



Animal Afterlife from the Viewpoint of the Quran, Islamic Narrations and Mulla Sadra

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Abstract

Muslim philosophers and theologians have disputed over the animal afterlife. Most Muslim scholars hold that the Quran, Islamic narrations and rational arguments affirm the resurrection of animals in the afterlife, though there is a dispute concerning how they will be resurrected and whether they will be rewarded or punished as humans will. Beside the controversies and disputes, several reasons suggest that they have their own afterlife. To prove the animal afterlife, it is necessary to prove primarily that they have soul. Mulla Sadra has attempted to prove that animals have soul, based on the immateriality of the faculty of imagination (*al-Khayāl*). Likewise, most of the reasons provided for the immateriality of human soul could be employed for the animal afterlife. The second stage is to explain the purpose of animal afterlife. Two goals could be mentioned regarding this issue: first, the compensation of evils harming them requires the afterlife. Second, some Quranic verses and Islamic narrations establish the fact that at least some animals have the intellectual faculty and thus have responsibly for their actions. Though these Quranic verses and Islamic narrations are not explicit, they can be a probable evidence for

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the animal afterlife. Finally, two points must be noted: first, though there are several arguments in favor of animal afterlife, there is no general agreement on it in the Islamic world. Second, the above arguments are not general, but they include merely those animals that have the faculty of sensation and have been inflicted by evils.

Key words

Animal, Afterlife, Resurrection, Soul, Quranic Verses, Islamic Narrations, Mulla Sadra.

Introduction

Though there is no agreement on animal afterlife among Muslim philosophers and theologians, some arguments and Islamic narrations suggest their resurrection on the Day of Judgment and afterlife. But there remain some important questions:

1. Do all animals have afterlife or some?
2. What is the purpose of animal afterlife?
3. If some animals will be resurrected, does it follow that they are responsible for their actions?
4. Will animals be rewarded and punished as humans will, or they will be resurrected for other purposes?

In this paper, I review the philosophical theory of the view presented by Mulla Sadra, the eminent Muslim philosopher, on these questions, and then concentrate on Quranic verses and Islamic Narrations concerning this subject.

1. Animal afterlife in Mulla Sadra's View

There is, as I explained, no consensus on animal afterlife among Muslim philosophers and theologians, some accepted it and some rejected it. Likewise, there are various theories on how they will be resurrected; will they be resurrected with their personal identity? will they be punished or rewarded for their actions or they have no wisdom and responsibility toward their actions?

In Mulla Sadra's view, all animals have afterlife, but some lose their personal identity and some preserve it. He distinguishes between two sorts of animals:

A: some animals lack the faculty of imagination (*al-Khayāl*). In Islamic philosophy, the faculty of imagination (*al-Khayāl*), as will be

explained, is the power of understanding of particular images like the image of a particular tree, a particular animal, a particular man etc. Mulla Sadra believes that some animals, like some insects, are not complicated enough to have this capacity. Therefore, they will not be resurrected with their personal identity.

These animals, in Mulla Sadra's view, will be resurrected without their personal identity. This belief is derived from Mulla Sadra's view that all things, including mineral and inanimate things, will be resurrected in the sense that they will return to God. He believes that all things created by God have a goal and purpose, and the purpose of material things is to move toward immateriality and God. He contends that this verse of the Quran refers to this fact:

"Surely, to Allah all things return" (aš-Šūrâ /53).

This opinion of Mulla Sadra is grounded on his belief that no creature has been created futile, and all creatures have the purpose of getting more perfect. The perfectness of inanimate things is to be annihilated in God. Similarly, the perfectness of these animals is to lose their materiality and to be annihilated in God.

B: Mulla Sadra holds that some animals have the faculty of imagination. This faculty, in Mulla Sadra's view, is immaterial, and thus the animals owning it must have immaterial souls. Then since these animals have immaterial souls, they will be resurrected with their personal identity (Sadra, 1960, pp. 248-250; Sadra, 2003, pp. 400-401).

So, the foundation of the theory of animal afterlife for Mulla Sadra is his philosophical principle that the faculty of imagination is immaterial. To explain more, it is necessary to expound that in Muslim philosophy, the soul has the power to perceive four sorts of ideas each of which belongs to a particular faculty:

1. Sensible faculty: this faculty understands sensory ideas; they

are simple phenomena in the soul which result from the effects of the relations between the sensory organs and material realities, such as images of scenery which we see with the eyes, or sounds which we hear with the ears. The subsistence of this kind of idea depends on the subsistence of relations with the external world, and after being cut off from contact with the external world, they vanish in a short time (about one tenth of a second).

2. The faculty of imagination (*al-Khayāl*): this faculty understands imaginary ideas. They are simple specific phenomena in the soul which are subsequent results of sensory ideas and link with the external world. But their subsistence does not depend upon links with the external world, such as the mental image of a view of a garden which remains in the mind even after the eyes are closed, and may be recalled even after years have gone by.

3. The estimative faculty (*al-Wahm*): Many philosophers have mentioned another kind of particular idea which is related to particular meanings, and which is exemplified by the feeling of enmity which some animals have for some others, a feeling which requires them to flee. Some philosophers have extended this term to cover all *particular meanings*, including the feelings of affection and enmity of man, etc.

4. Intellectual faculty: the function of this faculty is to comprehend universal conceptions and ideas (Mesbah, 1999, pp. 133-134).

Mulla Sadra's view on the immateriality of the animal's soul is in contrast to Avicenna. According to Avicenna, if someone has the intellectual faculty, he must have a soul understanding these universal conceptions, but comprehension of other sorts of ideas, like imaginary ideas, does not require an immaterial soul. Accordingly, Avicenna concludes that since animals are unable to have intellectual faculty (the faculty of understanding universal conceptions), they lack an

immaterial soul (Avicenna, 2000, p. 355).

Mulla Sadra disagreed with Avicenna, suggested that any sort of comprehension and understanding requires soul; he argued that all sorts of knowledge are not material and thus they need an immaterial soul. Therefore, he concluded that since animals can understand imaginary concepts, they must possess an immaterial soul by which they get able to understand these conceptions. This theory of animal's soul made a solid foundation for their afterlife, or at least made their afterlife more plausible.

The basic arguments provided by Mulla Sadra to prove animal's soul are:

A: animals can understand themselves as a united being persisting over time. As we can refer to ourselves by "I", animals understand themselves as a singular being owning personal identity. This singular being cannot be a material part of their bodies, since all parts of animals are changing, so the personal identity of animals is because of their immaterial soul; animals have an immaterial soul preserving their personal identity (Sadra, 1960, p. 42).

In fact, this argument had been used before Mulla Sadra to prove the immateriality of the human soul, but Mulla Sadra extended its domain, asserting that it can be used for the immateriality of the animal's souls too.

B: animals know themselves, and achieving knowledge for the knower needs an immaterial subject. In fact, Mulla Sadra believes that the nature of knowledge is the presentation of an immaterial reality for someone; and given this belief, anyone, including animals, who can possess any sort of knowledge must have an immaterial soul (Sadra, 1960, p. 43).

This argument had been used before Mulla Sadra by other Islamic philosophers, but Mulla Sadra employed it for all sorts of knowledge, arguing that possessing any sort of knowledge by animals indicates that they have an immaterial soul.

Therefore, it could be concluded that Mulla Sadra has endeavored to prove the existence of a soul for some animals owning the faculty of imagination, and then proved that they will have afterlife, but the important point that must be noted is that this afterlife is not necessarily a place where they will be punished or rewarded for their actions. Mulla Sadra accepts the afterlife for animals, but it does not follow that they are responsible for their action and will be rewarded or punished, as humans will, in terms of their free actions and decisions.

Consequently, the rational argument of Mulla Sadra for animal afterlife is that they have an immaterial soul, like humans; but in addition to this argument, Mulla Sadra appeals to some Quranic verses upholding his theory of animal afterlife.

Mulla Sadra says that this verse of the Quran might show the resurrection of animals:

"When the savage animals are resurrected" (at-Takwīr/5).

Mulla Sadra holds that this verse of the Quran is vague, since there is the possibility that the meaning of the *savage animals* is people who will be resurrected in the image of savage animals. Given Quranic verses and narrations, wrongdoers on the Day of Judgment will be resurrected in the image of animals. Therefore, Mulla Sadra supposes that there is a possibility that the meaning of this verse of the Quran refers to criminals and wrongdoers who will be resurrected in the image of savage animals. This possibility makes the verse of the Quran ambiguous and maybe irrelevant to animals (Sadra, 1982, p. 285).

Regardless of Mulla Sadra's interpretation of these verses, in the following section, I explain all verses related to animal afterlife and the possible meaning they may have.

2. Animal Afterlife in the Quran

In this section, I seek to focus more carefully on the Quranic verses showing animal afterlife and elucidate their meaning. The verses are as follows:

1. When the savage animals are resurrected (at-Takwīr/5).

There are several possible meanings for this verse of the Quran:

A: the dead animal will be resurrected as humans will. This interpretation is the most possible meaning and is the most compatible with the literal meaning of this verse of the Quran.

B: the living animals will be gathered on the Day of Judgment because of their fear. This is the second possible meaning derived from the word "*ḥushirat*". This word means "gathering" and normally refers to gathering of people in Judgment Day after their resurrection from death, but literally it might refer to living animals who will be gathered in Judgment Day for their fear.

C: human beings will be resurrected in the Judgment Day in the image of savage animals. As I quoted, Mulla Sadra has already referred to this interpretation, but it seems incompatible with the apparent literal meaning of the words of this verse.

However, the first interpretation, which is most probable given the apparent literal meaning of the verse, implies the animal afterlife. But what is the cause behind it and what then happens to them? This verse indicates none of these questions and to find a response to these questions, we should refer to Islamic narrations.

And there is no animal that walks upon the earth nor a bird that flies with its own wings but (they are) groups like you; we have not neglected anything in the book, then to their Lord they shall be gathered (Al-An'am, 38).

2. As I explained, the word "*yuḥsharūn*" refers normally to resurrection and then gathering of creatures in the Judgment Day. Thus, the best possible meaning of this verse is the animal resurrection and afterlife of animals.

3. There are some Quranic verses showing the power of animals to understand. A variety of verses of the Quran does not explicitly refer to animal afterlife, but show their power of understanding. These verses of the Quran make the theory of animal afterlife and even animal responsibility more probable, since the power of understanding makes them responsible to what they do.

The Quran refers to the power of Solomon to speak with animals. Verses 16 to 24 of the chapter Al-Naml (The Ant) of the Quran display plainly the rational power of animals. God says:

Solomon inherited David. He said: 'Know, my people! We have been taught the speech of birds and given everything. Surely, this is a clear bounty. We gathered to Solomon his army of jinn, humans and birds; gathered and dispersed, and when they came to the Valley of the Ants, an ant said: 'O Ants! Go into your dwellings lest Solomon and his army should, unknowingly, crush you. He smiled, and laughed at its words, and said: 'O My Lord! Inspire me that I should be thankful for Your blessing with which You have blessed me and my parents, and that I may do good works that will please You. Admit me, by Your Mercy, among Your righteous worshipers. He reviewed the birds and said: 'Why is it that I do not see the hoopoe here? Or is he among the absent? Surely, I will punish him with a terrible punishment, or I will

slaughter him or he gives me a good reason. He was not long in coming, and said: 'I know what you do not know. I come to you from Sheba with certain news. There I found a woman ruling over them. She possesses everything and has a great throne. But she and her people prostrate to the sun instead of Allah. And Satan has made their deeds seem pleasing to them and barred them from the Path, and therefore they are not guided.

These verses of the Quran suggest explicitly the intellectual faculty of animals, and this upholds the possibility of their afterlife.

However, if someone persists on the metaphorical interpretation of these verses of Quran, I reply that we are not permitted to interpret a text metaphorically, unless we have a strong reason for it. In our discussion, there is no cause to interpret these verses allegorically, and thus the literal meaning of the verses, showing the intellectual power of animals, must be accepted.

3. Animal afterlife in Islamic Narrations

There are several narrations indicating animal afterlife, some show merely their resurrection in afterlife and others suggest their responsibility. They are as follows:

Abuzar [the companion of the Prophet of Islam] says: when we were with the prophet of Islam, two goats were horning each other. The Prophet said [to his companions]: do you know why they were horning? They replied: we don't know. The Prophet said: but God knows it and will judge between them (Howayzi, 1995, Vol. 1, p. 715).

This narration does not only show animal afterlife, but even implies their responsibility to what they do. Likewise, it indicates that some animals will be rewarded or punished for their actions.

It is narrated from al-Sakuni that the Prophet (of Islam) saw a

camel tied and his load was on his back. The Prophet (of Islam) said: Where is the owner? Tell him: Prepare yourself for a complaint (of this camel on afterlife) (al-Saduq, 1993, Vol. 2, p. 292).

Al-Shaykh al-Saduq, one of the greatest Shi'a hadith scholars, explained the hadith that the meaning is that on Judgment Day (afterlife) the camel complains against his owner to God and says: "“what was my sin that you tyrannized me?” Then God takes away his right from the owner. (al-Saduq, 1993, Vol. 2, p. 292). So, the narration implies that those animals suffered and oppressed will have afterlife, not all animals. Likewise, this narration only implies animal afterlife, not their responsibility for their actions.

Imam Sadiq (p.b.u.h) said: every camel by whom people go to the pilgrimage (to Mecca) three years (or seven years in other narrations) will be from the animals of the heaven (al-Saduq, 1993, Vol. 2, p. 293).

This narration only implies animal afterlife, not their responsibility for their actions.

The Prophet of Islam (p.b.u.h) said: respect your sacrificial animals, since you will be ride on them in the bridge of *Serat* (in the judgment day) (al-Saduq, 1966, Vol. 2, p. 438).

This narration only implies animal afterlife, not their responsibility for their actions.

"It is narrated that the horses of fighters [in the way of God] in this world will be their horses in the paradise" (al-Kulayni, 1987, p. 3).

This narration only implies animal afterlife, not their responsibility for their actions.

Some of these narrations suggest that animals will be resurrected and will live in afterlife, but the first and second narration

adds the point that they will be rewarded for their actions and the oppressions they endure in their life will be compensated. Muslim theologians have advanced this subject in the topic of "compensation" (*al-Evaz*), holding that if an animal is oppressed in this world, God must compensate and reward the animal for tyrannies it has experienced in this world. Shaykh al-Mofid, an eminent Muslim theologian, says:

Given the mercy of God and His grace, it is necessary to compensate pains occurring to animals in this world, whether it is from divine action or action of others... God is just and benevolent and does not create something to be harmed (Al-Mufid, 1993, p. 110).

We can argue that for animals suffered in this world, it is necessary for God to compensate their sufferings, but it does not prove their responsibility. However, the first narration might be an argument corroborating their responsibility and thus their being rewarded or punished for their action, but there is no chain of narrators for this narration, and given the laws of the science of Hadith (traditions), it cannot be considered as an authentic narration.

So, it could be held that given the Quranic verses and Islamic narrations, the responsibility of animals is almost likely, but there is no certain argument supporting it. But, is there any rational argument affirming this position?

Some Muslim scholars disagree with it, contending that animals have no intellectual faculty, wisdom and free will, and thus the belief in their responsibility is absurd (Taleghani, 1983, Vol. 3, p. 173).

In contrast, some contemporary interpreters of Quran attempted to prove their responsibility in terms of their limited rational faculty. Allama Tabataba'i (Tabataba'i, 2015, Vol. 13, pp. 82-86) and Ayatollah Makarem (Makarem, 1995, Vol. 5, pp. 224-228) believe that animals have a low level of intellect and rationality and thus might have responsibility for

their actions. This responsibility (if proven) shows the necessity of the existence of afterlife, because this responsibility requires the existence of a world in which animals see the result of their actions.

Allama Tabataba'i, the great cotemporary interpreter of Quran, refers to the verse of the Quran "And there is no animals that walks upon the earth nor a bird that flies with its own wings but (they are) groups like you; we have not neglected anything in the Book, then to their Lord they shall be gathered" (Al-An'am, p. 38), and then holds that the words at the end of the verse, then to their Lord they shall be gathered, show that the resemblance does not mean merely similarity of animals with human being in food, cohabitation and shelter; rather, there is another aspect of similarity which makes them similar to man and that is their gathering in afterlife to God. And being gathered to Allah is naught but a type of conscious life animals, like humans, possess it.

The animal life shows their power to understand. An individual animal, as we observe it, in search of the necessities of its life resorts to systematic movements through which it maneuvers to fulfill its needs about food, cohabitation and shelter, which leaves no room for doubt that it perceives its needs and understands how it would be fulfilled. Thus, it has opinions and beliefs with which it rises to catch beneficial items and repulse harmful things. The scholars who have researched about animals have found in many species like ant, bee and termite, wonderful traces of civilization, fine points of manufacturing and subtle aspects of norms and policies which are generally not found except among civilized and developed human groups. Allama Tabataba'i argues that these evidences show that animals have a sort of faculty of understanding of goodness, badness and even of justice and injustice. It is the basis of their being gathered and reckoning of their deeds as well as their recompenses in form of reward or chastisement in the next life. Thus, it might appear to us that the animals too are subject to gathering

(*al-Hashr*) like the human beings. They may be rewarded and punished, like humans, but it does not mean that animals will be equal to man in perception and will, or that animals will rise up to the rank of man in psychology and spirituality. Such supposition is rejected evidently, and the effects appearing in animals and man refute it.

Allama Tabataba'i concludes that animal societies, like the human society, contain the element of divine religion that is nourished from its nature in the same way as the religion gets nourishment from the human nature and prepares it to be gathered towards Allah, as the natural religion prepares the man for gathering and recompense, even though the observation of the animal's condition, compared to that of the man, shows that animals have not been given details of human cognition nor are they subjected to duties of intricate burdens placed upon the man (Tabataba'i, 2015, Vol. 13, pp. 82-86).

Likewise, Ayatollah Makarem embraces the same position, holding that the complexity of actions practiced by animals is a sign of their intellectual power. Then though he denies the high level of responsibility and intellectual power of animals, he refers to the responsibility of them in terms of the low level of their understanding (Makarem, 1995, Vol. 5, pp. 224-228).

4. Conclusion

Reviewing Mulla Sadra's view, Quranic verses and Islamic narrations, it could be concluded that:

- Animal afterlife is necessary for animals that suffered in this world, given the Mercy and Justice of God.
- There are some evidences suggesting animal afterlife, even those who were not oppressed, but these evidences are not a definite reason. They show only the strong possibility of

animal afterlife.

- There is no certain evidence espousing the responsibility of animals, though it is probable according to some Quranic verses, Islamic narrations and rational arguments. However, the evidences for the moral responsibility of some animals may not be generalizable to all animals.

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