Ibn Taymiyya (Hoover) - Chapter 7 Commentary and Summary

Chapter 7 - God and Creation

Introduction

Ibn Taymiyya has not written more extensively on any topic than theology. His reason for doing so was because he believed Islam suffered from corruption and innovators who deviated the religion. He saw the influx of rationalist theologians, the Asharis, the Mutazila, and the Shia as an affront to the true and pure version of Islam.

Ibn Taymiyya says: "*"The Matrudiyyah are one of the groups whose opinions include true and false views, and some things that go against the Sunnah. It is known that these groups vary with regard to the truth, how near or far they are; the closer they are to the Sunnah, the closer they are to the truth and the right way. Among them are some who went against the Sunnah with regard to basic principles, and some who went against the Sunnah with regard to more subtle issues. There are some who refuted other groups who are farther away from the Sunnah, so they are to be praised with regard to their refutation of falsehood and what they have said of truth, but they have overstepped the mark in so far as they have rejected part of the truth and gone along with some falsehood. So they have refuted a serious bidah by means of a lesser bidah, and refuted falsehood with a lesser form of falsehood. This is the case with most of the philosophers (ahl al-kalaam) who claim to belong to Ahlus Sunnah wal Jamaah…"* (al-Fataawa, 1/348)

Carl Sherif al-Tobgui notes about the origins of Ashari thought, and as well about anti-rationalist views:

"*Al-Ashʿarī adopted theological positions close to those of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal but sought to support these positions on the basis of reasoned argument. The novelty in al-Ashʿarī's approach can be discerned in the fact that even when, in the course of an argument, he quotes from the Qurʾān, it can be seen that he is building up a "considerable structure of rational argument" around the verses. And while it is true that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal had made some cautious use of rational argumentation, al-Ashʿarī went farther by arguing unapologetically for the legitimacy of systematically defending theological doctrines by means of formal rational argumentation based on the very methods developed and employed by the Muʿtazila, whose substantive theological doctrine he had so resolutely rejected… Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, considered the very use of formalized kalām a dangerous capitulation to methods and assumptions that, in and of themselves, were invalid and without foundation*" (Ibn Taymiyya, al-Tobgui)

It is from this perspective, that Ibn Taymiyya (henceforth referred to as IT) argues one of his main concerns- *al-Istiwa'* (The Rising above the Throne)[1]. IT finds himself arguing against three opponents which I will now outline here:

Kalam Theologians

As mentioned above in the quote from al-Tobgui, the standard Hanbali position is to avoid discussion of Kalam. Contemporary to IT, is the famous Ashari Kalam theologian Fakhr al Din al Razi, who is IT's main opponent at the time.

Al Razi, as Hoover describes, believes in the following about Allah being above the Throne:

"The All-Merciful sat over the Throne" cannot be taken in its literal sense because ascribing spatial extension, body, and motion to God is irrational. God is an existent that cannot be perceived by the human senses. God may not be said to be within the world, nor may He be said to be distinct from it."

[1] *The Most Merciful [who is] above the Throne established* (20:5)

In reinterpreting such verses, al Razi comes up with two strategies to dealing with anthropomorphic verses. First is the strategy of delegation (*tafwid*). The second is the strategy of reinterpretation (*tawil*). Tafwid, more or less is to "delegate" the interpretation and true meaning of the verse onto Allah, and to cease further thought on the verse. Tawil on the other hand, seeks to divert the literal, textual meaning into a metaphorical one.

IT, however, objects to the practice of tawil. He claims that performing tawil strips Allah of His attributes, and is therefore negating what Allah has affirmed about Himself. IT also objects to the practice of tafwid, since he believed doing so meant that the Salaf were ignorant about the foundations of the religion; it is not the case that simply only words were conveyed, the Salaf knew the meaning of what they were saying as well.

Finally, Hoover notes:

More fundamentally, Ibn Taymiyya rejects the theological incorporealism that stands behind al-Razi's rule. He does not affirm explicitly that God is bodily and spatial because the terms body (jism) and spatial extension (tahayyuz) do not appear in the Qur'an or the sayings of the Prophet and the Salaf. He seeks to evade the charge of corporealism by reserving the label corporealist (mujassim) for those who affirm explicitly that God has a body. Nevertheless, he also does not deny that God is corporeal or spatial. Ibn Taymiyya is decidedly empiricist. ***He claims that nothing incorporeal and non-spatial exists outside the mind. Something existing outside the mind must be accessible to the human senses, and God is no exception****. While God cannot be seen in this world, He can be seen in dreams, and He will be seen in the hereafter. Ibn Taymiyya's view of God raises questions about God's location and spatial extent, to which I will return below.*

Esoterists

IT also objected to the esoteric school- which believed that the Quran was a hidden, mystical text with secrets not to be informed to the commoners. The Sufis and the Shia were his main opponents in this regard. IT rejects the aforementioned belief that the Quran has meaning that exists outside of the plain reading completely out of hand.

Non-Cognitivism

IT's third opponents are those engaging in tafwid and *imrar* (passing over without pondering the meaning) exclusively (as opposed to the Asharis who practiced this in addition to tawil). Hoover notes one opinion holding to this view:

Instead, Ibn Qudama contends, God must be described as He described Himself in the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet recorded in hadith reports. The texts must be passed over (imrar) without comment and without inquiring into meaning (ma'na) or modality (kayf). The Qur'anic verse, "There is nothing like Him" (Q. 42:11) is sufficient to negate divine corporeality and similarity with creatures. The Salaf, Ibn Qudama continues, remained silent about the meanings of God's attributes and forbade reflecting on them. They transmitted the verbal forms of the attributes but not the meanings. There is in fact no need to know the meanings since no deeds depend on them. It is correct to believe in the attributes with ignorance.

IT's response to these three schools will be outlined by a strategy Hoover calls "Apologetic Interpretivism"

Apologetic Interpretivism

IT agrees, in fact, with Ibn Qudama on many grounds.

Ibn Taymiyya's theology resembles Ibn Quadama's non-cognivitism in certain respects. God must be described as He describes Himself in the Qur'an and the Sunna. God is powerful, willing, loving, wrathful, laughing, and descending. God has a face and hands, and God is sitting over the Throne. The Kalam reinterpretation of God's sitting as possessing strips God of an attribute with which He has described himself. At the same time, God's attributes are unlike those of creatures except for their names, and the modalities of the attributes are unknown. The meanings, however, are known. Whereas Ibn Qudama says that both meaning and modality are unknown, Ibn Taymiyya distinguishes between the two.

However, the difference between Ibn Qudama's view and IT's view is that the latter believed that the meanings of anthropomorphic verses are in fact known. IT believed we can and should attempt to know the meanings of Allah's self-descriptions to recognize a vision of Allah that is worthy of being worshipped.

One of IT's central claims is that reason does not contradict in any way with revelation. If there is a contradiction between our reason and revelation, it is a fault of our limited reasoning. For example, when it comes to logic, he does not believe in the necessary probity of logic (c.f. *Al Radd ala al Mantiqiyyin*). Although this may be taken as an anti-intellectual approach, it is in fact a well argued, and philosophically advanced book, that was not matched or paralleled until Ludwig Wittgenstein later argued the same points. It is from this view, that he writes "*Dar Tarud al Aql wal Naql*" (The Reconcilliation of Rationality and Revelation). In this book, he argues many of the views that we associate with him today.

IT uses many arguments against what he believes to be imperfections in Allah. For example, as we have mentioned before, IT was a staunch materialist. Because of this, he did not believe that Allah could be immaterial, since in IT's mind, something immaterial cannot have an outside reality from the mind. Similarly, he argues, Allah cannot have a daughter because having a daughter is an imperfection on a man, so it would be even moreso of an imperfection to a human.

IT strives to ascribe the highest forms of *kamal* (perfection) to Allah, and believes all perfections belong to Him alone. If humans have a certain perfection, it must necessarily mean that the cause, Allah, has even moreso of that same perfection. Hoover quotes IT as saying:

If [God] were not living, knowing, hearing, seeing and speaking, it would necessarily follow that He is dead, ignorant, deaf, blind and mute. He must be exonerated of these imperfections. Indeed, He – Glory be to Him – has created whoever is living, hearing, seeing, speaking, knowing, powerful and moving. So, He is all the more worthy to be like that. Indeed, every perfection in a caused, created thing is from the perfection of the Creator.

Similar Hoover paraphrases:

Ibn Taymiyya says that God is moving (mutaharrik) because, as he argues, a God who could not move on His own initiative would be inferior to creatures who can so move. Ibn Taymiyya also argues that laughter and joy are attributed to God in order to rule out the imperfections of crying and sadness. Furthermore, God has hands because one who has power to act with his hands is superior to one who does not have that option. Ibn Taymiyya exonerates God of the imperfections of eating and drinking on the grounds that God has no need to take anything into Himself. Ultimately, explains Ibn Taymiyya, God is ascribed with the highest imaginable perfections, and the pinnacle of those perfections is to be unlike creatures…. Ibn Taymiyya argues that such texts [referring to Allah being above the throne] *are so numerous that they provide certain knowledge that God is above and outside the created world. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyya argues rationally, if God were in the world, He would come into contact with all manner of dirt and filth found within it. That would be unworthy of God.*

Indeed he believes this because if we were to say Allah does not *literally* hear, or see, or speak- then it is tantamount to denying that attribute altogether, since IT's belief is that *tawil* is a denial. Note as well, IT uses many analogies from Allah to the creation, in order to argue that Allah's perfection is in the same way, and must necessarily have those same attributes.

<u>God is Sitting Over the Throne</u>

Knowing IT's general principles of interpretation, we turn back to IT's focus on Allah's sitting over the throne. IT faces two contradictory verses:

and He is with you wherever you are. (57:4) and *The Most Merciful [who is] above the Throne established (20:5)*

It cannot be the case, as Razi argues, that Allah is both simultaneously above the Throne and also everywhere else at the same time. Thus al Razi argues that "with" in the verse 57:4 cannot refer to literal physical location, but rather refers to Allah's knowledge, and that Allah is constantly watchful over His servants.

It is important to note that IT is in fact *not* a literalist theologian. In fact, as we mentioned before, IT was an incredibly advanced philosopher. His theory of language was that all language is contextual. That is, no words have inherent meaning except by the context they are in. Literal is a meaningless distinction, and the only meaningful concern with language is the intention of the speaker. That is to say, if I called someone a "dog", my intent is to insult them and my *intended* meaning is to say that someone is degraded or submissive, not to say that they are in fact the animal dog which would be in line with the *lexical* or *prescribed* meaning.

By this IT denies Razi's argument by saying, Allah's intended meaning of "with" is that Allah is not spatial proximity, and that it is a strawman to suggest that "with" in 57:4 could mean location. Similarly, IT argues that above in 20:5 *does* mean locationally above, because of other verses, and other hadith that allegedly indicate that being the case. As such, IT, in denying the lexical theory of language in favor of a contextual one, is able to control and argue things according to his view.

Nonetheless Hoover notes that IT does not wish to analogise and ascribe human qualities to Allah. Rather Hoover notes:

Ibn Taymiyya is careful to indicate that his exploration of meaning is not a matter of likening and assimilating God to creatures.

IT also engages in rational defenses against Al Razi on the matter of Allah being above the throne. For example, Al Razi argues, Allah cannot be literally above, since if the earth is round, then Allah will be below someone if he is above someone on the opposite side. Therefore, this is a logical impossibility. IT responds to this by claiming that Allah is extremely large, and the earth is relatively very small in comparison to Allah. He cites the verse:

"The whole earth will be in His grip on the Day of Resurrection, and the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand" (39:67).

IT says, Allah is so large in fact, that He is above it on all sides and in every place, and therefore surrounds the Earth from all sides.

Al Razi also says, if Allah were to have a physical size, then He must necessarily be divisible into parts, since everything larger than *atoms* must necessarily be divisible into atoms, and is therefore dependant on those parts to exist, and would therefore compromise Allah's unity. IT argues instead that we can conceive of something as having

size, but not having parts, and being referred to as one unity. For example, he cites the Sun- it is large, but we cannot say that the sun is dependant on its left side or its right side to exist as the Sun. Rather, we refer to it as a whole, and it is indivisible into parts. Second, IT argues, that Asharis themselves allow for division of parts in Allah because they believe in separated attributes of Allah.

However, it is important to note that nowhere does IT *ever* use the words *body* or *spatial extension* because he believes such words are only the words of the *falasifa* and are an unquranic *biddah*.

For instances like this, IT was jailed under the charge of anthropomorphism. Many of his opponents, the Asharis and the Shia, accused him of anthropomorhpism. And although he never explicitly stated that Allah has a body, etc etc. IT's language suggests that in fact Allah does.

For example al-Tobgui describes:

According to Ibn Taymiyya, it is the metaphysical and ontological modality—and therefore the ultimate reality (ḥaqīqa)—of God's settling that constitutes the taʾwīl that is known only unto God, not the lexical significance of the phrase "istawā ʿalā al-ʿarsh" (the taʾwīl of which, from the linguistic perspective, is known to us as well). If the lexical signification of the verse, as understood according to the linguistic convention of the Salaf, were not known to us, then the verse would simply have no determinable meaning for us whatsoever, an eventuality precluded by the fact of revelation's signature clarity (bayān) and lack of ambiguity

In support of this understanding of taʾwīl, Ibn Taymiyya appeals to the early jurist,muftī of Medina, and contemporary of Mālik,Ibn al-Mājishūn (d.164/780 or 781), as well as to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal "and others among the Salaf," who used to say, "We do not know the 'how' (kayfiyya) of what God has stated about Himself, even though we do know its explication (tafsīrahu) and its meaning (maʿnāhu)." Indeed, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) reportedly stated that "God did not reveal any verse except that He desired [us] to know what He meant by it,"and in this spirit, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal "explicated (fassara) all the mutashābih verses in the Qurʾān and clarified what was meant by them

Here IT is responding the non-cognitivists by saying that simple imrar renders Allah's verses meaningless. IT is literally affirming Allah is spatially above the throne, but leaves the question of how this is possible or what the actual ontological nature and reality of Allah's rising above the throne up to Allah.

This is not an anomalous opinion, in fact, many Hanbali theologians ascribed to the same view.

ibn Musʻab al-Sarakhsi] (d. 168/785), who is quoted about istiwa' (translated above as being 'established' on the Throne), "Does istiwa' mean anything except sitting?" (Kitab al Sunnah, Ibn Hanbal)

Ibn al-Qayyim also mentions the hadith of al-Bukhari warning of the Antichrist (al-Masih al-Dajjal), who, in the Last Days will come forth and claim to be God, of which the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, "Allah has sent no prophet except that he warned his people of the One Eyed Liar, and that he is one-eyed—and that your Lord is not one-eyed—and that he shall have unbeliever (kafir) written between his two eyes" (Sahih al-Bukhari [1350/1898. Reprint. Istanbul: Maktaba Pamuk, n.d.], 8.172). Ibn al-Qayyim comments, "The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) negated the attribute of one-eyedness [of Allah], which is proof that Allah Most High literally has two eyes" [emphasis mine] (ibid)

"when He Most Blessed and Exalted sits on the Kursi, a squeak is heard like the squeak of a new leather saddle" or "Allah wrote the Torah for Moses with His hand while leaning back on a rock, on tablets of pearl, and the screech of

the quill could be heard. There was no veil between Him and him", or "The angels were created from the light of His two elbows and chest"

So in other words, the charge of anthropomorphism is in no way lifted from IT, simply on the basis that he does not explicitly mention that he is an anthropomorphist. These are opinions that he literally ascribes to, and does not attempt to divert from or reinterpret them in any way. In fact he takes it a step further than Ahmad ibn Hanbal who, when asked about anthropomorphism says:

Imam Ahmad was asked about the hadiths mentioning "Allah's descending," "seeing Allah," and "placing His foot on hell"; and the like, and he replied: "We believe in them and consider them true, without 'how' and without 'meaning' (bi la kayfa wa la ma'na)" (Nuh Keller)

Instead, IT leaves the *kayfa* (the howness) up to Allah, and literally affirms their meanings.

For further reading, we can see his Aqeeda al Wasitiyyah, wherein there are chapters titled: *Attribute of the face of Allah, glory be to Him*, *Affirming the hands of Allah the Exalted*, *Affirming the eyes of Allah the Exalted*, .

The Timelessly Eternal God of Philosophy and Kalam

Just as how IT believed that Allah was spatially extended and had physical size, so too did IT believe that Allah acted *in* time. Rather than the belief that Allah is *outside of time*, IT believed Allah experiences time in much the same way that we do, in that there is indeed a "past" and a "future" for Allah. Hoover notes:

Ibn Taymiyya's view of God is dynamic. He maintains that God wills on account of causes or wise purposes that subsist in God's essence. Moreover, God creates perpetually by His will and power from eternity. These doctrines mark Ibn Taymiyya off from the mainstream of Islamic philosophers and Kalam theologians. While those philosophers and Kalam theologians differ over the relation of purpose to God's will, they all agree that God is timelessly eternal.

Then he describes:

The Ash'ari Kalam theologians deny purpose and causality in God's will for three reasons. First, purpose would introduce imperfection and need into God. Those performing acts for purposes are perfected by them. If God willed to act for a purpose, God would be imperfect prior to the act and then perfected by it. Second, it would introduce temporality into God's essence. If God willed and acted for a purpose, God would change through time as He fulfills His purposes. God would become a substrate for temporally originating events (hawadith). Third, purpose would introduce an infinite regress of causes into God's essence. Each purpose or cause would require a prior purpose or cause to bring it into existence, and this would lead to a chain of causes back into the infinite past. To avoid all of these problems, the Ash'aris affirm that seven eternal and essential attributes subsist in God's timeless essence.

God Wills for Wise Purposes and Creates from Eternity

IT believes, as we have just mentioned, that Allah acts *in* time, and more importantly, "updates" Himself as time goes on. He claims that acting is an attribute of perfection, and thus Allah must necessarily have it. Hoover notes:

Ibn Taymiyya's position entails temporally originating events subsisting in God's essence. He has no difficulty with this, and he asserts that it is the position of the Salaf.

Al-Razi maintained the traditional Ash'ari doctrine of God's timelessness throughout most of his life. Then, as Ibn Taymiyya himself points out, al-Razi argues in his late work Sublime Issues (al-Matalib al-'aliya) that originating events in God's essence is the logically necessary position for all theological groups. It follows from God's knowledge of changing events occurring in the world that God's knowledge itself changes. God does not hear words until they are spoken or see a picture until it exists. God's will to originate also involves temporal origination in God Himself. Al-Razi does not integrate the import of these arguments into his wider theology, but Ibn Taymiyya does.

IT also undermines the idea that an infinite regress is absurd and claims:

"[God] has been active from eternity when He willed with acts that subsist in His self by His power and His will one after another"

Hoover then notes:

Ibn Taymiyya's view of God's continuous creation of the world is similar to that of Averroes, and he was aware of Averroes's writings on the matter. Both Averroes and Ibn Taymiyya reject Avicenna's emanation scheme. Both also observe that the Kalam account of creation of the world out of nothing with a beginning violates the plain sense of the revealed texts. The Qur'an does not say that Throne: "[God] created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His Throne was on the water" (Q. 11:7). The Qur'an also indicates that this world was created out of prior matter: "[God] rose toward the heaven when it was smoke, and He said to it and to the earth, 'Come willingly or unwillingly'. They both said, 'We come, willingly'" (Q. 41:11). From this, and on the basis of God's perfection, Ibn Taymiyya affirms that God's world of created things extends infinitely into the past.

Meaning, IT believed that Allah was always eternally creating things- that Allah was *not* as is typically said an "unmoved mover" or the "first-cause" as is typically used in proofs of Allah. IT does not see an issue that this undermines such proofs of Allah. He himself believes we do not need any philosophically defensible proof of Allah to affirm His existence[2]. An infinite regress is of no trouble or no issue to him. Hoover notes:

A timelessly eternal God could never give rise to the temporality of this world. For the same reason, Ibn Taymiyya agrees with the philosophers that the timelessly eternal will of the Kalam God can never begin to originate the world without a temporal cause originating.

This is the view of the Kalam theologians, and IT agrees with this view.

One of the critiques the philosophers will bring is that Allah cannot have intentions, as intentions require a goal, and a goal means that something is lacked prior that Allah does not possess. IT, as part of his attempt to show that Allah acts in time and dynamically with the changes of the world, denies this and says, if Allah did not have intentions, He could not be wise. Hoover notes:

Ibn Taymiyya explains, "Anyone who commits an act in which there is neither pleasure, nor benefit, nor profit for himself in any respect, neither sooner nor later, is aimless, and he is not praised for this" (MF 8:89–90). For Ibn Taymiyya, God acts on account of wise purposes subsisting in God's essence that redound to both creatures and God Himself. Ibn Taymiyya's God is self-interested and utilitarian in much the same fashion as human beings.

Of course, the Ashari's say Allah is self-sufficient of His creation, why should Allah have goals the same way we do- and why should Allah depend on creating wisely to remain as Allah? IT responds by saying, Allah is eternally

[2] Atheism and Radical Skepticism: Ibn Taymiyyah's Epistemic Critique

creative, and the world is intrinsic to Allah's perfection. Rather than saying Allah is not in need of His creation, IT says Allah needs no help in creating His creation.

To summarize IT's position, Allah must act intentionally, in time, and with wise purposes in order to be considered a wise God in worthy of being worshipped.

The Shia View

Given all of this, what could be the Shia position on Allah's attributes? For one, we have narrations that go against the rationalist trends, and some that are for the rationalist trends. But before we discuss such narrations and the Shia view, it is important to realize the phenomenon IT is part of.

It is clear that every one wishes to worship a perfect God. However, is it the case that we can ever know: what the definition of perfection is, and secondly whether we can know what fits into said definition in the first place? For IT, anything non-corporeal is imperfect, so he defines perfection in corporeal terms. Similarly, every decides to restrain and speak on Allah's behalf as to what His perfection should be. Just as how people restrain Allah's laws and His rulings and question His decisions on the basis of one's own limited perspective, so too do people use pseudo-rational argumentation to explain how Allah is. In this light, understanding the feeble and limited nature of human intellect and knowledge, we should understand the Shia position into Kalam as being one close to *imrar*. That is to refrain from speaking of technical matters of Allah's essence in of itself.

We can therefore make sense of the following narrations from the Ahlul Bayt:

On the authority of Abu Basir that Abu Ja`far al-Baqir (AS) said: "Discuss the creation of Allah, but refrain from discussing about Allah. Verily, discussing about Allah causes nothing but confusion." (al-Tawhid)

On the authority of Fudayl ibn Yasir that Abu `Abd Allah al-Sadiq (AS) said: O son of Adam! If a bird ate you heart, it would not fill him. If your eye was placed with a hole of a needle it would certainly be covered. And yet you seek to understand the heavens and the earth by means of your heart and your eyes? If what you claim is correct, namely, that you can understand Allah, then here is the sun, a creation from the creations of Allah, If your eyes can stand the sight of it, then what you say is true. (al-Tawhid)

In this narration, we are told, our hearts are so small, it cannot even fill the creation. Our eyes are so limited, that we cannot see even if something as small as a needle obscures our vision. We are told by the Imam, if you seek to understand and contain the essence of your Lord, look at the Sun, the creation. If you cannot take in the creation, how does one expect to take in the Creator. Our physical senses, our rationality, our intellect, cannot take in or understand, this created, limited, and fallible world, how is it then, that we expect to categorize, and rationalise, and explain Allah the Creator and the Almighty.

[8/-] al-Kafi: Muhammad b. Yahya from Ahmad b. Muhammad from al-Husayn b. Sai'd from al-Nadhr b. Suwayd from A'sim b. Humayd who raised it - he said: Ali b. al-Husayn عليه السلام was asked about Tawhid (Unity of God) so he said: Allah Mighty and Majestic knew that there would in the last age peoples who delve deep (wanting to know) so Allah the Elevated brought down "Say: He is Allah One" (chapter 112) and the verses in Surat al-Hadid until His words "and He is Knowing of that within the hearts" (57:6) so whoever looks (desires) beyond that then he has perished. (Al Kafi)

Whatever is in the heavens and earth exalts Allah,1 and He is the Exalted in Might, the Wise. His is the dominion of the heavens and earth. He gives life and causes death, and He is over all things competent. He is the First and the Last, the Ascendant (the Apparent) and the Intimate, and He is, of all things, Knowing. It is He who created the

heavens and earth in six days and then established Himself above the Throne.1 He knows what penetrates into the earth and what emerges from it and what descends from the heaven and what ascends therein; and He is with you2 wherever you are. And Allah, of what you do, is Seeing. His is the dominion of the heavens and earth. And to Allah are returned [all] matters. (57:1-5)

We are not meant to understand and rationalize and categorize and analogize Allah to the creation. We are meant to recognize Him and worship Him and praise Him.
Since our feeble intellects cannot grasp there- we look to the Imams to give us guidance in these regards.

With regards to the rising above the throne, the Imam has denied and negated Allah having spatial quality:

A group of our people from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Khalid from Ahmad ibn Muhammad ibn Abu Nasr who has said the following. A man from Ma Wara' Nahr Balkh (Transoxania) came to abu al-Hassan al-Rida (a.s.), and said, 'I have a question for you. If your answer is the same as I already know, I will accept you as my Imam (leader with divine authority).'" Imam abul-Hassan (a.s.) replied, "Ask whatever you wish." The man said, "Tell me when did your Lord come into existence, how has He been and on what did He depend?" Imam Abul-Hassan (a.s.), replied, "Allah, the Blessed, the Almighty, is the space maker of space, Who Himself is not subject to the effects of any space. He is the maker of How and Himself is not subject to How. He is Self-sufficient with His own power." The man stood up and kissed the head of the Imam (a.s.) and then said, "I testify that there is no god except Allah and Muhammad (s.a.) is the Messenger of Allah and that Imam Ali (a.s) is the successor of the Messenger of Allah and the Guardian and protector of what the Messenger of Allah has brought from Allah and that your forefathers are the leaders with divine authority and that you are a successor to them." (Al Kafi)

Otherwise, we turn to the Ahlul Bayt to teach us about Allah- and refrain as far as they refrain.