

# **Divine Justice in Said Nursi's Thought Compared with Mutahhari's One**

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Said Nursi has posed his ideas on Divine justice in his works from four points of view:

- 1- Divine justice as creation of the world in the best balance,
- 2- Divine justice related to the resurrection,
- 3- Divine punishment by disasters like earthquakes as His justice,
- 4- Theodicy in spite of the fact of evil.

Martyr Murtada Mutahhari (1919-1979) as a contemporary Iranian theologian has elaborated the matter in details in his works specially his book *Divine Justice*. These two famous theologians are from two neighbor cultures that have posed their treatments of the matter which can be a manifestation of each culture. Both of them have similar period as their encounters with Westernization of their countries which resulted the domination of Western point of view in most of people. Their treatments have regarded the consequences of human scientific and technological developments of the man kind in their periods.

Because the attendees in this conference are familiar with Said Nursi, I think that it is suffice to introduce only Mutahhari as an introductory acquisition of his life and thought.

Murtada Mutahhari was born in Farahan, in the province of Khurasan (Iran) in 1919. His father Shaykh Muhammad Husayn was a religious scholar and pious man. At the age of twelve, he joined the Traditional Islamic School at Mashhad where he pursued his studies for five years. Then he proceeded to Qum, the famous theological Center of Shia Muslims where for fifteen years he pursued his religious education under the supervision of Ayatullah Burujerdi in jurisprudence and its principles (who had comprehensive knowledge of Islamic sciences and remarkable insight in socio-political issues), Imam Khumayni in spirituality and principles of jurisprudence,

Allameh Tabataba'ii in Islamic philosophy, and Mirza Ali Agha Shirazi, among many other distinguished scholars.

In 1952 he migrated to and settled in Tehran, teaching traditional Islamic philosophical texts in Madrasah-i Marvi and modern Islamic philosophy in the Faculty of Theology at Tehran University. More importantly, he devoted his scholarly research to contemporary challenges to the Islamic faith, creating a rich and profound legacy of original exposition of the Islamic world-view which he presented through lectures, articles, and books to Islamic associations of students, doctors, engineers, traders and in mosques and which covered issues ranging from Islamic philosophy, responses to communist arguments against religion, doctrinal matters like Divine unity and justice, predestination, Resurrection, commentary of the Quran and *Nahj al-balagha*, social issues like *hijab*, women's rights, economic issues like an Islamic economic system and banking without usury, and political topics like global Islamic movements and revolution in Iran.

Politically, he engaged in covert struggle against the Shah's tyranny and in 1963 was arrested along with Imam Khomeini. After the latter exile to Turkey and later to Najaf, he maintained close contact with his mentor for fifteen years and guided the Islamic resistance movement, culminating in the victory of the revolution. His activities were intolerable for the followers of materialistic schools whose deviation he actively opposed and exposed, who therefore decided to eliminate him. Eventually they assassinated this eminent scholar on May 1, 1979.

## **A Comparison between Nursi and Mutahhari on Four Perspectives from Divine Justice**

As I said before there can be distinguished four perspectives of Divine justice in Said Nursi's works. We are going to compare them with Mutahhari's thoughts:

### **1- Divine justice as creation of the world in best balance**

Nursi in his *The Flashes*, Collection in "The Thirtieth Flash" explains the Six Divine Names bearing the Greatest Name. In the second point he states the Name of All-Just

which in his terminology it refers to the balance and equilibrium of the universe and all beings, which is one manifestation of the Name of All-Just.

At the beginning he states a verse of Quran:

*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.<sup>1</sup>*

He says: "one point concerning this verse and one manifestation of the Name of All-Just, which is a Greatest Name or one of the six lights comprising the Greatest Name, like the First Point, appeared to me from after while in Eskinsehir Prison."<sup>2</sup>

Then he describes the balance and equilibrium of the universe by likening it to a palace that although there are some destruction and reconstruction we can observe the balance: "But such an astonishing balance, equilibrium and equilibration prevail in the palace .... That it self-evidently proves that the transformation, incomings and outgoings apparent in these innumerable beings are being measured and weighed every moment on the scales of a Single Being Who sees and supervises the whole universe."<sup>3</sup>

He continues with the fact that if it had not been measured on the scale of that Single Being without His supervision "that equilibrium of beings and balance of the universe would have been so utterly destroyed that within a year, indeed within a day, there would have been chaos." He rejects every kind of materialistic interpretation of the balance by anarchic blind force and purposeless change.

For the illustration of the matter, he states some examples of equilibrium in the universe which human science and philosophy confirm it everywhere. "So, come and consider the balance and equilibrium of the sun and its twelve planets. Does this balance not point as clearly as the sun to the All-Glorious One Who is All-Just and All-Powerful?"<sup>4</sup>

He concludes from these evident balances in the universe as the signs of resurrection.

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<sup>1</sup> - Quran, 15:21

<sup>2</sup> - *The Flashes, Collection*, p.400.

<sup>3</sup> - *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> - *Ibid.*

His statement in this point is a descriptive one than an argumentative one. He points to the signs (*Ayat*) so that the heart awakens from its neglect. He is not in the position to set forth some theoretical arguments for those atheists that do not believe in Great Intelligence of the world.

Mutahhari also refers to this balance in his book *Divine Justice*. For the definition of justice, he distinguishes four definitions for it. He explains that only one of these definitions is related to the truly divine justice which is problematic by those who can not accept it because of the fact of evil in the world and also discrimination. His position is a philosophical and his method is an argumentative. He defines justice in this sense as "If we take a system or collectivity into consideration that is composed of various parts and that is made for a specific purpose, certain conditions –such as the amounts of component parts and the way that they are put together- must be met before the desired effect is reached and the system subsists and continues to play the role that it was meant to."<sup>5</sup> He brings some examples for illustration of the definition and then brings some evidence of these balances in the world, like what has made Nursi. Then he concludes: "The world is balanced and in equilibrium. If it wasn't, then it would not subsist; there would be no particular order, measurement. The Quran says:

*He raised the sky and set up the balance* <sup>6</sup>

.....In a tradition from our Prophet (pbuh), it is said:

*The heavens and the earth are maintained with justice.*"<sup>7</sup>

But, concerning to the problem of injustice in the world, he continues: "The opposite of justice (*'adl*) in this meaning of the word (i.e. balance) is imbalance or inexpediency, not injustice (*Zulm*)....Many of those who wanted to address the criticisms of the Divine justice doctrine related to the problem evil, discrimination and disasters, did so by recourse to the balance-imbalance paradigm of justice. They did this by sufficing themselves with the explanation that these evil, differences, and disasters are necessary for the general and overall order of the world...."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> - *Divine Justice*, p.50.

<sup>6</sup> -Quran 57:10

<sup>7</sup> - *Divine Justice*, p.51.

<sup>8</sup> - *Ibid*.

He defines the three other definition of justice as: (1) Equality and rejection of every kind of discrimination. (2) rights-giving to each thing its due (3) emanation or bestowal of being on merits and not abstaining from this in respect of that which can possibly exist or be further perfected. He examines these four definitions to what is meant by Divine Justice and concludes with necessary explanation that the fourth one is meant truly Divine Justice.

## **2- Divine justice related to the resurrection,**

Said Nursi, after his explanation of "the Divine Name of All-Just" as who created the world in balance, draws his reader's attention to the fact of resurrection in his words: "If someone who does not believe or deems it unlikely that the deed of jinn and men will be weighed up on the supreme scales of justice at the Last Judgment notes carefully this vast balance which he can see in this world with his own eyes, he will surely no longer consider it unlikely."<sup>9</sup>

He admonishes the reader: "Is it at all possible that although hundreds of comprehensive truths like these three vast lights, such as mercy, grace, and preservation, require and necessitate the resurrection of the dead and Hereafter, powerful and all- encompassing truths like mercy, favour, justice, wisdom, frugality, and cleanliness, which govern in the universe and all beings, should be transformed into unkindness, tyranny, lack of wisdom, wastefulness, uncleanliness, and futility, through there being no Hereafter and the resurrection not occurring?"

Said Nursi in his book *The Words* brings the same statement on the sign of resurrection based on the comprehensive and overall balance and equilibrium of the universe which is the act of the Name Divine All-Just. But his main claim is to argue for Resurrection due to Divine Justice that necessitates the day in which every man see the true result of his acts:

"Now is it at all possible that the justice and wisdom that hasten to relieve the pettiest need of the smallest of creation should fail to provide immortality, the greatest need of man, the greatest of creatures? That it

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<sup>9</sup> - *The Flashes, Collection*, p.402.

should fail to respond to his greatest plea and cry for assistance? Or that it should not preserve the dignity of God's dominicality by preserving the rights of his servants? Man, whose life is so brief, cannot experience the true essence of justice in this transient world; it is for this reason that matters are postponed for a supreme tribunal? For true justice requires that man, this apparently petty creature 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. Since this passing and transient world is far from manifesting such wisdom and justice for man, who is created for eternity, of necessity there will be an eternal Hell and everlasting Paradise of that Just and Awesome Possessor of Beauty, that Wise and Beauteous possessor of Awe."<sup>10</sup>

Mutahhari, also, sets forth Divine justice as an argument for resurrection in the rest of his book *Divine Justice* in a manner like:

"One of the Issues that ought to be touched upon in any discussion on Divine justice is the issue of the compensation for deeds in the hereafter. Resurrection and the judgment of good and evil deeds –rewarding good-doers and punishing evil doers- are in themselves manifestation of Divine justice. One of the standard proofs presented for the validity of resurrection is that since God is all-wise and all-just, He does not abandon human deeds without reckoning and reward or punishment."<sup>11</sup>

But he continues that the above argument is not sufficient for Divine justice and there is an objection and argument raised against Divine justice as regards the manner of punishment and retribution in the hereafter. It is claimed that the punishment in the hereafter, as it has been described to us, is contrary to Divine justice! It is said that in the retribution of the hereafter, there is no correspondence between the crime and its punishments, and hence the retribution is meted out unjustly.

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<sup>10</sup> - *The Words*, p.78.

<sup>11</sup> - *Divine Justice*, p.201.

Then he explains the four differences between two worlds in rewards and punishments; and some more explanation on the correlation between the two worlds. He replies the objection by distinguishing between three types of retribution and an illustration on the type of punishments of the hereafter with referring to some verses of Quran.

### **3- Divine justice in this world by punishing those guilty men in earthquakes and so on.**

When Said Nursi was asked about the reason of some disasters like earthquakes and so on he answered: "It has been said that the drunken, licentious songs,...in every corner of this blessed center of Islam resulted in the torment of this fear."<sup>12</sup>

He continued in replying to another question that the recompense of the greater part of the unbelievers' Crimes is postponed to the Last Judgment, while the punishment for the believers' fault is in part given in this world.

When he was asked: Since this disaster of an earthquake results from wrongdoing and is atonement for sins, why are the innocent and those not at fault struck by it? How does Divine justice permit this? He answered: "Since this matter concerns the mystery of Divine Determining, we refer you the Risale-i Nur and here only say this:

And fear tumult or oppression, which affects not in particular [only] those you who do wrong.<sup>13</sup>

That is, beware of calamity or disaster which when it occurs is not restricted to wrongdoers but strikes the innocents as well.

He said in further part, "for them there is a manifestation of mercy within the wrath and anger in the disaster. For just as the transient property of the innocent becomes like alms and gains permanence, 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. The earthquake earns for them a huge, perpetual profit, so for them is an instance of Divine mercy within the wrath.

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<sup>12</sup> - *The Words*, P.185.

<sup>13</sup> - Quran, 8:25.

Although there are some disasters or punishment of bad-doers, but Mutahhari says that it is not the fact that all disasters like earthquakes are due to the result of bad-doers. "Of course we should never think that whenever an affliction befalls a person or a people, it is necessarily the consequence of their deeds; since afflictions in this world a certain degree of natural consequences also prevail."<sup>14</sup> Mutahhari believes in worldly consequences of our deed and allocated one part of his book to this matter. But it is not restricted to huge disasters like earthquakes but there are a lot of particular punishments and awards for each person individually.

#### **4- Theodicy in spite of the fact of evil.**

The problem of evil is a crucial problem for every kind of theology which believes in an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent God. In Islamic theology it is more important in relation to Divine Justice and theodicy. Said Nursi like other theologian has his own treatment of the problem. Because it needs a long discussion on his answers and it has been done well in some other essays, I briefly state his views, then compare it with Mutahhari's treatment.

Nursi follows Ash'ari school in this relation. However, his central points of view of the matter are as following<sup>15</sup>:

- (a) The lesser evil is acceptable for the greater good,
- (b) The creation and bringing into existence of evil...is not evil and bad, for they are created for the many important results they yield. They can progress man more than angels. The choice of good freely when there may be chosen bad things transcendent man higher than angels.
- (c) The Evil and Instances of bad that arise from abuses and the particular causes known as inclination or choice pertain to man's 'acquisition' and choice, not to Divine creation.
- (d) The evil-ness of a thing must be judged in a whole world and in its relation to other parts of the world.

In another point of view he chooses a more mystical solution for the problem:

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<sup>14</sup> - *Divine Justice*, p.219.

<sup>15</sup> - *The Letters*, pp. 62-64.



"All the scholars who have researched into reality have agreed that existence is pure good and light, while non-existence is pure evil and darkness. The chiefs of the people of reason and the people of the heart have agreed that in the final analysis all instances of good, beauty, and pleasure arise from existence, and that all evils and bad, calamities, suffering, and even sins are attributable to nonexistence.."16

Nursi also has an optimistic view about the world like Leibniz and believe that our world is the best possible world that can be created. He points to some evidences in the world as some signs of this claim. However, as a matter of argumentation it can not be demonstrated for the best world claim by indicating to some evidences. The evidences can show some profits for what we supposed that are evil; but it is far from being an argument for the best world claim. We only demonstrate for the best world claim not by evidences in the world but by pointing to attributes of God and His actions that are driven from an All-Wise Being.

From another point of view about the problem of evil he addresses us to our inability to understand the answer totally. Mehmet Aydin uses the term of *hermeneutic obstacle* for pointing to this matter which is the matter of understanding, interpretation for solution of the problem. He has found in Said Nursi's thought that he believe in five obstacles in this matter<sup>17</sup>. For example we find it difficult to see the inner and outer dimensions of things as a whole. Or another obstacle is that "we know that certain things are neither completely clear nor totally obscure."

Mutahhari has analyzed the problem in detail and evaluated the answers. He has an introductory chapter about historical background of the answers in Islamic theological thought and the problems that every branches had encountered with their answers.

He has analyzed the problems against Divine Justice in two dimensions: discrimination and evils.

In the chapter of discrimination he points to some views about the world of creatures with the necessary arguments. He argues that the order in the universe is inherent. He shows that what we call discrimination truly is differentiation. Then he explains the

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<sup>16</sup> - *The Rays Collections*, pp.89-90.

<sup>17</sup> - "The Problem of Theodicy in the *Resale-i Nur*", P.219.

secret of differences by pointing out to the vertical and horizontal order of the existing beings and the situation of them in this overall order which is driven from Quranic vision. His view needs more explanation that must be done other places.

His treatment for the special problem of evil has three aspects:<sup>18</sup>

A. What is the essence of evils? Are evils real, existential things, or are they non-existential and relative?

B. Whether evils be existential or non-existential, are good and evils separable or inseparable? In the second case –that they are inseparable- is the entirety of the universe, with all its goodness and evils, good or bad? That is, do goodneses predominate over evils, or do the evils of the world predominate over its goodneses? Or does neither predominate over the other, with them being equal.

C. Whether evils be existential or non-existential, and whether they be separable from goodness or not, is that which is evil actually evil, without there being a preliminary or basis for one or several goodneses? Or is there one or rather several goodneses hidden in every evil, every evil producing one or several goodneses?

He argues that his argumentative answers to the above questions has different direction and for different problems. In the first part, an answer is given to dualists, who maintain two types or sources of existence. With the addition of the second part, an answer is given to the objections of materialists, who consider evils to be an objection to Divine wisdom, and also the objection of those who, by mentioning the problem of evil, find fault with Divine justice. The Third part of the discussion reveals the beautiful and unique order of the world of existence, and it can be considered as an independent answer –albeit sufficient- or a useful complement to the first answer.

Although we can find good similarities between Mutahhari's thought and Nursi's one, Mutahhari adds more analysis of the solutions and evaluation of the strength and direction of the solutions. It is because of two positions that each of these two scholars has encountered the mater. While Mutahhari's position is more philosophical (and more argumentative), the Nursi's one is more theological (and more descriptive). Mutahhari tries to study the problem in a systematic analysis, but Nursi's view is scattered in all of his works and he has stated it during describing his teachings.

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<sup>18</sup> - *Divine Justice*, pp.127-8.