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Towards a New Understanding of the Shī'ī Doctrine of *Tawhīd*: A Burrellian Reading of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's Concept of Monotheism

The Islamic doctrine of monotheism (*tawhīd*) is regarded as one of the most foundational principles of Islamic thought. Although it is asserted that the Islamic view of monotheism is more cohesive than its rival formulations, the very concept of monotheism has been traditionally confronted with challenges. This is because the philosophical understanding of God as a simple and necessary existent poses a problem for both the idea of God and the idea of monotheism. Within this framework, not only is the notion of divine simplicity problematic, but also the compatibility of the three varieties of monotheism that have been articulated by Muslim theologians and philosophers is a source of contention. The difficulty with the idea of divine simplicity arises from the fact that it is reduced to a kind of negative assertion about divinity which does not have any affirmative content. On the other hand, it is challenging to derive the concept of divine simplicity from the ordinary (material) notion of simplicity, which is seen to be imperfect in contrast to the idea of complexity, which is more perfect. Attributing a kind of unity to the divine nature that is compatible with the plurality of divine attributes and actions is another problem that is pervasive not only within Islamic theology but also within the philosophical theologies of other religious traditions, particularly Judaism and Christianity.

In the first part of my investigation, I will discuss how the “principle of focal meaning” proposed by Ṭabāṭabā'ī may be rethought in light of the findings presented in David B. Burrell's Grammatical Thomism. In the second part of this analysis, I will show how the aforementioned problems might be resolved by using an enriched interpretation of the principle that is under discussion. In order to accomplish this goal, it is vital to describe how Ṭabāṭabā'ī's *tanzīh fī l-tashbīh* (dissimilation-within-assimilation) strategy might be used to realize a term's focal meaning. Then, I will suggest how a type of univocity Ṭabāṭabā'ī associated with the focal meaning must be reinterpreted in accordance with the Wittgensteinian concept of family resemblance, in a manner Burrell employs in his interpretation of the way of analogy in a discussion of the concept of God as both transcendent and related to the world. In conclusion, a new interpretation of Ṭabāṭabā'ī's concept of focal meaning will be presented as a novel approach to comprehending the Shī'ī doctrine of *tawhīd* that will be argued to be more accurate.



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