

# Earth's Epistemic Fruits for Harmony with God: An Islamic Theodicy

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## Introduction

We can easily see many evils around us, some of which are horrendous in our view. There are innumerable moral evils and people act cruelly toward each other; some instances of which are: killing, torturing, stealing, deceiving and violating, especially when the victims of such evils are children and weaker people. Also, there are natural evils through which many people and animals suffer painfully and many others are killed: painful diseases, floods, earthquakes, conflagrations, and holocausts are some instances. We cannot deny the evil of such things. So, the question arises about God's reason for putting humans on the earth and leaving them to do and suffer evil (see Chapter 1). This is not only a human question; the first of those who raised this question were God's angels: "And when your Lord said to the angels: 'I am putting a viceroy on the earth,' they said: 'Will You set in it one who will cause corruption in it and shed blood, while we glorify You with praise and proclaim Your sanctity?' He said: 'Verily I know what you do not know'" (Qur'an 2:30; nearly all page citations within the chapter refer to the Qur'an. The first number refers to the Qur'an's chapter, known as *sura*, and the second number refers to its verses known as *ayah* (2:30 means *sura 2: ayah 30*)). So the question is: What is it that God knows and that explains putting humans on the earth at the expense of the occurrence of such horrendous evils?

My answer will be an Islamic answer in the following sense: first, my presuppositions will be drawn from Islamic doctrines; and, second, the answer itself can be supported by them. Since the Qur'an is the most fundamental religious source for Muslims, and is believed to contain the direct words of God, it is the first and basic source of research for anyone who seeks a pure Islamic view on a subject. For this reason, in this chapter, I will focus my attention on the verses of the Qur'an to support my claims. Of course, this work could be continued by referring to a huge mass of narrations (hadiths), which are quoted from the sacred Islamic persons, foremost among whom, according to the Shi'ite view, are

the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter (Fatimah), and his 12 successors, the Imams, all of whom are believed to be divinely immunized from any sin or mistake. Another kind of work would examine the wide variety of views expressed by Muslim thinkers from the origin of Islam up to now, including Muslim philosophers, theologians, jurists, and mystics.

## The Best Life Depending on Harmony with God

In the traditions of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim thought, it is commonly accepted that existence is good, and that we prefer to exist rather than not to exist. However, since there could be different sorts of existing, the important question is what sort of existing is good and admirable. For the initial answer, we may say that good existence of any living thing depends on whether it can be fully alive, that is, if one's full potential is actualized or not. Regarding human beings, it seems that if a person is in circumstances in which one can actualize one's full potential, one will have a good existence. Human beings are not the same and have different talents and skills; some people have physical skills and others mental ones; some people can be good artists and some can be good engineers; some can be good speakers and some good critics. The good life for any person depends on whether one's potential can be fully actualized. This understanding of life as having various aspects, each of which is intensified with the realization of potential is established in the Qur'an. The Qur'an states that God's revealed words have a warning function for those who have life (36:69–70), and by life it means the good work of one's reason, and this indicates that God's word is useful only for those whose reason works well and is alive. The Qur'an, also, regards people who turn away from God's words as dead and proclaims to Muhammad that he cannot make such a people who are dead in their reason hear (27:80). Life in this present world and life in the world to come also are regarded as two different levels of life. As compared with the life in the other world, this worldly life is regarded as a paltry little thing (9:38).

With such a meaning of life, it may be asked whether all existents together can have a good life or not, while the good life of some existents leads to the damage of other lives. Even in a single individual, is it possible for any individual to actualize *all* his potentialities? Any individual has a variety of interests and potentialities so that actualizing some of them may depend on ignoring some others.

It seems that a theistic view that supports the existence of God with such exalted attributes as all-knowing, all-powerful, all-wise and all-just can provide an answer in favor of the possibility of a good life for all existents together. If God exists and has such attributes, He will create each of His creatures with some especial role in existence so that this role never conflicts with other roles. The good life of each existent depends on playing the precise role that its Creator has assigned to it. The better it plays its role, the better life it would have. In fact, having a good life is a matter of being put rightly in this jigsaw-like world. In this picture, the kind of relation of any existent with others is the key factor in producing a good life. Since we are presuming that God is all-just, all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-wise, there is no role in the divine design that demands the devastation of others' roles. The good life is realized only by this harmony and being put in our right place and not deviating from our assigned role.<sup>1</sup>

1 The difference between perfectionism and my idea is that on my view, it is not the case that the more we actualize our potentialities (e.g., the more we know or the more we have power) the better; the better is to actualize

Presupposing the existence of God as our Creator, the most fundamental harmony that renders life best is the harmony between God as the independent Being and His creatures as beings dependant on Him (see Chapter 15). According to the Qur'an, harmony with God and acknowledging Him as the unique Creator is so vitally important that lack of it cannot be compensated by anything. The worst thing that causes alienation of the disharmonious agent is disharmony with God and the rejection of Him as the unique Creator and Lord: "Verily God does not forgive to set partner with Him, and He forgives other than that for whom He wills. And whoever ascribes partners to God has certainly strayed a far straying" (4:116). Accordingly, any apparently harmonious action that disregards this basic harmony is not fruitful: ". . . and whoever rejects faith, his works become vain indeed and in the hereafter he will be among the losers" (5:5). So our harmonious actions toward others will be fruitful and bring us a good life provided it accompanies harmony with God and the acceptance of His determinant role in existence: "Whoever does good work, man or woman, provided he has faith, We will certainly make him live a pure life . . ." (16:97).

Principally, God's purpose of creation can be thought to be the realization of divine harmony, the actualization of His role of lordship toward His creatures, and the acceptance of the roles of His creatures in worshipping Him. He intends to produce a world all of whose members are in harmony with one another and all of which are in mutual harmony with Him, so that all can have a good life by playing their assigned roles. Creatures' harmony with God is to play their worshipping roles toward Him and not to show any arrogance toward Him: "And to God prostrates whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth of the moving creatures, as well as the angels, and they do not show pride" (16:49). In fact, creatures' harmony with God is to acknowledge Him as their Creator and their Lord and to submit entirely to Him, because it is He who has created everything and has assigned a special role to everyone in harmony with others, and it is He who knows best how to produce good life for all.

## **Submission to God as the Necessary Condition for a Good Human Life (The Meaning of *Islam*)**

Among all the kinds of harmony, each of which has its own goodness, there could be a very valuable kind that is distinguished from others in an important way. In all other harmonies between God and creatures, only one side of harmony is active; it is God alone who produces harmony between Himself and His creatures. But there could be a kind of harmony both sides of which are active and have an important role in producing harmony. Mankind has such ability to play this important role in producing harmony between himself and God, and therefore, the good life of mankind depends on playing this role and

our potentialities (to know and to have power) just as much as our role demands and makes us come into a right relation with others. It is not good, for example, to know about others' faults and secrets. So the harmonious aspect of life on which I am insisting makes my idea distinct from perfectionism.

The significance of harmony can be the basis for a theory of value. In this theory, the egoism of traditional perfectionist theories can be avoided because life is seen to have a harmonious aspect that requires care about others' lives.

actualizing this ability. God creates mankind for this purpose and wants him to contribute to the harmonious union with Him. Indeed, His purpose of creating humanity is twofold; that He shows His harmony with humans and humans show their harmony with Him; that is, He intends, on one hand, to play His lordship role toward humans by having mercy on them, “. . . and for that He created them . . .” (11:119), and on the other hand, humans show their harmony with Him by playing the role of worshiping Him, a role than which no more is required: “And I did not create jinn and mankind except to worship Me. I do not want from them any sustenance and I do not want that they feed Me. Verily, it is God who is the All provider, the Lord of Power, the Strong” (51:56–58).

God never wants human beings to deprive themselves of enjoying what God has provided for them; good life for humans depends partly on satisfying their desires. God plays the providing role and humans are to accept this role of their Creator to produce a right harmony with Him; “O, you who believe! Eat of the good things We have provided for you and give thanks to God if it is Him that you worship” (2:172). However, the important point for keeping harmony with God and with His other creatures is that any person should surrender himself to God’s plan and not exceed the limitations for satisfying his desires; “O, you who believe! Do not forbid the good things that God has made lawful to you and do not transgress; verily, God does not like the transgressors” (5:87). Submission to God, then, as He who has created everything and knows best how to provide a good life for all, and performing only the role that God has assigned to any of us, is the only way for achieving happiness and a good life; “O, you who believe! Answer to God and to His messenger when He calls you to that which gives you life . . .” (8:24).

Submission to God and worshiping only Him is the most important thing for a good life, so that the Qur’an regards it as God’s religion; “Do they seek other than God’s religion, while to Him submits whoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly . . . ?” (3:83). By “God’s religion,” the Qur’an means submitting to God, and the Arabic word that it uses for this is “*islam*”; “And whoever seeks a religion Other than *islam* [submitting to God], it shall not be accepted from him, and in the Hereafter he shall be among the losers” (3:85). *Islam*, then, means submitting to God, and Muslim is any person who surrenders himself to God. The submission, of course, is an entire and thorough submission and those who have partial submission to God so that they believe in some and disbelieve in some are regarded as truly disbelievers (4:150–151). Accordingly, *islam* in our time includes believing in what God has sent to Muhammad as well (47:2).

## Human Epistemic Privilege and the Need to Be Trained

Angels also may have an active role in their mutual harmony with God, but there is a noticeable verse in the Qur’an that refers to the epistemic privilege of mankind (2:31). This kind of privilege makes humans preferable to angels as God’s viceroy on the earth so that those angels are commanded to be at the service of mankind and prostrate before Adam (2:34). I think that this epistemic privilege of humanity can explain God’s actions toward humans. When God announced that He was going to create humans and put them on the earth, an important question was raised for the angels. They knew that God’s purpose of creation was to have creatures who are in a mutual harmony with Him so that they would play their worshiping role toward God and He would perform His role of lordship toward

them. The angels knew that humans would do many disharmonious works on the earth. So, the question was why God did not prefer the angels for the task of worshiping Him on the earth and producing mutual harmony with Him when they were completely ready for such a task without fear of producing any disharmonious works: “. . . Will You set in it one who will cause corruption in it and shed blood, while we glorify You with praise and proclaim Your sanctity?” (2:30).<sup>2</sup> God’s response to them is significant.

And He taught Adam the names, all of them; then He presented them to the angels and said: “Inform Me of the names of these, if you are right.”

They said: “Glory be to You! We have no knowledge save what You have taught us. Verily, it is You who are the All-knowing, the All-wise.”

He said: “O Adam, inform them of their names,” then when he had informed them of their names, He said: “Did I not tell you that I know verily the Unseen things of the heavens and the earth?” And I know what you disclose and what you were hiding. (2:31–33)

God refers to the epistemic privilege of humans that makes their presence on the earth preferred, though at the expense of the occurrence of evils. This epistemic privilege is the human ability to know *all* the names while angels do not have such ability. According to some defensible commentaries, when the angels, before the All-knowing God, admitted that they have no knowledge save what God has taught them, they referred to their kind of existence with its special epistemic capacity. They confessed that they had some epistemic limitation by their nature, and naturally when they are created by God, they are created with this natural limitation. God’s teaching them, here, means that God has given them their special epistemic capacity, which can be called ‘natural teaching.’<sup>3</sup>

The epistemic limitation of angels, according to some commentaries, prevents the angels from having a comprehensive knowledge of God. While humans have the ability to obtain comprehensive knowledge of God so as to know God with all His names and attributes, each kind of angel can know God only in some aspect. Since their nature is simple and each kind has only a single attribute, each kind is able to know only one name of God according to the attribute it has. Because of this, the angels’ act of worshiping God differs from one kind to another. According to their attributes and so according to their kind of knowledge of God, one kind of angel, for example, is always prostrating and some other kind is always bowing. But humans have a combination of different attributes and because of this, they are able to obtain knowledge of God, and so worship God, in all aspects. God’s teaching Adam all the names means God’s creating Adam with different potentialities and attributes so that he is able to obtain knowledge in different aspects. Being confronted with Adam, each kind of angel, according to their nature, acknowledged one of his epistemic abilities and so they altogether acknowledged the full epistemic ability of Adam according to which he can know different aspects of God.<sup>4</sup> This commentary posits a relationship

2 According to some commentaries, there are some angels who are entirely neglectful of any other thing than worshiping God and even they were not among the questioners. (See Muhammad Husayn Tabataba’i 1996, volume 17, 226.)

3 See for example, Naser Makarem Shirazi (1995, volume 1, 178–179).

4 See Muhsin Fayḍ Kashani (1994, volume 1, 110–115).

between humans' epistemic and nonepistemic sides. In order to have knowledge in different aspects, one must have different attributes, according to each of which one can obtain some kind of knowledge. Some similar views have been presented by some western thinkers when they insist on a firm connection between the epistemic and the nonepistemic such as the emotional sides of humans.<sup>5</sup>

If humans must have different attributes and emotions to obtain a full knowledge of God, then such emotions, themselves, may prevent humans from worshiping God and so make the act of harmonizing with God much harder. God aimed to produce this kind of harmony and created mankind with such a purpose that He plays His role of lordship and mankind actively plays the worshiping role. At the time of the creation of mankind, God performed all harmonious actions toward humanity and provided humans with all favors according to His lordship role. Reciprocally, humans were to show God harmony by the role of worshiping Him through their obedience: "And We said: 'Adam! Dwell you and your wife in the garden, and eat from it bountifully wherever you both wish, and do not approach this tree, so you will be of those who do injustice'" (2:35). Humans, however, could not pass the test and failed to play their assigned role and committed a disharmonious work: ". . . and Adam disobeyed his Lord, so he went astray" (20:121).

An important indication of these verses is that God's initial choice has not been to make humans suffer, but His first choice has been to harmonize with them and behave towards them with His mercy, because this is His purpose of creation. More generally, however, His purpose of creation has been a mutual harmony between Him and His creatures through their respective roles of lordship and worship. Good life is realized only through this harmonious union with God, and disharmony with the Creator brings about severe damage to life.

Now, a question arises about Adam's disharmonious work: Why did Adam do such disharmonious work when he was in a good epistemic situation and knew God with all His names? Why did he not surrender himself to God with such knowledge he had? To answer the question, we may appeal to views that insist on the connection of human epistemic and nonepistemic sides. For having varieties of knowledge, humans need to have varieties of attributes and emotions. At the same time, having such emotions may have some negative impacts on the epistemic side, if it is not be trained well, and make humans neglectful of their knowledge. For example, it was Adam's *greed* for an eternal life that made Adam make an epistemic error so that he was deceived by Satan, and this epistemic error in its turn led Adam to oppose God and eat from the tree that he regarded it as the tree of immortality (20:120–121). So it is not the case that the less human beings are at an epistemic distance from God, the less free choice they have for worshiping Him.<sup>6</sup> The earlier verses indicate that Adam had good knowledge of God while he committed a disharmonious work.<sup>7</sup>

5 For getting informed of some recent debates about the epistemological relevance of emotions, see Brun *et al.* (2008).

6 For a defense of such claim, see John Hick's soul-making theodicy in his *Evil and the God of Love* (Hick 1985), part IV.

7 The problem about Adam, then, was not his epistemic distance from God, but the problem was that his epistemic side was not trained well against his nonepistemic side. Yes, when one is in less epistemic distance from God, one might not commit some trivial sins, but it might be that one commits sin against God for some greater things. For example, when one feels the enjoyment of knowledge of God, it might be that one does not surrender to God and is not satisfied with what God sees as right for one and one may demand God to give one more knowledge of Himself while one fails to keep one's harmony with God as well as with His other creatures.

The upshot is that for having a full epistemic ability, we need full attributes and emotions. Nevertheless, having full attributes and emotions may also have some negative impact on our epistemic ability. To prevent such negative impact, our epistemic ability must be trained well so that it always has prevalence and we never become neglectful of our knowledge. Adam's disharmonious action originated from an epistemic fault (forgetfulness, negligence), so that his greed for eternal life made him forget God's lordship role in the realization of such a life, and this indicates a human epistemic deficiency. Therefore, humans need some fortunate and some appropriate circumstances to train their epistemic capacity so that what they know is never neglected, never extinguished. If our epistemic capacity is trained in this way and if our knowledge always prevails over our emotions and desires, then we could have a constant harmony with God and surrender to Him in a guaranteed way without opposing God because of our desires; because we know and never forget, then, that our good life is realized only with harmony with God. If our epistemic capacity is trained well, we will not repeat our father's epistemic errors and we will not be pulled into disharmony with God again and we will not damage our lives.

Among other things, the earth has been provided by God for an epistemic purpose: so that humans can train their epistemic capacities (see Chapter 14). According to His lordship role, God wants to help human beings to receive an eternal good life through harmony with Him. For a constant harmony with God, however, humans need to remove their epistemic deficiencies and arrive at a safe epistemic point.<sup>8</sup> It is through earthly conditions that humans can train their epistemic capacity and make it so that it always gains the control of their emotions and desires and actions. It is due to God's mercy, then, not due to His punishment, that humans are put on the earth. Of course, disharmony with God is a very big fault that Adam committed, but it is not the case that we are put on the earth to be punished by God for our father's sin. Rather, it is due to His mercy that we are put on the earth to be trained well and to learn to harmonize with God forever. According to the Qur'an, not only did God forgive Adam's disharmonious work, but He selected him for the contribution in making harmony with Him and guided him for this: "Then his Lord chose him, so He forgave him and guided him" (20:122). Accordingly, when Adam was put on the earth, he was forgiven and guided by God, and the reason for being put on the earth was to become ready for harmony with Him.

## God's Epistemic Aid

It is only through the earthly conditions that humans can remove their epistemic deficiencies and arrive at an epistemic safe point so that it will guarantee their harmony with God. It is after reaching this epistemic safe point that humans can gain the necessary competence for having a good life through harmonizing with God forever. A significant aspect of the earth is that it provides humans with experiential knowledge. Experiential knowledge, as

8 The importance of knowing God for a constant harmony with Him can be used from some Islamic narrations, such as what is quoted from Imam Husayn (the third successor of the Prophet Muhammad, according to Shi'ite view): "God didn't create His servants except for them to know Him, when they know Him, they worship Him, and when they worship Him, they no longer have any need to worship other than Him" (Al-Shaykh al-Saduq 2004, 56). As I will say earth is a good ground for obtaining some *experiential* knowledge of God that is very effective in leading human beings to harmony with God.

compared with nonexperiential knowledge, has a very strong impact on humans. For example, all humans really know that they will die. But when one observes someone's dying, it has a special impact on him. As another example, according to the Qur'an, Abraham knew that God will revive the dead. However, he asked God to show him how He does this and his reason for this request was that this observation would have a special impact on his heart: "And when Abraham said: 'My Lord show me how you give life to the dead,' He said: 'do you not believe?' He said: 'Yes, but in order that my heart may be at rest' . . ." (2:260). Now we can say that although Adam in the garden knew all the names and attributes of God, it (or at least some of it) was not experiential knowledge.

The earth is so provided that the different relations with God as well as with His creatures can be examined. Indeed, the earth is provided as a laboratory so that we can observe the result of different sorts of existing, such as existing with harmony with God or disharmony with Him, also existing with harmony between His creatures or disharmony between them. In any kind of existing, we can see God's reaction toward it and so receive a better understanding of God that is based on experience. So, the earth is a testing ground for us in which we can test the different manners of existing and see what sort is the best. Of course, God could have given us all such knowledge without sending us to this testing ground, but this would not have been experiential knowledge. Indeed, God has equipped humans with the necessary knowledge about Himself before sending them to the earth. To make such knowledge effective, however, He has sent them into this laboratory in order that their knowledge be supported and strengthened by experiential knowledge.

An appropriate testing ground could be very beneficial and valuable for a being who is to contribute actively to harmony with God. However, we should keep in mind that a laboratory has its own rules and we do not expect an ideal life from a laboratorial world. In a laboratory, some rules are justified by its creator while this is not justified outside of the laboratory.<sup>9</sup> The consoling thing that makes the life in a testing ground tolerable is that the laboratory is very ephemeral and passing. The Qur'an regards a main characteristic of this world as that it is very transient as compared with the world to come. When people are gathered in the hereafter, their thought about this present world is ". . . as if they had not stayed but for an evening or its forenoon" (79:46) or even ". . . as if they had not stayed but for an hour of the day . . ." (10:45). Yet God insists that "We did not create the heavens and the earth and all between them in play. We did not create them save in truth; but most of them do not know" (44:38–39). Although, a testing ground could have rational ends, life in a testing place is not an ideal life, and because of this, in the Qur'an, it is stated that ". . . the life of this world is nothing compared with the world to come but a [trivial] enjoyment" (13:26). So the rational way is to take this testing life to be used for preparing for the ideal life, because "the life of this world is nothing but a sport and a play, and the last abode is verily Life, if they knew!" (29:64).

Other than providing a testing ground for man, another important epistemic help from God is that He has provided humans with the necessary knowledge for living in harmony with Him. Fundamental to this knowledge that is provided for man is knowledge of Himself and His lordship role. God has given human beings such knowledge from the first,

9 As I will say, in a temporary laboratorial world, God is justified to show us some degree of disharmonies between His creatures in order to give us some useful experiential knowledge that would be beneficial for our good life outside the laboratory and make us ready for eternal life.

before they come to this earthly world, and has made them face Him as their Lord. He has "... made them witness over themselves: 'Am I not your Lord?' They said: 'Yes we testify to it.' Lest you should say on the Day of Resurrection verily we were heedless of this" (7:172). Also, in this present world, God shows His signs to man. In many verses of the Qur'an, it is insisted that there are clear signs of God, and whoever rejects these signs is in a serious loss: "And do not be of those who reject signs of God, then you will be of the losers" (10:95). According to the Qur'an, God has provided us with His signs both inside and outside us and the Creator Himself suffices as the witness: "We shall show them Our signs on the horizons and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that He is the truth. Is it not Sufficient that your Lord is witness over all things?" (41:53).

According to the Qur'an, then, there are enough signs of God in the world so that, while encountering evils, we are not justified in losing our faith in His existence as well as His unique attributes, including His unique knowledge, power, wisdom, justice, and mercy. Signs for the existence, unity and mercy of God surround us, and they are sufficient for anyone who is ready for understanding (2:163–164). With such clear signs, encountering evils never justifies us in doubting Him.<sup>10</sup> However, it is possible that while we have knowledge about something, our heart may still not be at ease; the case of Abraham as I mentioned earlier is an example for this. As another example, a mother may have epistemic grounds sufficient to know that her child will stay alive after a surgery, but her heart is not at rest until she faces her child and gains an experiential knowledge of her child's life. The problem of evil is so amazing that from the beginning of the creation of the human being, the question about it was raised by angels who confidently believed in God's wisdom and knowledge (2:32). Not only did God not reproach them for this question, He helped them to understand the truth about it (2:31–33). So in order to increase our knowledge about God and make our hearts at rest, we are allowed to try to answer the question of evil and to try to understand God's reasons for the evils we encounter.

## The Epistemic Fruits of the Earthly Testing Ground

Now, the important question as to the testing function of the earth is this: How do earthly conditions help us to remove our epistemic deficiencies and make us ready for harmony with God? The general answer is that in this transient laboratorial world, we get a variety of experiences that are effective for making us experientially convinced that only through harmony with God we can have a good life. Of course, God Himself could make us convinced of this by making us like robots and could make us in harmony with Him by fiat, without putting us into such conditions; but this would prevent us from playing our roles in harmony with Him and would deprive us of having a good life because our kind of existence would be distorted. A short stop in this earthly testing ground, then, could grant us a good life forever.

10 This is comparable with what Brian Davies regards as the "We Know that God Exists" Argument (Davies 2006, 17). Defending such an argument in his book, Davies sees this Argument "implicit in a great deal of Christian philosophical thinking," and takes it "to be evident, for instance, in the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and Thomas Aquinas." He also regards Nelson Pike and Alvin Plantinga as the recent defenders of this argument (Davies 2006, 28–29, note 31).

The earthly laboratory is so made that while it is under God's control and in harmony with His ends, a variety of disharmonies happen inside it; disharmonies between the natural inanimate phenomena, between them and plants and animals, between animals themselves, and between any of them on the one hand and human beings on the other hand. These disharmonies can be divided into two major types: disharmonies that are relevant to the actions done by human beings and disharmonies that are irrelevant to them. Regardless of such a division, however, experiencing these disharmonies, generally, can help humans to gain a better understanding of the importance of harmony in existence and the importance of God's lordship role as well. According to the principle that "things are known better by their opposites," this is a rational way that we experience in a laboratory some controlled opposites of our ends. Such experiencing can give us a better understanding of our ends and appreciation of them. Therefore, it could be regarded as a special justified law for a transient testing ground that we can be shown the importance of things by being shown their opposites.

It seems that, at one level, God confronts us with an artificial world without God in which disharmonies are found; and at another level, He shows us His control over such disharmonies so that they do not yield the entire corruption of the world as well as His mercy on us against such disharmonies. Comparing these two levels and contrasting disharmonies with harmonies is a good way to make us able to evaluate the two sides in an appropriate way. Through such collating information, we understand better how the inharmonious world would be. Indeed, at one level, we experience how the world would be without God, and that it would be full of disharmonies. By experiencing such an opposite world, we get a better knowledge of the world with the presence of the merciful God. We get a good understanding of the need for God's role and we will become ready to accept His role. Such experience is very important for receiving a good eternal life. God first put man into a world like paradise under His harmonious control, and when it became clear for man that he needed to improve his epistemic capacity and to experience the importance of God's role in his life, God put him into this laboratory to make him obtain such epistemic fruits. It is through experiencing the worldly disharmonies that we receive the firm idea that only those who can harmonize themselves with others and fit themselves with the conditions of existence could remain and have good life;<sup>11</sup> and the most important harmony that we need to achieve is the harmony between ourselves and our Creator and fit our existence with His existence as the Lord.

The other aspect of the epistemic function of the earthly conditions is that we can test the degree of our commitment to what we know and improve it. We are faced with clear signs of God that are sufficient for knowing God's lordship in the world and His exalted attributes, such as His wisdom, goodness and justice. Now it is the matter of our commitment that we do not become neglectful of such clear signs in different conditions and that we should be firm in our confidence in God; it is only through steadfastness in approving

11 William Rowe sees no reasonable good in some instances of suffering such as animal suffering in the forests (see Rowe 1979). According to my view, however, the disharmonies that happen and produce sufferings all have epistemic impact on human beings. If one objects with reference to animal sufferings of which we never obtain knowledge, then we can ask how you affirm such sufferings. All sufferings that we affirm are within the realm of our knowledge, at least in a general manner. So, the knowledge of the disharmony of the world evidenced by the knowledge of innocent animal suffering may be a part of the unavoidable circumstances necessary for the epistemic conditions of our own position in the laboratorial world in which we test ourselves and are tested.

God's lordship role that we can play our role appropriately and accept God's harmonious role: "Verily, those who have said our lord is God then have remained steadfast, the angels descend upon them (and say) that do not fear and nor feel saddened and receive the good tidings of the paradise that you were promised" (41:30). We are confronted with some degree of disharmonies in order that the degree of our commitment to our knowledge and our patience with harmony with God's lordship is tested. Only those who can remain constant in their devotion to God under any circumstances deserve God's blessings: "And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and loss of wealth and lives and fruits. And give glad tidings to the patient" (2:155).

An important aspect of the earthly laboratory is that God has subjected it to human beings: "Do you not see that God has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and the earth and made complete to you His favors outwardly and inwardly? . . ." (31:20). This gives man the opportunity to examine it by his own hands as he wishes and to see the result. Indeed, the present world is made so that human actions have noticeable effects on it and human beings can test the results of their actions in the world. This provides a good chance for those who have failed to commit themselves to belief in God because of their epistemic deficiencies; they gain some supporting experiential knowledge about the results of their disharmonious actions in the world, especially the results of their disharmony with God. When man himself experiences the dangers of disharmony with God as well as the importance of harmony with Him for his life, then this guarantees a constant harmony between him and God, both sides of which are active. Indeed, the earth is a testing ground for humans in which they can test the results of different kinds of relation with God through which they can obtain some precious experiential knowledge that is very useful for accepting a right relation with God.

Of course, in this present world, humans do not experience the whole result of their disharmonious actions against God. We may not imagine the degree of the importance of the existence of God as it really is nor the degree of the danger of disharmony with Him. According to the Qur'an, in this testing ground, due to God's mercy, we only are shown some results of our disharmonious actions, not all of them, though such results are not small in our view: "Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea, because of what the people's hands have earned, to make them taste some part of what they have done, so that they may return" (30:41). God only wants to show humans the awfulness of their disharmonious actions, and because of His mercy, He lets people test only *some* results of their deeds in this present world in order for them to know what might happen in the everlasting world for their life if they do not accept God's lordship role and do not play their assigned role toward Him: "And any misfortune that befalls on you is because of what your own hands have earned, and He forgives much" (42:30). Of course, God can prevent the whole results of humans' disharmony in this earthly laboratory, and "no misfortune befalls save by God's leave . . ." (64:11). But God lets people experience some results of their deeds to allow them to understand the high degree of the awfulness of their deeds and to return to God: "And We shall surely make them taste the nearer punishment before the greater; so that they may return" (32:21).

As I stated before, the disharmonies in the present world can be divided into two major parts: disharmonies that are relevant to the actions done by human beings and disharmonies that are irrelevant to this. We might not distinguish exactly between the human-relevant disharmonies and the human-irrelevant ones, but according to religious texts as well as human religious experiences, even natural events could be affected by the kind of

relation humans have with God. There are many religious claims according to which some diseases have been healed, or some natural events have been changed by praying and asking from God. The point that should be noticed is that this earthly testing ground has a social aspect according to which people can test their social conduct as well. According to a divine law, “. . . Verily God does not change what is with a nation, until they change what is with themselves . . .” (13:11). So the prevailing conduct of a people is effective: “And if the people of the towns had believed and been God-wary, We would have opened to them blessings from the heaven and the earth; but they rejected, so We seized them because of what they have earned” (7:96).

According to what I said until now, in order to play our roles in existence and receive a right relation with God, we need to develop our epistemic character and remove our epistemic deficiencies. Some degree of the disharmonies in the world is to show us the importance of harmony with God. Also, it is to test the degree of our commitment to what we know about God. Another degree of the disharmonies in the world, however, is due to human actions. Such human-relevant disharmonies also have epistemic effects for human beings and provide them with some supporting experiential knowledge that can serve for developing their epistemic attitudes about God and their relation with Him. Some human beings may remove their epistemic deficiencies and strengthen their commitment to what they know about God by experiencing the results of their harmonious and disharmonious conducts.

Still, there could be very precious experiential knowledge that would be produced at the end of history. During history, human beings test the different ways to lead a good life. They adopt a variety of views about the world and their kind of behavior toward it. They do their best to achieve real happiness and examine the different ways for this. These different ways cannot be examined only by one generation at a time, and each generation during history can test only some ways. It is at the end of history that the upshot is obtained when all ways have been examined and the whole ability of humanity has been exhausted. The experiential knowledge obtained at the end of history of this laboratory would be very valuable and would grant humans a firm confidence about the result. Such experiential knowledge is nothing except that man sees that there is really no way for his good life except by harmony with the Creator so that he accepts His role and plays his own role toward Him.

This final experiential knowledge is a reliable guarantee for a constant harmony between man and God, both sides of which are active and makes humans ready for entering God's eternal paradise. Before the end of history and the day of resurrection, no person enters the original paradise, and all dead people are put in a world beyond this present world: “. . . and behind them is a barrier until the day they are raised” (23:100). Accordingly, the dead might share all experiences of the living including the final experiential knowledge that is gained at the end of history. So it is not the case that when a person is dead, everything is over for him. Living in this present world is only one part of the role that any of human beings is to play. Anyone who comes to this testing ground will play his laboratorial role according to what God has assigned. Each human being, including men and women and children, play their assigned roles in this laboratory, and then are transferred to the other world to observe what happens on the testing ground.

The present world, therefore, is not the only chance for soul development, because this world is only a part of God's program, and people, even children we may say, in the other world could have epistemic development while they are watching what happens

in this world. Furthermore, God gives every existent a special role, and having a good life is to play that role. The children who have died are given this role and they will have a good life because of playing this laboratorial role. We cannot criticize God for this, because the different roles are necessary for good life in general. The important point is that good life depends on playing the assigned role and children would have a good life because they have played their assigned role.

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The Qur'an.

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