

**WHEN THE ORDINARY
TURNS EXTRAORDINARY
OCCASIONALISM AND THE NATURE OF
SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY**

VRC Curriculum Essay Series

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Verification and Renewal Curriculum Essay Series, *When the Ordinary Turns Extraordinary: Occasionalism and the Nature of Scientific Inquiry*

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CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
The Kinds of Observations	2
Explaining Correlations.....	5
Correlations as Psychological Associations	7
Chapter 2: Causes and the Cause of Causes.....	10
What, then, is a Cause?.....	10
The Cause of Causes.....	12
Inferring Causes in Science	16
Chapter 3: Matters of the Heart and the Hand	18
Seeing with the Eye of <i>Tawhīd</i>	18
Grasping with the Hand of Wisdom	21
Chapter 4: A Paradigm Shift Regarding Science	24
Religion or Science?.....	24
Men of a Thousand Eyes	26
From Observations to Paradigms	28
The Metaphysical Backdrop to Physics.....	32
Chapter 5: Conclusion	35
Appendix: The Spiritual Effects in Scripture	37
Healing.....	37
Protection.....	38
Relief.....	41
Strength.....	42

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

“Observe what is in the heavens and the earth!” (Yūnus 10:101)

Your journey in life has, no doubt, proceeded through many stages. You know that you were born, “brought forth from the wombs of your mothers while you knew nothing,” (al-Naḥl 16:78). Born a screaming baby, you found yourself thrust into an unknown world. Your first knowledge was through touch: the warmth of your mother. Your eyelids opened to a world of brilliant colors and patterns. And though you may not remember it, you indulged in that most adorable habit of babies – shoving every new object in your mouth to taste it. How else were you to come to know what it was?

“He made for you hearing, sights, and hearts that you may show gratitude,” (al-Naḥl 16:78). As you matured, gaining the power of discrimination, beginning to distinguish between good and evil, turning to face the world from a perspective other than your own, you found in yourself a heart bearing the gift of intellect. To think (*tafakkur*), to contemplate (*tadabbur*), to comprehend (*ta’aqquq*): these are all commandments in the Qur’an. And the people of insight (*ūlū al-albāb*) as well as people of discernment (*ūlū al-nuhā*) are said to be those who will truly grasp God’s signs (*ayāt*).

The world we live in is full of signs. Tomorrow, when you walk out your door, find a road sign and contemplate how it works. The sign has a dual reality: on the one hand, it is an object, perhaps yellow and diamond-shaped with black markings. Had God ennobled you with nothing but the faculty of sight, such would have been the extent of your knowledge: the eye sees colors and shapes, and so seeing a road sign would have no more meaning than seeing a mound of dirt. But upon your eye making contact with the road sign, another part of you, your intellect, understood another meaning entirely, that the road will soon curve to the right. This ability of the intellect, as common and mundane as it may appear, touches on the profound nature of signs, that they are objects whose purpose is to point to another meaning. A traffic signal is a sign – it points to a meaning. A picture of endless waves as far as the eye can see is a sign – it points to the idea of an ocean. A word is sign – its points to the word’s meaning. A sign is not meant to point to itself – its purpose is to point to something beyond itself.

Is not the universe a series of signs? “We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves until it is clear to them that He is the Real,” (Fuṣṣilat 41:53). The world of nature outside of us, then – when one looks at it, what else does it point to? Does not the act point to the Actor? Does not a wondrous design speak to the wisdom of the Designer? “Say, look at what is *in* the heavens and

the earth” (Yūnus 10:101) not at the heavens and earth themselves! And what is that light shining *in* the heavens and the earth but God?¹ Yet this begs the question: *how* is the world of creation the act and design of the Creator? Physical phenomena appear to only point to the laws of nature: an apple falls, and I understand how gravity works. I shine light through a prism, and upon seeing the rainbow, I realize that white light contains all colors. But where is God in all of this, asks many a scientist? Does nature point to itself, to its own laws, or does it point to God?

▲ The Kinds of Observations

Before embarking on the quest to answer our conundrum, let us reflect on a few matters first. Think about the number of times you (or others) placed a kettle on the stove, turned on the fire, and found the water in the kettle boiling at 100° C. Your mind says to itself, “Heat boils water at 100° C.” Where do we learn this proposition from? Our eyes first see still water, then water with small bubbles, then water with larger bubbles and steam emitting from the water. As our eyes see the still water, our hands feel the pot: no heat is emitting from it, and it is cool to touch. Then, when our eyes fall over the water with small bubbles, our hands feel heat close to the pot, and we can barely touch it without burning our hands. And then, when our eyes testify that the water has large bubbles and that steam is rising, our hands simultaneously testify that the pot is too hot to touch without burning our hands, and when we insert a thermometer, our eyes additionally apprehend that the thermometer rises to the 100° C mark. Yet all that is gathered from the experience of our senses here is the convergence of these events – the sight of steam, the feeling of burning hands, the sight of a thermometer reaching 100° C – at the same time in the same place.

Much of your day and night is experienced through your five senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. These observations of your senses are called ‘sensory judgments’ (*ḥissiyyāt*). “The light is shining,” “This cat meows,” “This honey is sweet,” are all sensory judgments. We human beings live in a world of colors, shapes, sounds, surfaces, tastes, and aromas. Some sensations are in a state of constant flux – our perceptions turn from one color to the next, from feeling a hard surface to feeling a soft surface, from inhaling a smoky fragrance to inhaling the fresh morning air. But other sensations seem to exhibit some regularity; they follow a pattern, and we expect them to continue to follow a pattern: John is a human being, and he speaks. Peter is a human being, and he speaks. Janna is a human being, and she speaks. And eventually, we expect all human beings are able to speak, at least in principle. We see that when fire touches cotton, for example, the cotton turns black and disintegrates into ash. We saw this happen once, then twice, then thrice, and at some point, the regularity of this occurrence provided us conviction that the disintegration of cotton and its contact with the fire cannot be coincidental – there is some cause-and-effect relationship present.

¹ God says, “God is the light of the heavens and the earth,” (al-Nūr 24:35) and “And the earth is illuminated by the light of its Lord,” (al-Zumar 39:69).

We have just illustrated examples of different varieties of observation. The first category of observation is based on a single experience through one of the five senses – we have called these ‘sensory judgments’ (*ḥissiyyāt*). Based on a single instance of sight, of hearing, etc., the mind judges that the sensed quality – the color, the sound, the feel – belongs to some object.² “This thing, called a table, is long, smooth, and sound hollow when someone knocks on it.” But what distinguishes a sensory judgment is that you only gain knowledge of how that object is in the given moment. When our hands run over the surface of the table, we are justified in concluding that the table is smooth at that moment. But as to whether it was smooth one second ago, or whether it shall be smooth one second in the future – that cannot be known from a single sense experience.

You object, “But if the table is smooth now, I know it shall be smooth tomorrow when I wake up!” Indeed, that is the case! But I implore you to examine this a little further. *How* do you know that the table will remain smooth tomorrow? Is it just because it is smooth today? Perhaps you yearn to cut me off: “Well, yes, because it is smooth today and because physical objects don’t change their feel all of a sudden...” Precisely! My good friend, you have guided yourself to the answer! Your knowledge that the table shall remain smooth tomorrow is a judgment produced from two prior things that you know – the first is that the table is smooth today. The second is the general premise that “Physical objects do not change their feel without an outside force acting on it.” Now, how did this general premise come about? Surely it is because you have observed tables, chairs, rocks, screens, books, and pens since you were a swaddling baby and repeatedly found they remain hard if they were hard to begin with or to remain soft if they were soft to begin with – unless some force is applied to their surfaces changing them. In fact, I would wager your young mind formed an implicit hypothesis:

If it was only coincidental that physical objects do not change their feel, then I would have come across some physical objects that do change their feel without the application of force. But I have not come across any such physical objects. Therefore, it is not coincidental (*ittifāqī*) but rather necessary (*luzūmī*) that physical objects do not change their feel without the application of a force.

Do you understand? Your mind has been applying the scientific method from before it knew what the scientific method was! Let us then name this kind of observation an ‘**experimented judgment**’ (pl. *mujarrabāt*). An experimented judgment is a conclusion the mind reached based on 1) accumulated sense experiences (*takrār al-mushāhada*) that produced 2) an implicit inference (*qiyās khafī*) that the regularity of these sense experiences could not be coincidental. Instead, they must have been somehow related.³

² ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Khayrābādī, *Sharḥ al-Mirqāt*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Turkmānī (Amman: Dār al-Nūr, 2019), 699.

³ ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Khayrābādī, *Sharḥ al-Mirqāt*, 708.

Let us deliberate on the process just described. First, we sense something. “This fire burns our skin.” Then we sense a second thing. “This barbecue fire burns our skin.” Then a third time. “This stove fire burns our skin.” Each instance of this experience results in its own sensory judgment. But taken as a whole, observing the replicability of fire and skin burning, our mind judges that there must be some relation between these two events. The totality of this then is an experimented judgment. But there is another kind of observation formed from repeatedly sensing something without our minds ruling out the possibility of this pattern being coincidental. I can remember many a time when I walked into a classroom as a student and found that all the men in my class wore blue. But never did I suppose this concurrence was anything other than coincidence. My mind observed that “This man, Sami, is wearing blue.” “This man, Yaseen, is wearing blue.” “This man, Imran, is wearing blue.” “This man, Ahmed, is wearing blue.” Each of these is a sensory judgment. And, additionally, there this sensory judgment is repeated for every male student in the classroom. And so, I conclude, “Every male student wears blue.” But focus on the difference between what you are affirming when saying “Every male student in the classroom wears blue,” and when saying “Every physical object does not change its feel.” The first is simply a statement of fact gathered from the data available to your senses. It is a survey, a statistic. But the second statement is a statement implying some kind of necessity – “Every physical object cannot change its feel without the application of an external force.” That implication of necessity comes from the implicit hypothesis that a replicated event cannot be coincidental – this is what makes it an experimented judgment. As for simply observing some event many times and inferring that all instances of that event will exhibit that same behavior, this is called **inductive inference or a survey** (*istiqrā’* for both). It is formed from replicated sense experience without the implicit hypothesis found in an experimented judgment. If a person surveys all the male students one-by-one and finds each to exhibit something such as wearing blue, he can conclude with certainty that “All male students wear blue.” A survey examining every instance of an event is an **exhaustive survey** (*istiqrā’ tāmm*). Otherwise, an **inexhaustive survey** (*istiqrā’ nāqīṣ*) of most of the instances of an object only yields, at most, a strong probability.⁴ “Birds bite by closing their lower jaw.” “Lions bite by closing their lower jaw.” “Humans bite by closing their lower jaw.” Can you, my most insightful friend, think of an animal that does not bite closing its lower jaw? No? You might then tentatively reason that “All animals bite by closing their lower jaw.” Of course, this conclusion would only hold until you find yourself face-to-face with an alligator in Florida and realize that its fearsome bite comes from closing its upper jaw.⁵ In any case, whether our survey is complete or incomplete, our mind is only describing a pattern.

⁴ ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq al-Khayrābādī, *Sharḥ al-Mirqāt*, 664.

⁵ Faḥr-e-Imām al-Khayrābādī, *al-Mirqāt*, with *al-Mir’āt* by ‘Imād al-Dīn al-Cherkūṭī (Karachi: Maktabat al-Bushrā, 2020), 86-87.

Observations are then of three kinds: sensory judgments, inductive inferences, and experimented judgments. And upholding these observations, we shall soon discover the Divine shining, for “wheresoever you turn, there is the Face of God!” (al-Baqara 2:115). But patience and persistence! In each kind of observation, one sensation coincides with another. “Ouch! The stove burned me!” The experience of extreme heat coincided with the sight of a black, iron object. “I’m feeling stuffed after eating that sweet potato pie!” The experience of feeling stuffed coincided with the act of eating and the sight of a round orange object and the taste of a sweet potato. In a sensory judgment, then, we experience two events coinciding, occurring at the same time in the same place. When a sense experience is replicated, we repeatedly experience two events coinciding, fire and burning, for example, or eating and satiation. Then, in an experimented judgment, this experience is replicated with such regularity that the mind judges that this regularity cannot be random or coincidental. It demands an explanation.⁶ So how then shall we explain it?

■ Explaining Correlations

In statistics, any repeated coinciding⁷ of events is called a ‘correlation’. A weak correlation is one where two events sometimes coincide but not always. For example, a rainbow (event B) only sometimes follows after rainfall (event A). A strong correlation is one where two events regularly coincide such that one can confidently predict one event from another. For example, children being enrolled in a school (event A) is closely correlated to contracting the flu (event B) and is a strong predictor for it. Let me ask you: which of these correlations, strong or weak, indicates that one causes the other?

You may be inclined to argue that strong correlations usually imply some causal relationship and therefore demand explanation, as opposed to weak correlations. However, let me draw your attention to when we invert these examples: whenever there is rainbow (event B), it is necessary that rain precedes it (event A). However, when a child develops the flu (event B), it is not necessary that he attends school (event A) since he could have caught the flu from any number of places. Therefore, the weak correlation can be useful in explanation just as a strong correlation can. Intuitively, we know, in the case of rainfall and rainbows, that rainfall is *necessary* for rainbows but not *sufficient* (on its own) for rainbows since we do not always see a rainbow after its rains. The formation of rainbows also

⁶ As for why the mind judges that the regularity cannot be mere chance, this is based on the principle of determination: “Determination without a determinant is impossible (*al-tarjih bilā murajjih muḥāl*).” In this case, the regular concurrence of any two events is as equally possible as its irregularly (or randomly) concurring. But regular concurrence is determined over irregular concurrence, which then requires a determinant for such a determination. Therefore, the mind’s certainty that the regularity cannot be coincidental is justified. For more details about the principle of determination, see the ninth principle in Safaruk Chowdhury et al, *Principles of Certainty* (Boston: The American Society of Islamic Philosophy and Theology, 2025), 5. <https://asipt.org/curricular-essays/>.

⁷ ‘To coincide’ is for an event to happen at the same time as another event.

depends on sunlight hitting the water at a particular angle and the absence of clouds positioned between the rainbow and the observer. As for schoolchildren and the flu, attending a school and so being in close contact with other children is almost *sufficient* to contract the flu (since almost all children get the flu) but is not *necessary* (since children get catch the flu from others even if they do not attend school).

Glean from these examples and from others given above that inferring causation from correlation is not simple matter. Sometimes, events are correlated when event A is one of many possible causes for event B. Sometimes, events are correlated when event A does not cause event B and instead is a necessary condition for event B to happen. Sometimes, events appear to be correlated, like seeing all the men in a classroom walk in with a blue shirt, but eventually that correlation reveals itself to be merely chance. We have stated that in both inductive inference and experimented judgment, there is a correlation of events. In an experimented judgment, this correlation is so regular and invariable that it demands an explanation – there must be a cause for the correlation of events. In other cases, the correlation has not been experienced with such a regularity, and so the intellect recognizes that this correlation may be chance or there may be some reason and cause for this – but our experience with these events is not enough to be sure. Therefore, correlation does not imply causation. However, causation does imply correlation, for when something causes another, the cause and the effect must both exist – they coincide.

What about if there are two events, when the first happens, the second happens, and when the second does not happen, the first has not happened? My inquisitive friend, it is easy to slip at this point, jumping to the conclusion that, of course, if event A and event B always coincide, then event A must bring about event B! If, whenever fire meets cotton, cotton is blackened and disintegrates, then the fire must *cause* the blackening and disintegration of the cotton, a process we call ‘combustion’. “If I eat, I feel full.” A dull mind may assume that this can only be the case because eating *causes* fullness and because fullness can be completely *explained* by eating. Nothing else is needed. God plays no role is us being satiated, cries the atheist. Sufficiently stuffing your stomach with food is all that is needed to explain satiation. Yet, Abraham, the noble Prophet and friend of God, proclaimed, “It is He who nourishes me and quenches me. And when I am sick, He heals me,” (al-Shu‘arā’ 26:79-80). The atheist’s reasoning is fallacious, an unmistakable error. If you reason for yourself, you will realize that any regularity of events has three rationally possible explanations. Take a fever (event A) that always coincides with a rash (event B) for example:

- either the fever (event A) causes the rash (event B), or
- the rash (event B) causes the fever (event A), or
- a virus (event C) causes both the fever (event A) and the rash (event B) simultaneously.

Accordingly, my perceptive friend, any regular concurrence of events establishes without doubt that the two events are correlated. But the most that reason can conclude is that this correlation is

explained either 1) by A causing B, 2) by B causing A,⁸ or 3) by A and B each being effects of a third event that causes them. However, we cannot conclude that just because one thing regularly precedes a second thing that the first thing brings about the second thing. “Whenever I visit any city for travel, it rains. Therefore, my visit causes it to rain.” “Whenever I get in the shower, the phone bells rings. Therefore, getting into the shower causes the phone bell to ring.” “Whenever I wear these socks, we win our basketball game. Therefore, my lucky socks cause us to win.” It is easy to see why the regular concurrence of events in these examples does not entail that the first event brings about the second event.⁹ And yet, our observation of fire and burning is no different! We know that when fire contacts cotton, the cotton burns. When the senses establish is the concurrence of these events, once, then twice, then thrice, etc. What reason then establishes based on the consistency of this concurrence is *the mere fact* of there being a necessary correlation between these two events. However, *the nature* of the correlation – whether the fire causes the cotton to burn, whether the cotton burning causes the fire to exist, or whether a third cause causes the fire to exist and the cotton to burn – the *exact nature* of the correlation is not known to us. Fire is not observed to *cause* the cotton to burn, nor does reason necessitate that the fire *causes* the cotton to burn. And so, the atheist’s conclusion cannot be justified. Perhaps it is the case that when we eat, we are satiated because digestion causes satiation. Or perhaps it is the case that when we are satiated, it causes food to be digested in our bellies (but I doubt it). Or perhaps there is a third factor, such as the Almighty, who regularly creates the feeling of satiation when he creates digestion in your belly. For now, we can say that each is an equally viable rational explanation. But you shall soon come to discover that upon further investigation the only rational explanation is that the Divine causes every effect and chooses every regularity.

▲ Correlations as Psychological Associations

Perhaps this conclusion strikes you as implausible. Perhaps a corner of your mind objects, “Of course fire causes cotton to burn, even if I cannot find a flaw in your argument. I trust what my mind knows, and you are just speculating!” My dear reader, I must tell you that what I bring to you is not merely theoretical possibilities. Your own nature betrays your self-assurance. You must have heard of Pavlov’s experiments? In the 1890’s, Ivan Pavlov conducted an experiment on a group of dogs in which he would feed them and simultaneously ring a bell. Over time, he discovered that when the dogs heard that same bell, they would salivate even if no food was presented to them at that time. The reason for this behavior is that, psychologically, an association was built between the bell ringing and food due

⁸ The first option includes both the possibility that A causes B or that A causes B indirectly through a chain of causes. Similarly, the second options include both the possibility that B causes A or that B causes X which causes A.

⁹ This is known as the *cum hoc ergo propter hoc* (‘with this, therefore, because of this’) fallacy.

to them observing the bell and food in succession, time after time. Eventually, the dog's psyche believed that the bell ringing was what brought the food, and so it salivated in anticipation.¹⁰

Several centuries prior to Pavlov, a similar conclusion was reached by the great Imam Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) through his introspection and penetrating observation of human behavior. He describes the psychological phenomenon now known as 'reverse association'. If someone is bitten by a colorful snake, he will recoil at seeing a multicolored rope patterned similarly to the snake. Another person may feel disgusted by runny honey because it looks like pus. In each case, two experiences overlap: a person sees the sight of a long, round, colorful object (snake) and he feels the pain of being bitten. Now, the two are intertwined in the mind. Now, when he will see the sight of a long, round, colorful object (rope), he will expect the pain of being bitten and recoil in anticipation. The second person experiences the sight of a thin, yellow liquid (pus) and the foul taste of pus, and now whenever he will see a thin, yellow liquid (runny honey), he expects a foul taste and feels disgust accordingly. The psyche cannot help but function in this manner – even though your intellect recognizes with certainty that it is not a colorful pattern that causes biting nor a runny, yellow color that causes a foul taste, even still your intellect cannot overrule the psyche! You recoil, and you feel disgust!¹¹

Your experience of 'cause' and 'effect' in the world is analogous to this. Two events coincide until there is an unbreakable psychological association between the two, at which point your psyche *will* act according to that association, be it true or false! Now, in the example of the long, round, colorful object and recoiling, your intellect knows that the association is false: it was not the colorful pattern that causes the pain of being bit (but instead the pointed, sharp fangs of the snake) because you can stumble across that colorful pattern many times without experiencing the pain of being bitten. Imagine then that you see that same colorful pattern that was on the snake on a garden hose, but the garden hose, being a garden hose, does not bite you. This occasional non-coincidence of the colorful pattern and the pain of being bitten is your proof that seeing the colorful pattern itself does not cause pain. But what if someone had not experienced that occasional non-coincidence? What if, every time a person saw fire, he saw the object touching the fire burn? Would he not feel absolutely sure, based on an unbreakable association, that whatever fire touches it will burn? Would he not think it would be impossible for a person to enter a fire wearing clothing without that clothing burning? Would he not insist that fireproof wear is impossible and dismiss anyone who politely tried to remind him that there is more to the world than his own limited experience of it? Yet we know that fireproof clothing exists for firefighters, and so we do not feel that it is absurd that fireproof clothing exists. We know of a non-coincidence: we know of an instance when fire touched clothing without fire burning clothing. But in our hypothetical scenario, a person may not have seen or heard of fireproof clothing

¹⁰ Muḥammad Sa'īd Ramaḍān al-Būṭī, *Kubrā al-Yaqīniyyāt al-Kawniyya*. 40th ed. (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 2019): 274-275.

¹¹ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fi al-'itiqād*, ed. Anas al-Sharfāwī (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2019), 309-310.

and so would feel convinced that fireproof clothing is impossible because of the innumerable times he has seen fire burn all kinds of clothes without exception. So too is your experience of the world. The patterns in nature observed by anyone are nothing more than psychological associations. It may seem outlandish to suggest that its possible for the gravitational constant to be different on Mars, but there is no contradiction in this suggestion – it is simply beyond the scope of our experience.

We can call this psychological fallacy ‘overgeneralization’, another phenomenon noted by Imam al-Ghazālī. When an object is paired with a certain experience often enough, the psyche will tend to attribute that experience to the object and ignore the uncommon case when they are apart. When a person is taught that lying is always wrong from a young age and that lesson is reinforced with discipline and reward for telling the truth, he will develop an abhorrence for lying that he attributes to the lie itself. He thinks that punishment and moral criticism always exist when lying exists *because* punishment is intrinsic to the nature of lying itself. But lying is not always abhorrent! White lies may occasionally bring about some good, and lying to save another from undue danger is almost a moral imperative! But so often has lying been paired with its vilification that the psyche cannot disassociate the two and ignores the cases when lying is virtuous!¹²

Think about how often a child is forced to take cherry-flavored medicine and then later despises everything with a cherry flavor. Think, and you will find many witnesses in your own life to these phenomena. The number of times you have observed fire burning clothes does indeed justify your expectation that if you get too close to that open flame, your clothes will burn. But it does not justify concluding that your clothes will invariably burn without the possibility of any exception. Nor does it justify concluding that when your clothes do burn, that it is the fire that caused it. For you only observe the correlation, and correlation cannot imply causation. But what, then, is causation?

¹² al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fī al-ʿitiqād*, 308-309.

Chapter 2

CAUSES AND THE CAUSE OF CAUSES

▲ What, then, is a Cause?

There was once a man who would sit on a stool in front of a fountain in the center of his town square. Every morning, when the town's merchants would come to open their shops, they would find the man sitting on his stool. Then, at sunset, they would find the man still sitting in the same spot, staring at the fountain. Why was the man sitting for long? What was the *cause* of this man's strange behavior? Curiosity got the better of one of the shopkeepers, and so he approached the man on the stool: "What causes you to sit here like this?" The man said, "I am sitting here because my legs are bent at the waist and the knees, and because my back rests against an upright platform."

Such an answer would hardly satisfy the shopkeeper just as it hardly satisfies your curiosity. This is because when we ask "why" or ask for the cause of something, we may be asking for one of many answers. The question of the cause, the reason, the explanation of something is inherently ambiguous. As classically defined, a cause is "anything an effect depends on."¹³ But think about all the ways that something can depend on another! The man on the stool is technically correct – him sitting does indeed depend on his legs being bent at the waist and the knees. But sitting depends on this body position only in the sense that legs being bent at the waist and knees defines sitting; it is what makes a body sitting as opposed to standing or lying down. Let us call this the formal cause of sitting. The **formal cause** of some effect is that by which the effect is that effect and nothing else.¹⁴

Had the man replied, "I am sitting on this stool because I have bones and joints," he could not be faulted. Indeed, sitting on a stool does depend on having bones and joints in the sense that bones and joints make it *possible* to sit. Bones and joints act like raw material used to "make" sitting happen. The "raw material" of bones and joints is "formed" into legs bent at the waist and the knees. For this

¹³ 'Aḡud al-Dīn al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif fi 'ilm al-kalām* (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, n.d.), 85.

¹⁴ al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*, 85. For example, the formal cause of walking is the placing of one leg in front of another while maintaining an upright posture; this is what makes walking walking and not sitting or lying down. The formal cause of a table is its flat top supported by legs that allows objects to rest on it. It is this structure that makes a table a table and not a chair or a pen.

reason, the bones and joints are called a material cause. The **material cause** of an effect is that which makes it possible for the effect to come to be.¹⁵

I hardly imagine, however, that you inquire after the material or formal cause of sitting. Rather, you would likely seek to know what brought about the man's legs to be bent and the waist and the knees – of all possible bodily positions, what determined this one over others? Well, the man chose to sit down – in one sense, his choice determined that he sit rather than walk on by unperturbed. His choice was then determined by some internal drive – perhaps he knows a treasure lies inside the fountain and deliberates how to extract it. Perhaps he expects to meet his beloved at this fountain and waits there patiently. In any case, some *cause* drives him to sit – let us call this cause, the initial purpose for which an effect, such as sitting, comes to be – the **final cause**. “Mr. Baldwin’s speech *causes* adjournment of the House,” reads a headline. This does not mean that Mr. Baldwin’s speech compelled the members of the House to depart – rather, the members of the House departed of their own free will, but something in Mr. Baldwin’s speech drove them to depart of their own free will. Perhaps his moving speech led them to reconsider their policy preferences. Or perhaps his snazzy dress left them dumbstruck.¹⁶ It is this sense of cause that we intend when speaking about human actions. “A rumor causes a stockbroker to sell his position in a company.” “The promise of a gift caused the student to study hard for his exam.” “Thirst caused the runner to stop for a drink.”

Where, then, is God? More precisely, in saying that ‘God is the cause of the universe,’ what kind of a cause do we mean? God says, “He is the First,” (al-Hadīd 57:3) because this world, as a totality of events from its beginning to the present, is merely one of many possible worlds. It is entirely conceivable that the universe could have been governed by another set of laws and patterns or could have turned out other than how it has. As such, the universe with its history is entirely contingent, and anything contingent requires a cause that it depends on and which determines it to be as it is rather than otherwise. That cause on which the universe depends cannot then be contingent too and instead must be necessary and eternal, known to the adherents of religion as “God”.¹⁷

God causes the world – but not as a material, formal, or final cause. He causes it in the sense of bringing about its existence after having determined, from amongst all possibilities, which to bring about. In the language of theology, God causes the existence of the world with His attribute of power.

¹⁵ al-Ījī, *al-Mawāqif*; 85. For example, the material cause of a table is wood. Wood is the “raw material” formed into a flat top supported by legs. The material cause of typing on a keyboard are fingers. Having fingers makes it possible to type.

¹⁶ R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 290.

¹⁷ This is a summary of the kalam cosmological argument, which may be formally syllogized as follows:

Major:	Every contingent/temporal entity needs a necessary/eternal cause.
Minor:	The universe is a contingent/temporal entity.
Conclusion:	The universe needs a necessary/eternal cause.

For more details, see Aaron Spevack et al, *The Origin Story: The Science of Cosmology* (Boston: The American Society of Islamic Philosophy and Theology, 2025). <https://asipt.org/curricular-essays/>.

Having determined in eternity what He will create, He then actually creates it with His power in the moment that He had determined.¹⁸ The cause must exist at the same moment at its effect: when God enacts His power to create something, logically, the effect must exist at that same moment without delay. Let us call this kind of cause a creative cause. A **creative cause** is that which necessitates the existence of its effect. A fire in a grassy field is intrinsically possible – depending on the conditions, it could exist and it could not exist. When lightning strikes, however, and ignites the grass, the fire must necessarily exist. And so lightning appears to be the creative cause of the fire. High tides at the beach are intrinsically possible – depending on conditions, it may exist, and it may not. However, when the moon is set at a certain position in relation to the earth, its gravitational force “pulls” the water – at that time, high tide becomes necessary. The moon’s gravitational force appears to be the creative cause of high tide because it makes necessary what would otherwise be merely possible.¹⁹

There are three properties of a creative cause to then bear in mind.

1. It causes its effect in the sense of giving it existence.
2. Its effect, which was possible, now exists by necessity.
3. Because its effect is necessary, the effect cannot depend on anything else to exist.

■ The Cause of Causes

One of the descriptions of God in Muslim theology is the “Cause of Causes” (*musabbib al-asbāb*).²⁰ He is “The Creator of everything!” (al-An‘ām 6:102). “Power, all of it, belongs to Allah,” (al-Baqara 2:165), and so power does not belong to anything else. “Whatever God wills [is what comes to pass]. There is no power save with God,” (al-Kahf 18:39). His omnipotence pervades the entirety of His kingdom, sparing not even the human actions that people consider to be within their own grasp. During the Battle of Badr, the Prophet ﷺ seized a handful of dirt and threw in the face of enemies. God declared about this incident, “You did not throw when you threw, but God threw,” (al-Anfāl 8:17). “You do not will save that God, Lord of the worlds, wills,” (al-Takwīr 81:29).

The import of all these verses is that God alone causes all effects. And because God causes the effect, nothing in the world causes an effect. Fire does not cause burning, drink does not quench, and food does not satiate; rather “their connection [i.e. correlation] is due to the prior decree of God, who

¹⁸ Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Sanūsī, *Sharḥ al-Muqaddimāt*, ed. Anas al-Sharfāwī (Damascus: Dār al-Taqwā, 2019), 242-246. For this being a valid usage of the word “cause”, see Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, 313.

¹⁹ Aladdin Yaqub, “Al-Ghazali’s View on Causality,” in *Occasionalism Revisited: New Essays from the Islamic and Western Philosophical Traditions*, ed. Nazif Muhtaroglu (Abu Dhabi: Kalam Research & Media, 2017), 23-25.

²⁰ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ Ulūm al-Dīn*, 6 vol. (Damascus: Dār al-Fayhā’, 2010), 5:503 and *al-Maqṣid al-Asnā fi Sharḥ Asmā’ Allāh al-Ḥusnā* (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2018), 180.

creates them side by side.”²¹ Instead, He chooses to create burning at the place and time that He creates fire. He satiates your hunger when He causes the food to break down in your stomach. He creates the drink and the quenching of thirst at the same time in the same place, each independently. Remember in the previous section, we demonstrated that causation between events in the world, between fire and burning for example, is neither a logical necessity nor is it something observed. The eye sees two things existing concurrently and the intellect rightly concludes that the regular concurrence of these two must have a cause: either A causes B, B causes A, or C causes A and B together. *We say that, for all effects in the world, the third is the case: God causes A and B together.* This simultaneous causation of fire and burning, of a certain lunar position and high tide, of sunlight and warmth are God’s norm (*‘āda*) and pattern in His creation. Accordingly, the world is a realm of unbound Divine act. He could have chosen acts at random with no regularity to them, a world that would have been incomprehensible to mankind. First a fire would appear. Then, in the next moment, it would become water. Then suddenly, it would transform into a rock hurtling upwards. All of this is within the power of the Divine. Instead, however, He chooses to create a world with regularity and patterns so that it may be intelligible to the human mind. God creates fire directly at the place and time that a match ignites and chooses to keep the fire behaving as we are accustomed to fire behaving until He creates water that drenches it. Just as the match’s spark does not cause the fire to exist, the water does not cause the fire to cease to be – instead, these are places and times that God chooses to give existence to fire and to withdraw existence from fire. Based on this regularity, we as people can expect to have fire present or not present at certain times and places and for the fire to be hot. And when we expect the fire to be hot, we can expect that God will cause the food above it to be cooked. And when we eat cooked food, we can expect God to create satiation from hunger. Let us call this belief **occasionalism**: that events in the world have no causal power to bring about an effect – instead events in the world are *occasions* where and when God alone causes the effect.

If you find yourself skeptical about what we are proposing, let us invite you to consider the evidence for it. For a millennium, Muslim theologians have uncovered proofs for occasionalism, both from scripture and from mere reflection on the nature of the world and themselves. “Indeed, in His creating of the heavens and the earth and the changing of night and day are signs for those possessing intellect,” (Āl ‘Imrān 3:190). Rationally, we know that the universe depends on an entity outside of it, who we call God, to determine and cause its existence. This is because the universe could equally exist and not exist. Either is equally possible, and so a determinant is needed to select one of these two states. There are those who would question why the universe needs a cause at all – why cannot it pop

²¹ Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, tr. Michael Marmura, 2nd ed. (Provo: Brigham Young University, 200), 166.

into existence? It is simply a 'brute fact' that the universe exists.²² But this is a blatant contradiction! It implies that the universe in-and-of itself is at once determined to exist (because it does exist) and indeterminate (because it is possible for it to not exist).²³ Consider, for example, Sami standing atop a hill. If we entertain the possibility that things can exist without a cause – then Sami's standing atop the hill is *indeterminate* because in-and-of itself, it is equally possible that he is or is not on the hill. Simultaneously, Sami's standing atop the hill is *determinate* because he, in fact, is. And for any fact to be both indeterminate and determinate is plainly absurd. It is self-evident that things need a cause. Even babies – if a ball is thrown from behind them in front of them, the baby will turn around to look for who threw it! Something cannot come from nothing. And so, the universe needs a cause that gives it existence – a “creator” – called God.

Thus far we have concluded that God is a creative cause; He brings about the existence of the first thing in the universe. Whatever that first thing was – perhaps the Pen, perhaps an intellect, perhaps a Light – it was a contingent thing. And it is precisely because of its contingency – because it both had the possibility of existing and the possibility of not existing – that God's power could bring about its existence.²⁴ Therefore, by extension, everything else contingent also falls under the sway of God's power; He can cause it to exist. And don't forget! To be a cause means to be sufficient to alone cause the effect. Therefore, when we say that God can be a cause for anything possible, we mean that He alone, without depending on anything else, is sufficient to cause any possibility to exist.

Thus far, we have proven that it is possible for God to independently and immediately create any effect: He can create burning without needing fire, He can create typing without creating hands, and He can create understanding without creating a brain. What remains to be examined is whether any object in the world can bring about the existence of an effect. If it cannot, as we shall demonstrate, then the only remaining possibility is that God creates all effects. Let us return to the example of fire and burning cotton – either a) God causes the cotton to burn independently of the fire, or b) the fire causes the cotton to burn, or c) both God and the fire cause the cotton to burn. Of course, option (c) is impossible because one effect cannot have two causes.²⁵ And we have already proven that option (a) is possible for any given effect. So let us now reveal the impossibility concealed in option (b).

²² See Bertrand Russell and Frederick Copleston, “Debate on the Existence of God,” *BBC Third Programme*, 1948, 19:24. <https://youtu.be/wMsbD1L51IQ>.

²³ See al-Sanūsī, *Sharḥ al-Muqaddimat*, 229 and Safaruk Chowdhury, *Principles of Certainty*, 5. God says, “Were they created from nothing or were they [their own] creators? Or did they create the heavens and the earth?” (al-Ṭūr 52:35-36).

²⁴ Contingency is the “validating factor” (*muṣaḥḥih*) for anything to fall under the sway of God's power. See Nāṣir al-Dīn al-Bayḍāwī, *Ṭawālī‘ al-Anwār min Maṭāli‘ al-Anzār* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1991), 179 and ‘Abd al-‘Azīz al-Farḥārī, *al-Nibrās: Sharḥ Sharḥ al-‘Aqā'id al-Nasafīyya* (Istanbul: Maktabat Yaṣīn, 2012), 254.

²⁵ See Safaruk Chowdhury, *Principles of Certainty*, 5.

For fire, when in contact with cotton, to cause the cotton to burn would mean that fire is the creative cause of the burning. When the fire exists in contact with cotton, the burning would exist necessarily without depending on anything else. Yet how can this be the case when God exists? It is always possible for God to choose to determine that burning not exist at the moment that the fire makes contact with the cotton! But then the burning at that moment would remain contingent and dependent – one cannot say that fire makes it necessary that the burning exist (as a creative cause would) because it yet remains dependent on God not determining the opposite at that moment. We know that a creative cause must be sufficient to render its effect necessary, but fire cannot. In fact, no object in the universe is sufficient to make it necessary for its effect to exist because the effect would always remain dependent on another factor – God not determining that the effect does not exist. Hence, it is impossible b) for any object in the universe to be the cause of any effect. And this leaves only a) the possibility that God alone and independently causes all effects and that the “causes” in the world that we find correlated to effects are simply extraneous to the equation of causation.

That burning depend solely on fire and so become independent of God cannot be countenanced when God is All-Sought (*al-Ṣamad*). The very meaning of ‘god’ in the testimony of faith is ‘one who depends on nothing and on whom all else depends’!²⁶ Perhaps you suggest that objects can cause effects yet those effects still ultimately depend on God as He is the first in a chain of causal links. Perhaps grass burns because of fire, and fire is caused by lightning igniting the grass, and the lightning is caused by an electric charge building in the clouds, and the ever-building electric charge is caused by God – He is the first. We would counter this suggestion by asking you to consider the fire – once it exists in the grass after having God creating the “causes” that lead to it, is the fire sufficient without depending on anything else to cause burning? If it is, then the fire, in causing the fire, is independent, independent of even God!²⁷

The skeptic still objects: cannot God just “give” fire the power to give existence to the burning? Yet this cannot be since the power to give existence is solely a divine attribute – if there was another with the power to create, the second could conceivably challenge the first in their power. “Had there been in them [the heavens and earth] gods other than God, they [the heavens and the earth] would be in ruin,” (al-Anbiyā’ 21:22). To suggest that God can give the attribute of power to another is to suggest that God can create another god that rivals Him in his power! This is absurd, for “your god is one god. There is no god but Him, the All-Merciful, the Benevolent,” (al-Baqara 2:163). His oneness precludes “giving” another the power to cause effects.²⁸ The Qur’anic picture of the Divine is not one

²⁶ See Muḥammad b. Yūṣuf al-Sanūsī, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīda al-Ṣuḡhrā*, ed. Anas al-Sharfāwī (Damascus: Dār al-Taqwā, 2019), 277.

²⁷ See al-Sanūsī, *Sharḥ al-Ṣuḡhrā*, 286 and Muḥammad b. al-Hāshimī al-Tilimsānī, *Miftāḥ al-Janna fī Sharḥ ‘Aqīdat Ahl al-Sunna*, ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sha‘ār (Cairo: Dār al-Iḥsān), 252.

²⁸ al-Hāshimī, *Miftāḥ al-Janna*, 219.

of a Watchmaker who set the laws of the universe like the internal workings of a clock and then let them act of their own accord and power. Such a Creator would be distant, one too distant to be involved in His creation. But God is intimately involved in the lives of his creation. “And when my slaves ask of me, I am near!” (al-Baqara 2:186). “Every moment He is engaged in a tremendous affair,” (al-Raḥmān 55:29). “He knows all that is on land and in the sea. No leaf falls but He knows it. There is no grain in the darknesses of the earth nor anything moist or dry save it is in a clear Record,” (al-An‘ām 6:59). He listens to the plea of the oppressed and answers their prayers. He peers into the hearts of men and the intentions they hide and takes them to account. God is the Cause of Causes, not in the sense of being the first in a chain of causation but as the true cause and creator behind the apparent causes of the world. So “is there any Creator other than God sustaining them from the sky and the earth?” (Fāṭir 35:3).

▀ Inferring Causes in Science

Our discussion so far is likely to leave one question: what about me eating food and then feeling full? What about gravity and things falling to the ground? What endeavor are scientists engaged in if not the discovery of causes in nature? Recall our earlier exploration of various kinds of causes? We have identified God as the sole *creative* cause of the universe. Accordingly, objects in the world like fire, water, and ropes cannot be creative causes. However, they are **empirical causes** (sing. *sabab ‘ādī*): events which if they happen, the effect happens and if they do not happen, the effect does not happen. Empirical causes are defined in terms of the correlations that we observe between events. Similarly, an **empirically necessary condition** (*shart ‘ādī*) is an event which, if it does not exist, the effect does not exist; but which if it exists, nothing follows of necessity. For example, we call sunlight an empirical cause of a rainbow appearing because if there is sunlight, then a rainbow appears, and if there is no sunshine, then no rainbow appears. Then, water droplets being suspended in the air (from a rainstorm, for example) are an empirically necessary condition of rainbow appearing because if there is no water in the air, no rainbow appears; but if there is water in the air, nothing follows since the sun may not be shining. An **empirical impediment** (*mani‘ ‘ādī*) is an event which, if it exists, the effect does not exist; but if it does not exist, nothing follows of necessity. For example, the presence of clouds is an empirical impediment to a rainbow appearing since if clouds are present, no rainbow appears; but if clouds are not present, we do not know if we will find a rainbow since there may be no water in the air.²⁹

This commonsense presentation of causes, conditions, and impediments is normally sufficient for our everyday functioning. We know that horizontal beams are an empirical impediment to ceilings falling on our heads, so we build horizontal beams. We know that whisking milk into eggs is an empirical cause to have a fluffy mixture and so chefs whisk milk into eggs. Practically, human

²⁹ al-Sanūsī, *Sharḥ al-Muqaddimat*, 134-135.

beings function in the world without inquiring into exact mechanism by which an effect is brought about and necessitated with its cause, what about precisely about the beams prevent the ceiling from collapsing or what about the milk ensures a fluffy mixture. However, in scientific inquiry where measurement and precision are required, our given definition of an empirical cause is too broad. When speaking earlier about the kinds of correlations, we identified a number of reasons why there may be a statistical relationship (i.e., a strong correlation) between two variables. Sometimes event A may cause event B, but event B could be causing event A; they could be causing each other; event C could be a common cause of both; event A could be a necessary condition (but not a cause) of event B; there could be a chain of causes from event A to event B. Because of these possibilities, scientific experiments are grounded in not just observing but *manipulating* variables to identify how those variables are related to outcomes.³⁰ In other words, if variable X is suspected to be the cause of event Y, an experiment should be designed to keep all other possible factors fixed while actively manipulating variable X. If altering a variable X, under the appropriate conditions, systematically produces a change in Y, then X can be said to cause Y. Therefore, a **scientific cause** is something which, if it, and only it, is manipulated, the effect is observed to change. Does this imply that the causes discovered in science create or bring about the existence of their effects? Is gravity the creative cause of an apple falling? Such that it causes – i.e., determines the existence – of the effect? For the monotheist, who recognizes that God is the lone actor in the cosmos, a scientific explanation cannot refer to a sufficient cause for the determination of the existence of an effect. “The earth’s gravitational force explains the apple falling to the ground.” This cannot mean that the apple falling to the ground is created by and brought into existence by the earth’s gravitational force. Instead, a scientific cause explains that if gravity were to be a different constant, then the apple would invariably fall to the ground faster or slower. And if gravity were to disappear altogether, then the apple would not fall at all. But the scientist in the lab does not venture into the world of determining and bringing things into existence. That particular question – what determines and brings into existence the apple falling – is neither observed in a laboratory nor inferred from experiments. Instead, that question is left to the hearts and minds that study the cosmos and see, by the power of their reason or the power of their spiritual vision, that only the Uncreated can create, determine, and fashion things into existence.

³⁰ James Woodward, *Making Things Happen: A Theory of Causal Explanation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 10-12.

Chapter 3

MATTERS OF THE HEART AND THE HAND

“Whoever denies empirical causes themselves has neglected God’s wisdom! And whoever assigns efficacy to empirical causes has assigned a partner to God in His divinity!”³¹

▲ Seeing with the Eye of *Tawḥīd*

Tawḥīd may often appear to be a simple matter. There is only one god! Indeed, my friend! But the simplicity of Islam is not superficial. The oneness of God bespeaks of untold depths, appealing to the simple mind and the complex mind, to the unlettered and the learned, to the desert Bedouin and the city dweller. *Tawḥīd*, in the original Arabic, means “to see as one”. It is, firstly, to see that there is no god but God. But to be a god, one worthy of worship, implies that that entity is eternal, all-knowing, and all-powerful. And so *tawḥīd* entails too that there is no one eternal except God. And there is no one independent except God. And there is no one knowing except for God. And there is no one willing except for God. And there is no one with power except for God.

Ponder the words of the Prophet ﷺ when after offering the morning prayer in Hudaybiyya after a night of rain, he ﷺ turned to face the congregation and asked, “Do you know what your Lord said?” They said, “God and His messenger know better.” He ﷺ said, “There are those of My slaves who came into the morning believers and unbelievers. As for one who said, ‘We were rained upon because of God’s grace and mercy,’ he is a believer in Me, unbeliever in the stars. As for one who said, ‘...because of the setting of such-and-such a star,’ he is an unbeliever in Me, believer in the stars.”³² The import of this hadith is not simply that astrology is superstition in which one cannot believe. Rather, the point is that whoever believes ‘natural’ events to happen of their own accord due to inviolable natural laws necessarily does not believe ‘natural’ events to be divine acts. Conversely, whoever knows natural occurrences to be divine acts will not attribute them to natural laws because the things of nature, being created by God, are intrinsically powerless. To consider anything other than God to have this kind of causal power is the **idolatry of means** (*shirk al-asbāb*). Naturalists, ancient and modern, commit this idolatry because of their inattention to the nature of observation and correlation that we noted in the first chapter. Seeing the concurrence of events – fire with food cooking, water with

³¹ al-Hāshimī, *Miftāḥ al-Janna*, 93.

³² al-Bukhārī (1038).

getting wet, soap and feeling clean – they cannot fathom that these events are linked not due to some intrinsic necessity but due to a force unseen to them that joins them, Divine power.

There is no reason to suppose that simply because things have always been one way that they must continue to be so. Some people may reject resurrection in the Afterlife because they have never seen bodies rise out of graves.³³ “The laws of nature make it impossible for bones to come to life!” God quotes the unbelievers asking, “Is it that when we are bones and dust, will we be resurrected, created anew?!...Who will bring us back?!” Their disbelief is founded on believing that the laws of nature are fixed and unchanging. But they forget God in the equation: “Who will bring us back?!” Say, ‘He Who created you initially!’” (al-Isrā’ 17:49-51).

Does man not see that We created him from a drop then suddenly he is openly objecting?! *He draws an analogue for Us and forgets his own creation.* He says, ‘Who shall revive bones when they are dust?’ Say, ‘He shall revive them Who created them the first time, and He is knowing of every creation. He who made fire for you from green trees and from which you then light [another]. Is He Who created the heavens and the earth not able to create it’s like?! Nay, He is the All-Creating, All-Knowing! His command when He wills something is but that He say ‘Be!’ and it is! (Yā Sīn 36:77-82).

When the believer sees into the world, he does not see fixed laws of nature but instead the patterns and norms of God’s creative activity. The study of the natural world conducted in science ought not to lay groundwork for the futile challenge of God’s authority. The student of science swims in the oceans of the Divine handiwork of creation. The universe is a Divine tapestry that the scientist loves to study because he cannot help but marvel at the patterns of Divine creation.

The grounds for this view of the cosmos is the belief that God is the sole cause and actor in the cosmos. God is All-Powerful; therefore, objects in the world, including you, are powerless. God is All-Willing. Therefore, “you do not will [anything] but God wills,” (al-Takwīr 81:29). Recognizing this reality is not merely a matter of cognitively agreeing to a proposition. Instead, a person who lives perceiving that no real power belongs to him, no real knowledge belongs to him, and that his existence remains tentative, utterly dependent in every moment on God sustaining him – such a person will fall prostrate in humility before His creator. “O people, you are needy of God, and God is needless, praiseworthy!” (Fāṭir 35:15). The recognition that he has nothing to be proud of snuffs out the very possibility of arrogance. Everything that a man possesses – wealth, status, health, strength, beauty, possessions – are divine blessings that the person plays no part in securing. Whatever a person may happen to possess, it is merely incidental. The great sage Ibn ‘Aṭā’illah warns, “Your indigence is intrinsic to you, and the coming of causes are reminders of what was too subtle for you to

³³ al-Sanūsī, *Sharḥ al-Muqaddimat*, 185-186.

notice.”³⁴ Many a person in opulence and with status may forget his true nature as a being utterly dependent. “Truly man has transgressed. That he sees himself without need,” (al-‘Alaq 96:6-7). And so, the Divine, out of His *mercy*, reminds us – “verily, we shall try you with something of fear, hunger, and a loss of lives, wealth, and good. But glad tidings to the patient!” (al-Baqara 2:155). The people of patience are those who witness the Divine hand in the loss of blessings and content themselves with just their Creator. They are those who say, “Indeed, we are for God and to Him do we return!” (al-Baqara 2:155).

Just as the vision of God as the hand behind every event in the world engenders humility and patience, so too does it root sincerity. The essence of sincerity is to seek God’s good pleasure with one’s actions rather than aiming for any other objective such as seeking fame and reputation or enjoying the pleasures of food and fun. But why would the monotheist seek fame or enjoyment when having these things neither benefits him nor lacking these things harms him?³⁵ No sane person would go to a stone expecting it to confer happiness upon him. The idols of old were stone statues brought down by the monotheist Abraham ﷺ. The idols of today? Money. Fame. Delicious food. High achievement. These are all equal to a stone – each is powerless, each is causally inert, and so cannot bequeath that which a person desires. That power belongs to God alone. “His alone is creation and command,” (al-A‘rāf 7:64).

The Prophet ﷺ said, “O young boy, let me teach you some words [of advice]: keep God, and God will keep you. Keep God, and you will find Him facing you. If you ask, ask God. If you seek help, seek help from God. Know that if the nations were to unite to benefit you somehow, they could not benefit you save with what God has decreed for you. If the nations were to unite to harm you somehow, they could not harm you save with what God has decreed against you. The pens have been lifted, and the pages have dried.”³⁶ The Prophet ﷺ was teaching the boy to have no fear of people and to not let their opinions divert him from acting for God’s good pleasure. Be courageous in the face of people’s threats because the Divine decree saves you from their plotting. Be steadfast in the face of temptations offered by people, because you will derive no benefit from it except if God decrees benefit for you. Thus, the believer who witnesses that there is no actor in the cosmos save God has courage because he has nothing to fear. He speaks truthfully because he has no reason to lie. He does not backbite someone he dislikes because his words cannot harm that person. He trusts in God

³⁴ 99th aphorism of Ibn ‘Aṭā’illah al-Sakandarī, *al-Ḥikam* in ‘Abd al-Majīd al-Sharnūbī, *Sharḥ Ḥikam al-Imām Ibn ‘Aṭā’illah al-Sakandarī*, ed. ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Bizam, 16th ed. (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2018), 143.

³⁵ al-Sanūsī, *Sharḥ al-Muqaddimat*, 185-186.

³⁶ al-Tirmidhī (2516).

because this world exhibiting so much mercy and wisdom is His domain.³⁷ He has no hope except in God and has no fear except of God. He says with his character, “I possess for myself no benefit nor harm except what my Lord wills,” (al-A‘rāf 7:188). He is sincere because there is no worthy objective except God’s good pleasure. He is grateful to God because the myriad blessings that come upon him are all God’s doing and not his own. And He is humble because he is utterly and inescapably dependent on God creating him and then sustaining him. The vision of *tawhīd*, thus, is not merely a matter of cognitively accepting the proposition, “God is one,” in the manner a person accepts the proposition, “The grass is green.” Yes, the mind accepts this as factually true, but the implications of that acceptance reverberate throughout a person’s entire being and the significance of the testimony is akin to removing foggy, cracked glasses and finally seeing the world with clarity in the sunlight.

▀ Grasping with the Hand of Wisdom

The Companion Anas b. Mālik رضي الله عنه relates that a man came to the Prophet ﷺ with his camel and wanted to leave her somewhere, so he asked him ﷺ, “Shall I tie or trust in God?” The Prophet ﷺ said, “Tie her and trust.”³⁸ The vision of *tawhīd* in the cosmos, that God is the sole cause of events in the universe, has never implied that a person ought to recline on his couch and wait for God to create what He will. The prophetic way is to work and to take the means to ends: “Endeavor for what is of benefit to you! Seek God’s aid, and do not remain helpless!”³⁹ A fatalist may complain, ‘If it is indeed true that fire does not cook food, then why should I light a fire? If it is true that a rope does not cause anything to be fastened, then why should I tie a rope?’ This complaint, however, forgets that simply because these objects do not bring forth effects, one cannot conclude that there is no relationship between causes in the world and effect. Yes, everyday sentences like “Mirrors reflect light,” “Chains hold weight,” and “Knives cut,” may sound like these causes create their effects, but, in truth, they are based on the language of empirical judgments. An empirical judgment (*ḥukm ‘ādī*) expresses “the affirmation of a correlation (*rabṭ*) of existence or non-existence between two matters by means of repetition (*takarrur*) – while maintaining the possibility of their disassociation and the impossibility of one causing another.”⁴⁰ The sun and warmth are repeatedly experienced together with such frequency that a necessary correlation forms in our minds between the two events. But if the intellect’s vision remains sharp, it sees that this correlation is just empirical – it is more than possible for God to create the sun without warmth and for Him to create warmth when the sun is not shining.

³⁷ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*, 6 vol., ed. ‘Alī Muṣṭafā and Sa‘īd al-Maḥāsini (Damascus: Dār al-Fayḥā’, 2010), 5:503.

³⁸ Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Ḥibbān (731), al-Tirmidhī (2517).

³⁹ Muslim (1540).

⁴⁰ al-Sanūsī, *Sharḥ al-Muqaddimat*, 130.

The relationship between the sun shining and warmth is like the relationship between the sun descending below the horizon and the obligation of the sunset prayer (*maghrib*): the sun descending below the horizon “causes” the sunset prayer to become obligatory in the sense that it the sun’s movement *announces* to us and *informs* us of the obligation of the sunset prayer. The sun disappearing below the horizon is a *marker* of the prayer. Likewise, the sun shining is a marker informing us of warmth. Coffee, when drunk, causes energy in the sense that coffee is a marker informing us of the existence of energy in the body. It is God who brings about the existence of the sun below the horizon and who brings about the obligation of prayer – He makes one a marker for the other to inform us. Similarly, it is God who brings about the existence of the coffee and who brings about the existence of energy in the body – He makes one a marker for the other.⁴¹

Hence if a person seeks energy, he ought to go to the coffee, not because the coffee *itself* brings about the existence of energy but because the coffee is *place* where God brings about the existence of energy. The causes in the worlds are doors of divine activity. Imam al-Sanūsī explains this through a thought experiment: imagine a blind beggar habitually comes to the door of the king’s palace and stands waiting until he finds food, clothing, and whatever else he needs placed in his hand. Would he not become convinced over time that it was the door that provided him with everything that he needs? Wouldn’t he love the door and sing its praises? But in fact, the door was not giving him food.⁴² The king was giving him the food *at* the door, but he could not see due being blind in his eye. Imagine then that someone blessed with sight comes to the door and sees the king lending the food. He would know that the king is the one responsible for the food and not the door. Yet it would be utterly foolish for the seeing man to not go to the door asking for food. Yes, the door does not give the food, but the door is where the food is given. The monotheist is likewise tasked to see with his heart as this man sees with his eye. If he hopes for his camel to not stray, he goes to the door of a tied rope. It is not the tied rope that causes the camel to not stray, but the tied rope is the place where the camel is caused to not stray from its post.

When a light bulb ceases to emit light, replace it with another bulb and do not throw your hands up in despair proclaiming, “Whatever God wills!” If you attempt to study and find yourself unable to progress in your learning, do not hang your head thinking, “Perhaps God did not decree this for me.” Far from being statements of faith, these lazy justifications constitute an insult to God. Why do you attribute your inability to God rather than to yourself? Such attitudes follow in the footsteps of the abject idolaters who say, “Had God willed, we would not have assigned partners in divinity nor would have our forefathers,” (al-An‘ām 6:148). The Divine reply? “They have hearts with which they do not comprehend. They have eyes with which they do not see. They have ears with which they do not hear,” (al-A‘rāf 7:179). The disbelievers had the means of knowledge at their disposal, and yet they

⁴¹ al-Sanūsī, *Sharḥ al-Muqaddimat*, 130.

⁴² al-Sanūsī, *Sharḥ al-Muqaddimat*, 185-186.

neglected it and blamed God for their lack of knowledge. God is standing at the door ready to give. “His two hands are outstretched,” (al-Mā’ida 5:64). Why would a person then neglect to take the means to come to the door? And how could he be justified in blaming God when he refused to take the means to the door while God was waiting at the door?

Insofar as a believer neglects the means, he dismisses the Divine wisdom in creation. God created nature not as a chaotic place but with a regular design and pattern called His creative norm (*sunnat Allah fi khalqihī*). Had the world been created chaotically and randomly, then a person may have had the excuse of ignorance before His Lord. Yet because a person can expect (and even predict) what God will create in the future and can seize the means to come to a certain outcome, he is accountable (*mukallaf*) for his actions. It is in this sense that man can be said to have “power” over things. “Power” with respect to human beings does not mean “creating” or “bringing into existence” – instead it means “possessing the means and instruments to do something”.⁴³ We are not the creative causes of our actions just as fire is not the creative cause of burning and snow is not the creative cause of cold. They are ‘causes’ in the sense of practical, scientific causes: they are means (*asbāb*) by which a person finds some effect.

⁴³ See Muḥammad al-Bābartī, *Sharḥ al-‘Aqīda al-Taḥāwīyya*, ed. Ilyās Qablān (Istanbul: Şifa Yayınevi, 2018), 140.

Chapter 4

A PARADIGM SHIFT REGARDING SCIENCE

► Religion or Science?

The popular discourse that descends from a certain crop of scientists argues that the investigation into the natural world attributed the acts of nature first to magic, then to religion, and now to science.⁴⁴ ‘God?!’ they huff and puff derisively. ‘Does an educated person like yourself truly still believe in angels and miracles?’ they mock. They say, “These are the ancients’ fables recorded and recited to them morning and night!” (al-Furqān 25:5). Having discovered the centrality of divine activity to the workings of the universe, you should immediately recognize the absurdity of this narrative. Bringing the Divine or spiritual beings into the explanation of science is neither superfluous nor a convenient substitute for scientific explanations. Rather, God is indispensable to understanding the universe, as we have demonstrated at length. He is its Originator and its Sustainer.

Nevertheless, one premise of modern science is ‘methodological naturalism’. **Methodological naturalism** is a framework of inquiry that works from the *assumption* that any phenomenon in nature can be explained purely in terms of physical matter and that one should not resort to non-material explanations of natural phenomena. How do naturalists justify this assumption? Their reasoning is pragmatic – the easiest and best theory is the one with the least assumptions. This principle is known as **Occam’s Razor**: if a phenomenon can be explained with a given number of assumptions, anything more is superfluous and irrelevant.⁴⁵ If we can explain an apple falling to the ground in terms of the earth’s gravitational pull, then positing, for example, that the apple has an internal desire to fall is superfluous – we can account for the apple’s motion without resorting to an “internal desire” in the apple – therefore, we would be unjustified in believing that there is an “internal desire” in the apple that plays a role in it falling. Here, the naturalist insists that the whole history of scientific discovery has explained natural phenomena without needing anything spiritual or divine. Objects fall because of gravity. Chemical reactions are the result of a reactant colliding with a substance with sufficient energy. Plants grow in the direction of the sun because they seek sunlight. All of these phenomena can

⁴⁴ Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010), 5.

⁴⁵ Occam’s Razor, also known as ‘the principle of parsimony’, is notably absent from the corpus of Muslim theological and philosophical thought. This principle is no logical certainty – if there are two equal explanations for a phenomenon where one is complex, requiring a greater number of assumptions and another is simple, regarding less assumptions, then there is no reason to suppose that God would create the phenomenon in the simpler manner rather than the more complex manner. As such, we only invoke this principle polemically since the bulk of the scientific community today admits it.

be explained without resorting to God, and so God is superfluous! Natural phenomena operate without the involvement of the Divine.⁴⁶

This claim should summon to mind our earlier examination of the various kinds of causes, reasons, and explanations. What does the scientist mean when he asserts that a natural phenomenon can be “explained” with reference to other phenomena? We found earlier that a scientific cause is defined by the manipulation of variables to reliably observe change in phenomenon. Therefore, causation in science is not a statement about determining existence but instead a statement of empirical necessity, that there is a one-to-one correlation between phenomena. The scientist would then construe the earth’s gravitational force “explaining” the apple falling as meaning that the apple falling happens and changes with the existence of earth’s gravitational force. Because scientific accounts are statements of empirical necessity, the question of whether God belongs in scientific explanations disappears like a mirage. The supposed conflict is meaningless, for natural phenomena are “explained” by God in one sense and explained by a natural cause in another sense. They are explained by God in the vertical plane – He creates them and gives them existence at specific times and places. In the vertical plane, every object in the cosmos is causally inert – it neither gives existence nor prevents the existence of anything. Instead, the existence of the apple falling to the ground can only be explained by God’s unmediated will determining it to be so.⁴⁷ Scientific causes and explanations refer to patterns and correlations in the horizontal plane of reality. In this sense, God does not “explain” the apple falling because He is not an event in the universe that may or may not be correlated with the apple falling. The Prophet ﷺ said, “The sun and the moon are signs of God. They are not eclipsed due to the life or death of anyone. Rather, when God manifests to something, it humbles itself before Him. And so, if you see an eclipse, flee to prayer!”⁴⁸ Does the fact that eclipses are explained by God manifesting to the sun and the moon (which then “hide” in humility) imply that they cannot be explained by astronomical laws? Not at all in the view of the great theologian, Imam al-Ghazālī!⁴⁹ Indeed, you will not find in the halls of classical Muslim scientists (who testified to God’s omnipresence!) anyone who discarded a scientific theory about a relation between natural events,

⁴⁶ Nidhal Guessom, *Kalam’s Necessary Engagement with Modern Science* (Dubai: Kalam Research and Media, 2011) 4.

⁴⁷ Thus, according to Occam’s Razor, God is the simplest explanation and ascribing causal efficacy to earth’s gravity is superfluous. God’s existence and omnipotence is a certainty, not an assumption – God is necessary to explain the existence of the first object in the universe. Now, given two competing explanations, that the apple fell due to God and that the apple fell due to gravity, which theory makes the superfluous assumption? If we say that the apple fell due to God, we do not need to posit anything new, since the existence of God and of the apple are already known. But if we say that the apple fell due to gravity, we now need to posit a new, third entity of gravity. This assumption is unjustified. (Credit is due to Dr. Nazif Muhtaroglu for pointing this out to me.)

⁴⁸ al-Bukhārī (1046); al-Ḥākim, *al-Mustadrak* (1:331).

⁴⁹ See Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazali, *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl wa-l-muḥṣiḥ bi-l-aḥwāl* (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2015), 71.

insisting that theology demands that any and every natural event can only be explained by God. No, the monotheist conducts himself in the laboratory much the same as anyone else. The monotheist possesses no special method unavailable to the atheist to discover the mysteries of nature— he observes the natural world and records the correlations and patterns he discovers. Nevertheless, God is never absent from the picture. God is the cause in the vertical plane of reality; His will explains the existence of every event and its determination over other equal possibilities.

▲ Men of a Thousand Eyes

In the mind of many an atheist scientist exists the caricature of a religiously devout man, who, if he had his way, would burn the textbooks of science and explain mental disorder as the work of demonic spirits rather than chemical imbalances and explain earthquakes as God's wrath upon sinners rather than the movement of tectonic plates. One part of this myth has thus far been debunked, that there cannot be both a divine cause and a natural cause for the same phenomenon, because the meaning of 'cause' is not the shared between them. What then about 'spiritual' explanations? If there exists a sufficient material explanation, does it then imply that there can be no spiritual explanation?

One finds in the hadith literature of the Prophet ﷺ a number of teachings regarding plagues and infection that appear to be at odds with each other. In one report, the Prophet ﷺ said, "There is no infection. There is no serpent in the belly. There are no vermin calling for revenge."⁵⁰ Accordingly, because there is no such thing as infection, the hadith would appear to endorse that it is pointless to avoid proximity to the sick to prevent yourself getting sick. This is until a person comes across another report: "If you hear of plague in a land, do not enter it. But if it befalls a land where you are, then do not leave it."⁵¹ Then comes a third narration that where the Prophet ﷺ adds, "The plague is a punishment that God sends upon whomever He wishes."⁵² If there was only one true explanation of a phenomenon, then each of these reports (despite being all collected in the same book just pages apart) would be incompatible with the others. The third report suggests that widespread sickness is explained by spiritual punishment descending on a people. The second report suggests that widespread sickness is explained by the physical factor of coming into proximity with the sick. The first report then directly denies that widespread sickness can be explained by one sick individual infecting another. So what gives? *We say the advantage of occasionalism is that it allows the monotheist to find the harmony between otherwise competing explanations.* As for the first report denying the infected infecting others, it refers to the plane of divine causality. No one sick can create infection in another, and it is a matter of creed to live with this recognition. As for the second report, there is a

⁵⁰ al-Bukhārī (5715).

⁵¹ al-Bukhārī (5728).

⁵² al-Bukhārī (5734).

correlation established between one individual first being infected and others around him then becoming infected. Therefore, to avoid the spread of a plague, no outsiders should come into an infected area lest they become infected and no one in the city ought to leave the infected area lest they spread it to others.⁵³ As for the third report, there is also a correlation that we are informed of between spiritual punishment and plague.

All beautifully reconciliation may be observed in the example of the Companion ‘Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ. He once set out from Medina towards Syria, but, along the way, word reached him of a plague afflicting the region. He decided to turn back towards Medina. Surprised, his travel companion Abū ‘Ubayda asked, “Are you fleeing from God’s decree?” His surprise was because he believed, based on his belief in God’s decree, that whatever sickness God had chosen to ail them with was eternally determined and whatever sickness God had chosen to pass them by was eternally determined. There was no effect that turning back from the road to Syria would have. ‘Umar ؓ replied, “Yes. We flee from God’s decree to God’s decree.”⁵⁴ The perspective of ‘Umar ؓ was that, yes, while their decision to proceed or turn back would have no effect itself, to go to a land of plague was to go to the door where God is known to bring about sickness and then expect oneself to not become sick.

Such is the perspective of a man of thousand eyes. He sees no contradiction between different manners of explanation and causation but instead places each in its proper context.⁵⁵ One hadith states about shooting stars that when God decrees a matter, the angels near His presence glorify Him and then those near them glorify Him and learn from them what the Lord has said, and so on until it reaches the angels in the skies of the earth. Some jinn snatch the news they manage to hear hoping to carry it to their friends and so the angels pelt them with shooting stars.⁵⁶ But the scientist with a thousand eyes, who knows that shooting stars are meteors that burn up when they enter earth’s atmosphere, is not perturbed. He knows that explaining shooting stars as meteors – rocks from outer space – is the *material* cause of shooting stars. He knows that their appearance can be scientifically explained by, i.e., correlated with a buildup of heat from friction with the earth’s atmosphere. And he knows that their entrance into the earth’s atmosphere can be spiritually explained as angels pelting

⁵³ See Abdullāh Sirāj al-Dīn, *Sharḥ al-Manzūmat al-Bayqūniyya* (Damascus: Dār al-Daqqāq, 2022), 189 and Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Laṭā’if al-Ma’ārif li-Mawāsīm al-‘Āmm min al-Waṣā’if*, ed. Yāsīn al-Sawwās, 11th ed. (Damascus: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2020), 159-161.

⁵⁴ al-Bukhārī (5729), Muslim (2219).

⁵⁵ One will even find the Qur’an both perspectives combined in the same verses. God says, “God creates you and what you do,” (al-Sāffāt 37:96). Here, He affirms that the human being acts through God acting. God also says, “Kill them, and God will punish them by your hands,” (al-Tawba 9:14), and the Prophet ﷺ said, “I am the effacer. Through me God effaces disbelief,” (al-Bukhārī 3532, Muslim 2354). Here, one finds declarations that God acts through human beings acting. And so, a Quranic ethos therefore demands the ability to reconcile both perspectives.

⁵⁶ Muslim (2229).

jinn. When God creates shooting stars, He creates angels that launch them and He creates jinn in the direction that the stars are launched. A spiritual explanation refers to the state of affairs of beings of spirit when a phenomenon regularly happens. A scientific explanation refers to the state of affairs of physical and quantifiable objects when a phenomena regularly happens. Where then is the contradiction between a scientific explanation and a spiritual explanation? When some phenomenon occurs, cannot there be a state of physical affairs that we know through observation and simultaneously a state of spiritual affairs that we know through revelation?

The believer knows that only God provides: “Verily God is the provider, the possessor of might, the firm,” (al-Dhāriyāt 51:58). This is the lens of his heart; it sees all effects that it seeks as coming from God. He then takes the spiritual means of raising his hands and supplicating to God to aid him and to place food on the table. But he knows that taking the spiritual means alone can often be futile, so he then takes the physical means of securing employment and working to earn a weekly wage. Thus does the believer unite the physical, spiritual, and divine perspectives all in a singular vision of reality.

► From Observations to Paradigms

In most schools, the teaching of the scientific method is a rather straightforward process. A child may be taught a hypothesis that water boils at 100° Celsius. He then enters the lab equipped with a vial of water and an open flame, places the vial over the open flame watching the temperature of the water on a thermometer until suddenly, at 100°, the water sputters and hisses angrily. He does five trials, and upon finding consistent results each time, he returns to his seat satisfied that he has proven that water boils at 100° Celsius. Such is the popular image of the scientific enterprise. The scientist begins with a conjecture that is framed to be “falsifiable”, that is, testable such that data can fit the conjecture or not fit it, in which case the conjecture is falsified. The test of falsifiability is famously what demarcates a hypothesis as “scientific” as opposed to meaningless. The scientist conducts the experiment, notes his observations, and if the observations match what the hypothesis predicts, then the hypothesis becomes a theory. Otherwise, it is rejected. And so, it is said that science develops its theories through the accumulation of individual discoveries and inventions and progresses linearly towards an ever more precise account of nature.

Unfortunately, the normal practice of science today cannot fit this idealized narrative of the history of science. This is because the simple collection of observations and data cannot alone account for the body of knowledge and theories that is called ‘science’. Observations and data must be organized by the mind by what is called a ‘paradigm’, a non-empirical framework that determines what it is possible for scientists to discover and what is impossible. Consider a stone tied to the end of a swinging rope – while everyone *observes* the same object, two people *see* different phenomena based on the paradigm in which each is trained to think. The Aristotelian has learned that objects generate their own internal motion towards their natural resting place. This lens will determine how

he sees the swinging stone, as an object that would, by its own impulse, fall to the lowest point, the ground, but being constrained by the rope, the stone falls in a curved motion rather than linearly. A student trained in Galileo's physics will instead see, in the same phenomenon, a mechanical model, a pendulum with a pivot, an arm, and a point of equilibrium. *The Galilean point of view provides no more of an objective or accurate description of the swinging stone than the Aristotelian.* They are simply perspectives within two different frameworks that account for the observations about a swinging stone – the Aristotelian understands the nature of physical objects as objects with a natural location that they are impelled towards while the Galilean understands physical objects to be quantitative entities that are to be described in terms of mathematical laws.⁵⁷ The framework, the paradigm, provides the presumptions about the nature of physical objects that determined the experiments they conducted, the data they collected, and the theories they formulated.

In normal circumstances, the scientific community proceeds in its experiments under the assumption that the given theories and view of nature are largely accurate. The purpose of experiments, then, is to “complete the system”, to discover the missing details that fill out the picture already framed by the paradigms of the scientific community at the time. Accordingly, the teaching of science in normal periods consists of teaching the paradigms and rubrics under which the current scientific community operates. Whereas in the past, students read classics like Aristotle, Ptolemy, or Newton directly, the legitimate research areas and methods of science are now inherited through textbooks along with the achievements that scientists have managed using these methods. Accordingly, the student accepts these fundamentals as the basis for his own research areas and problems to solve. A student of optics who believes light is a photon (i.e., a massless particle that behaves like a wave with electromagnetic energy) is supplied with the premises needed to experiment on light manipulating its position and momentum. But a scientist in the past who believed that light was a material substance could conduct an experiment to examine the pressure that light particles exert on the solid bodies that they bounce off. Yet this experiment would not even be conceivable to the first student because he would presume *a priori* that light, being a massless proton, could not exert pressure! At various points in scientific history, light has been a photon, a wave, a material corpuscle, a particle emitting from visible bodies, and a modification of the air in between a visible body and an eye.⁵⁸ Each of these is its own paradigm, with its own phenomena that it best explains, with its own kinds of data that a scientist will experiment with, and with anomalies that it cannot account for. Yet a scientist does not, and cannot, conduct an experiment to “verify” or “falsify” one of these theories because, insofar as the reigning paradigm is able to account for most significant phenomena observed of light, it is true and unproblematic. And so, a scientist must conduct his experiments aiming to extend this unproblematic model of light into unexplored areas. The research

⁵⁷ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 4th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 119-120.

⁵⁸ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 10-13.

areas of normal science are not random fact-gathering of natural phenomena; they are selectively directed studies of phenomena where the scientist expects that the fundamentals of his paradigm will be consistent with data observed in his experiment.

Consider research conducted to measure the periods of eclipsing binaries or to measure the specific gravities of objects.⁵⁹ Such research questions are *presumptive* in that they presume the objects of outer space and physics have a certain nature and follow a certain model of behavior. The very conceptual categories of 'specific gravity' and 'eclipsing binary' can only be an object of experiment in an environment where such concepts are furnished by the dominant paradigm. Scientists, in normal science, therefore, do not conduct experiments that 'test' the truth of the paradigm. Instead, they take the truth of the paradigm for granted and instead investigate any residual ambiguity and imprecision left in the paradigm. When Newton formulated his laws of motion, for example, most of his applications involved astronomical bodies, planets and moons. The subsequent generations of physicists were concerned with demonstrating how motion on earth was a special application of Newton's general laws of motion. "Theoretical techniques, were, for example required for treating the motions of more than two simultaneously attracting bodies and for investigating the stability of perturbed orbits...to improve the match between Newton's paradigm and the observation of the heavens."⁶⁰ They did not test Newton's laws of motion; instead, they aimed to apply Newton's laws to motion on earth. This exemplifies why the normal, intended activity of scientists is a kind of puzzle-solving – taking the rules of the game (or paradigm) for granted, and working within them to complete the picture that the paradigm frames.

How, then, do paradigms change? Occasionally, an experiment will reveal a phenomenon that cannot fit within the puzzle of the paradigm because it shows itself contrary to expectations. Scientists will then tend to focus experiments on this anomaly until a minor adjustment is made to the paradigm so that the anomalous becomes expected again. Yet when an anomaly proves unable to be assimilated, and the experiments focused on the anomaly only reveal more anomalies, a crisis emerges in the scientific community. The crisis calls the whole paradigm into question. This crisis paves the road for a novel thinker to create a new game to play with new rules and paradigms that can account for the existing anomalies as well as previous discoveries about a given phenomenon.

The state of Ptolemaic astronomy was a scandal before Copernicus' announcement. Galileo's contributions to the study of motion depended closely upon difficulties discovered in Aristotle's theory by scholastic critics. Newton's new theory of light and color originated in the discovery that none of the existing pre-paradigm theories would account for the length of the spectrum, and the wave theory that replaced Newton's was announced in the midst of

⁵⁹ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 25.

⁶⁰ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 32.

growing concern about anomalies in the relation of diffraction and polarization effects to Newton's theory. Thermodynamics was born from the collision of two existing nineteenth-century physical theories, and quantum mechanics from a variety of difficulties surrounding black-body radiation, specific heats, and photoelectric effect.⁶¹

Perhaps the first of these, the Copernican revolution in astronomy, is the most famous example of paradigm shift in the natural sciences. Prior to Copernicus, Ptolemy's model of astronomy reigned supreme, and it was paradigmatically characterized by being geocentric (that the earth is the center of the universe) and only permitting circular orbits (that the orbits of astronomical bodies are perfectly circular, not elliptical). For hundreds of years, this model of astronomy proved capable of accounting for the observations about the motion and position of the planets and stars. Yet with the invention of new instruments capable of closer observation of the planets and stars, the observed behavior of the planets started to misalign with the theory of circular orbits. Astronomers on Ptolemy's model would continue to modify his model to include different numbers and magnitudes compound circular orbits (circles within a larger circular orbit), but the system grew ever more cumbersome and complicated. This was the crisis period that prepared the ground for Copernicus' heliocentric model, where the sun is the center of the planets' elliptical orbits, which, with simplicity, could account for the motion and position of the planets.⁶²

We should note about the Copernican revolution, akin to many other scientific revolutions, that the complex Ptolemaic system was just as accurate as its simpler Copernican rival in describing the facts. *Merely from the standpoint of observation, there was no observed data that one could account for that its rival could not.* The Copernican model superseded the Ptolemaic model not on the grounds of one being "more scientific" than the other, but instead due to one being a simpler alternative in a moment of crisis while the other seemed fraught with growing complexities.⁶³ A similar situation arises with all scientific revolutions – while the old paradigm proves successful in defining then solving its own range of problems, it eventually stumbles onto a stubborn observation or data point that cannot be accommodated into the paradigm. This challenges the viability of the paradigm as explanatory, and this tension persists until a scientist invents a new paradigm that quickly gains favor due to it being able to account for the persistent problem as well defining its own set of phenomena that it should be able to, in principle, solve. Yet history proves that this new paradigm must eventually stumble onto anomalies that it cannot solve, triggering another crisis. These constitute the inevitable limitations of the scientific enterprise.

⁶¹ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 67-68.

⁶² Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 68-69, 75.

⁶³ Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 76.

▲ The Metaphysical Backdrop to Physics

Why concern ourselves with the paradigms and revolutions of scientific inquiry? It fundamentally reveals, for any given set of data and observations, that more than one theoretical account can be given of it. Observations supply the scientist with material to organize, with data points to make sense of. But these data points can fit into more than one pattern or model, and the scientist cannot “observe” the pattern itself because it is not empirical. What the history of science bears out is that science is the endeavor of predictive modeling. A **model** is a mental representation of a real-world phenomenon that predicts its occurrence and explains it in terms of more fundamental elements, provided by the dominant scientific paradigm. Yet, whether that mental representation exists as such in the real-world, whether there is *correspondence* between the mental model and the real-world phenomenon, is beyond the ken of science.

If the scientific enterprise cannot determine which of two equally predictive models and paradigms is true, then how is this to be determined? Because the natural sciences must proceed from starting points and assumptions about nature, those assumptions must be verified in a *prior* discipline. We say that such a determination belongs to the discipline aptly named ‘metaphysics’ (otherwise called ‘theology’ [*ilm al-kalām*] in its broadest conception). Metaphysics is the discipline that studies everything that exists in the broadest terms. It studies the nature of eternity and temporality and establishes, for example, that that which is eternal has no cause and that which begins to exist in time must have a cause. It studies existence and establishes, for example, that things are real, not just figments of the imagination or pure subjective perspectives, and that they can be objectively known. Now, because the natural sciences study natural phenomena, and natural phenomena are things that exist, the broad conclusions of metaphysics apply to natural phenomena too. *The conclusions in metaphysics therefore are and must be presumed in the natural sciences.* For example, just as metaphysics establishes that everything that begins to exist in time must have a cause, natural phenomena (which have a beginning) must have a cause. Therefore, any scientific paradigm that allows for phenomena that pop into existence without a cause must be false in the real world. Even if that paradigm “works” as a mental model to consistently predict phenomena, reason demands that it is false, that the mental model does not correspond to reality. Another truth demonstrated in metaphysics is that quantities describe substances and depend on them – ‘five meters’ only exists as five meters *of something*. Substances are primary, and quantities measured in physics only describe the quantitative aspect of substances. Is light a particle or a wave (or both)? Both particles and waves in physics refer to mathematical objects, measurements of change, and therefore, light, in reality, is neither a particle nor a wave but rather is a substance which changes in a manner that can be modeled as a particle and as a wave. An aspiring physicist must understand this point well because one of the broadest paradigms of physics assumes the nature of physical objects to be fundamentally mathematical, which precludes the physicist from ever discovering anything that is

not measurable and not mathematical. As disconcerting of a conclusion this may to a physicist, long accustomed to the esteem of studying the queen of all disciplines, it is a completely aligned to the hierarchy of disciplines upheld by the fourteen-hundred-year tradition of Muslim scholarship. In that hierarchy of disciplines, the natural sciences proceed from starting points and assumptions about the world and physical nature that must be verified in a *prior* discipline called metaphysics. Because a student is rarely taught that the current paradigms of science are not proven by scientific experiment but instead presumed, he can easily fall into the delusion of thinking that science already understands the reality of nature in principle, and all that remains is to work out the details. Unbeknownst to him, he will understand the history of science like a linear disclosure of the reality of the natural world with increasing accuracy and precision.⁶⁴ And the metaphysical backdrop to his work will remain ever unexamined.

For our purposes, there is one metaphysical conclusion that concerns us in particular: that all phenomena are events that are directly caused, determined, and brought into existence by the eternal Creator. Given this is the case, let us explore the image of nature we are presented: nature is defined by the regularities that result from the accumulation of individual instances of events. These individual instances are not intrinsically related to each other, and instead, their apparent connection is due to the Divine creating them side by side. Accordingly, the natural world is “pixelated”, like particles of “dust scattered” (*habāʾun munbaththah*)⁶⁵ that appear in forms and patterns because of how the dust scatters and moves in the wind. Or you may view nature as a movie, as a series of frames flashing in rapid succession, the pixels of each frame all moving in unison, giving the illusion that a bat hitting a ball causes the pixels of the ball to move. But it is the light of the projector that causes each pixel to take the color that it does, the bat to be silver, the ball to be white, the silver to be close to the white and then the silver to be far from the white. It cannot be said that the ball did not hit the ball. Nor that the ball did not fly away from the bat. And because the ball does fly away when the bat hits it and would not otherwise, the scientist has a phenomenon to explain in terms of a more general rule (like Newton’s Laws of Motion) that consistently describes the motion of not just bats hitting balls but of any physical object contacting any other physical object. Is it any wonder, then, that nature can be described through a number of competing, explanatory systems? Any number of general rules can be found to be consistent with the motion of physical objects; Aristotle produces a model of how physical bodies move as does Newton and Einstein, and each is coherent if its rules are

⁶⁴ Note that the argument here is not that the simple fact that previous scientific theories have been superseded implies that we should be skeptical about the scientific enterprise as a whole. Instead, the upshot is that 1) beyond basic facts, every scientific theory must presume a framework, and 2) that this framework cannot be directly examined by scientists but can be found to be incoherent with observations. It is the very nature of collecting data and setting experiments that necessitates a presupposed paradigm, and because science must presume a paradigm, it cannot alone provide a full account of reality.

⁶⁵ “When the earth trembles terribly. And mountains crumble, pulverized. And become *dust scattered*.” (al-Wāqī‘a 56:4-6).

consistent with the way the pixels of physical bodies move and change. Yet, because occasionalism entails that God regularly creates effects in the world given a particular state of affairs, none of these models are causes of existence – they do not bring about or give existence or create change in the world just as no set of pixels on a screen causes or “moves” another set of pixels. Instead, the projector changes the pixels directly without intermediary and God brings about the existence of everything in the universe directly without intermediary, and the *laws of science are nothing but descriptions of how He acts in the universe*. The scientist who lives his life with both eyes open, then, is engaged in an endeavor of deep, sacred significance. He cannot help but be overwhelmed by a vision of the Divine, for his occupation is the study God’s signs on the horizons and in himself. The luminous pixels of nature lie in his petri dish and out the finder of his telescope. Because his activity is pattern finding, he should not be perturbed by the discovery of many patterns, each consistent in-itself but mutually incompatible with each other. Accordingly, from the point of view of occasionalism, the existence of various scientific theories and paradigms is not a matter of concern but a cause for celebration, an inevitable consequence of the search for descriptions of how God acts in the universe.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

“O fire! Be cool and safe for Abraham!” (al-Anbiyā 21:69)

One divine imperative directed towards all people is to “observe what is *in* the heavens and the earth!” (Yūnus 10:101). God’s wording is exacting; He did not command man to observe the heavens and the earth themselves. Yes, the study of the earth and skies, of this planet and outer space, constitutes a beautiful and remarkable endeavor. Hiking through the woods and seeing the sunlight peak in from between the treetops brings joy to the heart. The monotonous crash of waves onto the beach soothes the anxious mind until it finds a still tranquility. Man finds that he belongs in nature, among the vibrant flora and fauna that populate his home on Earth. And yet God places them here for us, not just as enjoyment in this life but as signs that are to be read pointing us to the One. What is *in* the heavens and the earth but the One signified by the signs. Every effect points to its cause, and everything we witness points to its Creator.

The cosmos is a play staged by God, every move orchestrated by Him. Turn back the history of the cosmos and there must have been a First, one who himself lies outside of the cosmos, who wrote its first page. He is God. Everything in the realm of possibility was within the grasp of His power, each being equally contingent. Because of His oneness, nothing could rival His power in His dominion. He was All-Powerful, and so everything else was powerless. We see and observe the world of nature around us and find it to be so. We see events follow each other in sequence, sometimes so frequently in an experiment that the mind rightly concludes that such a correlation of events cannot be due to chance. There must be a cause for the correlation. The eye never sees any causation *per se* and so the mind is left to infer it from the necessary powerlessness and dependency of nature and the inescapable power and independence of the Divine. And so, God is the sole actor in the universe, and everything He creates becomes a site for Him to manifest something of His most beautiful Names.

He alone is the sole cause that gives existence and determines some possibilities over others. And there are causes in the universe too, not causes that create but causes that, if seized and taken, are means to their effects. Each cause is a door where God brings about its effect. God, in His infinite wisdom and mercy, created a world of patterns where His creation could find His doors and know what to expect Him to provide from behind each one. The visionary who sees things as they are therefore walks from door to door, expecting nothing from the door but from God who awaits behind it. When he walks into the laboratory, he excels as a scientist, discovering the correlations between

natural events. When he reads the words of the Prophet ﷺ, he comes to know how to take the means in the world of the unseen and the spiritual. He knows the doors of His Lord, those in the physical realm and those outside the physical, in the realm normally unseen.

And yet sometimes a door opens from where even he was not expecting it. Sometimes, there is a breakdown of the means. Sometimes, God has been creating along a pattern but then inscribes an exception. The fire does not burn. The moon splits. The rock speaks. Sometimes, God creates events that transcend explanation, that cannot be correlated to phenomena physical or spiritual and that cannot be predicted. These are disruptions in the norm that God decrees to honor His chosen slaves, to anoint them before all of creation as His representatives and Messengers. Just as He caused all else, God causes a miracle.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ See Justin Poe et al, *Proofs of Prophethood* (Boston: The American Society of Islamic Philosophy and Theology, 2025). <https://asipt.org/curricular-essays/>.

Appendix

THE SPIRITUAL EFFECTS IN SCRIPTURE

In his commentary of the opening chapter of the Qur'an, the great sage and exegete Aḥmad b. 'Ajība collects many narrations about the spiritual properties of verses of the Qur'an. Many of these have been tried and tested by way of experiment (*tajriba*) and found to lead to the desired effect. We relate these below:⁶⁷

■ Healing

- God says, “And We reveal of the Qur'an that which is a healing and a mercy for the believers.” (al-Isrā' 17:82)
- The Prophet ﷺ says, “You must take the two healings: honey and the Qur'an.”⁶⁸
- The Prophet ﷺ says, “The best medicine is the Qur'an.”⁶⁹
- Ṭalḥa b. Muṣarrif, one of the trustworthy authorities of hadith narration, says, “It used to be said, ‘When the Qur'an is recited next to the sick, he finds the sickness alleviated because of it.’”⁷⁰
- A man came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, “I complain to you of my chest.” He ﷺ said, “Recite the Qur'an. God says, ‘And [it is] a healing for what lies in chests,’” (Yūnus 10:57).⁷¹
- On the authority of Jābir b. 'Abdullāh, the Prophet ﷺ said, “The opening chapter (*al-Fātiḥa* of the Book is a healing from every ailment.”⁷² Another narration has, “...a healing from everything except death.”
- On the authority of Abū Sa'īd al-Khudhri, the Prophet ﷺ said, “The opening chapter (*al-Fātiḥa*) of the Book is a healing from poison.”⁷³

⁶⁷ This is rearranged from Aḥmad Ibn 'Ajība, *Tafsīr al-Fātiḥa al-Kabīr*, ed. Bassām Bārūd, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Ḥāwī), 143-150.

⁶⁸ Ibn Mājah (3452); al-Hākim, *al-Mustadrak* (7435); al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr* (5524). The two 'healings' refer to the two things called a healing in the Qur'an. The first is the Qur'an itself as mentioned above and the second is honey. God says, “There comes out from their [i.e., bees'] bellies a drink of myriad colors in which there is a healing for people.” (al-Nahl 16:69)

⁶⁹ Ibn Mājah (3501); al-Daylamī, *al-Firdaws* (2890);

⁷⁰ al-Bayhaqī, *Shu'ab al-Īmān* (2579);

⁷¹ Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr fī al-Tafsīr bi-l-Ma'thūr*, ed. 'Abdullāh al-Turkī, 17 vol. (Cairo: Markaz li-l-Buḥūth wa-l-Dirāsāt al-'Arabiyya wa-l-Insāniyya, 2003), 7:665.

⁷² al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr* (5827).

- It is narrated, “We were on a journey, and we dismounted in one of the Bedouin neighborhoods, and we asked to be hosted but they did not host us. Their chief was then stung [by a scorpion] and a young girl came asking, “Our chief has fallen ill. Does one of you recite incantations for healing (*ruqya*)? One man stood up with her, and, in exchange for a herd of goats, he recited the Source of the Book (i.e., *sūrat al-Fātiḥa*) over the chief and he recovered.” One narration adds, “And it was as though he released from shackles. This incident was told to the Prophet ﷺ and he ﷺ said, “How did he come to know that it is a healing incantation? Distribute this [i.e., the herd of goats] and give me a share with you.”⁷⁴
- Sā’ib b. Yazīd said, “The Prophet ﷺ accustomed me to reciting the opening chapter (*al-Fātiḥa*) of the Book and spitting.”⁷⁵
- The Prophet ﷺ said, “Two verses that are recited, that heal, that God loves are the two verses from the end of the Chapter of *al-Baqara*.”⁷⁶
- On the authority of ‘Alī ؑ, it is related that a scorpion stung the Prophet ﷺ. He ﷺ called for water and salt [to be placed on the area] and began to wipe over it [reciting the chapter] Say: O unbelievers! (al-Kāfirūn 109:1-6) and the two chapters of protection (al-Falaq 113:1-5, al-Nās 114:1-6).⁷⁷

■ Protection

- The Prophet ﷺ said, “Verily, Satan will not approach the house in which *al-Baqara* is recited.”⁷⁸
- Ubayy b. Ka’b narrates, “I was with the Prophet ﷺ when a Bedouin came to him and said, “O Prophet of God! One of my brothers has some pain.” He ﷺ asked, “And what pains him?” The man responded, “He has a touch of insanity.”⁷⁹ He ﷺ said, “Bring him to me.” The man placed him in front of the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet prayed for his protection with
 - the opening chapter (*al-Fātiḥa*) of the Book (al-Fātiḥa 1:1-7);
 - four verses from the beginning of *al-Baqara* (al-Baqara 2:1-4);
 - the verse: “And your god is one god. There is no god but He, the Benevolent, the Merciful,” (al-Baqara 2:163);
 - the Verse of the Throne (*Āyat al-Kursī*) (al-Baqara 2:255);
 - three verses from the end of *al-Baqara* (al-Baqara 2:284-286);

⁷³ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaghīr* (2826).

⁷⁴ al-Bukhārī (3:121, 6:231, 7:170); Muslim (2201, 2046).

⁷⁵ al-Haythamī, *Majma‘ al-Zawā‘id* (5:113).

⁷⁶ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 1:378.

⁷⁷ al-Ṭabarānī (7262);

⁷⁸ Muslim (780); al-Tirmidhī (2880);

⁷⁹ Or this could mean: “He has been touched (i.e., possessed) by jinn.”

- the verse from *Āl Imrān*: “God bears witness that there is no god but Him as do the angels and those possessed of knowledge standing justly. There is no god but He, the Mighty, the Wise,” (*Āl Imrān* 3:18);
- the verse from *al-A‘rāf*: “Your lord is indeed God who created the heavens and the earth in six days then assumed the throne. He covers the night with the day, then the day urgently purses the night. The sun, the moon, the stars are subject to His command. Indeed, His is creation and command. Glory to God, Lord of the worlds!” (*al-A‘rāf* 7:54);
- the end of *al-Mu‘minūn*: “Transcendent is God, the Kind, the Real. There is no god but He, Lord of the Noble Throne. Whoever calls along with God another god – He has no proof for it. His Accounting will only be with his Lord, and the unbelievers shall indeed not flourish. Say: My Lord! Forgive and show mercy! You are the best of the merciful!” (*al-Mu‘minūn* 23:116-118);
- the verse from *al-Jinn*: “...that He, transcendent be His majesty, took no consort nor child,” (*al-Jinn* 72:3);
- ten verses from *al-Şāffāt*: “By those who set the ranks. And those who drive the clouds. And those who read the Reminder. Truly, your god is one. Lord of the heavens and of the earth and all that is between them, and Lord of the sun’s risings. We have adorned the lowest sky with ornaments, the planets. To protect it from every rebellious demon. They cannot listen to the Sublime Assembly, for they are pelted from every side. Repelled. Theirs is perpetual torment. Save him who snatches a fragment, and there pursues him a piercing flame.” (*al-Şāffāt* 37:1-10),
- three verses from the end of *al-Ĥashr*: “He is God. There is no god but He, the King, the Holy, the Flawless, the Securer, the Guardian, the Mighty, the Compelling, the Proudful. Glory be to God, transcendent of what they associate. He is God, the Creator, the Maker, the Designer. His are the names most beautiful. All that is in the heavens and the earth glorifies Him. He is the Mighty, the Wise.” (*al-Ĥashr* 59:22-24),
- “Say He Allah is one.” (*al-Ikhlāş* 112:1-4), and
- the two chapters of protection (*al-Falaq* 113:1-5, *al-Nās* 114:1-6).

The man then stood like he had had no complaint before.⁸⁰

- It is related on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ūd, “Whoever reads the four verses from the beginning of the Chapter of *al-Baqara* (Q. 2:1-4) will have no demon come near him or his family on that day nor anything he dislikes. Nor are they recited over struck by insanity except that he regains his sanity.”⁸¹
- “When you go to your bed, read the Verse of the Throne. Indeed, a protector from God shall remain over you, and no demon shall approach you until you wake in the morning.”⁸²

⁸⁰ al-Ĥākīm, *al-Mustadrak* (8319).

⁸¹ al-Dārimī, *Takhrīj Aḥādīth Iḥyā’* (1107).

⁸² al-Bukhārī (2561).

- It is related on the authority of Ibn Mas‘ūd, “A man said, ‘O God’s Messenger! God himself sent prayers upon you. Teach me something with which God will bring me benefit.’ He ﷺ said, ‘Read the Verse of the Throne. Indeed, God will protect you, your children, your home and even the homes around your home.’”⁸³
- It is related on the authority of al-Ḥasan b. ‘Alī that his grandfather, the Prophet ﷺ said, “My community’s safety from drowning when they sail the sea is to recite, ‘In the name of God be sailing it and anchoring it. My Lord is indeed forgiving, merciful!’ (Hūd 11:41); ‘They have not estimated God as is His right to be,’ (al-Zumar 39:67).”⁸⁴
- It is related on Layth that he said, “It has reached me that the following verse are a cure for black magic. They are to be recited in a glass containing water, and then the water is to be poured onto the head of the afflicted:
 - the verses from the Chapter of *Yūnus*, “And when they had thrown, Moses said, ‘You bring only magic. God will expose it falsity! Indeed, God does not uphold the work of corrupters! God establishes the truth with His word however much the wrongful despise it!’ (Yūnus 10:81-82);
 - God’s words, ‘Thus was the truth vindicated and what they used to practice came to be in vain. Thus, they were overpowered and turned back humiliated. And the magicians were thrown down prostrate. Saying ‘We believe in the Lord of the worlds!’ (al-A‘rāf 7:118-121);
 - God’s words, “What they have made is but a magician’s trick! No magicians shall flourish wherever he goes!’ (Ṭāha 20:69).”⁸⁵
- It is related on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās ؓ that the Prophet ﷺ said, “The following verse is a protection from theft: ‘Say: Call Allah or call the Benevolent (*al-Raḥmān*) – whichever you call, His are the most beautiful names. Neither pray shouting nor hide it but seek between them a middle way. And say: Praise be to God who took no child and has no associate in dominion nor, out of weakness, any helper. Magnify Him greatly!’ (al-Isrā’ 17:110-111).”⁸⁶
- It is related on the authority of Anas b. Mālik that the Prophet ﷺ said, “There is no blessing that God favored his slave with regarding his wife or his wealth or child and he says, “Whatever God wills. There is no power save by God,’ after which he will see a harm in that blessing other than death.”⁸⁷
- Abū Hurayra relates that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever recites all of *al-Dukhān* (Q. 44:1-59); the first *Ḥa-Mīm* until ‘...to Him is the destination’ (Ghāfir 40:1-3); and the Verse of the Throne

⁸³ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 3:171.

⁸⁴ al-Ṭabarānī (803); al-Haythamī, *Majma‘ al-Zawā‘id* (17101).

⁸⁵ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 7:692;

⁸⁶ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 4:206;

⁸⁷ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaghūr* (7842).

(al-Baqara 2:255) when he enters into evening will be protected until the morning. And if [he recites them] in the morning, then he is protected until the evening.”⁸⁸

- On the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه, it is related that the Prophet ﷺ said, “If you find something [stirring] in yourself [i.e., misgivings (*waswasa*)], then say, ‘He is the First, the Last, the Apparent, and the Unseen. He is knowing of all things,’ (al-Ḥadīd 57:3).”⁸⁹
- Abū Sa‘īd al-Khudhrī relates, “The Prophet ﷺ would seek refuge from the jinn and from the evil eye of man until the chapters of protection were revealed. He would seize upon them and leave all else.”⁹⁰

► Relief

- The Prophet ﷺ said, “Whoever recites the Verse of the Throne during tribulation, God will save him.”⁹¹
- The Prophet ﷺ said to Mu‘ādh b. Jabal, “Shall I teach you a prayer that if you supplicate with it and you owe debt as large as Ṣubayr [i.e., the name of a mountain in Yemen], God will discharge it for you? ‘Say: God, master of dominion, You give dominion to whom You wish, and You seize dominion from whom You wish. You honor whom You wish, and You humble whom You wish. In Your hand is all good. You are of all things capable. You thrust the night into the day, and you bring out the living from the dead, and you bring out the dead from the living. You sustain whom You wish without accounting,’ (Āl ‘Imrān 3:26-27). O Benevolent and Merciful in this life and the afterlife, You give of these to whom You will, and You withhold of them from whom you will. Shower mercy on me that frees me of needing the mercy of others!”⁹²
- It is related on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās رضي الله عنه, “If any of you find his animal acting difficult or bucking, then recite this verse in its ear, ‘Is it other than the religion of God that they desire when to Him surrenders all in the heavens and on the earth willingly and unwillingly and to Him they return?’ (Āl ‘Imrān 3:83).”⁹³
- On the authority of Abū Hurayra, the Prophet ﷺ said, “No matter troubled me except that Gabriel عليه السلام would manifest before me and say, ‘O Muhammad! Say: On the Ever-Living Who does not die do I trust. ‘Praise be to God who took no child and has no associate in dominion nor, out of weakness, any helper. Magnify Him greatly!’ (al-Isrā’ 17:111).”⁹⁴

⁸⁸ al-Tirmidhī (2875); al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 13:8;

⁸⁹ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 6:171.

⁹⁰ al-Tirmidhī (2058); al-Nasā‘ī (7804); Ibn Mājah (3511);

⁹¹ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 3:179.

⁹² al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Ṣaghīr*, 1:201.

⁹³ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 2:48.

⁹⁴ al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi‘ al-Ṣaghīr* (7971).

- Sa'd b. Abi Waqqāsh relates, "The prayer of Dhū al-Nūn that he supplicated when he was the stomach of the whale was 'There is no god but You. Glory be to You. Indeed, I was of the wrongful,' (al-Anbiyā' 21:87). There is no one ever who supplicates with it in a situation except God responds to him."⁹⁵
- The Prophet ﷺ said, "Indeed, I know of a word that no one undergoing tribulation says except that he if given relief. It is the word of my brother Dhū al-Nūn, 'He called out in the darkneses: There is no god but You. Glory be to You. Indeed, I was of the wrongful,' (al-Anbiyā' 21:87)."⁹⁶
- Ibn Mas'ūd ؓ said that he once recited something in the ear of someone afflicted and then he recovered. The Prophet ﷺ said to him, "What did you recite in his ear?" He said, "Do you deem that we have created you in vain and that you are not returned to Us?" (al-Mu'minūn 23:115)." The Prophet ﷺ said, "If a man with certitude recited it for [overcoming] a mountain, the mountain would vanish."⁹⁷
- Ibn Zubayr relates that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever places *Yā-Sīn* (Q. 36:1-83) in front of a need, it is taken care of for him."
- Regarding a woman who is having difficulty with postnatal bleeding, Ibn 'Abbās ؓ relates, "It should be written on a sheet and then [the ink of it] drunk, 'In the name of God. There is no god but He, the Forbearing, the Generous. Glorious and transcendent be God, Lord of the Mighty Throne. Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds. 'The Day they see it [it will be] as if they had remained only an evening or its morning,' (al-Nāzi'āt 79:46); 'On the day when they see that which they are threatened, it will appear to them that they had not stayed in the world for more than a moment of a day. The Message has been conveyed. Shall any other than the corrupt be destroyed?' (al-Aḥqāf 46:35)."⁹⁸

■ Strength

- The Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever recites the end of the Chapter of *al-Kahf* (Q. 18:106-110) intending an hour at night in which he wishes to stand for prayer will stand at that time."⁹⁹

⁹⁵ al-Tirmidhī (3505); al-Nasā'ī (10417); al-Suyūṭī, *al-Jāmi' al-Ṣaghīr* (3383);

⁹⁶ al-Tirmidhī;

⁹⁷ al-Ṭabarānī, *al-Du'ā'* (1081);

⁹⁸ Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-Aḥkām al-Qur'ān*, ed. 'Abdullāh al-Turkī, 24 vol. (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla 2006), 19:238;

⁹⁹ 'Ubāda said, "We tested this, and found it to be so." Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī relates that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Shall I not tell you of a chapter so great it fills everything between heaven and earth. Seventy thousand angels publicize its greatness. It is the chapter of *al-Kahf*. Whoever recites it on Friday, God forgives him for everything until the next Friday and three days more after that. He is given light that reaches heaven and protects from the trial of the Antichrist. Whoever recites the five verses at the end of it when he lays down to sleep in his bed, he is protected and woken at any moment of the night that he wishes [to wake]." al-Suyūṭī, *al-Durr al-Manthūr*, 4:257.