# Destiny and human free will

The existence of human free will is asserted on the following grounds:

* We feel remorse when we do something wrong. We beg God's forgiveness for our sins. If we trouble or harm someone, we ask that person to excuse us. These actions show that we choose to act in a particular way. If we could not choose our actions and were compelled to do them by a superior power, why should we feel remorse and seek forgiveness for anything?
* We choose to move our hands, speak, or stand up to go somewhere. We decide to read a book, watch television, or pray to God. We are not forced to do anything, nor or are we somehow remotely controlled by an invisible, superior power.
* We hesitate, reason, compare, assess, choose, and then decide to do something. For example, if our friends invite us to go somewhere or do something, we first go through this mental process and then decide whether we will accompany them or not. We repeat this very process maybe 100 times a day.
* When we are wronged, we sometimes sue the one who wronged us. The court does not ascribe the wrong done to a compelling superior power like Destiny, and neither do we. The accused does not excuse himself or herself by blaming that power. Virtuous and wicked people, those who are promoted to high social ranks and those who waste their time, those who are rewarded for their good acts or success and those who are punished for their crimes—all of this proves that each of us has free will.
* Only the insane are not held responsible for their acts. Human reason and other mental faculties require us to decide and act freely; the results seen in our lives prove the truth of this assertion. Without free will, human reason and other faculties have no meaning.
* Animals have no will power, and so act under God's guidance ("instinct," according to materialistic science). For example, bees always build hexagonal hives. Since they have no will power, they never even try to build triangular hives or a nest. But we consider many alternatives before acting or speaking. We also are free to change our minds, which we do when confronted with emergencies or new, better proposals. This also indicates our free will.

Our Free Will's Nature. Our free will is not visible and has no material existence. However, such factors do not render its existence impossible. Everyone has two (physical) eyes, but we also can see with our third (spiritual) eye. We use the former to see things in this world; we use the latter to see things beyond events and this world. Our free will is like our third eye, which you may call insight. It is an inclination or inner force by which we prefer and decide.

We will and God creates. A project or a building's plan has no value or use unless you start to construct the building according to it, so that it becomes visible and serves many purposes. Our free will resembles that plan, for we decide and act according to it, and God creates our actions as a result of our decisions. Creation and acting are different things. God's creation means that He gives actual existence to our choices and actions in this world. Without God's creation, we cannot act.

To illuminate a magnificent palace, we must install a lighting system. However, the palace cannot be illuminated until we flick the switch that turns on the lights. Until we do so, the palace will remain dark. Similarly, each man and woman is a magnificent palace of God. We are illuminated by belief in God, Who has supplied us with the necessary lighting system: intellect, reason, sense, and the abilities to learn, compare, and prefer.

Nature and events, as well as Divinely revealed religions, are like the source of electricity that illuminates this Divine palace of the human individual. If we do not use our free will to flick the switch, however, we will remain in darkness. Turning on the light means petitioning God to illuminate us with belief. In a manner befitting a servant at the master's door, we must petition the Lord of the Universe to illuminate us and so make us a "king" or a "queen" in the universe. When we do this, the Lord of the Universe treats us in a way befitting Himself, and promotes us to the rank of kingship over other realms of creation.

God takes our free will into account when dealing with us and our acts, and then uses it to create our deeds. Thus we are never victims of Destiny or wronged by Fate. However insignificant our free will is when compared with God's creative acts, it is still the cause of our deeds. God makes large things out of minute particles, and creates many important results from simple means. For example, He makes a huge pine tree from a tiny seed, and uses our inclinations or free choice to prepare our eternal happiness or punishment.

To better understand our part, and that of our willpower, in our acts and accomplishments, consider the food we consume. Without soil and water, air and the sun's heat, none of which we can produce or create despite our advanced technology, we would have no food. We cannot produce even a seed of corn. We did not create our body, of which cannot control one single part, or establish its relationship with food. For example, if we had to wind our heart like a clock at a fixed time every morning, how long would we survive?

Obviously, almost all parts of the whole complex and harmonious universe, which is a most developed organism, work together according to the most delicate measures to produce a morsel of food. Thus, the price of that morsel is almost as much as the price of the whole universe. How can we possibly pay such a price, when our part in producing that morsel is utterly negligible, consisting of no more than our own effort?

Can we ever thank God enough for even a morsel of food? If only a picture of grapes were shown to us, could all of us work together and produce it? No. God nourishes us with His bounty, asking in return very little. If He told us to perform 1,000 rak'as (units) of prayer for a bushel of wheat, we would have to do so. If He sent a raindrop in return for one rak'a, we would have to spend our whole lives praying. If you were left in the scorching heat of a desert, would you not give anything for a single glass of water?

How can we thank Him enough for each bodily limb? When we see sick and crippled people in hospitals, or when we ourselves are ill, we understand how valuable good health is. But can we ever thank Him enough for this blessing? The worship God Almighty orders us to perform is, in fact, for our personal benefit and spiritual refinement, and well as for a good personal and collective life. Furthermore, if we believe in and worship God, He rewards us with infinite happiness and bounties in Paradise.

In sum: Almost everything we have is given to us for practically nothing, and our part in the bounty we enjoy here is therefore quite negligible. Similarly, our free will is equally negligible when compared with what God Almighty creates from our use of it. Despite our free will's weakness and our own inability to really understand its true nature, God creates our actions according to the choices and decisions we make through it.

Divine Destiny Is Compatible with Human Free Will [\*]. Throughout history, people have tried to distinguish or reconcile Divine Will and human free will. Some have denied free will, while others have claimed that we create our own deeds and thereby ignore Destiny. However, as Islam is the middle way in everything, it proclaims that Divine Destiny dominates existence, including the human realm, but that we can use our free will to direct our lives.

The Qur'an expresses the true nature of this relation as follows: This [Qur'an] is a reminder unto the worlds, unto whoever among you wills to walk straight. You do not will, unless God wills, the Lord of the Worlds (81:27–29). These verses attribute absolute will to God Almighty, but do not deny human free will. In another verse, we read that God creates you and whatever you do (37:96).

Other verses speak of a covenant between us and God, and openly declare that we direct history: Fulfil [your part of] the covenant so that I fulfil [My part of] the covenant (2:40); If you help God['s religion], He will help you and will make your foothold firm (47:7); and God changes not the condition of a people unless they change what is in their hearts (13:11).

Except for humanity and jinn, both of whom have free will and must account for their acts, Divine Destiny is the only absolutely dominant factor in existence. To reconcile Destiny and human free will, consider the following:

* Destiny is a title for Divine Knowledge. God's Knowledge comprehends everything within and beyond time and space. If your knowledge allows you to know beforehand that a certain thing will happen at a certain future time, your "prediction" will come true. But this does not mean that your foreknowledge caused it to happen. Since everything and event are comprehended in God's Knowledge, He writes what will happen at a given time and place, and it does so. What God writes and what we do are exactly the same; not because God writes it and then forces us to do it, but because we will it and then do it.

For example: A train travels between Istanbul and Ankara. Considering its speed and characteristics, the railway's condition, the distance between the two cities, as well the number of stations along the way and how much time must be spent in each, a timetable can be prepared. Does this timetable cause the train to travel?

The time and duration of solar and lunar eclipses are known and written beforehand based on astronomical calculations. Does such foreknowledge and recording cause the eclipses? Of course not. Since astronomers knew beforehand when the eclipse would occur, they recorded it. The same relationship exists between Destiny and human free will.

* Our free will is included in Destiny. For example, someone asks you whether the clock in the next room is working. You hear it and answer in the affirmative. The questioner does not need to ask whether its hands are moving, for if the clock is working, its gears are working and its hands are moving. In an analogous way, Destiny and human free will are not mutually exclusive. We are neither dried leaves blown by the wind of Destiny nor completely independent of It. As Islam always follows the middle way, it explains the true relationship between Destiny and our free will: we will and do something, and God creates it.
* In the view of Destiny, cause and effect cannot be separated. That is, it is destined that this cause will produce that effect. But we cannot argue that killing someone is alright because the victim was destined to die at that time or place, and would have died anyway even if he or she had not been shot. Such an argument is baseless, since the victim is actually destined to die as a result of being shot. The argument that the victim would have died even without being shot would mean that this death was senseless. How would we explain such a death? Remember that there are not two kinds of Destiny, one for the cause and the other for the effect. Destiny is one.

\* Most Western Orientalists accuse Islam of being fatalistic, although only one small Islamic sect—the Jabriya—has ever defended fatalism. On the contrary, almost all Western philosophies of history and, to some extent, Christianity, are fatalistic and based on the supposed irresistibility of historical laws. The outlines of those philosophies of history may be summed up as follows:

* Humanity is steadily progressing toward the final happy end.
* This progress depends on the fatalistic, irresistible laws of history, which are completely independent of humanity. Therefore, we must obey these laws if we do not want to be eliminated.
* We cannot criticize the stages (e.g., primitive, feudal, or capitalistic) through which must inevitably pass, because we have nothing to do other than passing through them.

Such views imply the following: Present socioeconomic and even political conditions are inevitable, because they were dictated by nature, which decrees that only the able and the powerful can survive. If these laws favor the West, the communities that choose to survive must concede to the West's dominion.

What distinguishes the Qur'anic concept of history from other philosophies is the following:

• While philosophers of history or sociologists build their conceptions on the interpretation of past events and present situations, the Qur'an deals with the matter from the perspective of unchanging principles.

• The Qur'an stresses individual and communal free choice and moral conduct. Although Divine Will could be regarded as, in some respects, the counterpart of Geist in Hegelian philosophy and of absolute, irresistible laws of history in other philosophies, the Qur'an never denies human free will. God tests humanity here so that it should sow the "field" of the world to harvest in the next life, which is eternal. For this reason, all that happens here are occasions that God causes to follow one another so that good and evil people may be distinguished. Testing requires that the one being tested have free will to choose. Thus, according to the Qur'an, we are the ones who make history, not not a compelling Divine Will. God simply uses our choice to bring His universal will into effect. If this point is understood, the Western philosophies of history and their conception of some "inevitable end" are seen to be ground-less. (Tr.)

• People tend to imagine, excluding themselves from the passage of time, a limit for past time extending through a certain chain of things. They call this azal (past eternity). But to reason according to such an idea is unacceptable. To better understand this subtle point, consider the following:

Imagine you are holding a mirror in your hand. Everything reflected on the right represents the past, while everything reflected on the left represents the future. The mirror can reflect only one direction, since it cannot show both sides at once while you are holding it. If you want to see both directions simultaneously, you would have to rise high above your original position so that left and right unite into one direction and nothing could be called first or last, beginning or end.

Divine Destiny, in some respects identical with Divine Knowledge, is described in a Prophetic saying as containing all time and events as a single point, where first and last, beginning and end, what has happened and what will happen are all united into one. As we are not excluded from it, our understanding of time and events could be like a mirror to the past.

* We do not create our actions. If we actually did so, we also would have to be their ultimate cause. If that were the case, we could not have free will, for, according to logic, a thing exists if its existence is absolutely necessary and all necessary conditions are prepared for its existence. Thus whatever comes into existence has to have a real, complete cause. But a complete cause would make the existence of something compulsory, meaning that there would be no room for choice.
* Although our free will cannot cause something to happen, Almighty God has made its operation a simple condition for bringing His universal Will into effect. He uses our free will to guide us in our chosen direction, and so we are responsible for our actions. If you place your child on your shoulders and, at her request, take her outside, she might catch a cold. Could she blame you for her cold? Indeed, you might even punish her for her request. In a similar manner, Almighty God, the Most Just of Judges, never forces His servants to do anything, and so has made His Will somewhat dependent on human free will.

We may summarize the discussion so far in seven points:

1. Divine Destiny, also called Divine determination and arrangement, dominates the universe but does not cancel our free will.
2. Since God is beyond time and space and everything is included in His Knowledge, He encompasses the past, present, and future as one undivided and united point. For example: If you are in a room, your view is restricted to the room. If you look from a higher point, you can see the whole city. As you rise higher and higher, your vision continues to broaden. The Earth, when seen from the moon, appears to be a small blue marble. It is the same with time.
3. Since all time and space are included in God's Knowledge as a single point, God recorded everything that will happen until the Day of Judgment. Angels use this record to prepare a smaller record for each individual.
4. We do not do something because God recorded it; God knew beforehand what we would do it and recorded it.
5. There are not two destinies: one for the cause, the other for the effect. Destiny is one and relates simultaneously to the cause and the effect. Our free will, which causes our acts, is included in Destiny.
6. God guides us to good things and actions, and allows and advises us to use our willpower for good. In return, He promises us eternal happiness in Paradise.
7. We have free will, although we contribute almost nothing to our good acts. Our free will, if not used properly, can destroy us. Therefore we should use it to benefit ourselves by praying to God. This will make it possible for us to enjoy the blessings of Paradise, a fruit of the chain of good deeds, and attain eternal happiness. Furthermore, we always should seek God's forgiveness so that we might refrain from evil and be saved from the torments of Hell, a fruit of the accursed chain of evil deeds. Prayer and trusting in God greatly strengthen our inclination toward good, and repentance and seeking God's forgiveness greatly weaken, even destroy, our inclination toward evil and transgression.