

The Principle Used in Negation

When the People of Tawhīd and Sunnah negate from Allāh, they do so following the method of the Qurʾān, upon the broader principle of “negating for Allāh whatever Allāh and His Messenger negated from Him.”

Upon that we find that the following is what is negated for Allāh:

1. Every blameworthy attribute such as blindness, deafness, muteness, sleep, tiredness, death and the likes. The evidence is, “To Allāh is the loftiest **example**” (16:60), this means the loftiest description, and this negates all blameworthy attributes.
2. Deficiencies in His attributes, such as deficiency in His life, knowledge, power, wisdom and the likes. See for example Qāf (50:38) for negation of tiredness.
3. Likeness between Him and His creatures, such that His knowledge, power, face are held to be like those of the creatures. “**There is nothing which is a likeness unto Him.**” (42:11).

This is the elaboration of the principle we rely upon in negating from Allāh.

Now, we want to show the error of relying upon the vague, ambiguous principle of “Negating resemblance (tashbīh).”¹ In other words, is this a sound principle we can rely upon with respect to negating, that we “negate any and all resemblance between Allāh and His creation”. Hence, anything that is considered to be “resemblance” is to be negated.

The answer is no, and this will lead to negation of what Allāh affirmed for Himself. This is due to the ambiguity of what is resemblance. Is it with respect to the meaning (maʿnā) or the reality (ḥaqīqah, kaifiyyah) of the attribute? And also who defines what is tashbīh and what enters into it or does not enter into it? The Muslims differed over this, so whose word is taken. Because of these issues, we cannot rely upon this vague, ambiguous, generalisation in negating from Allāh, as it will lead us to misguidance.

The arguments against this can be summarised as follows:

1. If you mean by negation of tashbīh, that you negate that there anything in creation that resembles Allāh from all angles, then no one claims or says this such that this needs to be denied in the first place.

¹ Note that this is other than tamthīl (likeness), which the word that has come in the Qurʾān. Resemblance can be in some aspects as opposed to other aspects, or it can be in all aspects, in which it becomes the same as tamthīl (likeness). Because of this ambiguity, it is not a correct principle to rely upon in negating from Allāh, due to the reason that are explained.

2. And if you mean by negation of tashbīh, resemblance from some aspects but not all, then this is also not correct as it entails rejection of what Allāh affirmed for Himself of attributes. .This is because there is a resemblance in the meanings of what the Creator and His creation are described with, otherwise we would never be able to acquire and have any knowledge of the Creator. Thus, the meaning of life, knowledge, power, wisdom, hearing, seeing and so on. The Creator has these attributes and men have these attributes, so there is resemblance in the meaning, and we understand these meanings. However, there is no resemblance in the reality of how these attributes and how they are established with Allāh’s essence.
3. Also, the people have differed as to what entails tashbīh (resemblance). We have all these sects, the Jahmiyyah, Mu‘tazilah, Ash‘arī, Māturīdīs, and some negate all names and attributes, and others affirm names but not attributes, and others affirm some attributes but not others, and they all argue that what they negate is because it entails resemblance. So if this was the principle to be relied upon in negation, that “we negate resemblance between Allāh and His creation”, then there would be confusion and absence of clarity.
 - a) The Mu‘tazilah say affirming attributes such as life, knowledge, hearing, seeing means that we affirm eternity for multiple things, hence we have affirmed multiple gods. But the attributes are not other than Allāh’s essence, just as they are not synonymous with Allāh’s essence. We say they are established with Allāh’s essence, so you do not say, this entails resemblance because we are giving the attribute of eternity to other than Allāh, since Allāh’s attributes are neither other than His essence, or the same as His essence.
 - b) The Ash‘arīs deny Allāh ascended above the Throne, because they believe it necessitates He is a body (on account of Aristotelian philosophy) , and thus it is resemblance between the Creator and the Created. But we reject this so-called necessity, this is to make analogies for the Creator through the created, and we do not know the reality of Allāh’s essence, it is not like the created bodies, and it is not necessitate that if He ascends above His throne, His essence must be like ours.

What has preceded establishes that we cannot make our principle in negation to be mere “negation of resemblance between Allāh and His creation” due to its vagueness and ambiguity.