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# DIVINE IMMUTABILITY PERFECTION OR FLAW?

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## Abstract

Process theology stands in contrast to classical theism in its conception of God and the divine attributes. The crucial point in this confrontation is their way of interpreting 'divine perfection' (actus purus). The major point of disagreement – which is also the cornerstone in process theological worldview and is also the root of their different viewpoints in regard to all the divine attributes – is the idea of 'process'. From this element of 'process' the idea of the 'divine mutability' is born. Therefore, one of the major differences between traditional/classical theology and process theology is the idea of divine immutability. In the Islamic tradition, too, this attribute has been very much highlighted. In this contribution I seek to criticize the doctrine of divine mutability, based on the Islamic tradition and from the Islamic speculative perspective. To achieve this goal, after having discussed the major divine attributes in process theology, then in the second part, I will explore and criticize from an Islamic perspective process theology's conception of divine mutability. And finally and in the third part, I will critically study some of the main teachings of process theology.

*Keywords:* Islamic theology, process, critique, mutability, eternity

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## 1. Introduction

The concept of divine immutability was always agreed upon in classic theism – be it in Judaism, Christianity or Islam. In the Islamic thought this teaching was always underlined by the scholars and the religious texts. Apart from the adherents of the Kiramiyya school of thought who regarded God as the 'locus of events' and hence mutable [1], the divine attribute of immutability is agreed upon by almost all the Islamic thinkers and schools. The Muslim thinkers discuss on the topic of divine immutability under the title of the 'unviability of the divine essence to be the locus of events'.

In Western thought, however, process theology is the strongest movement that vehemently disapproves of this idea. Process theology is a school of thought which is regarded as panentheistic. Panentheism is a term that was first coined by the German philosopher, Karl Christian Friedrich Krause (1781-1832). His aim in introducing this idea was, in fact, to reconcile the two theological

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approaches – i.e. theistic approach and the pantheistic one. But then the panentheistic school of thought became known not under his name, but under the name of Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947). In fact, some years after Krause had coined this term, Whitehead founded the philosophical bases of this theological school. However, it was Hartshorne who subsequently developed the idea and elucidated its theological teachings. Therefore, Whitehead and Hartshorne are regarded as the founders of this theological school of thought. Process theology developed mainly in the Christian world; however, found some interest in the Jewish and the Buddhist traditions as well [2]. Hartshorne regards process theology as “modern theism” or “neo-classical theism” [3].

In understanding the concept of God and his attributes, process theology stands in contrast to classical theism. The crucial point in this confrontation is their way of interpreting *divine perfection (actus purus)*. In classical theism, divine perfection requires the attribution of certain attributes to God that are very much different from the attributes claimed by the process theology. The major point of divergence, which is the cornerstone in process theology and is also the root of their different viewpoints in regard to all the divine attributes, is the idea of ‘process’. From this element of ‘process’ the idea of the ‘divine mutability’ is born, which is regarded as one of the most important differences between process theology and classical theism.

Classical theism is a title given to a special conception of God whose core idea is the belief in a God that has certain characteristics; attributes that revolve around the idea of the absolute perfection of God. Based on this conception, there is a certain principle in understanding God; and that is, that God possesses all the conceivable attributes of perfection and absoluteness and is free from any flaw. As some have already stated [4], elements of this kind of theism are also observable in the Platonic, Neo-Platonic and Aristotelian thought, as well as among the Christian, Muslim and Jewish thinkers, who were the followers of the Greek philosophical tradition. In classical theism the immutability of God is highly stressed. In his work *Creative Synthesis and Philosophic Method* [5], while highlighting the attribute of absoluteness and perfection as the main divine attribute in classical theism, Hartshorne enumerates the followings as the divine attributes in classical theism: immutable, necessary (devoid of any contingency), timeless, partless (simple), non-material, impassible, and the creator of the world from nothing – i.e. *creatio ex nihilo*.

Based on this fact, one of the major differences between traditional/classical theology and process theology is the idea of divine immutability. In the Islamic tradition, too, this attribute has been very much highlighted.

The purpose of this article is, thus, to criticize the doctrine of divine mutability, based on the Islamic tradition and from the Islamic speculative perspective. To achieve this goal, first I will discuss the major divine attributes in process theology. Then in the second part, I will explore and criticize from an Islamic perspective process theology’s conception of divine mutability. And

finally and in the third part, I will critically study some of the main teachings of process theology.

## **2. God in the process theology**

As was mentioned already, the theoretical bases of process theology are fostered by Whitehead's process philosophy. Therefore, it is necessary to first take into account some of the most important elements of process thought and then enumerate the key divine attributes in process theology. The key element in process philosophy, which could be regarded as the most significant element in this philosophical movement, and which distinguishes it from other schools of thought, is the idea of 'process' and 'becoming'. Contrary to the conventional conception of the world, which regards it as consisting of some fixed and static essences, process thought sees the whole cosmos, including God and all beyond Him, as being in a state of process or becoming. In other words, process theologians regard everything in the world as subject to change through the flow of events, and hence strongly reject the idea of a static or determined world. The important point to keep in mind is that the term 'process' indicates temporal change and constant and incessant activity and movement.

The second key idea in process philosophy is the 'organic' nature of this process. Based on process thought, the reality is in an organic process. It is why Whitehead sometimes calls his metaphysics 'organic philosophy' or 'philosophy of organism'. Based on this view, then, changes and developments in the world are not and cannot be separate from one another; but the world is rather like an organism, in which all the developments of the parts are in an inseparable and interrelated connection with each other – and not at all like a machine which consists of separate unrelated parts. The term 'interiority', which is regarded as the most controversial concept of process philosophy by Ian Barbour [2, p. 33], refers to this very important point; that is to say, the parts and elements of the world are not only in the state of becoming, but that in this process of becoming they are also interrelated with other parts as well as with the whole. Therefore, each member of this cosmic community is both helping the whole as well as being modified by it.

The third key element in process thought is the 'self-creation' in each event. As was observed earlier, based on the second factor, the world consists of interrelated events; that means the members of the cosmic community are constantly interacting. This may bring some to the point of thinking that process theology holds a pantheistic view. In order to avoid this thought, one should also consider the third element along with the other two, which is the element of 'self-creation'. Based on this view, each event is in and by itself a self-creating centre and has a certain and influential contribution to the world. Therefore, each event is an entity that has a unique identity for itself [6].

Based on the proceeding elements, one can describe the conception of God in process theology as follows.

## **2.1. Divine process**

Based on the process understanding of God's perfection, change has priority over permanence. Therefore, in process philosophy, contrary to classical theology, God, like all the other creatures of the world, and through interaction with surroundings and with other beings, is in a state of process and change, hence is in evolution. Accordingly, the whole Universe, be it divine or otherwise, is in a state of becoming and process. In principle, the core idea of process thought is the development and evolution of reality, including the creator as well as the creatures.

Undoubtedly, from the idea of process follows the idea of divine development and change, and hence termination; and that is a result no one can accept about God. It is why the advocates of process theology have tried to keep God away from the idea of termination while remaining true to the idea of process. One of the ways to achieve this purpose is to regard two natures for God, and to consider process true for just one of them. Advocators of process theology chose this very path; according to them, God has two kinds of nature: the primordial nature and the consequent nature.

According to this conception, the primordial nature of God has all the eternal possibilities based on which the created world could be actualized. The consequent nature of God, on the other hand, consists of experiences and responses of the creatures, which pick up some of these possibilities and actualize them in their lives [7]. In other words, the primordial nature of God is 'God alone' or 'divine nature in itself'. This nature provides the means through which God can perceive all the potentials and provide the ground for their actualization. On the other hand, the consequent nature of God is the actual relation of God to physical reality [8].

Based on the existence of these two natures, divine action, too, is bipolar: what makes the relation of God and the created world possible is the consequent nature; that is why, the process of God, which was talked of earlier, is perceived through the consequent nature. And hence God is fluent, as long as the consequent nature is concerned; that is, it develops in response to the events in the created world; and therefore, one could conclude that God is in change and process. But as far as the primordial nature is concerned, God is timeless and perfect, as well as eternal (in the sense of immutable and non-created). As a result, one can say that although God is in interaction with the world, due to his dual nature, change and termination do not occur in the primordial and primal nature of God.

If God is fluent and mutable, as far as the consequent nature is concerned, then one can say that "God is temporal, in a sense" [9]. According to what was mentioned already, the concept of temporality meant in process theology should be understood with regard to this consequent nature. By regarding God as temporal, what is meant is that divine experience is also subject to change, because God has interaction with the world, and through this interaction, God is

affected by the world, and in this way, he unifies the varieties of his experiences, in a way that his freedom is preserved along with the freedom of the world [10].

On the other hand, based on what was said so far, it is obvious that the advocates of process theology believe both in divine transcendence as well as imminence in the world. This characteristic is the result of the emphasis process theology puts on the interaction between God and the world.

## ***2.2. Limited knowledge and power***

The proponents of process theology refuse to accept the understanding of divine power of classical theism. Therefore, a process theologian cannot accept the attribution of total and unrestricted power to God. According to process theology's conception of divine power, the ultimate power is his ability to penetrate. As was mentioned already, process and becoming is the general law for all the cosmos, including God. All creatures play a role in this process. God too, for his part, has an impact on the process of the world; and not by controlling it or adjusting it with the divine will [8, p. 497].

Accordingly, finite creatures are also centres of power, and can therefore cause new states of affairs. And thus, according to the process thinkers, power is divided between God and humans. As a result, the power of God is generally limited; and to regard an exclusive power for God is impossible. This is why they say that the power of God is persuasive; that is to say, that God encourages potential beings to become what God wills them to be, and he never coerces them for that purpose [11].

The advocates of process theology give an interpretation of the divine knowledge which also requires limitation. Based on the nature of process, God is in the process of experiencing the world. According to this view, Hartshorne highlights the fact that God is not aware of the future, for future is undetermined, uncertain and unpredictable in nature. Therefore, while confirming the omniscience of God, he interprets it in a way that would match with the basic principles of the process thought. Following this view, then, God does not have an absolute knowledge of the future, but is rather aware of those future events that have become necessary by some earlier events, as their causes [11].

## ***2.3. Mutability of God***

Based on the principle of change and process in God and the emphasis of process theology on the fact that God gets affected by the events, the proponents of this school of thought have no problems accepting the idea of change occurring in God. However, as was earlier mentioned, under the topic of the dual nature of God, they regard this change in the consequent nature of God and not in his primordial nature. But this makes no difference in their accepting the principle of mutability.

Based on what we enumerated of the attributes of the process God, it is now clear that one of the most important features regarded as highly controversial for classic theism is the idea of ‘mutability’, which stands in stark contrast to the classical idea of divine ‘immutability’ in classical theism. In what follows, this attribute is being studied and criticized from the Islamic theological and philosophical point of view.

### **3. Critique of divine mutability**

One can find an array of arguments in Islamic theology and philosophy to repudiate the idea of divine mutability. However, the root and origin of all these arguments lie in the belief that God is ‘the essential necessary being’ (*wajib al-wujud*), for if God is the necessary being by nature, then, he should have this characteristic in all aspects. Therefore, the necessary being possesses two aspects of perfection and absoluteness: a positive aspect and a negative one. The positive aspect requires God to have, in one way or another, all the attributes of perfection and absoluteness (attributes that result in God’s perfection); and the negative aspect requires that God be cleansed from all flaws and imperfections. As a result, the arguments that are presented here are divided into two groups; they either refer to the positive aspect of God’s being the essential necessary being or to the negative aspect.

Some of the most important arguments in this regard are below.

#### **3.1. Arguments based on the positive aspect**

##### **3.1.1. Absolute divine perfection**

If something is absolutely perfect, there could be no possibility for it to get better or worse. In other words, whatever possesses the attribute of absolute perfection cannot improve by change and development, for the assumption is that it is the absolute perfect being; and as such, there would be no attribute of perfection that it would be lacking. Moreover, such a being cannot get worse through change, for no deterioration and decline could ever occur to the absolute perfect being. In this regard, Mulla Sadra considers God as the necessary being who is the most complete and the most perfect, and thus regards this fact as requiring such a being to have all the attributes of existential perfection and all that follows from it, and hence to be needless of change and growth and improvement [12].

##### **3.1.2. Divine simplicity**

Based on this argument, change and development concern things that have parts, and since God is the most simple (*basīṭ muṭlaq*) and has no parts, therefore, change finds no place in him.

What is meant by divine simplicity is to deny any kind of composition in the essence and attributes. Therefore, in God there is neither any composition of differentia (*fasl*) and genus (*jins*), nor any composition of substance/*ousia* (*jawhar*) and attribute (*araḍ*), nor any other composition of any kind. In other words, it is not possible for the essence/nature of God to have certain basics, through the composition of which the necessary being would be shaped [13]. Divine simplicity is one of the prerequisites for his infinity, and is in fact one of the prerequisites for divine perfection. If God were not simple (in the sense of being partless) he would be composed (of parts), and composition requires limitation and restriction, and hence as a result, finitude in God. This, in turn, would lead to the existence of flaws (lack of perfection/imperfection) in God.

### *3.1.3. Divine absolute affluence*

God is the absolute affluent [14]; and whatever is absolutely affluent should have no parts; otherwise, it would be a composed thing that is dependent on its parts. On the other hand, change requires a potential in the nature of that thing, and this potentiality means that the essence of that thing is composed of parts.

### *3.1.4. Divine eternity*

Based on this argument, change occurs only in things that take shape in time; for a change to be actualized, a thing that lacks a certain characteristic should eventually strive to acquire it, and since God is eternal and timeless, the occurrence of change in him is refuted. As Imam Ali says, “One mode does not precede another mode in him, so that he may be the first before being the last or may be the manifest before being hidden” [15].

### *3.1.5. Divine essential necessity*

Based on this argument, God is an essentially necessary being (*wajib bi-l-dhat*), and mutability and passibility are incompatible with the necessary existence of God; therefore, God cannot be mutable [16].

### *3.1.6. Divine infinity*

God is infinite. If God’s being is infinite then there is no room for any ‘other’ being that could bring about a change in God or provide the ground for change in God. Therefore, change in God is unimaginable. This fact is clearly mentioned in the Qur’anic verses. One of these verses is the verse that reads: “*huwal awal wa l-akhir*” (He is the first and the last). If God is the first and the last, that means there remains no room for any other being which could or would be the agent of change or provider of change in God. In the *tafsir* (Qur’anic commentary/ interpretation) of this verse, Imam al-Ṣādiq says: “Nothing comes

into existence, unless there would be a change and termination in it; either change in colour, or in shape, or in status, or change from an attribute to another, or transmission from intensity to paucity, or from insufficiency to abundance. Except for God who is infinitely unique and one, and exists before [the creation of] everything else and comes at the end of everything finite. His names and attributes are not subject to change as are those of man.” [17]

What is meant by divine infinity is the limitlessness of God in all aspects. In this regard, some like Avicenna have used the term ‘being complete’ as one of the necessary attributes of God. This means that God should not have an expected state; that is, the state that one expects God later to become. Therefore, whatever is possible for God should necessarily be present in him already [13, p. 552]. Anyhow, to regard God’s essence as finite, based on what process theology conceives of God’s process, and to regard him as having a dual nature, requires God to have two parts; interior and exterior. In the interior part (within the divine essence) the parts of the divine essence would have interdependence, and this need and dependence turns God into a dependent being. In the exterior part, however, God’s process – as was mentioned earlier – requires interaction and interrelated communication between God and the other parts and entities of the world. And this results in the need and dependence of God in action.

### ***3.2. Arguments based on the negative aspect***

The second group of arguments in repudiating the mutability of God is derived from the negative aspect of God’s being the absolute necessary being. Some of these arguments are as follows.

#### ***3.2.1. Argument from the refutation of the transmission towards evil***

If by change the temporal or essential change is meant, then the divine mutability would require his transmission from good to evil, for each grade towards which God would move, would be lower than his own (highest) grade. And this is not compatible with the idea of the divine perfection. As a result, God cannot be mutable [12, p. 138].

#### ***3.2.2. Argument from the refutation of the divine physicality/corporeality***

Based on this argument, each change requires movement and movement is one of the characteristics of physical objects. Since God has no body or physicality, therefore, movement and hence change do not occur in him [12, p. 138].

### *3.2.3. Argument from the refutation of the existence of quiddity (mahīyyah) in God*

Based on this argument, if a change were to take place in God, he would be attributed with it – which is something that does not already exist in his essence (*dhat*). And if something/someone is attributed with a certain quality, which does not already exist in its/his essence, then that means that that thing/person has a quiddity (*mahiyya*). But God does not have quiddity; therefore God cannot change [12, p. 138-139].

### *3.2.4. Argument from the refutation of movement in God*

Change is a kind of movement – because it requires the certain thing/object move from the state of potentiality to the state of actuality – and due to the principle of the refutation of infinite regress (*nafy al-tasalsul*) in a chain of the moved ones, God is the mover that is himself not moved. Therefore, in God there is no movement and hence no change.

### *3.2.5. Refutation of potentiality in God*

This argument is very similar to the proceeding one. Based on this argument, change is a kind of movement; because it requires the object to move from the state of potentiality to the state of actuality. And potentiality is a characteristic of material and temporal things/objects. Since God is immaterial and non-temporal and has therefore no potentiality in him; as a result, it can have no movement, hence accepts no change. This argument is mentioned by Mulla Sadra [12, p. 43].

### *3.2.6. Refutation of temporality in God*

Change requires movement and movement requires temporality. And since God is not temporal due to his necessary being, he has no movement and hence no changes [18].

### *3.2.7. Refutation of God's being a substance/ ousia (jawhar) or an attribute/accident (arad)*

Change requires a subject, for change is an attribute, and as such, needs a subject to be attributed to. But God is neither a substance nor an attribute. Therefore, since God is not a substance, it could not be the subject for anything else; therefore, God is not the subject of any change. Hence, change can find no way in God. According to Avicenna, “God is neither substance, as to accept contradictions and hence accept change, nor is attribute, as for another substance to be placed before him” [19].

### 3.2.8. Refutation of the existence of any external causes

Change in God requires that God be caused by another cause; that is to say that a cause would have an effect on him. But due to his necessary being, he is the cause of all causes (the uncaused cause). This requires that God not be caused by another cause – that is to say that no cause whatsoever would affect him – otherwise he could no longer be the uncaused cause. Therefore, change does not occur in God [17, p. 50].

In the end, I refer to an argument which does not fit into any of the above-mentioned categories, and is rather an independent argument. This argument is called the argument from creation in time (*hudūth*): through this argument and in order to prove the existence of God, the Muslim theologians (*mutakallimun*), stated, “The world is mutable. Each mutable thing is created in time. Each created thing needs a creator. As a result, the world is a created thing and hence needs a creator.” Then they emphasized that in order to avoid the infinite regress, we have to come to a point of having a creator, that himself is not created and is hence not mutable. According to Imam al-Ṣadiq, “God is not created, and has hence no potential to change or have movement from one state to another. Therefore, there is no change in God due to the change in his essence, and the passage of day and night causes no change in him.” [17, p. 50]

The last point worth mentioning is the fact that some might try to interpret the verses in the Qur’an where the talk is of certain attributes of God like mercy, pity and wrath, in a way as to be able to prove mutability and possibility for God. But it must be mentioned that such attributes should not be interpreted in a way that would require the inner affectability of God and hence result in his mutability and possibility. Such attributes are, in fact, the attributes of action and the only way to ascribe them to God is through considering the results of these attributes on individuals. For example, when we say that God was wrathful against the people of Lot, this means that they were punished. There is an interesting narration by Imam al- Ṣadiq in this regard:

Hisham b. Hakam says: “One of the *zindiqs* (non-believers) asked Imam al-Ṣadiq, “Does God feel satisfied or angry?” Imam replied, “Yes, but not as is seen in the creatures, for satisfaction is a mood that occurs in mankind and makes them change from a mental state to another, since the creatures are created with a void inside and are composed [of things] and hence, the things can penetrate in them. But in the Creator there is no way of penetration by the creatures; he is the one and only, he is one in his essence and his attributes. Therefore, his satisfaction is, in fact, the benefits [he grants to creatures] and his wrath the punishment; without anything being able to affect him or provoke him or transmit him from one state to another, for such changes and developments are of the characteristics of the creatures, who are incapable and dependent.” [20]

In another narration, while elaborating on certain verses of the Qur’an, Imam al- Ṣadiq emphasizes that if God were to be subject to wrath and sadness (like the creatures) then one could say that the Creator could eventually come to

a termination, for wrath and sadness could overcome him and he could be subject to change and hence subject to annihilation ... [20, p. 6]. Therefore, those who try to prove the possibility of God through resorting to the concepts of divine mercy and pity in the Qur'an, fail to realize the distinction between the finite and the infinite beings. Mankind, as a finite being, could be subject to emotions when he sees a feeble human being, but God's mercy and pity, as the infinite being, is realized without such emotional involvements.

Up to this point we have mentioned the arguments that could be raised from the Islamic point of view in refuting the mutability of God. However, in order to have a comprehensive discussion on the topic, we should also study and criticize at least some of the main principles of process theology that were mentioned in the first part of the article. This is going to be presented in the next and last part of this contribution.

#### **4. The critique of the process conception of God**

##### ***4.1. Process and the finitude of God***

This is the point of divergence between the advocates of process theology and classical theists – i.e. God's being in the state of process and evolution – for according to the proponents of classical theism, God is 'absolute actuality' and contrary to the created world which is always in the state of change, no change and development occurs in him. That is why evolution in respect to God is inconceivable. However, in process theology, process and becoming both in respect to God and the world are regarded as the key elements and such, they refuse to accept the absolute perfection and absolute actuality, and all other attributes derived from them, for God. However, by regarding two natures for God, and attributing process, interaction and development to the consequent nature, they try to avoid the problem of divine termination.

It is clear, however, that regarding two natures for God results in accepting composition in the divine nature. And this, in turn, renders God finite and hence in need and dependence. In this bipolar view about the divine nature, one can see a kind of contradiction, for bipolarity is self-contradictory. As a matter of fact, the 'infinite', by definition, denies the 'finite'; the 'eternal' denies the 'temporal'; the 'absolute necessity' denies 'dependence' and 'need'. Attributing process to God results, in one way or another, in regarding God as finite. And this is, of course, what process theology's advocates accept, for they put a strong emphasis on the finitude of God. Therefore, here, we try to mention and then criticize some of the arguments raised by the proponents of process theology, and to prove divine finitude:

In order to regard God as finite, some like Whitehead, have listed the following arguments [21]:

1. **Incompatibility of divine infinity with his comprehensibility:** based on this argument, if God were infinite, he would not be comprehensible. However, one can ask what they mean by comprehending God. If by comprehending

God, we mean we are looking to know and conceive the reality of his nature; that is, if we are looking to comprehend the depth of his essence, then it is clear that such knowledge and comprehension is not possible for mankind, and one of the major points that is basically mentioned in the holy scriptures and the narrations of all the monotheistic religions is the very idea of the impossibility of knowing the depth of the divine essence by man. If in our attempt to comprehend God, however, we are looking to know his attributes, this is an attempt that is underscored by the monotheistic religions themselves, and is possible. As a result, one can say that just because of the incapability of man in comprehending the divine nature and essence, one should not come to the point of degrading God, by bringing him down to the level of the dependent creatures.

2. Equation of reality with finitude: based on this argument, if something is infinite, it cannot really exist. This is a claim that does not have a logical justification. One can never regard finitude as the precondition for reality. Based on the fact that one cannot reach to the infinite, one cannot infer that it does not exist. In other words, 'not finding, is not evidence for nonexistence'; but one would rather say that, based on the arguments for the existence of God, there is no way but to accept the existence of a infinite being, for in order to define the existence of contingent beings, one should necessarily accept the necessary being. And one of the prerequisites of the necessary being is to be infinite, for if God were not infinite, he would be limited and hence dependent – which is incompatible with the idea of the absolute necessary being. Therefore, by refuting the attribute of infinity for God, Whitehead and the advocates of process theology, in fact, implicitly deny the very existence of God.
3. Incompatibility of divine infinity with his absolute goodness: based on this argument, if God is infinite, he should be as evil as he is good. In evaluating this argumentation, one should say that such an argument has no logical necessity. But to the very contrary, logical arguments on this issue lead in the opposite direction. If God is indeed infinite, he must necessarily be the absolute good; otherwise, the question would then be: what is the root of this evil aspect in the infinite? The existence of evil is either due to an ontological defect or due to a moral one. An ontological defect implies the fact that God should be imperfect in his nature, and as such, be evil. If this be the case, then one should regard God as imperfect and therefore limited and finite, and not at all infinite; whereas, our assumption was that God is infinite. As for moral defect, that would mean that God has an evil aspect, due to his ignorance or due to the malice his motives. It is completely clear that such a supposition is not acceptable either, for it calls for defect and limitation in God and his infinity. And this is in contrast to our primary assumption – i.e. divine infinity. As a result, contrary to the claim of the advocates of process theology, we should clearly state that if God is absolutely good, he must necessarily be infinite. Infinity, in fact, logically requires absolute good, and refuting the existence of any evil in him. In

other words, if the claims of process theology would be accepted here, not only the divine good would fail to be preserved, but in fact the very idea of divine goodness would be refuted. This result is contrary to the idea and intention Whitehead had in mind in refusing to accept divine infinity.

4. Incompatibility of infinity with the possibility of proving the existence of God: based on this argument, if God were infinite, his existence could not be proved. However, as was mentioned earlier, in criticizing Whitehead's second argument – and as it is discussed in details in arguments for proving the existence of God – in principle, in order to define the world, the existence of an infinite being is inevitable; that is, not only is the existence of the infinite provable, but also inescapable.

#### ***4.2. Finitude of the attributes of knowledge and power***

Process theologians refuse to accept the two divine attributes of power and knowledge, and regard them to be limited. Based on classical theism, divine power is absolute. This could be conceived also from the scriptures (namely the Qur'an and the Bible).

Muslim philosophers and many of the Western thinkers emphasize the fact that what is meant by God's power over everything else is his power over things that have the actual possibility (*imkan wuqu'i*) and the inherent possibility (*imkan dhati*). That is to say that his power prevails to such things that are not logically impossible. Hence, beside some thinkers like Descartes who regard the divine power as dominant as to even encompass the contradictory things [22], according to most of the thinkers, except for certain things whose occurrences have inherent impossibility (*imtina' dhati*), all the other things are possible for God (to do). Therefore, to have a camel (a true camel) go through the eye of a needle is not within the scales of divine power. However this does not imply divine impotence but is rather due to the impossibility of the occurrence of such things.

One also should not regard God as capable of violating the law of excluded middle, for this is logically impossible [23, 24].

The result then is that from among the three kinds of impossibilities – i.e. the inherent, the actual and the normal ones – only normal impossibility fits within the scope of the divine power and the inherent impossibility – an impossibility which is inherently non-existent, like principle of non-contradiction) – and the actual impossibility are beyond the scope of divine power, not because of the impotency of God, but because of the impossibility inherent in the subject. It is like the fact that a mathematician, no matter how qualified he might be, he cannot make the equation  $8 + 4 = 16$  come out true. This fact is mentioned in some of the Islamic narrations. For example, in responding to the question whether God can make the world fit into an egg or not, Imam 'Ali replies, "That, for which you are asking is not possible in itself" [17, p. 130].

In process theology, however, God's power and knowledge are not absolute; and many problems arise when one regards God as finite in attributes of power and knowledge. The most important problem is that it requires accepting the unpleasant result that God is dependent and in need, for if God were to be finite, he would be limited and hence dependent; and this dependence renders him a creature next to other creatures and would turn him from the necessary being into a contingent being, and would hence not be worthy of worship.

The reason to regard God's power as limited in process theology is that based on the process perspective, the absolute power of God is incompatible with his description as the source of love and affection; for example, it was mentioned that Whitehead's reason to refute absolute power lies in the fact that if God – as is understood in classical theism – were to be regarded as omnipotent, then we would inevitably have the tendency to describe him based on his absolute power than to regard him as the source of love and goodness. And instead of describing him with love, we would be terrified of any encounter with him.

In criticizing this argumentation one should say that such a requirement is refutable altogether and that there is no logical correlation between the idea of the absolute and the derived conclusions. Can one not regard God as omnipotent and still have a love-based relation with him? Their claim could be understandable only if we would regard God as omnipotent and would ignore his other attributes. If we regard, however, God as the absolute good and the most compassionate of all the compassionate – as he was called in the Qur'an, and as he was mentioned in the Bible with terms like love and compassion to mankind – then one can regard God as both the omnipotent as well as the absolute manifestation of compassion, and can hence achieve a loved-based relation with him. This point would become clearer when, based on classic theism, the divine attributes of compassion and kindness exceed his wrathfulness. However, one can say that the image that is depicted in process theology of the interrelatedness of God and the world harms divine freedom and omnipotence. Peters considers this as the major problem in this regard [25].

Another reason that has brought the process theologians to regard God's power as limited was the problem of evil. As was mentioned earlier [21], Whitehead regards God's absolute power and good as incompatible with the existence of evil in the world. However, it must be said that the problem of evil was discussed and studied already in detail by the classical theologians, and many responses are provided in order to solve the problem; responses that while keeping the divine absolute power intact, have tried to solve the problem of evil in a way. Therefore, due to just one issue we should not simply give up the idea of the divine omnipotence.

Another reason held by the process theologians is this conception that the idea of the divine absoluteness barricades the relation of God with the world. One should say, however, that this statement by Hartshorne is due to the specific view he has on the relation of God to the world. He understands this relation just

within this framework of process-interaction between God and the world and the cosmic beings. It is due to this very reason that revelation as a way of communication between God and human beings are not very much acceptable by the advocates of process theology. Based on classical theism, however, there are no restrictions to God's relationship with the world. God has, in fact, two kinds of active and live relationships with the world: first the causal relation and second the verbal relation, through revelation.

Another result of the way process theology conceives of God is also manifest in God's dependence on his knowledge. The limited power and knowledge of God results, in fact, in his dependence. That is why, in theistic theology, God's knowledge about his own nature and his knowledge before and after the events are the basic points of emphasis [26].

### ***4.3. Divine imminence***

One of the characteristics of God in classical theism is God's distinction from the world, transcendence, and at the same time, his relation with the world, imminence. Based on this classical theistic view, God is distinct from the world and still with it – or rather, encompassing it. One can regard the divine distinction from the world as constituting his transcendence. God is, of course, always in contact with the world and his relation with the world is never cut. Although this divine feature is not usually discussed as a divine attribute, it still holds importance since it is one of the major elements in classical theism.

Based on the theistic view, God is always in contact with his created world. At a minimum, this relation is highlighted on two levels: first that God has made contact with man through revelation, has put certain obligations and duties on his shoulders, and has highlighted the necessity of acting upon these obligations in order to reach salvation. Second, that God, through his grace, controls the natural events and affairs, and he has not left the world after having created it. There are, of course, different interpretations and ideas among the classical theists on the scope and nature of his interference in the cosmic phenomena. However, all of them underscore the divine activity and his control over the world.

Divine imminence as understood in process theology requires God to be contained within the world in such a manner for there to be change and affectability in God. And since we have refuted the idea of mutability, through different arguments, the same would also be applicable here.

Beside the above-mentioned arguments, one can refute process theology's interpretation of divine imminence based on his self-sufficiency. It must be elaborated that one of the attributes highly emphasized in classical theism – and one of the major prerequisites of the divine perfection – is the divine self-sufficiency. What is meant by divine self-sufficiency is that God is by no means dependent on the other creatures. The existence of such a creature is completely "innate" and "from within", in other words "dependent on his own potentials" [7, p. 140-142]. Following this attribute, one can say that if God is to be manifest

in the world, based on the characteristics mentioned in the process theologians' idea of imminence, he must be dependent on and in need of the world and such cosmic entities as time or space-time, and thus, his self-sufficiency would be refuted and with that, he would then be imperfect and infinite. Moreover, the process idea of divine imminence is also refuted by divine simplicity.

## **5. Conclusions**

All the schools of thought believing in God agree on the fact that God possesses the attribute of perfection. However, this very idea of perfection, despite being a point of convergence, is also a point of divergence. In other words, different interpretations of perfection make theologians interpret or prove certain divine attributes in a way that would be in disharmony with other views. Therefore, the major element that brings about the variety of views about and approaches to the concept of God is this very element of perfection. Of course, Hartshorne and Reese regard two elements as decisive in this respect – and hold that the different types of theism differ from one another based on the approaches they take towards these two issues: The first one is the divine independence of the created world beyond him, and second, the divine perfection. One can say, however, the topic of divine dependence or independence too is, in fact, related to the topic of divine perfection and our interpretation of it.

Based on the teachings of process theology, God has a relative perfection, and not an absolute one. According to this teaching, many of the attributes and characteristics attributed to God in classical theism are reconsidered and reinterpreted. As a result, either those attributes are denied or are interpreted in a different way than what was conventionally known by classic theism. Moreover, some of the other special attributes that have been denied of God in classical theism are affirmed. The result of this reconsideration is the refutation of absolute divine perfection (based on the traditional interpretation of theism).

However, in classical theism, divine perfection is interpreted in a way that is not only inconsistent with any imperfection in God, but, furthermore, holds that all the other features and affairs that have to do with materiality and temporality are must be denied for him.

Based on the critiques that are mounted against the perception of relative divine perfection, it has become clear that if God is not the absolute perfect being based on what was said, as a result, he would have imperfections and other negative results. Some of these results are as follows.

- 1) Losing timelessness which leads to divine mortality.
- 2) The incapability of God to create perfectly and flawlessly; in the sense that if God is not an absolute perfect being, he must have certain flaws, which, as a result, cause his incapability in controlling the conditions and limitations of the world he is to create. For example, if God lacked omniscience – in the sense of his dominance over all the aspects, including his knowledge of himself, his knowledge of others, in past, present and

future – he could not be aware of the details of his creation and could hence fail to have control over the future events, which is a very big flaw for a Creator.

- 3) Not being worthy of worship: before all else, clearly God is the object of our worship and prayers. Worship requires unconditional submission. In order for this unconditional submission of man to God to be realized, the being before which we unconditionally submit ourselves must be supreme over all other creatures. Supremacy, however, despite being a prerequisite, is not a sufficient condition for the justification of submission. This Supreme Being should also possess absolute perfection.
- 4) Loss of necessity: If God lacked absolute power he would no longer be the necessary being. In other words, due to his being the necessary being, his absolute perfection is proved, since – as Muslim thinkers have elaborated – the essential necessary being must possess all the attributes in their perfect and supreme form, otherwise he would no longer be regarded as the essential necessary being.

The preceding negative results are enough to convince us that relative divine perfection should be rejected in favor of the idea of absolute divine perfection.

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