# Divine Knowledge and the Doctrine of *Badāʾ*

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**Abstract:** *Badāʾ* is one of the exclusive doctrines of the Shiʾte theology which has been commonly rejected by the Sunni thought in the Islamic world. According to a rough explication, this doctrine says that God's will is not restricted by His eternal destiny, but He is free to intervene deliberately in some current affairs of the universe and direct it towards an end different from what was predestined by Himself. Shi'te thinkers commonly appeal to some textual evidences (including Quranic verses as well as some sayings of their *imams*) to present a satisfying religious ground for *badāʾ*. They have proposed both figurative (metaphorical) and non-figurative (literal) interpretations of these textual evidences. According to the latter, some theological problems concerning the principle of the Divine immutability arise. In this paper, I deal with one of these problems which claims that *badāʾ* entails God's mutability via requiring a change in His eternal knowledge (i.e. changing His mind). After reformulating this problem as a simple argument against the rational plausibility of *badāʾ*, I explain and briefly examine three solutions for the problem which respectively consist in making an analogy between *badāʾ* and *naskh*, attributing the assumed change to the realm of the celestial souls' knowledge and accommodating the change in God's relational (not essential) knowledge.

**Keywords:** Doctrine of *Badāʾ*, Shi'te Theology, God's Knowledge, God's Immutability.

## 1. Introduction

One of the exclusive doctrines of the Shiʾte School in the Islamic tradition is the doctrine of *badāʾ*. Shiʾte scholars have been inspired by some Quranic verses as well as some traditions[1] (*ḥadiṯ*=narrated saying of the prophet and the infallible *imams*). Although this could be mainly thought of as a theological issue concerning Divine attributes like knowledge and will, it is usually linked to other significant theological

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[1] Although I believe that the translation of the Arabic words "*ḥadiṯ*" (حديث) and "*riwāyah*" (رواية) into the English word "tradition" is not so appropriate, I use it here regarding its more or less widespread usage in the literature. At any rate, according to Shi'te scholars "*ḥadiṯ*" (tradition or narration), in its broad sense, denotes words, actions and even silent approvals of the prophet and the *imams*, narrated by people and collected in some *ḥadiṯ* collections.

or philosophical issues such as the human freewill, the effectiveness of the petitionary prayer and the truthfulness of the predictions and prophecies of the Divine infallible prophets.[2]

As we shall see, there have been diverse interpretations of this doctrine among Shiʾte thinkers. In a rough explication, the doctrine of *badāʾ* says that Divine will is never restricted by an eternal destiny but is always free. Thus, in some cases, it *appears* to Him to intervene deliberately in some current affairs of the universe and direct it towards an end different from what was predestined by Himself.[3] At the first glance, the doctrine seems to be sufficiently plausible and consistent with the so-called "perfect being theology" since the most conceivable perfect being must be beyond any limitation including those assumedly imposed by his own nature. More contemplation on the implications of the doctrine, however, may indicate that this characterisation can raise some theological problems. For instance, it may be said that the acceptance of *badāʾ* apparently requires us to admit that God's will, as well as God's eternal knowledge, can change and this seems quite problematic since according to the prominent Shiʾte concept of God, He is totally simple and His essential attributes are identical with His very essence. Therefore, God's knowledge and will, as His essential attributes, are not properties distinct from His very essence but identical with it. Consequently, any change in these attributes entails a change in His essence, which is absurd since God is necessarily immutable. Therefore, at least in the first glance, the doctrine of *badāʾ* ends in the possibility of God's being mutable which is theologically implausible.

Moreover, one may think that this doctrine implies God's prior ignorance of some future facts since it seems that the reason for a change taking place in God's will is nothing but His becoming aware of some new facts He has not known earlier. And this is a serious threat to the belief in God's omniscience. In other words, it may seem that *badāʾ* happens due to God's *changing His mind*, which is, in a theology which pictures God as the most conceivable perfect being, unreasonable.

These initial (mis)understandings and prejudices naturally have encouraged the non-Shiʾte (Sunni) theologians to reject firmly the plausibility of the doctrine of *badāʾ* and even to condemn it as heretical. Thus, over the last centuries, there has been a

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[2] Sad to say that in many works about *badāʾ*, some other relevant but partially different issues are mixed and put together without making any clear analysis. For example, a relevant issue is that in some historical reports a prophet who is considered as an infallible man makes a prediction which will appear to be wrong and at least some of these wrong predictions are about the cases of *badāʾ*. So, it seems strange that some texts which are expected to explain the plausibility of *badāʾ*, suddenly engage in the second issue and try to explain why these predictions fail.

[3] Since the doctrine of *badāʾ* has different aspects, it is capable of being interpreted initially in several ways corresponding to that specific aspect which is going to be highlighted. Goldziher, for example, defines *badāʾ* as a theological term as "the emergence of new circumstances which cause a change in an earlier divine ruling." See Goldziher (1986, 850). As we see, this definition emphasizes somehow on the relation between the doctrine and the Divine will and ruling. Another point in this characterization is that it takes the real change of the divine rule for granted and makes no room for an apparent but not real change.

historical debate over this issue among the Islamic sects. Faḫr al-Din al-Razi, the great Ashaʾrite theologian, for example, confirms the expression of Suleimān bin Jarir who says in an ironic tone that the *imams* of the Shiʾa innovated the theory of *badāʾ* so that by appealing to it they never could be defeated by their opponents. The *imams* promised that they will soon become rulers and when this did not actually happen they excused this as a case of *badāʾ* that had taken place for God (and He had changed his will).[4]

In reaction to such refutations and accusations, Shiʾte thinkers, both theologians and philosophers, have usually tried to show that the opponents' refutation is essentially based on a deep misunderstanding and that the idea of *badāʾ* never means that God changes his mind in the sense that he comes to realise a new fact or to repent His initial decision and thus changes it to a new one. So, their duty has been, first, to show how and why this misunderstanding arises and, second, to establish rationally that the true content of this doctrine never contradicts any other theological principle about God and His attributes.[5]

In this paper, I am going to focus just on one aspect of the problem, i.e. the relation between the Doctrine of *badāʾ* and the Divine knowledge[6]; whether *badāʾ* requires a change in God's *knowledge* and whether this could really end in a theological problem.[7] But before this, it is useful to have a short look at the textual resources of the doctrine as an Islamic dogma.

## 2. *Badāʾ* in the Quran and the Traditions (narrations)

*Badāʾ* (بداء) is an Arabic infinitive literally means "appearance" or "emergence." When it is used in the form of a verb with the preposition "to" (ل), it commonly means that a new opinion appears or emerges to the subject so that he/she changes his/her previous opinion. In other words, it means "changing one's mind."

Some derivatives of the infinitive "*badāʾ*" are used in the Quran nine times[8] in the form of a past tense verb but no one is directly relevant to the theological terminology. In other words, what is referred to by these verses as something which appears does not appear *to* God. For example:

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[4] Al-Ṭusi (1405, 421). For some views of the Muʿtazilite theologians See: ʿAbd al-Jabbār (1962, 65) and al-Khayyat (1344, 128).

[5] Sheikh Muḥammad Rāzi popularly known as Aġa Bozorg Tehrani (1876-1970), one of the well-known Shiʾite scholars in the field of the bibliographical research introduces in his great work *Al-Ḏaryʿa ila Taṣanyf al-Shia* about 25 books and treatises written by the Shiʾite scholars on the topic of *badāʾ*. See Rāzi (1983:53-57). For a contemporary bibliography see: Zādhoosh (1382).

[6] Al-Shahrastāni distinguished between three kinds of *badāʾ*; *badāʾ* in God's knowledge, in His will and in His command. Al-Shahrastāni (1923, 110).

[7] Many scholars who wrote on *badāʾ a*dopted a historical approach instead of a theological or philosophical one. For some of these works see: Hekyemez (2008) and Howard (1990).

[8] Quran: 45: 33, 6: 28, 39: 47, 39: 48, 12: 35, 60: 4, 3: 118, 7: 22 and 20: 121. McDermott distinguishes between two meanings of the word "*badāʾ*" in the Quran; "to become manifest" and "to seem good" and indicates just seven verses. McDermott (1978, 329-330)

"If the evildoers possessed all that is in the earth, and the like of it with it, they would offer it to ransom themselves from the evil of the chastisement on the Day of Resurrection; yet there would appear to them from God that they never reckoned with, and there would appear to them evils of that they have earned, and they would be encompassed by that they mocked at" (39/47-48).

As we see, these two verses state that in the hereafter some facts appear to a group of people as evildoers and not *to* God.[9] Thus, such verses cannot be considered as a Quranic source for the idea of *badāʾ*. Nevertheless, there are other verses that, though void of the word "*badāʾ*" or its derivatives, have a connotation close to the idea of *badāʾ*. One famous verse, for example, says:

"Allah blots out what he wills and establishes (it) and with Him is the Origin of the Book (*Umm al-Kitāb*)" (13: 39).

According to many Shiʾte scholars, including Quran interpreters (*mufassirun*) and theologians (*mutikallimun*), this verse expresses the heart of the doctrine of Divine *badāʾ*. The first part of the verse apparently says that in some cases God eliminates (changes) what He (initially) wills but in other cases He confirms what he had first decided. But the approval of the possibility of a kind of change in the Divine will is the same as what the doctrine of *badāʾ* claims. Nevertheless, the second part of the verse indicating the "Origin of the Book" refers to a level or scope of the Divine knowledge in which any change (blotting out) is impossible.

Moreover, there are some verses reporting a historical story which can be interpreted as referring to an actual case of Divine *badāʾ*. For example, we may look at the story of Moses' appointment with God on Mount Sinai to receive the Tawrah through the Divine revelation. This story is narrated in two different verses. In one place, we read:

"And when We appointed with Moses forty nights then you took to yourselves the Calf after him and you were evildoers" (2: 51).

In this verse, the time of the appointment is clearly mentioned as forty days. In another verse, however, God says:

"And We appointed with Moses thirty nights and We completed them with ten, so the appointed time of his Lord was forty nights…" (7: 142).

This verse may refer to the fact that the total time of this appointment (i.e. forty days) was set in two stages so that the first time was just thirty days and after it, due to the occurrence of a Divine *badāʾ*, it was extended to forty days.

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[9] The difference between "appearance for" and "appearance from" should not be ignored.

There are other historical stories reported by Quran which could be interpreted as involving a case of *badāʾ*. The change of Muslims' *qibla* from Jerusalem to *Ka'ba*[10] (2: 144), the change of God's command to Abraham (in his dream) to slay his son Isma'il to a new order to slay a sheep instead of his son (37: 102-107)[11] and the removal of the predestined worldly chastisement of the people of the prophet Jonah (10: 98)[12] are some examples.

In addition to the Quranic verses, there are some traditions about *badāʾ* narrated specially in Shiʾte sources. Some of these disclose the essential status of the belief in *badāʾ* among Islamic foundational beliefs. For example, it is narrated that: "Allah never is worshiped by something as he is been worshiped by [the belief in] *badāʾ*"[13] or "No prophet became a prophet but he admitted five things: *badāʾ*, [Divine] will, prostration, worship and obedience."[14]

Some other traditions express the content of the doctrine and elucidate its theological foundations. For example, it is narrated from Imam Rizā, the eighth *imam* of the Shiʾte, that he said to Suleimān al-Mirwazi: "Oh Suleiman, there are some affairs which are non-determind (*mawqufah*) in the presence of God and He brings forward anyone He wills and postpones anyone He wills."[15]

Some traditions explain that the doctrine of *badāʾ* is consistent with other theological tenets such as God's omniscience. It is narrated from *Imam* Sādiq, the sixth *imam*, that he said: "Nothing appeared to God (*badā li-Allah*) but it had been in His knowledge before it appeared to Him."[16]

## 3. Some Historical motivations

Beside the Quranic verses and Islamic traditions whish have inspired Shi'te scholars, there have been some historical motivations behind the Shia endeavour to promote

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[10] "We have seen thee turning thy face about in the heaven; now We will surely turn thee to a direction that shall satisfy thee. Turn thy face towards the Holy Mosque; and wherever you are, turn your faces towards it…" (2: 144).

[11] "… he [Abraham] said, my son, I see in a dream that I shall sacrifice thee; consider, what thinkest thou? He said. My father, do as thou art bidden; thou shalt find me, God willing, one of the steadfast…. And We ransomed him with a mighty sacrifice" (37: 102-107).

[12] "Why was there never a city that believed, and its belief profited it? Except the people of Jonah; when they believed. We removed from them the chastisement of degradation in this present life, and We gave unto them enjoyment for a time." (10: 98)

[13] Al-Kuleyni (1407, 200).

[14] Al-Kuleyni (1407, 204). The Shi'ite scholars have offered different interpretations of these traditions. For example, interpreting the first *ḥadith*, Mulla Sadra says that probably it means that when one can in the best way worship practically God regarding the cases of *badāʾ* since in the cases one is ignorant of the Divine specific rationale behind the involved change of the Divine will and order but nevertheless he truly believe in the Divine wisdom and that this change is really prudent. See: Mullā Sadrā (1370, 196). Muḥammad Kāzim Aṣṣār in his treatise on *badāʾ* gives alternative interpretation. See: Aṣṣār (1376, 97-100)

[15] Al-Majlisi (1305, 96)

[16] Al-Kuleyni (1407, 203)

the idea of *badāʾ*. A historical point which can help us to gain a better understanding of the doctrine is that according to the Quran the Jews believe that God in the eternity decides and fixed all the future events and now He himself is not able to do anything different from the eternal predestined plan; God is powerless to change the determined scenario of the universe. The Quran strongly rejects this belief: "*The Jews have said: 'God's hand is fettered.' Fettered are their hands, and they are cursed for what they have said. Nay, but His hands are outspread; He expends how He will…*" (5, 64). Thus, one of the historical motivation for promoting the doctrine of *badāʾ* was that it is a rational response to the heretical Jewish idea which says that God's will is totally restricted by His own eternal predetermination.[17]

The second motivation was to resist against Islamic fatalism; the view endorsed specially by the so-called *Jabriyyah* and most Asha'rites who believe that one's actions are absolutely guided and fixed by the divine fate so that one can never change it. One of the aspects of the doctrine of *badāʾ*, however, is that human beings, through performing free deeds, whether good (like praying, paying for charity etc.) or bad (like killing innocent people) can change their initial destiny.[18]

## 4. Linguistic Analysis; figurative vs. non-figurative interpretations

According to the Arabic language structure, the standard expression of the Divine *badāʾ* is to say:

(Standard Expression): "It appears to God in x that y."

Where x and y are variables that range over events so that in any particular instance of *badāʾ*, the event E1 whose occurrence in the future was initially predicted substitutes with another event E2, i.e. E1 does not occur actually and E2 occurs instead of it. For example, if we see the story of Abraham's son as a case of *badāʾ*, we may report it as follows: "It appeared to God in the slaying of Abraham's son that a sheep will be slayed instead of him."

Many of those who reject the theological doctrine of *badāʾ* normally interpret it in this way. First, God has a specific item of knowledge according to which He intends to perform a specific action. Before performing that action, however, His knowledge changes and, consequently, He decides to do another action. It seems that most opponents of the doctrine of *badāʾ*, if not all, reject it on the basis of such an interpretation. Their objection could be that the doctrine is unacceptable since it contradicts God's immutability.

One rather ready to hand reaction to this line of objection is to provide a linguistic analysis of the semantics of the standard expression. Here, many Shiʾte thinkers

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[17] Tracing this idea back to the Jewish sources needs further research.

[18] This is that aspect of the doctrine that is closely linked to the problem of the effectiveness of our prayers.

claim that, regarding the rational and plausible view about the Divine attributes such as His immutability, the application of the Arabic term "*badā'*" to God must be interpreted in a somehow *metaphoric* way. There are several suggestions. One is that "*badā'*", when used for God, is used as a transitive infinitive which means "to manifest or to disclose (something hidden)". According to this, when we say that "*badā'* occurred for God in E1 that E2", it does not mean anything more than God, through making E2 actual, manifested it and made it appear to us by bringing it about while according to our prior knowledge, we had expected the occurrence of E1. In other words, the apparently intransitive verb "appear" is used in a transitive sense, i.e., making (something) manifest. Thus, according to this interpretation, in a case of *badā'*, what actually happens is just that God manifests the occurrence of a new event for us and this evidently does not seem theologically problematic at all.[19]

A second similar interpretation is that when one says that *badā'* takes place for God, one really means that it takes place *for* some of His creatures (human beings, for instance) not for Him. So, what we really do is to attribute *badā'* to God in a figurative way. It means nothing but that *we* come to know something new and the occurrence of a new event appears to us.

Still a third view claims that when we say that "something appears to God" (بدا لله) what we mean by "to" (ل) is nothing but "from" (من) and subsequently this sentence means that something is disclosed *from* God (for others not for Him).[20]

It seems obvious enough that according to such abovementioned interpretations, speaking of Divine *badā'*, by no means implies any change in God's knowledge or will. Many Shiʾte scholars think that such a conceptual and linguistic analysis of the doctrine of the Divine *badā'* plausibly shows that the refusal of this doctrine by the opponents is due to a real misunderstanding.

Beside the figurative interpretations, however, there are non-figurative (literal) interpretations according to which in the case of *badā'*, really something new appears to God. One rationale behind this second group of interpretations seems to be that according to the figurative interpretations the doctrine loses its expected theological content; it does not convey anything more than the somehow trivially known fact that we human beings are not omniscient subjects, that our knowledge about future events is quite limited and that in many cases what actually will occur in the future is different from what we predicted in the past. And this is a totally indubitable fact about human knowledge and beyond any significant controversy. Thus, we may say that the figurative interpretation tries to present a view consistent with the "perfect being theism" of Shiʾte theologians at the cost of making the doctrine void of any theologically significant content.

To be sure, however, the adherents of the literal interpretation face some serious theological problems and, thus, have the responsibility to offer a rational picture of Divine *badā'* which is consistent with other tenets of their theology. According to this

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[19] Aṣṣār (1376, 69). For a critique of this interpretation, see: Aṣṣār (1376, 70).

[20] Ibn Bābūye (1387, 24-25)

interpretation, *badāʾ* apparently implies a kind of change in God's attributes and if (according to the principle of the Divine simplicity) His attributes are to be identical to His very essence, then the occurrence of *badāʾ* will end in a change in His essence and this obviously contradicts the reasonable principle of the Divine immutability. There could be several versions of the theological problem regarding the diversity of the Divine attributes, including God's knowledge, will and impassibility. In the rest of this paper, I shall focus on one version of the problem which concerns the relation between *badāʾ* and God's knowledge. The main question is whether *badāʾ* implies a change in God's knowledge ("changing His mind") and if so, whether this change leads to any theologically implausible results.

**5. The Knowledge Argument (KA)**

The present problem can be formulated as an argument against the doctrine of *badāʾ*:

(1) Divine *badāʾ* implies a change of God's knowledge.
(2) A change of God's knowledge implies a change of His essence.
(3) God's essence is immutable; it is impossible for Him to change. (The principle of God's immutability)
Conclusion: Divine *badāʾ* is impossible.

Let's call this argument the "knowledge argument" (KA). Considering the above formulation of (KA), there could be several ways to tackle it. The third premise, however, is so widely accepted by Muslim theologians and philosophers that seems to be beyond any controversy. Thus, to response to (KA) one can deny either the first premise or the second.

**6. The rejection of the First Premise**

In order to criticize (KA), one strategy could be to reject the first premise. Those Shiʾite thinkers who make a similarity between *badāʾ* and *naskh* (abrogation) can be considered as those who use this strategy[21]. The idea is that both *badāʾ* and *naskh*

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[21] '*Naskh*' (نسخ) is an Arabic word literally means "abrogation." Its technical usage as a term of the science of Quran exegesis (*tafsir*) and Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) is inspired by a verse which says: "*None of Our revelations do we abrogate or cancel to be forgotten, but We substitute something better or similar. Knowest thou not that Allah hath power over all things*" (2: 106). According to a rough and general explication, when applied to the Quranic verses, *naskh* is a relation between two verses so that the recitation or/and the content of the first verse is substituted by the second. According to another definition, proposed in the field of Islamic jurisprudence, *naskh* is the abrogation of one Islamic law by another one. There are several explanations of the phenomenon of *naskh*. Most Shi'ite scholars believe that *naskh* never means that God changes the religious rule He Himself has legislated. Instead, when a religious law is abrogated, we come to discover that it was not essentially an eternal law but temporally limited and now it's time is over. In other words, after the legislation of the first religious law, since there is no indication of the time limitation, people think that this law is for ever. After the

follow the same logic in the sense that in both cases we discover that the time of the initial Divine decree finished and the time of a new one begins. The only difference is that *naskh* happens in the realm of God's legal (*tashri'i*) decrees while *badāʾ* occurs in His creational (*takwini*) decrees concerning the affairs of His creation.

This view has been endorsed by a group of Shi'te theologians including Ibn Babūye al-Sadūq and his pupil al-Mufid[22] as well as some philosophers like Mirdāmād who makes a comparison between *badāʾ* and *naskh* and concludes that there is just one difference between them, namely that *naskh* relates to the Islamic legal laws while *badāʾ* takes place in relation to the external events. Mirdāmād writes: "[T]he status of *badāʾ* in the creation (*takwin*) is [like] the status of *naskh* in [Divine] legislation (*tashri'*)".[23]

It is obvious that according to this view the occurrence of *badāʾ* does not imply any change in God's knowledge. In the case of the story of Abraham, for example, this view leads to the analysis that God knew from the first that His command of slaying Abraham's son, Isma'il, is a temporary one and that the new command after it would be to slay a sheep instead of the son. To put it in other words, God from the eternity knew that He will give two commands so that the first is a temporary one and after the ending of its specific time, the second command will be subsequently issued and become active. Thus, this view, at least in the first glance, can tackle (KA) through rejecting its first premise.

The abovementioned view has been criticized by other Shiʾte scholars. For example, Mulla Sadra (1572-1640), the most prominent pupil of Mirdamad, discards the view of his master. One of his objections is that in some cases, like the story of Abraham, the context of the *badāʾ* seems to be legislative, since the relevant *badāʾ* assumedly occurred in God's command which can be seen as a particular law addressed to Abraham, not a factual event in the external world.

The second and more important objection is that there seems to be a more essential difference between *badāʾ* and *naskh* when both relate to human actions. In *naskh*, the action which loses its initial religious property is not a particular one but a universal which can be instantiated in several cases and in different times and places by different people. In the case of *badāʾ*, however, there is just one single action which undertakes a kind of change in its property.[24]

In order to clarify this difference, we may compare an alleged case of *naskh* with one of *badāʾ*. Inspired by a couple of Quranic verses, some Muslim scholars believe that, at the early years after the rise of Islam, drinking wine was religiously legitimate for Muslims, but after a while, this initial law became abrogated and God prohibited drinking wine by revealing new verses. Here, drinking wine is a universal notion referring to a type which can have multiple instances. So, those instances

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legislation of the new law (which is not consistent with the first) the people come to realise that the time of the first law has ended and henceforth, the new one will be legally valid.

[22] Ibn Bābūye (1387, 335) and Al-Mufid (1403: 53).

[23] Mirdāmād (1374, 55).

[24] Mullā Sadrā (1370, 184)

realised by Muslims before the *naskh* were religiously permissible and those performed after it were (and still are) prohibited. But consider Abraham's story as a case of *badāʾ*. In this story the same particular action, namely the sacrifice of his son, was first the subject of God's command and later the subject of His waiver.

## 7. The rejection of the Second Premise

The second strategy is to reject the second premise of (KA). Mullā Sadrā's own response to the challenge can be seen as an example of this strategy. His position is based on some cosmological principles. First, as it is established in his metaphysics, the whole universe, consists of several co-existent worlds (*'awālim*) which are ranging from the world of the absolutely immaterial intellects to the world of pure physical objects in a hierarchical order. One of the intermediate worlds is that of the celestial souls who are governing and arranging all the affairs of the lower world of physical creatures. According to Sadra, these souls are identical to the so-called "angels" in the scriptures. These souls are so obedient to God that they never have a false belief or perform a wrong action[25]. Thus, all their knowledge and deeds correspond God's knowledge and will in a way that one can truly (and in a non-figurative way) attribute their knowledge and will to God.[26] Moreover, as far as they are responsible for the ever-changing physical affairs of the lower material world, their knowledge is subject to change.

Now, Sadra's response can be stated briefly as follows: Because of containing a variety of potentialities, the world of nature is subject to a continuous and essential change. God's and the celestial souls' knowledge of the universe are of the kind of "active knowledge."[27] The occurrence of *badāʾ* is due to a kind of change in the knowledge of the heavenly souls, which in its turn follows the wise and rational ends regarding what is the best destiny for the creatures. Since these souls are not God, but His creatures, their being subject to change is something possible. Thus, the change relevant to *badāʾ* just takes place in their knowledge instead of God's

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[25] According to a well-known interpretation of some Quranic verses, angles are infallible in knowledge and action: "Believers, guard yourselves and your families against a Fire whose fuel is men and stones, and over which are harsh, terrible angels who disobey not God in what He commands them and do what they are commanded." (66: 6) Though this verse is about a specific group of angels, the feature of infallibility is generalised to cover all types of angels. Mulla Sadra, among others, takes this verse as a Quranic evidence for his claim. Mullā Sadrā (1981, 396)

[26] Sadra draws an analogy between the relation of God with these souls and the relation of the Human soul (mind) with sensual faculties. These faculties are so obedient to the human soul that all their activities can be rationally considered as the activities of the soul itself. Mullā Sadrā (1981, 396)

[27] For Muslim philosophers, "active knowledge" is that kind of knowledge which lies somewhere in the *causal* chain of its object. It is worth noting that knowledge here is used as a translation for the Arabic word (*'ilm*) which is applied by the Muslim philosophers and theologians both to God and the human beings and has a broader definition than that of "knowledge" in contemporary epistemology. One very simple example of the human active knowledge is the case of an architect's mental plan of a building he is going to construct it in the external world.

knowledge. Nevertheless, since (as mentioned earlier) their knowledge can be, in a non-metaphorical sense, attributed to God, one can literally say that *badāʾ* occurs to God (*badā li al-Allah*). Nevertheless, there is no change in the eternal essential knowledge of God and thus it does not require any change in God's essence.[28]

As one may see, Sadra's response to (KA) admits a kind of change in the Divine knowledge (based on the souls' knowledge change) and at the same time, does not entail God's being mutable.

In order to assess this response, on may consider its metaphysical principles and specially the existence of the so-called celestial souls as controversial and disputed by the majority of the contemporary metaphysicians. Moreover, it remains somehow obscure that how can this view succeed in attributing both change and permanence to the Divine knowledge in a non-figurative and non-contradictive way.

## 8. God's Relational Knowledge

There is another way to reject the second premise of (KA). It is based on the Muslim philosophers' distinction between two kinds of the Divine attributes: absolute vs. relational attributes. An absolute attribute, as a concept, is what our minds grasp from the Divine essence itself and expresses one aspect of His absolute perfection. Divine power and life are usually seen as absolute attributes. On the other hand, relational attributes are those which, as concepts, come to our mind due to our contemplation on one or another relation between God and other beings, so that we could not have this concept if there was not such a relation in reality. "Being the creator of something" is an example for the relational attributes. If we do not consider the specific relation between God (as the producer) and another being (as the product) we will not be able to grasp and use the concept of "creator" as a Divine attribute.

Having this distinction in mind, we should note that for Muslim philosophers, some of the Divine attributes can be seen both as an absolute attribute and a relational one. Knowledge is a good example. It is widely accepted by Muslim philosophers that we can use "knowledge" as an attribute indicating a kind of perfection in the very essence of God without any need to consider another being beside Him. In this perspective, knowledge is an absolute attribute of God. Still we can consider it as expressing a specific type of relation between God (as the knower) and something else (as what is known) and consequently see it as a relational attribute.

Given the plausibility of the above analysis, it is usually thought that the principle of Divine simplicity, i.e. the identity between God's essence and His attributes, is restricted to the first type of attributes, namely the absolute ones. And it is this kind of attribute that its assumed change leads to a change in God's essence. On the other

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[28] See Mullā Sadrā (1981, 397-399).

side, the relational attributes are changeable since the changeability of things as the *relata* make a change in the relevant relations. Accordingly, though God's relational attributes are subject to change, their mutability never affects the Divine immutability, since these are not identical with God's essence.

Now we can return to (KA). One may accept that *badāʾ* implies a kind of change in God's knowledge. However, the claim could be that this change just occurs in God's relational knowledge and not in His absolute knowledge. The reason for this claim is that *badāʾ* assumedly happens just in the field of objects and events of the world of nature and thus God's knowledge of these, as an attribute of God, refers to a specific relation between God and other things and consequently the definition of the relational attribute does apply here. According to this analysis, the first premise of (KA) should be modified as follows:

(1*) Divine *badāʾ* implies the change of God's *relational* knowledge.

It is obvious that in order to have a logically valid argument, the adherent of (KA) has to modify premise (2) and change it to:

(2*) The change of God's relational knowledge implies the change of His essence.

Regarding the definition of the relational attributes, it is obvious that (2*) is false and therefore, the substitution of (2) with (2*) makes (KA) unsound.

In sum, one may appeal to the following principles accepted by the Muslim philosophers to provide a reply to (KA) through showing that its proper formulation would offer an unsound argument:

i. God has two kinds of attributes; absolute and relational.
ii. Knowledge, as a Divine attribute, can be considered as both an absolute and a relational attribute.
iii. God's relational attributes are changeable but their change does not imply a change in the essence of God.

**Conclusion**

The Shia doctrine of *badāʾ*, though initially plausible, may seem after a deeper concentration as inconsistent with some of the certain theological tenets concerning the Divine attributes such as God's immutability. In response to this theological challenge, however, the Shiʾte scholars have tried to show the rationality of the doctrine and its consistency with other Islamic theological tenets. They have two main different strategies corresponding two types of interpretation of *"badāʾ"* attributed to God in the Islamic scriptures: figurative and non-figurative. The common feature of the different versions of this figurative or metaphorical

interpretation is that accordingly, in the actual cases of *badāʾ*, nothing really appears *to* God, but to others and *from* Him. It is obvious that these kinds of interpretations could solve the theological problem straightforwardly but at the cost of making the doctrine void of any theologically significant content.

If one adopts the non-figurative interpretation, she will face the theological challenge directly and in a more serious way. Regarding different Divine attributes, such as His knowledge and will, this challenge could be stated as different arguments against the plausibility of *badāʾ*. According to one argument which was formulated and examined in this paper as the "knowledge argument" (KA), the occurrence of *badāʾ* requires a change of God's essential knowledge which in its turn, contradicts God's immutability. There are several ways to tackle (KA). One way which rejects the first premise of (KA) is to make an analogy between *badāʾ* and *naskh*. Some Muslim theologians and philosophers, like al-Mufid and Mirdāmād, have endorsed this view, but it was objected by others including Mirdāmād's pupil Mullā Sadrā who highlighted the deep essential differences between *badāʾ* and *naskh*. Mullā Sadrā's own solution could be analysed as one which rejects the second premise of (KA). This view based on some specific metaphysical principles, such as the existence of the so-called celestial souls, which could be very unlikely accepted by modern metaphysicians. Finally one may reject the second premise by appealing to the dichotomy of absolute/relational attributes and argue that *badāʾ* at most entails a change in God's relational (not essential) knowledge and this does not disturb God's immutability.

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