Theodicy and the Problem of Evil in Islam: The Risale-i Nur as Case Study

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Abstract

The thesis at hand presents a critical analysis of the writings of the contemporary, 20th century Muslim scholar, theologian and exegete Said Nursi (1876-1960) of Turkey. Special reference is given in this thesis to his views and writings on theodicy and the problem of evil from the perspective of Islām.

This thesis is an attempt to discover the Qur'anic narrative of evil (*sharr*) as deviating from the human perception of evil in this world; to analyze Nursi's magnum opus on the definition of *sharr* and its correspondence to the Qur'anic definition thereof; and to challenge Nursi's works with the thoughts and views of his predecessors and contemporaries in order to try to filter new insights and offer possible solutions to theodicy and the problem of evil through Nursi's *Risale-i Nur Collection*.

The methodology that has been used in this study follows Izutsu's example as seen in *Ethico-Religious Concepts of the Qur'an* and *God and Man in the Koran*: namely to conduct an inductive investigation of the term *sharr* in the Qur'ān and Nursi's *Risale-i Nur Collection*.

There are several issues that can be considered to be the main findings of this study: 1) human perception of evil in this world to a great extent at odds with the Qur'anic definition of *sharr*, 2) new theological concept called 'negative worship', establishing a relation between *sharr* and worship, 3) relationship between theodicy and the Divine Names of God, 4) link between the human 'I' (*ana*) and, if misused, its encouragement for all kinds of ashrār (pl. *sharr*), 5) original interpretation to the Qur'anic verse [2:30], 6) *sharr*, *ana* and free choice (*juzī ikhtiyār*) consist of the same nature and finally 7) suffering of on-human beings part of the field of theodicy.

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Transliteration

Said Nursi's writings were originally written in Ottoman (Arabic letters) and later in his lifetime translated into Turkish (Latin alphabet). However, the current Turkish version of the Risale-i Nur is in fact a combination of Ottoman and Farsi words. After the 1980's, the works started to be translated into English and thereafter, gradually into many other major languages.

Any Arabic or Farsi words have been written in italics. Words such as 'Qur'ān' or 'Islām' which have been integrated into common English usage have been used in that agreed form without special marking.

The Arabic-to-English list of transliteration employed in this thesis follows Neil Robinson's *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*.[1]

ء	’	س	s	ل	l
ب	b	ش	sh	م	m
ت	t	ص	ṣ	ن	n
ث	th	ض	ḍ	ه	h
ج	j	ط	ṭ	و	w
ح	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ي	y
خ	kh	ع	`	ة	ah; at (construct state)
د	d	غ	gh	ال	(article) al- and ’l
ذ	dh	ف	f		
ر	r	ق	q		
ز	z	ك	k		

Long vowels:
ā, ū, ī

[1] Neal Robinson. *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1996).

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Context to this Study

The problem of evil is not a contemporary one. It has been a dilemma throughout history. During the time of the Greeks, it was first discussed by Epicurus (341-270 B.C.), and later quoted by Lactantius (A.D. 260-340) as follows:

> God either wishes to take away evils but is unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is neither willing nor able, or He is both willing and able. If He is willing and is unable, He is feeble, which is not in accordance with the character of God; if He is able and unwilling, He is envious, which is equally at variance with God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both envious and feeble, and therefore not God; if He is both willing and able, which is alone suitable to God, from what source then are evils? Or why does He not remove them?[2]

This question and dilemma of God being omnipotent and at the same time infinitely good, is not old, forgotten and solved. It is still fresh in the minds of people, and arises anew ever since a natural evil occurs or a moral evil is committed.

Two poles of thought have been developed regarding theodicy: monism and dualism. Monism[3] suggests that the universe forms an ultimate, harmonious unity; evil is only apparent and would be recognized as good if it can be seen in its full cosmic context.[4] In other words, there might be partial evil; however from a universal context it is good. The main ideas introduced are

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[2] *On the Anger of God*, chap. 13, trans. By William Fletcher in *The Writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdman), Vol. vii, 1951.
[3] The founder of Monism in western thought is the Dutch philosopher Spinoza (1632-1677) who espoused the pantheistic system. For further information see Spinoza's *Ethics*, trans. by R. H. M. Elves (London: George Bell & Sons, 1891).
[4] *Evil and the God of Love*, 15.

first of all that everything that comes from God is perfect. Hence, since God is the infinite perfect One, every creation makes its own contribution to that infinite perfection. Furthermore, good and evil are not objective realities. Both are formed by comparing one to the other. And evil is therefore just an illusion of our finite perspective and can be seen as a "lesser good."[5] Every creation necessarily is determined by divine perfect nature and they act in a certain manner. They are therefore not free, since the only free is the perfect Determiner.

When talking about moral evil, namely the sin of a person, this is, according to the thought of Monism, due to lack of complete truth, a privation of virtue. The answer to the following question, how lacks can occur within an infinitely perfect reality, is given through the 'principle of plenitude.'[6] Hence, in order to show the huge range of diversity in God's creation and the infinite creativity of God, a sinner must exist just like a saint. The weakness of Monism, as stated by Hick, is that even if one accepts the idea that evil is just illusory, it is still very real for it can be felt, it hurts and it is experienced painfully by human beings. Therefore, evil should not be thought of as similar to a dream, a hallucination or a mirage. Hick states further that the pain suffered by human beings does not all of a sudden become bearable, if one knows that evil is an absolute universal necessity. For a reconciliation to take place, one must be able to show that either evil is to be justly deserved or that it is a means to a good end.[7]

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[5] *Ibid.*, 20.
[6] Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being.* (Harvard University Press, 1936). The 'principle of plenitude' means that a universe which contains as many different beings as possible, lower and higher, is more perfect than a universe which would contain only the highest and most perfect beings.
[7] *Evil and the God of Love*, 23.

Dualism[8], on the other hand, rejects this harmony in the world and suggests that good and evil are completely opposed to one another. Their duality can be overcome only by one destroying the other. The basic idea of this pole is the acceptance of two entities, namely good and evil, or mind and matter. This excludes the belief in a perfectly good and infinitely powerful Creator. The argumentation is that every design in this world is a means to an end. If the Designer has tied everything to certain means, this would mean that His power is limited and He therefore is dependent on means, for he could also come to the end by a single word.[9] Internal dualism suggests that God is good **and** evil, and that those two constantly oppose each other. In other words, God is infinitely good but at the same time He is the source of surd evil. E. S. Brightman calls the solution for evil 'theistic finitism.' It understands God as 'an eternal, conscious spirit, whose will is unfailingly good.' But at the same time 'there is something in the universe not created by God and not a result of voluntary divine self-limitation, which God finds as either obstacle or instrument to his will.' This 'obstacle' lies within God's own nature.[10] Moral evil occurs through the malfunctioning of system which is designed for the preservation and enhancement of life.

This very gerenalized background forms just a partial basis for what is to come in this study: besides taking into consiederation most of the theories

[8] The thought of dualism was developed before Christianity and traces back to the ancient Zoroastrian religion (618-541 B.C.) The notion of dualism has been applied to theodicy by a more 'contemporary' western scholar, namely Plato (428/427-348/347 B.C.) and was later carried on by J. S. Mill (1806-73) and E. S. Brightman (1884-1953). For further information see Cf. Francis M. Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus of Plato translated with a running commentary*, 1937 (New York: The Liberal Arts Library, 1957); J. S. Mill, *Three Essays on Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1875); E. S. Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940).

[9] *Evil and the God of Love*, 28, see also J. S. Mill, *Three Essays on Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader & Dyer, 1875), 176-7.

[10] *Evil and the God of Love*, 31, see also E. S. Brightman, *A Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1940), 314.

that have been developed in the field of theodicy, this study broadens the field by offering a semantic analysis of the term *sharr* in the Qur'ān and by looking into Said Nursi's views on theodicy by means of his contemporary work the *Risale-i Nur Collection*.

1.2 Aims of this Study

This study aims to examine new and unique ideas to the debates surrounding theodicy and the problem of evil, the evil nature of man, predestination and its compatibility with free will, 'Divine Trust', the human 'I' (*ana*) and its nature and function, the perfect paradisal state of Adam and his wife, the reasons for the creation of Satan, and the concept of 'natural' and 'moral evil'. This will be made comparable to those studies already undertaken on theodicy and the problem of evil, and so will greatly enhance the possibility for a lively and fruitful discourse.

Previous work has been concentrated mainly on the general human perception of evil in this world, dividing it into two main categories, namely 'natural' and 'moral' evil. Following this division, possible answers, solutions and theories have been developed. It seems however unlikely that much further work can be undertaken with this type of divisions. This study aims to highlight the potential to develop research into the definition of *sharr* from the perspective of Divine Scripture and to look further into the ethico-moral aspect of evil and its connection with *ana* as one major aspect of the 'Divine Trust' given to humankind, as well as its link with divine determining and free will. It is strongly believed that Said Nursi's works can contribute in this respect in a major way.

1.3 Motivation

The starting point of this endeavor was to write a comparative work on Divine Justice. However, after reading texts such as Ruth Scoralick's *Das Drama der Barmherzigkeit Gottes: Studien zur biblischen Gottesrede und ihrer Wirkungsgeschichte in Judentum und Christentum* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk GmbH, 1999), Rolf Baumann's *"Gottes Gerechtigkeit" – Verheißung und Herausforderung für die Welt* (Freiburg: Herder Taschenbuch Verlag, 1989) and Lempp and Thaidigsmann's *Gottes Gerechtigkeit in der Dialektik der Aufklärung* (München: Kaiser Verlag, 1990), a much bigger, unsolved problem seemed to be the discussion about putting God on trial – in other words, the question around why God did not interfere to prevent injustices. This directly led to the problem of evil, arguably the biggest challenge of traditional theism which comprises arguments against God's existence. Starting a comparative work would have been far beyond the scope of this thesis, hence the study has been confined to Muslim thought. Comparative work may thus be conducted in form of articles after the completion of this work.

1.4 Contribution of the Study to the Field

This study contributes to the field of theodicy and the problem of evil in many different ways: it explores the concept in view of Said Nursi's *Risale-i Nur Collection*, thus adding another contemporary viewpoint to the discourse. It identifies the Qur'anic understanding of *sharr* as being at odds with the human perception of evil and provides a definition for the nature of *sharr* in the view of Nursi. It shows that the notion of 'natural evil' is not conform to the Qur'anic definitions. Furthermore, Nursi establishes a relation between *sharr* and worhip, creating a new theological concept that he calls 'negative worship', comprising illnesses and calamities. These, according to Nursi,

make man realize his impotence and weakness, leading him to take refuge in God. Nursi also provides a link between theodicy and the Divine Names of God, claiming that God's Beauteous (*jamāli*) and Glorious (*jalāli*) Names together in unity form a 'Divine Mosaic', pointing to their Creator. Another novelty is Nursi's link between *ana* and, if misused, its encouragement for all kinds of *ashrār*. Nursi is thus arguably the first scholar to suggest *ana* to be one meaning of the Qur'anic Divine Trust. Another contribution to the field is Nursi's original interpretation of the Qur'anic verse [2:30] stating that the angels' questioning and doubts were not related to human beings' creation (*khāliqun*) but rather in regards to them being placed on earth (*jā'ilun*). For anything God creates is pure good (*khayr al-mahdh*). Yet another contribution is Nursi's claim that *sharr*, *ana* and free choice (*juz'ī ikhtiyār*) all consist of the same nature. All of them have no external existence serving as a unit of measurement; and in order for them to exist, there is no need for all causes to gather. Thus, all of the above, namely *sharr*, *ana* and free will can easily be attributed to man, making him responsible for his actions. And finally, Nursi adds the suffering of non-human beings into the field of theodicy asking how their short life, annihilation and their being killed without exception can be reconciled with God's compassion and kindness.

1.5 Methodology

In order to build a profound basis for the concept of *sharr*, it is important to have an idea of the semantic structure of the term *sharr* in the Qur'ān and to make a semantic analysis of key concepts and terms. To define the methodology that will be used for this study, Izutsu's *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*[11] and *God and Man in the Koran*[12] will be consulted

[11]Toshihiko Izutsu. *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* (Montreal&Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007).

as main reference. The author of this study is aware of the fact that the methodology of Izutsu concentrates merely on the semantic analysis of key concepts and terms in the Qur'ān – nevertheless, this very same methodology will also be used to define the term *sharr* in the *Risale-i Nur Collection* (henceforward referred to as *Risale*) which is our main reference point in the second part of this study, especially covering chapters six and seven. How this methodology has been ultimately applied to the *Risale* will be explained at the end of this section.

The aim will be to do an inductive investigation of ethical terms in the Qur'ān that will be "as little prejudiced as possible by any theoretical position or moral philosophy."[13] The best way of doing this, according to Izutsu, is to place oneself in the position of a child who is trying to learn its mother tongue; in other words, to try to find all defining attributes for a single term and reach the basic meaning of that term before it goes through the filter of that language community.[14] For according to Izutsu, the analytical study of key terms in a language which he calls 'semantics' is a whole *Weltanschauung* – not only of the people who use that language as a tool to speak and think, but more importantly for those who use it to conceptualize and interpret the world that surrounds them.[15]

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[12] Toshihiko Izutsu. *God and Man in the Koran* (New Hampshire: Ayer Company Publishers, Inc., 1987).
[13] *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, 13.
[14] Ibid., 14.
[15] *God and Man in the Koran*, 11. Izutsu thereby makes use of the writings of Johann Leo Weisgerber, who was influenced by Wilhelm von Humboldt's view of language as a mirror of its speakers' vision of the world (Weltansicht) and pointed out the importance of language as an intellectual process of world-shaping (Weltanschauung). For further reading, see Johann Leo Weisgerber, *Vom Weltbild der deutschen Sprache* (Düsseldorf: Schwann Verlag, 1950) and also his *Grundformen sprachlicher Weltgestaltung* (Köln und Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1963); furthermore Wilhelm von Humboldt, *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwicklung des Menschengeschlechts* (Berlin: F. Dummler, 1836).

Izutsu suggests three main ethical concepts to be found in the Qur'an. The first he calls 'Divine Ethics,'[16] which can be established by studying the names and divine attributes of God and which aims to describe God's ethical nature. The second is called 'Human Ethics'[17] and deals with absolute trust in God (*islām* and *īmān*) on the one hand, and with pious fear of God (*taqwā*) on the other. Those two form an ethico-religious concept, which is a response to God's ethical actions and describes the different facets of the fundamental attitude of man towards God, his Creator. In other words, according to Izutsu, it is a reflection of 'Divine Ethics.' Izutsu calls the third concept also 'Human Ethics,' with the difference that this concept refers to the principles and rules of conduct regulating ethical relations among individuals of the same religious community. This is covered mainly by Islamic jurisprudence.[18] For the establishment of his semantic analysis of the ethico-religious concepts in the Qur'an, Izutsu concentrates mainly on the second concept, the human response to the ethical actions of God.

One aspect, according to Izutsu, is to distinguish between 'descriptive' words on the one hand which he explains as the primary level of ethical discourse, and 'evaluative' words on the other, which are defined by Izutsu as words of the secondary level moral discourse.[19] To give an example for this, Izutsu writes:

> Thus, in the essentially nonreligious context of *Jāhilīyah*, 'humility' and 'self-surrender' were considered something disgraceful, a manifestation of weak and ignoble character, whilst 'haughtiness' and 'refusal to obey' were, in the eyes of pre-Islamic Arabs, marks of noble nature. With the advent of Islam, the balance was completely overturned. Now, in the purely monotheistic context of Islam, 'humility' in the presence of God and total 'self-surrender' to

[16] *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, p. 17.
[17] Ibid., 17.
[18] Ibid., 18.
[19] Ibid., 19-22.

> Him became the highest virtues, and 'haughtiness' and 'refusal to obey' the marks of irreligiousness. In other words, the term denoting these personal properties completely changed their value. Whilst the descriptive layer of their meaning remained the same, their evaluative force changed from negative to positive or from positive to negative.[20]

This is a clear example of how to distinguish the purely descriptive meaning of a term from its evaluative meaning, keeping in mind that the evaluative layer might change completely whereas the descriptive layer remains the same. According to Izutsu, words such as 'good' and 'bad' belong to the secondary level moral discourse for they do not describe precisely what is meant by them. Whereas in actual life, man's moral evaluations are mainly made on the primary level of discourse by using words such as 'pious', 'hypocrite', 'stingy', 'humble', 'generous', etc. instead of using a rather general classification like 'good' or 'bad.'[21] In relation to this study, the term *sharr*, if merely translated as 'bad' or 'evil' is rather a secondary level, evaluative term. Therefore it will be important to study other related words in the Qur'ān, which will serve as primary level terms that define and describe what is meant by *sharr*.

In order to establish such a healthy body of definitions, Izutsu draws the reader's attention to different methods of analysis of a single ethical term in the Qur'ān and its application. According to Izutsu, one of the simplest, however not very reliable methods, is to give the equivalent meaning of that term in one's own language. This method, he states, has proven itself to be frequently misleading rather than enlightening.[22] He gives the example of the word *ẓālim*, which is mostly translated as 'evil-doer' or the word *kāfir* that is usually equated with 'disbeliever' or 'unbeliever'. These translations, although they might be helpful as a first step in language learning, are

[20] Ibid., 22.
[21] Ibid., 19-20.
[22] Ibid., 24.

according to Izutsu by no means satisfying. In order to grasp the semantic category of these words, one needs to "inquire what sort of man, what type of character, what kind of acts are actually designated by this name in Old Arabic – in this specific case, in the Qur'ān."[23]

Izutsu believes that the Qur'ān itself defines many words of its own in different places within the Qur'ān; this is known as 'exegesis of the Qur'an by the Qur'an' (*tafsīr Qur'ān bi'l Qur'ān*). Hence, gathering those verses where the same word is used in one place and comparing them with one another might help to find out the original definition of that Arabic word.[24] Izutsu further points out a danger in defining the semantic category of a word in the Qur'ān: namely the tendency of a word being strongly influenced by the neighboring words belonging to the same meaning field – in many cases by its antonym.[25] To give the example of the word *kāfir* again, it can have the meaning of 'ingrate' when used as the antonym of *shākir* 'one who is thankful' or the meaning of 'unbeliever' when used as the contrary of *mu'min*. However, the former important semantic element, which is the original meaning of the word *kāfir*, can be completely lost, if the word is being interpreted solely in terms of 'belief.'[26]

According to Izutsu, there is a strong interconnection between a particular word and the culture it is used in. The stronger that connection, the more difficult it is to transpose that word into a different language. This kind of words can be found within the henotheistic nomadic Arabia; words, that are typical of the life and manners of that particular culture and hence which are

[23] Ibid., 25.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid., 26
[26] Ibid.

untranslatable.[27] The reason is that the semantic category of this kind of words has a long cultural history behind it.[28]

Another important method Izutsu introduces is called 'contextual interpretation'[29] and the practical rules for such an interpretation he quotes from Professor J. Marouzeau as to "bring together, compare and put in relation all the terms that resemble, oppose and correspond with each other."[30]

For the method of semantic analysis, Izutsu introduces seven cases in which any passage assumes a strategic importance: 1) contextual definition, 2) value of synonyms, 3) elucidation by contrast, 4) clarification by its negative form, 5) semantic field, 6) parallelism and 7) secular aspects of the term.[31]

Firstly, a passage is semantically relevant and the strategy is called 'contextual definition' when the exact meaning of a term is defined by means of verbal description.[32]

Secondly, synonyms can be of value especially if one word is substituted for another word within the same passage or in precisely the same kind of verbal context.[33]

As for the third method of analysis, the semantic structure of a term is elucidated by contrast. If there are two words that are very close to each other in meaning, for instance *khayr* and *ḥasanah*, one may look at their

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[27] Ibid., 27.
[28] For further information and examples of the words *hamāsah*, *murūwah* and *jahl*, see *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, 27 ff.
[29] Ibid., 36.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 37-41.
[32] Ibid., 37, see the word *birr* in the Qur'ān, 2:172,177 as example.
[33] Ibid., see the Qur'ān, 7:92-93;94-95 as example.

oppositions used in the Qur'ān. If one becomes sure about the meaning of one of the terms, says Izutsu, the other three terms will be easier to define.[34]

The fourth method of analysis is to define the semantic structure of a vague word (X) in terms of its negative (not-X). Although this might be very difficult to do in other areas, since not-X could be anything else but X, Izutsu states that in the area of moral evaluation, defining a word X through its negative can be very useful.[35]

The challenge of the fifth method of analysis is to disentangle the different semantic groupings of different words. It will be better to quote Izutsu at this point as follows:

> […] in the Qur'ān the verb *iftara* ('to invent', 'to forge') most frequently takes as its grammatical 'object' the noun *kadhib* (a 'lie'), thus forming a well-nigh inseparable group. To join this group comes the word *ẓālim*. In fact the expression 'Who does more wrong, or who is more unjust (*aẓlam*) than he who forges (*iftara*) against God a lie (*kadhib*)?' is one of the set phrases of our Scripture. This makes it clear that the three words *iftara-kadhib-ẓālim* form in the Qur'ān a peculiar group or combination, a semantic field in the sense just explained.[36]

The sixth method Izutsu calls the "rhetorical device of parallelism". Although this method is more common in the Biblical Hebrew and in Classical Chinese, he states, parallelism in poetic style can be found to some extend also in the Qur'ān.[37] Izutsu gives a few small examples of which one is in Sūrah 29:47 and 49:

> *And none denies Our signs save the kāfir.*

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[34] Ibid., 38-39.
[35] Ibid., 39, see the word *istakbara* in the Qur'ān [32:15] as example.
[36] Ibid., 40.
[37] Ibid., 40-41, see the Qur'ān, verses 5:48/44,49/45,51/47 as example.

And none denies Our signs save the ẓālim.

In this example one is able to see, states Izutsu that these two words are semantic equals in terms of refusing to believe in divine signs.[38]

The last and seventh method is the non-religious aspect of a term mentioned in the Qur'ān. As an example Izutsu gives Pharaoh's dialogue with Moses, where Pharaoh says: "And thou didst a deed of thine which thou didst, and thou art an ungrateful (*kāfirīn*)!" [26:19] The term is used in a non-religious context in this verse, for it is Pharaoh who speaks to Moses and who uses the term *kāfir* to accuse Moses of being ungrateful. According to Izutsu, this method is of particular importance since it provides the semanticist with very valuable information regarding the structure of the word concerned.[39]

Izutsu rightly states that morality in Islām developed exclusively within its eschatological framework.[40] Hence, the Qur'anic outlook on good and bad is accordingly deeply connected with *ākhirah*; man's ultimate destiny. One can see in his chapter 'Good and Bad', that there are a lot of terms which fall under this semantic field.[41] Words like *ṣāliḥ*, *birr*, *fasād*, *ma'ruf* and *munkar*, *ḥ-s-n* and *s-w´* are just a few. Relevant to this study is Izutsu's brief section on *khayr* and *sharr*.[42] These two are mainly used as antonyms in the Qur'ān. *Khayr*, according to Izutsu, has a very comprehensive meaning, which comprises everything that could be considered as valuable, beneficial, useful

[38] Ibid., 41.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Ibid., 203.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid., 217.

and desirable. And semantically it covers the worldly and religious spheres alike.[43]

Izutsu makes the distinction between 'worldly' and 'religious' in the sense that he divides the verses in the Qur'ān about *khayr* according to their context. In this respect, the 'worldly' meaning of the word *khayr* is to be found in verses like [38:32] and [2:180; 215; 272; 274]. In these verses, *khayr* behaves as synonym of *māl* (wealth).[44] On the other hand, the 'religious' sphere of the term *khayr*, according to Izutsu, is to be found in verses where God's bounty is explained [3:26; 73-74] or where God's special favor is addressed [2:105; 269 and 16:30], where it is explained that God knows every *khayr* in people's hearts [8:70], where God talks about the positive effects of faith [6:158], about pious work [2:110, 5:48, 21:90] and makes the description of an excellent believer [38:47], etc.[45]

Although it might be helpful to make this kind of a distinction for certain terms so it helps the reader to understand what God considers to be good from a worldly perspective (in this case, it would be *māl* being something good); nonetheless every action of a Muslim should ultimately be related on one or another aspect with the divine or religious sphere. An example for this can be seen in one of the verses quoted by Izutsu as 'worldly' aspect:

> Whatever of good (*khayr*) ye give benefits your own souls, and ye shall only do so seeking the 'face' of Allah. Whatever good (*khayr*) ye give, shall be rendered back to you. And ye shall not be dealt with unjustly. [2:272] Those who spend of their goods (*amwāl*, pl. of *māl*) by night and by day, in secret and in public, have their reward with their Lord: [2:274]

[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 217-8.
[45] Ibid., 219-20.

This verse, rather than talking about *khayr* merely as a 'worldly' affair, suggests *khayr* (be it an action or *māl*) to be done or treated merely for the sake of God and to please only Him. From this perspective, the term ceases to be only a 'worldly' affair and becomes maybe both in one: 'worldly' and 'religious', inseparable from each other.

This raises the question whether such a distinction between 'worldly' and 'religious' terms or actions, as made by Izutsu, is appropriate. One might ask, whether the term 'worldly' really exists. When Solomon says that he has loved the love of good things (*khayr*) better than the remembrance of his Lord,[46] does this imply that 'good things' is a 'worldly' term? If Solomon was admiring his horses by remembering and praising his Lord's bounties (*tafakkur*), this term would hardly be classified as 'worldly'. It is also worth mentioning that the Qur'an translation used by Izutsu does not seem to be correct. According to other translations,[47] Solomon says: "Verily, I have come to love the love of all that is good (*ḥubb al-khayri*) in order to bear my Sustainer in mind (*'an dhikri Rabbī*)."[48] This is profoundly different from saying that Solomon loved things more than the remembrance of his Lord and is closer to the idea of *tafakkur* mentioned before. Likewise, wealth being used interchangeably with *khayr*[49] does not exclude it from being a 'religious' affair, for being thankful for that wealth and spending it for the sake of God would be sufficient to count as 'religious'.

To give another simple example: many people would agree to think that a rope is a 'worldly' thing. However, a rope is neither a 'worldly', nor a 'religious' thing. It simply is a thing that serves humans. However, the action

[46] Ibid., 217, ref to Qur'an, 38:32
[47] Qur'ān translations by Asad, M., Davudoğlu, A.; Eliaçık, I.
[48] Ahmed Davudoğlu. *Kur'an-ı Kerim ve Izahlı Meali* (Istanbul: Çelik Yayın-Dağıtım, 1981), [38:32]
[49] Qur'ān, 2:180; 215; 272; 274.

that is performed with that rope, for instance saving a person's life or strangling someone, might be sacred or profane, respectively. Furthermore, while for many people, going to the mosque is a 'religious' act, going there so that others think of that person as pious would turn that action into a 'worldly' matter. In this regard making such distinctions as 'worldly' or 'religious' can be very misleading in two ways: the term itself does not change, *khayr* is good in any case, no matter in which context it is used. To differ between worldly and religious implies that the worldly is something bad, something that should not be desired, something that should not be loved compared to the religious. However, this is deceptive for the world should be loved as God's creation, as the reflections of God's most beautiful attributes and names, as God's beauty and bounty.

The impact such a distinction might have on Izutsu's methodology is manifold. By making a distinction between worldly goods and religious goods; and by dividing the word good (*khayr*) in the field of religious matters into two, namely the good the source of which lies in God, and the good produced by man, Izutsu opens the doors to several critiques.

First of all this kind of distinction implies that only religious *khayr* is a bounty from God, whereas the worldly *khayr* is not. However the whole chapter 55, *sūrah al-Raḥmān* in the Qur'an talks about God's favors on earth and by counting each of them asks over and over, which of these favors man would deny.

Secondly, to state that there is one sort of *khayr* the source of which lies in God and another produced by man[50] entails that man is the creator of his own actions and that man is able to create his own *khayr*. However, this

[50] *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, 220.

goes against the verse "whatever good (*ḥasana*) happens to thee is from God and whatever evil (*sayyiah*) befalls thee is from thyself."[51]

Sharr, on the other hand, functions as the opposite of *khayr* in all respects.[52] Quite interesting is Izutsu's comment on the following verses in the Qur'ān:

> Fighting is prescribed upon you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good (*khayr*) for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad (*sharr*) for you. But Allah knoweth, and ye know not.[53] and
>
> […] On the contrary live with them on a footing of kindness and equity. If ye take a dislike to them, it may be that ye dislike a thing, and Allah brings about through it a great deal of good (*khayr*).[54]

Although these verses are mainly explained simply in the sense that the goodness or badness of a thing depends on the ultimate end to which it leads and has nothing to do with man liking or disliking it, Izutsu adds another aspect to it which comes close to what will be discussed later in this study: Izutsu writes that taken from the reverse side, this verse would imply that "the problem of whether a thing is *khayr* or *sharr* tends to be made dependent [by the Qur'an] on man's natural subjective reaction to it, that is, whether he likes it or hates it."[55] This might lead to the assumption that what man calls *sharr* is in fact his own subjective view and has nothing to do with God's view on the same matter. This will be discussed in more detail after chapter three.

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[51] The Qur'an, 4:79.
[52] *Ethico Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, 220.
[53] Qur'ān, 2:216.
[54] Qur'ān, 4:19.
[55] Ibid.

There is one more aspect that needs attention in Izutsu's work, and that is his analysis of the term *sayyi'ah*. This term might have, according to Izutsu, two different meanings: it may mean an unfavorable and disagreeable turn of affairs in human life, all unpleasant circumstances and misfortune that befall a man; or it may mean the 'evil' work a man does against God's will, often called disobedience (*ma'ṣiyah*).[56] This is of particular importance since it is related to the difficult theological discussions between the Ash'ariyya and the Mu'tazila and Qadariyya[57]. At this point, Izutsu quotes the Maturidī theologian al-Bayyāḍī as follows:

> The Mu'tazilī al-Jubbā'ī asserts: it is an established fact that the word *sayyi'ah* is sometimes used in the sense of 'calamity' (*balīyah*) and 'trial' (*miḥnah*), and sometimes in the sense of 'sin' (*dhanb*) and 'disobedience' (*ma'ṣiyah*). It is also certain that God attributes *sayyi'ah* to Himself in the verse "Say: everything comes from God", and that in the following verse He attributes it to man: "And every *sayyi'ah* that befalls thee comes from thyself." Obviously something must be done here to establish harmony between the two statements so that they may not contradict each other. In reality, there is no contradiction because when *sayyi'ah* is attributed to God it is to be understood as 'adversity' and 'misfortune', while the same word means 'disobedience' when it is attributed to man.[58]

There is no need to say, states Izutsu, that al-Bayyāḍī, as a Maturidī theologian, will deny any kind of distinction and therefore states that everything comes from God, be it *īman* or *kufr*.[59] This study will nevertheless concentrate on the term *sharr*, since *sayyi'ah* after all is closer in meaning to disobedience and is used as such.

As has been previously noted, the same methodology introduced by Izutsu above will also be applied to the *Risale-i Nur Collection*, comprising mainly

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[56] Ibid., 226-227.

[57] For more information regarding the ahl al-sunnah, Mu'tazila and Qadariyya, and their theological discussions see chapter two.

[58] Kamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Bayyāḍī. *Ishārāt al-Marām min 'Ibārāt al Imām* (Cairo, 1949), 310.

[59] *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, 227.

the second part of this thesis, namely chapters five, six and seven. In this respect, an inductive investigation in form of a semantic analysis of the term *sharr* in the Risale will be conducted. Having located all the passages and pages that deal with the notion of *sharr*, their relation to each other will be analysed. This will hopefully help to define Nursi's understanding of *sharr* and how far his views on *sharr* are in line with the Qur'anic definition thereof.

One of the challenges in reading Nursi's works is the fact that he does not employ only one sort of methodology therein. Nursi's methodology is manigfold: it is reason-based; that is, a logical argumentation of the existence and unity of God, of eschatology, prophethood, etc. At this point it might be important to note that Nursi frequently employs the term 'proof' when he uses this type of methodology. This might be quite puzzling, given the fact that his proofs are not really 'proofs' at all in the philosophically and scientifically accepted sense of the term. Nursi in fact uses faith (*īmān*) as a tool which leads one to read and interpret creation accordingly. Thus, the Nursian 'proofs' should not be seen as irrefutable proofs that will turn everyone who reads it immerdiately into a believer – it should rather be accepted as a rhetorical emphasis to his rational argumentation for what he believes to be the truth.

Furthermore, Nursi's methodology is revelation-based, in other words, directly related to the Qur'ān. Thirdly, it is authority-based, that is, in accordance with transmission (hadīth); fourthly, experimental-sensory (*ḥissî*); fifthly, experiential-self-developed (*tajrubī/haqq al-yaqīn*); and sixthly heart-centred (*hadsī wa kashfî*). Since the last three types of evaluation are rather personal, it becomes not an easy task to understand him.

Since, as stated previously, Nursi makes use of faith as a tool for his argumentations, chapter 5 of this study has mainly concentrated on certain,

rather faith-related aspects to form a prologue and, so to say, a basis for Nursi's analysis of *sharr*. For it is clear that Nursi presupposes belief in a higher being in order to be able to understand and maybe accept his treatise on *sharr*. The outlines for each chapter will be elaborated in more detail in the next section.

After heaving read all passages and pages related to *sharr* in the Risale, the next step will be to analyse all topics that are in direct or indirect relation with the term. The two most important ones are being (*wujūd*) and non-being (*'adam*), followed by the reason for the creation of Satan, the notion of Divine Trust, the *ana*, free will and divine determining as well as the faculties of humanking and Adam's creation and the Fall. The methodology that will be employed in analyzing Nursi's works in regards to *sharr* will be, besides the guidance of Izutsu's methodology mentioned above, mainly based on twelve principles that have been derived from the *Risale* itself, and which have been explained in detail in chapter 6. These principles are shortly to be mentioned here: 1) Any existence (*wujūd*) requires an existing cause; 2) There is no absolute non-existence (*'adam al-muṭlaq*) in the universe; 3) existence is pure good (*wujūd khayr al-mahdh*) whereas non-existence is pure *sharr* (*'adam sharr al-mahdh*); 4) *sharr* is non-existential in nature and arises from non-existence (*'adam*); 5) there is no absolute *sharr* (*sharr al-muṭlaq*) in the universe; 6) abondaning a minor *sharr* can lead to greater *sharr*; 7) *sharr* has some sort of external reality or minor existence; 8) *ashrār* are the manifestation of Divine Glory; 9) all good things are the manifestation of Divine Beauty; 10) the creation of *sharr* is not *sharr*, rather the desire for *sharr* is *sharr*; 11) free will (*juzʾī irada*) has no actual existence; and 12) destruction is easy.

With the methodology based on these principles, chapters 6 and 7 have been developed.

1.6 Outline of Study

There is a very extensive range of material on theodicy and the problem of evil in the context of Islam. The problem, however, seems to be that in many cases, the human conception of evil in this world is taken for granted. It is thus the aim of this study to first of all try to find out whether human being's perception of evil is equal to the definition and understanding of *sharr* (evil) in the Qur'ān. Furthermore, as a second step, to explore the concept of *sharr* in the writings of Said Nursi; for as of yet, there is no intensified academic writing on this topic in regards to Nursi's views. In the course of this study, Colin Turner's *The Qur'an Revealed: A Critical Analysis of Said Nursi's Epistles of Light* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2013) has been published; a solid work, which covers and critically analyses approximately eighteen main topics of the Risale. Although this work touches on some issues that have been covered in this study, it does not offer an extensive analysis of the problem of *sharr* from Nursi's perspective.

The link between the first and second section of this work is thus to firstly introduce Nursi's novel ideas and thoughts into the discourse of theodicy and the problem of evil through illustrating that Nursi's understanding of *sharr* is in line with the definition of *sharr* in the Qurān; secondly to bring Nursi into the discourse of theodicy and to challenge his works with the ideas of his predecessors and contemporaries. In this regard, the first section of this study covers chapters two and three; chapter four is a bridging chapter and the second section of this study covers chapters five, six and seven.

The second chapter will consist of a semantic analysis of the term *sharr* in Qur'an and Hadīth, including the study of different exegetes from different

centuries. The main objective in this chapter will be to find out whether evil as perceived by human beings is the same as the definition of *sharr* in the Qur'ān. In other words, does man's definition of evil correspond with the Qur'ān's definition of *sharr*?

The third chapter covers the theological and philosophical approach to the problem of evil, by looking into the mainstream thoughts in Islamic history such as the Ash'arī, Maturidī, Jabriyya, Qadariyya and Mu'tazila as well as by studying philosophers and theologians like Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and al- Ghazālī. The aim here is to provide an overview of the main types of solutions offered to the problem of evil in the past and to show in which ways they have been objected, criticized and limited. This chapter will furthermore serve as a guideline to see in what ways Nursi's views on evil has been an asset to the hitherto widely discussed topic.

The next is a bridging chapter that will consist of a brief biography of Said Nursi as well as excerpts from his life which will illustrate his own way of dealing with apparent *ashrār* (pl. *sharr*), calamities, inflicts and injustices committed against him. This might shed light on Nursi's 'Existential Theodicy', in other words, his way of comforting and overcoming difficulties in practice rather than theory.

The fifth chapter will be a prologue to the problem of *sharr* in the *Risale-i Nur*. Due to the sensitivity and complexity of the topic at hand and its close relation to so many other areas of theology; and for the sake of easing the reader's way as he embarks towards the journey of understanding *sharr* according to the *Risale-i Nur*, some aspects of theology such as the Oneness of God, faith, being and non-being, and life and its purpose – again from the *Risale's* perspective – will be discussed.

The sixth chapter, then, will concentrate on the nature of evil according to the *Risale*. The objective in this chapter will be to deal with problems such as the existence or non-existence of *sharr*, the reconciliation of sharr with God's Omnipotence, the reasons for the creation of Satan, the reasons for the existence of dualities in this world, and the relationship between *sharr* and worship. Furthermore, in this chapter, Nursi's works will be challenged with views such as 'bitheism', 'theistic finitism', 'anthropodicy' as well as the well known solutions offered to the problem of evil such as *privatio boni*, the best of all possible worlds, world of dualities, and the principle of plenitude.

Finally, the seventh chapter, which will form the heart of this study, will discuss the moral aspect of *sharr* from Nursi's perspective. Thus, the objective will be to analyze the cause and creator of an 'evil will'; how sin entered into the perfect paradisal state of Adam and his wife; divine determining and its compatibility with free will; God's intention to punish some and save others; and God's wish to create a human being who would freely sin. In this regard, the chapter will cover mainly Adam's fall, the notion of 'divine Trust', free will and divine determining as well as existential theodicy.

2 Sharr in Qur'ān, Tafsīr and Ḥadīth

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the meaning of *sharr* in the Qur'ān, Tafsīr and Ḥadīth. The methodology that will be used in approaching the Qur'anic text will be that of Toshihiko Iztusu, which has already been explained in the introduction. The application of this sort of semantic analysis hopefully will help the reader to distinguish between *sharr,* as purposed and willed by God and evil, as understood by man. Once the difference becomes clear, it will be easier to apply this distinction to the rest of this study.

Three different Qur'an translations are used in order to see and be aware of possible differences in translation: *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān* by 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Alī; *An Interpretation of the Qur'an* by Majid Fakhry (both English translations); *Kur'an-ı Hakim'in Açıklamalı Meali* by Prof. Dr. Suat Yıldırım (Turkish translation) and *Der Koran* by Adel Theodor Khoury, with the assistance of Muhammad Salim Abdullah (German translation).

As for the interpretation of the Qur'ān – although to be found only in very few instances in the Hadīth collections – the first and foremost is that of the Messenger of God, Muhammed. The Qur'ān itself makes this clear: "… we have sent down unto thee the Message; that you may explain clearly to men what is sent for them, and that they may give thought"[60], "It is He who has sent amongst the unlettered a messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His signs, to sanctify (purify) them, and to instruct them in scripture and wisdom…"[61] Hence one can say that the Messenger is the foremost interpreter of the Qur'ān. However it is not always easy to know

[60] Qur'ān, 16:44.
[61] Ibid., 62:2.

which ḥadīth is *sahīh* (sound)[62] and which is not. For this study, those ḥadīth have been considered, that are in accordance with the teaching of the Qur'ān.[63] One source is the *Ḥadīth Encyclopedia Kütüb-i Sitte* (Turkish Translation and Commentary) by Prof. Dr. Ibrahim Canan. This source has been chosen because of several reasons:

1) It includes the six major ḥadīth collections *Sahih Bukhārī* (by Imam Bukhārī, d. 870); *Sahih Muslim* (by Muslim bin al Ḥajjāj, d. 875); *Sunan al Sughra* (by al Nasā'ī, d. 915); *Sunan abū Dāwud* (by Abu Dāwud, d. 888); *Jami al Tirmidhī* (by al Tirmidhī, d. 892) and *Muwaṭṭā'* (by Mālik bin Anas, d. 795).

2) In addition to the above, it also includes as a seventh book the *Sunan ibn Mājah* (by ibn Mājah, d. 887). Although some scholars have accepted the *Sunan ibn Mājah* instead of the *Muwaṭṭā'* as the sixth book of the *al-Kutub al-Sittah*, Canan has chosen to include the *Sunan ibn Mājah* as seventh book into his collection.

3) The commentary of Ibrahim Canan excludes any ḥadīth repetitions.

A second source for ḥadīth is the *Ḥadīth Institute for Knowledge and Education and Methodology*, <http://www.hikem.net/index.html> which has proven itself to be a very useful site for ḥadīth search, providing its Arabic original as well as the necessary sources for each of the narrations.

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[62] John Burton. *An Introduction to the Hadith* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd., 1994), 110-111.

[63] Murtaḍa Mutahhari. *Understanding the Uniqueness of the Qur'ān* in Al-Tawhīd, trans. Mahliqa Qara'i, vol. 1, no. 1-3 (1987). According to the Shi'a, any Ḥadīth narrated from the Prophet Muhammed or the twelve infallible Imams should be checked against the Qur'ān's teachings. If they do not comply with the Qur'ān, they should be regarded as false or not trustworthy. For further information, see also Ṭabāṭabā'ī, 'Allāmah Sayyid M. Ḥ. *Shi'ite Islam*, trans. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 102ff. It should be noted that this method is also to be found in the Sunnī tradition and is not unique to the Shi'ite.

Although the aim of this chapter is to understand the Qur'ān with the help of the Qur'ān itself, the term *sharr* has also been investigated by considering the interpretations of different *mufassirūn*. The number of exegetes from whom one can choose is enormous. Because of the scope of this study, it is necessary to find some principle of selection. In order to provide a diachronic overview, two classical and two medieval exegetes have been chosen. Furthermore four contemporary exegetes have been selected due to their different approaches. The principle of the selection has been to choose those *mufassirūn* whose works are most widely read, who are from different school of thoughts and who are highly esteemed by Muslims throughout the ages. Additionally, one contemporary exegete, who considers himself to be a *ḥanīf*[64] (Ihsan Eliaçık) has been added as well due to his sometimes interesting approach to certain topics of the Qur'ān. The authors and works to be considered are as follows:

Abū Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarīr al-Tabarī (d. 310/923), *Jāmi' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl al Qur'ān;* Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*; Abū 'Abdullah al Qurṭubī (d. 670/1273), *Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī*; Isma'il ibn 'Umar abū'l-Fidā' Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), *Tafsīr al-Qur'ān al-'aẓīm*; Muhammed Hamdi Yazır (d. 1343/1942), *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*; Syed Abū 'l- 'Alā Mawdūdī (d. 1380/1979), *Tafhīm al-Qur'ān*; Muhammad Ḥusayn Tabātabā'ī (d. 1382/1981), *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*; Ihsan Eliaçık, *Yaşayan Kur'an*. This study however is not restricted only to these exegetes. Other scholars will be brought into the discourse where necessary.

It is well known that since the time of Muhammed, there have been different approaches to the interpretation of the Qur'ān. This started already in the

[64] The term *ḥanīf* refers to those who retained some or all of the tenets of the monotheist religion of Abraham , which is Islām in the purest form.

first two centuries after *hijrah*, when the Islamic Empire was expanding and the Muslims came into contact with Greek philosophers as well as involved themselves in religious discussions with scholars of different religions and sects (*'ilm al-kalām*).[65] Thus, before the second century had come to an end, there were disputes over the names and attributes of God and about his actions, about heaven and hell, about free will and predestination, about reward and punishment and about *al-barzakh* (the intermediary period between death and resurrection).[66] To justify their claims, every group referred to the Qur'ān. Hence, one can either explain a verse by freeing oneself from any preconceived idea and by going where the Qur'ān leads; or one can interpret the Qur'ān so it fits one's preconceived beliefs by tailoring the verses accordingly.[67] Obviously and hopefully, the former will be the aim and focus when looking at the term *sharr* in the Qur'ān within the study at hand.

2.2 Semantic Analysis of the term '*sharr*' in Qur'ān and Ḥadīth

By examining the behavior of the key term *sharr* in the Qur'ān, it will be important to let the Qur'anic term explain itself for it has been understood in the introduction of this study on the methodology of Izutsu, that to understand the meaning of a word it is not sufficient to simply consult dictionaries. They can merely be a mediator and help.

The Arabic root-word for *sharr* is *sh-r-r*, occurring thirty one times in the Qur'ān and comprising thirty verses. In one of these verses, it has the meaning 'sparks of fire' (*bishararin*) and therefore falls outside of the area of

[65] *Mahmood Namazi, Thematic Approach to Qur'ān Exegesis* in Message of Thaqalayn, A Quarterly Journal of Islamic Studies, 10/4 (2010), 43.
[66] *Ibid.*, 44.
[67] *Ibid.*, 45.

interest[68]. Eleven of the twenty nine verses are Medinan verses whereas eighteen are Meccan[69]. None of these seem to describe any kind of disaster or natural calamities that were defined later by many philosophers and theologians as 'natural evil'.[70] Rather, any kind of misbehavior by man against the will of God is named *sharr*. Hence, if the term *sharr* is considered to be a secondary level moral term, in other words, forms the evaluative rather that descriptive layer of a term[71], it is important to build the related semantic field of it. However, before proceeding, it will be helpful to remember the definitions of descriptive and evaluative terms as explained by Izutsu. This part has been explained in more detail in the Introduction of this study.

The descriptive[72] form of a term in the Qur'ān is mainly used in its primary level, in other words, where it describes the true characteristics of the moral code of a community.[73] For example, instead of using the word 'good' to describe a person (which would be a term of the secondary level of moral discourse for it does not give a precise description), to say 'that pious person', or 'that person is humble'.[74] On the other hand, the evaluative[75] form of a term in the Qur'ān is mainly used in its secondary level. Here, it is used merely as classificatory, in order to classify the primary level terms, such as 'humility' or 'generosity', into a "recognized category of moral values."[76]

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[68] 'Abd al-Bāqī, M. F. *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* , 378.
[69] Uncertainties have been ignored.
[70] See chapter II.
[71] See introduction or Izutsu. *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, 19-22.
[72] *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, 21.
[73] Ibid., 20.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid., 21.
[76] Ibid., 20.

2.3 The Semantic Field of *sharr*

In this case, that recognized secondary level moral term would be *sharr*. The following deeds fall into the semantic field[77] of the term *sharr* and form its descriptive layer:

2.3.1 Parsimony

The state of extreme stinginess, withholding things in a covetous manner. The Arabic root-word used for it in the Qur'ān is *b-kh-l.* This word occurs 7 times in the Qur'ān[78], one time in combination with the term *sharr*. In each of these verses God warns man not to withhold from what He has given man out of His grace and God further warns that no property and good in the world can protect man from punishment. Hence, whoever shows stinginess harms himself and not God, for God is the possessor of all things. Parsimony is therefore identified as *sharr* for piling up possessions instead of spending them for the sake of God is *sharr*, although one might think that it is good:

> And let not those who are niggardly in spending (*yabkhalūna*) what God has given them of His bounty suppose that it is good for them. No, it is *sharr*; they will carry what they stinted around their necks on the Day of Resurrection. And to Allah belongs the inheritance of the heavens and the earth. Allah is aware of what you do.[79]

It is worth mentioning at this point that God touches on man's foolishness when it comes to distinguish between *khayr* and *sharr*. This verse points out that if man thinks unwisely that greedily withholding God's gifts is good for him – he should know that it is not. What he considers to be *khayr*, in fact is

[77] The notion of 'semantic field' has been explained in the Introduction of this study.
[78] 'Abd al-Bāqī, M. F. *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* , 115. Also see Qur'ān, 3:180; 4:37; 9:76; 47:37-8; 57:24; 92:8.
[79] The Qur'an, 3:180.

sharr for him. Ultimately, everything is a trust from God, belongs to Him and will return to Him.

2.3.2 Going astray

To err, to leave the 'right path' (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*). The Arabic root-word for it is *ḍ-l-l*. Being a very famous word in the Qur'ān, it occurs over a hundred times[80]. Preferring unbelief (*kufr*) over faith (*īmān*), associating partners with God (*shirk*), sowing discord (*nifāq*) and transgressing the lines set by God (*fisq*) are the main topics in relation with *ḍalla*. This term therefore falls into the category of *sharr*, explaining that those people who go astray by committing these mistakes will be in an evil plight and worse in rank:

> Those who are mustered on their faces in hell; those are in a worse position (*sharrun mekānan*) and are more wayward (*aḍallu*).[81]
>
> Say: "Shall I tell you something much worse (*bi sharri*) than this for retribution with Allah? Those whom Allah cursed and on whom He poured forth His wrath, transformed them into apes and swine, and worshippers of the Devil. They are worse off (*sharrun makānan*) and farther astray (*aḍallu*)."[82]

"Say: "Whoever is in error (*ḍalālati*), let the Compassionate prolong his term; so that when they see what they are threatened with, whether it be the punishment or the Hour, they will know who is worse in position (*sharrun makānan*) and weaker in supporters.""[83]

2.3.3 Rejecting God

In other words, to choose not to believe in God but in other entities instead, to cover the truth and to be ungrateful. The Arabic root-word is *k-f-r*. This

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[80] *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* , 421-424.
[81] Qur'an, 25:34.
[82] Ibid., 5:59-61.
[83] Ibid., 19:75.

word, like *ḍalla*, can be found several hundred times in the Qur'ān[84]. Analyzing the context shows that God describes man to be very ungrateful (*kafūrun*)[85]. Furthermore, He states that man worships other things beside God for which no authority has been sent down to them and of which they have no knowledge.[86] Additionally, one can see a denial in the faces of the *kāfirūn*, when the revelation is recited unto them:

> And when Our clear revelations are recited to them, you will recognize in the faces of the unbelievers (*kafarū*) the denial. They will almost fall upon those who recite to them Our revelations. Say: "Shall I tell you about what is worse than that (*bisharri min dhālikum*)? It is the Fire which Allah has promised the unbelievers (*kafarū*); and what a wretched fate!"[87]

They go even further and nearly attack with violence those who rehearse God's signs to them. If one takes a closer look at the descriptions above, he will see that it all has to do with wrong actions; to be ungrateful, to worship idols instead of God, to ridicule the signs of God by pulling a long face and by nearly becoming violent. And worse than all this (*bi sharri min dhālikum*) is ultimately hellfire. If hellfire is worse than all the actions mentioned above, this indicates that those actions, all of them, are described to be *sharr*. Therefore *k-f-r* is a primary level descriptive moral term that falls under the semantic field of *sharr*.

2.3.4 Idolatry

To worship anything other than God or to worship things alongside Him. The Arabic root-word for it is *sh-r-k* and means to be a sharer or make a sharer; to associate or make companions to God (*ashraka).* Like *ḍ-l-l* and *k-f-r*,

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[84] *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* , 605-613.
[85] Qur'ān, 22:66.
[86] Ibid., 22:71.
[87] Ibid., 22:72.

sh-r-k occurs very often in the Qur'ān[88], in close relation with the word *k-f-r* in particular, for associating partners with God and to be thankful to other entities instead of the true Creator is an expression of ingratitude. God reminds the people of previous messengers who have come to guide them to the right path and criticizes the people of the book for being divided (*tafarraqa*) after the clear proof came to them[89]. In the respective verse those who cover the truth or do not believe (*kafarū*) from amongst the people of the book and the idolaters (*mushrikīn*) are addressed:

> The unbelievers (*kafarū*), among the people of the book and the idolaters (*mushrikīna*), shall be in the Fire of hell, dwelling therein forever. Those are the worst of creatures (*sharru 'l bariyyah*).[90]

They are described to be the worst of created beings (*ūlāika hum sharru 'l-bariyyah*). According to this verse, *sh-r-k* is another descriptive term that can be included into the semantic field of *sharr*.

2.3.5 Violation of (a covenant or treaty)

In other words, not to keep one's promise. The Arabic root-word for it is *n-q-ḍ*. The word occurs nine times in the Qur'ān. Five times it is used in the above meaning and talks about the violation of a promise given to God.[91] It is used in combination with *sharr* as follows:

> The worst (*sharra*) beasts in the sight of Allah are those who reject Him, because they will never believe. Those, who each time you make a covenant with them, break it (*yanquḍūna*), and do not fear God.[92]

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[88] *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* , 379-381.
[89] Qur'ān, 98:4.
[90] Ibid., 98:6.
[91] *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* , 717. See also The Qur'ān, 2:27; 5:13; 8:56; 13:20.
[92] Qur'an, 8:55-56.

Although the definition of *sharr* is not given directly in the same verse, right in the following God explains whom He considers to be the worst of beasts, namely those who first give a promise to God and later violate or break it.

2.3.6 Turning away, aversion

In other words, to turn oneself away from God. This may be even a form of disliking God (*a'raḍa*). The Arabic root-word is '-r-ḍ and occurs seventy nine times in the Qur'ān[93]. However, the number of occurrences that are of interest here are thirty four. In fourteen places the word is used in a positive manner, such as turning away from the disbelievers. The rest is used in different meanings. The verse that is of concern here is the following:

> The worst (*sharra*) beasts in Allah's sight are the deaf and dumb who do not understand. If Allah knew of any good in them He would have made them hear; and had He made them hear, they would still have turned away (*mu'riḍūn*) defiantly.[94]

This verse may be explained further with the following other verse:

> And who is more unjust than one who, upon being reminded of His Lord's revelations, turns away (*a'raḍa*) from them, and forgets what his hands have done? We have placed coverings upon their hearts lest they understand it and, put a deafness in their ears. If you call them to the guidance, they will never be guided.[95]

As can be seen in chapter [8:22-23], while verse 22 talks about the deaf and dumb being the worst of creators, it is explained right after, in verse 23, and also in chapter [18:57], that this is metaphorical and what is meant by deaf and dumb are those, whose hearts are sealed and whom God knows will not understand and will not believe. They intentionally close their ears to the truth, do not speak the truth and reject to understand and accept the truth.

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[93] *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* , 457-8.
[94] Qur'ān, 8:22-23.
[95] Ibid., 18:57.

Furthermore, the following verses are related to the ones above, and talk about man's remoteness from his Creator.

> And when We are gracious to man, he turns away (*a'raḍa*) and withdraws haughtily; and if *ash-sharru* touches him, he is in despair.[96]

> If we are gracious to man, he slinks away and turns aside (*a'raḍa*); and if *sharr* touches him, he is given to constant prayer.[97]

Although *a'raḍa* is not directly defined as *sharr* in theses verses, nevertheless, it is considered to be a bad attitude that shows man's arrogance and ingratitude. This is made clear in the following chapters of the Qur'ān:

> And if you are touched by adversity at sea, those you call upon other than He will wander away, but when He delivers you to land safely, you turn away (*a'raḍtum*). Man is ever thankless (*kafūran*).[98]

> And if hardship afflicts man, he calls Us lying down, sitting or standing; but when We lift his hardship, he passes on as though he never called Us to (lift) a hardship that afflicted him. Thus, what the transgressors do seems fair to them.[99]

> Man does not tire of praying for good, but when *sharr* touches him he becomes downcast and despondent.[100]

> When *sharru* visits him, he is frightened; but when *khayru* visits him, he is avaricious.[101]

In here one can see man's subjective view on *khayr* and *sharr*. Man asks for *khayr* and God gives it to him. However, out of his biased view, he considers that what God has given to him as *sharr*, immediately loses all hope and falls into despair. In other words, man is mostly not wise and judges according to appearances. He is happy with apparent *khayr*, but often distant to God

[96] Ibid., 17:83.
[97] Ibid., 41:51.
[98] Ibid., 17:67.
[99] Ibid., 10:12.
[100] Ibid., 41:49.
[101] Ibid., 70:20-21.

during this time. And when *sharr* touches him, he again is not wise enough to see the *khayr* behind that *sharr* and falls into despair. This kind of unwise behavior is going to be dealt with in more detail later in this study.

The term ingratitude (*k-f-r*) has already been defined as part of the semantic field of *sharr*. Furthermore, one can find the act of *shirk* in here as well, by calling upon other than God. Therefore, it is not wrong to say that this verse implies turning away from God to be *sharr*. In this regard, *ʾ-r-ḍ*, by Qur'anic definition, falls under the semantic field of the term *sharr*.

2.3.7 Slander

In other words, defamation. The act of speaking falsely, and thereby damaging the reputation and good name of another. The Arabic root-word for it is *ʿ-f-k*. Words that derive from this root appear in the Qur'ān thirty times. However, in the meaning of slander, one is able to find 10 verses[102]. Most of them address those who defame God, His signs (such as the Qur'ān) or His messengers. In the respective verse, the slander is against Aisha, the wife of the Prophet Muhammed:

> Those who spread the slander (*ifki*) are a band of you. Do not reckon it a *sharra* for you; rather it is a good thing (*khayrun*) for you. Everyone of them will be credited with the sin he has earned, and he who bore the brunt of it shall have a terrible punishment.[103]

The verse goes on with God addressing the believers who have spread the slander, instead of bringing forth four witnesses[104]. Although receiving a lie on the tongues and uttering it with the mouth seems to be a simple matter, in God's sight, it is very grave.[105] Hence, God warns the believers to never

[102] *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* , 34.
[103] Qur'an, 24:11.
[104] Ibid., 24:13.
[105] Ibid., 24:15.

return to a behavior like this again.[106] Another example can be found in chapter 12 of the Qur'ān. After all the lies that the brothers of Joseph had told to their father Jacob regarding Joseph's sudden disappearance, they later lie again to Joseph by accusing him of having stolen something:

> They said: "If he has stolen, a brother of his has stolen before." Joseph kept his sorrow to himself and did not reveal it to them. He said: "you are in a worse position (*sharrun makānan*), and Allah knows best (the truth of) what you say."[107]

Further in this chapter, the brothers admit their lies and wrong behavior and ask their father to pray to God for their forgiveness[108]. God's message through Joseph is like a summary of the whole situation:

> …Surely, whoever fears God, forbears and is patient will find that Allah will never deprive those who do the good of their reward.[109]

Within the context of the respective verse and all the verses that follow, it is obvious that slander is considered by God to be something very bad. It is interesting to see that verse 11 of chapter 24 makes clear what is considered to be *sharr* and what not. According to this particular incident, one could say that Aisha is asked not to see this as *sharr* for herself, being the victim of this slander; on the contrary: the verse states that it is *khayr* (good) for her. The *sharr*, at this point would be the act of slander, the act of accusing someone of something falsely, without having knowledge of it. Here one is able to see how man does consider certain events as *sharr* for himself, although in God's perspective and wisdom, it is *khayr*. What is recommended therefore is to have patience. Having said this, slander has

[106] Ibid., 24:17.
[107] Ibid., 12:77.
[108] Ibid., 12:97-98.
[109] Ibid., 12:90.

been included into the semantic field of *sharr*, as being another descriptive, primary level moral term.

2.3.8 Transgression

To exceed all bounds in wickedness, to be excessively impious and insolent. The Arabic root-word is *ṭ-gh-y* and occurs forty two times in the Qur'ān. Thirty one of these terms fall into the area of interest[110]. The following verses are mentioned in connection with *sharr:*

> That is that, but the aggressors (*liṭṭāghīna*) shall have the worst (*sharra*) resort.[111]
>
> And were Allah to hasten the *sharra* for mankind just as they would hasten the good for themselves, their term would have been fulfilled. Then We would leave those, who do not hope to meet Us in their trespasses (*ṭughyānihim*) wandering aimlessly.[112]

While [38:55] points to the place the aggressor will find himself in, [10:11] talks about man's impatience and his excessive strive for profane pleasure. This is further explained in the following verses:

> Man prays for evil (*bisharri*), just as he prays for good; and man is very hasty.[113]
>
> Those who do not believe in the Hereafter are deviating from the Path. If we show them mercy and lift their affliction, they would persist in their arrogance/trespass (*ṭughyānihim*), wandering aimlessly.[114]

Here one is able to see several messages. First of all, God does not like those who exceed boundaries set by Him. Secondly, it defines who the transgressors are. They are those who do not hope to meet God, hence do not believe in a life after death. Thirdly, God, out of His mercy, does not

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[110] *Al-Mu'jam al-mufahras li-alfāẓ al-Qur'ān al-Karīm* , 426-7.
[111] Qur'ān, 38:55.
[112] Ibid., 10:11.
[113] Ibid., 17:11.
[114] Ibid., 23:74-75.

hasten the *sharr* for mankind which they have earned. While on the other hand, man, in his haste and out of his subjectivity, sometimes asks for *sharr* instead of the good. By doing this, man puts his own desires in front of or above God's wisdom. This verse teaches man to be patient, if he wants to really understand what God's wisdom behind things is. Having said this, it is interesting to note, that haste and the transitory (or this world) have the same roots in Arabic. They both derive from *ʾ-j-l*, one being *ʾjala* (to hasten, accelerate) and the other being *ʾājilun* (that which hastens away, transitory). In the light of the above one might be able to say that out of his haste, man asks for everything to be given to him in the transitory world, including those God has promised to him for the world to come. Finally, transgression will hereby be added to the semantic field of *sharr*, forming its descriptive layer.

To sum up, the term *sharr* has been defined as secondary level moral term, where it serves as generally recognized category of moral value. The term is in its evaluative layer, since *sharr*, having a very broad meaning and covering many wrongful actions and deeds as seen above, can be understood differently if not explained in a more precise way. In order to develop a sound understanding of the term as intended in the Qur'ān, it is necessary to build an appropriate semantic field for it. This can be achieved by finding the descriptive layers of the term *sharr*, in other words, the primary level moral terms that serve as a definition of *sharr*. The respective terms that have been found in the Qur'an are parsimony (*b-kh-l*), going astray (*ḍ-l-l*), rejecting God (*k-f-r*), idolatry (*sh-r-k*), violating (a covenant or treaty) (*n-q-ḍ*), turning away, aversion from God (*ʾ-r-ḍ*), slander (*ʿ-f-k*), and transgression (*ṭ-gh-y*).

In the discussion on 'slander', the unwise behavior of man regarding what is *sharr* and what *khayr* has been briefly touched upon. Due to its importance

and because this issue will be dealt with in further detail in the following chapters, it will suffice to repeat the example of the next verse which has been mentioned in the introduction already:

> You are enjoined to fight, though it is something you dislike. For it may well be that you dislike a thing, although it is good (*khayrun*) for you; or like something although it is bad (*sharrun*) for you. Allah knows and you know not.[115]

As mentioned before, in this verse God makes man aware of how he is created: namely as an unwise, fallible creature with a lot of shortcomings, who is likely to confuse *sharr* with *khayr* due to his subjective view on things. God adds to this the fact that He knows, whereas man does not know.

> And that we do not know whether ill was intended for whoever is on earth, or whether their Lord intended rectitude for them;[116]

Taberī, Ibn Kathīr and Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır share the opinion that this sentence was used by the Jinn who used to listen to the angels' conversations in heaven to steal information for the soothsayers. However, during the time of the Messenger, they saw the heavens filled with stern guards and flaming fires. Hence they weren't sure whether this was because something evil was intended to happen to those on earth or because God wanted their goodness and right conduct. [117] What is important to mention is that the information the jinns got from the heaven about any possible evil that might occur, was evil according to their own view and how they understood it. Again from the perspective of God, this might not have been *sharr* for the people on earth, but *khayr*. Hence, the verse might show a

[115] Ibid., 2:216.
[116] Ibid., 7:10.
[117] See et-Taberī. *Taberī Tefsīri*, Vol.8, 448; Elmalı'lı Hamdi Yazır. *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, Vol. 8, 5403; Ibn Kathīr. *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Online Version).

state of confusion of the Jinn's thought, who could not be sure about what is *sharr* and what is *khayr*.

2.4 Verses beyond the Semantic Field of sharr

While the above mentioned verses form the semantic field of sharr according to Izutsu's method, there are some verses that cannot be categorized as such. At this particular point, where the possible limit of Izutsu's method is reached, it may help to define the term sharr in the following verses by making use of the above semantic key terms and replace them with the term *sharr*.

2.4.1 Sharr as a Test

There are verses in the Qur'ān which clearly state that *sharr* is a test by God, such as

> Every living soul shall taste death, and We test you by *sharri* and good as a temptation and unto Us you shall be returned.[118]

If this verse is read in the light of the above semantic field of *sharr*, as defined by the Qur'ān, it becomes clear that *sharr* can mean here to go astray, to reject God, to be ungrateful, etc. All these can be seen as temptations and as trial. Indeed, if the verse is analyzed within its context, one is able to see that it talks about idolatry and about those who do not see God's creation, the earth, the sky, night and day and the sun and moon[119], on the contrary; who take the messenger as an object of mockery.[120] Man will be accountable in the life to come for every single *sharr* he has committed in this world.

[118] Qur'ān, 21:35.
[119] Ibid., 21:31-33.
[120] Ibid., 21:36.

> And whoever has done an atom's weight of *sharra* shall find it.[121]

In other words, nothing he does is lost – everything is kept safe, the *khayr* as well as the *sharr*.

2.4.2 Sharr in Hell (Jahannam)

Jahannam, is a day that God wants man to fear, the day to come which He describes as follows:

> As for the Companions of the Left; and what are the Companions of the Left? Amid searing wind and boiling water; and a shadow of thick smoke which is neither cool nor bounteous. They lived before that in luxury; and they used to insist upon the Great Blasphemy. They used to say:"What? When we are dead and turn into dust and bones, shall we be raised from the dead? And our forefathers too?" Say: "The first and the last shall be gathered upon an appointed, pre-assigned Day. Then you, erring ones and denouncers, shall eat from the Tree of Bitterness, filling your bellies therefrom, and drinking on top of it boiling water; lapping it like thirsty camels." That shall be their meal on the day of Judgment.[122]

Jahannam as a place of humiliating chastisement, a place of no coolness nor drink, except boiling water; it is prescribed for those who partly fall under the above mentioned semantic key words of the term *sharr*: the ungrateful or unbelievers (*kafarū*)[123], the sinners (*tafsuqūna*)[124], the liars (*mukaththibūn*[125]*; kharrāṣ*[126]), the wrong-doers or evil-doers (*ẓālim*)[127], the pride and arrogant (*mutakabbir*)[128], the transgressors (*ṭāghīn*)[129], those who

[121] Ibid., 99:8.
[122] Ibid., 56:41-56.
[123] Ibid., 67:6.
[124] Ibid., 46:20.
[125] Ibid., 56:51-56; 52:9-16.
[126] Ibid., 51:10-14.
[127] Ibid., 37:62-68.
[128] Ibid., 40:60; 16:29.
[129] Ibid., 78:21-26.

act viciously (*fājir*)[130], those who deviate from the right course and act wrongfully (*qāsiṭ*)[131], the rebels (*'āṣi*)[132], those who, though outwardly a pious believer, is in reality a most stubborn disbeliever (*munāfiq*)[133], those who mock at Revelation (*mustahzī'*)[134], and finally those who, having no faith, never participate in charity and relief work[135].

Hence, according to these verses, the situation man will find himself in is explained in the Qur'ān as a *sharr*, that man should fear.

> They perform their vows and fear a Day whose *sharr* is rampant.[136]

Elucidating the term *sharr* by its contrast[137], one is able to see that the word *sharr* is used in most of the cases as the antonym of *khayr*[138]. In only one case, the term *in 'amnā* (from *ni'ma*)[139], meaning favors, is used, whereas in another verse, it is the term *naḍratun wa surūran*[140] (Light of Bounty and a blissful Joy):

> But Allah will deliver them from the *sharr* of that Day, and will shed over them the Light of Bounty and a (blissful) Joy.[141]

Therefore, one might think that the opposite of these terms are perceived as *sharr* by human beings.

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[130] Ibid., 82:13-16.
[131] Ibid., 72:14-15.
[132] Ibid., 72:23.
[133] Ibid., 66:9.
[134] Ibid., 18:106.
[135] Ibid., 69:30-37. For a more detailed explanation of the Companions of Hell in the Qur'ān, see *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān*, 111-116.
[136] Ibid., 76:7.
[137] *Ethico Religious Terms of the Qur'ān*, 38-39.
[138] See Qur'ān, 2:216; 3:180; 10:11; 17:11; 21:35; 24:11; 41:49.
[139] Ibid., 17:83.
[140] Ibid., 76:11.
[141] Ibid., 76:11.

2.4.3 Satan or Evil Inclinations

Chapter 113 and 114 in the Qur'ān serves as a prayer. Man asks God to deliver him from different kinds of *sharr*. Therefore, one is able to say that these two chapters contain different definitions of the term *sharr*.

> From the *sharr* of the slinking whisperer,[142]

In this verse it says *min sharri 'l waswāsi 'l khannās*; from the *sharr* of the *waswās* (Satan or the evil inclinations within man's own will), that is pervasive *(khannās*), I seek refuge with the Lord. One is able to define *sharr* according to this verse as Satan in person or as the evil inclinations within man, or, to put it without any interpretation, any 'voice' that commands man to do bad or just not to perform a duty.[143]

In addition to the above mentioned verse, there is one whole chapter (*sūrah*) in the Qur'ān, which might be seen as the main chapter that merely talks about *sharr*; that is chapter 113:

> Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of the Daybreak, from the *sharr* of what He has created; and the *sharr* of the darkness when it gathers; and the *sharr* of those who blow into knotted reeds; and from the *sharr* of the envious when he envies.[144]

It will be important to explain what is meant by the *sharr* of what God has created. First of all there is a difference between the "*sharr* of what God has created" and "God actually creating *sharr*". While the former suggests that God creates *khayr* from any *sharr* intention of man, the latter says that God creates *sharr*. Although this issue will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapters, a short outline will be given here.

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[142] Ibid., 114:4.
[143] How 'not performing one's duty' can be considered as *sharr* will be explained in chapter 6, under "Why Satan has been created".
[144] The Qur'ān, 113:1-5.

In first sight, it seems odd and difficult to accept that man should seek refuge from the *sharr* of what God has created. However, what is meant in this verse is that God creates whatever man inclines. In other words, man always has to make choices in life. These choices can differ in the following way: He might have to choose between two good. In this case, he will choose what he thinks is the better of the two. Or he might have to choose between two bad. In this case, he will choose what he thinks is the lesser bad. Or he might have to make a choice between good and bad. Then, he will decide for the good, rather than the bad. These choices are mostly made according to personal profit, and although rarely, sometimes for the greater good. Whatever the decision is, before it is put into action, in other words, before it is created by God, man inclines towards one of the two choices. Hence, if it is accepted that man is not the creator of his own actions, than one will accept that through his choices man first inclines towards the *sharr* and God creates the outcome for him. In other words, whatever God creates is ultimately *khayr*, but the intention of man is *sharr*. More about this essential issue will follow in chapter 7.

Since it has been said before, that man chooses according to his personal preferences rather than the greater good, and if this is combined with him being unwise, fallible and foolish, it is likely that he will choose *sharr* thinking that it is *khayr* for him. Therefore, he is advised to seek refuge with the Lord from all kinds of *sharr* intentions, inclinations and seducements, whose outcome is then created by God.

The second āyat talks about the *sharr* of the darkness (*ghāsiqin*). It would be too simplistic to say that darkness, in other words, the lack of sunshine bears *sharr* in it. Although one might argue that the possibility of bad things to happen is higher during night compared to daytime, nowadays, it is rather difficult to justify such an argument since many people, including women,

have no trouble leaving the house during night time and since in many cities, public life does not come to an end during that time.

Another alternative explanation might be to compare darkness with misguidance and light with guidance. It can be said that darkness is the lack of light. Hence, when the light of guidance goes because of man's own weaknesses and *sharr* inclinations, then he has to guard against the *sharr* which may happen as a result.

The root-word of *ghāsiqin* is *gh-s-q*, which has the meaning 'it became dark' or 'intensely dark'. Therefore one might say that *al-ghāsiq* indicates 'black darkness' or 'the black night'. Since *ghassāq* might also mean 'intense or icy cold', the combination of the two meanings would bear the concept of an 'ice-cold darkness'. It could be the ice-cold darkness of despair, which would then mean that man is to seek refuge by God from the *sharr* of *Jahannam*, described earlier.

One final explanation could also be to compare darkness with 'non-existence', which is explained in the following chapters within the *Risale-i Nur* as pure *sharr*. More about that will follow in chapter 6 under "Principles of the *Risale* regarding *khayr* and *sharr*".

From the next verse one is able to read that the very old custom of blowing into knotted reeds while murmuring some secret incantations can lead to some *sharr* that man should seek refuge from. Whether or not to believe in such magic activity can be argued upon. However, what seems to be more likely is the possible cooperation of *sharr* human and *sharr* jinn with *sharr* intentions to harm someone. Hence, man is asked to seek refuge by God from this kind of evil intentions.

The last verse is pretty obvious and could actually be included into the semantic field of the term *sharr*: the act of practicing envy. Being an envious person and to envy others is considered to be *sharr* – both from a personal moral and a social aspect.

Until to this point, the semantic analysis of the term *sharr* in the Qur'ān has been made. Thereby, the semantic field of the respective term has been defined in order to try to grasp the true meaning and intended implication of *sharr* according to the Qur'ān. Meanwhile, small limitations have been reached, where it was not possible for some verses to be categorized into well defined semantic fields. These have been considered to be verses beyond the semantic field of *sharr*. As a next step, it will be interesting to see how the exegetes (*mufassirūn*) have explained the respective chapters and verses. Not every exegete has interpreted every single verse. Some verses have not been commented upon. Hence, only those verses where comments have been made are included into this study. These verses are:

> And let not those who are niggardly in spending (*yabkhalūna*) what God has given them of His bounty suppose that it is good for them. No, it is *sharr*; they will carry what they stinted around their necks on the Day of Resurrection. And to Allah belongs the inheritance of the heavens and the earth. Allah is aware of what you do.[145]
>
> Say: "Shall I tell you something much worse (*bi sharri*) than this for retribution with Allah? Those whom Allah cursed and on whom He poured forth His wrath, transformed them into apes and swine, and worshippers of the Devil. They are worse off (*sharrun makānan*) and farther astray (*aḍallu*)."[146]
>
> The worst (*sharra*) beasts in Allah's sight are the deaf and dumb who do not understand.[147]

[145] Qur'an, 3:180.
[146] Ibid., 5:60.
[147] Ibid., 8:22.

The worst (*sharra*) beasts in the sight of Allah are those who reject Him, because they will never believe.[148]

And were Allah to hasten the *sharra* for mankind just as they would hasten the good for themselves, their term would have been fulfilled. Then We would leave those, who do not hope to meet Us in their trespasses (*ṭughyānihim*) wandering aimlessly.[149]

Man prays for evil (*bisharri*), just as he prays for good; and man is very hasty.[150]

And when We are gracious to man, he turns away (*a'raḍa*) and withdraws haughtily; and if *ash-sharru* touches him, he is in despair.[151]

Every living soul shall taste death, and We test you by *sharri* and good as a temptation and unto Us you shall be returned[152]

And we understand not whether *sharr* was intended to those on earth or whether their Lord wanted to guide them to right conduct.[153]

Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of the Daybreak, from the *sharr* of what He has created; and the *sharr* of the darkness when it gathers; and the *sharr* of those who blow into knotted reeds; and from the *sharr* of the envious when he envies.[154]

From the sharr of the slinking whisperer[155]

2.5 Opinions of Exegetes with regard to the Verses on *sharr*

The interpretations of the different *exegetes* concerning the verses at hand show that they did not really concentrate on the term *sharr* in particular and its possible meaning and definition. They rather delivered general interpretations about the overall possible meaning of each respective verse and what it mainly covers. Above, verses containing terms of the same

[148] Ibid., 8:55.
[149] Ibid., 10:11.
[150] Ibid., 17:11.
[151] Ibid., 17:83.
[152] Ibid., 21:35.
[153] Ibid., 72:10.
[154] Ibid., 113:1-5.
[155] Ibid., 114:4.

semantic field have been mentioned together. Here, this is not possible since the *mufassirūn* concentrate on different aspects in each verse.

2.5.1 Chapter 3, Verse 180

Starting with [3:180] in the Qur'ān, the verse on parsimony (*yabkhalūna*) states the reprehensibility of withholding of what God has given to man. This attribute, having been defined as part of the semantic field of *sharr*, has been interpreted by some of the exegetes as follows:

Ibn Kathīr, Qurtubī and Tabātabā'ī share the general meaning of this verse and state that the miser should not think that collecting money will benefit him.[156] According to Ibn Kathīr, this kind of behavior will rather harm him in his religion and worldly affairs, without thereby giving further explanation of how it can harm a person's worldly affairs.[157] Both support their argument with the following ḥadīth recorded from al-Bukhārī and conveyed from Abu Hurayrah:

> The Messenger of Allah said: Whoever Allah makes wealthy and he does not pay the Zakah due on his wealth, then (on the Day of Resurrection) his wealth will be made in the likeness of a bald-headed poisonous male snake with two black spots over the eyes. The snake will encircle his neck and bite his cheeks and proclaim, `I am your wealth, I am your treasure.'

The Messenger, after having said this, recited the respective verse (3:180) until the end. Ibn Kathīr further states that while this ḥadīth can be found in al-Bukhārī, it has not been collected by Muslim.[158]

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[156] Ibn Kathīr. *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Online English Version); Kurtubī. *El-Cemiu li-Ahkāmi'l Kur'an* (Online Turkish Version); Muhammad Ḥusayn Tabātabā'ī, *Al-Mīzān fī Tafsīr al-Kur'ān* (Online Turkish Version).
[157] *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Online English Version).
[158] Ibid.

Al-Rāzī, while sharing the above explanation, adds another approach to this verse. According to him, this verse does not only address those who act niggardly distributing their wealth, but might also address those who keep their knowledge (*'ilm*) for themselves instead of sharing it with others.[159] Thus, says Al-Rāzī, the Jews were hiding the attributes of the Messenger mentioned in the Torah[160]. Hiding such information, according to Al-Rāzī, is stinginess. Having said this, nevertheless, Al-Rāzī states that the first interpretation, namely withholding of one's wealth, is more likely to be relevant in this verse.[161]

Mawdūdī emphasizes that nothing belongs to man and that God is the true owner of everything. Every human being will ultimately return to God and when that time comes, he will take nothing, no possessions and belongings which he thought are his, with him. Therefore, according to Mawdūdī, this verse states that the clever man is the one who spends his wealth in the name of God and the foolish is he who collects and piles it.[162]

2.5.2 Chapter 5, Verse 60

The next verse [5:60] deals with those who go astray (*aḍallu*):

> Say: "Shall I tell you something much worse (*bi sharri*) than this for retribution with Allah? Those whom Allah cursed and on whom He poured forth His wrath, transformed them into apes and swine, and worshippers of the Devil. They are worse off (*sharrun makānan*) and farther astray (*aḍallu*)."

According to Tabātabā'ī, this verse declares that "if our belief in Allah and His revealed Books was an evil in your opinion, then I inform you of what is more evil than that, and which you should truly hate, and it is the

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[159] Fakhruddīn Er-Rāzī. *Tefsīr-i Kebīr Mefātīhu'l Ghayb* (Online Turkish Version)
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.
[162] *Tefhimu'l Kur'an*, Surah Al-Imran (Online Turkish Version)

characteristics, which is found in yourselves."[163] Tabātabā'ī further points out that the demonstrative pronoun 'this' in 'worse than this' can either point to the entire community of believers, or it can point to the verbal noun, to find fault or to hate. According to the former the verse will declare something that is worse than the believers and in the latter it will declare something that is "worse than this fault-finding and hate of yours in retribution".[164] Al-Razī is of the opinion that the demonstrative pronoun 'this' refers not to a verbal noun but to the people who are the owners of that noun mentioned one verse before:

> Say: "Oh people of the Book, do you believe in Allah and what has been revealed to us and what was revealed before, and that most of you are transgressors?"[165]

In other words, it does not refer to the act of hatred but to those who hate or to the act of transgression, but to the transgressors.[166]

Mawdūdī, on the other hand, relates this verse merely to the Jews instead of interpreting the verse in a more general manner. According to him, the verse addresses those Jews who opposed the Muslims. Interestingly enough, Mawdūdī seems to take the expression "transformed them into apes and swine" literally and states that God turned them into apes and swine because they did not fulfil the Sabbath.[167] Al-Rāzī also mentions this incident by referring to it as "according to some narratives".[168]

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[163] Muhammad Ḥusayn Tabātabā'ī, *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, in <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> latest access 22 March 2011.
[164] Ibid.
[165] Qur'ān, 5:59.
[166] *Tefsīr-i Kebīr Mefātīhu'l Ghayb* (Online Turkish Version).
[167] *Tefhimu'l Kur'an*, Surah Al-Imran (Online Turkish Version).
[168] *Tefsīr-i Kebīr Mefātīhu'l Ghayb* (Online Turkish Version).

Contrary to Mawdūdī, Ibn Kathīr points out that this transformation should not be taken literally, thereby providing the following ḥadīth:

> Sufyan Ath-Thawri narrated that Ibn Mas'ud said, Allah's Messenger was asked if the current monkeys and swine were those whom Allah transformed. He said: "Allah never destroyed a people by transforming them and making offspring or descendants for them. The monkeys and swine existed before that." This was also recorded by Muslim.[169]

As can be seen, what the *mufassirūn* mainly concentrate on in this verse is the meaning of the demonstrative pronoun 'this' (by discussing who or what the addressee is) and the 'transformation into apes and swine'. Qurtubī, in difference to the other exegetes, explains the reason for the revelation (*asbāb nuzūl*) of this verse with the following narrative:

> Ibn Abbas said that a group of Jews came to the Messenger of God and asked him in which Messengers he believed in. The Messenger replied reciting chapter 2, verse 136 of the Qur'ān: "We believe in God, in what has been revealed to us, in what was revealed to Abraham, Isma'il, […] Moses, Jesus and the other Prophets from their Lord, […] and to Him we submit." But when they heard the name Jesus, they denied his Prophethood and said: "By God, we do not know of any religious community whose enjoyment (*nasīb*) in this world and in the hereafter is less. And we do not know of any religion worse than yours." Thereafter, the respective verse has been revealed.[170]

Hence, Qurtubī believes that the expression "Shall I tell you something much worse (*bi sharri*) than this" is an answer to the Jews' statement about the Messenger's religious community.

2.5.3 Chapter 8, Verses 22 and 55

According to Ibn Kathīr, verse 22 and 55 of chapter 8 refers to the *munafiqūn* and the disbelievers respectively. Verse 22 talks about the deaf and dumb, the hypocrites who say that they heard but act as if they have not and they say they understood, but act as if they have no knowledge at

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[169] *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Online English Version)
[170] *El-Cemiu li-Ahkāmi'l Kur'an* (Online Turkish Version).

all. Whereas verse 55, states Ibn Kathīr, addresses the unbelievers who break their promises whenever they make a covenant, even when they vow to keep them.[171]

While Al-Rāzī shares the opinion of Ibn Kathīr, he also explains that there are different views of different scholars about what beast (*dawāb*) might mean. Some say that because of their ignorance and because their own words did not benefit them in any way, they were compared with *dawāb*. That is why God described them as 'deaf' and 'dumb' and 'those who are not capable of using their intellect'. They are from amongst the beasts because *dawāb* is the name of a creature living on earth.[172]

Qurtubī does not refer verse 22 only to the *munafiqūn* or to the unbelievers. In his opinion, everyone, who does not apply his knowledge in life and act upon it, falls under the warning of the 'deaf' and 'dumb'; for how can one say that he has heard and understood, if he does not put his knowledge into action?[173]

Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır explains that the reason why in verse 22 the deaf and dumb are defined as the 'worst (*sharra*) of beasts' is because those who have ears but don't hear the truth or do not want to hear the truth, who have a tongue but do not say the truth or do not want to say the truth, and those who have a mind but do not think about the truth or do not want to think about the truth are the most *sharr* for themselves and for others and worse than any other living being on earth.[174]

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[171] *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Online English Version).
[172] *Tefsīr-i Kebīr Mefātīhu'l Ghayb* (Online Turkish Version)
[173] *El-Cemiu li-Ahkāmi'l Kur'an* (Online Turkish Version).
[174] Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır. *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, Vol.4, p. 2383-4.

2.5.4 Chapter 10, Verse 11

It has been said previously that man is very hasty in nature and hence sometimes asks God for *sharr* thinking that it is good for him. One of the verses mentioned in this regard is to be found in chapter 10, verse 11:

> And were Allah to hasten the *sharra* for mankind just as they would hasten the good for themselves, their term would have been fulfilled. Then We would leave those, who do not hope to meet Us in their trespasses (*ṭughyānihim*) wandering aimlessly.

Al-Rāzī provides additional verses for reference.[175] The ungrateful do not believe in the Messenger and the warning-messages sent by their Lord. Hence they ask God to hasten and to make His warnings real, if it is right what the Messenger states. But God does not hasten the *sharr* for it might be that some of them will repent or there will be believers amongst their offspring.[176] Rāzī further comments on the term *sharr*. He states that God calls chastisement *sharr* in this verse for chastisement is perceived by the recipient as being malign.

Those who do not expect to meet with God challenge Him in their foolishness by asking Him to send down punishment on them. Taberī and Ibn Kathīr explain it differently: they refer to the bad attitude of imprecation. If Allah were to hasten in accepting the unjust imprecations men do to each other, then their respite would be settled at once. According to them, God shows mercy by granting the believer (*mu'min*) a possibility of repentance

[175] *Tefsīr-i Kebīr Mefātīhu'l Ghayb* (Online Turkish Version), mentions the following verses: [43:18], [10:49-51], [13:6].
[176] Ibid.

and giving the ungrateful/unbeliever (*kāfir*) a certain time.[177] Hence in this case, *sharr* is defined as unjust imprecation.

2.5.5 Chapter 17, Verses 11 and 83

The next two verses in chapter 17 are similar to the one mentioned above in chapter 10, verse 11:

> Man prays for evil (*bisharri*), just as he prays for good; and man is very hasty.[178]
>
> And when We are gracious to man, he turns away (*a'raḍa*) and withdraws haughtily; and if *ash-sharru* touches him, he is in despair.[179]

Mawdūdī first explains the *asbāb nuzūl* of the first verse above. In there he states that the unbelievers of Mecca, in their foolishness, wanted the Messenger to ask God for their immediate punishment, whereupon verse 11 was revealed. However, Mawdūdī also points to another more general aspect, which serves as a hidden warning to the believers. That is, not to ask God to destroy the unbelievers for their torture and suppression. For amongst their descendants, there might become strong and firm believers and representatives of God's religion.[180] Hence, the Muslim is asked not to hasten and not to ask for things by thinking narrowly and self-centered. Mawdūdī does not touch on the term *sharr* in any way. Ibn Kathīr relates this verse to [10:11] and connects it also with unjust imprecation, as explained before.[181]

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[177] Ebū Cafer Muhammed b. Cerir et-Taberī. *Taberī Tefsīri*, Vol.4, trans. Kerim Aytekin, Hasan Karakaya (Istanbul: Hisar Yayinevi, 1996), p. 400; Hafiz Ibn Kathir. *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Darussalam)
[178] Qur'ān, 17:11.
[179] Ibid., 17:83.
[180] *Tefhimu'l Kur'an*, Surah Al-Imran (Online Turkish Version).
[181] *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Online English Version)

Al-Rāzī, on the other hand, explains his own view about the meaning of verse 11 as man being very likely to confuse *khayr* with *sharr* out of his lack of wisdom.[182] This matter has been discussed earlier.

Yazır adds to the above that man always prefers the advance to the credit. In other words, he tends to ask for the beauty of the hereafter in this world, hence gives up the hereafter and turns to the world (*dunya*). By doing this, he does not mind the big merit of the hereafter but does also not think of the punishment and hence, thinking that what he asks for is good for him, invites the *sharr* out of his haste.[183]

Ihsan Eliaçık has a quite different approach to verse 11 of chapter 17. According to his interpretation, man commits *sharr* by saying over and over again that what he does is good. For example does man invade other countries and sheds blood in the name of justice, human rights, democracy, freedom, etc. When one hears them speak, one might think they are angels and it is as if they have been given the divine duty to civilize the world. Eliaçık gives another example about those who tend to say "those who are against us are against *shari'a*. How can they oppose us while we recite verses from the Qur'ān and read ḥadīth? So it must be the Qur'ān and the ḥadīth they are opposing. Since those, who are against Qur'ān and ḥadīth are considered to be apostate, it will be a reward to kill them. We are doing all of this for the sake of Allah". Hence, they twist the truth and think that what they do is *khayr*, although it is nothing else but *sharr*.[184]

[182] *Tefsīr-i Kebīr Mefātīhu'l Ghayb* (Online Turkish Version).
[183] *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, Vol.5, 3168.
[184] Ihsan Eliaçık. *Yaşayan Kur'an*, vol. 2 (Istanbul: Inşa Yayınları), 84.

2.5.6 Chapter 21, Verse 35

The verse "every living soul shall taste death, and We test you by *sharri* and good as a temptation and unto Us you shall be returned"[185] has been mentioned previously under the category 'Sharr as a Test'. There, *sharr* has been defined in relation with its semantic field. It is however interesting to see that er-Rāzī, for instance, defines *sharr* as poverty, grief and any other afflictions and worldly harms and/or losses with which God tests human's faith and patience.[186] In other words, er-Rāzī seems to accept worldly afflictions to be *sharr*, just as Mawdūdī does[187]. Ibn Kathīr adds to the definition of *sharr* sin and misguidance, thereby referring to Ali bin Abu Talhah, who apparently reported from Ibn Abbas[188]. Similarly does Qurtubī mention poverty and *harām* in relation with *sharr.*[189]

2.5.7 Chapter 72, Verse 10

In chapter 72 verse 10 it was the jinn who did

> understand not whether *sharr* was intended to those on earth or whether their Lord wanted to guide them to right conduct.

Taberī, Ibn Kathīr and Elmalılı Hamdi Yazır share the opinion that this sentence was used by the Jinn who used to listen to the angels' conversations in heaven to steal information for the soothsayers. However, during the time of the Messenger, they saw the heavens filled with stern guards and flaming fires. Hence they were not sure whether this was

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[185] Qur'ān, 21:35.
[186] *Tefsīr-i Kebīr Mefātīhu'l Ghayb* (Online Turkish Version).
[187] *Tefhimu'l Kur'an* (Online Turkish Version).
[188] *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Online English Version).
[189] *El-Cemiu li-Ahkāmi'l Kur'an* (Online Turkish Version).

because something evil was intended to happen to those on earth or because God wanted their goodness and right conduct.[190]

2.5.8 Chapter 113, Verses 1 to 5

The chapter the exegetes did comment the most on is chapter [113:1-5]:

> Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of the Daybreak, from the *sharr* of what He has created; and the *sharr* of the darkness when it gathers; and the *sharr* of those who blow into knotted reeds; and from the *sharr* of the envious when he envies.

Many commentators give similar explanations to the first verse that asks the reader to seek refuge with the Lord from the Daybreak (*al-falaq*). However, Tabātabā'ī's interpretation of the first verse is highly interesting.

After he provides the meaning of *falaq*, being an adjective in the meaning of an object (i.e. something that breaks through or cleaves), he says: "… the reason of this expression is to seek refuge from evil that hides the good and conceals what is manifest"[191]. This explanation is very important for it provides another hint to what is later going to be discussed in more detail: namely human's perspective of *sharr* that covers or hides all *khayr* that is behind it and man's judgment of situations according to the apparent, for *sharr* conceals only what is manifest. Hence, Tabātabā'ī states that "within the world of creation lies a crack which leads to the realm of obliviousness – an opening which exposes the evil into existence."[192]

According to this verse, one should seek refuge by God from the following *ashrār* (pl. of *sharr*):

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[190] See et-Taberī. *Taberī Tefsīri*, vol.8, 448; *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, Vol. 8, 5403; Ibn Kathīr. *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Online Version)
[191] *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, in <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> latest access 08 April 2011.
[192] Ibid.

2.5.8.1 What he created (*khalaq*)

Yūsuf ʻAlī describes this as "a) physical dangers, typified by darkness, b) psychical dangers within us, typified by Secret Arts, and c) psychical dangers from without us, resulting from a perverted will, which seeks to destroy any good that we enjoy."[193]

Hamdi Yazır's opinion is that "the *sharr* of created things" can cover anything that is material (*maddî*) or immaterial (*mânewî*), worldly (*dunyawî*) or otherworldly (*ukhrawî*); or anything that belongs to the outer (*afâkî*) or the inner (*enfusî*); or anything that is natural (*tabiî*) or at will (*ikhtiyarî*).[194] Hence, according to Yazır, this *âyat* covers any *sharr* that comes about from man and jinn, from the *shayâtîn* (pl. of *shaytân*, devil), from vermin and germs, poisons and fire (*nâr*), sins (*dhunûb*) and covetousness (hewā); from the lower self (*nafs*), from actions, etc.[195] This explanation of Yazır suggests that *sharr* can be seen in any created thing.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī counts similar things amongst the *ashrār* like Yazır does: One should seek refuge from the *sharr* of a) the *shayṭān*, b) hellfire, c) from vermin and germs and any harmful animals, and d) from the *sharr* of illnesses and calamities.[196] He mentions objections saying that illnesses and calamities cannot be defined as *sharr* since this would mean that man is supposed to take refuge in the causer of *sharr* and that would be a contradiction in itself.[197] But Rāzī does not see any contradiction therein and says that there is nothing wrong to take refuge in God from God. For the Messenger of God himself used to say "My Lord! I seek refuge in You from

[193] ʻAbdullah Yūsuf ʻAlī. *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, 1716.
[194] *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, Vol.9, 6373.
[195] Ibid.
[196] *Tefsīr-i Kebīr Mefâtihu'l-Gayb*, surah Falaq (Online version).
[197] Ibid.

You." [198] To any other objection about taking refuge from *qadar*, in other words, about why God would ask someone to seek refuge in Him for something He willed to happen, Rāzī confines himself saying that God cannot be taken into account for anything He does.[199]

While Qurtubī just shortly states that taking refuge from created things means taking refuge from Iblīs and hell and all beings God has created and has given the ability to cause harm,[200] Mawdūdi chooses to give a more detailed explanation about this *āyat*. He states that first of all *sharr* in this *āyat* is not related to God, but to created beings. It does not say 'I seek refuge in God from *ashrār* created by God', but rather 'I seek refuge in God from the *ashrār* of created things'.[201] While this statement keeps the door open for the discussion of whether God is the Creator of *sharr* or not, this shows according to Mawdūdī, that God has not created anything for *sharr* but has created certain things with certain features in order to complete the wisdom of creation. Secondly, says Mawdūdī, the best way for man to protect himself from the *ashrār* of created things is by seeking refuge in God, who is the Creator of things. For God is always dominating creation and knows best about *ashrār* that are unknown to man.[202] Hence, by finding refuge in God, man finds refuge from any *ashrār* of creation that is known or unknown to him; from *sharr* in this world and in the hereafter.[203]

Furthermore it is important to state that according to Mawdūdī, the term *sharr* can be used for any loss, deficiency, and anguish. Having said this, he

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[198] Ibrahim Canan. *Kütüb-i Sitte*, vol. 7, Hadith 1803, 25. Also see Muslim: Book 4, Hadith 986.
[199] *Tefsīr-i Kebīr Mefātihu'l-Gayb*, surah Falaq (Online version).
[200] *El-Cemiu li-Ahkāmi'l Kur'an* (Burç Yayınları), Vol. 19, 471-474.
[201] *Tefhimu'l Kur'an*, Surah Falaq (Soft Copy).
[202] Ibid.
[203] Ibid.

states that illnesses, hunger, being hurt during war, to burn in fire, to be hurt by a scorpion or to grief out of the loss of one's child can be counted amongst *ashrār* of first grade. On the other hand, ungratefulness, polytheism, and any kind of sin and injustice is of second grade for it does not cause direct harm and does not hurt like those of first grade.[204] Finally he states that the *sharr* that one seeks refuge from in God does cover these two types.

Tabātabā'ī makes clear that every created thing, be it humans, jinns, animals or else, can bear evil and one should not be preoccupied about it.[205] However, he does not give any further explanation about what he means by not being preoccupied by it. One suggestion for the meaning may be that one should not be too anxious about this kind of evil and one should be aware that God stands above and is much more powerful than all evils.

2.5.8.2 Darkness when it gathers

This, according to Yūsuf 'Alī is the description of physical danger, for everyone is afraid of physical darkness, injuries, accidents and calamities.[206] It is well known that man mostly depicts all kinds of physical dangers with darkness.

Rāzī, Mawdūdī, Qurtubī, Yazır and Tabātabā'ī more or less share the opinion that dangers increase during darkness and that anyone with bad intentions get into action after sunset. Therefore, the verse advises to seek refuge in God from darkness as it overspreads. Ihsan Eliaçık translates this verse differently. According to him, the translation should be as follows: "I seek refuge in You, oh Lord (*Rabb*), from the appearance of all repressed and

[204] Ibid.
[205] *Tafsīr al-Mīzān*, in <http://www.shiasource.com/al-mizan/> latest access 7 May 2011.
[206] *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, 1716.

hidden stimulations that flow in my veins and from their seducement of me."[207] Eliaçık, similar to the other mentioned exegetes, translates the word *ghāsiq* as 'thoroughly filling up', 'covering'[208] and the word *waqab* as 'to completely enter something else and be out of sight'[209]. However, he translates it differently. This interpretation of Eliaçık reduces the amount of questions that might be raised regarding the association of bad actions directly with darkness. Furthermore it concentrates more on the intrinsic aspect of man. This draws the attention from other beings to oneself. Instead of seeing *sharr* in others, in darkness or in other people doing bad things when it is dark, one seeks refuge in God from one's own inner seducements. According to Eliaçık, the next verse is in close relationship with this one.

2.5.8.3 Those who blow into knotted reeds

This, according to Yūsuf 'Alī, causes psychological terror[210] which can, however, also lead to physical dangers, for the outcome of these plots may be the destruction of family bounds, the sickness or madness of people, etc.

Yazır and Eliaçık's interpretation of this verse is similar and they state that they are in line with Abū Muslim in that one meaning of this verse may be 'women who blow on knots' or 'women who seduce and provoke'[211]. Tabātabā'ī is also one of those who believe that women favor witchcraft more than men and additionally refers to chapter 2, verse 102 of the Qur'ān to emphasize the truth of the act of witchcraft:

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[207] *Yaşayan Kur'an*, Vol. 3 (Istanbul: Inşa Yayınları), 444.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.
[210] *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, 1716.
[211] *Yaşayan Kur'an*, Vol. 3 (Istanbul: Inşa Yayınları), 444; *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, Vol.9, 6386.

> […] but the devils did, teaching the people witchcraft and that which was revealed in Babylon to the two angels, Harut and Marut. Yet those two angels did not teach anybody without saying: "We are a temptation. So do not disbelieve." Those [who wished] learned from them what would sow discord between man and wife, but could not harm anybody with it, except with Allah's permission. […]

Although it is well known and widely accepted, states Eliaçık, that women have the ability to seduce men and to make them their slaves, it would be wrong to restrict this verse only to women. Therefore it might be appropriate to translate this verse as follows: "As a human being, I seek refuge, oh Lord (*Rabb*) in You from the *sharr* of becoming a slave of provoked desires and lustful addictions, and from temptations and all kinds of blowing that evoke these feelings."[212] Accordingly, *naffāthāti fi 'l 'uqad* covers everything and every feeling, be it avidity, desires or anything that enslaves humans, that enchains and captivates them, that blinds them and that makes them commit all kinds of evil.[213] Although it is man who has free will and the ability to choose to do right or wrong, he is asked to seek refuge in his Lord from being defeated by his desires and from being enslaved, in other words to ask his Lord for help in making the right decisions.

In comparison with Yazır and Rāzī, one can see that Yazır, in this verse, is very much influenced by Rāzī, but Rāzī adds the view of the Mu'tazilites regarding this verse, which is worth noting: The Mu'tazilites do not believe that secret arts can affect or influence anyone. They state three possible meanings for this verse. One, to seek refuge from the sin of performing secret arts; second, to seek refuge from the mischief (*fitna*) within society as

[212] *Yaşayan Kur'an*, Vol. 3 (Istanbul: Inşa Yayınları), 445.
[213] Ibid.

the result of secret arts[214]; three, to seek refuge from their plots, such as making people eat poisonous food that leads to death or madness[215].

In comparison, Sayyid Qutb believes that secret arts can highly influence people's senses and feelings.[216] It can frighten, divert and burden people and therefore one need to seek refuge in God from this kind of evil.[217] Contrary to those who believe that prophet Muhammed was affected by secret arts performed by some others, and that that was the reason for the last two chapters in the Qur'ān to be revealed, Qutb believes in the weakness of this account. The Qur'ān, according to Qutb, states that the Prophet was never bewitched.[218]

2.5.8.4 The envious when he envies

Malignant envy, put into action, states Yūsuf 'Alī, seeks to destroy the happiness or the material or spiritual good enjoyed by other people.[219] Yazır's explanation of the term *ḥasad* is akin with that of Yūsuf 'Alī. He draws a line between *ghibṭa* (envy without malice) and *ḥasad* [220](jealousy) and states that while there is nothing wrong with showing *ghibṭa* towards another person, it is evil to show *ḥasad*.[221] The former is to desire or long

[214] This does not mean that performing secret arts has an influence on or affects people. It means that those people who seek to perform secret arts or ask others to do so are envious and destructive. Hence their actions and bad behavior destroys social harmony.
[215] *Tefsīr-i Kebīr Mefātihu'l-Gayb*, surah Falaq (Online version).
[216] Seyyid Kutub. *Fī Zilāl 'il-Kur'an Tefsiri*, surah Falaq (Online version).
[217] Ibid.
[218] Ibid.
[219] *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān*, 1716.
[220] Yazır emphasizes that *ḥased* being translated as 'envy', should not be confused or equalized with the term 'jealous'. A man can be jealous at his wife or a woman jealous at her husband. This is a praised (*memduḥ*) attitude. Whereas envy (*ḥased*) contains grimness or tyranny for it wishes the other the decadence of his blessings. As long as this kind of envy is kept to oneself, it only harms the envious one; but the moment it is put into action and one tries to actively destroy the other's blessing, it becomes *sharr*. Therefore one should seek refuge from this kind of *sharr*. See *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, Vol.9, 6406.
[221] *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, Vol.9, 6404.

for someone else's belonging, attitude, character or beauty without destroying it, whereas the latter is the same, but with the bad intention of wishing that person to cease having that belonging, attitude, character or beauty.[222] Furthermore, Yazır says that this chapter of the Qur'ān addresses external (*āfāqi*) *ashrār*, such as the darkness, secret arts and envy. Yazır continues that although envy as an attribute can also harm the envious one himself and hence become an internal (*anfusi*) *sharr*, this part is addressed in the chapter that follows *sūra al-Falaq*, which is *sūra al-Nās*[223].

According to Mawdūdī, one should seek refuge in God as soon as the envy (*ḥasad*) of a person is put into practice.[224] Furthermore, one should take precautions from the *sharr* of the envious one (*ḥāsid*). One of these precautions is to show total submission to God and to firmly believe that no one can harm one without God allowing it. Secondly, one should show patience to the actions of the *ḥāsid* and should not lower oneself by being like him.[225] Thirdly, no matter what the *ḥāsid* does, one should keep being pious (*taqwa*). Fourthly, one should not think too much about the *ḥāsid*, for thinking too much will be the beginning of one's defeat. The fifth precaution is, according to Mawdūdī, not to treat the *ḥāsid* in a bad way; by contrast, to show kindness and be generous towards him. And lastly, one should be persistent in the doctrine of the oneness of God (*tawhīd*). If the doctrine of *tawhīd* is rooted in one's heart, he will never be afraid of anyone, anywhere.[226]

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[222] Ibid., 6404-6405.
[223] Ibid., 6408.
[224] *Tefhimu'l Kur'an*, Surah Falaq (Soft Copy).
[225] Ibid.
[226] Ibid.

2.5.9 Chapter 114, Verse 4

The last verse in the Qur'ān with the term *sharr* can be found in *surah an-Nās* and reads as follows:

> From the sharr of the slinking whisperer,[227]

All exegetes that are mentioned in this study agree that the word *waswās* can mean to whisper or a covert voice. Mawdūdī adds that the word *waswās* signifies a repetition, such as to whisper again and again[228]. Yazır discusses two verses from the Qur'ān, where the term *waswās* is mentioned to explain its possible meaning in this case. One is "It was We Who created man, and We know what dark suggestions (*waswisu*) his soul (*nafs*) makes to him:"[229] and the other is "But Satan whispered (*waswasa*) (evil) to him (Adam):"[230] In the light of these two verses, Yazır suggests that the *waswās* in [114:4] is either the *nafs* or *nafs ammārah* (the self that commands *sharr*) to be more precise, or it is Satan (*shayṭān*).[231] As mentioned before, Yazır considers the kind of *waswasa* that comes from one's own *nafs ammārah* or *shayṭān* to be internal (*enfusi*) *sharr*[232], which harms the one that shelters it.

Mawdūdī does not consider *waswās* to be only the *nafs* or the *shayṭān*. According to him it can also be from among the '*jinn shayṭān*' and human beings (*ins shayṭān*)[233].

In the light of all these commentaries, the term *sharr* seems to frame itself in form of physical and psychological calamities, which originate from the

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[227] Qur'ān, 114:4.
[228] *Tefhimu'l Kur'an*, Surah Nās (Soft Copy).
[229] See Qur'ān 50:16.
[230] See Qur'ān 20:120.
[231] *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, Vol.9, 6423.
[232] Ibid., 6408.
[233] *Tefhimu'l Kur'an*, Surah Nās (Soft Copy).

distorted will of man rather than from any kind of natural disasters or external calamities. However it should be noted that none of the exegetes give precise descriptions or definitions of what the term *sharr* might mean, how its meaning should be approached and what God might have meant when mentioning it in the Scripture. The only commentator from the ones mentioned in this study, who has written the most about *sharr* in more detail, is Ihsan Eliaçık. Compared to the other mufassirūn, Eliaçık is unconventional and not very traditional. In other words, he prefers not to restrict himself on the different schools of thought (*madhāhib*). What he has to say about *sharr* is not very different from what will be mentioned in the next chapter about the different philosopher's and theologian's view on evil and what has already been said in the introduction about the 'west's' approach to the topic. In other words, he gives an outline about what has already been said[234]. He does not provide any solution however to the problem of evil.

This chapter will come to an end after analyzing the term *sharr* in ḥadīth, the sayings of the Prophet Muhammed.

2.6 Semantic Analysis of the term *sharr* in Ḥadīth

Different approaches have been tried to identify the *aḥādith* (pl. ḥadīth) which include the term *sharr*. One of them was to look at those that stand in relation with, or are mentioned together with the Qur'anic verses on *sharr*. However, this approach was unsuccessful. None of the *aḥādith* mentioned together with the respective verses of the Qur'ān did include the term *sharr* in any way. Neither did they explain or define the term.

The second approach was to use an online search engine. The search engine provided by the *Institute for Knowledge and Education and Methodology* has

[234] *Yaşayan Kur'an*, vol. 3, 442-444.

proven itself to be very useful. From this engine, thirty three Traditions have been picked. Not all of the *aḥādith* that contain the term *sharr* have been considered due to some of them being prayers of the same kind that the Prophet used to do. These prayers are mainly in form of seeking refuge by the Lord from any kind of *ashrār*; the respective term thereby not being closer defined.

In here, the narrators of the Traditions will not all be mentioned, rather the concentration will be on the saying of the Prophet only. Whoever is interested in knowing the chains of narration can always look into any ḥadīth collection. Furthermore, those *aḥādith* have been chosen which are in close relation with the study at hand; in other words, any ḥadīth that describes the term *sharr* in one, or another way.

Hence, in the following ḥadīth, *sharr* is defined as any kind of misbehavior that may occur through one's perverted will:

> A man approached the Messenger and asked: "Which of the human beings are amongst the better ones?" He replied: "Those who struggle for the sake of Allah with their wealth and their life." The man asked: "And who next?" He replied: "That *mu'min* who prays to his Lord in secret and who protects others from his own *sharr*."[235]

The Messenger's advice for everyone is to protect their environment from their own mischief that can result in *sharr*. The better ones are those who act responsibly and make the right choices in life. Another supporting ḥadīth in this regard might be the following:

> Abdullah said: We were together with the Messenger in a cave. The sūrah Mursalāt had been revealed to him and we were listening to it. All of a sudden, a snake approached us. The Messenger said: "Kill it." So we prepared to kill the snake but it was faster and disappeared. Thereupon the

[235] Muslim, al-Imara, 122; Abu Dāwūd, Jihad, 5.

> Messenger replied: "Just as God protected you from the snake's *sharr*, He protected the snake from your *sharr*."[236]

In another ḥadīth, the Messenger is quoted as having said

> Oh son of Adam! To give away the excess of your wealth as *sadaqa* (charity) is *khayr* for you. To keep and pile it is *sharr* for you. However, you will not be taken into account for keeping as much as you need for your own living. Start with giving *sadaqa* to those who are under your maintenance (*nafaqa*). The higher hand is better that the lower hand.[237]

In the analysis of the Qur'ān, it has been said before in this chapter that parsimony, the state of extreme stinginess, falls under the semantic field of *sharr*. This ḥadīth supports the respective verse [3:180]. While God says in the Qur'ān that "those who are niggardly in spending what God has given them out of His bounty should not think that it is good for them. No, it is *sharr*; …" the Messenger clearly states that piling up wealth instead of sharing it with the needy is a *sharr* act.

The next ḥadīth seems to be related to the verses [8:22-23] and [18:57] where God talks about the deaf and the dumb, those who turn away, whose hearts are sealed and who will not believe.

> No doubt some people are like keys towards *khayr* acts and like deadbolts towards *sharr* acts. And some other people are like keys towards *sharr* acts and like deadbolts towards *khayr* acts. How blessed is the one whom Allah has given the keys of goodness (*khayr*) into his hands. And pity to those whom Allah has given the keys of *sharr* into their hands.[238]

The rejection of understanding and accepting the truth that was mentioned before in this chapter stands in close relation with this ḥadīth. It is worth noting, however, that having the keys for *khayr* or *sharr* in one's hands still requires making use of them. In other words, before man has decided to use

[236] Muslim, Salām, 137.
[237] Muslim, Zakāt, 97.
[238] Ibn Mājah, Sunna, 19.

that key, God will neither create *khayr*, nor *sharr* for him. This issue will be discussed in more detail in the chapters to come.

The next ḥadīth might be referring to the act of idolatry and hence might support verse [98:6]:

> Aisha said: When the Messenger was ill, some of his wives talked about a church they saw in Abyssinia. The church was called Māriya. Later, one of the wives of the Prophet, Ummu Salama and Ummu Habība went to the area of Abyssinia. They talked about the beauty of the church and about its pictures and figures. Thereupon the Messenger raised his head and said: "When a good person of them dies, they build a *masjid* (place of worship) on his grave and paint that place with these pictures and figures. In the sight of Allah, those are the most *sharr* of living beings."[239]

This ḥadīth might be referring to the wrongness of turning a person's grave into a place of worship, since this can be seen as a sign of associating partners with the Lord.

It has been discussed previously in this chapter that man should seek refuge by the Lord from created things. Although the discussion was more about what God creates according to the inclinations of man, this ḥadīth seems to describe that there can also be other kinds of *ashrār* that man should seek refuge from:

> Abdullah bin 'Amr said: When the Messenger travelled and it was dark, he used to pray as follows: "Oh earth, my Lord and your Lord is Allah. From your *sharr*, and the *sharr* that you have, from the *sharr* that is created on you, and from the creature's *sharr* that walk on you, I seek refuge by my Lord. From the *sharr* of the lion, from the *sharr* of the scorpion and snake, from the creature's *sharr* that sit on this earth, from the *sharr* of those who give birth and from the *sharr* of what they have given birth to, I seek refuge by my Lord."[240]

[239] Bukhārī, Janāiz, 70.
[240] Abū Dāwūd, Jihād, 75.

Hence this seems to show that *sharr* can be created from all sorts of created beings and that one should seek refuge by the Lord from any kind of harm that might inflict oneself.

The next ḥadīth describes *sharr* as failing to apply the message of the Qur'ān in one's life:

> Abu Said al-Hudrī narrated: The Messenger leaned his back to his camel and said to the people: "Shall I tell you about the most *khayr* and most *sharr* of mankind? The most *khayr* is he who strives all his life (until death) for the sake of Allah, be it on the back of his horse or camel or by foot. The most *sharr* is he who reads the book of his Lord but does not apply it to his life." [241]

If elaborated upon, this ḥadīth might explain the importance of having the good characteristics described in the Qur'ān and keeping away from the characteristics that have been described as *sharr*, or that fall under the semantic field of *sharr*.

Another very open description of *sharr* is to be found in the following saying of the Messenger:

> No one can lead astray a person God has guided and no one can guide a person whom God has led astray. The most righteous of words is the Book of the Lord. The most beautiful of ways is Muhammed's path. The most *sharr* of actions is that which is fabricated later on. Anything that is fabricated later on is *bid'a*. Any *bid'a* is heresy. […][242]

This ḥadīth might be in relation with slander, with telling lies. For *bid'a* is mostly about inventing things and saying that it is part of Islām or part of a religious practice. Hence, it is in a way the act of telling lies about God.

The next ḥadīth describes *sharr* to be hypocrisy:

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[241] Al-Nasā'ī, Jihād, 8.
[242] Al-Nasā'ī, Salāt ul-ʿĪdayn, 22.

> The most *sharr* of humans are those hypocrites; they approach these with one face, and those with another face.[243]

Cruelty and injustice are another two attributes associated with *sharr*:

> […] as long as one does not totally submit with his tongue and his heart, one will not be a true muslim, as long as one's neighbor is not safe from one's *sharr* actions, one has no true *īmān*." They asked: "Oh Messenger of God! What are those *sharr* actions?" He replied: "It is cruelty and injustice. […][244]

Other than the *aḥādith* mentioned above, there are others the Messenger used to utter in form of prayers. These are similar to the one narrated by Aisha: The Prophet used to supplicate to God in the following way:"I seek refuge in You from the *sharr* of what I did and from the *sharr* of what I did not."[245] Or he used to seek refuge by his Lord from the *sharr* of his own *nafs* (soul)[246], from the *sharr* of the *fitna* of wealth and poverty[247], from the *sharr* of his ears, eyes, tongue, and heart[248].

In the light of the above, one might say that there are additional terms that could be added into the semantic field of *sharr* – although one might want to avoid to melt all terms in one big pot, it is possible to treat the Qur'anic terms separately from the narrations of the Messenger. That was one reason why this part has been dealt with under a separate section. Following the above descriptions of the term *sharr*, attributes such as the fabrication of lies (*bid'a*), hypocrisy (*nifāq*), cruelty (*ẓulm*) and injustice, and to fail to put the teachings of the Qur'ān into practice fall under the semantic field of *sharr* in ḥadīth narrations.

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[243] Bukhārī, Aḥkām, 27; Abū Dāwūd, Adab, 34.
[244] Ibn Hanbel, Book 1, 388.
[245] Muslim, Book 35, 6557.
[246] Abu Dāwūd, Salāt, 221, 223.
[247] Muslim, Zikr wa Du'a wa Tawbah wa Istighfār, 49.
[248] Tirmidhī, Da'awāt, 74.

2.7 Conclusion

So far, the semantic structure of the term *sharr*, as defined mainly in the Qur'ān itself, can be summarized as follows: *sharr* as well as *khayr*, does not necessarily make a statement about wrong or right, but rather about the benefit or loss that and action or a situation brings.[249] In the case of *sharr*, the addressee in all circumstances is that man who chooses to be foolish, arrogant, stubborn, ignorant, impatient and unwise. What is described as *sharr* is the loss that is behind such a behavior. That the term *sharr* can be seen as loss or deficiency has been stated before by Mawdūdī. Contrary to the term 'natural evil' or 'moral evil', there is no such thing as 'natural *sharr*' or 'moral *sharr*' in the Qur'ān.

The terms used in the Qur'an and which have a strong moral connotation are *ḥusn* and *su'*, which are also most times translated as good and evil. These two terms, defined by Murata and Chittick as 'beautiful' and 'ugly' in order to avoid confusion, reflect a judgment on the rightness or wrongness of an action performed by man.[250] The reason why these two pairs, *khayr/sharr* and *ḥusn/su'* are both seen simply as good and evil, might be because the loss or benefit of something is ultimately related to a right or wrong action of an individual[251], hence goes back to some kind of moral behavior.

The term *sharr* is rather a relative one, and can change according to every single individual. A loss that someone suffers, and which that person considers as being evil for him, can be a benefit and hence something good

[249]Sachiko Murata; William C. Chittick. *The Vision of Islam* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1994), 108.
[250]Ibid., 109.
[251]Ibid.

for someone else.[252] Or, a negative situation now, that man thinks is evil, can turn out for him to be good in the long run. Looking into people's daily lives will be sufficient to see a lot of conditions that exemplify the above verses. Even the worst of evils for many people, which is death, can be seen as necessary and good for the world if looked at from a broader perspective. In other words, all of the above are seen as evil by people, but not as *sharr* from the Qur'anic perspective. *Sharr*, according to the Qur'ān, is the loss of God's grace[253], loss of guidance[254], loss of God's resignation[255], loss of understanding[256], loss of faith[257], loss of patience[258] and loss of hope[259].

In light of all that loss, one can say that from the Qur'anic perspective, *sharr* is not a thing as such and does not seem to have an external existence (*wujūd al-khāriji*) in this world. It is not man who is *sharr*, neither the attribute itself. *Sharr* is the loss of goodness, the loss of good character, the loss of good action – in other words the loss of something that exists. Hence, it would be appropriate to say at this stage that *sharr* has no external existence and nothing which is created (*makhlūq*) can be *sharr*. One might call this an immaterial existence (*wujūd al-mā'nawi*), which is subject to change, depending on man's change of attitude and behavior. It is something that can be transformed from loss into gain, and once that has happened, it is no longer *sharr*, but *khayr*.

[252]Ibid., 108.
[253] Qur'ān, 3:180.
[254] Ibid., 12:77.
[255] Ibid., 5:60.
[256] Ibid., 8:22.
[257] Ibid., 8:55; 22:72; 98:6.
[258] Ibid., 17:11.
[259] Ibid., 17:83; 41:49; 70:20.

3 Muslim Theologians and Philosophers on Theodicy

3.1 Introduction

The problem of evil has been discussed and examined by many western philosophers and theologians in the past and it continues to be a mystery. No real solution or answer has been given to the question of evil in this world. It remains to be the greatest challenge of belief in the God of traditional theism, and is used as one of the arguments against God's existence.[260] Mostly theologians were the ones who believed that evil was not something to discuss about but rather something that needs to be faced without probably losing faith in God; for the problem is logical and the premises are incompatible: God exists; God is good; God is omnipotent; God is omniscient; The world contains evil.

Then how is it that God allows evil in the world? The next important question, rather related to moral evil, is about the justice of God and predetermination. How can the justice of God be reconciled with what seems to be unjust; namely punishing and rewarding those whose behavior was predetermined for them by God? Another main question, hence, is how to reconcile God's attributes with the existence of evil in the world without sacrificing the absoluteness of any of the attributes?

[260] *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Chad Meister; Paul Copan, (Oxon: Routledge, 2007), 397. See also Ian S. Markham, *Understanding Christian Doctrine* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 91.

Mackie gives a successful overview about main types of solutions to the problem of evil within the discourse so far and their incoherence[261]. These solutions, however, consist mainly of either the denial or the restriction of one or more of the premises stated above. Ancient philosophers such as Plato, for instance, made a distinction between matter and cause and thus stated that God is not responsible for evil because it is not 'the good Demiurge' who creates evil for he has no control over it.[262] The Manicheans, on the other hand, found a solution to the problem of evil by stating that God has power only over good things. Evil things are created by another entity or God – the evil one. Within its theological application, this principle is called *dualism*[263]. In order not to be confused with the mind-body dualism mostly used in philosophy, this term shall be called *bitheism*. Hence, the contradiction is avoided and evil arises not because of, but inspite of God's will. Another solution is to simply deny the fifth premise, which is evil itself. Thus, evil is an illusion and does not really exist or evil is *privatio boni*[264], the absence of good, which aims to eliminate evil as a "positive reality"[265]. This concept of *privatio boni*, which Mackie lists under those types of solutions which explicitly deny one or more of the premises stated above, is supposed to do the opposite. Monotheists such as Augustine have offered this solution to maintain the premises, especially to keep up the absolute attributes of God.[266]

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[261] J. L. Mackie. *Evil and Omnipotence* in Mind, New Series, Vol. 64, No. 254 (Oxford University Press, April 1955), 200-212

[262] Harold Cherniss. 'The Sources of Evil According to Plato' in *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, vol. 98, no. 1 (February 15, 1954), 25. Note that according to Cherniss, there are different views on whether according to Plato, the source of all evil is matter. For more information see p. 23 footnote of the same article.

[263] John Hick. *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 25.

[264] For further information see ibid., 38-58.

[265] *Evil and Omnipotence*, 200-212.

[266] Shams Inati. *The Problem of Evil, Ibn Sīnā's Theodicy* (New York: Global Publications, 2000), 30.

The second main solution does not explicitly deny any of the attributes of God or the existence of evil and tries to uphold all premises. One statement takes evil as a necessary effect of good. Fire, for instance, serves the good while it brings along some evil. Eliminating it would mean to eliminate its good causes as well. This solution's attempt is to justify God's causing evil or allowing it. Another statement regards evil as necessary means to good. Evil happens to bring about something better than already exists. This principle is called the *higher good defense*[267]. The attempt of this solution is to avoid God to be charged of being evil, since the reason for doing so is morally sufficient. This point, however, implicitly restricts God's power being absolute, for if God is supposed to enjoy absolute power, He must be able to obtain good without having to employ any evil means. The third suggestion for a possible solution of the problem of evil is the principle of *the best of all possible worlds*[268]. According to this principle, the existence of evil is necessary for it adds to the variety in the world as well as to its own positive value. Hence, if evil is taken away, the world is left with less variety than there can be. One last solution offered is evil as a product of human free will. If humans bring about moral evil due to their freedom, the presence of such evil does not conflict with God's goodness. This principle, which is called the *free will defense*[269], is supposed to free God from the responsibility for moral evil. Mackie states the problem this defense brings along is that it does not provide any solution to metaphysical and physical evil. Furthermore, one can ask, why God allows human free will knowing that the possibility of evil also exists, and finally, whether God can make people do choose the right at all

[267] Ibid., 10.
[268] For further information see ibid., 154-166. Although Hick introduces Leibniz (1646-1716) as the founder of this theory, in fact it is al-Ghazālī (1058-1111), who first discussed the doctrine of *al-aslah*. For more information, see Ormsby, Eric Linn. *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over al-Ghazālī's 'Best of all Possible Worlds'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984)
[269] *The Problem of Evil, Ibn Sīnā's Theodicy*, 10.

times despite to their freedom. In other words, this principle does also, according to Mackie, implicitly restrict or deny God's omnipotence.

Therefore, no matter which solution one would like to prefer, eventually a proposition is either temporarily or completely rejected. Theologians tend to accept the restriction of one or more attributes of God when it comes to the problem of evil and to re-assert them again elsewhere in the system.

To avoid any confusion and misunderstanding, it seems important to come to an agreement of how to use the terms moral, physical, natural and metaphysical evil which are so commonly used. The first point is that 'evil', as it is discussed here, is something the meaning of which has already been assumed. In other words, the discussion still remains, whether 'evil' from human's point of view and as understood by humans is the same as it is from the Creator's point of view. However, this point shall be discussed in following chapters in further detail.

The second point, which is about using the appropriate terminology, will be described here. Ninian Smart[270] defines 'moral evil' as human wickedness and according to Plantinga[271], 'moral evil' is the result of human choice or volition. Both state that the result of immoral action of a human being, which causes pain, is called 'moral evil'. For others like McCloskey[272] who comes to the conclusion that there cannot be an omnipotent and benevolent God, 'physical evil' is being used in equal meaning to 'natural evil': anything that is involved in the constitution of earth and animal kingdom such as any kind of dangerous animals, natural calamities which result in human

[270] Ninian Smart. *Philosophers and Religious Truth* (Canterbury Press, 1969), chapter 6.
[271] Alvin Plantinga. *God and Other Minds: Study of the Rational Justification of Belief in God* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1967), 131-2.
[272] H. J. McCloskey. 'God and Evil' in *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 39 (April 1969), 98-99.

suffering, various diseases and any kind of evil with which many are born. 'Moral evil', on the other hand, is defined by McCloskey simply as immorality, such as selfishness, envy, greed and any other larger scale evil such as wars.[273]

In this study, two main terms will be used throughout – merely to avoid confusions[274]. One is 'natural evil', which stands for all kinds of natural disasters, such as earth quakes and floods; the other will be called 'moral evil', which means any kind of negative situation caused through willful, malicious action of man. Both of these terms will be further divided into the two classes 'physical evil' and 'metaphysical evil', as is commonly used within the philosophy of religion. 'Physical evil' will stand for bodily pain or mental anguish such as fear, illness, grief, etc. 'Metaphysical evil', on the other hand, will refer to such things as imperfection, such as criminals going unpunished, deformities, etc.

3.2 Main Thoughts in Muslim Theology

Before examining the Muslim point of view of the problem of evil, it will be of advantage to understand the different main thoughts that have emerged within Muslim theological history. Besides the *ahl al-sunnah*, the mainstream Sunni thought, the Jabriyya, the Mu'tazila and the Qadariyya (not to be confused with Qadiriyya[275]) thoughts emerged.

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[273] Ibid, 100.

[274] These terms will be used only because they are known as such throughout history. It seems that these terms have been introduced by Plato. See *The Problem of Evil, Ibn Sīnā's Theodicy*, 15-29. As will be explained in the following Chapters of this study, Nursi makes no use of these terms since he has a different understanding of evil which is not exactly as described here.

[275] It should be noted that Qadariyya and Qadiriyya are two different movements. The Qadiriyya is an order (*tarīka*) of dervishes, called after 'Abd al-Kādir al-Djilānī (d. 1166). For further information see E. van Donzel, et al. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* "Kadiriyya", vol. IV (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 380.

3.2.1 Jabriyya

Jabriyya[276], a deterministic thought, was first introduced and defended by Ja'd bin Dirhem (d. 736) and Jahm bin Safwana (d. 745), who stated that humans are not free in their actions. According to this view, nothing and nobody else but God owns any action or deed. All actions are predetermined and human beings are both powerless and unaccountable. These thoughts of the Jabriyya, which largely ignored the understanding of human free will, were criticized by the rationalistic Mu'tazilites[277].

3.2.2 Mu'tazila

Among the founders of the Mu'tazila is Wasil Ibn Ata (d. 748). According to Ata, humans are free in their actions; they are the creators of their own deeds, be it good or evil. God is all-Wise and Just, thus it is unlawful to attribute any evil or injustice to Him.[278]

3.2.3 Qadariyya

The Qadariyya are considered to be those who represented the principle of free will in the early period of Islam, from about 690 to the definitive consolidation of the Mu'tazila at the beginning of the 9th century.[279] Although the name indicates the doctrine of *qadar*, they upheld the centrality of human free will.[280] According to the Encylopaedia of Islam, the earliest document of the movement is the *Risāla* of Hasan al-Basrī, which was

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[276] For further information on Jabriyya, see B. Lewis, et al. *Encyclopaedia of Islam,* "Djabriyya", vol. II (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 365.
[277] For further information on the Mu'tazila, see C. E. Bosworth, et al. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* "Mu'tazila", vol. VII (Leiden-New York: E. J. Brill, 1993), 783.
[278] Hamdi Gündoğar. 'Mu'tezile Mezhebinde Insanin Fiilleri Problemi' in *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi Ilahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, Cilt VIII/2, 205-218.
[279] E. van Donzel, B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* "Kadariyya", 368.
[280] Peter S. Groff. *Islamic Philosophy A-Z*, 42.

composed between 694 and 699[281]. From it, the moderate wing of the Qadariyya drew the following argument, which was according to the Encyclopaedia of Islam, no innovation, however systematically formulated for the first time: "God creates only good; evil stems from man or from Satan. Man chooses freely between the two; but God knows from all eternity what man will choose. He only "leads him into error" (*idlāl*) if man has first given him occasion for this through his sin."[282] Although the latter part, which states that man first chooses to disobey God's command whereof God leads him into error, sounds like it is similar to the thought of the *ahl al-sunnah* described below, the former part opens the doors and lays the grounds for bitheism, especially if one hands over the power of creating evil, to Satan.

3.2.4 Maturidī and Ash'arī

Within the *ahl al-sunnah*, there are two main theological streams, the Maturidī and the Ash'arī. In view of the different socio-cultural environments of the two theologians, it seems to be quite normal that there are different views on certain issues. The founder of the Maturidī school is the Hanafite theologian Abu Mansur Muhammad al-Maturidī (d. 944), and this school was born in Transoxania (Ma Wara'un-Nahr)[283]. This theological school came to be widely recognized as the second orthodox Sunnī *kalām* school besides the Ash'arī. The Ash'arī school was established by the Shafi'ite theologian Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'arī (d. 936) in Iraq[284]. Iraq is at the same time the place where the ideas of the Mu'tazila – the great opponent of Ash'arī – flourished. That

[281] E. van Donzel, et al. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* "Kadiriyya", vol. IV (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 380.
[282] E. van Donzel, B. Lewis, Ch. Pellat. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 369.
[283] For more information on Maturīdiyya, see C. E. Bosworth, et al. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* "Maturīdiyya", vol. VI (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1991), 847.
[284] For more information on Ash'arī and its difference from Mu'tazila, see H. A. R. Gibb, et al. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, "al-Ash'arī", vol. I (Leiden, J. E. Brill, 1986), 694.

is, why Imam Ash'arī spent his life mainly disputing with Mu'tazila scholars whereas Imam Maturidī's concern was merely to encounter some of the ideas of the Mu'tazila, which made their way to Transoxania.[285] Al-Ash'arī was a Mu'tazilite until he was forty years old.[286] The reason why he decided to take a different way is unknown; however, Klein quotes As-Subkī as follows:

> The Sheikh (al-Ash'arī) asked Abū 'Alī (al-Jubbā-ī), 'O sheikh, what have you to say about three persons, one a believer, another an unbeliever, and the third an infant.' He replied, 'The believer is among the glorified, the unbeliever among those who perish, and the infant among those who are safe.' The Sheikh answered, 'If the infant wills to rise to a place among the glorified, can he do so?' Al-Jubbā-ī said, 'No; it will be said to him, "The believer achieved this grade of glory only by obedience, and you have nothing of the sort." The Sheikh said, 'Then if he says "The deficiency is no fault of mine, and therefore if Thou hadst suffered me to live, I would have rendered obedience like the believer" – what?' Al-Jubbā-ī said, 'God will say to him, "I knew that if you survived you would surely be disobedient and incur punishment, wherefore I considered what was best for you and brought death upon you before you reached the age of responsibility."' The Sheikh said, 'Then, if the unbeliever says, "O my Lord, Thou didst know his condition as Thou knewest mine; therefore why didst Thou not consider also what was best for me?" – what?' Then al-Jubbā-ī was nonplussed.[287]

Al-Ash'arī seems to have discovered an inconsistency in the doctrine of 'public interest' (*maṣlahah)* (which Klein calls misleadingly 'welfare'); that God would do only what was best for each individual. In fact, there are several points where al-Ash'arī was in contradiction with the Mu'tazila. Along with the discussion whether the Qur'an is created or not, another disagreement was from the point of free will. While the Mu'tazila emphasized God's justice, the Ash'arites, very similar to the Maturidī view, stressed God's

[285] Halil Taşpınar. 'Matüridiyye ile Eş'ariyye Mezhepleri Arasında Ihtilaf mı? Suni Dalgalanma mı?' in *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi Ilahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, Cilt X/1, 214
[286] *Abu'l-Hasan 'Alī Ibn Ismā'īl Al-Aš'arī's Al-Ibānah 'An Usūl Ad-Diyānah*, trans. Walter C. Klein, 26.
[287] ibid., 27.

omnipotence. Although al-Ash'arī's view was misunderstood that it would undermine the possibility of free will and would imply some sort of fatalism, the Ash'arites saw themselves holding a position between the Jabriyyas' privileging of divine compulsion and the Qadarites' and Mu'tazilates' privileging of free will.[288]

The fact that there are two main divisions within the *ahl al-sunnah* – namely the Ash'arī and Maturidī thought – does not ipso facto mean that they are entirely different from each other. While the Encyclopedia of Islam states that the differences between Ash'arī and Maturidī thoughts are more substantial than the later harmonizing theologians would admit[289], according to Taşpınar, these two thoughts have agreed on the main issues of theology (*kalām*). They lived within the same century, however in different locations, and tried to explain their understandings accordingly. Therefore, says Taşpınar, it is quite normal that there are little differences in their way of interpretation. One should note, that Maturidī put more emphasis on the intellect (*'aql*) than Ash'arī did and hence was closer to the Mu'tazila.[290]Al-Maturidī took a middle position between the Mu'tazila and the Ash'arī in some subjects such as free will (*irāda*), the attributes of God, and so on.[291] In terms of *irāda*, what distinguishes al-Maturidī from al-Ash'arī is the insistence of al-Maturidī that "God will lead astray (*'aḍalla*) only those who, He knows, will choose the wrong way and will guide only those who, He knows, will choose the straight path. The initial choice is man's, not God's as it is for al-Ash'arī."[292]

[288] *Islamic Philosophy A-Z*, 17-18.
[289] C. E. Bosworth, et al. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* 848.
[290] 'Matüridiyye ile Eş'ariyye Mezhepleri Arasında Ihtilaf mı? Suni Dalgalanma mı?', 213-14.
[291] Richard C. Martin. *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, Vol. 2, 443.
[292] C. E. Bosworth, et al. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam,* "Maturīdiyya", 846-7.

Klein introduces the work *Ar-rawdah al-bahiyyah*, a twelfth century book, in which thirteen differences between the Ash'arī and the Maturidī are enumerated:

	Question	Answer	
		Al-Ash'arī	Al-Maturidī
1.	When one calls a certain person a believer, must one add, 'If God wishes?'	Yes	No
2.	Can a righteous man still be damned, a damned person still be saved?	No	Yes
3.	Do infidels receive divine favors?	No	Yes
4.	Do deceased prophets continue to exist as prophets?	Undecided	Yes
5.	Is God's 'will' the same as His 'satisfaction'?	Yes	Undecided
6.	Is blind faith true faith?	Undecided	Yes
7.	'Acquisition', on which they differed		
8.	Can God punish one who obeys Him?	Yes	No
9.	Is our knowledge of God the result of revelation or of reason?	Revelation	Reason
10.	Are God's active attributes eternal, or do they come to an end?	Come to an end	Eternal
11.	Is God's eternal Word heard, or not?	Yes	No
12.	Can God hold man responsible for what he cannot do?	Yes	No
13.	The Hanīfites believed that prophets were preserved from all sins; the Ash'arites, that they could commit light sins.[293]		

Figure 1: Difference between Ash'arī and Maturidī

[293] *Abu'l-Hasan 'Alī Ibn Ismā'īl Al-Aš'arī's Al-Ibānah 'An Usūl Ad-Diyānah*, trans. Walter C. Klein, 37

Klein states that the Ash'arites in general did not discuss whether deceased prophets continue to exist as prophets (4) and whether prophets could commit sins (13).[294] Furthermore, Klein argues that al-Ash'arī's use of tradition in the *Ibānah* implies that he would have said yes to the question whether a righteous man can still be damned, or a damned person still be saved (2).[295] Klein also corrects the answer given to (5), whether God's 'will' is the same as His 'satisfaction'. He indicates that Article XIV of the *Maqālāt* creed shows that al-Ash'arī in fact answered that question with "no" instead of "yes".[296] There is no answer given to the question of 'acquisition' (7) however Klein thinks that al-Maturīdī is the more liberal of the two, hence the answers would have been accordingly.[297] Finally Klein points out that the questions (4), (6), (10), and (13) are discussed rather by later Ash'arites than by al-Ash'arī himself.[298]

3.2.5 Al-Maturidī on evil

In his article on *'The uses of Evil in Maturidian thought'*, Pessagno introduces his readers to al-Maturidī's *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, and demonstrates the framework built by Maturidī for the confrontation of the problem of evil. According to Maturidī, whatever there is accords with wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and is not without purpose. The whole universe is governed by God with wisdom, which is defined as knowledgeable, purposeful competency. Wisdom is contrasted with folly (*safaḥ*), i.e. stupidity, the result of ignorance (*jahl*)

[294] Ibid.
[295] Ibid.
[296] Ibid.
[297] Ibid, 38.
[298] Ibid.

which flavors one's action with incompetency, meaning that the act described as 'stupid' either works not at all or works wrongly.[299]

The next point emphasized by al-Maturidī is, according to Pessagno, the self-sufficiency of God that he relates with His wisdom. Pessagno does not reveal in his article the Arabic word for the 'self sufficiency of God' to his reader. The relation between the two are that God, being self-sufficient, is not in need of anything, is in possession of everything, is therefore in control of everything and can act in total wisdom. For only an imperfect action indicates the lack of wisdom, and an action is imperfect if the owner of that action must need at some point. [300] Al-Maturidī seems to use different names of God for His self-sufficiency at different places in his *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*. At one point, he uses *Ghanī*[301], whereas at another place he prefers *Rubūbiyyah*[302] which seems to be closer to what Pessagno relates to.

As a last step to finalize his framework, al-Maturidī equates wisdom (*ḥikmah*) with fairness (*'adl*). Wisdom, he states, is the attainment of "putting each thing in its proper place."[303] Fairness or justice (*'adl*) has the same ability of establishing a balance in a cosmological sense, not to be understood merely as a structural, but also as a moral designation. Having said that, al-Maturidī now equates the two terms which opens the gates to examine evil in the context of wisdom instead of human justice.[304]

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[299] J. Meric Pessagno. 'The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought' in *Studia Islamica*, No. 60, (1984), 67-68.
[300] ibid., 69.
[301] Ebū Mansūr el-Māturīdī, *Kitābu't-Tevhīd*, trans. Bekir Topaloğlu (Ankara: Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları, 2003), Chapter I.
[302] Ibid., Chapter III.
[303] 'The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought', 68.
[304] ibid., 69.

According to Pessagno, al-Maturidī describes evil as 'a thing' (*shay'*), an existent being – everything is created by God, including evil. He says that God as the all-wise and all-knowing, wisdom is the attainment of every creature. Hence, the acts of the creature have been decreed (*qaḍā*) by God. Accordingly, Pessagno points out, evil must be the result of the divine decree, else it could not be at all.[305] Taking a look into *Kitāb'ut Tawhīd* shows, that al-Maturidī has the following explanation on *qaḍā*:[306]

> The true nature (*ḥaqīqa*) of divine decree (*qaḍā*) is judgment about the thing (*al-ḥukmu bi'l-shai'*) and the certain occurrence of that thing in regard to what is appropriate for it (*wa' l-qat'u 'alā mā yalīqu bihī*). Sometimes, it may refer to the actual creation of a thing for it means the fulfillment of their being as they are. As stated in the former sentence, the state of every being exactly as they are created. The All-Knowing, who created everything, is the owner of judgment and wisdom. Wisdom means the attainment of the true nature due to each thing and putting everything in its proper place […] accordingly, one may say about the acts of man, that God has created them. In other words, God has created them and passed judgment on them.

Pessagno states that *qaḍā* is, according to this passage, a metaphysical decision concerning the act of existence and the essential structure of each thing. He suggests *qaḍā* be seen as the determinant of the structure of the being.[307] However, Pessagno seems to understand divine decree (*qaḍā*) as being a two-fold decision: one, that the thing be and two, that it should be appropriate to it. From this he concludes, that "the divine decree is creational and creative in the primary sense of those terms, i.e., to bring into being what was not".[308] This statement might be very confusing, since it

[305] 'The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought', 70.
[306] Ebū Mansūr el-Māturīdī, *Kitābu't-Tevhīd*, trans. Bekir Topaloğlu, Chapter III.
[307] 'The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought', 70.
[308] Ibid., 71.

indicates that giving an 'official permission to an act' is equal to 'creating the act'. It seems that Pessagno misunderstood al-Maturidī at this point for al-Maturidī talks about the creation of a thing merely in relation to the fulfillment of its being as it is. [309]

Furthermore, al-Maturidī explains *qadar* as follows: [310]

> As for the term *qadar*, it has two senses. One of them is that it is the divine ordinance (*al-ḥadd*) in accord with which the particular emerges into being, i.e., the making (*ja'l*) of everything as it is, such as good or evil, beauty or ugliness, wisdom or ignorance. It is the proper interpretation of wisdom that each thing is created as it is, thus attaining for each thing what is most appropriate for it…
>
> The second meaning of *qadar* is the manifestation (*bayān*) of that in accord with which each thing occurs, such as time and place, truth and falsehood and the reward or punishment which is assigned to each happening. The tradition handed down on the authority of God's Messenger regarding Jibril's asking him about faith is similar in what it says to one of these meanings. In it the Messenger is reported as saying that man's good and evil are from God, which response is linked with what we have mentioned about *qadar*. The first sense refers to the creation of the thing as it actually is. That refers to the acts of man, such as their emergence in a way that their imaginations cannot grasp in terms of good and evil, nor their intelligences determine. Thus, it is proven that his acts come forth as they do by the power of God. Secondly, it is equally impossible that men on their own determine their acts in terms of time and place, for the power of their knowledge cannot attain to that either. So, for that reason, it is also impossible that the action comes about as it does by their own power. Their acts in all these aspects depend on God (*wa-hiya ghairu khārijatin 'ani 'llāh*), as He said [in sab'a, 34.18]: "We have determined in their regard the journey…" and [in al-hajar, 15.60]: "…except for his wife. We have determined that she indeed is one of those who lag behind."

Accordingly, the difference between *qaḍā* and *qadar* is a very thin line. *Qaḍā* is the decision of that thing to be, *and* that it should be in a way appropriate to it. With help of the quotation above, Pessagno deduces two qualifications

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[309] A clearer distinction between divine decree (*al-qaḍā*) and divine foreordainment (*al-qadar*) will be defined later.
[310] *Kitābu't-Tevhīd*, trans. Bekir Topaloğlu, Chapter III.

of the second meaning of *qadar*. The former he calls 'intrinsic clarification', stated by al-Maturidī as good-evil, beauty-ugliness, and wisdom-folly. These are intrinsic to the divine willing itself and to the nature of the created being, inasmuch as the thing is what God wills it to be. The latter Pessagno calls 'extrinsic clarification', defined as the externals of the action with time-place, the action's relationship to the intellect with truth-falsehood and the consequences of the action with reward and punishment.[311] Here, Pessagno tries to find something to distinguish the first and second sense of *qadar* and he chooses to do so by naming them intrinsic and extrinsic clarification. The conclusion Pessagno derives from all this is that

> (1)The creature, in terms of its initial act of existence is dependent radically on the divine decree (*al-qaḍā*); (2) The creature, in terms of its internal qualities of good-evil, ugliness-beauty and wisdom-folly, is dependent on divine foreordination (*qadar*) and (3) the creature, specifically in regard to its actions in their spatial, temporal, judgmental and eschatological relationships, is likewise dependent on divine foreordination (*qadar*).[312]

In Topaloğlu's fist Chapter of the *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* translation, entitled by him 'Evidence that the Cosmos has One who gave it existence', Maturidī offers numerous proofs that the cosmos being temporal is not the adequate explanation of its own being[313]. In the second proof, Māturīdī offers a quite interesting and unique approach explaining the existence of natural and moral evil. Here he states that would the world exist by its own essence, its state would not be the most appropriate of all conditions and its attribution would not be the most appropriate of any other capacity. The fact, that creation is *mukhtalifun*, different and varying shows that its being is not self-existent; would the world exist by itself, it would have to create the best of all states and the most appropriate of all attributes for itself, which would

[311] 'The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought', 71.
[312] Ibid., 72.
[313] *Kitābu't-Tevhīd*, trans. Bekir Topaloğlu, Chapter I.

mean the legitimacy of the cosmos to be creative in all respects. Then, along with the cosmos itself, all evil and unpleasant (*al-shurūr wa' l-qabā'ih*) [314] would cease to exist. All this shows that creation came about by something other than itself (*bi-ghairihī*), and that 'other' is God. [315] Here, al-Maturidī makes use of the existence of evil to prove the imperfection in creation and hence that the universe is not self-existent, i.e. eternal, but that rather it exists temporally and that there is a God and that He is the Creator.[316]

It is possible to see the same approach of al-Maturidī, confronting the question of God's oneness[317]. Giving the example of the combination of opposites in every single creation, such as the beneficial and the harmful or good and evil, he emphasizes the manifestation of God's wisdom and indicates God's unicity (*waḥdāniyya*)[318]. Although there is nothing particularly new about explaining God's unicity through the theory of the combination of opposites, what **is** new about it, Pessagno points out, is the direct mention of the harmful and evil as explicit examples.[319]

Clearly, al-Maturidī emphasizes the doctrine of *tawḥīd*, the oneness of God as one of the four main themes within the Qur'anic message, taking the theological inference from the Qur'an as basis: "There is nothing like Him (*laisa kamithlihī shai'un*)" and hence states that using the term creator for anything else but God does go against the very Qur'anic teaching. To the

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[314] In Pessagno's article on "The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought", the Arabic term *al-shurūr wa' l-qabā'ih* is translated as 'moral and physical evils'. Pessagno uses this translation within a quotation from Fathalla Kholeif's edition of al-Mūturīdī's *Kitāb al-tawhīd* (Beirut: Dar al-Machreq, 1970).
[315] *Kitābu't-Tevhīd*, trans. Bekir Topaloğlu, Chapter I.
[316] 'The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought', 73-74.
[317] Ibid., 74.
[318] Nursi makes a difference between *waḥdāniyya*, *wāḥidiyya* and *aḥadiyya*. This will be discussed later.
[319] 'The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought', 75.

question how to deal with God's own goodness or evil in willing the existence of evil in the world, al-Maturidī, without hesitation states that evil is willed by God, though not ordered by Him; for evil is an existing thing (*mawjūd*)[320] and nothing exists outside the divine power (*qudra*). To explain this issue further, al-Maturidī makes use of the doctrine of *kasb*, which means that the doing of evil is not God's doing it, but man's doing. God's part thereby is to "create the capacity that enables man to perform that which he has decided to do."[321] Man, with his intellect, is supposed to decide in light of reason and revelation, which is called free choice (*ikhtiyār*). Because there is always the possibility that man's choice is not in accord with God's command, human freedom is preserved. In other words, Pessagno lays out, "in man's doing evil, God is responsible for the act of doing as doing, but man's own choice for the doing of evil rather than good."[322]

It might be useful to give an example for the better understanding of Maturidī's assertion above. One might imagine a doctor and a murderer. Both take a knife and stab another person's body with it. The action itself, which is created by God, is, in both cases the same. What makes this action evil, however, is the intention or choice of the agent. While the doctor chooses or intends to save the life of that person, the murderer's intention or choice is to kill him. In fact, if the person would die in the hands of the doctor, he would not be taken accountable for it, since his inclination was not evil, but good.

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[320] Pessagno does not make clear, whether he means by 'existing thing' 'what exists' (*mawjūd*), or a created being (*makhlūq*). In light of what he thinks al-Maturīdī says about evil, namely that 'evil is a thing', 'a being which exists', and 'evil being a created thing', one could say that evil is both, *mawjūd* and *makhlūq*, it is existent *and* a created being.
[321] 'The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought', 78.
[322] ibid.

Finally, having said that al-Maturidī discusses the problem of evil from the point of view of divine uniqueness or wisdom, rather than divine justice, which removes the possibility of putting God on trial, Pessagno states that evil becomes perfectly capable of being assigned to God. As he puts it, "moral evil, which, in this context, means what is done in violation of the divine command, is assigned to man's decision and subsequent acquisition of the action as his own."[323]

3.3 The Theory of Value

Now, a general outline will be given about the theory of value in a broader sense, with use of Hourani's *Theory of Value*[324]. This is due to the fact that the definition of what is good and evil mainly flourished out of the distinction between two main types of this theory.

According to Hourani, in medieval Islam, the early Abbāsid period, the nature of values has been highly debated among Islamic intellectuals. The Mu'tazila, on the one side, suggested that values such as justice and goodness have a real existence independent of anyone's will, including God's; Hourani calls this view *objectivism*. On the other hand, the Ash'arī and his followers insisted that all values are determined by the will of God, who decides what shall be just and good. Hourani names this *theistic or divine subjectivism* and that it is more commonly known as *ethical voluntarism*.[325] Eventually, the Ash'arite position prevailed and spread widely, especially within the *ahl al-sunna*. The question behind this debate is

[323] ibid., 79.
[324] G. F. Hourani. 'Two Theories of Value in Medieval Islam' in *The Muslim World,* Vol. 50, Issue 4 (1960), 269-78.
[325] Ibid., see also G. F. Hourani, 'Ethical Presuppositions of the Qur'an' in *The Muslim World*, Vol. 70, Issue 1, 1-2

what the common element is in all that is called good, right and so on; what a right action constitutes and how we actually know a right action.

The objectivist view was common in the western thought before the twentieth century. Socrates with his view that piety is loved by the gods because it is good in itself as opposed to the notion that piety is made good by the fact that it is loved by the gods, affirmed objectivism; later on it was developed by Plato and Aristotle and upheld by Stoics and most of the Catholic philosophers in the doctrine of natural right[326]. Also Kant and other utilitarians have accepted the idea of objectivism.[327] In Islam, after the Mu'tazila, this idea was mainly supported by philosophers influenced by Greek tradition.

The theory of theistic subjectivism was held by Ash'arī and all following Ash'arites as well as by Ghazālī. The main critique to theistic subjectivism was that "if God had commanded theft and idolatry, it would have been ipso facto right for man to commit them."[328]

The Ash'arites definition of value helped them to circumvent the problem of evil. As said previously, theistic subjectivism means that good and evil are not intrinsic values but rather something is good or bad because God commanded it to be so. But God Himself is beyond right and wrong. Therefore, states Hourani, if a person chooses to commit evil, he disobeys God's commands but God is the commander and not the receiver of

[326] 'Two Theories of Value in Medieval Islam', 269-78.
[327] Ibid.
[328] For more information about why the Ash'arī view of theistic subjectivism prevailed, see 'Two Theories of Value in Medieval Islam', 269-78.

commands; it follows therefore, that God is never evil. He creates evil without thereby becoming evil Himself.[329]

Hourani's statement of God creating evil might be misleading since this statement is rejected by Ash'arī. God does not create evil, everything God creates is good. Leaman borrows Hourani's term 'ethical subjectivism' and offers a slightly different articulation regarding the advantage of the subjectivist view. He states that one does not need to bother about whether a benevolent God can bring about evil, since nothing in the world brought about by God can be called evil. "Evil, after all", Leaman states, "is defined in terms of disobedience to God's commands, and he has commanded the world to take its particular form, so whatever form it takes cannot subsequently be called evil."[330]

The next part will elaborate the views of Ibn Sīnā.[331]

3.4 Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna)

Shams C. Inati provides successful insights into the issue of evil in his book *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sīnā's Theodicy*. According to Inati, Ibn Sīnā is maybe the first Muslim philosopher who has written extensively on the problem of evil. Ibn Sīnā's theodicy is here divided into three main chapters, his 'analysis of metaphysical evil', his 'notion of moral evil' and his 'solution for the problem of evil and the problem of destiny'. Ibn Sīnā approved many

[329] G. F. Hourani. 'Averroes on Good and Evil' in *Studia Islamica*, No. 16 (1962), 13-40; also see G. F. Hourani. 'Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics', 254.
[330] *Averroes and his Philosophy*, 154.
[331] Abū 'Alī al-Husayn ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Sīnā', also known as Ibn Sīnā or Avicenna (980-1037), was a Persian polymath and the primary physician and philosopher of his time. He wrote extensively on early Islamic philosophy. Besides the medieval Islamic world, where he successfully reconciled Aristotalianism and Neoplatonism along with Kalām, and became a leading figure in Islamic philosophy by the twelfth century. He was also influential in medieval Europe, especially through his doctrines on the nature of the soul, and his existence-essence distinction.

philosophers before him by stating that being (*wujūd*) is good (*khayr*) and "goodness is being or existence"; the more being or existence something has, the more goodness or perfection it entails.[332] Respectively, if good is being, than evil must be non-being (*'adam*); hence, the less being, the more evil.[333] However, there is not only one kind of evil for Ibn Sīnā. A second kind actually has some sort of being. While Ibn Sīnā names the former essential evil (*sharr bi dhāt*), for him the latter is accidental evil (*sharr bil-'arad*). These kinds of evils, according to Ibn Sīnā, are metaphysical evils.

Essential evil, which, as already said, Ibn Sīnā defines as the privation of existence/goodness, is divided in itself into five categories: 1) essential evil is privation of being, 2) essential evil is privation of the natural, 3) essential evil is identified with disorder, 4) essential evil is evil in all respects, and 5) essential evil is uncaused.

Essential evil as privation of being does not mean absolute privation (*'adam muṭlaq*), for this would lead into absolute non-existence. However, evil requires some sort of being in order for that being to lack goodness, so that one can actually talk of evil.[334] Furthermore, the definition of essential evil according to Ibn Sīnā is the privation of that which is natural or normal for a being. Hence, there are different perfections a being can be missing. Two of them, Ibn Sīnā calls 'fixed perfections': those perfections of power (*quwwa*) and those of actions (*af'al*). While the privation of the former would lead to the cessation of that being's existence, the deprivation of the latter does not cease its existence, yet does affect that thing's well-being. The third kind of perfection consists of useful, yet non-natural qualities. [335]

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[332] *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sina's Theodicy*, 65.
[333] ibid., 66.
[334] ibid., 67.
[335] ibid., 70.

It is hard to distinguish primary and secondary perfections from each other. Therefore it seems important to note that Ibn Sīnā's theory of primary and secondary perfections needs to be looked at from a body-soul relationship. According to Ibn Sīnā,

> the human soul is a separate intelligence, which leads its own spiritual existence while being united with the body, it is capable of apprehending itself directly […] the being thus apprehended in man , and in every existing thing, is not present there of necessity. The essence of 'man', 'horse' or 'stone' does not imply the necessity of the existence of a particular man or horse. Existence is given to actualized, concrete beings by a Being that differs from all of them: it is not one of the essences that have not existence in themselves, but its essence is its very being.[336]

While primary perfections are directly connected to the soul of a human being, secondary perfections are related to the body. Hence, states Inati, the non-existence or non-functioning of an eye or the inability of a human being to see does not lead to the non-existence of a human being. However, if the primary perfection, which is part of the soul – in this case the sight of a being is removed, that human being is no more a human being. [337] In other words, that human being no longer fulfills the criteria of the mental understanding of what a human being is.

Inati criticizes Ibn Sīnā's theory of seeing the body separate from the soul, and he states that body and soul are strongly intertwined. This, Inati continues, leads to the conclusion that if any organ, which is a secondary perfection, is removed from the body the primary perfection also ceases to function and hence, indirectly, leads to the cessation of that human being. Furthermore, evil has no particular cause for only something that has an

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[336] B. Lewis, et al. *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, "Ibn Sīnā", vol. III (Leiden, J. E. Brill, 1986), 943

[337] *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sina's Theodicy*, 75-76.

external existence can have a cause. Therefore, evil does not occur due to a cause but rather evil is the result of the inaction of an agent[338].

Accidental evil (*sharr bil-'arad*), which has according to Ibn Sīnā some sort of being, is divided into two main categories: existing accidental evil and non-existing accidental evil. Existing accidental evil is anything that withholds or destroys the good, such as grief and pain, injustice or adultery, or any agents that bring about a privation in the nature of anything. Since existing accidental evil has some sort of being, it is good. It is considered to be evil only because it **causes** evil. Acts in themselves are not evil. But if the effect of an act has deficiencies that act is called an **evil** act. Hence, an *evil* act is only called such in relation to the cause receptive to it.[339] If something is positively real, it is good. Rain, for instance, is good. If it causes harm on other beings, it is called 'evil', even though we know that there is no evil in the rain's being and that it does not touch it as such.

Non-existing accidental evil is the lack of a tertiary perfection, a perfection that is not necessary for that beings wellbeing or for the whole species. According to Inati, "if such perfections exist, they must be over and above the perfections that either are (in whole or in part) constitutive of the nature of a being or are common features of that nature"[340]. Hence, the privation of such tertiary perfection is not evil with respect to that species, but with respect to what that species could have additionally had.[341] Examples could be the lack of radiant beauty or ignorance of philosophy. A similar example would be the lack of knowledge of geometry, which might be evil in respect

[338] ibid., 82.
[339] ibid., 88-90.
[340] Ibid., 96.
[341] Ibid., 97.

to a certain individual, but not with respect to the whole species.[342] Hence, in order for such a privation to be considered evil, there must be a desire of an individual, to have knowledge in geometry. For not having that knowledge or loosing that knowledge will cause suffering in the individual as a result of desiring that goodness.[343] Now, Inati states, one could ask the question whether one knows **before** gaining that tertiary perfection, that this is a privation one would really miss, or is it something that one misses after losing it? In other words, do those tertiary perfections become necessary after the goodness of such things have been confirmed to the individual? According to Inati, even after the confirmation, those perfections remain for Ibn Sīnā tertiary perfections. Such perfections are additional to what is necessary for a species.[344]

Coming now to the notion of moral evil, according to Ibn Sīnā, evil is 'acquired' by human beings, just as the good is. He explains this using the different kind of intellects, such as the 'practical', 'theoretical' and 'agent' intellect, which origins can be traced back to the Aristotelian notion of *nous poietikos*[345]. The 'practical' intellect seeks knowledge in order to act in accordance with the good in its individual body whereas the 'theoretical' intellect is to know the eternal aspects of the universe. The 'agent' or 'active' intellect (*'aql al-fa'l*), which is the tenth and final intellect to arise through the process of emanation, on the other hand, makes it possible for the 'theoretical' intellect to acquire the universals in the purest form; in other words, it is a kind of a link between the human and the divine[346]

Inati explains that:

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[342] Ibid.
[343] Ibid.
[344] Ibid., 98.
[345] *Islamic Philosophy A-Z*, 4.
[346] Ibid., 5.

> If the practical intellect is not strong enough to take hold of the desires and demands of the body, it is then overruled by these desires and demands. This will blind the soul, and render it unfit and unable to receive the light of the agent intellect. When this happens it is not possible to go beyond the light of imagination, and the road to truth, goodness, and happiness is then closed. With that, the life of ignorance, that is, the life of evil, prevails.[347]

Ibn Sīnā suggests some solutions to the problem of evil, so to say; he tries to reconcile the presence of evil with the absolute goodness of God and all His other absolute attributes and names.

First of all, from a providential aspect God knows the order, the perfect place of every being and their interconnection. In fact, Leaman states, according to Ibn Sīnā, the only sort of knowledge applicable to God is universal and necessary knowledge, not contingent and particular knowledge. Leaman states that according to Ibn Sīnā, God can know everything that comes into the category of theoretical knowledge, such as abstract principles which lie behind the construction of the world and the movements of the spheres; but it is pointless to think of Him coming to know the very minor and uninteresting facts of our daily lives.[348] God's reflection on something is the production of that thing. Everything that emanates from God is good, however only to the extent of that thing's possibility, for nothing but God can be absolutely good. Furthermore, God is pleased with the order of the good. However, "its coming into existence has nothing to do with whether God is pleased with it, but is the unavoidable consequence of God's knowledge of, and reflections on, the order. Thus the order that emanates is nothing but a manifestation of the order known by God – in fact; it is an exact copy of that order. Hence, the existent corresponds to the known."[349]

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[347] *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sina's Theodicy*, 123.
[348] *Averroes and his Philosophy*, 72-73.
[349] *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sina's Theodicy*, 129.

Secondly, according to Ibn Sīnā, there is more good than evil in the Universe. While evil occurs on earth, which is small compared to the universe, evil does not strike a whole species, but mostly individuals; not *all* individuals and only at certain times. Even if someone would say that evil is predominant, Ibn Sīnā reminds us that there is a difference between numerous and predominant. Evil is not predominant on this earth, but it may be widespread. Furthermore, secondary and tertiary evils are not something to be concerned with, since this kind of evil has not much relevance to theodicy.[350] Inati criticizes Ibn Sīnā's view that evil exists only within the sublunary (earthly) sphere which is small in relation to the whole universe and argues that since there is motion in the universe, there must be some sort of imperfection and hence evil within the celestial sphere as well[351]. Inati does not seem to make any difference between imperfection and evil; he uses these terms interchangeably at many places. According to him, there is an ambiguity within the teaching of Ibn Sīna – although Ibn Sīna describes all celestial intelligences as pure goods (because free from any kind of matter), he also states that anything apart from God is possible in existence and hence not a pure good.[352] If Inati has understood Ibn Sīna rightly, his objection seems to be justified.

Another way for Ibn Sīnā to seek for a solution for the problem of evil is the common statement that evil is a necessary **consequence** of the good. That means, to bring about good causes implies the existence of causes that accidentally lead to evil. Very similar to this is the notion of evil being a necessary **means** for the good, also used by Ibn Sīnā as the fourth argument. Accordingly, God is always concerned with the whole for the

[350] ibid., 133.
[351] Ibid., 134.
[352] Ibid., 135.

notion of evil is relative to the being that is harmed by it. For some, it might be indifferent and for others even good. But for the whole of the world, it is **always** good.[353] To the argument, that evil is willed by God, Ibn Sīnā tends to say that God does not will evil as such; He is aware of its presence but He minds it not because he knows it is necessary. Inati criticizes this argument by saying that God could have made humans such that they eat only earth and drink only water and that they take all necessary vitamins, minerals and proteins from these two without having to kill other beings and produce evil in order to continue with living. What seems to be missing from Inati's exposition is the understanding, that death is not necessarily evil and that the purpose of other being's creation might be to serve human beings in their survival; which would mean that these creatures are merely doing what they are meant to do by God.

Ibn Rushd's approach to the problem of evil is in many ways different from that of Ibn Sīnā. Being very well known among philosophers in the western world, it will be interesting to look into his way of trying to find solutions for the problem of evil.

3.5 Ibn Rushd (Averroes)

Ibn Rushd, known in the West as Averroes (1126 - 1198), whose education was grounded on the Maliki approach to jurisprudence and whose introduction to theology had an Ash'arite perspective, nevertheless was a defender of objectivism[354]; he rejected the idea that God was beyond good and evil; since for him, anyone is evil when he does certain types of acts or creates things which are evil in character. Thus, according to Ibn Rushd, this

[353] ibid., 145.
[354] *Averroes and his Philosophy*, 4, 154; see also George F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 250.

qualification of evil also applied to God and was therefore a problem for him which he tried to avoid in certain ways.

One way for Ibn Rushd to find out why a perfect God would create any kind of evil, was to consider Zoroastrian dualism, which he eventually rejected. This is obviously due to the fact that dualism suggested associationism, which is not acceptable to any Muslim. Ibn Rushd, just as the Mu'tazila, also rejected the idea that good and evil is created by God and that He is the cause of both.[355] This idea might have emerged due to an excessive sensitivity towards God, wanting to exonerate Him from any guilt and defect.

Ibn Rushd found the answer to the question in early Platonism. According to Ibn Rushd, evil existed not because of God but because of the very existence of matter itself. Hence, existence is possible only under two conditions: either things, to whose existence evil is attached should not exist or they should exist in this condition, since more than that is not possible in their existence.[356] Ibn Rushd uses this explanation for the existence of [natural] evils (*ashrār*), such as decay, age, etc.[357], which shows that Ibn Rushd regarded decay and age as evil. For a Muslim philosopher this view brings along the difficulty that it implies God's omnipotence being limited. For one could say that God was not able to create a world completely free of any kind of evil. Yet, Leaman defends Ibn Rushd by making clear that Ibd Rushd's suggestion is not a specifically Platonic doctrine but rather that it is based on the idea that whatever has a material content is corruptible, and whatever is corruptible will at some point be corrupted.[358] This view goes

[355] 'Averroes on Good and Evil', 13-40, taken from *Averroes' commentary on Plato's 'Republic'*, Hebrew tr., ed. and Eng. tr. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge, 1956), 379.
[356] 'Summary (Jami') of Aristotle's Metaphysics' in *Rasā'il Ibn Rushd* (Hyderabad, 1947), 170.
[357] 'Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics', 255.
[358] *Averroes and his Philosophy*, 156.

back to Aristotle, according to whom the generation of one substance involves the destruction of another, so that the matter which was in the thing which was destroyed moves to the thing which is created.[359] Hence, states Leaman, "the account which Ibn Rushd provides to reconcile God's goodness with the evil in the world does not presuppose a Platonic belief in the necessity of an evil nature, but rather an Aristotelian account of change and corruptibility."[360]

The other way of seeking a solution to the problem of evil was according to Ibn Rushd related to divine and human justice and the All-knowing God. The question at this point is how a just God could create man and be the cause of man's acts knowing that man would do injustice on earth and then suffer for it? In other words, why would God make man suffer for acts for which man is not ultimately responsible? Again as an objectivist, Ibn Rushd believed in the intrinsic justice of God. He asserts that all substances have natures which define them and their ends. The purpose of a knife, for instance, is to cut or the purpose of a tree is to reach a certain level of growth. Hence, there must be a purpose of a human being for a human being is also a substance. Leaman states, that according to Ibn Rushd, the ultimate aim of a human being is to be happy and to avoid misery.[361] According to him, happiness and misery of the soul in this world were natural effects of human action, rather than a reward or punishment of God. This is, because Ibn Rushd did not believe in the survival of each individual soul in the next life, but he believed in the unity of parts of the soul in the world-soul.[362] Furthermore, man's moral actions affect not only the individual,

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[359] ibid.
[360] ibid.
[361] ibid., 157.
[362] *Averroes' commentary on Plato's 'Republic'*, Hebrew trans., ed. and Eng. tr. E. I. J. Rosenthal (Cambridge, 1956), I, xi, 5-7.

but the happiness of the whole community, as a whole and as a species. Hence, man's misery might not follow him in the afterlife but may well follow the community. The importance of belief in an afterlife, according to Ibn Rushd, could be taken as an indication of the wider terms of reference of moral action.[363]

To the question whether God causes human injustice, Ibn Rushd discusses his theory of human free will (*irāda*) and its relation to divine will. He starts with the principle that choice (*ikhtiyār*) is a condition of human obligation. The fact that man is under obligation leads to the other fact that man must have choice. In this respect, Ibn Rushd goes against the Jabriyya, the Ash'arites and even the Mu'tazila by comparing volitional acts with compelled acts. Humans will their own acts and those acts come about through an operation of the agent's mind, he states, whereas compelled acts come about through external forces bringing about the act directly.[364] Thus, Ibn Rushd is an advocate of free will and the cause of injustice is not God but rather the agent's mind. However, Ibn Rushd is not happy with the Mu'tazila's view of complete free will, since it undermines God's power by stating that human is the creator of evil, and not God. Therefore he prefers to propose a middle solution which includes man's obligation and God's creation, in other words a cooperation of human and divine free will, which draws him nearer to the Ash'arite view. However, Hourani states, if examined closer, he eventually gives the ultimate decision to God, "through a theory of complete determination of human acts."[365] If one believes in what Hourani states at the latter, then Ibn Rushd at this point chooses to be in line with the view of Jabriyya. After quoting the verse of the Qur'an 'He

[363] *Averroes and his Philosophy*, 159.
[364] 'Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics', 257.
[365] 'Averroes on Good and Evil', 25.

leads astray whom He will, and guides whom He will' [Ibrahim, 14:4], Ibn Rushd claims that this verse should not be understood in the most common sense that God leads astray certain individuals. Rather, Hourani states, Ibn Rushd's interpretation of this verse is addressed by his doctrine of providence which states that providence does not extend to particulars but only to species. Hence, God has created a species among which a certain number of unknown individuals would go astray, and a certain number would not.[366] And to the question why God created a species that would include people going astray instead of creating species that are completely free of any injustice, Ibn Rushd answers that "God chose to create a minority of bad natures for the sake of the majority of good ones; and this was made necessary by 'the natural elements (*tabī'a*) from which He created man and the composition (*tarkīb*) in which man was formed.' The only alternative would have been not to create man at all, and that would have meant renouncing the greater good."[367]

Leaman states that Ibn Rushd is aware of the Qur'anic statements that God knows our thoughts, and everything happening in the world, and that no leaf falls without Him noticing it. Knowing every petty phenomena, He will certainly know all actions of every individual. Yet as a person being strongly influenced by Aristotle, it must be noticed that Aristotle's God seems to be unconcerned with many everyday events. So to say, God has knowledge over important issues, but the fact that "God is immutable and unaffected by matter, pure actuality without any kind of potentiality" will lead to the assumption that He is unresponsive about the events in the world of creation and corruption. [368] In other words, Ibn Rushd seems to share the view of Ibn

[366] 'Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics', 259.
[367] ibid.
[368] *Averroes and his Philosophy*, 72.

Sīnā that God does not know the particulars or at least, that He is unresponsive in this matter.

A second problem pointed out by Leaman is the principle that the object of knowledge is identified with the intellect of the knower. This principle would closely connect God with the objects of the world of creation and corruption. However, God "must be separate from creation in status, and not appear to be like a very clever and well-informed natural being. Averroes in fact accused the theologians of making God out to be nothing more than an 'eternal' man."[369]

Being an opponent of both Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd, and defending the traditional view of the *ahl al-sunnah*, Ghazālī fought against the Greek influence on Islam. Special attention will be given to the views of Imam Ghazālī, since Said Nursi credited the work of Imam Ghazālī highly and was influenced by this remarkable scholar.

3.6 Al-Ghazālī

Al Ghazālī (1058-1111), as an Ash'arite, presented an understanding of the shari'a which places the power and influence of God over all things.[370] This emphasis leads to the abandonment of the objectivity of causality, ethics

[369] ibid.

[370] The outstanding theologian, jurist, original thinker, mystic and religious reformer Abū Hāmid Muhammad B. Muhammad Al Tūsī, known as al-Ghazālī, was born in Tūs in Khūrasān. The Persian al-Ghazālī is one of the most important figures in the history of Islam, especially within its philosophical tradition. His teacher was the great Ash'arite theologian al-Juwayni. According to al-Ghazālī, three philosophical theses in particular were abhorrent enough to qualify as instances of unbelief (*kufr*): 1) the assertion of the pre-eternity of the world, 2) the claim that God knows the temporal entities and events of this world only as universals and not as particulars, 3) the denial of bodily resurrection. For further information see *Islamic Philosophy A-Z*, and B. Lewis, et al. *The Encyclopeadia of Islam*, vol. II.

and the world as an eternal entity.[371] Furthermore, Ghazālī strongly rejects the idea advocated by philosophers like Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd, that God has knowledge over only universal and important issues, and that it is unnecessary for God to know minor issues such as the actions of every individual.[372] Ghazālī denounces this position as heresy and points out his argument as quoted by Leaman:

> this principle implies that God cannot know whether Zaid obeys or disobeys him, since God cannot know any new occurrences that happen to Zaid, as he does not now the individual Zaid… he cannot know that Zaid becomes a heretic or a true believer, for he can only know the unbelief and the belief of man in general, not as instantiated into individuals. God can even not know Muhammad's proclaiming himself prophet at the time he did.[373]

The definition of goodness (*ḥasan*) made by Ghazālī is twofold: one is a technical explanation which means whatever is fitting for any end in this life. The other is what is fitting only for the ends of the next life. The latter is more important and has been focused on by the *ahl al-sunnah*. It is also important to note that reference is made here to the ends of the agent. As a follower of theistic subjectivism, Ghazālī believes that all God's acts are called good (*ḥasan*), but that they have no effect on Him and have no personal end.[374]

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[371] *Averroes and his Philosophy*, 4.
[372] This is important to mention especially in relation to moral evil and God's knowledge of man's volition and God's creating every single act (*fi'l*). If one argues that God is the creator of every single action, than one must presume and accept that God is in knowledge of particulars, just as He knows the universals.
[373] Oliver Leaman. *Averroes and his Philosophy*, p. 73, cited from *Averroes' Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, ed. M. Bouyges (Bibliotheca Arabica Scholasticorum, Serie Arabe, 3; Imprimerie Catholique: Beirut, 1930).
[374] George F. Hourani. 'Ghazali on the Ethics of Action' in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol.96, Issue 1 (Jan.-Mar., 1976), 73.

Evil (*qabīḥ* as it is translated by Hourani) is defined as whatever is repugnant or improper to an end, again meaning the end of the agent. Hourani points out that the Mu'tazila had objected that the meaning of good and evil is not necessarily restricted to what promotes an end or to what hinders accomplishment of an end.[375] For people might do things that are not in any ways advantageous to their ends; or they might avoid other acts of evil even if they see no disadvantage to themselves. So an individual might help and comfort a dying person only because he believes that this is intrinsically the right and good thing to do. Similarly, an unbeliever and hence a person without fear of an afterlife punishment, might refuse to break a contract, even under threat of execution for his refusal. This person regards breaking a contract as evil not only in relation to ends, but avoids it as an intrinsic evil.[376] Ghazālī's answer to this objection is mainly to avoid the doctrine that attributes of good and evil are intrinsic to the acts themselves, in other words, to avoid the objectivist view. Hence he gives examples showing the self-interest of the individuals or emotional causes for the acts mentioned above.[377]

Hourani further states that according to Ghazālī, God has no needs and the reason he created the world is to reveal His power and to realize His will. It is important to note that these ends are no benefits or advantages for Him. God cannot do wrong (*ẓulm*) for by definition, wrongdoing consists in dealing unjustly with the property of others. But God is the owner of

[375] Ibid., 73-74.
[376] Ibid., 74.
[377] ibid.

everything and nobody is in possession of anything God could deal unjustly with.[378]

Hourani quotes Ghazālī from the opening passage of *Iqtisād*, Part 3, as follows:

> The totality of acts of the Exalted is admissible (*jā'iza*) and none of them is describable as 'necessary'. We assert seven things in this part.
>
> We assert [1] that it is admissible for God the Exalted not to impose obligations (*yukallifu*) on His servants, as well as [2] to impose on them unachievable obligations, [3] to cause pain to His servants without compensation and without [preceding] offence [by them]; [4] that it is not necessary for Him to heed what is most advantageous for them, or [5] to reward obedience or punish disobedience… and [7] that it is not necessary for God the Exalted to send prophets, and if He does send them it is not evil or absurd, but He is able to show their truthfulness by a miracle. All these assertions are based on investigation of the meaning of *wājib*, *hasan* and *qabīh*.

In his discourse with the Mu'tazilite objection to the points mentioned above, Ghazālī explains the third one that God, if He wills, can cause pain to His servants, as something quite usual: He can do so, since He does it all the time and He is under no necessity not to do so because necessity does not apply to God. Furthermore doing so does not turn God into a wrongdoer since, as said before, a wrongdoer is someone who deals with another person's property without any law or command.[379]

Hourani emphasizes that according to Ghazālī's viewpoint, human "acts do not cause virtues as we see in Aristotle's doctrine of habituation. Acts do not cause rewards in the next life. Virtues do not cause rewards, as they do in

[378] ibid.
[379] ibid., 75.

Hindu *karma* or in Ibn Sīnā's eschatology. In all cases the rewards or the moral progress are bestowed by God through His grace."[380]

The issue of moral evil leads again to the topic of *qadar* and *qaḍā*.

Abrahamov states that according to Ghazālī the issue of *qadar* is slippery and has misled many people. Traditionally, he prohibits against dealing with this matter those who study it for the sake of discussion and contest (*bi'l bahth wa'l jidāl*). Ghazālī's view on *qadar* and *qaḍā* is in accordance with Ash'arī; those who are not satisfied with merely devotion should believe what Abu Hanīfa and his adherents say about this matter. "Namely that it is God's action that creates power in man (*ihdāth al-istitā'a fi'l allah*) while man's action consists using the power created (*wa'isti'māl al-istitā'a al-muhadatha fi'l al-'abd*) ... These are the two basic components of the doctrine of acquisition (*kasb*)."[381]

In fact, Ghazāī explains the doctrine of acquisition in his *Ihyā*, in the chapter on the Oneness of and Trust in God (*tawḥīd wa tawakkul*). Ghazālī answers the question, how a person can be compelled and autonomous at the same time. For this, he states, one first need to understand the meaning of free will (*irāda*) and maybe also the difference between will and choice (*irāda wa ikhtiyār*). Free will is dependent on the knowledge that teaches man what is good for him. If someone tries to prick one's eye with a needle or if someone is attacked with a sword, that person's knowledge teaches him undoubtedly, that it is better for him to avert from this situation. Hence, free will comes into action through knowledge, and power awakens through free

[380] ibid., 77.
[381] Binjamin Abrahamov. 'Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Causality' in *Studia Islamica*, No.67 (1988), 79.

will. Eyes close suddenly to prevent the prick of a needle and hands start moving to avoid the harm of a sword. All this happens instinctively, albeit through free will.[382] Hence, free will (*irāda*) is the power to incline towards one side whereas free choice (*ikhtiyār*) is the freedom of a person to favor one action over another or to choose whether to act or not. In other words, *irāda* is a more general term whereas *ikhtiyār* is more specific.

Ghazālī states, to choose the better between two goods or the worse between two bad can happen only through the intellect (ʿaql). Free will can come about only through the certain judgment of a person's feelings, imagination or intellect. That is why it is mostly impossible for a person to cut his own throat. This impossibility, however, does not mean that that person lacks power or has no knife. It means that that person is missing free will, which directs and invites power. The reason for the lack of free will is that it occurs through the influence of the intellect or the feeling that tells him that not killing oneself is the better action to do. Therefore is suicide for a person not the appropriate thing to do, unless that person is in the midst of an unbearable pain or penalty. In this case, says Ghazālī, the intellect pauses for a moment and thinks of what the lesser evil is. If the intellect decides that killing oneself is the lesser evil, and if this decision is definite, and if there are no obstacles, free will and power will go into action and the person will commit suicide.[383]

Ghazālī states that free will obeys the judgment of the intellect and wisdom. When someone with a stick chases a person, that person runs until he is at the edge of a roof. Suddenly, his intellect tells him that being hit with the stick is better or easier than jumping from that roof. All his limbs stop

[382] Al-Ghazālī. *Ihyā Ulūm-id-Dīn*, *Kitāb at-Tawhīd wa at-Tawakkul*, vol. IV, 238-286.
[383] ibid.

moving, hence his power obeys the "caller of free will" and motion obeys power. This shows that all of these are compulsorily ordained for mankind without his knowledge. Hence, he is also compelled in regards of his free choice (*ikhtiyār*). Man is merely the center of implementation. This means that another guides man's will and strength, at all times. A man is the intermediary of God's will and power flow. For example, the burning of fire is pure compulsion. The act of God is absolute free choice (*ikhtiyār*). Man's act lays between those two for man is compelled with free choice. Therefore, people of truth have searched for a third term and have called this state *kasb* or acquisition. Acquisition is neither contrary to compulsion, nor contrary to free choice: it unites the two.[384]

After explaining Ghazālī's view and proofs on *qadar* and *qaḍā* and that everything in this world is due to God's will, Abrahamov criticizes that Ghazālī does not answer the question of why man should act if things are predetermined by God. Additionally, according to Abrahamov, Ghazālī's view of causality leaves no room for man's free choice (*ikhtiyār*).[385] Despite Abrahamov's opinion, Ghazālī writes about two different kinds of proofs regarding God's determination (*taqdīr*) of human actions. One is the proof based on transmission (*naqlī*) and the other rational (*'aqlī*) proofs.[386] For the former one, Ghazālī makes use of several verses of the Qur'an[387] and based on these he suggests that although the action of man is his own acquisition

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[384] ibid.
[385] 'Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Causality', 86.
[386] Al-Ghazālī. *Ihyāu 'Ulūmi'd-Dīn, Kitābu Kavāidi'l-Akāid, Rub'u'l-Ibādāt*, trans. Ahmed Serdaroğlu, Maturidī and the Ash'arī, Vol. I, 283-284.
[387] Ghazālī refers to the following verses in the Qur'an: [Al Anbiyā, 21:23] He cannot be questioned for His acts, but they will be questioned (for theirs); [Al Ra'd, 13:31] Do not the Believers know, that, had Allah (so) willed, he could have guided all mankind (to the Right)? and [Al Sajdah, 32:13] If We had willed, We could certainly have brought every soul its true guidance. From 'Abdullah Yūsuf 'Ali, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an*, (Maryland: Amana Publications, 2004).

(*kasb*), it will not be beyond God's will (*murād allāhu*)[388]. Regarding the rational proof, Ghazālī suggests that if sins (*ma'āsī*) and moral evils (*jarāim*) are left out of God's will (*irāda*) and are given to the will of God's enemy Iblīs, this would lead to the increase of actions consistent with the enemy's will. In fact, the actions consistent with the will of the enemy would be more than actions consistent with God's will.[389] Ghazālī says further that nobody would accept the presidency of someone whose enemy is more efficacious. According to the innovator (*mubtadi'ah*), states Ghazālī, all sins are against God's will (*irāda*). God, who is the governor of the universe, is beyond and above weakness (*'ajz*) and incapability (*ḍa'f*). Ghazālī also points out that God has consent for goodness (*khayr*) and no consent for evil (*sharr*).[390]

To the critique of Abrahamov mentioned above, there is a similar question Ghazālī rhetorically asks: considering that as God wills good, so He also wills evil; why is it then that God forbids what He wills and what He doesn't wills He commands?[391] To give an example: God forbids unbelief, but at the same time He wills (*murād*) it, on the other hand, God commands prayer although there are people who do not practice that command, which means that God wills it not. What does all of this mean? Ghazālī states that command and will (*irāda*) are two different things. To show how they differ, Ghazālī uses the following example: A Lord who beats his servant because of his disobedience, is called for punishment (*ta'dhīr*) by the Sultan. To show the servant's disobedience, he commands him in presence of the Sultan: "saddle that horse". He does not really want the servant to saddle the horse. His aim is merely to show the servant's disobedience. For if he would not be able to

[388] Al-Ghazālī. *Ihyāu 'Ulūmi'd-Dīn, Kitābu Kavāidi'l-Akāid, Rub'u'l-Ibādāt*, 284.
[389] Ibid.
[390] Ibid.
[391] Ibid.

proof the situation to the Sultan, his excuse would not be accepted. Just like this example, to show the disobedience of His servants, God can command what he wills not.[392]

3.7 Conclusion

As elucidated in this chapter, there has been a variety of answers and explanations on how to reconcile God's attributes with the existence of evil. Not only has the term been divided into different categories such as 'natural' and 'moral' and examined thoroughly – on the 'moral' aspect there has been extensive discussions on the responsibility of humanity for their actions, on *irāda* (free will), *qadar* (divine will) and *qaḍā* (divine decree). By doing this, some did depart from the *ahl al-sunnah* whereas others did stay within those boundaries.

What is common in all is the complexity and deepness of the issue at hand. It is indeed hard to understand God's plan and *ḥikmah* behind every situation. In fact, it seems to be impossible to ever really understand God's intentions and wisdom. Despite all the ideas and viewpoints of the different scholars and philosophers mentioned in this chapter, in conclusion, the main aspect sill remains: Is 'evil' as it is seen by humans really equal to '*sharr*' as it is explained in the Qur'ān?

Furthermore, there is the presumption in nearly every thought that evil exists and the solutions offered are therefore accordingly – trying to justify the existence of evil in many different ways. For many, evil is real, it can be felt and people go through it in pain and grief, such as the powerful critique

[392] Ibid.

of Ivan in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel.[393] However, it seems that starting at the wrong end of the problem makes it all more complex and difficult.

The following chapters will elaborate on how Said Nursi has understood *sharr* and whether for him *sharr* is existent. All other issues on *ḥikmah*, *irāda*, *qadar* and *qaḍa* will be discussed after Nursi's understanding of the quiddity of *sharr* in the light of the Qur'ān has been introduced and examined. The next part is a bridging chapter on Said Nursi, his life in relation to the apparent 'evils' he went through by constant imprisonments and his answers to these in his letters.

[393] Fyodor Dostoyevsky. *The Brothers Karamazov* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958, reissued in one volume, 1982), 283.

4 Short Biography on Said Nursi

This chapter will give a short outline of the life of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi. It will furthermore provide a general, chronological overview of his works. The aim in this chapter, however, is not to offer the reader an ordinary biography. Instead, the life of Nursi will be examined in the light of events that happened to him that might be considered negative, or even 'evil'. It will be interesting to see the response of Nursi to these events throughout his life. Moreover, this will constitute a practical example and maybe a certain form of application into one's life; in other words, a tangible example of how to respond to apparent evils in one's life that touches one directly.

4.1 Said Nursi's Life

Said Nursi (1877 - 1960) was born in the village Nurs, in Bitlis, one of the Eastern Provinces of the Ottoman Empire, which is today a city in eastern Turkey. He was the son of a farmer, both parents were devout Muslims.[394] He started with his studies in 1886 and studied in a series of schools (*madrasas*). In contrast to other religious scholars of his time, Nursi studied physical and mathematical sciences, which he concluded with a study in philosophy. He believed strongly that Islamic Theology (*kalām*) could be renewed and could successfully answer the attacks the Qur'an and Islam were subject to, but only through bringing together different educational traditions.[395] In a remarkably short time, he was aware of many religious

[394] Sükran Vahide. *The Author of the Risale-i Nur Collection: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Sözler Neşriyat, 2000), 3.
[395] Sükran Vahide. 'A Chronology of Said Nursi's Life' in *Islam at the Crossroads*, ed. Ibrahim Abu Rabi (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), xvii.

and modern sciences in such a way that he was able to compete with very important savants (`*ulama*) at that time. He became a teacher and educational reformer.[396] What makes the figure of Said Nursi so important is the fact that he lived through the time of constitutionalism. This is due to the fact that he defined and explained the importance of constitutional monarchy (*mashrūtiyya mashrū'a*)[397] in Eastern Turkey to the people, tribes and religious scholars to make them understand constitutionalism, emphasizing their conformity with the Islamic *shari'ah* and the importance of building bridges with the folk.[398] He began to work as a mediator in tribal disputes and traveled among the tribes as a person of religion.

Nursi was deeply involved in public life, and put forward his ideas regarding educational reform, unity, constitutional monarchy (*mashrūtiyya mashrū'a*), etc. in newspaper articles. He was active in the *Ittihad-ı Muhammedī* (Muhammadan union or society for Muslim Unity).[399]

Nursi volunteered as a commander in the military on behalf of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, and during his fight at the front against the Russians he wrote a commentary on the Qur'an called *Signs of Miraculousness* (*Isharāt al-I'jaz*).[400] This was only one of the many commentaries and books he would write in the following years. After spending two years as a prisoner of war in Russia he escaped and came

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[396] *The Author of the Risale-i Nur Collection*, 12.
[397] Nursi's understanding of freedom is a freedom that is conform to the norms of shari'a (*mashrūtiyya mashrū'a*). In that sense, Nursi believes that freedom (*mashrūtiyya*) is justice and shari'a. See Said Nursi. 'Divan-ı Harb-ı Örfî' in *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, Vol. 2, 1921, (own translation); Nursi further explaines freedom's characteristic as neither harming **one's own soul (*nafs*)** nor others. This kind of freedom, Nursi believes to be apart from an understanding of freedom that allows any kind of abject pleasures (*safāha*) as long as one does not harm others. See also 'Münazarat' in *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, Vol. 2, 1941.
[398] The fruit of his endeavors is his work called the *Münazarat*, which Nursi composed in 1911 as answers to the questions of the tribes in Eastern Turkey.
[399] Sükran Vahide. 'A Chronology of Said Nursi's Life', xvii.
[400] *The Author of the Risale-i Nur Collection*, 125.

back to Istanbul.[401] In 1922, after repeated invitations from the leaders of the new centre of government, Nursi finally left Istanbul for Ankara. He turned down the offer of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk to work in the government of the new Republic of Turkey. In 1925 the Shaykh Said Revolt took place.[402] Although Nursi was invited to join this rebellion against the Ankara government, he strongly advised its leaders to give it up.[403] Nevertheless he was also sent into exile in western Anatolia for the next twenty-five years. During this period Nursi started devoting himself to expounding the Qur'ān and writing the *Risale-i Nur*, a work of approximately six thousand pages.

It is also important to note what kind of thought influenced Nursi. He belonged to the scholarly tradition and was firmly grounded in classical Islamic scholarship. Despite some views that he might have been largely influenced by and attracted to Sufism, because of the Sufi environment he grew up in, Şükran Vahide states that there is no evidence of its influence in the works of the first period of his life. This, however, does not mean that he did not find guidance from Sufi masters. He attended *madrasas* directed by *'ulama* and Sufi *shaykhs* during his childhood, the majority of whom were members of the Naqshibandī (*Khālidī*) order; however, he never joined any of those orders.[404] During a period of spiritual crisis of Nursi, when he withdrew from society, he found what he was searching for in the writings of

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[401] *The Author of the Risale-i Nur Collection*, 119.
[402] The Shaykh Said Revolt is called after a Naqshibandi Shaykh named Shaykh Said of Palu, who was the leader of the revolt. See *The Author of the Risale-i Nur Collection*, 191, see also Mehmet S. Kaya. *The Zaza Kurds of Turkey: A Middle Eastern Minority in a Globalized Society* (I.B. Tauris, 2011), 64.
[403] See Sahiner, N. *Bilinmeyen Taraflarıyla Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul, 1990), 254-5. Whether Nursi has really written a letter to Shaykh Said in order to persuade him against a rebellion is questioned. While some believe that this was rather a Turkish nationalist reading among the followers of Nursi, witnesses assert that this incident is true and that Nursi's endeavors prevented many from joining the rebellion, thus saving thousands of lives.
[404] Said Nursi. *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybī* (Istanbul: Sinan Matbaasi, 1960), 116.

'Abd al-Qādir Geylānī.[405] Moreover, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindī (1563-1624), also known as Imam Rabbānī, a Sufi master, was instrumental in his eventual finding guidance.[406] Nevertheless, all of this did not lead him to Sufism but rather to the Qur'ān.[407] Nursi himself states his standpoint, which is also cited and translated by Şükran Vahide, in the following way:

> Through their good works, worship, spiritual journeying, and asceticism, the people of sainthood observed reality and the truths of belief from behind veils. The Risale however has opened up a way to reality within knowledge (*'ilm*) in place of worship; it has opened up a way to the essence of reality through logical proofs and scholarly arguments in place of spiritual journeying and recitations; it has opened up a direct way of 'grater sainthood' within the sciences of *kalām* and *'aqida* and *usul al-din* in place of the sciences of Sufism and the *tariqa* and thus it prevails over the misguided philosophical currents that have defeated the *tariqa* and Sufi movements of this century.[408]

There are some major cornerstones that should be mentioned within the life of Said Nursi. The first cornerstone is his eagerness for reform in *madrasas*. He was unsatisfied with the education system and developed new ideas, such as bringing together modern secular schools, religious schools and Sufi *tekkes*, which was a unique idea at that time.[409] Another turning point in his life happened when he learned from a newspaper that "the British in the person of Gladstone had declared open war on the Qur'ān as the chief obstacle to their imperialist ideas."[410] This was the moment when he decided

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[405] Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey, An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (New York: SUNY Press, 2005), 165.
[406] Ibid.
[407] 'A Chronology of Said Nursi's Life', 2-4; *Islam in Modern Turkey,* 165-6; *The Author of the Risale-i Nur Collection: Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, 168.
[408]Said Nursi, 'Emirdağ Lahikası' in *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, Vol.2 (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Publications, 1996), 1715-1716.
[409] Abu-Rabi', *Islam at the Crossroads*, 7-8.
[410] Ibid., 5. There is no historical evidence, to the author's knowledge, that Gladstone has said this. However, in a weekly review of politics, literature and art called *The New Age*, dated March 20, 1919, Marmaduke Pickthall quotes Gladstone in his article 'The Perils of a Propaganda'. In his article, Pickthall writes as follows: "…It is true that Mr. Gladstone, the ecclesiastically-minded, once so far forgot decorum as to declare that so long as there were followers of that "accursed book" (the Koran), Europe would know no peace – a strange

to take the miraculousness of the Qur'ān as his guide and teacher and dedicate his life to its service. His inner journey and spiritual search was set off through his contemplation of death and the overwhelming realization of his own age.

4.2 Said Nursi's Method

First of all, it might be important to stress that there is no methodology in religious studies that is similar to that of natural and social sciences, because the study of religion is in some ways an act of trust in an authority. As McIntyre states in his work *After Virtue*, during the enlightenment, faith in God has been undermined and moral values have been distorted. Reason has become the most important aspect in acquiring knowledge – in fact, complete certainty was required.[411] Nursi's methodology does not depend merely on reason. According to Bilal Kuşpınar, Nursi's epistemological evaluation of arguments is firstly, reason-based (*nazar-ı aqlī*), in other words, it is a logical presentation and argumentation of the existence and unity of God, of eschatology, prophethood, divine and social justice, the cosmos, as well as theoretical and existential theology. The cosmological and aesthetic arguments could count as such. Secondly, his epistemological evaluation of arguments is revelation-based (*wahyī*), that is, dependent, in direct relation with, and based on the Qur'ān. Thirdly, authority-based, that is, according to transmission (hadīth); fourthly, experimental-sensory (*ḥissī*); fifthly, experiential-self-developed (*tajrubī/haqq al-yaqīn*) and lastly, heart-centered

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inversion of the truth at a time when Christendom allowed no peace to followers of that Book in which I find this statement among others to the same effect …" See Marmaduke Pickthall. 'The Perils of a Propaganda' in *The New Age*, Vol. XXIV, No. 20 (Thursday, March 20, 1919) This article, although not directly a source from Gladstone, may serve as an evidence for such a historical event, especially given the fact that this article has been written in 1919.

[411] Alasdair MacIntyre. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, see chapter five.

(*hadsī wa kashfī*).[412] The last three types of evaluation are rather personal, thus, it is hard for the reader to always empathize with Nursi on these, especially if one is not on the same spiritual and sensual level. These arguments, however, in a way recover the pre-modern way of knowing and offer a new way of argumentation which is rather tradition-constituted.

In his works, Nursi uses certain methods to explain verses of the Qur'an in a way that can be understood by people of various educational levels. His target is neither the 'elite' or the academics, nor only the lay people.

First of all, what can be seen throughout his works is that he sees the universe as a book. He uses this metaphor very often and one has to keep this constantly in mind while reading the *Risale-i Nur*. The universe needs to be 'read' and understood as one of the three evidences[413] of God's existence;[414] the other two being the Qur'ān and the Messenger sent by God. Adopting this approach, one will be able to regard beings for the meaning they signify (*mānā-i ḥarfī*), which also can transform the physical sciences into knowledge of God, and impel them towards their true goal.[415]

Another method Nursi uses in his *Risale-i Nur* is the method of allegory and the explanation of unclear and unfamiliar truths in an easily accessible manner. This approach of allegorical comparisons (*qiyas tamsīlī*) is essentially Qur'anic, since the Qur'ān uses a similar way of communication. Nursi explains this method as follows:

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[412] Notes from a presentation delivered by Bilal Kuşpınar on the methodology of the *Risale-i Nur Collection* at the Third International Young Academics Conference in Istanbul (18-19 June, 2011), organized by The Istanbul Foundation for Science and Culture.
[413] Nursi uses the word 'proof' in his works not in the classical meaning as philosophical or scientific proof, but rather to emphasize that his explanations on i.e. the existence of God or the hereafter are very compelling and convincing. Colin Turner tackled this issue in his recently published book *The Qur'an Revealed* (Berlin: Gerlach Press, 2013).
[414] Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, Vol.1 (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Publications, 1996), 91.
[415] *Islam at the Crossroads*, 26.

> So, the stories or parables in the Words… are sorts of allusions. The truths at the end of the stories are extremely correct, extremely true and conformable to reality; they are the allusive meanings of the stories. Their essential meanings are comparisons that bring distant objects close like a telescope and however they may be it does not damage their veracity and truthfulness. Moreover, all those stories are comparisons or parables. Purely to enable people in general to understand, what is properly communicated without words is put into words, and immaterial and abstract matters are represented in material form.[416]

Just as in many places in the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi uses this way of allegory also for the "ten proofs of the resurrection of the dead that are based on such matters as the order in the universe, the wisdom and purposes followed in beings, and the absence of futility and absence of waste."[417]

Lastly, what can also be stated here as one of the methods of Nursi is the type of reflective thought (*tafakkur*), which is based on the divine names and a form of deductive reasoning. Through reflective thought one observes the universe and tries to read the divine marks on every single creation.

4.3 A Chronological Overview of Nursi's works on *sharr*

The writings of Nursi on *sharr* are spread throughout his works. While at some places he briefly touches on the topic, in other instances he deals with it in length.[418] The chronological overview below only covers those pieces related to the problem of *sharr*, which Nursi has covered in a major way. There are quite a lot of other places in the *Risale-i Nur*, wherein direct and related topics are treated, however, it would be beyond the scope of this overview to cover all of them.

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[416]Said Nursi, *The Words* (Istanbul: Sozler Publications, 1998), 644.
[417] See concised forms in 'Muhakemat' in *The Risale-i Nur Collection*, Vol. 2, 2028-9; *Signs of Miraculousness*, 59 ff.; and in more detail in *The Words*, 521 ff.
[418] In this chronological outline, only the lengthy and more detailed parts shall be mentioned. All other parts will be considered in this study as well, however, not within this part of the study.

Composed Year	Explanation
1914-1916	A major treatise is Nursi's interpretation of chapter 2, verse 7 of the Qur'ān[419], which can be found in *Signs of Miraculousness*.[420] This piece can be better understood in connection with the Twenty-Sixth Word of *The Words*. Also in *Signs of Miraculousness*, Nursi explains the Qur'anic narrative on the creation of the first human being[421] and how sin entered the perfect paradisal state of Adam and his wife.[422]
1927	Very important pages and passages can be found especially in his writings on divine determining (*qadar*) and free will (*juz' ikhtiyar*).[423] In the same year, he has also composed the Eighteenth Word, in which he explains chapter 3, verse 188 of the Qur'ān[424]. In there, Nursi explains the powerlessness of man, the function of free will and the beauty of everything that God creates.
1929	Furthermore, in the Twenty-Third Word of *The Words*, Nursi analyses two aspects of mankind, one pertained to

[419] "Allah has sealed their hearts and their hearing; their sight is dimmed and a terrible punishment awaits them."
[420] Said Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 79 ff.
[421] Qur'ān, [2:30] "Behold your Lord and Sustainer said to the angels: "I will create a vicegerent on earth." They said: "Will You place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate your holy name?" He said: "I know what you know not.""
[422] Said Nursi, *Signs of Miraculousness*, 262 ff.
[423] Said Nursi, *The Words*, Twenty Sixth Word, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Reyhan Ofset, 2002), 477.
[424] "Do not think those who are pleased with what they have done and love to be praised for what they have not done, immune from punishment; a painful punishment is in store for them."

invention (*ijād*), good, acts and positivity; the other pertained to destruction, non-existence, *sharr*, negativity, and passivity.

1928-1930 Another piece that has been of major importance for this study is the First Aim of the Thirtieth Word, the treatise on the *ana* and 'divine Trust."[425] In 1930, Nursi wrote the Twelfth Letter, in which he answered questions such as the reasons for the creation of Satan and why God inflicts innocent people with calamities.[426]

1933 In the Fourteenth Word of *The Words*, Nursi interprets chapter 99, verses 1-5 of the Qur'ān[427]. In this treatise, Nursi explains the hitherto so-called 'natural evils.'

1934 Moreover, Nursi explains chapter 23, verses 97-98 of the Qur'ān[428], where he talks about the reason for the creation of Satan and about *sharr.*[429] Very important for Nursi's views on existential theodicy is the Twenty-Fifth Flash, which is a message for the sick and comprises twenty-five remedies.

Nursi wrote mainly between 1899 and 1949. Considering the fact that Nursi's years of exile and thus, his years of torment and loneliness, began in around

[425] In this treatise, Nursi interprets chapter 33, verse 72 of the Qur'ān: "We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they refused to carry it, but man carried it. He has indeed been unjust and ignorant."
[426] Said Nursi, *The Letters*, 61 ff.
[427] "When the earth shall quake violently, and the earth shall bring forth its burdens; And man shall say "That is happening to it?" On that Day, it shall relate its tales; That its Lord has inspired it."
[428] "And say: Lord I seek refuge with You from the agitations of the devils. And I seek refuge with You lest they join me."
[429] Said Nursi, *The Flashes Collection*, 103 ff.

1925 and lasted until approximately 1950, it is interesting to see that he wrote most of his treatises on *sharr* during this period of his life. During this time, albeit often in very helpless situations, Nursi never lost hope. Through the Qur'ān, his main source of inspiration, he aspired to inspire the people around him and those yet to come in the future. It was not been possible, though, to trace and identify, whether his approach to the subject matter has been affected through all the above periods. Some examples for this will be given in the next section.

4.4 Nursi's approach to *sharr* in his Lifetime – some examples

Said Nursi himself was the victim of a lot of evils that were committed against him. Exploring his life shows that his response to these evils has been exceptional. His life serves as a living example to his writings. This matter will be elaborated in more detail in the following paragraphs.

It has been said previously that Nursi spent most of his life in prison and exile. Despite all the stress, discomfort and bad treatment he was exposed to in old age, he knew how to turn the bad situation he was in, into a bearable and profitable one. So he says:

> … Later they took us to Denizli Prison, and put me into solitary confinement in a stinking, cold, damp ward. I was most unhappy at my old age and illness and the difficulties visited on my friends because of me, and most distressed at the confiscations of the Risale-i Nur and the cessation in its activities, when the Divine grace suddenly came to my aid. It transformed that huge prison into a Risale-i Nur *madrasa*, proving it was a 'School of Joseph'.[430] … the conquests began both within the prison and outside. It transformed our losses in that calamity into significant gains and our distress into joy. It once

[430] The term 'School of Joseph' is often used in the *Risale*, referring to Prophet Joseph who was imprisoned innocently for many years and was patient and obedient to his Lord. Nursi uses this term to refer to the situation in prison, which turned into a school where other inmates started taking lessons from Said Nursi and helped him writing copies of his works.

> again showed the meaning of the verse "But it is possible that you dislike a thing which is good for you.[431]"[432]

Nursi very often talks about Divine grace, Divine determining as well as Divine justice, when it comes to his life. Interestingly enough he uses the verse [2:216] that has been mentioned before in Chapter 2, on the analysis of the term *sharr* in the Qur'ān. This verse is used again by Nursi in relation to his wish to withdraw from social life into a cave or onto a mountain like those who abandoned the world in old times.[433] He was thinking about this when he was twenty years old, planning to realize it towards the end of his life. However, says Nursi, this wish of his has been transformed by the grace, compassion and justice of his Lord to his old age into a different form. It has transformed the caves into prisons, and the places of seclusion and loneliness into solitary confinements. These prisons and solitary confinements were, according to Nursi, far superior than caves and mountains, for they did not only give him the benefits pertaining to the Hereafter, but also strenuous service of the truths of belief and the Qur'ān. For this reason, Nursi applies the same verse [2:216] into his life again, adding to it that "good lies in what God chooses".[434]

The very same verse serves as a motivation when Nursi writes letters to his approximately hundred friends who are taken together with him into Denizli Prison, in October or November 1943.[435] Nursi points to the wisdom behind matters and states that if the veil was drawn back, it would make them

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[431] Qur'ān, 2:216.
[432] Said Nursi. *The Flashes Collection*, 333-4.
[433] Ibid., 336.
[434] Ibid.
[435] Said Nursi. *Hutbe-i Şamiye* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat, 2011), 23.

thank God and see His grace and mercy.[436] Towards the end of the letter, he writes the following words of comfort:

> … Do not blame those who were the cause of this affair. The far-reaching and fearful plans for this calamity had long since been laid, and in the event we have got off lightly. God willing, it will pass quickly. In accordance with the meaning of the verse "It may be that you hate a thing, and it is good for you", do not be grieved.[437]

When Nursi was sent into exile and was isolated from everyone in a small village called Barla, he did not lose hope but remained faithful to whatever God had planned. The authorities allowed Nursi to receive visitors only occasionally and they had spread rumours and slander about him to frighten off the local people. He was watched, followed and harassed continuously.[438] A Letter he wrote to his students[439] around 1929 shows very well the state of Nursi and his interpretation of the situation he was in. In there he considers the "exile" to be "God's mercy", the "solitude on the mountains" to be a "retreat in the safe and sincere mountains of Barla"; and all the wrongful actions of 'the worldly'[440] against his person, Nursi understands to happen for his further employment in the service of the Qur'ān.[441] The reason why non of his relatives and fellow countrymen where allowed to visit him, despite the offer of a general amnesty to all other leaders and shaykhs, according to Nursi was in order to leave his mind clear and was "the means of his receiving the effulgence of the All-Wise Qur'ān as it is, free of all malice and ill-will".[442] In other words, according to Nursi, all the

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[436] Said Nursi. *The Rays Collection*, 319.
[437] Ibid. For furhter, similar examples in form of letters written by Nursi in this regard see *The Rays Collection*, 349; *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, Vol. 2, 1651; 1685; 1706; 1731; 1763.
[438] Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey,* 189.
[439] Said Nursi, *Letters*, trans. Şükran Vahide (Istanbul: Sözler Neşriyat, 2001), 66.
[440] This term (*ehl-i dünya*) is used by Nursi for those whose view is restricted merely to the life in this world and who disregard the hereafter.
[441] *Letters*, 67.
[442] Ibid.

tyranny was turned into mercy by the All-Compassionate Sustainer and All-Wise Creator.

Examples about Nursi's way of looking at the wrongful and unjust treatments he was exposed to and the way he interpreted those in an eloquent, positive and especially Qur'anic way are innumerable. In this chapter, just a few examples have been given in order to illustrate Nursi's attitude towards evil that inflicted him personally. This study will go on to explore Nursi's thoughts on the ontological, theological and philosophical view of the problem of *sharr*[443].

[443] The word 'evil' is not used here and will not be used in the following chapters in particular because this study argues that Nursi's explanation of the term is in accordance with the term *sharr* used in the Qur'ān and as such not to be confused with the term evil used by previous philosophers and theologians mentioned in the study.

5 Prologue to *sharr* in the Risale-i Nur

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will serve as a preface to Nursi's presentation of *sharr*. The sensitivity and complexity of this issue entails the brief treatment of certain other aspects first, before proceeding to the core problem of *sharr*. This is due to the following reasons:

One of the many methodologies employed by Nursi in his works is faith-based. As has been explained in the introduction of this study, Nursi often times uses faith as a tool to read and interpret events, situations and creation itself. In this regard, it has been considered necessary to provide the reader with a chapter that deals with faith-related issues – albeit in connection with *sharr* – first, before proceeding with the main topic, that is, the problem of evil in the *Risale*.

As the semantic analysis of *sharr* in the Qur'ān has shown, and as further analysis of Nursi's works in this regard will illustrate, disbelief (*kufr*) and idolatry (*shirk*) were two main terms that fell under the semantic field of *sharr*. Therefore, to ease the reader's way as he embarks towards the journey of understanding this aspect of *sharr* according to the Qur'anic narrative – and in the following chapters according to the *Risale* – the treatment of the Oneness of God (*tawhīd*), faith (*īmān*) as well as 'connection' (*intisāb*) will be briefly elaborated upon. The analysis of *tawhīd* will be closely linked with the concept of 'Divine Names Theology'[444], a

[444] A concept that has been named as such for the first time by Izzet Çoban in his article named 'Nursi on Theodicy: A New Theological Perspective' in *Classic Issues in Islamic Philosophy and Theology Today*, Vol. 4, Part 3 (2010).

concept that is widely used by Nursi throughout his works, also in relation with *sharr*.

In the following chapters, another main aspect will be the nature of *sharr* and its quiddity. Therefore, this chapter will look into the concept of being (*wujūd*) and non-being[445] (*'adam*) to form the basis for future discourse. These terms will be employed in a major way in chapter six and seven.

Finally, life (*ḥayāt*), bearing evidence of God's unity and reflecting Divine mercy, has come to be another important aspect for the apprehension of the notion of *sharr* and has thus been analyzed briefly in this chapter.

In this regard, the first section will deal with God's Oneness (*tawhīd*) as the first 'pillar', so to say, through which Nursi tries to counter disbelief (*kufr*) and idolatry (*shirk*).

5.2 Tawhīd

Tawhīd is Nursi's most basic premise that he establishes in the *Risale* before any other issue related to faith. It is one of the most fundamental issues not only in terms of the problem of *sharr*, but in terms of most of the other themes of theology and philosophy that Nursi deals with.

As it is well known, the first part of the *shahadah* expresses *tawhīd* by saying that 'There is no god but God'. This is supported in the Qur'ān at many different occasions.[446] The understanding of God, however, can be different in each religion. It is for this reason, maybe that if someone says "I don't believe in God", Muslims familiar with their religion's teachings might

[445] Alternatively, 'existence' and 'non-existence'.
[446] Eg. "No god is there but one God" (5:73); "God is but one god" (4:171); "your god is one God, so submit to Him" (22:34).

easily reply, "I don't believe in the God you don't believe in either."[447] Since it is quite often justified that one does not believe in the god he has come to understand, the first part of the *shahadah*, according to Murata and Chittick, is supposed to put this understanding back to its right place.[448]

'There is no god but God' (*lā ilahe illallāh*) is thus an affirmation of the True Object of Worship. To understand this phrase better, Nursi suggests looking closer at creation. In this regard Nursi employs the teleological argument[449], also known as the argument of design, which was introduced in the Islamic tradition for the first time by Ibn Rushd. The latter proposed that order and continual motion in the world is caused by God's intellect; with His absolute knowledge, He provides order to the lesser intelligences.[450] The argument later became very famous through William Paley (d. 1805) who drew an analogy between the universe and a watch.[451] Similar arguments have been brought forth by Nursi, stating that

> every needle must have its manufacturer and craftsman and every village must have its headman; every letter must have been written by someone. How can it be that a so extremely well-ordered kingdom should have no ruler?[452]

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[447] Murata, S.; Chittick, W. C. *The Vision of Islam* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1994), 46.
[448] Ibid., 58.
[449] The teleological argument aims to argue for God's existence based on apparent design and purpose in nature, beyond the scope of any such human activity. Nursi, in fact, employs all three major arguments for the existence of God, namely the Cosmological, Ontological and Design arguments, in his works. Explaining Nursi's perspective on all of these would go beyond the scope of this study. It is worth mentioning, that Nursi does not restrict himself to these arguments. He also includes religious experience, moral experience and love, which Markham talks about in *Understanding Christian Doctrine*, 39.
[450] Kogan, Barry S. *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation* (Suny Press, 1985), 240-243.
[451] Paley claimed that in the same way as an intricate workmanship of a watch points to an intelligent designer, the intricate workmanship of the world, too, shows an intelligent designer. For more information, see his work *Natural Theology or the Evidence of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity* (Oxford University Press, 2006)
[452] *The Words*, 60.

The argument of design has been criticized mostly by David Hume (d. 1776), in fact, before Paley's book.[453] The main arguments against design as introduced by Paley have been firstly the weakness of parallel between the world and a human artifact. Secondly, Hume claimed that there are naturalistic explanations for the order which do not require a designer.[454] This was later developed by Charles Darwin (d. 1882), who claimed that the world fitted perfectly together because that which 'did not fit in' did not survive. [455] Hence, the perfect order was not established through God, but rather through natural selection. The third critique of the design argument was that albeit its affirmation of the existence of a designer, it did not necessarily get to God. In other words, it did not need to be the creator God revealed in Scripture. Another major problem with the argument was related to the study at hand, namely the considerable amount of evil and suffering in this world. What kind of designer must that be, who established the balance of nature based on animals feeding on each other?[456]

For Nursi, the wise creativity, systematic unfolding and most compassionate, generous, merciful munificence and bountifulness proves the necessary existence and Unity of an Active, Creative, Opening, Munificent Possessor of Glory.[457] Furthermore, the phrase 'He is one' (*wahdehu*), Nursi continues, demonstrates an explicit degree in the affirmation of Divine Unity. Hence, Nursi's teleological approach is looking at creation, and seeing a universal ordering and balancing, a universal wisdom and justice, as well as power

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[453] Hume, D. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, and the Natural History of Religion* (Oxford Paperbacks, 2008)
[454] *Understanding Christian Doctrine*, 36.
[455] Ibid.
[456] Ibid., 37. See also 'Evil Makes a Strong Case Against God's Existence' by David Hume, in Part Five of *Philosophy of Religion* by Peterson, M.; Hasker, W., et al. Nursi is arguably the first scholar who addresses the suffering of non-human beings under the category of the problem of evil. See more in chapter seven of this study.
[457] *Letters*, 272.

and knowledge. In other words, creation tells man that it is merely a veil behind which One Powerful over all things Who has Knowledge of all things, is apparent.[458]

This concept of universal ordering, balancing and wisdom, which is very much emphasized throughout the *Risale* with numerous examples, serves as one cornerstone for the existence of apparent *ashrār*. For it may help man to try to rid himself from judging according to the apparent and to try to look at events from a broader perspective.

Having said this, the Qur'ān summarizes its teachings about God in the 'most beautiful names' (*al-asmā' al-husnā*), *husnā* being the superlative adjective from *hasan*, which means 'beautiful' and 'good'.[459] In here is an implication of the Qur'ān that God himself is good and beautiful and that his names express His beauty and goodness. Important to note however, is the fact that the divine names are never personified or looked upon as separate beings.[460] Each name represents a certain quality or an attribute and not a concrete thing.[461]

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[458] Ibid., 273.
[459] Murata, S.; Chittick, W. C. *The Vision of Islam* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1994), 58.
[460] Theological disputes have taken place in regards to whether God's attributes are identical with His essence. Arguably the first theologian to deal with this topic has been Ghahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 746), stating that God is not a thing (*shay'*). Scholars such as Ḍirār ibn 'Amr (d. 815), Ḥafṣ al-Fard (fl. at the beginning of the ninth century), and Sufyān ibn Saḥbān (or Saḥtān, a Murji'ite jurisprudent and speculative theologian) believed that God would create a sixth sense in the resurrection so that people would know God's essence through that additional sense, that is, by a divine act. However, most of the theologians such as Mu'tazilīs, Kharijīs, Shi'ites, and Murji'ites rejected this view. While some believed that the attributes belonged to the divine essence, others asserted that attributes are identified with names, and both are referred to as acts. Ghazālī discussed this issue extensively in *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-I'tiqād* (ed. Ibrahim Agah Çubukçu; Hüseyin Atay, Ankara 1962) and in *al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ ma'ānī asmā' Allāh al-husnā*, trans. David B. Burrell; Nazih Daher (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1999). Ghazālī (d. 1111) claimed that one can know God's essence the same way one knows of things without shape and measure, such as power and love. Fahr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), in his early phase, asserted that God's essence can be known, however, in his later works he expressed a contrary view. For more

Tawhīd means that all these qualities denoted by the Divine Names belong truly to God and only secondarily or metaphorically to the creatures. In other words, there is no god but the Merciful would mean, for example, that there is no mercy but God's mercy; the mercy of God overshadows all other mercies in the universe.[462] This example can be extended to all the other Names of God, such as the Praiseworthy, the Knowing, the Strong, the Creator, the Permanent, the Independent, etc.

Another meaning of *tawhīd* mentioned by Murata and Chittick can be found mostly in Sufi tradition and is hidden in the Name 'the Real' (*al-Haqq*) which means that there is no other reality than God. According to this tradition, everything other than God is unreal, ephemeral, transitory, illusory, vanishing, nothing.[463] Illusory not in the sense of nihilism, though, since nihilism implies a sense of meaninglessness and despair. In the case of *al-Haqq*, everything has a relative, meaningful reality; the message that the name *al-Haqq* conveys is that there can be no reality without 'the Real' that is absolute. While God is the absolute reality, all other realities are relative and exist only through that absolute Reality (*al-Haqq*).[464] In other words, everything exists through God's existence. This is explained in further detail through the Divine Names. Every creation, being a manifestation of God's Divine Names and Attributes, is shaped, changed and altered according to it. Sometimes, these changes appear like *sharr* to the eye of the observer.

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information see Binyamin Abrahamov. 'Faḫr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on the Knowability of God's Essence and Attributes' in *Arabica*, T. 49, Fasc. 2 (Apr., 2002), pp. 204-230.

[461] *The Vision of Islam*, 59.

[462] Ibid., 60.

[463] Ibid., 61.

[464] Ibid., 62. See also *wājib al-wujūd* (necessary existent) and *mumkin* (contingent) beings under the discussion on 'Being (*wujūd*)' in this chapter.

5.2.1 Divine Names Theology

Throughout his works, Nursi fundamentally establishes a theory that has been called by Çoban 'Divine Names Theology'[465]. According to this theory, everything in this universe is the manifestation and mirror of the Divine Names and Attributes of God. Unlike Ibn Jarīr at-Tabarī's (d. 923) work on the *Asmā al-ḥusnā*, or al-Bayhaqī's (d. 1066) *al-Asmā' wa al-Sifat*, in which Bayhaqī covers the topic in terms of Hadīth literature; or unlike Ghazālī's (d. 1111) *al-Maqṣad al asnā fī sharḥ asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*, in which Ghazālī concentrates more on the conceptual, structural and descriptive aspect of Divine Names and Attributes; and also unlike Fakhruddīn al-Rāzī's (d. 1210) *Lawāmi' al-bayyināt fī asmā' Allāh wa'l -ṣifāt*, who, similar to Ghazālī, commentates on the ninety-nine names of God; Nursi constitutes a whole new Weltanschauung that is designed to link literally everything and every event with the Names and Attributes of God.

One example for this has been chosen due to its direct relation with the problem of *sharr*. Nursi explains that man has been given a tool named *ana*[466], which is a key to the Divine Names.[467] It is, at the same time, defined by Nursi as one aspect of the 'Divine Trust' (*amānah*) that the heavens and mountains refrained from undertaking[468]. According to Nursi, God has given man the *ana* so he may comprehend the essence (*māhiyya*) of His Names, Attributes and actions. This unique interpretation of Nursi is a major step towards explaining the question whether one can know God.

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[465] Çoban, I. 'Nursi on Theodicy: A New Theological Perspective' in *Classic Issues in Islamic Philosophy and Theology Today*, Vol. 4, Part 3 (2010), 116.
[466] *Ana* has been translated as 'I' or 'ego'. In this study, the original term will be used.
[467] *The Words*, 558. This whole issue will be elaborated upon in chapter seven.
[468] Ibid., 557 ff. Nursi interprets the Qur'ānic verse 'We offered the Trust to the heavens, the earth, and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it, but man carried it…' (Qur'ān 34:72). This will be discussed in further detail in chapter seven.

Ghazālī provided fundamental illustrations and insights, explaining how there are two ways of knowing God. The first was inadequate and the second closed[469]; that is, the former consisted of mentioning names and attributes and comparing them with what was known to oneself and the latter, being the impossible path, consisted of waiting to attain all the divine attributes to the point of becoming a 'lord'.[470]

Nursi seems to have borrowed this basic concept of Ghazālī and developed it through his interpretation of the Divine Trust, contributing to this discourse in a major way. Nursi explains further that this *ana* has no external reality. It is rather something nominal, just like the imaginary lines in geometry.[471] An absolute and all-encompassing thing cannot have a boundary and therefore it is impossible to understand the essence of something that cannot be limited in any way. It is impossible to comprehend the essence of permanent light without darkness; thus, one cannot understand something without the chance to compare. Likewise, since the Attributes of God such as Power (*qudra*) and Knowledge (*'ilm*) also have no boundary, it is not possible to understand them. In order for these Attributes to be known, a nominal border needs to be demarcated; this is done by *ana*.

Nursi further explains two stages for this purpose. In the first stage, the *ana* imagines itself to possess nominal dominicality (*rubūbiyyah*), power (*qudra*), knowledge (*'ilm*) and ownership (*mulkiyya*). He starts drawing a line between his own area and the area of his Lord, saying: "up to here mine, after that, His."[472] With the help of this line, he starts developing a sense of the essence (*māhiyya*) of terms like 'knowledge', 'power', 'dominicality' and

[469] Al-Ghazālī. *Al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ ma'ānī asmā' Allāh al-husnā*, 40.
[470] Ibid.
[471] *The Words*, 558.
[472] Ibid.

'ownership'. In the second stage, he starts to realize and comprehend that along with the whole universe, he himself also is God's possession; thus he lifts the nominal line he had drawn before. He realizes the infinity of God's knowledge, power and ownership and starts to consciously and deliberatively believe in God.[473] This *ana*, if not used for its right purpose, can lead to *sharr*.[474]

In another illustration Nursi points out that the realities and attributes of all beings and of the universe are each based on one or more Divine Names. True natural science, he explains, is based on the Name of All-Wise (*Ḥakīm*), true medicine on the Name of Healer (*Shāfī*), and geometry on the Name of Determiner (*Muqaddir*), etc.[475] Just as all the sciences are based on and come to an end in a Name, the realities of all human attainments are based on the Divine Names.[476] Thus, the fact that human beings go through different kind of hardships and *ashrār* (pl. *sharr*) may be to reflect and be a mirror of the numerous Names and Attributes of his Creator. These apparent *ashrār* may help him to develop and reach perfection.

How different names can reflect on one single thing is explained by Nursi in the following way: The All-Wise maker delimits, orders and gives determined proportions and shapes to all things, particular and universal, through the manifestation of His Names. Thus He makes them recite His Names of Determiner (*Mukaddir*), Orderer (*Munazzim*) and Giver of Form (*Muṣawwir*).[477]

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[473] Ibid., 559.
[474] This will be explained in further detail in chapter seven.
[475] *The Words*, 655.
[476] Ibid.
[477] Ibid., 657.

He determines the limits of their shapes in such a way that He displays His Names of All-Knowing (*ʿAlīm*) and All-Wise (*Ḥakīm*). Through forming them within those limits, with care and craftsmanship, He displays His Names of Maker (*Sānīʾ*) and Munificient (*Karīm*). Nursi, in this lengthy treatise, goes on illustrating Names such as Gracious (*Laṭīf*), Loving (*Wadūd*), Known One (*Maʿrūf*), Bestower (*Munʿim*), Compassionate (*Raḥīm*), Gentle (*Ḥannān*), Merciful (*Raḥmān*), Beautiful (*Jamīl*), and so on.[478] This shows one way of reading the Universe and seeing the realities of things, for as Nursi quotes a group of the most learned (*muhakkikīn awliyā*) saying: "The Divine Names constitute the true reality of things, while the essence of things are only shadows of that reality."[479]

Despite of all the above, vital for the understanding of the problem of *sharr* is that God is known for having qualities that are apparently contradictory. These are most commonly categorized into two groups, being called Glorious (*Jalālī*) and Beauteous (*Jamālī*) names such as His Wrath and Mercy respectively. Murata and Chittick explain this apparent contradiction by stating that although God is one, He is dealing with many creatures.[480] Not only does He interrelate with each creation in a different way, the forms of this interrelation change over time. For instance is God the Giver of Life (*muhyī*) and at the same time the Taker of Life (*mumīt*). Every giving of life is at the same time a death.[481] A seed dies under the earth before it shoots forth; likewise does a person die, but is born again into the next world. Thus death is not only destruction and extinction. Nursi states:

> With Divine permission, all creatures are unceasingly flowing in the river of time; they are being sent from the World of the Unseen; they are being

[478] Ibid., 657 ff.
[479] Ibid., 655.
[480] *The Vision of Islam*, 67.
[481] Ibid., 68.

> clothed with external existence in the Manifest world; then they are being poured in orderly fashion into the World of the Unseen, and it is there that they alight. At their Sustainer's command, they continuously come from the future, stop by in passing pausing for a breath, and are poured into the past.[482]

Nursi further explains that God gives life with His power and discharges with His wisdom. Hence, what man calls death which is defined by some as the worst of all evils[483], is in reality a transformation from the sphere of power to the sphere of knowledge.[484]

How this categorization of God's names into Glorious (*Jalālī*) and Beauteous (*Jamālī*) can be further explained, and what their relationship is with *khayr* and *sharr*, will be explained in the following section on *tanzīh* and *tashbih*.

5.2.2 Tanzīh and Tashbih

In the technical language of theology, there are two terms that express the perception of God's nearness (*qurb*) and mercy and that of his distance (*bu'd*) and wrath; *tanzih* (declaring incomparability) and *tashbih* (affirming similarity) respectively.[485] While the former literally means "to declare something pure and free from something else,"[486] the latter stands for "the declaration of something similar to something else."[487] Thus *tanzih* is to declare God free of all the defects and imperfections in the creatures. In this respect, God cannot be compared to any of His creation, as it is stated in the Qur'ān, "Nothing is like Him."[488] This view has been supported by

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[482] *Letters*, 284.
[483] That death is the worst of all evils has been stated by scholars such as the English Philosopher Thomas Hobbes. See chapter 3 of Schumacher, B.N. *Der Tod in der Philosophie der Gegenwart* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004)
[484] *Letters*, 284.
[485] *The Vision of Islam*, 70.
[486] Ibid.
[487] Ibid.
[488] Qur'ān, 42:11.

philosophers such as Ja'd bin Dirhem (d. 736) and Jahm bin Safwān (d. 745), who were at the same time pioneers of the birth of the science of *kalām*. They went so far in their view of *tanzih* in that they tried to minimize the relation between God and the universe.[489] *Tashbih*, on the other hand, asserts that God must have some sort of similarity with His creatures since they designate His attributes such as knowledge, desire, power, mercy, generosity, etc. This view has emerged as a reaction to the former, and these philosophers have later become known as anthropomorphist (*mushabbih*) for they tried to relate God with space and tried to reify Him.[490]

Murata and Chittick claim that mostly the Glorious (*Jalālī*) names express *tanzih* as they stress God's difference from creation. And it is mostly the Beauteous (*Jamālī*) names that express *tashbih* for they emphasize God's nearness to creation and His concern for His creatures.[491]

Nursi states that the two terms 'Glory be to God' (*subhanallah*) and 'Praise belongs to God' (*alḥamdulillah*) describe God's attributes of glory (*jalāl*) and beauty (*jamāl*) respectively. *Subhanallah*, which comprises the attribute of *jalāl* shows that servant ('*abd*) and creation (*makhlūq*) is distant from God. *Alḥamdulillah*, on the other side, which comprises the attribute of *jamāl* shows that God, with His Mercy (*raḥmah*) is close to His '*abd* and *makhlūq*.[492] For instance has the sun, from man's perspective, two aspects. One is closeness (*qurb*), the other is distance (*bu'd*). The former aspect provides warmth and light, the latter aspect keeps it pure and exempt from

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[489] Güven, M. 'Hakikat ve Mecaz Bağlamında Müteşabih Bir Kavram Olarak "İstivâ"' in *Hikmet Yurdu*, Yıl: 3, C:3, S: 6 (Jul.-Dec., 2010), 180.
[490] Ibid. For further information, see also Shahristānī, *al-Milel ve'n-Nihal*, Vol. I, pp. 105–109.
[491] *The Vision of Islam*, 71.
[492] Nursi, S. *Mesnevī-i Nuriye*, trans. Abdülmecid Nursi (Istanbul: Söz Basım Yayın, 2006), 165.

man's damages and havocs. From this point of view, man can only be affected by the sun, but he cannot influence on it.[493] In the light of this analogy, man praises (*ḥamd*) God in respect to His closeness to man, with His *raḥmah*. In respect to man's distance from God, man glorifies (*tasbīḥ*) Him.

While Murata and Chittick look at nearness (*qurb*) and distance (*bu'd*) in respect to 'realness' and 'lack of realness', Nursi explains it from the perspective of the 'universal' and the 'particular'. In other words, if one takes the name Provider (*razzāq*), for instance, one glorifies God who provides all creation (*makhlūq*) with His bounties; whereas on the other side, man praises God who, among all the creation, also provides that particular man with His bounties. Thus, one might say that *subhanallah* relates to the general whereas *alḥamdulillah* relates to the particular. The following analogy might shed light over this issue: if a council would provide fabulous service to the whole city and all the streets would be neat and tidy and well organized, one might feel awe towards that councilor. And if the street in front of one's own house is likewise neat and well organized, one will feel thankful and contented. However, if one's personal and specific wish or intent is not satisfied, even if the whole city is fully organized, one will feel dissatisfied with the council and its works. One the other side, if the whole city would be generally disorganized but that man's specific street would be neat and organized, that man would certainly feel satisfied, for his personal needs would be met.

Nursi explains:

> The acts of the Almighty are, first of all, concerned with Him, not with the carnal 'I' and its narrow mind. The "wheel" of creation does not revolve

[493] Ibid.

> according to the carnal 'I"s fancies, and it did not witness His creation of the universe. Surely, Imam Rabbānī told the truth: "The gifts of the Sovereign can be borne only by those qualified for them."[494]

In the light of the above, those two aspects, awe and thankfulness need not to be confused but seen in a differentiated manner. Otherwise, justice and uprightness will merge. But what is important is to appreciate those two positives separately. Thus, one should ask for the tidiness of the whole city in the same manner as one should expect one's personal street to be tidy and neat. They should not mingle, but they should be side by side. This is the mystery of *subhanallahi wa biḥamdihi*.

Likewise, something is called by man *sharr* if the outcome of it is detrimental for him. The general and universal aspect of it is thereby mostly overlooked. However, something that is *sharr* for one might be beneficial for others.[495]

One might say that *sharr* is inherent to the universe in respect to *tanzih* whereas *khayr* is inherent to the universe in respect to *tashbih*.[496] While the former suggests that the universe has nothing of *khayr* since God alone is *khayr* and God is totally other than the universe; the latter emphasizes that the universe is *khayr* through God's *khayr* as much as creation is able to reflect God's signs and activity in the cosmos.[497] In other words, to say that something is *khayr* would mean that it shares the divine names and attributes of God to some degree. And to say that something is *sharr* would thus mean that it lacks the divine attributes and names to some degree. Since nothing can reflect the divine names and attributes absolutely, one has

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[494] Ibid., 104.
[495] Further detail regarding this point will follow in chapter six. This point has also been mentioned in chapter two, the semantic analysis of *sharr* in the Qur'ān.
[496] *The Vision of Islam*, 110.
[497] Ibid.

to accept that all things are both *khayr* and *sharr*.[498] While Murata and Chittick claim that the cosmos is good inasmuch as God displays His signs and activity in it, Nursi would rather oppose defending the position that God always displays His attributes and names, but it is up to the ability of creation to reflect those in the best manner.

However, there is one issue that is important to note. If the point is accepted that God, in other words 'the Real', is absolute *khayr* and coincides with everything that is good, this would mean that the unreal corresponds with *sharr*.[499] In other words, according to Murata and Chittick, "*sharr* is the lack of good, the lack of light, the lack of reality, the lack (or insufficient reflection) of the divine qualities."[500]

5.3 The concept of faith (*īmān*) and 'connection' (*intisāb*)

As has been indicated in the introduction of this chapter, it is essential to discuss faith in relation to the problem of *sharr* for without *īmān* theodicy becomes somewhat useless. Attempts have been made to explain the problem of evil separate from faith, for instance during the period of the Enlightenment.[501] One such scholar was Newton, who suggested a self-contained, mechanical system, capable of being represented mathematically by the concept of motion, matter and space and time. This theory of his, however, was ultimately not enough to solve the problem. On the contrary, more problems were maybe added: firstly, how could evil exist in the world

[498] Ibid. It is important to note that according to the authors, *khayr* and *sharr* does not imply a moral statement about right and wrong, but rather about the benefit or loss that something brings. According to the authors, *husn* and *su´* have a strong moral connotation, although the two pairs are often used interchangeably.
[499] Ibid., 109.
[500] Ibid., 110.
[501] Surin, K. 'Theodicy?' in *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (Apr., 1983), 226.

represented by this mechanistic system that was so precisely ordered and aesthetically proportioned? Secondly, from a theologians' perspective, how could one accommodate morality and religious faith in a world governed by the laws of a rigidly mechanistic and ultimately godless system?[502] Thus the need arose to find a way of circumventing the problem of reconciling the existence of evil with the existence of an increasingly 'absent' God.

> The only way to achieve this new explanation was gradually to shift the burden from reliance on God's will to the belief in man's understanding and powers. This was a shift that was to occupy the whole Enlightenment, and it was not accomplished easily. In fact … the separate … traditions each had their own kind of ingenuity, and, fashioned quite different notions of 'secular' theodicy, or 'anthropodicy'.[503]

Anthropodicy has thus been developed as an alternative or even substitute to theodicy. The latter was, according to the thinkers of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment such as Newton, Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Hume, Kant and Hegel, no longer valid in a world where the voice of God wasn't heard any more. The question is, however, whether man can handle evil on his own – without *īmān* – as an anthropodicy, regarding evil not as 'evil' (for this has a religious connotation) but as human fault or error.[504]

As the second reason for the insufficiency of theodicy, Surin mentioned the abstract conception of evil used by the theodicist.[505] He criticized the concentration of theoretical solutions of theodicy, discarding any practical

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[502] Ibid., 227.
[503] Ibid., 228, quoted from Ernest Becker, *The Structure of Evil: An Essay on the Unification of the Science of Man* (New York: Free Press, 1976), 17.
[504] To read more on the discussion about anthropodicy, read Sontag, Frederick. Anthropodicy or Theodicy? A Discussion with Becker's "The Structure of Evil" in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Jun., 1981), pp. 267-274.
[505] 'Theodicy?', 230.

implications. This kind of theodicy which has practical solutions to evil and suffering is called 'Existential Theodicy'[506].

It stands to reason that Nursi was opposed to the idea of anthropodicy and firmly believed in the necessity of faith. Thus, faith (*īmān*) appears to be one of the most important topics in the *Risale*. Nursi does not provide one single definition of *īmān*; however, he compares in many instances a faithful person with a faithless one.[507] Nursi, rather than giving plain definitions, prefers to illustrate what it is like and how the life of a human being changes with *īmān*. Nursi thereby emphasizes the importance of true or unshakable faith (*tahqīq al-īmān*) as opposed to a faith based on imitation (*taqlīd al-īmān*). Throughout his works, he tries to establish a *tahqīq al-īmān* firstly on himself, and secondly on his reader.[508] It is striking that Nursi explains faith (*īmān*) almost like a window through which man observes the world. Depending on the window's cleanness does the perception of the world, from the onlooker's perspective, change. Hence one is inclined to say that the apparent *sharr* in this world is perceived as such depending on the degree of faith (*īmān*) one has. On the other hand, what might influence the wisdom of human beings negatively is the 'veil of commonplace', which will be explained now.

5.3.1 The Removal of the Veil of Commonplace

To be in a constant relation with the Creator entails ridding oneself from the veil of commonplace. This is essential for this veil hinders one to realize the countless bounties and beauties of God and instead makes him concentrate

[506] Existential Theodicy from the perspective of the *Risale* will be discussed briefly in chapter 7.
[507] See *The Words*, pp. 27-31; 45-50; *The Rays Collection*, pp. 604-608.
[508] For more information on the existence of God and the establishment of *tahqīq al-īmān*, the following treatises can be consulted: *The Flashes Collection*, pp. 232-254; *The Rays Collection*, pp. 123-200 and pp. 226-229; *The Words*, pp. 287-318 and pp. 173-176.

maybe on the **one** apparent ugliness. Nursi accuses philosophy of falling into this kind of trap, concealing all the extraordinary miracles of power through the veils of commonplace.[509] Belittling man's creation as ordinary and looking at it indifferently, philosophy points out as an object of instruction a person who has diverged from the perfection of creation by having three arms or two heads.[510] The questions about how God could allow this to happen starts to occupy the minds of people, without thinking once about the thousands and millions of creations having two arms and one head. One is so familiar with the situation that a person has two arms and one head, that it never strikes him as being a bounty and blessing, as being pure goodness (*khayr al mahdh*).

Another example provided by Nursi is the veil of ingratitude that is drawn by philosophy over the regular sustenance of infants and young from the treasury of mercy as being ordinary. Instead,

> spotting an insect under the sea which is an exception from the general order and is alone and isolated from its fellows, being fed with green sea-weed, philosophy wants to make the fishermen weep for it, because of the Divine favor and munificence manifested on it.[511]

This behavior ultimately becomes eligible for *sharr* as described in the Qur'ān and the *Risale*, namely being ungrateful (*k-f-r*).[512] Thus one might say that Nursi's suggestion is not to discard *sharr* but to do justice on the fact that God's creation is generally *khayr*, deserving to be seen and appreciated as such.

In the chapters to come, Nursi will set up a relation between being/existence (*wujūd*) and *khayr*; and non-being/non-existence (*'adam*) and *sharr*. This in

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[509] *The Words*, 150.
[510] Ibid.
[511] Ibid.
[512] See Qur'ān, 55:1-78. Also chapter 2 of this study.

fact forms the basis for Nursi's methodology for most of his treatise on the nature of *sharr* as well as the twelve principles that will follow in chapter six are build upon this concept. Therefore, the following part will serve as a fundament to this relation, forming an essential aspect for the establishment of the theories of *khayr* and *sharr* as explained by Nursi.

5.4 The concept of being (*wujūd*) and non-being (*'adam*)

As indicated before, it will be useful to understand the concept of being and non-being in the Risale-i Nur in order to better understand the concept of *khayr* and *sharr* as it is explained by Nursi. This is because Nursi's explanation of the term *sharr* depends on the comprehension of the terms *wujūd* and *'adam.* Being (*wujūd*) is put by Nursi in direct relation with *khayr* whereas non-being (*'adam*) is the counterpart of *sharr*. According to Nursi, non-being (*'adam*) is pure *sharr* (*sharr al-mahdh*) whereas existence (*wujūd*) is pure good (*khayr al-mahdh*)[513]. Since *wujūd* is the opposite of *'adam* and since it is far more difficult to explain what non-being is, it might be helpful to first understand the nature of *wujūd* to then grasp the meaning of *'adam* and hence the concept of *sharr*.

5.4.1 Being (wujūd)

The Arabic term *wujūd* is used as an abstract noun representing existence.[514] In this study, 'being' and 'existence' will be used interchangeably for the term *wujūd*. What has been discussed in more detail in the past by philosophers such as Aristotle, Ibn Sīna, Ibn Rushd and Mullā Ṣadrā was the difference and definition of being and essence. They all agreed upon the necessity to distinguish between being and essence and

[513] *The Flashes Collection*, 106.
[514] P.J. Bearman, TH. Bianquis, et al. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. XI (Leiden: Brill 2002).

that these two are not the same. Ibn Sīna defined the distinction of these two terms by naming them *wujūd* and *māhiyya*, the latter thereby representing essence or quiddity.[515] He was also arguably the first philosopher to speak of God as the *wājib al-wujūd*, "the only being whose essence is to exist"[516], or, in other words, the only necessary existent, in contrast with everything else which is contingent. While philosophers went on discussing which one of these, existence or essence, has priority over the other, the *Risale* has its own usage.

The term *wujūd* has three different forms in the works of Nursi. One is called *wājib* (necessary), the other *mumtanī* (impossible) and the third is called *mumkin* (contingent/possible).[517] The former is used as previously defined by Ibn Sīna, as the One whose existence is necessary. This term can only be used for the existence of the Creator of everything, which is God. In this regard, Nursi will also use the term *wājib al-wujūd* when comparing God's existence with the rest of creation. The second term, *mumtanī*, is anything for which it is impossible to exist. One example is *shirk* (applying partners to God), for God has no partners and it is impossible for God to have any partners whatsoever. The last term is used for anything which may or may not exist. These things can equally be or not be. This term is used for anything but God, in other words, for the whole creation.[518] Nursi explains contingency in more detail by saying that their existence and non-

[515] Morewedge, P. 'Philosophical Analysis and Ibn Sīnā's 'Essence-Existence' Distinction' in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 92, No. 3 (Jul., -Sep., 1972), pp. 425-435.
[516]El-Bizri, N. 'Avicenna and Essentialism' in *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Jun., 2001), pp. 753-778.
[517] See dictionary part of *Sözler (The Words)* by Nursi, S. (Istanbul: Sözler Basım Yayın, 2008).
[518] *The Rays Collection*, 162 ff. See also dictionary part of *Sözler (The Words)* by Said Nursi (Istanbul: Sözler Basım Yayın, 2008)

existence are, within the sphere of contingency, equal.[519] To explain how the Creator is able to create one single individual with the same ease as creating all living beings, and that there is no difference for God between many and few or great and small, Nursi gives the example of a big and sensible scale. He states:

> if two walnuts of equal weight were placed on a pair of scales which were absolutely precise and large enough to weigh mountains, and a tiny seed was added on one of the walnuts, it would raise one of the pans to the height of a mountain-top and lower the other to the bottom of the valley with the same ease as raising one pan to the skies and lowering the other to the valley bottom if two mountains of equal weight had been placed in the pans and a walnut added to one. In exactly the same way, in the terminology of the science of theology (*kalām*), contingency (*imkān*) is equal in regard to existence (*wujūd*) and non-existence (*'adam*). That is, if there is nothing to cause their existence, things which are not necessary (*wājib*) nor impossible (*mumtani*) but contingent (*mumkin*) are equal in regard to existence and non-existence; there is no difference.[520]

In other words, one might say that when talking about contingency, being (*wujūd*) is whatever God chooses and non-being (*'adam*) is whatever God does not choose. For instance, if one would say that the chance for a human being to exist is one in a million, those whom God chooses to exist become beings, whereas those He does not choose fall into non-existence (*'adam*).

Whatever the degree of existence (*wujūd*) is, that God has given beings, states Nursi, their right before the *wājib al-wujūd* is nothing else but to offer

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[519] *The Rays Collection*, 624-625. Nursi did borrow this idea most likely from Ibn Arabī. William Chittick explains Ibn Arabī's view as follows: "…'possibility' is the fact that all things stand midway between necessity and impossibility. In themselves, they have no claim on existence. They are nonexistent things that have the potential to exist. They can only come to exist if God gives them existence. No thing can escape its own possibility, for its possibility pertains to its very essence. Ibn Arabi refers to this point while providing one of his many commentaries on the saying, "God has seventy veils of light and darkness."" See William C. Chittick, *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2008), 190.
[520] *The Rays Collection*, 625.

thanks and praise. In no way, Nursi continues, do beings have any other rights before the necessarily existent One, nor can they claim them. For all the degrees of existence that are given are occurrences and each requires a cause. Degrees which are not given are possibilities (*mumkin*), and possibilities are non-existent (*'adam*) as well as being infinite. No non-existent (*'adam*) requires a cause, for one cannot assign a cause for anything infinite.[521]

Thus states Nursi, all the degrees of existence such as having tasted life, having been created as a human being, good health and well-being, etc. are pure bounties (*ni'mah*) from his Lord which he has received undeservedly. Bounties are contingencies (*mumkin*) and non-existent (*'adam*) in type and non-deserved and as such man has no right to complain about his Lord with meaningless greed for the bounties he has not received.[522]

Another important aspect that Nursi points out is that once a being's duties are completed, that being

> takes off its garment of external existence and sends it apparently to non-existence, but in fact to an existence within the sphere of His knowledge.[523]

Nursi does not believe that there is an absolute non-existence (*'adam muṭlaq*), but the non-existence that is talked about is merely an apparent *'adam*. This is because nothing ceases to exist within the knowledge of God (*'ilm ilāhi*); they pass from the sphere of power to the sphere of knowledge; from the manifest world to the world of the unseen.[524]

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[521] *Letters*, 337. Nursi provides this explanation in relation with Qur'ān 5:1 and 14:27 "God does/decrees whatever He pleases".
[522] Ibid., 338.
[523] *The Rays Collection*, 625; also see *Letters*, 340.
[524] *Letters*, 340.

According to Nursi, all the beauty and perfection in things pertain to the Divine Names and are their manifestations. Since the Names of God are eternal and their manifestations are also everlasting, the embroidery on everything will be renewed, refreshed and made beautiful. Hence, Nursi states, they do not go into non-existence;

> their realities (*ḥaqīqat*), essences (*māhiyya*) and identities, which are the means of beauty and loveliness, effulgence and perfection, are enduring.[525]

This point is important to keep in mind throughout the next chapters since it comprises an answer to the assumption that death is *sharr*. It gives comfort and assurance that death is not equal to *'adam* and ergo that it is not *sharr;* on the contrary that it is the continuation of *wujūd* in a different form and therefore equals *khayr*.

5.4.1.1 Mulk and Malakūt

In relation to existence (*wujūd*) different scholars have introduced similar yet slightly different categorizations in relation to the Divine. Ibn 'Arabī, for instance, taught about 'Five Divine Presences'[526] (*al-ḥaḍarāt al-ilāhiyyat al-khams*). It is important to note, though, that what Ibn 'Arabī was referring to individually, was later on systematized and adopted in form of a doctrine,

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[525] Ibid.

[526] Ibn 'Arabī's disciples, such as Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, Sa'īd al-Dīn al-Farghānī, Mu'ayyid al-Dīn al-Jandī, Kamāl al-Dīn 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Kāshānī, and Sharaf al-Dīn Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī, in time, came up with five to six levels of existence, naming them in different ways. The most common form seems to be derived from the commentary on Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam*, called *Sharḥ Fuṣus al-Ḥikam*, as follows: 1) The presence of Essence (*'ālam-i hāhūt* or *'ālam al-Aḥad*); 2) The Presence of the Attributes and Names, that is, the Presence of Divinity (*'ālam-i lāhūt or 'ālam al-Wāhad*); 3) The Presence of the Acts, that is, the Presence of Lordship (*'ālam al-jabarūt* or *'ālam-i arwāh*); 4) The Presence of Image-Exemplars and Imagination (*'ālam al-malakūt* or *'ālam-i mīthāl*); 5) The Presence of Sense-Perception and the Visible *('ālam al-mulk* or *'ālam-i nasut* or *'ālam al-ajsām*). For more information, see al-Kashānī. *Sharḥ Fuṣūs al-Ḥikam* (Cairo, 1966), chapter on Joseph, 132. Also see Chittick, W. 'The Five Divine Presences' in *The Muslim World*, Vol. 72, Issue 2 (Apr., 2007), 122; Konuk A. A. *Fuṣūs'l Ḥikem Tercüme ve Şerhi I*, ed. Mustafa Tahralı; Selçuk Eraydın (Istanbul: M.Ü. Ilahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı Yayınları, 2010), 66-67.

first by his chief disciple al-Qūnawī (d. 1274)[527] and later by his other students. Al-Ghazālī, on the other hand, in his work *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-Islām wa'l zandaqa*, also mentions five levels of existence, albeit naming them differently.[528]

Nursi points out that everything (*makhlūq*) in this world has two different faces. While one of these is the outer face, called *mulk*, the other one is the inner face, called *malakūt*.

Mulk is that part of a thing which is visible to human beings but which is not the reality of that being. For instance, 1) when man looks at something, it appears to him as if these beings are the owners of action and power; 2) man also considers *sharr* in this world and among created things to have real existence (*wujūd ḥaqiqa*); 3) furthermore, for man, some of created things seem to be more difficult or easier than others. However it is important to note that all these three aspects mentioned are actually created in the inner world of man and are not the reality of the universe and creation. The reason for this different perception is the fact that man's nature is not able to comprehend reality, in other words, the *malakūt* aspect of things. Hence it would not be wrong to say that *mulk* is the personal world of each human, how it reflects in his own soul.

Malakūt is the reality of being (*wujūd*). In this real face of being, it can be seen that 1) nothing else but God is the real actor and owner of power; 2)

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[527] Chittick, W. 'The Five Divine Presences', 109.

[528] According to al-Ghazālī, the five levels of existence are called as follows: 1) essential existence (*wujūd al-dhātī*); 2) sensual existence (*wujūd al-ḥissī*), 3) imaginative existence (*wujūd al-khayālī*); 4) intellectual existence (*wujūd al-'aqlī*) and finally, 5) figurative existence (*wujūd al-shibhī*). For further details, see Jackson, Sherman A. *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abu Hamid al-Ghazālī's Fayṣal al-Tafriqa* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002); Görmez, M. 'Gazālī Felsefesinde Varlık Mertebeleri Bakımından Hadislerin Anlaşılması ve Yorumlanması' in *Ankara Üniversitesi Ilahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, Cilt 39, Sayı 1 (1999).

ashrār (pl. of *sharr*) have no real existence and that their reality is non-existence (*'adam*); 3) none of creation has any influence on God's power and hence that everything is of equal ease for Him.

Nursi explains this in the following lines:

> … that is to say, causes have been placed so that the dignity of power may be preserved in the superficial view of the mind. For like the two faces of a mirror, everything has an outer face (*mulk*) that looks to this manifest world, which resembles the mirror's colored face and may reflect various colors and states, and an inner face (*malakūt*) which looks to its Maker, which resembles the mirror's shining face. In the outer face which looks to the manifest world may be states incompatible with the dignity and perfection of the Eternally Besought One's power, so causes have been put to be both the source and the means of those states. But in the inner face, that of reality, which looks at their Creator, everything is transparent and beautiful; it is fitting that power should itself be associated with it. It is not incompatible with its dignity; therefore causes are purely apparent and in the inner face of things and in reality have no true effect.[529]

In the light of the above, one reason for the existence of causes is due to God's mercy to human beings. Causes serve as a shield between man and God's sovereignty, power, infallibility and goodness. They are created in order that man does not accuse God directly for any apparent *sharr* that he observes with his superficial mind. However, according to Nursi these causes are influential only in the outer face of things (*mulk*) which is the manifest world. In reality (*malakūt*), causes have no true effect, for that is the realm of God's direct power which is always beautiful and good.

It is interesting to mention that the Encyclopaedia of Islam mentions *mulk* and *malakūt* as synonymous to each other and does not explain *malakūt* any further. No philosophical, mystical or theological reference is given, except

[529] *The Words*, 300-301.

some verses from the Qur'ān regarding *mulk*.[530] Nursi however sees a major difference in those two terms. It is two different ways of looking at things. Although it seems to be impossible for man to look at the inner face (*malakūt*) of things, the question arises whether it is possible at least to a certain extent? Nursi explains that this might be possible, and can be achieved through the contemplation (*tafakkur*) of created things. For this method, which comprises two different ways of looking at things, Nursi introduces two new terms which he names *manā-e ismī* vs. *manā-e ḥarfī*.

5.4.1.2 *Manā-e ismī* and *manā-e ḥarfī*

He states that in forty years of his life and thirty years of education he has learned four words/terms (*kalima*). Those words are 'self-referential' (*manā-e ismī)*; 'other-indicative' (*manā-e ḥarfī*)*;* intention *(niyyah) and* viewpoint *(naẓar).*[531] Due to its relevance here, emphasis will be laid on the former two terms.

Everything has two aspects. One points to the Creator whereas the other points to the being itself. The latter aspect should be, states Nursi, like a very thin curtain or a transparent piece of glass that shows the aspect pointing to the Creator behind that curtain. Hence, "when looking at the bounties (*ni'mah*), one should be able to see the Blessing-giver (*Mun'im*), when looking at all the art, one should see the Artist or Designer (*Sānī*) and when looking at the causes, one should be able to realize and remember the Real Causer (*Muessir Haqīqī*)."[532] In other words, according to Nursi, one should regard all beings as a meaningful letter, bearing the meaning of another (*manā-e ḥarfī*), on account of their Maker. In this case, one would

[530] C.E. Bosworth; E. van Donzel; et al. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, see 'Mulk'. 'Malakūt' is not listed as separate word to look at.
[531] *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, Vol 2, 1297.
[532] Ibid.

say 'How beautifully they have been made! How exquisitely they point to their Maker's beauty!'[533] The opposite would be to look at all beings as signifiers of themselves (*manā-e ismī*), that is, to look at them on account of themselves as natural philosophy has done. Instead of appreciating the beauty of their Maker, one would say 'How beautiful they are,' thereby making them ugly.[534] The concept of *manā-e ismī* and *manā-e ḥarfī* will be set into relation with *khayr* and *sharr* in the discussion of 'the soul' (*ana*), which can be found in chapter seven.

This method is similar to that of Ibn Arabī, who talks about a "vision through the veil"[535]; perfect and complete unveiling is thereby impossible for it is a divine attribute. Nursi would share the opinion of Ibn Arabī that no one can know the realities exactly as God knows them. Ibn Arabī, like many other Sufis, uses the term *al-a'yān al-thābita* to describe the objects of God's knowledge[536]. As soon as these are created with an outer appearance and send to the world, they are called *fayḍ muqaddas*. The Sunni *kalām* scholars, on the other hand, have called beings within the knowledge of God *māhiyya* and their created versions *haqīqa*.[537] Nursi, on the other hand, prefers to use the term 'being of knowledge and the unworldly' (*wujūd 'ilmī wa manawi*) instead of *a'yān thābita* and *māhiyya*; and the term creation (*makhlūq*) or the 'circle of power' (*daira qudra*) instead of *fayḍ muqaddas* and *haqīqa*.

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[533] *The Words*, 145.
[534] Ibid.
[535] *Sufism: A Beginner's Guide*, 191.
[536] 'The Five Divine Presences', 112; see also Ebu'l-Alā Afīfī, 'İbn Arabi'de A'yan-ı Sabite; Mu'tezili Düşüncede Ma'dumat' in *İbn Arabi Ansına (Makaleler)*, trans. Tahir Uluç (İstanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2002)
[537] Demirli, Ekrem. *Sadreddin Konevī'de Bilgi ve Varlık* (Istanbul: Iz Yayıncılık, 2005), 337.

While at one point Nursi states that everything has two faces, as mentioned before (*mulk* and *malakūt*), on another occasion he states that the world and all things have three faces.[538] The first face, states Nursi, looks to the Divine Names and is their mirror. Death, separation, and non-existence cannot intrude on this face; instead one is able to find renewal and renovation[539].

The second face, as introduced by Nursi, looks to the hereafter. It serves eternity and makes transitory things as though eternal. Here too, there is no death, neither decline but the manifestations of life and eternity.[540]

The third face, on the other hand, looks to transient beings. This face, states Nursi, is the beloved of ephemeral beings and those following the caprices of their souls; a place of trade for the conscious, an arena of trial and examination for those charged with duties. Since there is death and separation in this third face, the cure for the pains and wounds of decline and extinction are the manifestations of life and eternity in its inner face.

To summarize, Nursi states that

> This flood of beings, these travelling creatures, are moving mirrors and changing places of manifestation for the renewal of the Necessarily Existent One's lights of creation and existence.[541]

In other words, if one is able to look at any event – be it good or bad from his perspective – merely as a manifestation of the Necessarily Existent One's names and attributes, that is, if one is able to link the third face always with the first two faces, it might ultimately help to understand to a certain extend how there is beauty in everything that God creates. For one starts to read

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[538] *Letters*, 343.
[539] Ibid.
[540] Ibid.
[541] Ibid.

and perceive the many names of his Lord wherever one looks and starts building a close relationship (*intisāb*) with Him. Everything else but the Creator becomes unimportant and transient, their importance thereby lays only in them being mirrors of the Divine.

5.4.2 Non-being ('adam)

Non-being is a translation of the Aristotelian term *privatio* and means the absence of existence or being.[542] In Aristotelian philosophy, a distinction is made between two different kinds of non-existence: absolute non-existence versus relative non-existence; the latter meaning either the absence of a quality in matter and/or the pure potentiality of matter.[543] Since according to Aristotle, the absence of a quality contains potentially its opposite, Aristotle's theory of becoming is based entirely on this concept of privation. In other words, all becoming is the actualization of a relative non-existent or potential.[544]

The existence of the non-existent has been discussed most acutely by the Stoics[545] and their terminology can be found among the Muslim theologians.[546] The Mu'tazilis, for instance, considered non-existence (*'adam)* as a thing (*shay'*). They asserted that God knew the entities He was going to create before the existence of the world. Thus, what He knew had, since He

[542] Aristotle. *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross, Book I.; Gibb, H. A. R.; Kramers, J. H., Schacht, J., et al. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. I (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 178.
[543] Aristotle. *Metaphysics*, trans. W. D. Ross, Book I.
[544] Ibid.
[545] Stoicism is a school of Hellenistic philosophy founded by Zeno of Citium in Athens in the early 3rd century BC. Stoics were concerned with the active relationship between cosmic determinism and human freedom.
[546] Gibb, H. A. R.; Kramers, J. H., Schacht, J., et al. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. I, 178.

knew it, a certain reality. Creating the world, He gave those entities the accident of existence.[547]

According to Nursi, there is no **absolute** non-existence (*'adam muṭlaq*). But he addresses in his works seemingly different kinds of non-existence.[548] One he calls apparent non-existence (*'adam dhāhirī*). God gives external existence (*wujūd ḥarijī*) to things whose forms are present in His knowledge or who exist as knowledge. This can be compared to spreading a special liquid over invisible writing in order to reveal it. Through the command "'Be!" and it is (*kun fa yakūn*)'[549] God brings into external existence from apparent non-existence things whose plans, programmes, shapes and proportions are present in His knowledge.[550] Furthermore, states Nursi, non-existence can only be apparent if it is put in relation with the all-Knowing God. If the Creation of things would be, for instance, referred to different hands and causes; since they do not possess comprehensive knowledge, non-existence would not be apparent but absolute. And absolute non-existence can in no way be the source of existence.[551] Thus, according to this kind of apparent non-existence, it is used for things that are not or not yet present in the visible world and are yet to be given external existence, if God wills. Hence, contingent (*mumkin*) beings, who God decides to bring into this visible world, are given external existence whereas those contingents who God decides not to create, are left in the knowledge of God, in other words, in apparent non-existence.

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[547] Ibid.
[548] These different kinds of non-existence will be elaborated upon in further detail in the coming chapters. They have been kept short in this chapter just to provide a summary of what Nursi considers to be non-existence.
[549] Qur'ān, 36:82.
[550] *The Rays Collection*, 33.
[551] Ibid.

Another kind of non-existence, according to Nusi, is disbelief (*kufr*) since it is a denial of the truths of belief. For this, Nursi provides the example of a man who is submerged in misguidance and cannot extricate himself. This man, who does not believe in God, will also deny the existence of Paradise and Hell. However, states Nursi, the existence of Hell is still immeasurably better than eternal annihilation[552] for man and even animals will receive pleasure at the pleasure and happiness of their relatives, offspring and friends.[553] Hence, if a man, out of his disbelief (*kufr*) does not believe in Hell, he will have to accept non-existence not only for himself but for all his loved ones. Thus, non-existence is absolute *sharr* (*sharr mahdh*) for with the annihilation of man together with all his loved ones, it causes pain to man's spirit, heart and inner nature severer that a thousand Hells.[554] Nursi states:

> For if there was no Hell, there would be no Paradise. Through your disbelief, everything falls into non-existence. If you go to Hell and remain within the sphere of existence, those you love and your relatives will be happy in Paradise, or will be recipients of compassion in some respect within the spheres of existence. This means you should support the idea of Hell existing. To oppose it is to support non-existence, which is to support the elimination of innumerable friends' happiness.[555]

Furthermore, there are also forms of non-existence in the form of existence. Egotism is one of them. It is, states Nursi, a form of non-existence that has acquired the colour and form of existence due to a mistaken claim of ownership. Egotism appears through the lack of knowledge of man's mirror-like being and the imagination of the imaginary to be real.[556] The source of all beauties, Nursi continues, is existence and the source of all *sharr* is non-existence. According to him, the most elevated, most luminous, most

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[552] See also *Signs of Miraculousness*, 89.
[553] *The Rays Collection*, 249.
[554] Ibid.
[555] Ibid., 249-250.
[556] Ibid., 90.

powerful and farthest from any blemish kind of existence requires a beauty that is necessary in being, pre-eternal and everlasting, the firmest and most elevated; this kind of existence will express such a beauty and indeed will be such as beauty.[557] In other words, the lack of awareness that one is merely a mirror that reflects the beauty of the Necessary Existent One, which leads to egotism, is defined by Nursi as a form of non-existence that has acquired the colour and form of existence. For no matter how real a beauty may seem, it can never reach the state of absoluteness. Therefore Nursi distinguishes between two types of contingent beings. One is being in egotism. This kind of being faces non-existence and eventually turns into non-existence. The other is non-existence through the abandonment of egotism. This faces the Necessarily Existent One (*wājib al wujūd*) and eventually attains existence (*wujūd*). Thus, states Nursi, "if you strive for existence, be nonindulgent so you will find it."[558]

Another form of non-existence is incompetency, in other words, not to fulfill one's duties. Nursi claims that all faults arise from non-existence or lack of ability, or destruction which are all not existent and pertain to non-existence.[559] That is why there is no need for power and strength to perform *sharr* and destruction that pertain to non-existence. Every insignificant power or pity act, sometimes even the lack of action may lead to extensive destruction and non-existence. [560]

Closely linked with existence (*wujūd*) is life (*ḥayāt*) and its purpose. It is necessary to explore how Nursi explains what the purpose of life is, for this will generate another basis for the explanation of *sharr* and its nature.

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[557] Ibid., 90.
[558] *Mesnevī-i Nuriye*, 96.
[559] *The Rays Collection*, 981.
[560] Ibid.

5.5 Life (*ḥayāt*) and its purpose

Life (*ḥayāt*) is the manifestation or mirror of *al-Ḥayy*, one of the names of God, meaning the living. Al-Tabarī says that the word *ḥayy* describes Him who has perpetual life and a permanent existence (*baqā*) without any initial or terminal limit. Contingent (*mumkin*) beings, on the other hand, although also living, have a life that begins at a definite point and ends at a fixed limit.[561] Al-Tabarī further states that all commentators agree on this. There are however points, where they disagree. While some argue that *al-Ḥayy* means that God Himself provides for the maintenance of His creatures and allots every creature its portion and is therefore living by virtue of His management (*tadbīr*) of the Universe and not by virtue of Life; others claim that He is living by virtue of Life, being one of His attributes. Others again say that it is one of His names.[562] Al-Zamakhsharī argues that *ḥayy* describes one who has knowledge and power.[563] Al-Rāzī explains *ḥayy* by taking up Ibn Sīnā's distinction between *wājib al-wujūd* and *mumkin* beings. However, contrary to Ibn Sīnā's assertion that the existence of the contingent being does necessarily follow from the existence of the necessary being in itself; Al-Rāzī says that creatures do not necessarily proceed from God: they are created by Him in His Wisdom and His Freedom. This is how *ḥayy* should be understood.[564]

Nursi would agree with al-Rāzī that God creates beings in His Wisdom and His Freedom. For Nursi, life is the 'highest manifestation' (*jilwa 'aẓām (j-l-y)*

[561] Al-Tabarī. *Jami' al-bayān 'an ta'wīl ay al-Qur'ān*, ed. Mahmud Muhammad Shakir and Ahmad Muhammad Shakir, Vol. 5 (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1954-), 386.
[562] Ibid.
[563] Zamakhsharī, Abu al-Qāṣim. *Al-Kashshāf 'an Haqāiq al-Tanzīl*, Vol. 1 (Cairo, 1948), 291.
[564] Al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn. *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, Vol. 2, Beirut, 307 ff.

('-ẓ-m)) of *al-Ḥayy* and most 'pleasant manifestation' (*tajallī laṭīf (j-l-y) (l-ṭ-f)*) of *al-Muḥyī*.

Nursi, commenting on the (Qur'ān 30:50[565]; 2:255[566]), explains *al-Ḥayy* and *al-Muḥyī* in twenty-nine points.[567] He looks at life in regard to the universe; art (*san'at*) and essence (*māhiyya*); he explains thanks and worship to be the result of life and he asserts that life looks to the six articles of faith and proves them. According to Nursi, life not only bears evidence of the oneness and unity of God, it also delicately reflects Divine mercy and is a mirror of the Divine Attributes and Names.[568]

Nursi explains that there are numerous purposes for the existence (*wujūd*) of everything and numerous results for their lives (*ḥayāt*). These purposes and results are not restricted to this world and merely to the 'soul' (*nafs*) of men, as the people of misguidance might think. The purposes of existence and results of the lives of all things relate to three categories.[569]

The first category, which is the most exalted one, pertains to the Creator. In this category, the purpose of all things is to proclaim, by means of their lives and existence, the miracles of power and the traces of artistry of the Maker (*Sānī*) and display them to the gaze of the Glorious Monarch (*Sulṭān dhul-Jalāl*). Since nothing can exist without the Necessarily Existent One (*wājib al wujūd*), and since everything is but a reflection of the Divine Names and Attributes of the *wājib al wujūd*; to live for a fleeting second or even only

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[565] "Behold, then, the marks of God's Mercy, how He revives the earth after it was dead. He, indeed, is the One Who revives the dead and He has power over everything."
[566] "God! There is no god but He, the Living, the Everlasting. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him."
[567] *The Flashes Collection*, 426.
[568] Ibid., 428.
[569] *The Words*, 86.

the potentiality and intent for existence[570] is enough, without ever emerging into life, to remain untouched by vanity and purposelessness.

The second category for the purpose of existence and result of life pertains to conscious creation. Everything is like a missive, displaying truth or a wise word of their Maker, offering itself to the gaze of angels, jinn, animals and men, desiring to be objects of contemplation and to be read by every conscious being that looks upon it.[571]

In the third category, on the other hand, the purpose of existence and result of life pertains merely to the 'soul' (*nafs*) of that thing. Therefore the consequence of such being is only minor, such as the experience of pleasure and joy, and living with some degree of permanence and comfort.[572]

Hence one might say that while the purpose of a thing related to its own 'soul' (*nafs*) and its worldly existence is one, the purpose related to its Maker is hundreds. This is, states Nursi, how apparent opposites such as divine wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and economy (*iqtiṣād*) is perfectly compatible with divine liberality (*jūd*) and infinite generosity (*sehā*). While on the individual level, liberality and generosity predominate, in universal purpose wisdom predominates and the name of all-Wise (*Ḥakīm*) is manifested.[573] Thus everything, including the purpose of the fruits of a tree can be divided into the three categories that have been established above.

[570] For example delicate creatures that vanish swiftly or seeds and kernels that never come to life, that is never bear fruit or flower.
[571] *The Words*, 86.
[572] Ibid., 86-87.
[573] Ibid., 87.

5.5.1 The two faces of life: mulk and malakūt

The two faces of everything, namely *mulk* and *malakūt* has been mentioned before. Nursi argues that these two faces of life are shining, elevated and without dirt or defect. Nursi further claims that life is an exceptional being (*makhlūq*), on which both faces, apparent causes veiling the disposal of Divine power have not been placed, as it is the case with other things (*shay'*).[574] This could be accepted with *malakūt*, the inner face that is the reality of being; but what about *mulk*, being the outer face, visible to human beings? How can that face be free from any apparent causes? If Divine power is directly visible in both faces of life, would this not mean that everyone should believe in God?

5.5.1.1 The face of '*mulk*' in things (*ashyā*) and the purpose of apparent causes

Nursi explains that everything in the universe is good and beautiful with very minor *sharr* and ugliness (*kubh*), only for the purpose of being a unit of measurement, showing the degrees of *khayr* and beauty (*ḥusn*). In this regard, states Nursi, *sharr* becomes *khayr* and *kubh* turns into *ḥusn*.[575]

However, to the superficial view of conscious beings, apparent ugliness, badness, disasters and calamities can very likely lead to complaints and anger. In order for these complaints and angers not to be directed to the Ever-Living and Self-Subsistent One (*dhāt ḥayy qayyūm*) and so that the contact of sacred, pure Divine power with apparently vile and filthy things should not offend the dignity of power, apparent causes have been made a veil to those disposals of power. These causes, states Nursi, cannot create,

[574] *The Flashes Collection*, 428.
[575] Ibid., 429.

but function as a target of unjust complaints and objections.[576] For example Azra'il (the angel of death) as well as other causes function as apparent veils so that the anger and complaints of those who do not see the true, beautiful face of death are not directed to the Ever-Living and Self-Subsistent One.[577]

5.5.1.2 The face of '*mulk*' in life (*ḥayāt*)

On the other hand, life, that is also created (*makhlūq*), has no such apparent minor *sharr* to it, states Nursi, neither on the inner (*malakūt*) nor the outer (*mulk*) face. Since there is nothing to invite complaints or objections, these faces of life have been surrendered directly, without veil, to the hand of the 'life-giving, restoring, resurrecting' Name of the Ever-Living Self-Subsistent One – just as it is with light (*nūr*), being (*wujūd*) and 'giving of being' (*ījād*).[578]

Furthermore Nursi emphasizes that since life is the most important result and fruit of the universe, and at the same time the purpose of its creation, it certainly is not restricted to this fleeting, brief, deficient, painful worldly life.[579] Thus, the aim and result of this tree of life, states Nursi, ought to be eternal life, life in the Hereafter.

5.6 Life after death

Faith in a life after death is a vital part of the problem of *sharr*. Nursi explains by means of God's Divine Names and Attributes twelve reasons why there must be an afterlife. According to Nursi, the Divine Names and Attributes indicate, show and logically require the existence of the hereafter.

[576] Ibid.
[577] Ibid.
[578] Ibid., 429-30.
[579] Ibid., 431.

This is because compared to the Names and Attributes that are absolute, man in this world can have only

> a taste of that generosity, enough to whet his appetite but not to satiate him, and only a dim light coming from the perfection, or rather a faint shadow of its light, without in any way being fully satisfied. It follows then, that man is going toward a place of eternal joy where all will be bestowed on him in full measure.[580]

God's dominicality (*rubūbiyyah*) and sovereignty (*saltanāt*), under His Divine Name the Sustainer (*Rab*), are reflected in the cosmos in order to display His perfections along with their lofty aims and elevated purposes. All this, states Nursi in the First Truth, requires the establishment of a reward for those who, through faith and worship, respond to these aims and purposes and punishment for those who treat His purposes with rejection and scorn.[581]

In the Second Truth, Nursi points out all animate being's form of sustenance, thereby emphasizing the nourishment of the weakest and most powerless, who are being sustained in the best form. This, states Nursi, is the manifestation of God's generosity and bounty, reflecting the Divine Names of Generous (*Karīm*) and Merciful (*Raḥīm*).[582] After providing plenty of examples, Nursi concludes that God makes Himself known to man with all His well-ordered works and expects recognition through worship from man whom He has endowed with the most important capacities. Furthermore, Nursi continues, God makes Himself beloved of man through the numerous adorned fruits of His mercy and expects man to make himself beloved of God through worship. God also demonstrates His love and mercy to man

[580] *The Words*, 80.
[581] Ibid., 74.
[582] Ibid., 75.

through variegated bounties and expects to be respected by man with thanks and with praise.[583]

Hence a place of requital for those who fail to recognize Him and a realm of reward and eternal bliss for those believers who respond to the Merciful and Compassionate One in faith, thanks and veneration is necessary and conceivable.[584] Nursi justifies this as follows:

> ... There must therefore be a realm of blessedness appropriate to that generosity and worthy of that mercy. One would otherwise have to deny the existence of the sun that fills every day with its light. For irrevocable death would transform compassion into disaster, love into affliction, blessing into vengeance, intellect into a tool of misery, and pleasure into pain, so that the very essence of God's mercy would vanish.
>
> There must in addition be a realm of punishment, appropriate to God's glory and dignity. For generally the oppressor leaves this world while still in possession of his might, and the oppressed while still subject to humiliation. These matters are therefore deferred for the attention of a supreme tribunal; it is not that they are neglected...[585]

The second paragraph is in particular important for the purpose of this study, for it offers justice for those in pain who have been afflicted with different sorts of *sharr*, particularly committed by other fellow human beings.

As has been illustrated in the first two truths, Nursi explores and links the existence of an afterlife with the Divine Names and Attributes of the Creator, such as the Wise (*Ḥakīm*); the Just (*'Ādil*); the Generous (*Jawād*); the Beautiful (*Jamīl*) in relation with beauty (*jamāl*); the Answerer of Prayer (*Mujīb*); the Compassionate (*Raḥīm*); the Glorious (*Jalīl*) in relation with splendour (*ḥashmat*); the Eternal (*Bāqī*); the Preserver (*Ḥafīẓ*); the Guardian (*Raqīb*); the Beautiful (*Jamīl*) in relation with promise (*wa'ad*); the Glorious

[583] Ibid., 76.
[584] Ibid.
[585] Ibid.

(*Jalīl*) in relation with threat (*wa'īd*); the Eternally Living and Self-Subsistent (*Ḥayyul Qayyūm*); the Giver of Life (*Muḥy*) and Giver of Death (*Mumīt*); and the Truth (*Ḥaqq*).[586] Henceforward, those aspects that are relevant to the current topic will be elaborated upon in further detail.

5.6.1 The Wise and Just

In the beginning of this chapter it has been said that Nursi (in accordance with the Qur'ān) defines disbelief (*kufr*) as *sharr*. Hence, with the guidance of *Ḥakīm* and *'Ādil*, he states that it is indeed possible that those disbelieving in God's wisdom and justice and rebel against Him in insolence should be chastised. True justice, according to Nursi, requires that man should be rewarded and punished, not in accordance with his pettiness, but in accordance with the magnitude of his crime, the importance of his nature and the greatness of his function as human being.[587] However, he continues, not even a thousandth part of that wisdom and justice is exercised with respect to man in this transient world; it is rather deferred.[588] Since most of the misguided leave this world unpunished and most guided leave it unrewarded; all things must be postponed for a supreme tribunal, and ultimate bliss.[589]

5.6.2 The Glorious and Eternal

With the names the Glorious (*Jalīl*) and Eternal (*Bāqī*), Nursi points out the transient nature of everything, despite their high value and most exalted and beautiful artistry. The fact that the life span of everything is so short implies, states Nursi, that everything is only a sample, a form of something else;

[586] Ibid., 74-102.
[587] Ibid., 78.
[588] Ibid., 77.
[589] Ibid.

thus it functions as a pointer to the authentic and original objects to be found in a place eternal and everlasting.[590] Someone who has truly understood the wisdom behind this will not be afflicted with loss and calamities, for he will always see this world, including himself, subject to fade and reunification with the Eternal (*Bāqī*). There must then be a different purpose of these adornments of high value and brief duration; that is, according to Nursi, for instruction in wisdom, for arousing gratitude, and for encouraging men to seek out the perpetual originals of which they are copies.[591]

How the name of the Eternal (*Bāqī*) is manifested in everything and how everything is created for eternity can be understood by everything's annihilation with only one aspect and its remaining eternal with numerous other aspects. Nursi gives the example of a flower that lives for a short period of time and then

> hides behind the veil of annihilation. That flower goes leaving its apparent form in the memory of everything that sees it, its inner essence in every seed. [592]

From this example Nursi explains how a human being as the highest form of life and possessor of soul, should be closely tied to eternity. Thus Nursi points out that the annihilation of the visible body of a being is only one aspect of that being. There are numerous other aspects, such as the soul of man which possesses an extremely exalted and comprehensive nature, that do not annihilate and that are eternal.

[590] Ibid., 86.
[591] Ibid.
[592] Ibid., 87.

5.6.3 The Preserver and Guardian

Another very important Divine Name that is related to the problem of *sharr* pertains to the Preserver (*Ḥafīẓ*). According to this Name, everything is preserved with the utmost order and balance. Nursi states that God "causes all things to be preserved in mirrors pertaining to both the outer and inner worlds. To demonstrate the universality and comprehensiveness of the law of preservation, Nursi provides the example of the memory of man, the fruit of the tree, the kernel of the fruit or the seed of the flower.[593] Likewise, states Nursi, if God cares to preserve such impermanent and insignificant things, He will as well preserve the deeds and actions of man who has been given the lofty disposition of humanity, the rank of the supreme vicegerency, and the duty of bearing the Divine Trust.[594] The importance of this Attribute of God in regards to the problem of *sharr* can be seen in the following lines:

> ... the Master of all creation devotes great care to the orderliness of all things that come to pass in His realm. He pays great attention to the function of sovereignty, and lavishes extreme care on the dominicality of kingship. Thus He records, or causes to be recorded, the pettiest of happenings, the smallest of services, and preserves in numerous things the form of everything that happens in His realm. This attribute of Preserver indicates that an important register of deeds will be subjected to a precise examination and weighing: the records of men's deeds will stand revealed...[595]

In other words, as a result of this kind of precise preservation no deed and action gets lost. The smallest injustice on earth is recorded and will be asked about. And since man is mostly not called into account and judged in fitting fashion while in this world, it follows that he must proceed to a Supreme Tribunal and a final felicity.[596]

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[593] Ibid., 88.
[594] What this Supreme Trust, according to Nursi might be will be discussed in chapter seven.
[595] *The Words*, 90.
[596] Ibid., 91.

Nursi concludes that

> such a manifestation of life, which is the light emitted by the sun of eternal life, cannot be limited to this Manifest World, this present time, this external existence. On the contrary, each world receives the manifestation of that light in accordance with its capacity, and the cosmos together with all its worlds is alive and illuminated through it. Otherwise, as the misguided imagine, beneath a temporary and apparent life, each world would be a vast and terrible corpse, a dark ruin.[597]

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has addressed some topics that form the basis for the problem of *sharr*. Every issue in Islam is linked primarily with the main articles of faith, being God's Oneness (*tawhīd*) and an eternal life after death (*ḥashr*). Thus it has been considered most relevant to tackle these issues in this chapter before proceeding to the other topics.

The concept of tawhīd has been discussed in relation to the Divine Names and Attributes of God as well as the understanding of 'declaring incomparability' (*tanzih*) and 'affirming similarity' (*tashbih*), or in other words, God's nearness (*qurb*) to His creation and contingent being's distance to their Creator (*bu'd*). A relation has been established between *tashbih* and *tanzih*/*qurb* and *bu'd* and the treatment of *khayr* and *sharr*. While *sharr* is inherent to the universe in respect to *tanzih*, *khayr* is inherent to the universe in respect to *tashbih*. The former, it has been said, suggests that the universe has nothing of *khayr* since God alone is absolute *khayr* and totally other than the universe; the latter points out that the universe is *khayr* through God's *khayr* as much as creation is able to reflect God's signs and activity in the cosmos. Since nothing can reflect the Divine attribute of *khayr* absolutely, it follows that all things are both *khayr* and *sharr*.

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[597] *The Flashes Collection*, 436.

Furthermore, the concept of faith (*īmān*) has been included into this chapter. Thereby, it has been discussed whether a theodicy without faith, in other words, anthropodicy, is possible or not. After emphasizing the essentiality of establishing a connection with the Creator, ways towards that establishment have been suggested through the removal of the veil of commonplace.

Being (*wujūd*) and non-being (*'adam*) has been introduced as an elementary aspect for the understanding of the existence and essence of *sharr* as explained by Nursi. It has been said that according to Nursi, non-being is pure *sharr* (*sharr al mahdh*) whereas being is pure good (*khayr al mahdh*). In relation to being (*wujūd*), terms such as Necessarily Existent (*wājib al wujūd*), impossible (*mumtanī*) and contingent/possible (*mumkin*) have been introduced. Additionally, the two aspects of being, namely *mulk* and *malakūt* have entered the discussion.

In order to better understand the reason for the existence of apparent *sharr*, the discussion of life (*ḥayāt*) and its purpose has been deemed suitable. How life and its purpose relate to three different things, such as to the Creator, to conscious creation and to the 'soul' (*nafs*) has been explained further. Already the arguments on life have shown the necessity to a life after death, which has been also included into this chapter. Divine names such as the Wise and Just, the Glorious and Eternal as well as the Preserver and Guardian have confirmed their own necessity to form a basis for the understanding of *sharr*.

From this point onwards, the next chapters will deal mostly directly with the problem of *sharr* in the *Risale*.

6 The Nature of Evil according to the Risale-i Nur

6.1 Introduction

This chapter as well as chapter 7 will discuss again the questions that have been raised regarding *sharr* so far in this study and an attempt will be made to try to answer these questions – this time from the perspective of the *Risale*. The reader will realize that there is not only one ultimate answer to the problem of *sharr*. The Risale offers several answers and each of them need to be considered and taken into account. Each one of them looks at the problem from a different perspective and provides what Nursi describes as respective remedies. To be satisfied at the end, one needs to see the whole picture and look at all remedies as a whole.

The current chapter will illustrate how Nursi approaches the problem from different angles, thereby using well known theories, but nevertheless combining these theories with aspects that are original to the *Risale*. Nursi partially shares the theory of *privatio boni*, and employs the theory of 'the best of all possible worlds', 'world of duality', and 'principle of plenitude' in his own way. He furthermore discusses the necessity of minor *ashrār* as a test, in relation to the creation of Paradise and Hell, in terms of calamities and inflicts as well as natural disasters. Additionally, he explains why Satan has been created. Establishing a relation between *sharr* and worship, he creates a new theological concept that he calls 'negative worship'.

Thus the questions that will be addressed in this current chapter are as follows: What is the nature of *sharr*? Does *sharr* exist? How can *sharr* be reconciled with God's Omnipotence; in other words, why does God allow *sharr* to exist? Why did God create Satan knowing that he will misguide so many human beings? Why does the world exist of dualities and what is the

purpose of all this? Is this world perfect or imperfect; in other words, could there be a more perfect world than already exists? What is the relationship between *sharr* and worship?

Nursi takes on the Qur'anic concept of the Names and Attributes of God as a major aspect in his works. One might say that He employs this conviction in nearly every area of theology and philosophy.[598] Thus, in Nursi's conception, theodicy as well is completely based on the Divine Names. In this respect, he establishes a close relationship between theodicy and the Divine Names of God.[599] It is crucial to understand this concept for it is also closely linked with the doctrine of *tawhīd*, the absolute Oneness of God. It is the idea that there is unity in diversity. Every single creation, from an atom to the stars in the universe, manifests the Divine Names and Attributes of God. This includes God's Beauteous (*jamālī*) as well as His Glorious (*jalālī*) Names. Every one of them as well as together in unity, form a (what shall be called) 'Divine Mosaic' and point to their Creator, the owner of those particular Divine Names. Thus one might say that Nursi's theology as well as his ontology is based on the Divine Names.

Nursi upholds the idea of al-Maturidī's wisdom-centric approach to the problem of *sharr*[600] without discarding at the same time His absolute Justice, Power and Will. Nursi would agree that there is an infinite wisdom behind

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[598] The employment of the divine names and attributes is not particular to Nursi's works. The study of divine names is implicit in Islamic thought because it is the connecting thread of the Qur'ān. Thus, one might say that the majority of theological thinking of Islam revolves around the divine names revealed in scripture.

[599] Nursi might have borrowed the Divine Names concept from Ibn 'Arabī, who states that there is no existent possible thing in everything other than God that is not connected to the divine relationships and lordly realities (*al-ḥaqā'iq al-rabbāniyya*) known as the Most Beautiful Names (Ibn 'Arabī. *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, Vol. II, Chapter 73, 115.27). Ibn 'Arabi extensively explains the relationship between the Divine Names and the Real (*al-ḥaqq*) as well as the creation or contingent beings.

[600] Al-Maturidī's view on *sharr* in relation to wisdom (*ḥikmah*) has been discussed in chapter 3 of this study.

the creation of *sharr* and we can know only as much of it as our wisdom allows.

It has been said in the beginning of this study that there are two main approaches to the problem of evil. One is monism, the other bitheism. Hence, the starting point will be to discuss the notion of bitheism a bit closer to then proceed with major principles of the Risale regarding *sharr*.

6.2 The Notion of Bitheism

It stands to reason that any kind of dualism or bitheism is rejected in the *Risale*. The notion that there are two entities, good and evil, that are completely opposed to each other and that evil can be overcome only through one destroying the other, implies two different ideas. One idea is that there is a good entity called God and an evil entity called Satan. These two entities are in constant struggle with each other. This idea suggests that Satan has also creative power, just as God has. However, Nursi states that Satan and its followers do not interfere in creation and they can have no share in Divine sovereignty. Furthermore, they do not carry out those works such as the varieties of unbelief, misguidance, *sharr* and destruction, through any power or ability; what seems to look like power is rather neglect and abstaining from action. It is the commitment of *sharr* through not allowing *khayr* to be done, that is they become *sharr*.[601] It will be explained later that since "bad and *sharr* are a sort of destruction, their causes do not have to be an existent power and active creativity. Rather, vast destruction comes about through one command pertaining to non-existence (*'adam*) and one condition being spoilt."[602] In the light of the above, Nursi criticizes the bitheism of the Zoroastrians and Manicheans. According to him, the

[601] *The Flashes Collection*, 103.
[602] Ibid.,107.

imaginary god of evil which they called Ahriman, was Satan, the cause for *ashrār* through the power of free choice (*ikhtiyār al-juz'ī*) and non-creational acquisition (*kasb*).[603]

The second kind of dualism, which is called 'internal dualism' suggests that God is infinitely good and at the same time the source of surd evil. The solution offered by this second kind of dualism to the problem of evil is called by E. S. Brightman 'theistic finitism'. According to this solution, God's being is responsible for evil, though not God's will. God intrinsically resists it, but it is not something God chooses.[604] Brightman's God is thus a finite God who did the best that He could and therefore was a more suitable object of worship – this notion was better than an unlimited God who could do away with all evils but chooses not to do so; who allows such evils to go unchecked and its victims go uncomforted.[605]

Dilley does not think that it is a problem to believe in a finite God who will have no ultimate control over everything and who will not be able to guarantee that its experiment in trying to shape matter could not have an unhappy end.[606] This is because Dilley argues that what happens to the world of matter has never been important for traditional theodicies or defenses of God. Dilley further asks whether theodicies or defenses of God have in mind any specific outcome as to the natural world or human history as part of their solution to the problem of evil.[607] While he claims that theodicists of a God of unlimited power always offer eschatological solutions

[603] Ibid. The notion of free choice (*ikhtiyār al-juz'ī*) and acquisition (*kasb*) will be discussed in chapter 7.
[604] F. B. Dilley. 'A Finite God Reconsidered' in *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*, Vol 47, No. 1 (Feb., 2000), 33.
[605] Ibid.
[606] Ibid., 35.
[607] Ibid., 36.

to the problem of evil rather than finding solutions under the conditions of history. Furthermore, according to scholars such as Crombie, Mitchell and Hick theodicy works independently of what happens to the material world, it is a matter of what happens to souls in the hereafter.[608] Thus Dilley asks what difference it makes to traditional theodicists whether a finite God ultimately controls the destiny of matter, if the success of unlimited God theodicies does not depend on what happens to matter.[609]

Dilley criticizes the notion of an unlimited God who could do away with all evils but chooses not to do so and who allows such evils to go unchecked and its victims go uncomforted. On the other hand, he also criticizes theodicists of typically offering eschatological solutions to the problem of evil. Thus, he defends the belief in a finite God, who at least tries his best to prevent evils to happen. It seems that Dilley would like to see that victims are comforted in this world, and if possible immediately, or even better, that they do not become victims at all. The fact that a comfort in the hereafter seems to be too 'classical' of an answer is because it is too far in the future. Human beings always prefer an immediate gain or comfort over a belated one. Nursi provides a very vast response to the necessity of the existence of a hereafter and the comfort it brings to victims in the Tenth Word of his work *The Words*. That a firm eschatological belief is one of the basic elements in dealing with the problem of *sharr* has been explained in Chapter 5 of this study.

According to Nursi, the world of matter is of utter importance for every single material being has a very important duty to fulfill in terms of being the manifestation of God's absolute Divine Names. What will happen to the

[608] Ibid.
[609] Ibid., 37.

world of matter is explained by Nursi in his treatise on the 'world of duality', also covered in this current chapter.

Furthermore, Nursi refers his reader in relation to the co-eternity of matter with God, to the scholars of religion and theology (*kalām*), stating that they have proven that matter is not eternal. Nursi himself also explains this through the principles of contingency (*imkān*) and createdness (*ḥudūth*).[610] Since this issue is outside the scope of this study, it will not be discussed further.

Now, it has been seen above that the absoluteness of God's power has particularly become a problem in relation to the problem of evil. The fact that God does not lift evil although He has the power to do so has maybe drawn man to be satisfied with a God Who has limited power but Who does the best He can to prevent evil. Nursi provides the following explanations of how God's infinite power should be imagined.

6.3 The All-Powerful (*qadīr*)

The idea of a limited God has been asserted by scholars such as Plato, Ibn Rushd[611], John Stuart Mill, Samuel Alexander, William James, Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne and Edgar Sheffield Brightman. This study will touch on the absoluteness of God's Power (*qadīr muṭlaq*). This hopefully will then show that, according to Nursi, God's power does not have to be limited in order to justify the existence of *sharr*.

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[610] For more information regarding this, see *The Rays Collection*, 163 ff; *Signs of Miraculousness*, 163 ff; see also *The Words*, pp. 287-318; 619-723; *The Letters*, pp. 264-307.

[611] While G. F. Hourani asserts that Ibn Rushd was a defender of early Platonism, believing that evil came about because of matter and not because of God, Oliver Leaman suggested that Ibn Rushd was rather an Aristotelian, defending the continuity of matter. For more information, see chapter 3 of this study.

Nursi explains that the Qur'anic verse "Your creation and your resurrection is but like a single soul"[612] proclaims God's perfect power, explaining that nothing at all is difficult for Him and that the greatest things and the smallest are the same in relation to His power.[613] But how is one to understand that impotence and feebleness cannot intervene in God's power? And what does it mean that no obstacles can ever become interpenetrated with it? Furthermore, how can one explain that in God's power, particulars are equal to universals and minor things are like comprehensive ones? These three principles will now be explained in further detail.

Regarding the first point, Nursi emphasizes that Pre-Eternal Power is of necessity intrinsic to the Essence and can in no way be separated from it.[614] If something exists in its essence, it cannot be affected by its opposite. Thus, since power is essential to the Divine, the Essence which necessitates that power cannot be affected by impotence or feebleness, the opposite to power. In fact, the degrees of existence of a thing occur through the intervention of its opposites.[615] If one takes a look at contingent (*mumkun*) beings, one is able to see that everything exists together with its opposites. There is hot and cold and the degrees of heat come about through the intervention of cold; there is beauty and its degrees occur through the existence of ugliness, etc. Contingent beings have innumerable degrees in all of their attributes because qualities such as warmth and beauty are not inherent, natural and necessary. They are influenced by their opposites and through this influence the existence of degrees, diversity, variance and change arose in the world.[616] Since impotence cannot intervene in that essential power, there

[612] Qur'ān, 31:28.
[613] *The Words*, 545.
[614] Ibid., 546.
[615] Ibid.
[616] Ibid.

can be no degrees in it. It follows then, that for such an absolute power that has no degrees and that no kind of feebleness or impotence can affect, all things that it decrees will be the same in relation to the absolute.[617] In this respect, God is indeed able to lift all *ashrār* from this world. But as it has been mentioned above, things' degrees are known through their opposites. Those opposites are called by Nursi 'units of measurement', and by others, they have come to be known as evil.[618]

In regards to the second point which states that no obstacles can ever become interpenetrated with Divine Power, Nursi states that Divine power is related to the inner face (*malakūt*) of things. As it has been explained in chapter 5, Nursi states that the universe has two faces like a mirror. One is its external face (*mulk*), resembling the coloured face of the mirror. Everything here exits with its opposites, such as beautiful and ugly, *khayr* and *sharr*, big and small, difficult and easy, etc. These matters which are called apparent causes have been made a veil to the disposal of Divine Power,

> so that the hand of power should not appear to the mind to be directly concerned with matters that on the face of it are insignificant or unworthy. For majesty and dignity require it to be thus.[619]

However, Nursi continues, causes have no true effect for the Unity of Oneness requires that they have none.

The other face of the universe is called the inner face (*malakūt*) which looks to its Creator.[620] This aspect faces its creator without any causes or

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[617] Ibid.
[618] The notion of 'unit of measurement' will be elaborated upon later in this chapter.
[619] Ibid., 547.
[620] Ibid.

intermediary, thus, obstacles cannot interfere in it. In this respect, he says, a particle becomes brother to the sun. In conclusion of this point, Nursi states:

> Divine power is both simple, and infinite, and essential. The place connected to Divine power has neither intermediary, nor stain, nor is it the scene of rebellion. Therefore, within the sphere of Divine power great does not take pride of place over small. The community does not take preference over the individual. Universals cannot expect more from Divine power than particulars.[621]

In the third point Nursi explains how in God's power, particulars can be equal to universals and minor things can be like comprehensive ones. He states that Divine power's relation is according to certain laws that are like mysteries in the universe. These mysteries, Nursi calls 'transparency', 'reciprocity', 'balance', 'order', 'disengagedness' and 'obedience'. All of these six mysteries or laws will be shortly described. What can be derived from these examples and mysteries is firstly that lifting the hardship of a single particle is of same ease to the Creator as lifting the burden or calamity of a whole country or continent; secondly, that God's Beauteous (*jamālī*) and Glorious (*jalālī*) Names, that are all absolute, will be manifest and reflected in creation to the amount of the thing's ability and capacity.

6.3.1 Mystery of Transparency (shafāfiyah)

To explain this mystery, Nursi uses the analogy of the sun. The sun's image and reflection can be seen and is displayed on the whole surface of the sea as well as on every single drop of the sea. If the whole surface of the globe was composed of varying fragments of glass and exposed to the sun, Nursi continues, every single piece of glass as well as the globe's entire surface would manifest the sun's reflection in the same way, without being divided

[621] Ibid.

into pieces or being diminished.[622] If the sun would possess willpower and willed to confer the radiance of its light and image of its reflection, the degree of difficulty would be the same between conferring its radiance to the whole surface on the earth and conferring it on a single particle.[623]

6.3.2 Mystery of Reciprocity (muqābala)

For this Nursi gives the example of human beings forming all together a form of a circle and each one of them holding a mirror in their hands. At the centre of that circle stands another individual with a candle in her hand. The radiance and manifestation reflected in all the mirrors surrounding the central point will be the same, and its reflection will be without obstacle, fragmentation or being diminished.[624]

6.3.3 Mystery of Balance (mawāzanah)

Nursi asks his reader to imagine a huge and very sensitive and accurate scale. Whatever is placed in its two pans, be it suns, stars, mountains, eggs or even particles, it will require the same force to raise one pan of those huge sensitive scales to the sky and lower the other to the ground.[625]

6.3.4 Mystery of Order (al-niẓām)

For this Nursi compares the turning of a huge ship with that of a toy boat. Both are of same ease, states Nursi.

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[622] Ibid.
[623] Ibid., 547-548.
[624] Ibid., 548.
[625] Ibid.

6.3.5 Mystery of Disengagedness (tajarrud)

For example, states Nursi, a nature disengaged from individuality regards all particulars from the smallest to the greatest as the same and enters them without being diminished or fragmented.[626] In other words, God's essence is not like any other essence. It is not of the same kind as the universe. It is rather abstract and its essence is flawless. Thus, nothing in the universe can influence God or can restrain Him. In this context, to be disengaged means to be purified from something. For instance, to be a fish requires to be limited to many attributes and restrictions pertaining to fish. A fish cannot live without food, it cannot live outside of water and, because it is limited to a certain body, cannot be at the same time in more than one place. These kinds of attributes are essential and indispensible for fish no matter whether small or big. Thus there is no difference between a big fish and a small fish, so long as both aren't purified from the above attributes and restrictions. From this point of view, none of them can dominate or rule over the other.

God's power is not of the same kind as the universe. In other words, it is purified from the attributes and restrictions of the universe. Thus, any restriction that is in the universe does in no way bind God's attribute of Power. In respect to God's absolute Power, creating and ruling over a small fish is exactly the same as creating and ruling over a big whale.

6.3.6 Mystery of Obedience (ṭā'ah)

Just as a commander causes an individual to advance with one command, in the same way does he cause a whole army to advance with the same command. Nursi explains this mystery further with an example that will be of particular importance in chapter 7, for it explains the creation of human

[626] Ibid.

actions after his inclination. Everything in the universe, states Nursi, has a point of perfection (*kamāl*), and everything has an inclination towards that point.[627] When inclination increases, it turns into need; and when need increases, in becomes desire; increased desire, on the other hand, turns into attraction. All of these, attraction, desire, need and inclination are each seeds and kernels which together with the essence (*māhiyya*) of things conform to the creative commands (*awāmir takwini*)[628] of Almighty God.[629] Nursi continues:

> The absolute perfection of the true nature of contingent beings is absolute existence. Their particular perfections are an existence peculiar to each which makes each being's abilities emerge from the potential to the actual. Thus, the obedience of the whole universe to the command "Be!" is the same as that of a particle, which is like a single soldier. Contained all together in the obedience and conformity of contingent beings to the pre-eternal command of "Be!" proceeding from the Pre-Eternal will are inclination, need, and attraction, which are also manifestations of Divine Will.[630]

This last mystery, in fact, might also serve as a response to Aristotle's 'principle of continuity' which has been discussed under the sub-heading 'The Principle of Plenitude'. Nursi has suggested twelve principles with which he intends to explain the existence, nature and reason for *sharr*.

6.4 Principles of the *Risale* regarding *khayr* and *sharr*

The following metaphysical[631] principles that are spread all over the *Risale* will help to structure the issue and then elaborate on them for a better understanding. These principles have first been enumerated in Izzet Coban's

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[627] Ibid.
[628] Creative commands (*awāmir takwini*) are commands that God placed into creation. It is an umbrella term for innate laws as well as God's customs (*adatullah*), such as the burning of fire, the freezing of water or the shooting of seeds.
[629] Ibid.
[630] Ibid., 548-549.
[631] Metaphysical in the sense that it is based on abstract and theoretical reasoning.

'Nursi on Theodicy: A New Theological Perspective' and have been elaborated in this thesis in a major way. These principles are all derived from within the *Risale* and as such form an implicit methodology and framework from within Nursian discourse and his exegesis. In this respect, these principles form the heart and foundation, so to say, of the Nursian understanding of *sharr*. To have a system in it, the structure will start with existence (*wujūd*) and non-existence (*'adam*) and then will be followed by the notion of *khayr* and *sharr*.

1. Principle: Any existence (*wujūd*) requires an existent cause.[632] In other words, it is based on one or more causes which have an actual reality. All necessary causes need to combine in order for something to come into existence. Non-existence (*'adam*), on the other hand, is dependent upon non-existential things. The non-existence of a thing may take place through the non-existence (*'adam*) of only one of all its conditions and causes.
2. Principle: There is no absolute non-existence (*'adam al-muṭlaq*) in the universe. Everything, states Nursi, has a sort of existence in Divine Knowledge (*'ilm ilāhī*) even before it has been created. After its creation, it has an external existence and enters the 'realm or circle of causes' (which is this present world) and after that thing dies or ceases to exist, it goes back to the Divine Knowledge which is an apparent, but not an absolute non-existence (*'adam*).[633]

[632] *The Flashes Collection*, 106. This is not valid for the Necessarily Existent One (*wājib al-wujūd*). His existence is not dependent on any cause. He is the Pre- and Post-Eternal One without Whose existence nothing else can exist. In other words, the existence of anything is dependent on His existence.
[633] *Letters*, 340.

3. Principle: Serves as an ontological relationship. Nursi most likely borrowed this principle from Ibn Sīnā.[634] It links existence (*wujūd*) with goodness (*khayr*) and non-existence (*'adam*) with *sharr*. It states that existence is pure good (*wujūd khayr al-mahdh*) whereas non-existence is pure *sharr* (*'adam sharr al-mahdh*).[635] From this relationship, the other principles derive.
4. Principle: *Sharr* is non-existential (*'adamī*) in nature and arises from non-existence (*'adam*).[636] It has been said before that the non-existence of a thing may take place through the non-existence (*'adam*) of only one of all its conditions and causes. Thus, it follows that *sharr* occurs through the non-existence of one of the causes that would be necessary for something to exist.[637] One might give the following example: in order for every child to be safe, all causes would have to gather (that is to say for instance every single human being would have to be morally pure and ethically equipped). If one of the causes does not exist (if one person is morally and ethically spoilt), child abuse can occur. Nursi gives more than one reason for *sharr* being non-existent in nature and having non-existence as its cause. The first reason is rather ontological whereas the second reason is related to free will.

From an ontological perspective, for anything to exist in this world, as has been stated in the first principle, all the necessary causes need to join together and be existent.[638] For a flower to grow, the conditions of

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[634] *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sīnā'a Theodicy*, 65-66.
[635] *The Flashes Collection*, 106.
[636] Ibid., 103-104; 106.
[637] This point of Nursi is almost identical with Ibn Sīnā's definition of essential evil, which, according to Ibn Sīnā, requires some sort of cause. It is thus the privation of being, albeit not an absolute privation (*'adam muṭlaq*). Nursi shares Ibn Sīnā's view, that absolute privation or, in other words, absolute non-existence, is not possible. For more information, see *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sīnā'a Theodicy*, 67 ff.
[638] *The Flashes Collection*, 106.

water, air, soil and sunlight need to exist. For a flame, a match, an inflammable matter and air are the conditions. If there is the inflammable matter and air, but no match, the flame will not come into existence. Whereas non-existence (*'adam*) can rely on non-existential matters; a non-existential matter can be the cause for non-existence. For a building to stand firm, all conditions need to be fulfilled. But if only one supporting pillar does not exist, the building will collapse – the result is destruction and non-being. [639]

Because of these two principles, states Nursi, huge destruction, unbelief, misguidance and *sharr* can occur from among the *jinn* and men. However, they do not interfere at all in the act of creation, and they can have no share in Divine souvereignty. Fruthermore, Nursi carries on, those works are not carried out by *jinn* and man through any power or ability; the power lies in neglection and abstaining from action[640], in other words, in non-existence.

5. Principle: The second principle said that there is no absolute non-existence (*'adam al-muṭlaq*) in the universe – following this the fifth principle teaches that there is no absolute sharr (sharr al-muṭlaq) in the universe either.
6. Principle: To abandon a minor *sharr* can lead to greater *sharr*.[641] For instance is it sometimes necessary to make a surgical intervention to a person in order to avoid greater harm. If that minor intervention which seems to be *sharr*, takes place, it eventually leads to *khayr*, to goodness, to the recovery of that person. However, if that minor *sharr* (that surgical intervention) is avoided or discarded, this can lead to much

[639] Ibid.
[640] Ibid., 107.
[641] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 32-33; 88.

bigger health problems. Hence one might say that *ashrār* can be good with regards to their outcome, their results. This principle has been called the *higher good defense*.

7. Principle: *Sharr* has some sort of external reality or minor existence.[642] The point is how this external reality is interpreted and perceived by human beings. The minor existence of *sharr*, says Nursi, is in fact good and not *sharr*. It is a 'unit of measurement'[643], for it contributes to the development of innumerable abilities and potentialities in human nature and all creation. In this respect, Nursi partly shares the viewpoint of Monism which regards evil to be good if it can be seen in its full cosmic context.[644] However, Nursi's view of minor *sharr* as a 'unit of measurement' does not correlate with the idea that evil is merely an illusion of man's finite perspective, as it is asserted by Monism. For Nursi does not deny the existence of *sharr*. Contrary, he accepts its minor existence for he believes that it is part of the manifestation of God's Divine Glory as the eighth principle states.[645]
8. Principle: *Ashrār* are, according to Nursi, the manifestations of Divine Glory[646] and thus they come from God and they require a certain reality for manifestation and serve as a mirror of His Glorious Names. This is clearly in contradiction with the theory that asserts that evil is an illusion

[642] *The Flashes Collection*, 104; 429.
[643] *The Rays Collection*, 39.
[644] *Evil and the God of Love*, 15.
[645] To avoid any misunderstanding, it is worth noting that Nursi implies accidental evil at this point. He might have borrowed this idea from Ibn 'Arabī, who states that "nonexistence gazes upon the possible thing in respect of its being a possible thing; but at that moment it dwells in Sheer Good (*khayr al-mahdh*). Whatever reaches it from nonexistence's gazing upon it because it is a possible thing – to that extent is the evil which the cosmos finds where it finds it." (Ibn 'Arabī. *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, Vol. III, Chapter 349, 207.33:291). See also *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 290 ff.
[646] *The Flashes Collection*, 115; *The Words*, 194-195.

of man's finite perspective, as monism states.[647] Nursi explains that it is because of the lack of ability and lack of capacity of creation that something becomes *sharr*. For example, in the white and beautiful light of the sun, some substances become black and putrefy and that blackness is related to their capacity – but it is God Who creates the *ashrār* through a Divine law which comprises numerous benefits.[648] Hence, *sharr*, according to Nursi, has an accidental reality; it originates directly from God however it is not caused by God.

9. Principle: All good things are the manifestation of Divine Beauty and as such originate from God. Thus, they too are real. The difference with *ashrār* is that God is the cause of all good things. This is because their causes are existential. They don't come about through the lack of capacity or ability, but rather from something existential.[649]
10. Principle: The last three principles stand in relation with so called 'moral evil', in other words, with the commitment of *ashrār* by human beings through their wrong choices. [650] The tenth principle, thus states that the creation of *sharr* is not *sharr*, rather the desire for *sharr* is *sharr*. In other words, man, with his free choice, inclines towards or desires a *sharr* action and God creates it for him.
11. Principle: Free will (*juz'ī irada*) has no actual existence. It rather is like a unit of measurement.
12. Principle: And finally, destruction, which pertains to non-existence, is easy. This means that one does not need to be creative to destroy something. A minor action, like placing dynamite into a building and

[647] See Introduction of this study.
[648] *The Words*, 478.
[649] This does not mean that God cannot create from *ex nihilo*. It rather means that God does not lack any ability or capacity, thus he is the cause of any *akhyār* (pl. of *khayr*) which pertain to existence.
[650] These principles will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 7.

afterwards pulling the trigger is enough to make a whole building collapse; whereas it will take months and a lot of manpower to rebuild it again.

6.5 The Definition and Nature of *sharr*: Illusion or Reality?

Firstly, an overview shall be given about previous thoughts that have explained evil as illusion. There is, for example, Monism that suggested that evil has no objective reality and is rather an illusion of man's finite perspective and thus can be seen as 'lesser good'. Similarly is moral evil (e.g. the sin of a person) due to lack of complete truth, a privation of truth. This thought is shared by Augustine through his theory of *privatio boni*, the absence of goodness. The criticism to this thought was that even if evil would be accepted as an illusion, it is still very real for it can be felt and is experienced painfully by creation. A reconciliation, according to Hick, can only take place if one is able to show that evil is justly deserved or that it is a means to a good end.

On the other hand, chapter 2 on the Semantic Analysis of the term *sharr* in the Qur'ān has shown that there is no such description as 'natural' or 'moral' *sharr* in Qur'anic understanding. '*Sharr*' according to the Qur'ān, it has been said, is the loss of God's grace, the loss of guidance, the loss of resignation, the loss of understanding, the loss of faith, the loss of patience and the loss of hope. In other words, it consists of attributes such as parsimony, disbelief, idolatry, the violation of a treaty, aversion, slander and transgression.[651] It has also been argued that, despite these definitions of the Qur'ān, some exegetes have interpreted *sharr* to be attributes as well as actions. Exegetes such as Mawdūdī, for instance, considered illnesses, hunger, being hurt

[651] For a detailed layout, see chapter 2 of this study.

during war, to burn in fire, to be hurt by a scorpion or to grief out of the loss of one's child as first grade *sharr*. Those attributes that have been mentioned above Mawdūdī saw as *ashrār* of second grade.

So, should *sharr* be treated as illusion or reality? Or how else should *sharr* be approached? And what is it then that makes man think *sharr* to be so genuine and real?

These questions will be discussed from Nursi's perspective by examining the principles of '*privatio boni*', 'the best of all possible worlds', 'the nature of a world of duality', and 'plenitude'.

6.5.1 Sharr as 'privatio boni'

The concept of *privatio boni*, in other words, the lack of goodness has been introduced by Augustine. According to him, evil is a defective good, an imperfection and therefore cannot exist apart from goodness.[652] In other words, evil cannot be a substance, for then it would be good by definition. And if something were deprived of all good, it would not exist at all.[653] William Babcock asserts that Augustine tried to find an answer to the cause of evil (or evil will) but was not particularly successful.[654] Making no real distinction between evil and sin, Babcock quotes Augustine's definition of sin as a will either to keep or to obtain something that justice forbids when there is freedom to abstain.[655] Burn also provides a definition for evil according to Augustine. Thus, to the degree that a being does exist and act, its reality derives from God; to the extent that it fails in being and falls short

[652] Saint Augustine, *The Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 43.
[653] Ibid., 124.
[654] W. S. Babcock. 'Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency' in *Journal of Religious Ethics, Inc.*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Spring 1988), pp. 28-55.
[655] Ibid., 37.

in operation, it is evil.[656] Augustine asked himself the question how an evil act arises[657] - for the answer to this question it will be helpful to see first, what the nature of evil (of *sharr* in this case) is, in the first place.

Ibn Sīnā upheld the idea of *privatio boni*, however not as the only way to define evil. According to him, evil had many different kinds and in some cases evil was also existent. Ibn Sīnā stated that essential evil (*sharr bi dhāt*) was privation of existence/goodness.[658]

While the notion of *provatio boni* in respect to 'moral evil' will be discussed in Chapter 7; Nursi has not only one approach to the nature and existence of *sharr*. According to him it would not be right to entirely deny the existence of *sharr*. While in some cases he defines *sharr* as a 'unit of measurement', in other instances he states that it has a minor existence – one might say, an accidental existence – serving as the manifestation of God's Divine Glorious Names and as such, taking part of the 'Divine Mosaic' that ultimately indicates the Oneness of God (*tawhīd*). From this respect, *sharr*, even if minor, becomes not only relatively real but also an important part of creation.

Accordingly, Nursi shares the idea of *privatio boni*, albeit partially, for he seems to disagree with its definition. The fact that Nursi is in line with the definition of *sharr* as demonstrated by the Qur'ān raises a question that needs to be elaborated. The Qur'anic understanding of the two terms *khayr* and *sharr* was not that these terms make a statement about right and wrong. It was about the benefit and loss that an action brings. Thus, it has been stated that *sharr*, according to the Qur'ān, and in fact according to Nursi, is the loss of God's grace, loss of guidance, loss of God's resignation, loss of

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[656] J. Patout Burns. 'Augustine on the Origin and Progress of Evil' in *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 11-12.
[657] 'Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency', 45.
[658] For more information, see Chapter 3 of this study.

understanding, loss of faith, loss of patience and loss of hope.[659] This might raise the questions that these losses are in a way also some sort of privation. However, it is important to note that these losses are not defections. It does not mean, for instance, that when resignation, understanding, or faith is **defective**, *sharr* occurs. In other words, deficiency should not be confused with loss.

6.5.2 The Best of All Possible Worlds

The theory of the 'best of all possible worlds' has been firstly discussed by al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) with the doctrine of *al-aslah*[660] and later by Leibniz (d. 1716). According to this theory, the existence of *sharr* is necessary for it adds to the variety in the world as well as to its own positive value. Hence, if *sharr* is taken away, the world is left with less variety than there can be. Nursi takes this theory and looks at it from a slightly different angle. Explaining the Qur'anic verse "Who has created everything in the best way"[661], Nursi claims that the universe is perfect; as perfect as creation and created things can be. He believes that in everything, even in things that appear most ugly, there is an aspect of true beauty. He states that there are two aspects to creation: either something is 'essentially beautiful', that is, it is beautiful in itself, or it has 'relative beauty', in other words, it is beautiful in regard to its results.[662] Thus Nursi compares the apparent ugliness to a veil, underneath which most shining instances of beauty and order is hidden.[663] In the season of spring, for instance, that mostly evokes stormy rains and muddy soil, is hidden the smiles of innumerable beautiful flowers

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[659] See Chapter 2 to remember.
[660] For more information, see Eric Linn Ormsby. *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over al-Ghazālī's 'Best of all Possible Worlds'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984)
[661] Qur'ān, 32:7.
[662] *The Words*, 240.
[663] Ibid.

and well-ordered plants. Even autumn, which normally evokes harsh destruction and mournful separations is hidden the discharge from the duties of their lives of the amiable small animals, the friends of the coy flowers so as to preserve them from the blows and torments of winter events which are manifestations of Divine Might and Glory; and under the veil of which the way is paved for the new and beautiful spring.[664] Likewise do potentialities sprout and grow beautifully through events such as storms, earthquakes and plague; the abilities of sparrows unfold through the hawks harrying them and man thinks that this is incompatible with mercy.[665] But because of man's self-centeredness and adoration of the apparent, he considers only the externals and pronounces them ugly. Or he reasons according to the result that merely looks to himself and judges it to be ugly. Whereas, if, of their aims one looks to man, Nursi continues, thousands look to their Maker's Names.[666] Thus, Nursi advices his readers to look at these events with the eyes of wisdom, to accept them as perfectly correct. In this respect, Nursi shares the idea of the Qur'ān that *sharr* is relative and that it therefore can change according to every single individual.[667]

Furthermore does Nursi emphasize that a lot of scientific research and experience has shown that *khayr* and beauty and perfection always dominates in the universe; sometimes completely, sometimes in its result. Every scientific study of the universe teaches such universal principles and perfect order about species and groups, that reason is unable to suggest anything more perfect. For instance, states Nursi further, all sciences such as anatomy in medicine, the solar system in cosmography, or any other science related to plants and animals show in each one of their universal

[664] Ibid.
[665] Ibid., 241.
[666] Ibid., 240-241.
[667] See chapter 2.

principles the order and miraculous Power and Wisdom of their Creator and points to the respective Qur'anic verse.[668]

6.5.3 The Nature of a World of Duality

Nursi talks about a world of duality or opposites, which is essentially different from the understanding of the 'theory of opposites' in Hinduism. While the Hindu tradition taught that goodness within a person becomes valuable only if it is in a struggle against evil (dharma being separated from adharma), and – in a broader sense – good in the universe is valuable only because it exists together with evil; Nursi does not share the idea that the value of things is dependent on the existence of *sharr*. He rather states that God will allow minor *ashrār* in order for greater *khayr* to happen. Everything God creates is inherently valuable and *khayr*, either intrinsically or from the point of view of its results.[669] The latter thereby sometimes requires minor *ashrār* to exist.

The fact that this world is necessarily a world of opposites makes Alan Watts state that in Hinduism there is no problem of evil. Evil is an integral part of God, just as good is, and stems from Him. Some Hindu myths also say that, sometimes, there might be evils which trouble humans because the gods, in order to free themselves from sin, have elected to inflict them on mortals and hence have transferred these troubles from themselves to mankind.[670] Nursi, on the other hand, makes a distinction between calamities and *ashrār* that occur through the misguidance and wrong choice of human beings. He does not call natural disasters '*sharr*' for he believes that they are the

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[668] Qur'ān, 32:7. Said Nursi. 'Hutbe-i Şāmiye' in *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, vol. II (own translation), 1965.
[669] *The Words*, 240.
[670] Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 141.

manifestation of the Divine's Glory and his glorious (*jalālī*) Names. And those minor *sharr* that accidentally exist in the universe are in fact called *sharr* only metaphorically, because they ultimately result in greater *khayr*.

Nursi shares the idea of al-Maturidī that the combination, confrontation and interpenetration of opposites in creation, such as *khayr* and *sharr*, pain and pleasure, light and darkness, heat and cold, beauty and ugliness and guidance and misguidance manifests God's Divine Wisdom and indicates God's Unity.[671] Good can be known, pleasure can be understood, light's importance can be grasped and the degrees of heat can be realized through the existence of their opposites. Thousands of varying degrees of beauty come into existence through ugliness.[672] The concept which states that the existence of evil is necessary for it adds to the variety in the world, Nursi would partly agree with. He would not call these opposites *sharr*, but rather 'units of measurement' that help human beings to understand, feel and maybe even enjoy the variety of degrees in this world.

Nursi does not look at this concept only from the perspective of this transitory realm. He believes that the eternal realm, in other words Paradise and Hell will be formed through the ultimate separation of these opposites, one pouring into Paradise, the other into Hell. He states that the floods of this continuously agitated universe are emptied into those two pools. [673] Emphasizing God's Divine Wisdom "which we do not yet know of"[674] in this context, he states that this Wisdom necessitates certain truths like

> the result of the examination and trial, truths of the Divine Names' manifestations, the originals of the embroideries in this transient world, the

[671] *The Rays Collection*, 252; *The Words*, 553.
[672] *The Rays Collection*, 252.
[673] Ibid.
[674] *The Words*, 553.

> aims and benefits of the duties of beings, the wages of the acts of service of creatures, the truths of the meanings the book of the universe stated, the sprouting of the seeds of innate disposition, the opening of a Supreme Court of Judgment, the displaying of the sample-like panoramas taken from this world, the rendering of the veil of apparent causes, and the surrendering of everything directly to the All-Glorious Creator.[675]

For those truths to come about, the purification of opposites will be necessary, because the world needs to be delivered from change, transience, transformation and extinction. Furthermore, causes of change and matters of conflict need to be separated out.[676] In short, Nursi believes that the eternal realm is a realm purified from all kinds of opposites.

6.5.4 The Principle of Plenitude

The 'Principle of Plenitude', named as such by Arthur Lovejoy, is defined by him in a wider sense than the concept introduced by Plato. While, according to Plato, the "universe is a *plenum formarum* in which the range of conceivable diversity of kinds of living things is exhaustively exemplified"[677], Lovejoy adds to the definition of this principle that no genuine potentiality of being can remain unfulfilled; the extent and abundance of the creation must be as great as the possibility of existence. Since the Source is perfect and inexhaustible, creation must commensurate with the productive capacity of that Source.[678] This theory implies that everything that is possible, that is, every contingent being (*mumkun*) that has a potentiality to exist **must** exist in actuality; it has no potency not to be realized.[679] That is, God is not free to create or not, and He is also not free to choose some possible kinds of

[675] Ibid., 553-554.
[676] Ibid., 554.
[677] *The Great Chain of Being*, 52.
[678] Ibid.
[679] Ibid., 55.

beings as the recipients of the privilege of existence, while denying it to others.[680] For this would be contrary to God's goodness.

As it has been indicated several times before, Nursi's ontology is based on the Divine Names of God. The fact that there is an infinite variety of creation is answered by Nursi with the help of two verses of the Qur'ān. One states that "Indeed, your Sustainer is Doer of what He will"[681] and the second states "Everyday in [new] splendour does He [shine]! (*kulla yawmin huwa fī sha'nin*)"[682] The former verse states that there is nothing God **must** do. He is absolutely free in doing how He wills and He is the one who decides what to create and what not. The latter verse points out that God is constantly in relation with His creation and creates everyday anew.

Interpreting these verses of the Qur'ān, Nursi reminds his readers of the astonishing, unceasing activity in the universe and of those fleeting beings that continuously change and are renewed. While Nursi points out that this important matter could not been solved by philosophy and reason, he attempts to give a twofold answer to it.[683] A social duty or natural function, enthusiastically performed by a person will mostly have two reasons to it: The first reason will be what Nursi calls the 'ultimate cause', in other words, the benefits, fruits and advantages which result from that duty. The second reason for the enthusiastic performance of that duty Nursi calls 'necessitating cause and reason', that is, a love, a desire, a pleasure which cause the duty to be performed. [684] For instance will the pleasure and longing that arises from appetite drive a person to eat several times every

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[680] Ibid., 54.
[681] Qur'ān, 11:107.
[682] Qur'ān, 55:29. This verse might also be translated as "Everyday [anew] does He [deal with] a matter".
[683] *Letters*, 113.
[684] Ibid.

day, and the 'ultimate cause' to it will be the nourishment of the body and perpetuation of life.[685]

In the same way, states Nursi, there are two vast instances of infinite wisdom for the endless activity in the universe and they are based on two sorts of Divine Names:

The first wisdom, according to Nursi, is that God's Most Beautiful Names (*al-asmā al-ḥusnā*) have incalculable sorts of manifestations. The variety in creation arises from the variety of the manifestations.[686] The Names require to be manifested in a permanent fashion. In other words, adds Nursi, they want to see and display the manifestations of their beauties in the mirrors of their embroideries. The 'Book of the Universe'[687] and missives of beings is renewed in every instant by those Names. Thus, the Divine Names display each letter to the study and gaze of the Most Pure and Holy Essence, the One signified, as well as to all conscious beings; they require to make each of the letters read.[688]

The second instance of wisdom is related to the point that all activity is a sort of pleasure.[689] Likewise, states Nursi, has the necessarily existent One (*wājib al-wujūd*) boundless sacred compassion and holy love, in a suitable

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[685] Ibid.
[686] Ibid., 114.
[687] The Book of Universe is an expression introduced by Nursi. It is one of the four great and universal instructors (*kullī mu'arrif*) which make known to man the Sustainer of all things. These are listed by Nursi as a) The mighty book of the universe, which is the macro cosmos; b) The prophet Muhammad, the greatest of God's signs in the book of the universe; c) The Qur'ān, the interpreter of the book of the universe and finally d) the conscience as man's conscious nature, being one the most important senses for it has the capacity to recognize God. For more information, see Said Nursi. *Letters*, 275-280; *The Words*, 243.
[688] *Letters*, 114.
[689] It might be useful to remember that according to Nursi, activity pertains to being (*wujūd*) and is pure *khayr* (*khayr al mahdh*) whereas idleness pertains to non-existence (*'adam*) and is pure *sharr* (*sharr al mahdh*).

way and form appropriate to His essential self-sufficiency and absolute riches and in a manner fitting for His absolute perfection.[690] Nursi continues:

> He has a boundless sacred ardour arising from that sacred compassion and holy love, and an endless holy joy arising from that sacred ardour, and, if one may say so, an infinite sacred pleasure arising from the sacred joy. And pertaining to that Merciful and Compassionate One, is, if the term is permissible, a boundless sacred gratification and infinite holy pride arising from the boundless feeling of compassion that springs from the sacred pleasure, sacred gratification and pride which arise from the gratitude and perfections of creatures which result from their abilities emerging from the potential to the actual and their developing within the activity of power. It is these which necessitate in boundless fashion, an endless activity.[691]

This quite lengthy paragraph of Nursi explains that God creates out of Divine Compassion and Love an infinite number of beings. Those attributes of God, such as His Compassion, Love, Ardour, Pleasure, Joy, Gratification, Holy Pride arise from the gratitude, activity and perfections of His creature. The gratitude and perfection of creatures, according to Nursi, is nothing else but the emerging of their abilities from the potential to the actual. And all of these attributes of God require an endless activity; and activity and change, as it has been defined elsewhere in the Risale, are nothing else but pure goodness (*khayr al mahdh*) and existence (*wujūd*), whereas calm, repose, idleness, monotony and arrest from action are forms of non-existence (*'adam*), and harm.[692] Nursi further claims that life finds its perfection through action and it manifests various actions through the manifestation of the Divine Names.[693]

Looking now further into Plato and Aristotle and later on Plotinus, one can see the major differences between their view and that of Nursi.

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[690] *Letters*, 114.
[691] Ibid.
[692] Ibid., 65.
[693] Ibid.

According to Aristotle's metaphysics, matter is an eternal element of reality that exists alongside form and God. Unlike Plato's Demiurge, Aristotle's God is not a active creator and does not know about the existence of other things. He does also not interact in any ways with other things. However, Aristotle was in agreement with Plato that matter is eternal, exists independently of God, and is a source of evil.[694] Aristotle's 'principle of continuity'[695] fused with the Platonistic doctrine of the necessary 'fullness' of the world.[696] Thus, the Platonic principle states that

> if there is between two given natural species theoretically possible intermediate type, that type must be realized – and so on *ad indefinitum*; otherwise, there would be gaps in the universe, the creation would not be as 'full' as it might be, and this would imply the inadmissible consequence that its Source or Author was not 'good'[697]

This great chain of being as introduced by Aristotle and later on developed by Plotinus and others ultimately stated that anything that reaches its own perfection cannot endure to remain in itself but generates and produces some other thing. This is not only valid for beings that have the power of choice but for all other beings as well. It follows, then, that the Most Perfect Being and the First Good will not remain shut up in itself as though it were jealous and impotent; thus something must be begotten of it.[698] Hence, according to Plotinus, it is by no means the will of the being who meted out to all their several lots that inequalities exist among them, for it was necessary according to the nature of things that it should be so.[699] In relation to Theodicy, then, the questions are answered in the following

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[694] 'A Finite God Reconsidered', 30.
[695] The 'Principle of Continuity' asserted that "things are said to be continuous whenever there is one and the same limit of both wherein they overlap and which they possess in common." *The Great Chain of Being*, 55.
[696] *The Great Chain of Being*, 55.
[697] Ibid., 58.
[698] Ibid., 62.
[699] Ibid., 64.

ways: While according to Plotinus, the only meaning that can seemingly be attached to the term 'evil' is the privation of good, he believes that those who find fault with the nature of the universe do not know the successive grade of beings.[700] For according to the doctrine above, everything that has reached its perfection must come into existence. In other words, since that coming into existence is outside of God's will, he cannot be blamed for the existence of evils. This dualistic approach is clearly rejected by Nursi. Furthermore, no creature has the right to claim more qualities than he has received for this would be comparable to asking for all animals to have horns just because some animals have them.[701] Additionally, it is better for an animal to be eaten by another than that it should have never existed at all. Thus they are needed to make up the set.[702]

Plotinus additionally states that generally speaking conflict is only a special case and a necessary implicate of diversity. "Difference carried to its maximum is opposition."[703] Opposition is the only way to produce otherness and therefore the World-Soul will produce things opposed to one another; this way perfection will be realized.[704]

The doctrine above eliminates God's constant activity, His Divine Will and Power in the universe, seeing Him merely as the first cause of everything. It goes so far as to stating that He reaches some sort of perfection (that is His essence changes and is therefore not absolute) and as a result of that perfection begets other things. Nursi's 'Divine Names Ontology'[705] which is

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[700] Ibid.
[701] Ibid., 65.
[702] Ibid.
[703] Ibid., 65-66.
[704] Ibid., 66.
[705] Another term borrowed from Izzet Çoban. 'Nursi on Theodicy: A New Theological Perspective' in *Classic Issues in Islamic Philosophy and Theology Today*, 2010, vol. 4, part 3, 116.

an ontology developed in the light of the Divine Names, does not cohere with these respective doctrines, as it has been shown above. For according to Nursi, the activity in the universe is based on an utter Knowledge, Wisdom and Perception.[706]

6.6 The Necessity of *sharr* (why does God create *sharr*?)

A very famous question is about the creation of *sharr*. Why does God create *sharr* and isn't the creation of *sharr*, *sharr*? Nursi states that the creation of *sharr* is not *sharr*, rather the 'acquisition' of *sharr*, in other words the desire for *sharr*, is *sharr*.[707] This is because when God creates something, that act looks to all consequences whereas the desire of man to do *sharr* looks to a particular result, for it is a particular relation.[708] Nursi provides two allegories to this problem. Rain for example, is a creation from God which has thousands of consequences to it. All of these consequences are positive, beneficial and good. If out of wrong choice, some people receive harm from rain and it becomes *sharr* for them, they cannot say that the creation of rain is not mercy, but *sharr*.[709] Likewise it is with fire. The creation of fire bears lots of benefits and good. But if some people are harmed by it because of their own misuse, for instance through thrusting their hands into it while cooking, they cannot say that the creation of fire is *sharr* for it was not created to burn them.[710] Thus, Nursi continues, "the lesser *sharr* is acceptable for the greater good." If one would abandon a minor *sharr* which will ultimately lead to a greater good, just in order to avoid that lesser *sharr*, a much greater *sharr* will have been perpetrated.[711] If there is for instance a

[706] *Letters*, 114.
[707] Ibid., 62. More about the acquisition of *sharr* in Chapter 7.
[708] Ibid.
[709] Ibid.
[710] Ibid.
[711] Ibid.; *The Rays Collection*, 582.

finger infected with gangrene, the doctor will decide to amputate that finger, which is a right and good decision, although it looks like it is *sharr*. But if it is not amputated, the whole hand will be amputated, which is a much greater *sharr*.[712]

Thus one might say that God does not create *sharr*. What God creates is always *khayr.* Thus, perfection, good (*khayr*) and beauty are essentially what are intended in the universe, states Nursi, and are in the majority.

> Relatively, defects, *ashrār*, and ugliness are in the minority, and are insignificant, secondary and trivial. Their Creator created them interspersed among good and perfection not for their own sakes, but as preliminaries and units of measurement for the appearance, or existence, of the relative truths of good and perfection.[713]

What are relative truths and what makes them so significant that partial *ashrār* are approved for their sakes? Nursi explains:

> Relative truths are the ties between beings and the threads with which their order is woven. They are the rays from which is reflected each unique being of the species in the universe. Relative truths are thousands of times more numerous that real truths, for if the real attributes of a person were sevenfold, the relative truths would be seven hundred.[714]

This has to do with the countless degrees or grades a human being has, within each of his attributes. These degrees, each one of them being a relative truth, exist and become manifest through the 'concept of opposites'.[715] For instance, states Nursi, if there were no ugliness and it would not permeate beauty, the existence of beauty with its infinite degrees would not be apparent.[716]

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[712] *The Letters*, 62.
[713] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 32.
[714] Ibid.
[715] Ibid., 33.
[716] Ibid.

6.6.1 Sharr as a Test and the creation of Paradise and Hell

As it has been stated in Chapter 2, there are verses in the Qur'ān that clearly state that *sharr* is a test by God[717]. While the term *sharr* in this verse has often rather been understood as a material loss or a severe or incurable illness or the rebellion of one's child; if taken in its Qur'anic semantic context, such attributes as disbelief, ungratefulness, aversion, etc., become a test. Thus, by creating Satan, making man accountable and sending prophets, God has opened up an arena of trial, examination, competition and striving so that the different levels of humankind will appear and will be separated.[718] Without striving and competition, the potentialities of humans would have remained equal. Thus, there would be no difference between the noblest of humanity and the lowest of the low. Thence, the creation of Satans and *ashrār* look to great and universal results and the fact that they are brought into existence is not *sharr*. If they become *sharr* in particular instances, this is because of their abuse and because of wrong choices of man and not of the Divine.[719]

Paradise and Hell, Nursi explains, are two fruits which point to eternity from the tree of creation and are two results of the chain of the universe. He compares them with two storage tanks, wherein the universe is ultimately poured with the appropriate matters.[720] There are according to Nursi, many reasons why God has willed the change and transformation of this world. He has accordingly combined *khayr* and *sharr*, and mixed harm with benefit and included ugliness in beauty[721], so that the different levels of humankind may clearly be defined. For this, He willed trial and competition and for there to

[717] Qur'ān, 21:35.
[718] *The Letters*, 63.
[719] Ibid.
[720] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 212.
[721] Ibid., 213.

be differences and change among men, so he mixed in bad people with good. At the time of the closure of the realm of trial, Nursi states, bad people will be confronted with the verse "get you apart… o you guilty ones"[722], and the good will be honored and graced with the verse: "so enter there to dwell forever!"[723] Thus, Nursi concludes, the universe will ultimately be purified and those matters that gave birth to *sharr* and harm will be separated on one side to become the fitments of Hell; whereas those matters that gave birth to good and benefit will become fitments of Paradise.[724]

6.6.2 Why Satan has been created

One might ask why an infinite good, merciful and compassionate God permits Satan, who is considered to be pure *sharr* (*sharr al mahdh*), to harass the people of belief and make lots of people go to Hell. The answer of Nursi is quite interesting. There are a lot of universal good purposes in the existence of Satan, Nursi explains, and human attainments and perfections.[725] According to Nursi, the existence of Satan is therefore *sharr* only in a minor way and without an external reality, compared to all the *khayr* that it entails.

Nursi believes that to understand the idea behind such a statement, it is important to have knowledge about the nature of humankind. Human nature is equipped with innumerous abilities[726], most of which he himself is not aware of. These abilities and potentialities need to develop. Thus Nursi

[722] Qur'ān, 36:59.
[723] Qur'ān, 39:73. Also see *Signs of Miraculousness*, 213.
[724] Ibid. Also see *The Words*, 553-554.
[725] *The Flashes Collection*, 104.
[726] Ibid.

explains how this development is interrelated with many other features. Figure 1 shows this relation.

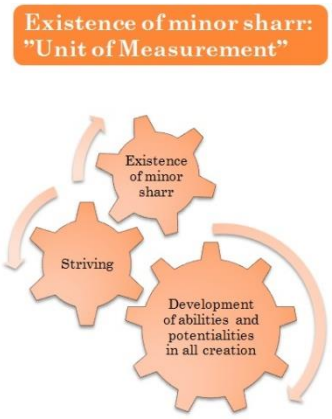

Figure 2: Existence of minor *sharr*

The development of these abilities and potentialities depends on action. The action of the mechanism of progress, states Nursi, is brought about through striving. And striving occurs through the existence of *sharr* spirits such as Satan and through the existence of harmful things.[727] If there would be no striving, no action, and no potentialities in human nature, man would be the same as an angel, his situation being constant. Thus there would be no differences between human beings.[728] Those minor evils which are dispersed among the good creation should not be seen as existing *ashrār* but as the cause for striving, motion and the development of innumerable potentialities, in other words, as a unit of measurement.

Furthermore, Nursi continues, it would be contrary to wisdom and justice to abandon a thousand instances of good so as to avoid one minor evil.[729] Now the question might be, that due to the seducement of Satan, a lot of people

[727] Ibid.
[728] Ibid.
[729] Ibid. More about wisdom will be explained in Chapter 7.

go astray and fall into disbelief. Hence, this cannot be called minor evil. Nursi states that importance and value look mostly to quality and only a little or not at all to quantity.[730] If there are ten 'perfect man' (*insān kāmil*)[731] who, through the struggle against the 'soul' (*nafs*)[732] and Satan, gain profit, honor, enlightenment and value for humankind; their gain can in no way be reduced to nothing by the people of misguidance causing harm to mankind.[733] Nursi compares these people of misguidance with vermin, meaning that they also might be harmful however they are God's creatures and as such, there are good purposes in their existence, despite of minor *sharr*. It might occur to minds that a comparison in form of quality-quantity, in other words, stating that ten qualitatively high men (from a pure humanitarian perspective) cannot be equal to thousand misguided men is a bold statement that goes against God's compassion and mercy to all humankind.

Nursi would share the view that piousness or straightness (*ṣāliḥāt*) means to make things better. Every single human being is asked to perform piousness and straightness (*'amal ṣāliḥ*), in other words to strive for the better. No one can say, "I don't care", because the sin and bad action of one man will

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[730] See also *The Letters*, 63.

[731] Nursi's definition of *insān kāmil* is as follows: "…to struggle to be a perfect human being through journeying with the heart and striving with the spirit and spiritual progress; that is to say, to be a true believer and total Muslim; that is, to gain not superficial belief, but the reality of belief and the reality of Islam; that is, to be directly the bondsman of the Glorious Creator of the Universe, in the universe and in one respect as the universe's representative, and to be His addressee, and friend, and beloved, and to be a mirror to Him; and through showing man to be on the best of patterns, it is to prove man's superiority to the angels. It is to fly through the lofty stations with the Shari'a's wings of faith and works, and to behold eternal happiness in this world, and even to enter upon it." Nursi, S. *The Letters*, 535. These sentences that describe the perfect man can be seen as a summary of Ibn Arabī's description of *al-insān al-kāmil*. To read more about it, see T. Izutsu. *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (London: University of California Press, 1983), pp. 218-262.

[732] *Nafs* refers to the *nafs al-ammārah*, the evil-commanding 'soul'.

[733] *The Flashes Collection*, 105.

harass or disturb the other; not as an individual, but in the name of humanity. In this respect, neither rewards, nor sins are personal. To give an example, one might say that mankind is a big pool and every single dirt that is thrown in it concerns all humanity. Thus, every human being is either the honor or the disgrace of the human family. Thus, ever single honorable act of one man will be appreciated by the whole human race and will be taken as much more valuable than the disgraceful actions of a thousand men. In this respect, one might understand Nursi's concept that quality is more important than quantity.

Contrary to the followers of Jesus who turned the 'unpleasant angel' (that is, Satan) into a grand, malevolent figure, into God's enemy, His antagonist or even His rival[734], Nursi assures that Satan is much weaker than many people assume. The reason is because *sharr*, as indicated before, is not a constructive but a destructive matter. And destruction is much easier than construction for the former pertains to non-existence (*'adam*) whereas the latter pertains to existence (*wujūd*). Nursi explains this in the light of the analogy of a building. It is well known, states Nursi, that one man can destroy in one day (nowadays, in a few minutes) a building made by twenty men in twenty days.[735] Similarly, a child is able to destroy hundreds of acres of woodland with one single match. Sometimes even, there is no need to do anything, in other words, simply not to fulfill a duty in order to cause big harm.

One might ask, how then, goodness can prevail if construction and repairing and good are much harder than *sharr*. This can be achieved through

[734] Knut Schäferdick, "Satan in the Post-Apostolic Fathers," s.v. " σατανας," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* 7 (1971), 163-65.
[735] *The Flashes Collection*, 103-104.

connecting (*intisāb*) with the Creator and asking for His help, for it says in the Qur'ān "And the end is [best] for the righteous".[736]

It has been said earlier that the Qur'ān and well as Nursi in his works define disbelief (*k-f-r*), going astray (*ḍ-l-l*), aversion (*ʻ-r-ḍ*) and transgression (*ṭ-gh-y*) (among others) to be *sharr*. The Qur'ān threatens the people of misguidance, complaining greatly about them mostly on account of one minor action, as though he had committed a thousand of crimes. To the apparent reason (*ʻaql al-ẓāhir*), this does not seem in accord with the Qur'ān's justice, apt eloquence and the congruence and moderation of its style.[737] Why would one possessor of weakness and poverty, although in misguidance, be threatened in such a comprehensive way? Furthermore, the Qur'ān states that the universe grows angry at the evil of the people of misguidance, and the universal elements become wrathful, and all beings furious. With the words "almost bursting in fury"[738] does the Qur'ān describe the anger of Hell at the people of unbelief in the Hereafter and the rage of the other beings at the unbelievers and people of misguidance.[739] Why do such unimportant actions and personal sins of insignificant men attract the anger of the universe in such a way? A similar question has been posed by fundamental option theorists[740] and other religious ethicists, scholars such as

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[736] Ibid., 104. See also Qur'ān, 7:128. Furthermore, Nursi refers to the Qur'ān, 23:97-98:"Oh my Sustainer, I seek refuge with You from the whisperings of the Evil Ones, and I seek refuge with You, my Sustainer, lest they should come near me."
[737] *The Flashes Collection*, 105.
[738] Qur'ān, 67:8.
[739] *The Flashes Collection*, 119.
[740] The fundamental option theory rejects a legalistic emphasis on correct action in everything one does and instead, focuses on the person's general orientation for or against God. In other words, as long as that fundamental orientation (for God) does not change, individual sins do not really matter. For more information, see James J. Warner (1998) *Karl Rahner and the Option of Grace in Freedom: A critical examination of Rahner's understanding of both fundamental option and virtue ethics and the link between them in the light of their classical antecedents and contemporary developments in moral theology,*

Thomas Aquinas and Augustine, and later Richard Niebuhr, Karl Rahner, Charles Curran, Franz Böckle and James Keenan. Should sin be taken seriously as a power or force deeply affecting the individual person or world; or should it **merely** be seen as an act without much influence, an act that can easily be eradicated?[741]

According to Nursi, one tiny action and small deed of Satan or of those who are the followers of Satan, can cause great destruction and violation of the rights of many creatures.[742] How is this possible? Previously it has been stated that mankind is comparable to a big pool and every action of an individual concerns all the other individuals. Nursi's illustration is that of a large merchant ship of a king. If one man working on that ship neglects a small duty, all the efforts of those employed on the ship and all the fruits of their labor will be lost and will go to nothing.[743] In this case, that man cannot say:"what significance can one tiny duty of mine have?" Thus, it will be rightful for the owner of that ship to complain about and threaten the rebellious man on account of all his subjects who are connected with the ship. And that man deserves to be punished, not for that insignificant action but for is dreadful results and not in the owner's name but in that of the rights of his subjects.[744]

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moral philosophy and fundamental theology. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Australian Catholic University.

[741] Ch. E. Curran. *The Catholic Moral Tradition Today: A Synthesis.* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 1999), 39. For more information, see D. F. Weaver. 'Taking Sin Seriously' in *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring, 2003), pp. 45-74.

[742] *The Flashes Collection*, 105.

[743] Ibid.

[744] Ibid., 106.

Similarly to this allegory, the people of disbelief (*kufr*), through their apparently insignificant mistakes and sins[745] transgress against the numerous creatures and nullify the result of their elevated duties. Through their denial and disbelief, they reject the manifestations of the Divine Names which are apparent in the mirrors of beings, exalting their value.[746] They insult those sacred Names and by degrading the value of all beings, greatly detract them.[747] Since all beings are dominical officials charged with elevated duties, the people of disbelief cast them down.[748] Thus, one is able to realize the wisdom that is behind the threats and punishment of the Monarch of Pre- and Post-Eternity[749] for man's being might be small but his guilt can be great and his sin grievous.[750]

How then should Divine Wisdom be reconciled with the existence of *ashrār* that result in punishment? Divine Wisdom, Nursi explains, necessitates the existence of relative truths and their appearance is possible only through the existence of *sharr*.[751] But *sharr* needs to be held within its limits to prevent aggression, which can only be achieved through intimidation. Intimidation, on the other hand, only truly affects the conscience if it is verified and actualized by the existence of external torment.[752] For conscience, similar to the intellect and imagination, is truly affected by intimidation only if it perceives from various indications the eternal, external reality of torment.[753]

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[745] the biggest one being the denial of the existence of God and through it the trivialization of the value of all other creation
[746] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 88.
[747] *The Flashes Collection*, 119.
[748] See also *The Letters*, 62.
[749] *The Flashes Collection*, 106.
[750] Ibid., 119.
[751] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 88-89.
[752] Ibid., 89.
[753] Ibid.

On the other hand, not only disbelievers, but also believers can sometimes be carried away by the Satan's baseless deceits and rebel against God; despite there being so many means guiding them to the straight path. The Mu'tazilites and some Kharijite sects asserted that someone who commits a grievous sin either becomes an unbeliever or is in a state between belief and unbelief[754]. Fundamental option theorists, as mentioned before, claimed that each individual makes a choice for or against God. After that choice has been made, single acts of that individual may or may not be in accord with his fundamental orientation in favor of God. Thus, these acts do not change the individual's basic orientation. Only if the individual's fundamental option changes against God does he fall out of a state of grace. In other words, a person can commit particular sins without losing a state of grace. What about acts such as adultery, or homosexuality? Nursi points out that it is not due to the lack of unbelief or weakness of belief, that believers are being deceived by the Satanic machinations.[755] Thus Nursi does not share the Mu'tazilites view and states that man can be thrown into serious peril through some insignificant matter pertaining to non-existence (*'adam*).[756] Furthermore, man's lower 'soul' (*nafs*) always listens to Satan. However, as has been discussed before, God with His nearness (*qurb*) to His creation, His names of Often-Forgiving (*ghafūr*) and All-Compassionate (*raḥīm*) are turned to the people of belief with a maximum manifestation. [757] Nursi is aware of the fact how import it is to understand the functionality of humankind and what her nature is in order to grasp the respective problem. He states that human beings tend to prefer an ounce of immediate pleasure to a ton of postponed, hidden pleasure; likewise does he abstain from an immediate

[754] *The Flashes Collection*, 110.
[755] Ibid., 108.
[756] Ibid.
[757] Ibid.

slap more than a year of torment in the future.[758] Especially if man's emotions are dominant, they do not heed the reasoning of the mind. Desire, illusion and emotion do not see the future and if the 'soul' (nafs) assists these emotions, the heart being the seed of belief, and the mind fall silent and are defeated.[759] Thus, Nursi concludes

> …committing grievous sins does not arise from lack of belief but from the defeat of the heart and mind through the predomination of emotion, desire, and illusion.[760]

Thus Nursi closes his treatise with the passage of the Qur'ān:

> Say: I seek refuge with the Lord and Cherisher of mankind, the Ruler of mankind, the God of mankind, from the mischief of the whisperer [of sharr], who withdraws [after his whisper] – [the same] who whispers into the hearts of mankind – among jinns and among men.[761]

6.6.3 Calamities and Inflicts

The existence of different calamities and tribulations are mostly considered to be *sharr* for it harms and inflicts man. The question then is asked why God allows this to happen and how this can be reconciled with His Mercy. It has been discussed in chapter 5 that God has Names of Beauty (*jamāl*) and also Names of Glory (*jalāl*). And it has also been said that all Names of God necessitate a reality to be reflected on and to be a mirror to these Names.[762]

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[758] Ibid., 111.
[759] Ibid.
[760] Ibid.
[761] Qur'ān, 114:1-6.
[762] Nursi is in line with Ibn 'Arabī, who claims that what is normally called 'imperfection' is in fact perfection, since it allows for the actualization of the various levels of existence and knowledge. In other words, would there be no imperfection like diminishment, decrease, lack; there would be no creation and Divine Reality would not disclose itself and God would be the Nonmanifest instead of the Manifest, which is absurd. (*The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, 294.)

Furthermore, Nursi argues, man mostly errors in reasoning by thinking that he, with his body and all his faculties and feelings, belongs to himself; that he is the owner of himself. However, God is the possessor (*mālik*) of everything and He holds sway over His possessions as He wishes, including human beings. Thus, the body of a human being is comparable to the garment of a craftsman. Just as the craftsman, in order to display his art and skill, may shorten and lengthen his garment and the model who is wearing it has no right to complain; similarly does God cloth man in a

> most artistically wrought being bejeweled with faculties like the eye, the ear, and the tongue. In order to display the embroideries of various of His Names, He makes man ill, afflicts him with tribulations, makes him hungry, fills him, makes him thirsty and makes him revolve in states like these.[763]

This is important for if life would pass monotonously with permanent health and well-being, it would become a deficient mirror. It would even reduce life's value and transform its pleasure into distress.[764] For permanent idleness, repose and well-being in time turns into boredom and so time passes quickly, man throws himself either into vice or into amusements. Nursi even states that such a man becomes hostile to his valuable life and wants to kill it and make it pass quickly.[765]

Nursi further explains the nature of life (*ḥayāt*) with the following words:

> In order to strengthen the essence of life and display the manifestation of His Names, He makes man journey in numerous such conditions … in any event, calm, repose, idleness, monotony and arrest from action are forms of non-existence (*'adam*) and harm. Action and change are existence (*wujūd*) and good. Life (*ḥayāt*) finds its perfection through action, it progresses by means of tribulations. Life manifests various actions through the manifestation of the Divine Names, it is purified, finds strength, it unfolds and expands, it

[763] *The Letters*, 64.
[764] *The Flashes Collection*, 280, *The Words*, 487.
[765] Ibid.

> becomes a mobile pen to write its own appointed course; it performs its duty, and acquires the right to receive reward in the hereafter.[766]

At another instance, Nursi describes grieves, calamities, difficulties and tribulations[767] that living creatures go through as a means to the renewal of the lights of existence and the purification of their lives, for through these grieves, calamities, difficulties and tribulations the darkness of non-existence draws distant[768]. It has to be pointed out that according to Nursi, it is any kind of *sharr* that is been drawn distant through grieves and calamities that happen to lives. In short, Nursi explains, since life displays the impresses of the Most Beautiful Names, everything that happens to it is good.[769]

Thus, a rich and idle man living in luxury will complain about the time never passing and will maybe search for activities such as amusements to make time pass. Or he will constantly strive for worldly ambitions and complain of not possessing this and that. On the other hand, a poor man living in hardship or someone stuck by disaster, or a worker, if he is sensible, will thank his Lord for being able to work. He will feel time passing very quickly and will ask for the evening not to approach so fast so that he can finish his work. He will believe that life also passes very quickly and thus will always believe that that hardship he is going through will also pass. In other words, Nursi emphasizes that while the pleasure and value of life lies in hardship and labor, ease and health make life bitter and make it wanted to be passed.[770]

Maybe it is for this reason that when a few young and ill men came to visit Said Nursi and ask him to pray for their well-being, he says that he would

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[766] *The Letters*, 65.
[767] *The Words*, 487.
[768] Ibid.
[769] Ibid.
[770] *The Flashes Collection*, 281.

pray for them, however he does not feel sorry for them and that he is not opposed to their illness. Nursi explains that he noticed that each of these ill youths had begun to think of the Hereafter to a greater degree than their contemporaries. They were lacking the drunkenness of youth. Thus Nursi would advice these youth to be patient until that illness awakens them completely and after it has performed its duty, God willing, the Compassionate Creator will restore them to health.[771]

6.6.4 Natural disasters

The Qur'ān does not count natural disasters among *ashrār*. Maybe it is because of this that Nursi prefers to use the term disaster or torment, rather than *sharr* when explaining some aspects about earthquakes. And it is for this reason that the heading for this section has become 'the existence of calamities and inflicts' rather than 'natural evils'. Nursi's interpretation for natural disasters such as earthquakes is that it is the result of sin and wrongdoings in society.[772] Why the whole country would shake because of the wrongdoings of some individuals, Nursi responds that general disasters result from the wrongdoings of the majority: most people participate in the actions of tyrannical individuals by supporting them either actively, or morally or in some other connection.[773] So why is it then that those innocent people who have nothing to do with such tyrannical actions are struck by those disasters and how does Divine Justice permit this? At this point Nursi refers to the Qur'anic verse "And fear tumult or oppression, which affects

[771] Ibid., 269.
[772] Nursi refers to the following Qur'ānic verse and interprets it: "When the earth is shaken to its [utmost] convulsion. And the earth throws up its burdens [from within], And man cries [distressed] "What is the matter with it?" On that Day will it declare its tidings. For that your Sustainer will have given it inspiration" Qur'ān, 99:1-5.
[773] *The Words*, 186.

not in particular [only] those of you who do wrong."[774] In other words, this verse confirms the assertion that disasters also inflict innocents. To explain this situation, Nursi reminds his reader again that this world is a place of trial and examination. Thus the reality remains veiled to foster competition and striving. If the innocent remained untouched by such disasters, the lowest of the low among humanity would submit just like the highest of the high and the door of spiritual and moral progress would be closed and the mystery of accountability spoiled.[775] The fact, so Nursi, that God's Wisdom requires a combined affliction of both guilty and innocent, the share of the innocent touched by such disasters is a manifestation of mercy within the wrath of that calamity. Their lost worldly and transient property becomes, according to Nursi, like alms and gains permanence, and the relatively little and temporary difficulty and torment is a form of martyrdom for them which also gains for their transient lives a permanent life.[776] Thus, the earthquake becomes for the innocent an instance of Divine mercy within the wrath. The importance of faith in the hereafter, as emphasized in Chapter 4, is essential to accept calamities and inflicts such as these, but also to be able to bear with and endure any other kind of *ashrār* arising from ill actions of ill minded people.

Another question that might come to mind is, since God is All-Just, All-Compassionate, All-Powerful and All-Wise; why does He not give particular punishments for particular wrongs instead of inflicting a mighty element? How is this reconcilable with the beauty of His mercy and His all-encompassing Power?[777] To answer this question, Nursi uses the sixth principle which states that to abandon a minor *sharr* can lead to greater

[774] Qur'ān, 8:25.
[775] *The Words*, 186.
[776] Ibid., 186-187.
[777] Ibid., 187.

sharr. For according to Nursi, all the elements are given numerous duties and not only one duty. Each one of these duties cause them to produce numerous different results.[778] Thus, states Nursi, if only one result of one of an element's duties is ugly, *sharr* or calamitous, all the other good results turn this one also into good. Nursi continues:

> If the element which is angry at man, is prevented from that duty, so that the single ugly result will not occur, then instances of good to the number of the good results will be abandoned, and so since not doing a necessary good is *sharr*, instances of *sharr* will be perpetrated to the number of the instances of good. A single *sharr* not occurring would be extremely ugly, contrary to wisdom, contrary to reality, and a fault. And power, wisdom and reality are free of fault.[779]

In other words, although from the perspective of man, such calamities and disasters that inflict human beings look very comprehensive, it should be known that in reality it is only one among other general duties of a mighty element and thus is perfect wisdom and justice; and mercy for the oppressed.[780]

How man should be responding to calamities and how he can turn this time of struggle and suffering into an eternal profit and bliss is explained by Nursi through worship and in particular through supplication.

6.7 *Sharr* and worship

Firstly it will be useful to understand the notion of worship defined by Nursi. According to him, worship means that the servant (*'abd*) sees his own faults,

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[778] Ibid.
[779] Ibid.
[780] Ibid. In the continuation of this treatise, Nursi criticizes with determination those who state that this kind of calamities are the result of a fault in the rock strata inside the earth, or even a chance event, natural and without purpose. He points out that even if it is a fault in the strata, it should not be forgotten that that fault also has a Causer and that it happens through Divine command and in accordance with His Wisdom.

impotence, and poverty and prostrates in love and wonderment before dominical perfection, Divine mercy, and the power of the Eternally Besought One.[781] Nursi emphasizes the long journey for a human being to develop and learn. It takes man twenty years to learn completely the conditions of life[782], but this is still not sufficient and he will go on learning until the very end of his life. It takes man to rise up to his feet one to two years and approximately fifteen years until he can distinguish between harm and benefit.[783] Thus, what distinguishes human beings from other creatures is that human being's innate duty is perfection through learning and to proclaim his worship to God through supplication.[784] That is to say, another meaning of worship and supplication is to know the answers to the following questions: "Through whose compassion is my life so wisely administered in this way? Through whose generosity am I so kindly raised? Through whose graciousness am I so delicately nurtured and ministered to?"[785] Hence, the purpose of worship is to turn minds towards the All-Wise Maker. It induces obedience and submission and establishes connection (*intisāb*)[786]. And maybe the most essential of all is that this order leads to the realization of the mystery of wisdom, and the wisdom is testified to by the perfect art in the universe.[787] But what might be the relationship between terms such as worship, wisdom, impotence and weakness and apparent *ashrār*? To explain this, Nursi introduces two terms, one of which he calls 'positive worship' (*muthbat 'ibādah*) and the other negative worship (*manfī 'ibādah*).[788] The former is the well-known type consisting of supplications and five daily

[781] Ibid., 52.
[782] Ibid., 324.
[783] Ibid.
[784] Ibid.
[785] Ibid.
[786] See Chapter 5.
[787] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 162.
[788] *The Flashes Collection*, 23-24; 267.

prayers. The latter are illnesses and calamities. These, Nursi calls negative forms of worship for they make man realize his impotence and weakness. Thus, with his impotence and weakness, man knocks the doors of the All-Compassionate Creator and takes refuge in Him. This kind of worship, in other words, remembrance of God in times of illness and calamities is sincere and without hypocrisy.[789] Based on narrations, Nursi claims that a life passed in illness is counted as worship for the believer, on condition he does not complain about God.[790]

Nursi establishes a relation between worship and *sharr* and/or calamities based on the Divine Names. In fact, He wills human beings to turn to Him in any situation. For the manifestation of His Names, with His infinite Power and unlimited Mercy, He has created man with an infinite impotence and unlimited want inherent in his nature.[791] Human beings are thus capable of receiving unlimited varieties of pain, as well as infinite varieties of pleasure. The degrees of pain and pleasure in human beings have no limit. His Beauteous Names are manifested in good health and all kinds of different pleasures whereas His Glorious Names become visible in illness, pain and disasters and are put in motion. For instance does hunger manifest the Name of Sustainer (*razzaq*), illness the Name of Healer (*shāfī*), and so on.

Thus, while matters like good health, well-being and pleasures are supposed to cause man to offer thanks and turn towards his Creator, likewise, matters such as misfortune, illness and pain are supposed to make humans aware of their weakness, impotence and poverty and thus turn towards their Creator

[789] Ibid., 267.
[790] Ibid. Narrated from al-Albani, *Sahihu Jami'i'-Saghir* 256.
[791] Ibid., 28.

and seek help in the all-Powerful and becomes himself an ode to the Glory of God, fulfilling the duties of his nature.[792]

Thus one might say that according to Nursi, impotence, weakness and poverty that is innate in human nature requires the existence of *ashrār*. For someone who is constantly well, has absolutely no worries and lives his life in idleness and monotony develops in time a state of self-reliance that drives him towards arrogance and egotism. He does barely remember that he is a created being with responsibilities, who has certain duties to fulfill towards his Creator. Thus, one might say that in order to realize one's weakness, poverty and impotence and with this awareness turn towards one's Creator in worship; and through this kind of turning, attract His Compassion and Mercy, the existence of *sharr* and calamities is necessary. And in this turning towards the Creator in times of hardship and difficulty, the meaning of the following Qur'anic verse seems to be hidden:

> So, verily, with every difficulty there is relief. Verily, with every difficulty there is relief. Therefore, when you are free [from your immediate task], still labor hard, and to your Lord turn [all] your attention.[793]

6.8 Final Comparisons between previous Theodicies and the Theodicy of Nursi

Although there seem to be a lot of similarities in Ibn Sīnā's theodicy with that of Nursi, the fact that Ibn Sīnā does not base his arguments on Divine Names makes Nursi's approach original. For instance does Ibn Sīnā define the lack of action (*af'al*) as evil, which Nursi would agree with, for according to Nursi, any kind of idleness and monotony pertains to non-existence and is

[792] Ibid.
[793] Qur'ān, 94:5-8.

therefore *sharr*.[794] The notion of accidental evil (*sharr bil-'arad*) as introduced by Ibn Sīnā is yet another similar aspect to that of Nursi, who stated that the creation of *sharr* is not *sharr*, rather the 'acquisition' of *sharr*, in other words the desire for *sharr*, is *sharr*.[795] On the other hand, Nursi would deny the notion of non-existing accidental evil of Ibn Sīnā and would agree with Inati's criticism that the privation of tertiary perfection[796] is not evil with respect to that species, but merely with respect to what that species could have additionally had.[797] Even that would not be considered by Nursi as *sharr* for since God is the true owner of everything, He is free in giving each creature the amount of features He wishes. For every single feature given to a being is already a plus, compared to the fact that that being did not exist and was given everything from *ex nihilo*.

Ibn Sīnā's further argued that God does not will evil as such; He is aware of its presence but He does not mind it because he knows it is necessary. Inati criticized this argument by saying that God could have made humans such that they eat only earth and drink only water and that they take all necessary vitamins, minerals and proteins from these two without having to kill other beings and produce evil in order to continue with living. Nursi's answer to this criticism would be that it completely ignores the purpose of life and the purpose of human beings' creation. While the former purpose has been explained in chapter 5 and partly in this current Chapter, the latter purpose, namely human being's creation will be elaborated upon in the next Chapter.

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[794] *The Words*, 487.
[795] *The Letters*, 62. More about the acquisition of *sharr* in chapter 7.
[796] Tertiary perfection is not necessary for that being's well-being or for the whole species.
[797] *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sina's Theodicy*, 97.

Nursi has been influenced by Ghazālī, and this is manifest in his works. For instance Ghazālī defines evil (*qabīḥ*) as whatever is repugnant or improper to an end (the end of the agent). Nursi also emphasizes greatly and in many instances the notion that minor *ashrār* can exist to bring about universal good which ultimately is also good to the agent as part of that universe. Furthermore, Nursi, like Ghazālī, points out that God is the possessor of everything and thus is free in realizing His will as He wishes. Nursi explains this idea under the Name of *Mālik al Mulk*. However, to stress this point again, Nursi's Divine Names Theology adds a completely new perspective of looking at the issue at hand. The differences between the scholars mentioned above and Nursi on so called 'moral evil' will be discussed in the next chapter.

Contrary to some philosophers such as Razi, who stated that in this world evil surmounts goodness, Nursi assures his reader that creation is based on *khayr* and that *sharr* has merely a dependent existence (*tāba´,* written in the *Risale* as *'tebeī'*)[798]. Nursi's explanation, however, is quite different from that of Maimonides and Ibn Sīnā. Nursi states that *khayr* is universal (*kullī*) whereas *sharr* is minor (*juz'ī*).[799] For each species (*naw'*) in this world, a science has emerged and still emerges. Science is composed of universal principles (*qawā'id kullī*) (principles that are generally accepted). These general or universal principles are discoverers of the beauty of order in each species.[800] Thus all sciences are loyal testifiers of orderly beauty.[801] Nursi

[798] The word *tāba´* means that the existence of something is dependent of the existence of another.
[799] *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, Vol. 2, 1995. (own translation).
[800] For this beauty in order, one might cite the following verse: "He Who created the seven heavens one above another: No want of proportion will you see in the creation of God Most Gracious. So turn your vision again: Do you see any flaw? Again turn your vision a second time: your vision will come back to you dull and discomfited, in a state worn out." (Qur'ān, 67:3-4)
[801] *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, Vol. 2, 1995.

further states that universality is an evidence of order. For instance is it universally accepted that there is gravity on earth; that water boils at one hundred degree Celsius, etc; for if there is no order in something, a theory cannot universally come into existence. These testifiers (sciences) are purified with induction, through the eye of wisdom.[802] In other words, it is for instance universally accepted that every living individual dies. Man has no ability to see every single individual in the past and the future. But from those few examples, one is able to derive that all living beings will die. This fact has no exemptions[803]. But sometimes order is not visible because its circle is wider than the scope of vision; because it cannot be imagined and comprehended, the unique order cannot display itself. [804]

Thus, Nursi states, all the sciences testify and all wise visions derived from induction affirm that in creation the main goal and real purpose and absolute dominant is beauty (*ḥusn*), goodness (*khayr*), justice (*ḥaqq*) and perfection (*kamāl*). On the other hand, *sharr* and ugliness (*qubh*) and superstition (*bāṭil*) are dependent (*tebeî*), discomfited (*maghlūba*), and dilapidated (*maghmūra*). Even if they descend upon, it is temporal.[805]

6.9 Conclusion

This chapter has covered several topics that hopefully have shed light to the problem at hand, namely the nature and existence of *sharr*; not the moral aspect of it (such as free will and inclination) but the aspect of so called 'natural evils'. The terms 'evil' as well as 'natural evil' has been avoided in this chapter and will be avoided in the next as well. This is due to the

[802] Ibid., 1995.
[803] The Qur'ān also verifies this fact in [3:185]: "Every soul shall have a taste of death".
[804] *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, Vol. 2, 1995.
[805] Ibid., 1995.

different meanings that these two terms entail. The implication of evil as has been used in history covered a whole range from disasters, calamities, disabilities, imperfections, wars, tortures, all kinds of cruelties, until, ultimately, death. From among these, mainly calamities and disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis and others have been called 'natural evils'. The semantic analysis of sharr in the Qur'ān, covered in chapter 2, has shown that the meaning of *sharr* is quite different. Accordingly, almost none of the above can be named as *sharr*[806]. This chapter has shown that Nursi's definition of the term is in line with that of the Qur'ān. While the Qur'ān mainly describes religious, moral or ethical deficits such as disbelief, idolatry, parsimony, violation of covenants, aversion from God, slander and/or transgression among *ashrār*, Nursi additionally states that there exists minor *sharr* as a 'unit of measurement'; or to be a means to a good end; or to avoid greater *ashrār*; but most important of all: to manifest the Glory of the Divine.

Twelve metaphysical principles have been derived from the Risale that are like summaries of Nursi's understanding of *sharr*. Most of these principles are ontological. These principles have served as cornerstones throughout this chapter and will continue to do so in the coming chapter. In summary, the first principle stated that existence requires an existing cause whereas non-existence depends upon non-existential things. The second principle asserted that there is no absolute non-existence in the universe. According to the third principle, existence was pure good (*wujūd khayr al-mahdh*) whereas non-existence was pure *sharr* (*'adam sharr al-mahdh*). The fourth principle said that *sharr* is non-existential and arose from non-existence. Following this, the fifth principle taught that there is no absolute *sharr* in the

[806] For the semantic analysis of the term *sharr* in the Qur'ān, see chapter 2.

universe. The sixth principle stated that the abandonment of a minor *sharr* could lead to greater *sharr* (higher good defense). The seventh principle asserted that *sharr* has some sort of minor existence or external/relative reality. According to the eighth principle, *ashrār* were the manifestation of Divine Glory – they originated directly from God, however they were not caused by Him. The ninth principle said that *akhyār* (pl. *khayr*) were the manifestation of Divine Beauty – they originated directly from God and were caused by Him. According to the tenth principle, the creation of *sharr* was not *sharr* but the desire for *sharr* was *sharr*. The eleventh principle stated that free will had no actual existence and lastly, the twelfth principle asserted that destruction pertained to non-existence and was easy to perform.

This chapter has further emphasized that Nursi's originality lies in explaining theodicy in the light of the Divine Names and Attributes of God. In this respect it has been stated that *sharr* originates from God (in being the manifestation of Divine Glory), but is not caused by God. The manifestation of Divine Glory, on the other hand, should be understood in relation with the lack of capacity, or ability of creation.[807] There is no contradiction according to Nursi, in stating that *sharr* originates from God and at the same time that whatever originates from God is good. For according to Nursi, underneath every veil of apparent ugliness, there is hidden most shining instances of beauty and order.[808]

Furthermore, in the light of the principles of '*privatio boni*', 'the best of all possible worlds', 'the nature of a world of duality' and 'plenitude', the question of whether *sharr* is an illusion or reality has been discussed.

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[807] *The Words*, 478.
[808] Ibid., 240.

Accordingly, Nursi did not share the idea of Augustine that evil is a defective good and the lack of goodness and therefore cannot exist apart from it. He upheld the idea of Ghazālī and later also Leibniz of 'the best of all possible worlds', in the light of the Qur'ān, 32:7. He emphasized the beauty in every creation, either essentially or in regard to its results and thus advised his reader to look at every event with the eye of wisdom in order to see its perfection. Regarding the principle of a world of dualities, Nursi shared the idea of al-Maturidī that the opposites in this world manifest God's Divine Wisdom and indicate God's Unity. But while those opposites that add to the variety in this world are generally called evil, Nursi called them 'unit of measurement'; a means to help human beings understand and enjoy the variety of degrees in creation.

Dilley critically remarked that what happens to matter has never been important for traditional theodicies. He furthermore asked whether theodicies or defenses of God have in mind any specific outcome as to the natural world.[809] In Nursi's theology and theodicy, the change, tribulations, and different states matter and creation goes through it due to the many different Divine Names and Attributes they manifest. Hunger in the world points to the Divine Sustainer; illness to the Divine Healer, and so on. In this regard, the transformation in matter is, according to Nursi, a very important duty of creation. There will be, however, a place that is pure of any kind of change and transformation, a realm that is free from any kind of opposites; that is, according to Nursi, the hereafter.

Nursi also explained the principle of plenitude, quite differently from Lovejoy, though. Lovejoy pointed out that any potentiality of being must be fulfilled[810]

[809] F. B. Dilley. 'A Finite God Reconsidered', 36.
[810] *The Great Chain of Being*, 55.

– which implied that God is not free to create or not, for this would be contrary to God's goodness; hence comes the variety in this world. Nursi, on the other hand, stated that firstly, the variety in creation stemmed from God's Most Beautiful Names that have incalculable manifestations. Secondly, since all activity is a sort of pleasure, Nursi talked about sacred ardour, sacred compassion, holy love, holy joy, sacred pleasure, sacred gratification that could be attributed to the Creator. Nursi continues that these attributes arise from the gratitude and perfections of creatures, resulting from their abilities emerging from the potential to the actual and their developing within the activity of power.

Nursi additionally elaborated on the question of the necessity of *sharr* and the reason why it is created. Stating that the creation of *sharr* is not *sharr*, rather the acquisition of it is *sharr*, he continued with his explanation with different approaches. He looked at this issue firstly from the perspective that lesser *sharr* is acceptable for greater good. It might be useful at this point to remember Hick's statement: For a reconciliation to take place, one must be able to show that either evil is to be justly deserved or that it is a means to a good end.[811] Secondly, Nursi discussed this issue as a notion of a test and examination, a competition and striving that will ultimately lead to the emergence of the different levels of humankind and their separation from each other. Thirdly, Nursi said that the creation of Satan serves the development of innumerable potentialities of humankind. Thus, according to him, Satan's creation is merely a minor *sharr* in comparison to all the *khayr* that it entails.

Nursi further provided answers to the following questions: Why does God allow lots of people to go astray because of Satan? Why is a misguided man,

[811] *Evil and the God of Love*, p. 23.

being a possessor of weakness and poverty as human being, threatened so drastically in the Qur'ān? In relation to the Qur'ānic verse 67:8, Nursi further discussed the question: Why do such unimportant actions and personal sins of insignificant men attract the anger of the universe? How should Divine Wisdom be reconciled with the existence of *ashrār* that result in punishment?

Another important statement made by Nursi was that the "commitment of grievous sins do not arise from lack of belief but from the defeat of the heart and mind through the predomination of emotion, desire, and illusion."[812] With this statement Nursi proclaimed his opposition to the Mu'tazilite view that the committer of a grievous sin becomes an unbeliever.

In this chapter, Nursi has also touched on calamities and inflicts as well as natural disasters. He has given different reasons of how their existence can be reconciled with God's mercy and has also asserted that these do actually not fall into the category of *ashrār*. What seems to be quite original about Nursi's view is his statement that through grief, calamities, difficulties and tribulations the darkness of non-existence draws distant.[813]

Nursi finally suggested a form of response to calamities and inflicts, and added that the time of struggle and suffering can be turned into an eternal profit and bliss. This could be achieved, according to Nursi, through worship. This anthropological approach of Nursi aims to make human beings aware of their impotence, poverty and weakness; through that awareness and their proclamation to the Creator, Nursi aims to show them their richness and

[812] *The Flashes Collection*, 111.
[813] *The Words*, 487.

power.[814] In relation to worship, Nursi has further provided two new terms into the discourse, one being 'positve worship', and the other 'negative worship'.

The next chapter will discuss Nursi's perspective on so called 'moral evil', and in relation with it the notion of free will, the 'divine Trust', the 'soul' and arrogance and Adam's Fall. Nursi will try to give answers to the questions of who the creator of *sharr* is and what the difference is between the creation of *sharr* and the inclination to do *sharr*. He will furthermore elaborate on the question of ethical responsibility for the existence of *sharr* – man or God?

[814] Ibid., 493. Nursi, relying on the Qur'ān, 91:9 states that man's perfection lies in his awareness of imperfection, his power in his awareness of impotence and his wealth in his awareness of poverty.

7 The Moral Aspect of sharr and Existential Theodicy

7.1 Introduction

This current chapter will discuss the 'moral aspect' of *sharr* from Nursi's perspective; that is, any kind of *sharr* that man chooses to commit with his free will. This study has shown that from a Qur'anic perspective, there is in fact no other aspect of *sharr*, other than 'moral *sharr*'. While natural calamities and disasters did not fall under the Qur'anic description of it, any kind of misbehavior by man against God's will has been named *sharr*. Chapter 6 has shown, how far Nursi's description of the so called 'natural aspect' of *sharr* is in line with the Qur'anic view of this term. This chapter will disclose Nursi's coherence with the Qur'anic 'moral aspect' of the term.

In relation with the notion of free will, there are several more aspects that need consideration. Nursi discusses them in different chapters under different topics; however, a relation between them will be made and seems to be appropriate. Issues such as free will (*juzī ikhtiyār*) and predestination (*qadar*) have been discussed already in earlier chapters, albeit by different scholars. This section therefore aims to put Nursi into a discourse with those who came before him.

The current chapter will seek to find answers in Nursi's works to the following questions: Who or what is the cause of an 'evil will' and who created it? How did sin enter into the perfect paradisal state of Adam and his wife? How should divine determining be understood? Does God create some with the intention to punish them and others with the intention to save them? Why did God choose to create a being who He knew would freely sin?

Nursi tries to approach the issue of the moral aspect of *sharr* from different angles. First of all, Nursi introduces the different faculties of humankind. He discusses this issue in relation with the 'straight path' (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*) in the opening chapter of the Qur'ān, the *fatiḥa*.[815] Nursi asserts that the transgression of these faculties, be it their excess or their deficiency, may lead to the separation from that straight path and hence may lead to *sharr*. This will be one illustration for why man is capable of committing *sharr* and what the guideline is for him to avoid it. This thesis, or so to say, scheme of Nursi can be seen as some sort of a template that can be employed in different areas.

Secondly, in connection with the moral aspect of *sharr*, Nursi discusses the creation of Adam and his Fall. For the verses in the Qur'ān that are related to the creation of the first human being start with a conversation of God with the angels, who seem to question God's decision. The question discussed here is thus, how man, who is capable of committing *sharr* and shedding blood can be given the vicegerency on earth? Additionally, why Adam was expelled from Paradise? The discussion centers on whether Adam was the first human being committing *sharr* by being disobedient to God, eating from that forbidden fruit. Another question is whether Adam was the first conscious being or whether there existed other beings before the creation of the first human being? These questions aim to analyze whether Adam and/or his wife can be blamed for the existence of so-called evil on earth and the Qur'anic narrative on why God chose to create a human being capable of committing *sharr*.

[815] Al-Fatiḥa (the Opener) is the first (opening) chapter of the Qur'ān and is a prayer for God's guidance, stressing His Lordship and Mercy. The respective verse is 'guide us to the straight path'.

Thirdly, Nursi brings into the discourse the notion of the '*ana*'[816] and 'inordinate self-esteem' (*anā'iyyah*) in relation with *sharr*. Nursi illustrates that the latter, that is the inordinate self-esteem, elucidates through the misuse of the '*ana*' and results in *sharr* and *'adam*. This aspect is of particular importance for it bears a point made by Nursi that is arguably original and – so to say – unique: namely, the link between '*ana*', and, if misused, its encouragement for all kinds of *ashrār*.

Fourthly, Nursi deals with the nature of divine determining (*qadar*) and free will (*juzʾī irāda*). He discusses free will's capability of choosing *sharr*; the nature of it, why it has been given to man and what its function is or should be. Nursi links this with the Qur'anic verse "Whatever good (*ḥasana*) happens to you is from God, but whatever evil (*sayyiatin*) befalls you is from yourself".[817] He further analyses the famous question around the possibility to reconcile divine determining with free will. Through his discussion on the nature of free will, Nursi introduces a very important and arguably unique point that is capable to serve as another main cornerstone of this discourse: namely, the link between free choice and 'relative matters' (*'amr ītibārī*), and through this link the ascription of that choice to man.

Finally in this chapter, after having shown through Nursi's works that *sharr*, in fact, is committed through the mal inclinations of human beings, Nursi offers some pragmatic solution to apparent *ashrār*; that is, to inflictions that are mostly seen by the superficial mind as *sharr*.

[816] The word *ana* has been translated by Şükran Vahide as the 'I'. In other works, it is also translated as the 'ego'. In this study, we prefer to use the original word *ana* as it is, without translating it; instead descriptions and definitions shall be provided to the reader.
[817] Qur'ān, 4:79.

7.2 Faculties of Humankind and the Ability to do sharr

The following faculties of humankind, that Nursi will talk about, have been expressed before by al-Ghazālī in his *Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb*. While Ghazālī categorizes these under the self or soul (*nafs*)[818], Nursi states that these faculties have been given to man so that his spirit (*rūḥ*) can live in a body that is constantly changing, needy and exposed to dangers. These three faculties are classified as instinct (*quwwa al-shahawiyya*), for self-interest; intellect (*quwwa al-aqliyya*), to distinguish the useful from that which is harmful and to distinguish *khayr* from *sharr*; and aggression (*quwwa al-ghaḍabiyya*), to fend off the harmful.[819]

These strengths are restricted by religion, states Nursi, but there is no restriction in the nature of human beings because God's wisdom necessitated that humanity should achieve perfection through the mystery of competition[820]. Thus, in case of the absence of any innate limitation each of these propulsions are examined by Nursi in three categories: deficiency (*tafrīṭ*), optimal (*wasaṭ*) and excess (*ifrāṭ*). With this categorization, Nursi aims to guide his readers to the understanding of what 'the right course' (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustakīm*) might mean; whereas al-Ghazālī, by introducing these faculties, is more concerned with the purification of the heart on its journey in reaching God. Ultimately, both agree on the importance of the preservation and care of the body, since the body is the kingdom of the soul (*nafs*)[821] and the house of the spirit (*rūḥ*).[822]

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[818] Al-Ghazālī. *Marvels of the Heart (Kitāb sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb)*, trans. Walter James Skellie (Louisville: Fons Vitae, 2010), 7.
[819] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 29.Nursi borrowed this concept from al-Ghazālī and applied it to his exegesis of sūrat al-Fātiḥa. For more information, see *The Marvels of the Heart*, especially p. 14ff.
[820] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 29.
[821] *Marvels of the Heart*, 18.

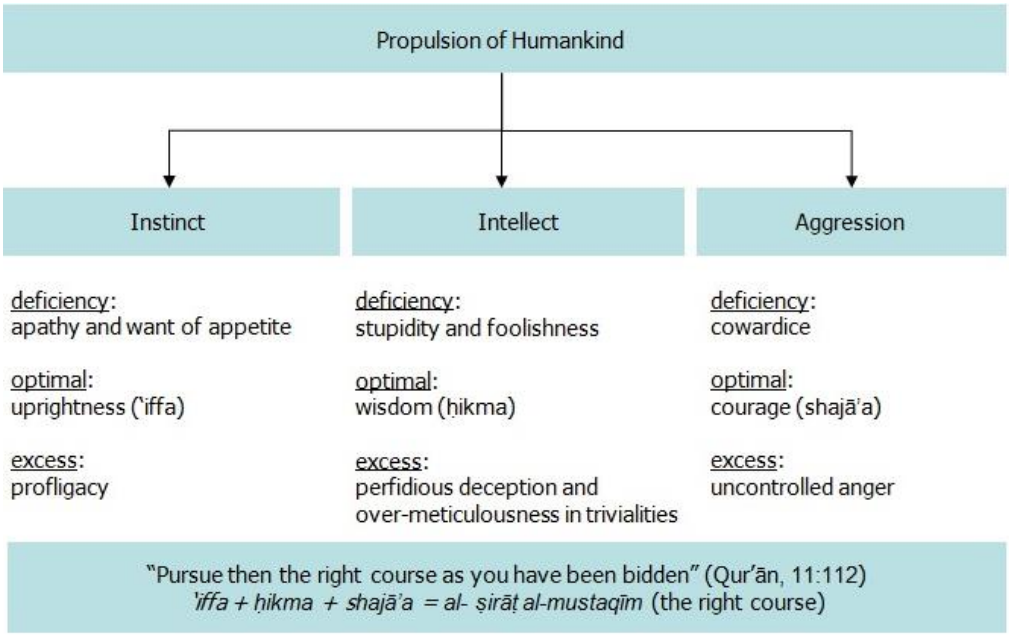

Figure 3: The Faculties of Humankind

7.2.1 Instinct (shahwa)

Nursi explains that this disposition is to satisfy the basic needs for livelihood. Examples for this level of motivation are eating, drinking, sleeping, talking, and sexual satisfaction and so on.[823] If, in exertion, man understates this strength, the result will be apathy, the will for nothing (*khumud*). On the other hand, Nursi continues, if man enters excess, profligacy, in other words, careless wastefulness and shameless and immoral behavior occurs (*fujūr*).[824]

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[822] *The Words*, 535.
[823] Walter James Skellie notes that this idea corresponds somewhat to the Platonic thought of the rational and irrational souls. The rational soul, according to Plato, was created by God and placed in the head, but the irrational part was the creation of the *demiourgoi*. Its nobler part is anger, or the spirited, irascible nature (*thymos*), and has its seat in the heart or thorax; while the base part, which is appetence, or the concupiscible nature (*epithymia*), has its seat in the abdominal cavity. See *Marvels of the Heart*, xix; Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. R. G. Bury (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1929).
[824] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 30.

But the optimal is explained by Nursi as uprightness (*'iffa*). At this level, there is desire for everything which is included in the ethical-religious frame and there is listlessness for everything which is out of this frame.[825] Physical and mental harms for oneself and for others occur, if these defined borders are overstepped towards both poles. Although the aim of this study is not a comparison between Christianity and Islam, this is perhaps comparable to Augustine's statement. Augustine explained that lust becomes evil or wrong if the human soul perversely delights in sensual pleasures, thereby neglecting his self-control, which would be in line with the state of *fujūr* mentioned by Nursi. Augustine further explained that that self control leads to spiritual realities far more beautiful, with a loveliness which cannot fade[826]; comparable maybe to the state of *'iffa* in Nursi's explanation. It might also be useful to remember at this point Eliaçık's interpretation of chapter 113, verse 4[827] in Chapter 2 of this study; for according to Eliaçık, the meaning of this verse was to seek refuge by the Lord from the *sharr* of becoming a slave of provoked desires and lustful addictions, and from temptations and all kinds of blowing that evoke these feelings.[828] This sounds very much like a description of Nursi's definition of *fujūr*.

7.2.2 Intellect ('aql)

This ability is, according to Nursi, to distinguish the beneficial from harm, to accept the good and to dissociate from and deny what is *sharr*. The deficiency of the power of intellect is thus, Nursi continues, stupidity and foolishness (*ghabāwa*). Therefore man lives in a state of primitiveness. The

[825] Ibid.
[826] *The Problem of Evil – A Reader*, 61.
[827] "… and the sharr of those who blow into knotted reeds"
[828] *Yaşayan Kur'an*, 445.

excess of the intellect leads to deception and over-meticulousness in trivialities (*jarbaza*).[829]

The middle way is explained by Nursi as being wisdom (*ḥikma*).[830] Nursi shows that this power should be employed, for instance in the question of the creation of actions. In this respect, states Nursi, the view of the Jabriyya can be categorized as excess (*ifrāṭ*), for it completely deprives man from it. The Mu'tazila, on the other hand, can be categorized according to Nursi as deficient (*tafrīṭ*), in the sense that it attributes all effect to man. Nursi thus claims that the *ahl al-sunna* is the optimal (*wasaṭ*). This is because according to Nursi, this school positions itself in between the other two and gives the beginning of the actions to free will (*juz'ī irada*) and the end of it to divine will (*kullī irada*).[831]

7.2.3 Aggression (ghaḍab)

Nursi states that this faculty is given by God to repulse harmful and destructive things. The state of minimal or no aggression, in other words the deficiency of it, is cowardice (*jabāna*). In this state, man fears what is not to be feared of and enters delusive imagining. The excess of it, Nursi continues, is uncontrolled anger (*tahawwur*), which is the progenitor of despotism, domination and tyranny.[832] Hence, this level bears all kinds of violence and delinquency.

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[829] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 29.
[830] Ibid. Nursi links this with the Qur'anic verse: "He who has been given wisdom, has been given great good" [2:269].
[831] Ibid., 30.
[832] Ibid.

The optimal state of this compulsion is called by Nursi courage (*shaja'a*); the meaning of it is giving freely of oneself with love and eagerness for the upholding of the Word of Divine Unity.[833]

Thus, Nursi concludes that the six extremes are tyranny and the three middle ways are justice and the Straight Path mentioned in the Qur'ān.[834] This thesis of Nursi is by no means an objective one. It is the subjective view and interpretation of him regarding the meaning of the right course (*ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*), mentioned in the opening chapter of the Qur'ān, the *al-Fātiḥa*. Nevertheless, it might provide a guideline for the functioning of the innate nature of man and it might also provide an indication of what man is actually asking God's help for.

Nursi has stated previously the fact that these compulsions or powers in human beings, as introduced above, are of unlimited nature. This was supported by Maimonides' statement that evil arises through imperfect human institutions of the state. The result was tyranny and war. Another kind of evil introduced by Maimonides was man's excess in desire and asking for things he does not really need in order to live a useful life. This kind of evil inflicts man himself.[835]

This shows that perfection through competition is intended by God. It might well be stated that the mystery of competition lies in the right conduct of free will. This faculty, namely free will, is employed in every little aspect of man's life, for he is in a constant state of having to make decisions of some sort. In the following, it shall be discussed, why God decided to create a human being with free choice and what the importance of this faculty is for

[833] Ibid.
[834] Qur'ān, 1:6; 11:112.
[835] *Moses Maimonides*, 120; *A Maimonides Reader*, 305.

human beings, in his relation with God and other beings, such as the angels, who do not possess such a faculty.

7.3 Adam's Creation and the Fall

The creation of the first human being, as mentioned in the Qur'ān, has been the source of a lot of various interpretations. The Qur'anic narrative illustrates most importantly, how *sharr* entered into the creation of God through the first human being and through the rebellion of Satan. In this respect, the Qur'anic definition of *sharr* appears to be ungratefulness (*kufr*)[836] to God, with its main manifestations to be rebellion and disobedience against His commands. It is also noteworthy, however, that the Qur'anic narrative ends with the human's repentance, God's forgiveness, and God's promise of guidance for all.[837]

The respective verse revealing God's decision and the angels' reaction to that decision is what Nursi focuses his own exegesis on. There are several aspects therein, that require further analysis, including the issue of free will. The verse reads:

> Behold, your Lord and Sustainer said to the angels: 'I will create a vicegerent on earth.' They said: 'Will you place therein one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate Your praises and glorify Your holy [name]?' He said: 'I know what you know not.'[838]

[836] Stowasser used the word 'disbelief', which might be misleading since disbelief in God can neither be attributed to Adam as the first human being and messenger of God, neither to Satan. But ungratefulness, which is another meaning of *kufr* might be more appropriate.
[837] Barbara Freyer Stowasser. 'Theodicy and the Many Meanings of Adam and Eve' in *Theodicy and Justice in Modern Islamic Thought*, ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi' (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 1.
[838] Qur'ān, 2:30.

Nursi, in the light of the verse above, tries to prove the existence of angels[839] and talks about man's vicegerency (*khalīfatun*). What is of concern for this study is the vicegerency of man.

It is however significant to see in this verse the reaction of the angels immediately after God announces his decision to create a vicegerent. Hence, the angels either knew about the meaning of vicegerency[840]; or they must have seen a previous example of what beings with the responsibility of vicegerency are capable of. Considering the meaning of the term *khalīfa*, the question needs to be asked, **who** Adam was to replace or succeed. Al-Qāḍī states that there were only two possibilities to answer this question. One, this *khalīfa* replaced and succeeded some other creature(s) on earth; two, he was a *khalīfa* of God.[841] Interestingly enough, the early exegetes preferred to employ the first choice and thus rely on *isrā'iliyyāt* material instead of endorsing the second choice at all. It was not until the late exegetes such as Tabarī, that the second choice, namely that a *khalīfa* is God's *khalīfa* was considered[842].

[839] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 262 ff.
[840] The modern intellectual approach to the term is mainly socio-political. To understand the rather exegetical interpretation of the term, it is necessary to look into early exegetical literature. Wadād al-Qāḍī approached the issue from an 'exegetically historical' perspective, not ranging beyond the Umayyad period. He asserted that the early exegetes came up with five main meanings to the root word of *khalīfa (kh-l-f)*. 1. To succeed, to follow, to come after another; 2. To replace, to substitute, to take the place of another, to deputize for; 3. To substitute, to replace, to take the place of another, but after this other is gone, destroyed or death, etc. thereby succeeding him; 4. To inhabit, to cultivate; and finally, 5. To govern, to rule, to be king. According to al-Qāḍī, the first two meanings have been employed by many early exegetes, being the most famous interpretations. The third one, being very similar to the second meaning, preconditions the death or destruction of the one replaced. For more information, see Al-Qāḍī, Wadād. '"Khalīfa" in Early Exegetical Literature' in *Die Welt des Islams*, New Series, Bd. 28, Nr. ¼ (1988), pp. 392-411.
[841] Al-Qāḍī, Wadād. '"Khalīfa" in Early Exegetical Literature' 406.
[842] Ibid.

Nursi in his interpretation also preferred to use the first meaning, stating that *khalīfatan* suggests that before conditions on the earth were readied for human life, there were intelligent creatures for whose lives, conditions during the earth's early epochs were suitable. This view, states Nursi, is in conformity with the questions of science (*qaḍiyya al-ḥikma*). He also points out the most widely held view, namely that these creatures were species of *jinn*[843], but they spread corruption on the earth and therefore were succeeded by mankind[844]. Ahmed Hamdi Akseki also asked the question whether Adam was really the father of the human race, or whether there were some other human beings before him; he came to the result that there were probably humanlike creatures before Adam.[845] Whether this view of Ahmed Hamdi Akseki is at odds with that of Nursi or not is questionable, since Akseki might as well have meant *jinns* who are humanlike in many aspects. Furthermore, Nursi **first** states that there were intelligent creatures for whose lives, conditions during the earth's early epochs were suitable **then** he explains the widely held view that these creatures were a species of *jinn*.

While analyzing this verse, Nursi emphasizes that the angels' questioning and their doubts is related to mankind being 'placed' (*jā'ilun*) on the earth

[843] Al-Qāḍī offers Muqāṭil b. Suleymān's commentary on sūra 2:30, albeit mythical, as follows: "God created the angels and the *jinn* before He created the devils and men, i.e. Adam. He made the *jinn* the inhabitants of the earth and the angels the inhabitants of the heavens. Then *jinn* fell into discord and jealousy, and they started killing each other, whereupon God sent to them a host of the inhabitants of the lower heaven, headed by Iblīs, and so they descended to the earth. There they were not required to do as many acts of worship as required in heaven, and thus they desired to stay on earth. It is then that God revealed to them: I am going to make a '*khalīfa*' other than you, and I am going to raise you back to heaven. Man, then, was going to replace the angels on earth, but the angels were going to continue to exist elsewhere in the heavens. Man in this sense is the deputy of the angels…" Al-Qāḍī, Wadād. '"Khalīfa" in Early Exegetical Literature', 400.
[844] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 267.
[845] Veysel Kaya. 'Can the Quran Support Darwin? An Evolutionist Approach by Two Turkish Scholars after the Foundation of the Turkish Republic' in *The Muslim World*, Vol. 102, Issue 2 (Apr. 2012), 360-361.

and appointed to cultivate[846] it. They are thus not questioning God's will to 'create' (*khāliqun*) a human being and give him existence.[847] For existence is pure good (*wujūd khayr al-mahdh*) and creation is an essential act (*fi'l dhātī*) of God and therefore cannot be questioned.[848] The angels are perfectly aware, and have no doubts that everything that God creates is good.

Nursi further points out the reason why, according to the verse above, man is placed 'in (*fī*) earth', although mankind is 'on earth': the choice of in (*fī*) implies, Nursi states, that man resembles the spirit breathed into the earth, and if man ever quits earth, the earth will fall apart and expire.[849] This shows the importance that is given to man.

Additionally, Nursi interprets the following phrase "He said: 'I know what you know not'", which is God's answer to the questioning of the angels for why God wants to create human beings. The *inna* in *innī a'lamu* ('I know'), Nursi states, is confirmative and rebuts doubts and hesitation.[850] Nursi explains that this *inna* spreads light on several aspects. According to Nursi's interpretation, there is much good and many advantages in mankind; there is also sinfulness but this is minor. It would be opposed to wisdom, Nursi continues, to abandon the former due to the latter.[851] Additionally, man holds a mystery which qualifies man for vicegerency. This mystery is known by the Creator, however unknown by the angels, Nursi points out. Furthermore, Nursi proceeds, there is an instance of wisdom in the creation

[846] Here Nursi seems to employ one of the many meanings of the term *khalīfa*, namely 'to cultivate', which has been pointed out in the previous footnote as the fourth meaning of the term according to al-Qāḍī.
[847] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 267.
[848] Ibid.
[849] Ibid.
[850] Ibid., 269.
[851] Ibid., 270.

of human beings that renders them superior to the angels; again, the angels did not know this, but God knew.[852]

Thus Nursi concludes with the following lines:

> When Allah the Most High created pure good (*khayr al-mahdh*), that is, the angels, and pure *sharr* (*sharr al-mahdh*), that is, the devils, and that which was neither *khayr* nor *sharr*, that is, the animals, being the Munificent Bestower of Bounties, His wisdom necessitated the existence of a fourth category that embraced both *khayr* and *sharr*. [That is, human beings.] Thus, if the [human] powers of anger and instinct submit to the power of intellect[853], through effort and striving, man rises higher than the angels. But if the reverse is the case, he falls lower than the beasts, for he has no excuse.[854]

In this respect, Nursi points out, that man is asked to direct and use the faculties given to him in his nature, in the right way. It has been said previously, that these faculties are not limited in any way in the innate nature of man, however limits have been set to them through revelation. Man, with his free will and the guidance of revelation, is thus asked to use his intellect to distinguish the right from the wrong. Thus, Nursi does not share Augustine's view to restrict the free exercise of will to the first instance, the first sin of the first human being.[855] To blame Adam for the sins of humanity and to say that after the first sin, man sins involuntarily and is the moral agent of the evil that he commits only in the sense that he is himself the author of the condition in which he cannot help but sin[856], seems rather to be an attempt to escape the difficult problem at hand.

One might rather want to ask how sin entered into the perfect paradisal state of Adam and his wife (whose name is not mentioned in the Qur'ān), in

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[852] Ibid.
[853] See the 'Faculties of Humankind' in this chapter.
[854] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 270.
[855] 'Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency', 40.
[856] Ibid.

the first place. Adam and his wife, both being human, were able to distinguish between right and wrong; for they did possess an intellect, and they were directly guided by the Lord. Muslim theologians are divided in questions whether Adam did eat from that forbidden tree before or after his prophecy[857]; and whether this act should be considered as a sin, or as something else. In regards to the latter point, some believed it to be sin (some branches of the Kharijites), and others described the act as a minor sin or 'slip' (*zalla*)[858]; others still interpreted it as forsaking the better (majority of the *ahl al-sunnah*), a misinterpretation[859], forgetfulness (majority of Maturīdīs) or relativity of sin (Abū Ishāq al-Isfarā'ini (d. 1027)).[860]

Nursi believes in sin being the requirement of man's nature (that is, also of the nature of Adam as the first human), contrary to that of the angels.[861] Having said this, Nursi does not explain, whether Adam was given free will from the very outset or only after he had been expelled from Paradise. In fact, nowhere seems Nursi to interpret the respective verses in the Qur'ān that narrate the Fall of Adam and his wife.[862]

According to Augustine, Adam, in his heart, must have already turned away from God in order for the devil's solicitations to be able to make any appeal to him.[863] In other words, neither Adam nor his wife would have committed the deed (of eating from the forbidden fruit) if they had not already been

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[857] Ferruh Kahraman. 'Hz. Adem'in Yasak Ağaca Yaklaşması', 207ff.
[858] Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767), Abū al-Lays al-Samarkandī (d. 1270) and Abdallah Ibn Omar al-Baidawi (d. 1286) were amongst those who believed Adam's action to be *zalla*.
[859] Abū 'Ali al-Jubbā'i, Mālik bin Anas (d. 710), Ibn Arabī (d. 1148), and Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896) believed in Adam's action to be a misinterpretation.
[860] 'Hz. Adem'in Yasak Ağaca Yaklaşması', 210.
[861] *The Letters*, 62.
[862] Nursi explores verses up to 2:34, but then goes on with 2:41. But the verses that talk about Adam's Fall can be found in 2:35-38.
[863] *Evil and the God of Love*, 65-66.

"evil in will".[864] This statement of Augustine indicates an 'original evil', an evil that came first in secret, which resulted in the other evil in the open,[865] namely, acting against God's command. However, there is no indication suggesting that this is a definitive answer. The Qur'ān narrates that **after** Adam and his wife had eaten from the forbidden tree, their private parts became visible to them and they started to cover themselves with the leaves of paradise.[866] This might mean that after their inclination towards doing something that is wrong, worldly desires appeared in them; and after their slip (*zalla*), they realized their nakedness – that is, they became self-aware. In other words, Nursi might agree with the following order: Adam and his wife had been created as vicegerents (*khalīfa*). They had been given free will (*juzʾī irada*) from the very outset. However the pure good (*khayr al-mahdh*) environment in paradise was not able to show them their potentialities as human beings – until they were confronted with pure sharr (*sharr al-mahdh*) in form of Satan. Their confrontation with Satan and their inclination towards his whisperings made them feel a desire towards the worldliness. And finally, as a result of their *zalla* they became self-aware (or became aware of their faculty of instinct (*shahwa*)).

According to Nursi, desire, illusions and emotions do not see the future. Assisted by the *nafs* that incites to *sharr* (*nafs al-ammārah*), the heart (*qalb*), being the seat of belief and the intellect (*ʿaql*) fall silent and are defeated.[867] Nursi might have borrowed this concept from al-Ghazālī, who stated that powers such as appetence (*shahwa*) and anger (*ghaḍab*) must be held in

[864] 'Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency', 42. Although the term 'evil in will' has been preferred by Augustine, it might be more suitable to say 'able to sin' instead.
[865] Ibid., 43.
[866] Qur'ān, 7:22.
[867] *The Flashes Collection*, 111.

check by the rational soul[868] or intellect (*'aql*). When the intellect dominates these lower powers, justice is established for the soul and the body; when the lower powers dominate the intellect, it becomes their slave.[869]

Thus, Nursi further explains, committing grievous sins does not arise from lack of faith but from the defeat of the mind and heart through the predomination of emotion, desire and illusion.[870] This statement of Nursi's serves at the same time as an answer to the Mu'tazilites' assertion that someone who commits a grievous sin will enter disbelief (*kufr*).

A similar statement to that of Nursi was made by Ibn Sīnā and by Maimonides. The former claimed that if the 'practical intellect' is not strong enough to assume control over the desires and demands of the body, they will prevail; in which case the soul will lose the ability to receive the light of the 'agent intellect'. And in this case, the road to truth, goodness and happiness will be closed and the life of ignorance and evil prevails.[871] Maimonides stated that self-inflicting evil arises where the imagination dominates the intellect;[872] that is, were desires and illusions have gotten the upper hand. In this regard, the statements above may serve as a further explanation for the interpretation of Ihsan Eliaçık to chapter 113, verse 4 of the Qur'ān, in which he stated:

> As a human being, I seek refuge, oh Lord, in You from the sharr of becoming a slave of provoked desires and lustful addictions, and from temptations and all kind of blowing that evoke these feelings.[873]

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[868] Al-Ghazālī most probably adopted this concept from Plato's 'rational' and 'irrational soul', who stated that the excellence or virtue of the rational soul is wisdom, that of anger is courage and that of appetence is temperance. See *The Marvels of the Heart*, xix ff.
[869] *The Marvels of the Heart*, xix.
[870] *The Flashes Collection*, 111.
[871] *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sīnā'a Theodicy*, p. 123.
[872] *Moses Maimonides*, p. 120; *A Maimonides Reader*, p. 302-303.
[873] *Yaşayan Kur'an*, Vol. 3, 445. Explained further in chapter 2 of this study.

7.3.1 Adam was taught the Names

In the Qur'ān, God asks the angels to prostrate before Adam, which they all do except of Iblis.[874] Nursi explains that the reason why the angels are asked to prostrate before Adam is the fact that Adam has been taught all the Names.[875] Nursi believes that this event was just the tip of a universal principle, namely the teaching of countless sciences, and numerous all-embracing branches of knowledge about the universe, and extensive learning about the Creator's attributes and qualities.[876] This teaching, Nursi further explains, afforded man superiority not only over the angels but also the heavens, earth and the mountains in the question of the bearing of the Divine Trust.[877] Thus, through man's comprehensive disposition, he is the vicegerent on earth. This vast disposition of man and his ability and potentiality to rise above the state of the angels might serve as an answer to whether God is ultimately responsible for the existence of sin, because He chose to create a being whom He knew would freely sin. For, according to Nursi, God's purpose for the creation of humanity does not seem to be a human being without any sins; but rather the creation of a human being that, albeit constantly exposed to sin, remains in a constant struggle of pleasing God and a permanent progress.[878]

In the same chapter of the Qur'ān, a few verses later, is stated that Iblīs refused to prostrate before Adam out of arrogance and haughtiness. According to Nursi's interpretation, this shows that most of the physical

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[874] Qur'ān, 2:34.
[875] Ibid., 2:31.
[876] *The Words*, 254.
[877] Ibid.
[878] *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, 1302-1304. Nursi relates his outline to the following Qur'anic verse (39:53): "Say: ‚O my Servants who have transgressed against their souls (*anfusihim*)! Despair not of the Mercy of Allah. Allah forgives all sins: for He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.'"

beings in the universe and their representatives and appointed beings are subjugated to man and further that man's senses are predisposed and amenable to benefiting from all of them.[879] Iblīs' refusal thus indicates, Nursi believes, what a fearsome enemy and serious obstacle in the path of man's progress *sharr* matter and its representatives as well as sharr inhabitants, are.[880] In this respect, Nursi points out, with the example of Adam as one single being, the Qur'ān points to all human beings.

How serious that obstacle of *sharr*, as interpreted by Nursi, is, can be easily seen in the following verse of the Qur'ān, where it states that Satan made Adam and his wife stumble in the garden of Paradise and brought about the loss of their erstwhile state.[881] Why, though, would Adam, being in a spiritually and morally good position, oriented with love towards God, prefer or freely choose to be evil and miserable? Nursi, like mainstream Muslim thinkers[882], believes that the reason why Adam was expelled from Paradise was a duty he had to fulfill. The result of his duty, according to Nursi, was the unfolding of all mankind's spiritual progress, and the revealing of all humanity's potentialities as well as man's essential nature of being a comprehensive mirror to all the Divine Names.[883] Nursi further explains that if Adam would have remained in Paradise, his rank would have been fixed like that of the angels. There would be no levels of progress and man would not have been able to unfold his potentialities. Furthermore, Nursi states, there are numerous angels whose only reason for creation is to worship God,

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[879] *The Words*, 254.
[880] Ibid.
[881] Qur'ān, 2: 36
[882] The mainstream view is that it was Divine Will that Adam descended to the world; his act of eating from the forbidden tree through the use of his free will, started the history of humankind, as predestined by God. For further information, see Kurtubī, *Al-jāmī al-aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, Vol. 11 (Egytp: Dār al-Kutūb al-Miṣrī, 1962), 255.
[883] *The Letters*, 61.

in an unchanging manner and in a fixed rank.[884] To create man for the same kind of duty would have been in vain; but there is no vain in God's creation.

Divine Wisdom, Nursi explains, required a realm of accountability appropriate to the potentialities of man, who would traverse infinite degrees. For this reason, Nursi continues, Adam was expelled from Paradise for his well-known sin – sin, Nursi adds, being the requirement of human nature and contrary to that of the angels.[885]

The notion that the first human being was sent to earth with a certain responsibility, consciousness, freedom of choice and potentialities awaiting to be discovered is closely linked with the notion of the 'divine Trust' which is supposed to remind man of this very responsibility. What this responsibility entails will be elaborated in the next section.

7.4 The Notion of the 'Divine Trust' (*amānah*)

The root-word of *amānah* is *a-m-n*. According to Ali Bulut, in his unpublished Master Thesis, derivatives of this root-word is mentioned 879 times in the Qur'ān[886]. The direct meaning of *a-m-n* is, according to Bulut, to trust a person or a being with peace of mind and heart.[887] Bulut's conclusion, after a semantic analysis of the term, is that the common denominator for the meaning of *amānah* is 'trust'.[888] In the history of Islam until most recent studies, a lot of different interpretations have been made regarding what the 'Divine Trust', mentioned in the following verse of the Qur'ān, might mean:

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[884] Ibid., 62.
[885] Ibid.
[886] Bulut, Ali. 'Kur'ân'da Emânet Kavramı' (Unpublished Master Thesis, Süleyman Demirel University, 2002), 138.
[887] Ibid.
[888] Harr, G. I. B, et al. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, volume I (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986)

> We did indeed offer the Trust to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it being afraid thereof. But man assumed it; indeed, he is most unjust (*ẓalūman*), most foolish (*jahūla*)[889].

The range of interpretations seems to be innumerable. Mullā Ṣadrā[890] (d. 1640) claims that what is meant by the 'divine Trust' is man's vicegerency of God on earth, which has been accepted by him.[891] Thus Mullā Ṣadrā continues, the fact that it was man who overtook the 'Divine Trust' and no other being shows that every object in the universe is a fragmentary Being, ontologically broken and disintegrated and is therefore unable to understand and shoulder this responsibility.[892] Man, being an ontological whole and accomplished Being, a universe in a nutshell, is capable of understanding the gravity of this responsibility.[893]

It seems as if this statement of Mullā Ṣadrā is derived from Jāmī's[894] (d. 1492) – and thus, maybe indirectly from Ibn 'Arabī's – description of the perfect man (*insān kāmil*) and the following justification that it could have been no other being than man to shoulder the 'Divine Trust'. For Chittick explains that according to Jāmī,

> only through man does God gaze upon Unity in multiplicity. In Himself He sees nothing but Unity, and in the world nothing but multiplicity. But in man, Unity and multiplicity are combined in such a way that all of God's Attributes – or in other words the Name "Allāh" – are manifested within one unitary locus of theophany in the midst of the plurality of the world.[895]

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[889] Qur'ān, 33:72.
[890] Ṣadr ad-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrazī, also known as Mullā Ṣadrā, was an Iranian Shi'a philosopher and theologian of Islam and a scholar (*'ālim*) who led the Iranian cultural renaissance in the 17th century.
[891] 'Abdul Haq, M. 'Mullā Ṣadrā's Concept of Man', 285.
[892] Ibid., 286.
[893] Ibid.
[894] Nur ad-Dīn Abd ar-Raḥmān Jāmī is known for his achievements as a scholar, mystic, writer, composer, historian and and the greatest Persian and Sufi poets of the 15th century. He was of the school of Ibn 'Arabī.
[895] Chittick, W. C. 'The Perfect Man as the Prototype of the Self in the Sufism of Jāmī', 151.

For this reason, Jāmī explains the vicegerency of God (*khalīfat Allāh*) mentioned in the Qur'ān to mean that man manifests the All-embracing Name within the world, namely "*Allāh*" and therefore has been given the responsibility for the whole of creation.[896] In this respect, Jāmī further explains, man serves as the isthmus (*barzakh*) between God and the world.[897] Qūnawī[898] (d. 1274) puts it slightly different in saying that the Perfect Man is the isthmus between the necessity (*wājib*) and possibility (*mumkun*) and the mirror which unites the attributes of Eternality with those of the temporal events.[899] In the light of the explanations of Jāmī's Perfect Man, this man carried the 'Divine Trust' for he possesses a perfect and total receptivity (*qābiliyya*) for all of the Divine Names; as opposed to all other levels of existence who refused to carry the 'Divine Trust' because they are loci of manifestations for only certain Names of God.[900]

Mohammad Iqbāl[901] (d. 1938), from another perspective, explains that man is the trustee of a 'free personality' which he accepted at his peril.[902] He links this 'free personality' with the notion of the 'ego'; the 'ego' thereby meaning rather the soul (*nafs*) than the 'I' (*ana*).[903] He defines the ego to be a "unity of mental states".[904]

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[896] Ibid., 152.
[897] Ibid.
[898] Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Isḥāq b. Muḥammad b. Yūnus Qūnawī was one of the most influential thinkers in mystical or Sufi philosophy. He was one of the best students of Ibn 'Arabī.
[899] 'The Perfect Man as the Prototype of the Self in the Sufism of Jāmī', 152.
[900] Ibid., 154.
[901] Also known as 'Allāma Iqbāl was a philosopher, poet and politician in British India who is widely regarded as having inspired the Pakistan Movement. He is considered to be one of the most important figures in Urdu literature.
[902] Iqbal, M. *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 90.
[903] Kılıç, C. *Büyük Mütefekkir Dr. Muhammed Ikbal: Hayatı, Şahsiyeti ve Fikirleri*, 116.
[904] *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 93.

But this is not all: the 'divine Trust' has been defined by different scholars in many different ways. It has been interpreted to be servant-hood and the intellect[905]. Thus, betrayal of that Trust will lead to atrocity and ignorance. It has been further interpreted as obedience[906], the world and everything that is in it; homeland; property; family; religion; and generation (lineage).[907]

Before proceeding to Nursi's understanding of the *ana* and 'Divine Trust', it might be useful to define very briefly the notion of the soul (*nafs*) that will be employed.

7.4.1 The 'soul' (nafs)

According to Picken, the term *nafs* occurs with its derivatives 398 times in the Qur'ān.[908] Picken enumerates five points the *nafs* can point to. *Nafs*, he states, can signify "the soul (*rūḥ*),"[909] being extracted from the body at death by angels; it can signify the human being (*insān*) as a whole, including both the body and the soul; it can also signify the human being's power of understanding, in other words, that the "human being has the ability to comprehend and reason using his intellect to arrive at and perceive certain ideas and concepts"[910]; nafs can also signify the heart, indicating that an emotional aspect exists, such as the attributes of remembrance (*dhikr*) and concealing a secret (*sirr*); finally, it can signify an inclination to good and evil, being, according to Picken, one of the outstanding characteristics of the

[905] Kur'an-ı Kerīm Meali, Türkiye Diyanet Foundation, <http://www.diyanetvakfi.org.tr/meal/Ahzap.htm>, last access 19 November 2012
[906] Ibn Kathīr. *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Online English Version)
[907] Engin, S. 'Emaneti Yüklenmek' in Altınoluk Internet Arşivi, No. 238 (Dec., 2005), 26. <http://dergi.altinoluk.com/index.php?sayfa=yazarlar&yazar_no=1037&MakaleNo=d238s026m1&AdBasHarf=&limit=0-15>, last access 19 November 2012.
[908] Picken, G. 'Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm', 106.
[909] Ibid.
[910] Ibid.

nafs.[911] These various facets of humanity, including both the physical and metaphysical, states Picken, are inferred by the term *nafs* and therefore, are all the object of purification from the Qur'anic perspective.[912]

What needs to be criticized, however, is Picken's misleading equation of the *nafs* and soul (mostly translated as '*nafs*') and in addition to that, his translation of the soul as *rūḥ* in Arabic. The latter is more commonly translated as 'spirit.' Picken relies on the Qur'anic verse 6:93, which states that the angels stretch forth their hands to grip the souls (*anfusakum*) and drag them outwards. In this regard, Picken claims that this expression might signify the *rūḥ*, in other words, the spirit[913], which is quite misleading. A suggestion at this point might be that the verse refers to al-Ghazālī's explanation of the soul (*nafs*) that includes his blameworthy qualities (*ṣifāt madhmūma*) and which includes both the faculty of anger (*ghaḍab*) and of appetence (*shahwa*).[914] Or it might refer to the second meaning of soul according to al-Ghazālī, which is man's essence.[915]

In the light of the verse

> By the self (*nafs*), and the proportion and order given to it; and its inspiration as to its wrong and its right;- truly he succeeds who purifies it, and truly, he who defiles it has failed[916]

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[911] Ibid., 107.
[912] Ibid., 118.
[913] Al-Ghazālī provides two different meanings for the term spirit (*rūḥ*). The second meaning, which is more of a concern to him, is a subtle tenuous substance in man which knows and perceives. It is a marvelous and lordly (*rabbānī*) affair, the real and ultimate nature of which most intellects (*'uqūl*) are unable to grasp. Al-Ghazālī, *Marvels of the Heart*, 7.
[914] *Marvels of the Heart*, 7-8.
[915] *Marvels of the Heart*, 8. This explanation seems more appropriate than that of Picken because, if the whole verse is taken into account, one can see that it talks about the injustice of man who imputes falsehood to God. Falsehood and wrongdoing, on the other hand, in the literature of Islam, is mostly attributed to the evil-commanding soul (*nafs*).
[916] Qur'ān, 91:7-10.

one is able to see not only the potentiality that the nature of the self bears, but also the possibility of its purification and defilement.[917] Picken argues that these are the only verses in the Qur'ān that make use of both the soul (*nafs*) and its purification (*tazkiya*) in one place, thus deserving further attention. [918] One can further see in this verse that the *nafs* is the receiver of inspiration (from God) to choose between what is wrong and what is right and thus has been given free will. While this, according to Picken, also indicates the human being's rational faculty or intellect (*'aql*) it should be kept in mind that having to choose between iniquity and righteousness is a moral dilemma; therefore, the importance and influence of the heart (*qalb*) and of the conscience (*ḍamīr*) cannot be underestimated.[919]

One important discussion that Picken takes on is the question about 'who' it is that is doing the purifying of the *nafs*. Picken explains that scholars such as Farrā'[920] (d. 822) and Zajjāj[921] (d. 923) believed that it is God that is the subject.[922] Whereas there is a second view that states that it is the human being who brings about this process at a personal level. In this case, Picken explains, the verse would mean: "indeed he who has caused his self to be purified has indeed attained true success."[923] Picken notes that this latter rendering is the preference of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328).

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[917] 'Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm', 102.
[918] Ibid.
[919] Ibid., 103.
[920] Al-Farrā' is known for his famous commentary of the Qur'ān, the *Ma'āni al-Qur'ān*, being one of the most comprehensive of the early commentaries on the Qur'ān.
[921] Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Sahl b. al-Sārī al-Zajjāj was a lexicographer and grammarian, and an intimate student of al-Mubarrad Abū'l Abbās Muḥammad b. Jazīd al-Azdī (d. 900), the most important representative of the so-called Baṣran school of grammar in his time.
[922] 'Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm', 104.
[923] Ibid.

Particularly interesting is Picken's survey of the different sensations, feelings and emotions alluded by the Qur'ān that the *nafs* consciously perceives.[924] For there are aspects of the *nafs* therein, that fall into the Qur'anic definition of *sharr*. For instance does Picken point out the fulfillment of the *nafs*' pleasures and appetites (*shahwa*) that are in most cases harmful and destructive for the *nafs* in this world.[925] This has also been pointed out by Yazır in his interpretation of chapter 114, verse 4 of the Qur'ān[926] in which he suggested that *waswās* is either the *nafs al-ammārah* or Satan (*shayṭān*). He considered the kind of *waswasa* that comes from one's own *nafs al-ammārah* or *shayṭān* to be internal (*enfusī*) *sharr*[927] which harms the one that shelters it.

Picken further emphasizes the impatience of the *nafs* in events that befalls it, which overshadows its endurance (*ṣabr*) most of the time.[928] It has been said previously in this study that the impatience of man makes him ask God for things that are *sharr* for him, thinking that it is *khayr*.[929] Thirdly does Picken call his reader's attention to another negative perception of the *nafs*, namely miserliness (also translated as avarice or selfishness) (*sh-ḥ-ḥ*)[930]. Explaining that this is one of its overwhelming qualities commonly found in many *anfūs* (pl. of *nafs*), Picken says that the Qur'ān strongly encourages its eradication.[931] Miserliness, or in other words, parsimony (*b-kh-l*) has been defined as one of the terms that fall into the semantic field of *sharr* in the Qur'ān. While Picken also conceals the other faculties of the *nafs*, such as

[924] Ibid., 108.
[925] Ibid.
[926] "From the *sharr* of the slinking whisperer (*waswās al-khannās*)"; see chapter 2.
[927] *Hak Dini Kur'an Dili*, vol.9, p. 6423
[928] 'Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm', 108.
[929] See chapter 1, explanations on chapter 10, verse 11 of the Qur'ān.
[930] See for instance Qur'ān, 4:128.
[931] 'Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm', 109. Qur'ān, 2:265; 4:4; 18:28; 59:9; 64:16.

envy and jealousy, fear, conceit, anxiety and distress, the ability to comprehend, and so on, Picken stresses the fact that in the light of all the above, the nafs is responsible for its actions within the realms of its capacities.[932]

7.4.1.1 The three states of the soul (*nafs*)

Lastly it will also be useful to point out the three different states[933] of the *nafs* as described by the Qur'ān. In this respect defines Picken the first state, namely the 'soul/*nafs* inclined to evil' (*nafs al-ammārah bi'l su'*), in the following way:

> This state of the nafs occurs when the human being is overcome by his desires, to the extent that he pursues the appetites of his soul to the exclusion of everything else. In this state the limits set by God are made secondary in comparison to the fulfillment of corporeal needs and desires. Thus, the performance of forbidden acts is common and the ultimate result is sin and transgression.[934]

This statement is comparable to the state of excess of the power of 'Instinct' explained by Nursi, which he called profligacy (*fujūr*). Nursi defined this state as careless wastefulness and shameless and immoral behavior.[935] This kind of behavior, which is some sort of transgression, falls under the semantic field of *sharr* in the Qur'ān, as has been explained previously. Thus,

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[932] Ibid., 111.
[933] These three states of the *nafs* mentioned by Picken occur in the Qur'ān. There are however more states that one can find in literature. Most of these terms are borrowed from Greek philosophers' discussion on the soul and are thus called vegetable soul (*nafs al-nabātī*), animal soul (*nafs al-ḥayawānī*), or the rational soul (*nafs al-nāṭiqa*). For more information on these, one may consult Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Ma'ārij al-Quds fī madārij ma'rifat al-nafsi*, 4th edn (Beirut: Dār al-Afāq al-Jadīda, 1980); Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Rāzī, *'Ilm al-akhlāq*, trans. English by M.S.H. Ma'sumi, 3rd edn (New Delhi: Kitab Bhavan, 1992), pp. 87-167; Yūsuf Maḥmūd Muḥammad, *al-Nafs wa'l rūḥ fī'l fikr al-insānī wa-mawqif Ibn al-Qayyim minhu* (Doha: Dār al-Ḥikma, 1993), pp. 145-251.
[934]. 'Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm', 112.
[935] *Signs of Miraculousness*, 30.

one might say that it is the *nafs* which incites to sharr (*nafs al-ammārah bi'l su'*)[936], which is one major factor why human beings, in their utilization of free choice, are likely to be inclined towards *sharr*. This point might also shed some light on Augustine's dilemma of why the soul[937] would ever determine itself to the evil if it is good and its first orientation is to the good.[938] For Nursi explains that everyone has an inner faculty situated in a corner of the heart (*lumma-i shayṭāniyya*) which is the means to diabolical suggestions and temptations and a satanic tongue which speaks through the promptings of the imagination – contrary to its owner's will.[939] This *lumma-i shayṭāniyya*, Nursi further explains, is like an ear and a tongue, inferring the existence of an external *sharr* individual who blows on the one and makes the other speak.[940]

So, is man supposed not to love his self at all, then? Nursi's approach to love of one's soul (*nafs*) is an interesting one. He does not ask man to dislike his *nafs* for this would be a task too difficult for a human being. He rather states that the love to one's self should be a love that sees its short-comings and trains it with a compassion that seeks to perfect it, and that impels it towards good.[941] For this kind of love results, Nursi further explains, in giving the self objects of love worthy of it in Paradise.[942]

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[936] Picken defines the term *ammārah* as 'constantly urging, always demanding, inciting and instigating'. This is the exaggerative form of the *nafs*. For further information and Jurjanī's definition of *nafs al-ammārah*, see Picken, G. 'Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm', 112.
[937] Presuming that the 'soul' of Augustine indicates the notion of the 'soul' (*nafs*).
[938] 'Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency', 30.
[939] *The Flashes Collection*, 118.
[940] Ibid.
[941] *Words*, 678.
[942] Ibid.

Picken calls the second state of the *nafs* 'the self-reproaching soul' (*nafs lawwāma*)[943], explaining that in this state, the veil of disobedience is lifted and the soul begins to blame itself for the transgressions it has committed, inclining towards repentance, regret, self-criticism and reproach.[944] Picken further provides some different views on the meaning of the term *lawwāma*, which is worth noting. One opinion, as explained by Picken is, that the term means 'shifting repeatedly', in other words, the soul is characterized by its changeability, fickleness, and inconsistency, never remaining steadfast upon one state of affairs.[945] As an example, Picken states, that the soul in this state is mindful then heedless, loves then hates, is happy then sad, is obedient then disobedient, righteous then immoral, and so on. Another opinion about the meaning of the term *lawwāma*, according to Picken, is 'blame'.[946] This means that either the soul blames itself or is blameworthy. In other words, in this state the human being is constantly in the state of blaming his own self in the sense of questioning himself and his actions according to their rightness and truthfulness. The opposed behavior would be to constantly sanction one self, trying to justify and defend all of one's actions, thoughts and intentions in one or another way. It would not be wrong to state that Nursi would agree with this kind of *tazkiya*, or in other words the constant remembrance that it is nothing but one's own self that deserves to be blamed and that is blameworthy.[947]

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[943] Also translated as 'the upbraiding soul', "for it upbraids its possessor whenever he falls short in the worship of his Master." See *The Marvels of the Heart*, 8.
[944] 'Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm', 113.
[945] Ibid.
[946] Ibid., 114.
[947] Throughout the *Risale*, Nursi addresses always his own soul/nafs in many different ways, such as "Oh my lazy soul"; "Oh my senseless soul"; "Oh my soul, which laughed in its youth and now weeps at its laughter"; "Oh my ignorant soul"; "Oh my soul full of doubts and evil suggestions and exceeding it bounds"; "Oh my foolish soul, charmed at glory, enamored of fame, addicted to praise, and without equal in egotism", etc. These are taken from the first

The third state of the *nafs* is called by Picken 'the tranquil soul' (*nafs al-muṭma'inna*), which is the state of tranquility from establishing God's obedience, accepting His threat of punishment and promise of reward in Paradise, being satisfied with His decree.[948] Picken further explains that a person who has reached this state

> has put his trust in God alone, has truly tasted the sweetness of faith and felt the pleasure of communicating with its Lord, to the extent that it seeks no other substitute. As such it does not deviate from God's devotion, nor is it affected by the changes in circumstances that normally cause change in the psychological state of the human being, or attracted to the ornamentation of the worldly life.[949]

Picken elaborates this issue further by pointing out that this state can be reached through constant remembrance of God, as mentioned in the Qur'ān, 13:28;[950] and through a firm faith in divine predestination (*qaḍa' wa'l-qadar*). The latter being the final of the six articles of faith in Islam, Picken notes, is arguably the most difficult to actualize, since it requires firm conviction (*yaqīn*) in God's overall wisdom and plan. In other words, this kind of conviction would require that man, no matter what kind of human or personal tragedy and *ashrār* befalls him, his faith in the Almighty remains firm, because of his faith in foreordainment.[951] Furthermore a *nafs* that is *muṭma'inna*, Picken points out, is not overjoyed by the bounties it receives but rather recognizes God's favor upon it and fulfills the divine right of gratitude.[952] This state thus brings about God's pleasure and satisfaction. Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya's comment on the state of tranquility of the self is

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250 pages of the *Words*. However, this kind of expressions blaming the soul can be found throughout the works of Nursi.

[948] 'Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm', 115.

[949] Ibid. This state is alluded to in the Qur'ān, 89:27-30.

[950] Ibid., 116.

[951] Ibid. See also Qur'ān, 57:23-24; 64:11.

[952] Ibid.

particularly interesting in that it completely concentrates on attributes and characteristics of a human being. He states:

> If the *nafs* becomes at ease from doubt to certainty, from ignorance to knowledge, from heedlessness to remembrance, from deception to repentance, from ostentation to sincerity, from deceit to truthfulness, from being incapable to being competent, from tyranny of conceit to the submissiveness of humility, from arrogance to modesty, from laxity to action, then the soul has achieved tranquility.[953]

Some of the characteristics in this statement are again a reminder of the excessive states of the three faculties of humankind illustrated by Nursi before, such as ignorance, deceit, incapability, tyranny, arrogance and laxity.

Picken concludes in the light of the above, that the nature of the soul (*nafs*) tends to negative potentialities; however with volition, will, training and experience, its positive potentialities can be nurtured.[954] Nurturing and training one's soul until it reaches the second and even third state mentioned above does apparently not mean that one is completely freed from the evil commands of the *nafs*. That this is a lifelong struggle is stated by Nursi, when he says that sometimes the *nafs* which incites to *sharr* (*nafs al-ammārah*) is transformed into *nafs al-lawwāma* or *nafs al-muṭma'inna*, handing over its weapons and equipment to the nerves (*āsāb*). And the nerves of temperament continue its function till the end of life.[955] According to Nursi, this is the reason why many saints and purified ones have continued to complain about their *nafs* which incites to *sharr* while they were in the state of *nafs al-muṭma'inna*.[956] So it is not the *nafs* which incites to *sharr* that afflicts them but rather its function which has been handed

[953] Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya. *Al-Rūḥ* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 2000), 259.
[954] 'Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm', 118.
[955] *The Letters*, 387.
[956] Ibid.

over to the nerves. Thus, Nursi further explains, the sickness is not of the heart but of the imagination.[957]

Nursi employs the *ana* as another branch or as part of the *nafs*. It would be wrong though, to state that the *nafs* is made up of the *ana*. The following section will discuss the notion of *ana* and its connection with *sharr* in further detail.

7.5 The '*ana*' as one Aspect of the 'Divine Trust' (*amānah*)

Nursi introduces the 'divine Trust' (*amānah*) mentioned in verse 33:72 to be the '*ana*'; thereby defining *ana* as both, a key to the Divine Names and a key to the locked talisman of creation.[958] Nursi's Divine Names Theology has been introduced before in this study. Considering the fact that this concept is spread all over Nursi's works, it is no surprise that one comes across this concept another time.

As it is with many faculties and other created things, they have positive as well as negative aspects, depending on how they are used or misused. The same it is with the *ana*, which, according to Nursi, has been throughout history, and continues to be the seed of a terrible tree of *Zaqqūm*[959] and at the same time the seed of a luminous tree of *Ṭūbā*[960]. In other words, *ana* is such a tool that can lead man to Paradise as well as to Hell, depending on one's knowledge of it and its use. Accordingly, Nursi first explains the nature and purpose of *ana*, and later illustrates how the misuse of it can lead to *sharr*.

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[957] Ibid., 388.
[958] *The Words*, 558.
[959] See Qur'ān, 37:62; 44:43; 56:52.
[960] See Qur'ān, 13:29. Also Nursi, S. *The Words*, 557.

In this respect, Nursi states that the *ana* is a tool or a key with which man is supposed to open the doors of the universe.[961] This key, Nursi further explains, is attached to man's 'soul' (*nafs*). Another tool given to humankind by his Creator is, what shall be called an 'inordinate self-esteem' (*anā'iyyah*)[962], in order to discover the hidden treasures of the Creator of the universe.[963]

With the introduction of these two tools, Nursi establishes another discourse that will lead to the discussion of the existence of *sharr*, in case these tools are not used in accordance to their purpose. What is their purpose then? Nursi explains the reason why the *ana* is given to man in the following lines:

> The All-Wise Maker gave to man as a Trust an *ana* which comprises indications and samples that show and cause to recognize the truths of the attributes and functions of His dominicality (*rubūbiyyah*), so that the *ana* might be a unit of measurement and the attributes of dominicality and functions of Divinity might be known.[964]

Thus, first of all Nursi believes that what is meant by the 'Divine Trust', mentioned in verse 33:72 of the Qur'ān, is the *ana*. Thus the *ana* must be something quite serious, given the fact that, again according to the same verse, the heavens, the earth and the mountains refused to undertake it – in fear. Nursi explains that the *ana* serves man in recognizing God's dominicality (*rubūbiyyah*). This is possible if man can relate to the attributes and functions of Divinity, which the *ana* is a means of. Then, Nursi continues explaining the quiddity of *ana*:

> … it is not necessary for a unit of measurement to have actual existence; like hypothetical lines in geometry, a unit of measurement maybe formed by

[961] *The Words*, 558.
[962] Most commonly called the 'I-ness' or 'ego'.
[963] *The Words*, 558.
[964] Ibid.

> hypothesis and supposition. It is not necessary for its actual existence to be established by concrete knowledge of proofs.[965]

In other words, according to Nursi, the *ana* has no actual, external existence; it is a unit of measurement, something hypothetical, that helps man in his understanding or in relating one thing with another. In this case, the *ana* helps to relate to the Names and Attributes of the Divine and their absoluteness. Nursi explains that anything that is absolute is very difficult to grasp, simply because it has no limits or ends, no shape and no form and thus cannot be determined in any way.[966] He compares this situation with an endless light, stating that such a light cannot be comprehended without drawing a line of real or imaginary darkness. Similarly, Nursi continues, God's attributes such as knowledge and power or His names such as the all-Wise and all-Compassionate are absolute, endless, undeterminable and thus unknowable. At this point, Nursi explains, the *ana* comes into play. It draws a hypothetical and imaginary limit to the Divine attributes and names, by imagining itself a "fictitious dominicality, ownership, power and knowledge."[967] Thus, making a division, the ana says "up to here, mine, after that, His." Or it understands: "Like I am the owner of this house, so too is the Creator the owner of the universe." It may also state: "As I made this house and arranged it, so someone must have made the universe and arranged it."[968] Through repeating this principle in every aspect of life, using tiny units of measurement, it slowly understands the true nature of Divine attributes and names.[969]

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[965] Ibid.
[966] Ibid.
[967] Ibid.
[968] Ibid., 559.
[969] Ibid., 558.

Although the concept of the ana seems to be pretty much *sui generis*, and unexplored by Western writers[970], it still reminds of the discussion whether God can be known through cognition or through experience. Can God be experienced? Is it possible to give a clear definition of God? One might also ask whether there is a relation between the *ana* and religious experience: does the correct use of the *ana* lead one to some sort of religious experience? Wieman explains that two methods have been used to show how one can know God. Firstly to show that one knows God just as one knows other objects. Secondly to show that knowledge of God is a special kind of knowledge that maybe requires a special faculty or a kind of knowledge that is different from ordinary cognition.[971] Wieman believes in the hopelessness of the latter one and asserts that God is an object of experience. The example he provides as being unquestionably religious is

> …the very common human appeal to God in the hour of bewilderment when the individual (and often the group) feels baffled and defeated. It is when he is not sure of himself that he turns to God; when he is in doubt, and yet feels the urgency of action; when he does not know which way to turn, and yet feels that he must turn some way. Above all it is when one has staked all his life's success and happiness upon some enterprise and feels it threatened with disaster or actually ruined.[972]

This example of religious experience provided by Wieman relates to the remembrance and experiencing of God in times of 'loss of ownership'. This could be an enterprise as well as a loved one. Nursi's concept of the *ana* is also related with the issue of ownership, albeit an ownership that is illusionary and that needs to be 'surrendered' or 'submitted' to God.[973] That is to say, Nursi would perhaps agree that if man accepts that all his

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[970] Colin Turner, Hasan Horkuc. *Makers of Islamic Civilization: Said Nursi* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 67.
[971] Henry Nelson Wieman. 'How Do We Know God?', 113.
[972] Ibid., 120.
[973] This underpins the notion of *islām* or submission. See *Turner, Horkuc. Makers of Islamic Civilization: Said Nursi*, 65.

belongings are temporal and illusionary and if he gives up his claims to ownership; this will lead to the 'purification of the soul (*nafs*)' and he will ultimately experience God. Thus, Nursi would condition religious experience with the purification of the self, and at the same time, he would agree with Wieman on the point that knowledge of God does not require a special faculty.

7.5.1 The 'self-referential' and the 'other-indicative'

With these examples, Nursi points out another important aspect of the *ana*, namely, 'other-indicative' (*manā-e ḥarfī*);[974] that it shows the meaning of things (in this case the meaning of the attributes and names of the Creator) other than itself.[975] Right at this point, Nursi begins to explain how the *ana* can also become a tool for *sharr*. He argues that the *ana* has two faces. While the first of these faces looks towards good (*khayr*) and existence (*wujūd*), the other face pertains to *sharr* and destruction and thus to non-existence (*'adam*).[976] The following figure provides an overview of Nursi's idea.

[974] The concept of 'self-referential' (*manā-e ismī*) and 'other-indicative' (*manā-e ḥarfī*) has been explained in chapter 5 of this study. Translations of these terms have been borrowed from *Makers of Islamic Civilization: Said Nursi*, 67ff.
[975] *The Words*, 559.
[976] Ibid., 559-560.

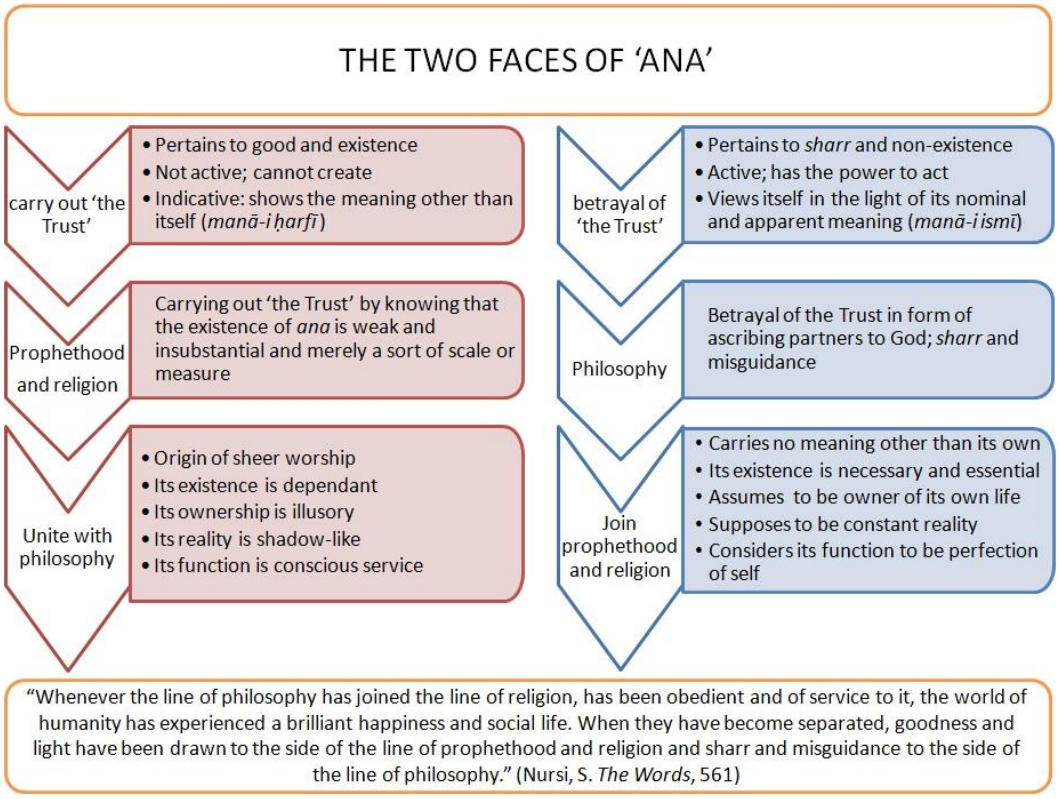

Figure 4: The Two Faces of 'Ana'[977]

In an original way, Nursi establishes a relation between the *ana* as one aspect of the 'Divine Trust' and prophethood and religion on one side, and philosophy on the other. Nursi's critique in this respect is to philosophy without religion. Because of its relevance for the study at hand, these two faces of *ana* introduced by Nursi will be elaborated upon in further detail.

7.5.2 The 'ana' pertaining to khayr

The first face of *ana*, which pertains to good (*khayr*) and existence (*wujūd*), is only capable of receiving favor[978], states Nursi. This statement is in fact connected with Nursi's interpretation of the verse "Whatever good (*ḥasana*)

[977] Composed from *The Words*, pp. 559-563.
[978] Ibid., 559.

happens to you is from God, but whatever evil (*sayyiatin*) befalls you is from yourself"[979]. Since the *ana* knows itself to be other-indicative (*manā-e ḥarfī*), showing the meaning of another, namely God, it is aware that it cannot create and thus accepts whatever is given.[980] Given the assertion that it has no actual existence but is merely an illusory line or a unit of measurement, Nursi adds that its dominicality (*rubūbiyyah*) is imaginary. It is like a thermometer or barometer that indicates the degrees and amounts of things; a measure that makes known the all-encompassing and limitless attributes of the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*).[981] Nursi offers this thought as an interpretation of the Qur'anic verse "Truly he succeeds who purifies it"[982]. Thus Nursi believes that he, who knows his soul (*nafs*) in this way and acts according to it, is included in the good news of this respective verse.[983] But Nursi does not stop here but goes one step further stating that after man has observed the universe through the telescope of the *ana* and has seen what the universe is, what duties it performs; and after all this knowledge of man which has remained as light and wisdom for him, the *ana* abandons its imaginary dominicality and supposed ownership and realizes God's sovereignty and that to Him alone belongs all praise and that all will be brought back to Him.[984] Nursi concludes that through this realization man achieves true worship and attains the rank of the 'Most Excellent of Patterns' (*aḥsan taqwīm*)[985]. This rank can be compared to the 'Perfect Man' (*insān kāmil*) described by Ibn 'Arabī.

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[979] Qur'ān, 4:79. Further details about this in 'Free Will' of this chapter.
[980] *The Words*, 559.
[981] Ibid.
[982] Qur'ān, 91:9. The two verses preceding this verse are "By the soul (*nafs*), and the proportion and order given to it; and its inspiration as to its wrong and its right;-truly he succeeds who purifies it (meaning the *nafs*)."
[983] *The Words*, 559.
[984] Ibid.
[985] Ibid., in indication of the Qur'ān, 95:4.

7.5.3 The 'ana' pertaining to sharr

The second face of *ana*, according to Nursi, pertains to *sharr* and leads to non-existence (*'adam*). This face in particular is of interest for it is directly related to this study. This face, states Nursi, becomes activated if the *ana* forgets the wisdom of its creation and abandons the duty of its nature; thus views itself merely in the light of its nominal and apparent meaning.[986] This is the state of betrayal of the 'Divine Trust', asserts Nursi, when the *ana* believes that it owns itself and comes under the category of the Qur'anic verse "And he fails who corrupts it."[987] Thus, if the *ana* is misused in this way, or in other words, if the *ana* of a human being thinks of itself not in terms of a hypothetical line, it will permeate all parts of that human being, states Nursi. Like a gigantic dragon, Nursi continues, it will swallow up that human being and the entire person with all his faculties will become pure *ana*.[988] The *ana*, claims Nursi, is supported by an 'inordinate self-esteem' (*anā'iyyah*)[989] of the human race at large. Through this kind of inordinate self-esteem, it uses itself as a yardstick and compares everyone and everything with itself; it contests the commands of the Glorious Maker and starts dividing God's sovereignty between them and other causes.[990] This state is, according to Nursi, the addressee of the verse "To assign partners to God is verily a great transgression."[991]

Nursi then concludes that the *ana*, while in this state, is in complete and utter ignorance (*jahl muṭlaq*), no matter how sophisticated it is and how knowledgeable it is in science. He thus continues:

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[986] Ibid., 560.
[987] Qur'ān, 91:10. This verse again refers to the soul (*nafs*).
[988] *The Words*, 560.
[989] Also translated as 'egoism' or 'I-ness'.
[990] *The Words*, 560.
[991] Qur'ān, 31:13.

> […] For when its senses and thoughts yield the lights of knowledge of the universe, those lights are extinguished because such an ana does not find any material within itself with which to confirm, illuminate, and perpetuate them. Whatever it encounters is dyed with the colours that are within it. Even if it encounters pure wisdom, the wisdom takes the form, within that *ana*, of absolute futility. For the colour of an *ana* that is in this condition is atheism and ascribing partners to God, it is denial of God Almighty. If the whole universe is full of shining signs, a dark point in the *ana* hides them from view, as though extinguished.[992]

Remembering the semantic field of *sharr* in the Qur'ān, one will be able to see that two of these terms that fell into that semantic field are mentioned here by Nursi. Ascribing partners to God and denial of God are, as it has been seen before, considered to be *sharr* according to the Qur'ān. As the quotation above indicates, to Nursi, any science or knowledge that does not lead a person to the knowledge of God (*ma'rifatullah*), is nothing but utter ignorance.

7.5.4 How Philosophy may lead to sharr

In the light of the above, Nursi explains how he believes that *ashrār* occur. He points out that since the time of Adam until now, two lines of thought have always continued and have spread throughout all classes of humanity.[993] One of them is according to Nursi the line of prophethood and religion, and the other the line of philosophy in its various forms.[994] The former is explained by Nursi as sheer worship in which the ana knows itself to be a bondsman, serving Another than itself. It is completely aware that it exists only through the creativity of Another. Thus, states Nursi, it knows all its ownerships to be temporal and apparent and it knows its own function to be conscious service to that Other.[995] Without going further in the line of

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[992] *The Words*, 560.
[993] Ibid., 561.
[994] Ibid.
[995] Ibid.

prophethood and religion, the latter one, namely the line of philosophy shall be elaborated, since according to Nursi, this line may well result in *ashrār*.[996]

As previously mentioned by Nursi, it is the line of philosophy[997] that regards the *ana* as carrying no meaning other than its own, in other words, being 'self-referential' (*manā-e ismī*). In this respect, in Nursi's view, the *ana* works purely on its own account and regards its existence as necessary and essential; assuming itself to be the real master in its sphere of disposal.[998] In this line then, the duty of the *ana* becomes perfection of self which originates from self-love. Nursi criticizes in this respect philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Ibn Sīnā and Farābī for their claims that the ultimate aim of humanity is to liken themselves to the Necessary Being and to resemble Him.[999] For this thought, according to Nursi, encourages 'inordinate self-esteem' (*anā'iyyah*) and polytheism and opens the doors for various forms of associating partners with God (like nature and other causes).[1000] Whereas, what is intrinsic to human nature is impotence and weakness, poverty and need, deficiency and imperfection; if this door is closed, states Nursi, then the road to worship is closed as well.[1001]

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[996] Ibid.
[997] Nursi's usage of philosophy is twofold. While he uses the term to refer to it in the classical sense, he also, in more often, uses the term alluding to the materialistic interpretation of science: "The philosophy the *Risale-i Nur* strikes at fiercely and attacks is not absolute, but the harmful sort. For the philosophy and wisdom that serve the life of human society, and morality and human attainments, and industry and progress, are reconciled with the Qur'ān. Indeed, such philosophy serves the Qur'ān's wisdom and does not oppose it. This sort the *Risale-i Nur* does not bother with. As for the other sort, since it both leads to misguidance, atheism, and the swamp of nature, and is the cause of vice and dissipation, heedlessness and misguidance; and since with its spellbinding wonders it opposes the Qur'ān's miraculous truths, the *Risale-i Nur* attacks and deals slaps at it with the powerful proofs in the comparisons contained in most of its parts. It does not attack beneficial, rightly-guided philosophy. Members of the secular schools can therefore embrace the *Risale-i Nur* without hesitation or objection." See *The Staff of Moses*, 8.
[998] *The Words*, 562-563.
[999] Ibid., 563.
[1000] Ibid.
[1001] Ibid.

Following these statements, Nursi now concludes that the line of philosophy, if it does not obey the line of religion, gives moral support to tyranny, encourages despots and urges oppressors to claim divinity. This is because according to the principles of philosophy without religion, states Nursi,

> … power is approved. 'Might is right' is the norm. It says 'All power to the strongest.' 'The winner takes all,' and 'In power there is right'.[1002]

According to this thought, anyone who has power and is strong claims to be right, no matter what he does.[1003] The line of religion, on the other hand, defends that power is in right, in other words, that the one who is right has or should have power.

Thus, Nursi thinks that this kind of thought bears and gives birth to all kinds of *ashrār*, the biggest thereof being the denial of God and the association of partners with God. Until here, Nursi tried to illustrate how the misuse of *ana* and thus the betrayal of the 'Divine Trust' will lead the human being to the commitment of *sharr*, on his own account, being responsible thereof[1004]. It is important to note that Nursi is not completely and blindly opposed to philosophy. He believes that in history, whenever the line of philosophy did unite with the line of prophethood and religion; that is to say, whenever philosophy has been obedient and in service to religion, the world of humanity has experienced a brilliant happiness and social life.[1005] However, the separation of the two has led to goodness and light being drawn to the side of religion and *sharr* and misguidance to the side of the line of

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[1002] Ibid.
[1003] This refers to the theory of evolution, that is, evolution by natural selection. It refers particularly to the notion of the 'survival of the fittest', which, arguably was not introduced by Darwin himself, but named as such for the first time by the philosopher Herbert Spencer in 1864. See Herbert Spencer. *Principles of Biology* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1886)
[1004] How man is responsible himself for the *ashrār* he commits will be elaborated later in this chapter.
[1005] *The Words*, 561.

philosophy.[1006] Thus, Nursi believes that philosophy needs to be nurtured and fed by prophethood and religion.

Nursi continues by means of four examples criticizing philosophy for firstly, trying to imitate and become like the Necessary Existent One (*wājib al-wujūd*) as self-perfection[1007]; secondly for introducing conflict concerning social life stating that "life is conflict"[1008]; thirdly, for claiming that "from one, one proceeds". In other words to claim that from one thing, only one thing can proceed and all other things will proceed from the latter by means of intermediaries[1009]; and fourthly the assertion that the purpose of every living being looks to itself or is connected with benefits for mankind.[1010]

It is thus quite significant, that Nursi sees the misuse of *ana* to be the origin for various other claims of philosophy in addition to the above mentioned, such as denying God choice; that His divine knowledge is not concerned with insignificant matters; that nature has the power to create; or that there is no afterlife and instead that souls are pre-eternal[1011]. Nursi concludes:

> Indeed, the powers of *sharr* have raised up the minds of atheistic philosophers as though with the beaks and talons of their *anas* and have dropped them in the valleys of misguidance. Thus, the *ana* is an idol in the microcosm, like nature is in the macrocosm.[1012]

Nursi also explains thus that philosophy that has not obeyed the line of religion has lost its way and the *ana* therefore has taken the reins into its

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[1006] Ibid.
[1007] Ibid., 564.
[1008] Ibid.
[1009] Ibid. Here, Nursi criticizes the thought of the 'Prime Mover' first introduced by Aristotle. Since this thought, according to Nursi, bears associating partners with God, in other words, believe in idols, it is nothing but *sharr*.
[1010] Ibid., 565. For further information, see *The Words*, pp. 95-100.
[1011] Ibid., 566-567.
[1012] Ibid., 567.

own hands, running into all sorts of misguidance.[1013] Nursi makes use of his theses mentioned before, the faculties of humankind and states that in this case, the faculty of instinct has given birth to idols and goddesses. In the branch of aggression, it has nurtured the fruits of greater and lesser Nimrods, Pharaohs and Shaddads, ruling over unfortunate mankind.[1014] And the faculty of the intellect gave birth to atheism, Materialism, and Naturalism, throwing man into confusion.[1015]

Now the respective verse stated that

> We did indeed offer the Trust to the heavens, and the earth, and the mountains; but they refused to undertake it being afraid thereof. But man assumed it; indeed, he is most unjust (*ẓalūman*), most foolish (*jahūla*)[1016]

If man is indeed the most comprehensive of all creation and capable to carry this very important divine Trust, why is it then that he is called in this verse most unjust (*ẓalūman*) and most foolish (*jahūla*)? According to Nursi, one of the reasons is man's interference in God's Divine duties. By doing so, Nursi states, man burdens his weak shoulders, his impatient head and debilitated heart in a way he cannot bear himself.[1017] Furthermore, Nursi believes that man is called unjust (*ẓalūman*) and most foolish (*jahūla*), when he misuses the purpose of the *ana* and thus betrays the Divine Trust.[1018] Contrary to animals, Nursi states, there are no limitations to the facutlies and inclinations of man. The inclination to tyranny and the love of the own *nafs* takes the upper hand. If the vicious side of *ana* and the 'inordinate self-esteem' (*anā'iyyah*), such as vanity, egocentrism, arrogance and obstinacy joins that

[1013] Ibid., 563.
[1014] Ibid., 564.
[1015] Ibid.
[1016] Qur'ān, 33:72.
[1017] Said Nursi. *Ilk Dönem Eserleri* (Istanbul: Söz Basım Yayın, 2007), 49.
[1018] *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, Vol 2, 1341.

inclination, it will produce such great sins humankind has no name for.[1019] Nursi further gives examples to unjust behavior saying for instance that every individual has numerous attributes. One of these attributes may sometimes summon hostility but the Qur'ān teaches, states Nursi, that hostility should be shown to that respective attribute and not the innocent individual – for he deserves merely to be pitied. But the foolish unjust, Nursi continues, will be unfair to the individual because of the single attribute; in some cases, he will even extent his hostility to the individual's family members and his colleagues.[1020] Nursi in the light of the above, further explains that since a thing has numerous causes it can be that that malicious attribute is not due to the heart's malice but the result of an external cause. Therefore, if the attribute is malicious or even infidel-like, the individual itself cannot be malicious.[1021]

In the light of all the above, it might be appropriate to state that the correct use of the *ana* and thus the upholding of Divine Trust as well as man's concentration on his own duties instead of his interference in the Divine, is all connected with divine determining and free will.

7.6 Free Will (*juz'ī ikhtiyār*) and Divine Determining (*qadar*)

Nursi in *The Words* interprets [15:21] and [36:12] of the Qur'ān[1022] and treats divine determining (*qadar*) and free will (*juz'ī ikhtiyār*) (or power of choice) in the same chapter, due to their close connection.

[1019] Ibid., 2045.
[1020] Ibid.
[1021] Ibid.
[1022] "And there is not a thing but its (sources and) treasures (inexhaustible) are with Us, but we only send down thereof in due and ascertainable measures." [15:21]; "And of all things have we taken account in a Clear Book." [36:12]

Trying to understand the notion of divine determining and free choice is very important, mainly for the following reason: If it is claimed that all actions are created by God, that is, if it is believed that it is Divine Power that makes one speak, walk, laugh, think, etc; furthermore, if it is asserted that man is responsible and accountable for his actions – then there must be something about man, some possession of his that makes him responsible as such. For if all actions are created without man's interference, like it was claimed by the Jabriyya , it is impossible to hold him accountable. On the other hand, if it is man who creates his own actions, like asserted by the Mu'tazilites, then it becomes difficult to believe that God is the creator of everything. Thus the questions arise, who is to blame for moral ashrār? Can one put God on trial saying that if He had not pre-determined, man would not have done any of the moral *ashrār* which he committed? It is justified if man says that he cannot be held responsible for he is just a puppet acting in accordance with the Preserved Tablet (*lawḥ al-maḥfūḍ*)[1023]? This issue, it seems, can be solved only if the nature of free will and divine determining is comprehended.

Right in the beginning of his treatise, Nursi points out that divine determining as well as free will pertain to state and conscience, thus are not theoretical and do not pertain to knowledge.[1024] According to Nursi, divine determining and free will have the duty to prevent man from irresponsibility and haughtiness. That is, the moment man becomes too pre-deterministic[1025] in his thoughts and actions, attributing everything he does

[1023] The term Preserved Tablet (lawḥ al-maḥfūḍ), also known as the "mother of the book" is mentioned in the Qur'ān, 13:39 as follows: "God erases what he will, or confirms. And with Him is the mother of the book."
[1024] *The Words*, 477.
[1025] Determinism is the idea that everything that happens, including all human actions, is completely determined by prior events / or God. This term should be distinguished from pre-determinism, namely the idea that the entire past (as well as the future) was determined at the origin of the universe. For more information, Van Inwagen, P. 'Moral

to God, the power of choice confronts him and reminds him of his responsibility and obligation. On the other hand, the moment he start attributing all his good deeds and achievements to himself, divine determining confronts him showing him his limits and reminding him that without God's grace and help, he would not be able to achieve them.[1026] Thus, Nursi explains that divine determining has been included among the matters of belief to save them from pride and conceit; not to relieve them from their obligations and responsibility. Likewise, free will has been included in order to be the source of *ashrār*; not to be the source of virtues.[1027] This is because good deeds are wanted and required by Divine mercy, created by dominical power. Man's share in those, explains Nursi, is merely supplication, belief, consciousness, and consent. In the case of *ashrār*, however, it is man's *nafs* that wants them, either through capacity[1028] or through choice. God thereupon, creates the *ashrār* through a Divine law which comprises numerous benefits.[1029]

Nursi claims that divine determining is exempt from evil and ugliness with regard to results and fruits, and free from tyranny in respect to reason and cause. According to Nursi, divine determining looks to the true causes and acts justly but man, constructing his judgment on causes which he sees only superficially, falls into error within the pure justice of divine determining.[1030] He makes this clear with the following example:

Responsibility, Determinism, and the Ability to Do Otherwise' in *The Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (1999), pp. 341-350.

[1026] *The Words*, 477.

[1027] Ibid., 478.

[1028] "In the white and beautiful light of the sun some substances become black and putrefy, and the blackness is related to their capacity" and not to the sun or its light. *The Words*, 478.

[1029] *The Words*, 478.

[1030] Ibid.

> "a judge finds you guilty of theft and sends you to prison. You are not a thief but you have committed a murder which no one knows about. Thus, divine determining also sentenced you to imprisonment, but it sentenced you for the secret murder and acted justly. Since the judge sentenced you for a theft of which you were innocent, he acted unjustly. Thus, in a single thing, the justice of divine determining and divine creation and man's wrongful choice or acquisition were apparent in two respects…"[1031]

7.6.1 Compatibility of Divine Determining and Free Will

Nursi's view on the compatibility of divine determining and free will is that these two are not opposed to each other and can be perfectly reconciled. This opinion of Nursi is in contradiction with Ibn Sīnā, for instance, who is a hard determinist. Although he insisted on the fact that human beings are free[1032], he believed that every being and every action is the necessary consequence of external causes.[1033] From a radically deterministic perspective, then, if human beings are not free in their choices and their actions, should God be responsible? Ibn Sīnā's answer would be no for he believes that God is also not free in His actions, that is that He is also determined – not by external causes like it is with human beings, but by His own nature.[1034] Freedom of choice implies that after one has done something, that he could have done otherwise. However, Ibn Sīnā claimed that God cannot at any moment chose to do anything except what necessity has determined God's nature to do.[1035] Who, then, is going to be held

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[1031] Ibid., 478-9.
[1032] Ibn Sīnā believes that faith and reason demand the advocacy of human free choice. See *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sīnā's Theodicy*, 161.
[1033] Ibid.
[1034] Ibid., 162. Nursi's assertion that the misuse of *ana* is the origin of various claims of philosophy, one of the being to deny God choice, makes itself manifest here.
[1035] *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sīnā's Theodicy*, 162. This view of Ibn Sīna is also supported by Hourani who claims that 'determinism' was central to Ibn Sīna's philosophy as opposed to traditional 'predestination.' While the former suggests that human acts and characters are predestined by a freely willed decision of God; the latter understands *al-qadar* as the 'determination' of man's life as a part of a cosmic system in which God causes His effects by the necessity of His nature and their natures. See Hourani, George F. 'Ibn Sīnā's 'Essay on

responsible for moral evils? In Ibn Sīnā's system, no one could be held responsible, since there was no room for moral responsibility because any being in this system, including God, cannot help doing what they do.[1036] This, it might be imagined, also lifted the issue of reward and punishment. In this regard, there was no punishment and reward[1037] in the sense that is understood, if the Qur'anic verses would be taken literally. Rather, according to Ibn Sīnā, punishment was the alienation from God whereas reward was equal to closeness to God. In other words, they were the effects of our own behavior in the present life.[1038]

According to Ibn Rushd, the agent's mind was to be blamed for moral evils. That is, comparing volitional acts with compelled acts, he asserted that man wills his own acts and those acts come about through an operation of the agent's mind; whereas compelled acts come about through external forces bringing about the act directly.[1039] In this respect was Ibn Rushd an advocate of free will and the cause of injustice was not God but rather the agent's mind.

Ghazālī's view was that God cannot do wrong (*ẓulm*) for by definition, wrongdoing consisted in dealing unjustly with the property of others. But God was the owner of everything and nobody was in possession of anything God could deal unjustly with.[1040] Furthermore, Ghazālī was opposed to Ibn Sīnā's eschatology and explained that rewards or the moral progress of man were bestowed by God through His grace.[1041] In regards to the issue of man

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the Secret of Destiny'' in *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, Vol. 29, No. 1 (1966), 25; 40.
[1036] *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sīnā's Theodicy*, 162.
[1037] 'Ibn Sīnā's 'Essay on the Secret of Destiny'', 33.
[1038] *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sīnā's Theodicy*, 164.
[1039] 'Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics', 257.
[1040] 'Ghazali on the Ethics of Action', 74.
[1041] Ibid., 77.

being compelled in his actions and being autonomous at the same time, Ghazālī claimed that man's free will directed and invited power. Man's intellect (*'aql*), on the other hand, influenced his free will.[1042] Since free will obeyed the judgments of the intellect and wisdom[1043], it meant that all of this was compulsorily ordained for man without his knowledge. Man being merely the center of implementation, another guided man's will and strength, at all times. In the light of the above, Ghazālī believed that man was the intermediary of God's will and power flow being compelled with free choice. This intermediary state of man has been called *kasb* or acquisition.[1044]

Nursi's thought, being in line with that of Ghazālī, is radically different with that of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd. First of all he claims that the fact that human beings are not capable of understanding God's wisdom and the compatibility of free will and divine determining does not ipso facto prove that it is not so.[1045] As opposed to the claim that human beings choose necessarily out of their determination to external factors, Nursi explains that out of necessity, everyone perceives in himself a will and choice. The fact that man cannot explain its nature does not prove its non-existence. There are, according to Nursi, many things, although their existence is self-evident, man does not know their true nature. Man's ignorance of a thing is no proving for its non-existence.[1046]

[1042] Al-Ghazālī. *Ihyā Ulūm-id-Dīn, Kitāb at-Tawhīd wa at-Tawakkul*, Vol. IV, pp. 238-286.
[1043] In chapter 3, the example was given about a person being chased by someone with a stick until that person stopped at the edge of a roof. Suddenly his intellect told him that being hit with a stick was better or easier than jumping from the roof. All his limbs stopped moving, that is, his power obeyed the 'caller of free will' and motion obeyed power. For further detail, see chapter 3.
[1044] *Ihyā Ulūm-id-Dīn, Kitāb at-Tawhīd wa at-Tawakkul*, pp. 238-286.
[1045] *The Words*, 480.
[1046] Ibid.

Nursi thirdly believes that divine determining can be understood as some sort of knowledge (*'ilm*). Knowledge is connected with man's will and choice, that is, God knows through His absolute and all embracing knowledge what man will do or choose. Knowledge (*'ilm*) is dependent on the thing known (*ma'lūm*).[1047] The thing known is not dependent on knowledge. In other words, knowledge does not direct the thing known with regard to its external existence. This is because the essence of the thing known and its external existence look to will and are based on power.[1048] Two examples will be given for the theses above. Firstly, one should think of a pear. The pear in my mind is knowledge (*'ilm*), whereas the known (*ma'lūm*) is the pear itself in real life. One might ask the question whether the pear is like that because of my knowledge (*'ilm*), or whether, due to the pear being as it is (*ma'lūm*), I know it the way it is? In other words, is my knowledge dependant on the external appearance of that pear? Or is that pear which is *ma'lūm*, dependant on my knowledge? If I knew the pear as a water melon; would the pear turn into one? The answer would be no because the appearance of the pear is not dependant on my knowledge. It does not look like that because of my knowledge of it. Rather I know that pear as it is because of its shape and appearance.

The second example that will be provided has two aspects to it. Firstly, one might think of a commander who takes a camera and goes off to check on two of his soldiers keeping guard. He sees that both of them are sleeping. He records them with his camera. In this example, knowledge (*'ilm*) is the record in that camera and the knowledge of the commander about the

[1047] Nursi shares this statement with the *ahl al-kalām*. See Qādi, 'Abd al-Jabbār. *Sharhu'l-Usūl al-Ḥamsa* (Bayrūt, 2001), 290. Or see also Ghazālī, Abū Ḥamīd M. *al-İqtiṣād fī al-İ'tiqād* (Bayrut: Dāru'l-Qutub al-'İlmiyya, 1983), pp. 65-66; Fahraddīn al-Rāzī. al-Arba'īn fī Usūl al-Dīn, ed. Aḥmad Hijāzī al-Sakā, Vol. 1 (Qāhira: 1986), 207.
[1048] *The Words*, 481.

situation of the two soldiers. The known (*ma'lūm*), on the other hand, is the sleeping of the soldiers. The questions are the same as in the above example: Did the soldiers sleep because their commander recorded them? Or did the commander record them because they were sleeping? It is obvious that the second is the case. If, the next day, the commander would call these two soldiers, would show them the records and would say to them that they will be punished for sleeping while on duty; it would be ridiculous if the soldiers would reply: "You are the cause for our shortcoming, if you would not have recorded us, we would not have slept while keeping guard." This is because the knowledge (the commander's knowledge about the soldiers) is dependent on the known (the soldier's sleeping while keeping guard).

The second aspect of this example is as follows: Assuming that this commander is able to travel in time and hence able to travel to the future before these days have come; and thus able to know about what is going to happen in the future before it has actually happened. Also assuming that the commander has seen these two soldiers sleeping while keeping guard in a month time; has recorded them and has come back in time. After a month has passed, he has shown the two soldiers the recording saying that he knew a month ahead of time that they were going to sleep, the soldiers still have no right to say that it is the commanders fault that they have slept.

Nursi's view that knowledge (*'ilm*) is dependent on the known (*ma'lūm*) should therefore be understood as in the light of the above examples. In this respect, one might say that divine determining, which is a kind of knowledge, is not in contradiction with the choices that human beings make. One does not nullify the other. This view of Nursi is opposed to that of Ibn Sīnā who

stated that the existent (*ma'lūm*) corresponds to the known (*'ilm*).[1049] Ibn Sīnā's assertion derives from his thought that the coming into existence of something is the unavoidable consequence of God's knowledge of, and reflections on, the order. The order that emanates is nothing but a manifestation of the order known by God – in fact it is an exact copy of that order. Hence, the existent corresponds to the known.[1050]

7.6.2 Nature of Free Will

There are some further, basic points that also need clarification and that scholars such as Augustine have dealt with. According to Babcock, Augustine tried to find an answer to the Manicheans' assertion[1051] that man sins because he is compelled by the dark power of evil operating upon man from within; for in reality, if man would not be overwhelmed by this power of evil, the soul, the self, would not turn away from the good.[1052] Thus, the Manicheans, Babcock further explains, posed the question, why the soul would ever determine itself to the evil, if it is good and its first orientation is to the good? Augustine never escaped this question, nor was he able to solve it.[1053] If the term mentioned by Augustine, namely 'the soul' or 'the self' is seen as the equivalent to the soul (*nafs*) in Islam, one might well say that the *nafs* seems to have an utterly different notion than the self of Augustine. For the *nafs* never really pertains to good; it rather commands the evil.[1054]

[1049] *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sīnā's Theodicy*, 129.
[1050] Ibid.
[1051] It should be kept in mind at this point, that the Manicheans were bitheists who believed in two external powers; one good, the other evil. Augustine himself was a Manichean before his conversion in 386 and tried to find answers to the problem of evil and free will from a theistic point of view. See 'Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency', 31 ff.
[1052] 'Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency', 30.
[1053] Ibid.
[1054] The Literature of Islam explains the *nafs*, or *nafs al-ammārah* to be an evil-commanding soul. This issue, which is mainly a spiritual or even mystical field of study, is dealt with

From this perspective, the question, why the soul (or the self) would ever determine itself to the evil becomes superfluous.

Furthermore Augustine decided to choose a more delicate and difficult position as opposed to the assertion of the Manicheans that evil stems from the contrary nature opposing the divine and existing independently. Augustine claimed that the origin of evil comes forth from God, the human soul and the fallen angels.[1055] Thus he insisted on only two kinds of evil: sin and penalty. The former being moral evils committed by moral agents and the latter being the punishment that God justly imposes in response to sin.[1056] Babcock explains that, particularly regarding the first kind of evil, namely moral evils committed by moral agents, Augustine faced a problem that was two-fold:

> ...on the one hand, to establish the claim that the evil that persons do is specifically moral evil, of which they may rightly be counted the moral agents and for which, therefore, they are justly subject to penalty. But on the other... even though human beings are capable of (moral) evil, they nevertheless came forth good from God and do not implicate God in evil as the maker of the makers of human sin and wretchedness.[1057]

Augustine's answer lay in freedom of will. He defined will as "an uncompelled movement of mind either to acquire or to avoid losing some object" and sin as "will either to keep or to obtain something that justice forbids when there is freedom to abstain".[1058] As far as could be understood, unlike Nursi, Augustine did not provide an explanation for the nature or

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within the sphere of Sūfism, under the name *tazkiyat al-nafs*. For more information, see. 'Tazkiyat al-nafs: The Qur'anic Paradigm', pp. 101-127

[1055] 'Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency', 31.

[1056] Ibid.

[1057] Ibid., 31-2.

[1058] Ibid., 37.

quiddity of free will or choice as such. He did, however, recognize the difficulty in trying to explain the cause for the first sin and preferred rather to speak of a 'deficient' rather than an 'efficient' cause of the first evil will.[1059] He stated:

> ... the cause is not an efficient but a deficient cause because the evil will itself is not something effective but something defective. For to defect from the highest to a lesser good, that is to begin to have an evil will.[1060]

As will be seen in the following explanations of Nursi, this point of Augustine is quite similar to Nursi's assertions that free choice (*juzī ikhtiyār*) (Nursi does not talk about evil will as such, though) has no actual external existence. It appears when man makes a choice, and disappears again when there is nothing to choose. Nursi calls this a 'theoretical matter' (*amr itibārī)*[1061]. In other words, theoretical matter is called anything that man names for description such as the words 'above', 'underneath', 'left', 'right', 'big', 'small', 'far', 'close', and so on. All of these have no external reality but no one can claim the non-existence of them either.

Hence, Nursi states, that the nature and quiddity of free choice (*juzī ikhtiyār*) is unknown to us. However,

> everyone perceives in himself a will and choice; he knows it through his conscience. To know the nature of beings is one thing, to know they exist is something different. There are many things which, although their existence is self-evident, we do not know their true nature. The power of choice may be included among these.[1062]

Nursi, as other traditional Muslim scholars, criticizes the Mu'tazili thought that suggests that man is the creator of his acts and the Jabrī

[1059] Ibid., 46.
[1060] Ibid.
[1061] *The Words*, 479.
[1062] Ibid., 480.

thought that proposes that man has absolutely no role in his actions.[1063] He categorizes both outside of the *ahl al-sunna*. Furthermore, he states the difference between Maturīdī and Ash'arī (both of the *ahl al-sunna*) thoughts lie in the issue of inclination (*mayalān*), which is the essence of the power of choice.

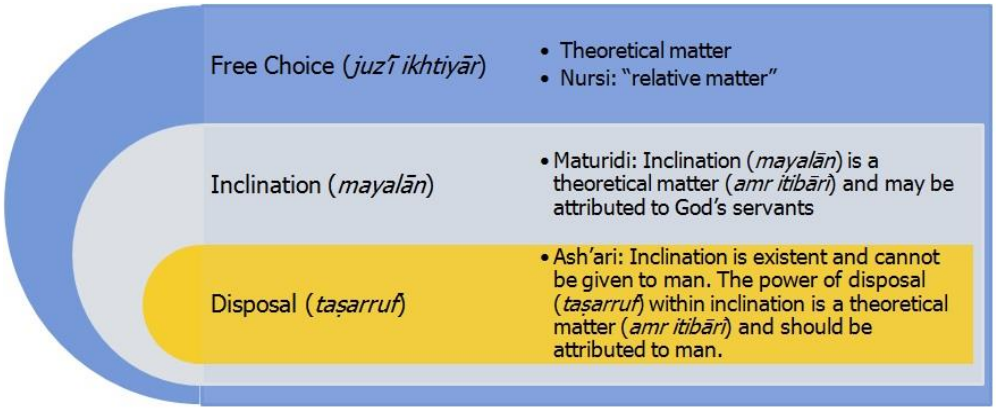

Figure 5: Free Choice, Acquisition and Sharr

According to the Maturīdī, says Nursi, inclination is a theoretical matter (*amr itibārī)* and may be attributed to God's servants[1064]. But the Ash'arī did consider it to have existence, therefore they did not attribute it to man. Instead they stated that the power of disposal (*taṣarruf*) within inclination is a theoretical matter, which, according to Nursi, "makes the inclination and the disposal together a 'relative matter' (*amr nisbī*) lacking a definitive external existence."[1065]

Turner rightly points out the puzzling point here: while Ash'arī agreed that inclination and the power of disposal together constituted a mental entity that had no external existence which could therefore not be attributed to

[1063] Ibid., 482.
[1064] The reason why it can be attributed to God's servants is, as stated earlier, because theoretical matter has no external existence and thus does not require a cause to necessitate it. Therefore, it can attributed to man.
[1065] *The Words*, 482.

man, he believed inclination to be a created matter when standing on its own. Why this is Nursi did not explain.[1066]

The term 'relative matter' introduced by Nursi, is just slightly different from 'theoretical matter'. While theoretical matter can be explained through certain descriptive words as mentioned before, 'relative matter' appears not to describe things but to relate them to other things. For instance, if I say 'left', I mean left from my perspective. From the perspective of the person standing in front of me, 'left' would become 'right'; or the second floor of an apartment is 'above' the first floor, but 'underneath' the third floor. The building and the floor do exist. However, 'above' and 'underneath' have no external existence. They are 'relative matters'. Similarly, goodness is existent; with the intervention of *sharr*, different levels of goodness appear.

Babcock claims that Augustine was not able to find the continuity with the dispositions, inclinations, motivations, aims and intentions of the agent that must be present if an act is to count as the agent's own and therefore as an instance of moral agency.[1067] Nursi seems to have been able to provide an answer to this problem.

According to Nursi, theoretical and relative matters have no external existence. Ontologically speaking, in order to appear, there is no requirement for all causes to gather. The lack of such a requirement does allow the ability to choose. Nursi now goes one step further, and closes the circle of one's understanding of free choice. He states:

> If the cause of the theoretical matters acquires the weight of preference, the theoretical matter may become actual and existent. In which case, at that juncture, it may be abandoned. The Qur'an may say to a person at that point: "This is *sharr*; do not do it." Indeed, if God's servants had been the

[1066] Colin Paul Turner. *The Qur'an Revealed*, 379.
[1067] 'Augustine on Sin and Moral Agency', 49.

> creators of their actions and had had the power to create, then their wills would have been removed. For an established rule in the sciences of religion and philosophy is: "If a thing is not necessary, it may not come into existence [of itself]." That is, there has to be a cause for a thing to come into existence. The cause necessarily requires the effect. Then no power of choice would remain.[1068]

In the light of the above statement, one might say that no matter whether free choice is a theoretical or relative matter, in both cases, it has no external existence and thus is not a thing (*shay'*). Therefore, it can be ascribed to man (the agent) for one cannot claim the creation of something that does not really, externally exist.

In the light of the above, all deeds[1069] mentioned in chapter 2 that fall under the semantic field of the term *sharr* in the Qur'ān are freely chosen by man and thus are ascribed to him.

Mackie asserted in chapter 3, that the free will defense does not offer a solution to the question whether God can make people do choose the right at all times. This question is connected in some ways with the Qur'anic verse 113:2, in which man is asked to seek refuge by God from the *sharr* of what He has created. To the objections to this verse why God would ask someone to seek refuge in Him for something He willed to happen, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī stated that God cannot be taken into account for anything He does.[1070]

Nursi's explanations above represent an answer to Mackie's assertion as well as to the objections to the verse mentioned, for which Rāzī confined himself with a short answer. Following Nursi's illustration, to make people choose

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[1068] *The Words*, 482.
[1069] These deeds were parsimony, going astray, disbelief, idolatry, violation of covenant or treaty, aversion from God, slander, and transgression as mentioned in the Qur'ān; and the fabrication of lies, hypocrisy, cruelty, injustice and to fail to put the teachings of the Qur'ān into practice as mentioned in the hadīth narrations.
[1070] *Tefsīr-i Kebīr Mefātihu'l-Gayb*, surah Falaq (Online version).

the right at all times, would make free choice an actual existent matter with all necessary causes existent, which is impossible. Nursi explains this further in the following lines:

> If you say: Preference without a cause or attribute to cause the preference is impossible (*tarjīḥ bilā murajjih muḥāl*). But the theoretical or relative matter we call human acquisition (*kasb*) sometimes does a thing and sometimes does not. Now if there is nothing to cause the preference, this would constitute an instance of preference without something to cause it. Does this not demolish one of the most important foundations of theology?[1071]

It has been stated in chapter 5 that every contingent (*mumkin*) being's existence (*wujūd*) and non-existence (*'adam*) is of equal possibility for that thing. If it has come into existence, there must have been a determinant (*murajjih*) that caused the thing to exist by preferring its existence over its non-existence. This determinant is called in theology the necessarily existent One (*wājib al-wujūd*), in other words, something whose existence is self-necessitated. The question posed above asks what the status of that faculty within man, namely inclination or disposition, is. Since that faculty has no external existence, this means that there is no determinant causing the actions of man?

Nursi's answer is as follows:

> …preference without a cause or attribute to cause the preference is impossible. That is, a being deemed preferable or superior without a cause or attribute to make it so is impossible. But preference without something to cause it is permissible and occurs. Will is an attribute, and its mark is to perform a work such as that.[1072]

In the statement above, Nursi agrees that it is not possible for something to come into existence without a determinant, which is the *wājib al-wujūd*. And it is that very cause who declares something 'preferable' or 'superior' over

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[1071] *The Words*, 482.
[1072] Ibid.

something else. However, in the case of human free will, man's inclination (*mayalān*) or disposal (*taṣarruf*) does not do such thing. It does not declare something 'preferable' or 'superior'. The only thing it does is to choose between two possibilities. While it may incline towards doing one thing today, it may as well choose to refrain from doing the same thing the next day.

This can be explained with the following illustration: x wants to slap y. In this case, x, the slap and y are all creatures (*makhlūq*) and thus created by God. However, 'wanting or intending to slap' or 'having an inclination to slap' is not a creation but a theoretical matter (*amr itibārī*). After x decides to slap y, that is, after x has chosen one of two possibilities (to slap or not to slap), the action takes place. If this action is *sharr*, the ethical teachings of the Qur'ān whispers into the ear of x: "Don't do this!" Since theoretical matter, which is merely an inclination, is not in need of any causes in order to appear, x can always relinquish, if he wishes. If theoretical matter would have been dependant on external causes, x's free choice would have been taken away and he would be coerced to act in a certain way. Just as fire, after all causes have gathered, has no other choice but to burn.

It might be helpful to summarize what has been said about free choice, acquisition and *sharr* so far: free choice (*juz'ī ikhtiyārī*) has no external existence and is a theoretical or relative matter (*amr itibārī or amr nisbī*). Its causes are non-existential and therefore it is subject to change. Similarly, acquisition (*kasb*) also has no external existence and is also subject to change.[1073] *Sharr* is non-existential in nature, it is a unit of measurement, and in most cases the result of human acquisition (*kasb*) or inclination (*mayalān*).[1074]

[1073] *The Words*, 479.
[1074] Ibid.

According to Nursi, God does not create *sharr*. Within the creation, along with minor *ashrār* (pl. of *sharr*), there is major goodness (*khayr*). To abandon major goodness for a minor *sharr* results in greater *sharr*. Therefore, a minor *sharr* becomes like good.[1075]

Nursi further explains that since God is the creator of all things man has no interference in creation whatsoever. His part is only the inclination or the power of disposal within the inclination. This statement is quite similar to that of Ghazālī who explained that it is God's action that creates power in man while man's action consists using the power created.[1076]

Then Nursi asks the following: If God creates the murder, why am I called murderer?[1077] And secondly, how can huge destructions and big *ashrār* happen through such a small part that is within the responsibility of man?[1078]

Regarding the first question, the following image might be of help which derives from the explanations of Nursi:

[1075] Ibid., 478.
[1076] Abrahamov, Binjamin. 'Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Causality' in *Studia Islamica*, No. 67 (1988), 79.
[1077] *The Words*, 482.
[1078] Ibid., 479.

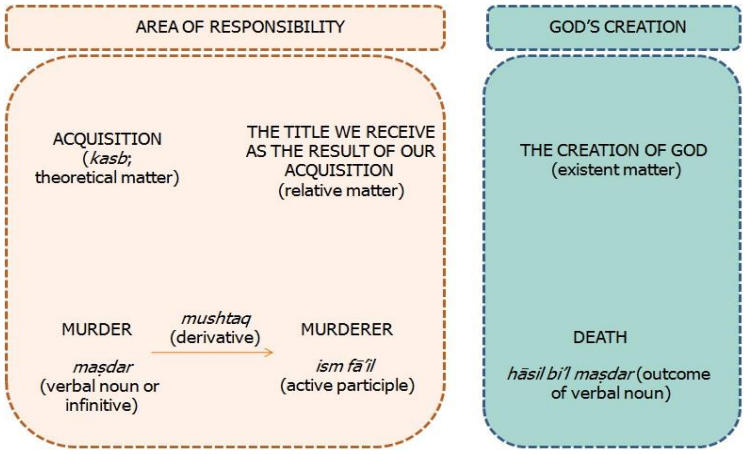

Figure 6: Explanation of the relation between theoretical matter and external existence[1079]

Nursi makes use of the Arabic grammar rules in order to answer this question. According to the rules of Arabic grammar, an active participle maybe derived from an infinitive (which is a theoretical matter and subjective), but not from its outcome (which has an external existence). The infinitive, states Nursi, is the acquisition. It is subjective and is something that has no external existence (therefore attributable to man). As the result of his acquisition, he can thus acquire the title of the active participle. That is, why man, as in the example above, receives the title murderer. The outcome of the infinitive, on the other hand, is God's creature.[1080] It is attributed to God because it is something fixed and concrete and has external existence. If one searches for the responsible, he cannot find it around God's creation, but rather around the acquisition.

Turner emphasizes an important point worth noting here: The question posed above is "Since the one who creates the murder is Almighty God, why do you call me a murderer?" Turner points out that this question is based on

[1079] Own figurative illustration of Nursi's example: *The Words*, 482-483.
[1080] *The Words*, 482-483.

a false premise since it assumes the infinitive to be created by God. It has been stated that murder has no real existence and thus cannot be 'created' but 'acquired' by man. Turner thus believes that the right way of asking the question would be "Since the one who creates death is Almighty God, why do you call me a murderer?" and continues:

> Nursi, although clearly aware that the premise upon which the question is based lacks validity, gives the questioner the benefit of the doubt and eschews a direct attack on his faulty reasoning, electing instead to clarify the issue by means of a measured and compelling appeal to the internal logic of Arabic grammar.[1081]

To the second question, how huge destructions and big *sharr* happen through such a small part that is within the responsibility of man, such as his acquisition, Nursi explains that the reason lies in the nature of *sharr* which is non-existential and destructive. Vast destructions and innumerable instances of non-existence may occur through a single theoretical matter and one instance of non-existence.[1082] E.g., if the captain of a ship abandons his duties, the ship may sink and the labor of all those employed on it may become useless. The reason for that vast destruction is a simple abandonment of duty, through the provocation of a theoretical free choice.[1083] In this respect, Nursi sides himself with Ibn Sīnā in that (essential) *ashrār* "…are not due to the action of the agent but to the inaction of the agent…"[1084] Hence, destruction is easy for it is non-existential, whereas construction is difficult for it is existential. While it takes a minute and minimum effort to burn down a house, e.g. through lighting up one match, it takes many months to rebuild it.

[1081] *The Qur'an Revealed*, 383.
[1082] Ibid., 479.
[1083] Ibid.; 'Mesnevī-i Nūriye' in *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, Vol. 2, 1382.
[1084] *The Problem of Evil – Ibn Sīnā'a Theodicy*, p. 81.

7.6.3 All goodness pertains to God, all sharr pertains to man

In direct relation with the above, Nursi interprets the following verse of the Qur'ān:

> Whatever good (*ḥasana*) happens to you is from God, but whatever evil (*sayyiatin*) befalls you is from yourself[1085]

The message Nursi thinks this verse conveys is that man has no right to boast for things he has actually not done. For man's soul (*nafs*) consists of nothing else but fault and *sharr*. Even if there would be some *khayr*, it would be quite minor (*juz'î*), like his free choice (*juz'ī ikhtiyār*). However, Nursi continues, man should not say: "my *sharr* is also quite minor", for with his free choice (*juz'ī ikhtiyār*) he can commit major *sharr*.[1086] Nursi reminds himself and the reader of man's purpose, namely his vicegerency and how creation is favorably disposed to this purpose. Thus, Nursi states, any mistake that man commits terminates the fruits of creation's work and thus leads to major loss.[1087] Nursi explains that the soul (*nafs*), which is in one way the disciple of Satan – contrary to the premise – makes man think of his *khayr* to be abundant and all-encompassing, and his *sharr* to be very minor and insignificant; thus becoming Pharaoh-like.[1088]

Nursi explains this with the analogy of a foolish man who becomes part of a merchant ship crew. Each one of these individuals pay a certain amount and fulfill a certain duty on that ship. However that foolish man, through denial of his duty, becomes the reason for that ship to sink. Every individual makes a loss of thousand liras. Then they turn to that foolish man and say: "You must take all our loss on, for you have spoilt all our work." But the foolish

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[1085] Qur'ān, 4:79.
[1086] *Risale-i Nur Külliyatı*, Vol. 2, 1382.
[1087] Ibid.
[1088] Ibid.

man replied: "No, I do not accept this. This loss should be split up and I shall take over my part."[1089] Nursi continues with his analogy: The second time, the foolish man has fulfilled all his duties on the merchant ship and they have made one thousand liras profit. They said: "Loss is according to duty and profit according to capital. So let us split the profit up according to our capitals." But the haughty man replied: "No, all profit is mine, for before you said that I have to take on all the loss. And I did not accept. Thus, all profit should be mine as well, then." Following to this statement, it was said to him: "Oh ignorant man! The existence (*wujūd*) of something pertains to the coming together of all its causes; thus, the fruits of that being (*wujūd*) is split up to all causes. Profit is the fruit of being. But loss is the fruit of non-being (*'adam*). And non-being comes about through the lack of one or more causes. Therefore, the fruit of non-being will be given to that lacking cause."[1090]

After providing the above analogy, Nursi continues to explain the meaning of the above mentioned Qur'anic verse. He gives four reasons why man has no right to be haughty and prideful. Firstly, Nursi states, *sharr* are from man, *khayr* are from elsewhere. Secondly, the *sharr* of man is vast, whereas his *khayr* is very minor.[1091] The third reason provided by Nursi is that man has received the payment for his good deeds (*'amal khayr*) in advance, before his actions. According to Nursi, all goodness of man together cannot correspond to one hundredth of God's bounties towards man. Therefore, Nursi states, Paradise is granted to man out of God's mercy and blessing; whereas Hell is the punishment for man's actions and hence pure justice. For man is capable to commit grievous and eternal crime with minor

[1089] Ibid.
[1090] Ibid., 1383.
[1091] Ibid.

sharr.[1092] And as fourth reason, Nursi states that *khayr* become *khayr* if it is for the sake of pleasing God. If it is for God, it is with His permission.[1093] Thus, Nursi continues, man's right is thankfulness instead of haughtiness. For any action that bears haughtiness, Nursi explains, is sanctimony and hypocrisy. And sanctimony and hypocrisy turns *khayr* into *sharr*.[1094]

7.7 Existential Theodicy in Nursi

This study has shown that Nursi defines *sharr* most commonly as disbelief (*kufr*) and the association of partners with God (*shirk*). This is in line with the Qur'anic definition of the term *sharr*. Thus, according to Nursi, the worst of human misfortune is that which effects religion.[1095] Nursi in fact believes that any other misfortunes that do not affect religion, in reality are not misfortunes, in other words, cannot be named *sharr*.[1096]

It is difficult to offer consolation to inflictions that befall human beings, more so if these human beings are innocent – and worst of all, if they are innocent and children. An often cited and hence famous example for this is Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov,* in which Ivan Karamazov, facing the death of an innocent child, is forced to "hand back his ticket" to existence. In such cases, after having offered an initial consolation, what follows mostly right after is trying to look for reasons.

Nursi offers practical solutions and cures on how to deal with certain disasters, calamities, misfortunes that befall human beings. Furthermore, he offers solutions to the biggest of *ashrār*, namely disbelief, saying that

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[1092] Ibid.
[1093] Ibid.
[1094] Ibid.
[1095] *The Flashes Collection*, 26.
[1096] Ibid.

psychologically as well as cosmologically, the cure for all kinds of so called moral *ashrār* is faith (*īmān*). For a man who has faith, in other words, a believer (*mu'min*) has established on a cosmological level his own ontological status. According to this man, "since we have an infinitely precious bounty like belief, both old age is agreeable, and illness and death. If there are things that are disagreeable, they are sin, vice, innovations (*bid'a*)[1097] and misguidance."[1098] The way to get rid of all these *ashrār* is to walk in the light of *tawhīd* with faith and love. For Nursi states that

> if love, man's sweetest, most pleasurable, and most precious emotion is assisted by the mystery of Divine unity, it gives miniscule man the expanse and breadth of the universe, and makes him a petted monarch of the animals.[1099]

Thus, what has to be done is to "rend the *ana* and show Him."[1100] In this regard, some of the possible solutions introduced by Nursi for *ashrār* shall be elaborated upon. By doing this, attention will be given not only to the concrete definitions of *sharr*, such as *kufr* or *shirk*, but also those kinds of apparent calamities that appear to the human eye as *sharr*.

7.7.1 Suffering and Death of Innocent Children

Coming back to the suffering and death of young, innocent children, Nursi writes a letter of condolence addressed to Hafız Halid Efendi, who, at that time[1101] had recently lost a child. In this letter, he refers to the term 'immortal youths' of the following verses of the Qur'ān: "Round about them will wait immortal youths"[1102] and "…immortal youths will wait upon them:

[1097] For more information on Nursi's understanding of *bid'a*, see *The Letters*, 508-516.
[1098] *The Flashes Collection*, 304.
[1099] *The Rays Collection*, 24.
[1100] *The Words*, 369.
[1101] This letter was written sometime between 1928-1932.
[1102] Qur'ān, 56:17.

when you seest them you would think them scattered pearls."[1103] With the guidance of these verses Nursi explains that children who die before reaching maturity will remain perpetually as eternal, lovable children in a form worthy of Paradise. Being in this state, they will be an everlasting means of happiness in the embrace of their mothers and fathers who go to Paradise.[1104] Nursi compares this kind of love and happiness that parents will have towards their children in an everlasting place, with a short love that is mixed with sorrows in this world and states that the former should be a great source of happiness for believers.[1105]

As Nursi does quite often, he offers an analogy for a better understanding of the second point. He invites his reader to think of a man in prison together with his young child, sent to comfort him. Now the man suffers two sorrows, his own and that of his child whom he cannot make as comfortable as he wishes. Then the compassionate judge offers to take the child and look after him in a fine palace but the father refuses for the child is his only comfort in that prison. His friends reason with him saying that the child might go to a spacious palace. When the child stays in prison, he will suffer and will cause his father suffer with him; whereas in the palace, the child might act as an intercessor and might attract the "mercy of the king". However, it is necessary that the father trusts in the king's wisdom and benevolence.[1106] With this analogy Nursi intends to show that the children in fact are fortunate for being taken into the realm of beauty where they can intercede for their parents. It is in fact the parents, who remain miserable captives in the dungeon of the world. Thus, grief becomes meaningless.[1107]

[1103] Ibid., 76:19.
[1104] *The Letters*, 100-101.
[1105] Ibid., 101.
[1106] Ibid.
[1107] Ibid.

Furthermore Nursi reminds, similar to al-Ghazālī, that God is the possessor of every creation. In this respect, the child too, was the creature, possession and artifact of the Most Compassionate Creator. He was put temporarily under the supervision of the parents and made them the servant of the child. In return, the child gave them pleasurable compassion as an immediate wage. Thus, Nursi states that a believer should always remember that his share of the child is only one out of nine hundred and ninety nine. God, however, is the true owner of that child.[1108]

Nursi further invokes the parents' compassion to their child being the manifestation of God's absolute Compassion. Compassion, Nursi states, is much more direct than passionate love; it leads to a direct bond with the Almighty God. Parents who "love their child more than all the world", when it dies, turn their face from this world and find the True Bestower of Bounties who is really worthy of the heart's attachment.[1109]

7.7.2 Old Age

Nursi offers salve and relief for the elderly who might perceive old age as *sharr* due to various physical as well as mental illnesses, limitations of various kinds and the ever approaching reality of death. After all, the assertion that 'death is the worst of evil'[1110] has been asserted by some scholars such as the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes.

[1108] Ibid.
[1109] Ibid.
[1110] Marc C. Murphy's aim in his essay is to show that this standard view of Hobbes' is correct. See Murphy, M. C. 'Hobbes on the Evil of Death' in *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, Bd. 82, pp. 36-61. For a more general view on the evil of death, see chapter 3 of Schumacher, B.N. *Der Tod in der Philosophie der Gegenwart* (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2004)

Relating to his own old age and disclosing his feelings of sorrow and dark states of mind[1111], the message sent ahead by Nursi is the belief in God, which, according to him, is the spring and source of the hopes and lights he is going to talk about.[1112] Nursi tries to console his elderly readers in several ways.

First of all, he points to the absolute Mercy of God, stating that it is that mercy which is sent to those needy for sustenance; in a much greater degree even, relative to man's weakness and impotence.[1113] Thus Nursi affirms that God's Mercy is therefore the greatest hope and most powerful light of the elderly.[1114]

Secondly, Nursi points out the feeling of separation, which can be regarded as apparent *sharr*. The fact that death is approaching rapidly, bringing along the separation from innumerable friends and loved ones, seems, according to Nursi, to be an incurable spiritual wound.[1115] As a cure for this apparent *sharr*, Nursi offers the belief in a hereafter, a world to come which is the meeting place of friends.[1116] A third aspect, states Nursi, is the feeling of despairing sorrow and a regretful penitence, caused by the thought of having wasted the fruits of one's life's capital through the giddiness of youth, seeing those fruits to consist only of sins and mistakes.[1117] Nursi's cure for these kind of feelings is faith (*īmān*) and submission to God, listening to the Qur'ān and accepting it, and reciting it.[1118]

[1111] *The Flashes Collection*, 287.
[1112] Ibid.
[1113] Ibid.
[1114] Ibid., 288.
[1115] Ibid.
[1116] Ibid.
[1117] Ibid., 289.
[1118] Ibid., 290.

Nursi further tries to console the feeling of loneliness, which brings along a feeling of estrangement and exile, by reminding the elderly of the existence of God.[1119] For the existence of a Compassionate Creator, states Nursi, lifts the feeling of exile. Since God exists, Nursi affirms, everything exists; with Him, the angels exist too and thus the world is not empty.[1120] And seen through His light and on His account, Nursi continues, every single creature in the universe becomes like a very familiar friend.[1121]

Nursi goes on thinking of the horrors coming from the thought of the past which appears as a vast grave, filled with fathers, forefathers and the human race; the future, another grave for himself, his contemporaries and future generations; the present day, a coffin bearing his half-dead, suffering and desperately struggling corpse.[1122] Looking for a remedy, Nursi emphasizes the weakness and helplessness of himself as an old man, being the possessor of merely a very limited, defective, short, weak freedom of choice (*juz'i ikhtiyār*) with no ability to create and a small acquisition (*kasb*) as his support and defensive weapon in the face of these horrors. Being aware of the fact that his free will was able to silence the sorrows of the past and penetrate the future to prevent the fears coming from there, Nursi states that he found the remedy in faith "shining in the sky of the Qur'ān of Miraculous Exposition"[1123]. With this light, Nursi explains, the grave turned into a meeting place with friends, a banquet of the Most Merciful One in delightful places of bliss. The present time's coffin appeared as a place of

[1119] Ibid., 292.
[1120] Ibid.
[1121] Ibid., 292-3.
[1122] Ibid., 293.
[1123] Ibid., 294.

trade for the Hereafter and a glittering guest-house of the All-Merciful One.[1124]

In conclusion, Nursi tries to explain to the elderly that death should not be seen as sharr and that calamities and inflictions that derive from old age can be endured with faith in God and faith in the hereafter.

7.7.3 The Suffering of non-Human Beings

There is arguably no other scholar in the field of theodicy who has considered the suffering of non-human beings as part of the problem of evil: Nursi asks the question how the annihilation, the very short life or very hard work and labour of non-human beings; their being changed by calamities with no one of them being left in peace; their being killed without exception (such as trees and plants, flowers and the species of animals) can be reconciled with God's compassion and kindness. Although, states Nursi, these creatures are worthy of existence, lovers of life and desire permanent life.[1125]

Nursi explains this offering five different answers showing its cause and reason and five indications pointing out the aims and benefits. As one reason, Nursi states that everything is created to display the perfections of God's art through the embroideries of His names in form of bodies and senses. Here he makes use again of his famous Divine Names Theology. Since everything is merely a model, states Nursi, and the possession of God, and since everything has been created *ex nihilo*, they are merely asked to offer thanks and praise for the degree of existence they have been given by

[1124] Ibid.
[1125] *The Letters*, 336.

God.[1126] Nursi reminds that any degree that is not given remains merely a possibility and possibilities are infinite. Just as a plant cannot complain for being a plant – for it has received life as well as existence – an animal also cannot complain of not being a human being, since it also has received spirit and life and existence. There was always the possibility for them not to exist at all. Therefore, Nursi states, they are to offer thanks.[1127]

Nursi further explains that he found the second reason in three steps. The first step was the thought that every creature was a dominical missive studied by conscious beings. The second step of Nursi's understanding was to know that the most important aims of creatures look to their Maker.[1128] That is, the notion of the other-indicative (*manā-i ḥarfī*),[1129] in other words, to be mirrors to His beauty and perfections. The third step for Nursi was to understand that the constant change, transformation and activity in creation was due to the activity of Divine power in the universe. That constant flood of beings was so meaningful that through it the All-Wise Maker caused all the realms of beings in the universe to speak.[1130]

Nursi additionally points out that nothing vanishes into non-existence but merely passes from the sphere of power to the sphere of knowledge; from the manifest world to the World of the Unseen. Since, the beauty and perfection in things pertain to the Divine Names; and since the Names are eternal and their manifestations perpetual; it is for sure that their impresses will be renewed, refreshed and made beautiful.[1131] In the light of the above Nursi believes that the creature's realities essences and identities which are

[1126] Ibid., 337.
[1127] Ibid.
[1128] Ibid., 339.
[1129] This notion has been explained in chapter 5.
[1130] *The Letters*, 339-40.
[1131] Ibid., 340.

the means of beauty and loveliness, effulgence and perfection, are enduring.[1132] Furthermore, although a creature leaves this transient world, the meanings it has expressed are preserved and perpetuated.[1133]

It becomes apparent again that for the satisfaction of the heart and mind in the face of the questions posed above, faith and trust in an absolute merciful, compassionate, just and wise, all-powerful God; and faith in a life after death is essential. Nursi provides numerous pragmatic solutions in his works in regards to how to prevent youngsters from intemperance and extremism that may result in *sharr* and proves and remedies for attributes that fell under the semantic field of *sharr*.

7.8 Conclusion

This chapter formed the heart of the whole study in that it has aimed to illustrate the origin of *sharr* from the perspective of Nursi's *Risale*. It has put Nursi and other scholars mentioned before in this study into a discourse on issues such as the creation and disobedience of the first human being, the notion of Divine Trust (*amānah*) and how the misuse of the *ana* can lead to *sharr*, free will (*juzî ikhtiyār*), divine predestination (*qadar*) and their reconciliation. It has endeavored to find answers to the following questions: What, according to Nursi, is the origin of an 'evil will' and who created it? How did sin enter into the perfect paradisal state of Adam and his wife? Why would Adam freely choose to be evil and miserable? Why is man called in the Qur'ān 'most unjust' (*ẓalūman*) and 'most foolish' (*jahūla*)? How should divine determining be understood and how can it be accommodated with the notion of free will? Why did God choose to create a being who He knew would freely sin? Why could he not create a being who would choose to do

[1132] Ibid.
[1133] Ibid., 340 ff.

the right thing at all times? If God creates the murder, why am I called murderer?

While in some aspects it seemed as if Nursi's account of the issues mentioned above were a verbatim duplication or reproduction of the opinions of his predecessors, it has soon proven itself to be an asset to the hitherto widely discussed and accepted notions among Muslim intellectuals. Albeit, with substantial elaborations and further novel additions based on his own examination and interpretation of the Qur'ān. Some of his views with concentration on the novel ones will be recaptured here.

Considering the Qur'anic definition of *sharr* as covering mainly the moral aspect of it, Nursi's interpretation of the right course, the *ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm* in the opening chapter of the Qur'ān, the Fatiḥa, served as a guide for optimal moral behavior. That is, it has illustrated through the examples of instinct, intellect and aggression, what is meant by right moral conduct and what falls outside of its frame, becoming eligible for the Qur'anic definition of *sharr*.

Nursi's interpretation on the Qur'anic narrative of the creation of the first human being has shed further light on the origin of *sharr*. While it has opened up a discourse whether *sharr* might in fact pre-date even Adam as the first human being, attributing it (that is, *sharr*) to the *jinns* or angels that fell into discord and jealousy; it has also established a direct link between Adam's creation, the Divine Trust and the notion of *ana*, as well as free will and their relation with *sharr*. Nursi defended the idea that Adam had a duty to fulfill: that is the unfolding of humanities' spiritual progress and the revealing of mankind's potentialities and his essential nature of being a comprehensive mirror of all the Divine Names. In this regard, Nursi believed

that the sin of Adam was a requirement of his human nature, contrary to that of the angels.

In connection with the wisdom in the creation of human beings, rendering them superior to the angels, Nursi interpreted the Qur'anic narration of the Divine Trust that was offered by God to the heavens and the earth and the mountains but was refused by all of them in fear. Man, who assumed it, Nursi continued, in fact assumed a key to the locked talisman of creation, called the ana. This tool, which was attached to the nafs, along with the inordinate self-esteem (anā'iyyah) was perfectly capable of becoming a tool for sharr, if it was not used for its true purpose. If the ana, supported by anā'iyyah, used itself as a yardstick and compared everyone and everything with itself, it contested the demands of the Glorious maker and started dividing God's sovereignty between them and other causes. This state, Nursi continued which is a state of utter ignorance (jahl muṭlaq), pertained to idolatry and disbelief and thus fell into the semantic field of sharr.

In this respect Nursi distinguished between two currents, that is, two different faces of the ana: one being prophethood and religion, the other being philosophy. He urged these two currents to fuse, that is, philosophy to obey prophethood and religion, so that humanity could experience happiness and social life. Otherwise, he warned, in case of their separation, goodness and light would be drawn to the side of prophethood and religion whereas sharr and misguidance to the side of philosophy. For Nursi pointed out that the misuse of the ana was the origin of various claims of philosophy such as denying God choice; that His divine knowledge is not concerned with insignificant matters; that nature has the power to create; or that there is no afterlife and instead that souls are pre-eternal. Through this explanation, Nursi is arguably the first scholar establishing a close link between ana as

Divine Trust and philosophy without religion as being the 'sharr aspect' of that ana.

To the famous discussion on the compatibility of free will and divine determining, Nursi positioned himself with al-Ghazālī and opposed Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd, stating that these two are perfectly reconcilable. However, if man is not able to grasp God's wisdom and the compatibility of free will and divine determining does not mean that they are not compatible. Nursi's starting point to explain this issue further was the principle that knowledge is dependent on the thing known, which Nursi borrowed from the ahl al-kalām. It was important to tackle this problem for it was going to shed light on the question who the responsible was for moral ashrār.

Another important aspect about Nursi that might be seen as unique is that he used the same principle to explain the existence of sharr, ana, and free choice (juzʾī ikhtiyār): namely that they have no external existence, that they serve as a unit of measurement, and in order for them to exist, that there is no need for all causes to gather. They have no external reality, but no one can claim the non-existence of them either. This point is vital for only in this way can they be attributed to human beings. One might say that according to Nursi, it is because of this quiddity, that man is held responsible for his actions. With this theory was Nursi not only able to provide an answer to Augustine's unsolvable problem about the continuity with the dispositions, inclinations, motivations, aims and intentions of the agent that must be present if the act is to count as the agent's own and therefore as an instance of moral agency; he also answered Mackie's critique on the free will defense, namely whether God could have made people do choose the right at all times.

Finally, Nursi offered some practical aspects how man should position himself when facing inflicts and calamities that appear like sharr. No matter how practical these treatises may be, it became apparent that faith in God and faith in a life after death was significant in dealing with apparent ashrār.

In the light of all that has been said, man is asked to establish his own ontological status which he can only accomplish through faith in God and faith in a life after death.

8 Conclusion

The study was set out to explore the concept of the problem of evil and theodicy in view of the contemporary Muslim theologian Said Nursi and his magnum opus, the *Risale-i Nur Collection*, comprising an approximately six thousand pages commentary on the Qur'ān. The study has identified the Qur'anic understanding of *sharr* as deviating from the human perception of evil and has provided a definition for the nature of *sharr* in the view of Nursi. Additionally, the study claims having completely or partially revealed answers to some of the major questions on theodicy that have hitherto remained unsolved in theoretical literature.

This conclusion will establish the context, background and importance of the topic at hand. It will then proceed to indicate the problems in the field of study in form of research questions as well as the key objectives of the study. After having mentioned the methodology used, an outline will be given on the challenges that the works of Nursi faced and possible answers it gave to various objections to the field of theodicy by various scholars. The conclusion will then proceed to outline briefly those views of Nursi that are novel and as such, add a new perspective to the problem of evil and the field of theodicy. It will then, finally, suggest areas of further research. Some of these will be suggestions to develop on Nursi's points to bring the discourse further to another level; others will suggest areas that this study has not been able to cover due to its physical limitations.

The problem of evil has been discussed thoroughly by many Western and Muslim theologians and philosophers and has always remained unsolved. It has been one of the biggest challenges of traditional theism and a major argument against the existence of God. For the main concern was to reconcile God's omnipotence, omniscience and absolute mercy and

compassion with the existence of evil, without thereby sacrificing their absoluteness.

The general theoretical literature on this subject is inconclusive on several vital questions. In this regard, this study has sought to analyze Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* which, as this study claims, would shed light and bring a fresh and original contribution to the discourse at hand, thus taking the discussions further into a new dimension. The works have been examined aiming to find possible answers to the following research questions: is evil, as it is perceived by human beings, equal to the Qur'anic narrative of *sharr*? What is the nature of *sharr*? Does *sharr* exist? How did sin enter into the perfect paradisal state of Adam and his wife? Why does God allow *sharr* to happen? Why does God allow human free will knowing that the possibility for *sharr* also exists? Can God make people do choose the right at all times despite their freedom? Why did God create Satan knowing that he will misguide human beings? Who or what is the cause of an evil will and who created it? Does God create some with the intention to punish them and others with the intention to save them? Why did God choose to create a human being who He knew would freely sin?

The methodology of this study is based on Izutsu's *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'ān* and *God and Man in the Koran* which have been consulted as main reference. First of all it was necessary to see whether the notion of evil as understood by man was equal to the Qur'anic narrative of *sharr*. To achieve this objective, a semantic analysis of the term has been employed to the Qur'ān, its exegeses as well as to the Prophetic tradition, that is, hadīth, in form of an inductive investigation. The study has shown that the notion of 'natural evil', defined as such by general theoretical literature on theodicy, was not conform to the Qur'anic definitions. In fact, according to the Scripture, there was no such thing as 'natural evil'; instead,

the Qur'ān stressed the moral and ethical aspect of *sharr*. Consequently, the moral terms that served as a definition of *sharr* were parsimony, going astray, disbelief, idolatry, violation (of a covenant or treaty), aversion from God, slander and transgression. Further indications were found in hadīth literature, namely the fabrication of lies (*bid'a*), hypocrisy (*nifāq*), cruelty (*ẓulm*) and injustice, and to fail to put the teachings of the Qur'ān into practice. Although it was not possible to find direct definition from the exegesis literature, it is noteworthy to state that *sharr* was understood as physical and psychological calamities originating from the distorted will of man, rather than from any kind of natural disasters or external calamities. In this respect Nursi added that there existed minor (apparent) *sharr* as a 'unit of measurement'; or to be a means to a good end; or to avoid greater *ashrār*; or to manifest the Glory of the Divine.

The study of the Qur'ān in regards to *sharr* has further shown that the term is a relative one that can change according to the individual, time and circumstance. Something that is considered to be *sharr* now, can become something good (*khayr*) in a few months. In this way, the Qur'ān indicated that real *sharr* is the loss of something good. That is, the loss of grace, loss of guidance, loss of God's resignation, loss of understanding, loss of faith, loss of patience, and the loss of hope. This was of utter importance since it laid the foundations for Nursi's approach to *sharr*. For the Qur'anic narrative indicated that *sharr* was the loss of an existent thing and had no external existence and nothing which is created (*wujūd*) could be *sharr*.

The methodological approach to Nursi's magnum opus has been based on twelve principles that have been derived from therein. These principles were firstly, that any existence (*wujūd*) requires an existing cause; secondly, that there is no absolute non-existence (*'adam al-muṭlaq*) in the universe; thirdly, that existence is pure good (*wujūd khayr al-mahdh*) whereas non-existence

is pure *sharr* (*'adam sharr al-mahdh*); fourthly, that *sharr* is non-existential in nature and arises from non-existence (*'adam*); fifthly, that there is non absolute *sharr* (*sharr al-muṭlaq*) in the universe; sixthly, that abondaning a minor *sharr* can lead to greater *sharr*; seventhly, that *sharr* has some sort of external reality or minor existence; eighthly, that *ashrār* are the manifestation of Divine Glory; ninethly, that all good things are the manifestation of Divine Beauty; thenthly, that the creation of *sharr* is not *sharr*, rather the desire for *sharr* is *sharr*; eleventhly, that free will (*juz'ī irada*) has no actual existence; and finally that destruction is easy. All other findings and exploraitions have been based in these principles.

The study has further shown that Nursi, for whom the Qur'ān always remained the fundamental source of study, treated the concept of *sharr* in the same way as the Qur'ān. His main emphasis was on 'moral *ashrār*', whereas the so-called 'natural evils' remained being called disasters, calamities and natural inflictions rather than *sharr*.

The *Risale-i Nur*'s theodicy has furthermore been explored in the light of principles and concepts that have been developed by Nuris's predecessors. These principles were the notion of dualism, *privatio boni*, evil as a necessary effect of good, the higher good defense (evil as necessary means to good), the best of all possible worlds, and the free will defense. Nursi incorporated most of these principles into the *Risale-i Nur*, thereby criticizing and ultimately rejecting the notion of dualism. Through the explanation of these principles, Nursi tried to provide answers and explanations to questions such as whether *sharr* existed and why God allowed *sharr* to happen.

This study also sought to put Nursi's theodicy into discourse with so called 'secular' theodicy or 'anthropodicy,' supported by scholars such as Newton,

Descartes, Leibniz, Spinoza, Hume, Kant and Hegel. Nursi's explanations on the nature of *sharr* and his illustrations on the notion and nature of free will confuted the assertions of anthropodicy.

Another theory with which the *Risale-i Nur* was challenged was the notion of 'theistic finitism' supported by scholars such as Dilley. This assertion was quite appealing for it stated that God being finite, at least did the best He could to combat evil, but unfortunately was not able to. After all, this was better than to say that God could do away evil but chose not to do so. Since 'theistic finitism' emerged out of the seeming failure to reconcile evil and the absoluteness of God's power, Nursi concentrated on trying to prove God's Omnipotence through five analogies. Dilley further claimed that what happens to matter has never been important for traditional theism. Whereas Nursi's theodicy showed that the change, tribulations and different states matter and creation go through was due to the many different Divine Names and Attributes they manifest. Thus, Nursi stressed the transformation of matter to be a very important duty of creation.

Furthermore, Nursi has been set into discourse with Plotinus' principle of plenitude. This principle asserted that God was not free to create or not. Rather, everything that reached its perfection had no other option but to come into existence. This happened outside of God's will, thus He could not be blamed for any evil. Nursi was in contradiction with Plotinus, explaining that all existence is the manifestation of God's attributes and thus they require an endless activity. Activity and change, on the other hand were in Nursi's teaching nothing else but pure goodness (*khayr al-mahdh*) whereas calm, repose, idleness, monotony and arrest from action were forms of non-existence (*'adam*), and harm.

Ibn Sīnā's theory of non-existing accidental evil was another point that Nursi would not have agreed with. While Inati's objection to this theory was that the privation of tertiary perfection is not evil with respect to that species, but merely with respect to what that species could have additionally had, Nursi would have explained that even this could not be considered as *sharr* for God being the owner of everything, is free in giving each creature the amount of features He wishes.

Nursi was in line with al-Māturidī that the opposites in this world manifest God's Divine Wisdom and indicate God's Unity. However, while these opposites were generally called evils, Nursi called them 'unit of measurement' and explained them to be a means to help human beings understand and enjoy the variety of degrees in creation.

Nursi additionally opposed Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd, and affirmed al-Ghazālī by promoting the view that divine determining and free will are compatible and can be perfectly reconciled. While Ibn Sīnā did not blame anyone for evils believing that God was – just like human beings – also determined (albeit not by external causes but by His own nature); Ibn Rush preferred to blame the agent's mind. Basing his argument on the premise that 'knowledge (*'ilm*) is dependent on the thing known (*ma'lūm*)' he answered the question whether God created some with the intention to punish them and others with the intention to save them.

While in some aspects it seemed as if Nursi's account of the issues mentioned above were a verbatim duplication or reproduction of the opinions of his predecessors, it has soon proven itself to be a fresh articulation of the hitherto widely discussed and accepted notions among Muslim and Western intellectuals. Albeit, with substantial elaborations and further novel additions based on his own examination and interpretation of

the Qur'ān. Some of his novel views and contributions to theodicy will be recaptured here:

1. Nursi established a relation between *sharr* and worship and thus created a new theological concept that he called 'negative worship.' In contrast to 'positive worship' being supplications and daily prayers, 'negative worship' consisted of illnesses and calamities. They were called by Nursi negative forms of worships for they made man realize his impotence and weakness. With this awareness, man was supposed to take refuge in God. In fact, Nursi believed that this type of worship was sincere and without hypocrisy. The introduction of the concept of positive and negative worship could be seen as part of Nursi's Existential theodicy, in other words the practical aspect of theodicy, in which he tried to offer comfort to those inflicted with calamities.

2. Nursi established a whole new Weltanschauung about the Names and Attributes of God, employing this conviction in nearly every area of theology and philosophy. Nursi is arguably the first scholar to establish a relationship between theodicy and the Divine Names of God. According to this concept, God's Beauteous (jamālī) as well as his Glorious (jalālī) Names together in unity formed a 'Divine Mosaic', pointing to their Creator. Thus, *sharr* originated from God, however was not caused by Him. According to Nursi, this did not entail any contradiction. With this concept, Nursi offered the first part of a solution to the question who the cause of an evil will was and who it was created by.

3. Another novel view that has been brought into the discourse by Nursi was the link between *ana* and, if misused, its encouragement for all kinds of *ashrār*. Nursi is arguably the first scholar to interpret the meaning of the Qur'anic 'Divine Trust' to be *ana*, describing it as a key to the locked

talisman of creation, attached to the 'soul' (*nafs*) of man along with the inordinate self-esteem (*anā'iyyah*). Nursi stated that this *ana* was perfectly capable of becoming a tool for *sharr* (in this case idolatry and disbelief), if it was not used for its true purpose. Nursi explained two faces of *ana*, one being prophethood and religion and the other being philosophy. In order for humanity to experience happiness and social life, these two faces had to fuse. Nursi warned that the misuse of *ana* was the origin of various claims of philosophy such as denying God choice; that His divine knowledge is not concerned with insignificant matters; that nature has the power to create; or that there is no afterlife and that souls are pre-eternal.

4. The notion of Divine Trust was further connected with the creation of the first human being and as such offered possible answers to how sin entered into the perfect paradisal state of Adam and his wife and why God chose of create a human being who He knew would freely sin. In this respect, Nursi offered an arguably original interpretation of the Qur'anic verse [2:30] stating that the angel's questioning and doubts were not related to human beings' creation (*khāliqun*) but rather in regards to them being placed on earth (*jā'ilun*). The significance in this distinction lied in the premise of Nursi that existence was pure good (*khayr al-mahdh*) and since creation was an essential act of God its goodness could not be questioned.

5. Nursi claimed that *sharr*, *ana* and free choice (*juzī ikhtiyār*) consisted of the same nature. He believed that all of them had no external existence; they served as a unit of measurement; and in order for them to exist, there was no need for all causes to gather. Through this explanation, Nursi was able to attribute all of the above, namely *sharr*, *ana* and free choice, to man thus making him responsible for his actions. In this way, Nursi was able to provide an answer to Augustine's unsolvable problem about the continuity with the disposition, inclinations, motivations, aims and intentions of the

agent that must be present if the act is to count as the agent's own and therefore as an instance of moral agency. With the same theory, Nursi furthermore answered Mackie's critique on the free will defense, namely whether God could have made people do choose the right at all times. Nursi furthermore was able to provide explanations to the question what the nature of *sharr* was and why God allowed human free will knowing that the possibility of *sharr* also existed.

6. Additionally, there was arguably no other scholar to add the suffering of non-human beings, such as trees and plants, flowers and the species of animals, to the field of theodicy. Nursi raised the question how the annihilation, in some cases very short life, and in other cases very hard work and labor of non-human beings, their being changed by calamities with no one of them being left in peace, their being killed without exception, can be reconciled with God's compassion and kindness.

Further aspects in regards to Nursi and his writings will be worth mentioning here. First of all, as it has been mentioned and clarified before, Nursi's frequent use of the term 'proof' cannot be understood in purely philosophical and scientific terms. It should be rather understood as raoming around the different possibilities with one's mind to finally find the one option that is closest and most logical to intellect (*aql*) and to reason (*mantiq*). In that sense, Nursi seems to employ the Qur'anic method, which is based on the principle to open up doors to the one's intellect without depriving him from free will. Thus, Nursi seems to like to emphasize that one, most logical option by claiming it to be a 'proof'.

Another aspect is in regards to Nursi's infallibility. By no means does this study imply or indicate that Nursi provides the ultimate answers and solutions to the problem of evil. In fact, this study has in many ways shown

that despite the approach of this problem from many angles and aspects, and despite the depth of knowledge that can be found in Nursi's works on theodicy, when it comes to actual life and to the existential aspect of it, Nursi's approach can maybe persuade one's intellect, but it cannot control one's feelings – namely the feelings of utter anger, distress, grief, sorrow, and anguish when confronted with calamieties and different kinds of inflicts.

In conclusion, this study as well as the outline above has shown that the debate is very extensive and multifaceted. There are some points that can be reevaluated and discussed again in the light of Nursi's contributions since there have been some issues that could not be examined in detail in this study and might be considered as future studies in relation to theodicy.

For instance, the ontological aspect of the problem of *sharr* should be reexamined in the light of the novel contributions of Nursi and the extent of the influence these views will have on the discourse should be examined.

Secondly, some answers and explanations of Nursi have been included into this study only partially; in some instances in very brief outlines, in other cases, treatises that went on for pages have been compiled into one page only. Some of these treatises can form a whole area of study for their own. Since they are related to the problem of evil, it will be worthwhile to take the study further in these areas. Some of these might be the Divine Names Theology, Divine Names Ontology; and the eschatological aspect of theodicy.

On a final note, this study has been able to only partially explore the field of existential theodicy in the light of Nursi. As theoretical theistic theodicy has been criticized for lacking an existential aspect, it might be important to take this study further in this area. What kind of answers and solution did Nursi offer for those who suffer in specific circumstances? How can, according to

Nursi, suffering and apparent *ashrār* be made manageable or alleviated? Furthermore, how should, according to Nursi, believers respond to God while suffering?

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