

Determinism & Free Will

(Jabr w Tafweed)

The Mutazilites: Absolute Free Will

- Our actions are completely our responsibility, and that is the reason Allah ordered us to perform certain actions or refrain from certain actions, otherwise why would God order the individual to act or not act in the first place?

- We know reward and punishment to be a certain principle of Islam. Therefore, the idea of the afterlife and our recompense correlates with our idea of free will.

- All evil is from the hand of human beings themselves and is not an action of Allah - forming the Mutazilite belief in the justice of God.

- The effect does not need the cause in its subsistence, meaning that after power and will was given to the human being, the cause which gave them that power no longer has anything to do with the action taking place.

The Asharites: Determinism

- All action is attributed directly to Allah, the only actor in all of existence, whereas the human being has nothing to do with any action. Even the action of the human being is a creation of Allah.

- Our position correlates with the classical reports concerning destiny and the divine decree

- As for good (husn) and evil (qubh), they are not rational so that they are known through the intellect, rather we know what is good and evil through the Sharia itself.

'There can never be two causes for one effect'.

The views of the Mutazilites and Asharites can be traced to the same origin found in this following philosophical principle, referred to as Burhān al-tawarud.

To explain this principle further; if I have two complete causes, each one must be a cause for a separate effect. It is impossible for there to be two complete causes whilst the result is only one effect. Therefore, the Mutazilites and Asharites were both facing the same problem in that when it comes to action, then it is either the action of God or the action of the human being, and it cannot be the act of the both of them.

The problem for the Asharites and Mutazilites stemmed from them regarding the two causes as being linear and transverse (horizontal). Were they to regard them as two complete causes whilst one stems from the other and so being longitudinal and hierarchical (vertical) – then such a position would not contradict the philosophical principle, because the cause would ultimately be only one.

Imam Jafar al-Sadiq, in response to these ideas, cites the famous Quranic verse “You [alone] do we worship, and to You [alone] do we turn for help”.

It would make no sense to ascribe ‘worship’ to ourselves if we were to believe in predestination and that we have no role to play in our own actions. Likewise, it would make no sense to invoke a Lord and turn to Him for help if He has no role to play in realising our actions.

Arguments against the Mu'tazillah

To believe in the Mutazilite opinion is to suggest that God acts, and that the individual acts, and the action of the individual is independent at one point or another from God's. The consequential result of this is that the contingent existent becomes independent, and this is contradictory to it being a contingent existent.

- An entity cannot be both contingent and independent at the same time, as the essence of any entity cannot ever be removed from it – otherwise it would lose its identity and no longer be what it is.
- Likewise, the essence of a contingent existent is at odds with the essence of an independent existent, and so it is impossible for it to transform from one into the other.
- Even if we were to suppose that such a transformation could take place, then this independent existent would be another God alongside Allah, and this is of course impossible and a denial of His Oneness.

Arguments against the Asharites

The Ash'ari opinion leads to either one of two conclusions, and both are problematic:

1) The first conclusion is that action is only attributed to the human being metaphorically, like when one exclaims 'the river flows'. The river isn't actually flowing, rather the water is, though we metaphorically attribute the flowing to the river.

- This would mean that an individual has no free will and that there is no actual relationship between the individual and his action – therefore negating the principle of causality.
- This would also negate the idea of reward and punishment, because they are only deserved for one who performs an action, and if performing an action is only metaphorical then so too is the consequence of reward and punishment, heaven and hell.
- The consciousness (widjaan) of the human being within each individual would agree that when it comes to their actions, it is they who perform such actions themselves. Even as these words are read, there is knowledge within the reader that they are not obliged or being forced to read, but are doing so because they have willed such an action.

2) The second conclusion is that the human being has a will, but it differs to the will being imposed upon him, for this is the meaning of 'jabr' in the first place. If he did not have a will to begin with then the individual would not be one who is in a state of 'jabr'.

- Ultimately, we return to tafweed because it still means that the will of the human being exists side by side to the will of Allah, and differs to it, not to mention limiting the infinite will of Allah.

For example, Zaid performed an action, but this action was forced upon him through the will of Allah. This means that Zaid has his own will, but he simply does not act in accordance with it. Rather, he acts in accordance to the will of Allah, the imposing will. This suggests two wills, with one being imposed on the other, insinuating that neither will is reliant upon the other to exist. This is the very meaning of tafweed, even if one of the wills imposes itself on the other, because both wills are independent from the other in their existence. Ultimately, the opinion of both the Mu'tazillah and the Asharites end up at the same problem.



The Opinion of the Imamiyya (al-Tusi) and Peripatetic philosophers

The Imamiyya, as well as the peripatetic philosophers, believed that the relationship of the contingent existent to the necessary existent is one of absolute dependence, both in the conception of the power of free will and in its maintenance.

Avicenna's causes

Avicenna proclaimed that Allah is the cause of all causes, whilst going on to divide causes into three categories: a proximate (close) cause, an intermediate cause and an ultimate (distal) cause.

- For a cause to have an effect there must be a situation whereby the varying and necessary conditions of the potential effect are met.
- The will of the human being is that the will of the individual is an encompassing, intermediate cause, and one such constant condition that must be met for the cause to be complete and the action to be performed.

This is not in contradiction with the will of Allah, because the will of the human being stems from the power (longitudinal) which Allah ordained for the human to have, and so the action of the individual is an effect of the action of Allah, which is the ultimate and distal cause of the said one effect. For example, we may have one effect which is a result of an action that Zaid performed, whilst also being a result of an action that Allah performed, the difference being that Allah's action is a distal cause whilst Zaid's action is a proximate cause, but ultimately there is only one cause as the proximate one stems from the distal one.

God is always the ultimate cause of every effect as the distal cause - the cause of all causes. However, the effect will only occur after all the conditions of the cause are met, and so the intermediate and proximate causes must still be established for the cause to be finalised.

For Zaid's writing to exist, so must Zaid, his fingers, his will and his pen.

The free action of the human being is therefore an effect of several different conditions and proximate causes, such as time, place, person and circumstance. In conclusion, Allah remains the actor without having to negate the free will of the human being – which He graced upon the individual himself - as they are hierarchal and longitudinal rather than linear and transverse in the way that the Asharites and Mutazilites suggested.

Muhaqiq al-Tusi

God created power and will in the human being, only for this power and will to be executed by the human being according to their choice. This is whilst God is the distal cause of each action performed and always remains so, even whilst the human being - the proximate cause - chooses to exercise this God-given will.

The distal cause (God) permanently maintains its position to provide subsistence for the effect. Therefore, Allah's power is always connected to the human will as an encompassing distal cause and such a role never ceases.

For the Mutazilite, the causes are transverse and that is why a contradiction in their theory is evident, whereas for the Imamiyya the causes are hierarchal and longitudinal, avoiding the problem of contradiction. Whilst the Mutazilite view contradicted the traditional creed of divine decree and destiny, this creed remained in tact according to the opinion of the Imamiyya and peripatetic philosophers.



Transcendent Theosophy and the Gnostics ('Urafa)

Briefly elaborate on what you want to discuss.

Mulla Sadra's Transcendent theosophy

Transcendent theosophy focuses on the primary relationship of the Necessary being with the entire contingent world.

- In transcendent theosophy, the Necessary being is an independent existence and a substantive notion (ma'na ismī), perfectly complete within itself.
- On the other hand, the contingent existence is copulative (rābit) and can only be conceived in relation to the substantive and independent existent. This means that the contingent being not only relies on the necessary being for its existence, but that as a non-substantive notion (ma'na harfī), it is nothing but absolute dependence itself. It has no meaning of its own, and can only be deemed to mean anything when viewed in relation to its independently existing cause.

Mulla Sadra on Causality

Transcendent theosophy also held a unique view on causation. Whilst the Ash'ari scholars denied causation completely, Mulla Sadra believed that all causation relates back to one cause, which is at the same time both proximate and Necessary.

According to his school, for example, it is true that there is an extricable relationship between fire and heat, but this relationship is not one of true causality. It is only a relationship of necessary conditions, and so fire cannot be considered as the true cause of the heat it emits. True causality is only when an essence is given existence, and that can only occur through the Necessary being, who brings both the fire and the heat that fire emits into existence as a proximate cause to them both.

- The Peripatetic philosophers relied upon the impossibility of an infinite chain of regression to prove the existence of the Necessary being, as they regarded the Necessary as the longitudinal ultimate cause of all causes, whilst Mulla Sadra negated the longitudinal and hierarchal chain of causes because he believed in only one proximate cause, the Necessary existence – Allah – and deemed every contingent being as simply copulative.

Quiddity needs existence

It is agreed upon that if an existent is contingent, then it is in a neutral state between existence and non-existence, and is always in need of a cause that will move the quiddity of a thing towards existence. For Mulla Sadra, this cause is the one, encompassing, proximate, independent, necessary cause. It is as if the entire cosmos is one contingent entity, constantly and utterly dependant in its very existence on the Necessary being.

‘Reflection on the reality of being leads to the conclusion that, apart from the self-necessary being which itself is ‘the reality of being’ and the summit of the hierarchy of being, other levels of being have no reality other than belonging and relation to the self-necessary being. Anything that is not the divine essence is nothing other than relation and belonging to Him. Other levels of being are His manifestations (zuhurat). Manifestation and belonging to the necessary being or other levels of dependant beings have no being without relation to the necessary being. Anyone who thinks that in addition to the source of being – which is the self- necessary being – there are or may be other beings that have reality more than belonging and relation to the self-necessary being, has erred and has not understood the reality of being.

An effect by itself, as an effect, has no realty other than reliance and dependence and has no meaning other than being an effect and subordinate. All relations and dependence go back to Him. The chain of beings – including both causes and effects – originates from an essence which is a simple, luminous, primary, existential reality free from multiplicity, deficiency, contingency, shortcoming and obscurity: free from anything accidental or additional to Him, internally or externally. He is the source and other beings are just His states and affairs.'

- Mulla Sadra

From Contingency to Action

The human being is contingent, and the fact that he now exists means he exists necessarily, though not of his own power but rather through reliance on the independent, self-necessary being. This situation mimics itself identically regarding human action. The defining question one must therefore consider is that if the human being, in his very existence, is not independent of God, how can his action be? The free action of the human being is contingent just as the human being is, and once it exists, it exists necessarily, though God is the one who brings it into existence just as He did the human being.

- One may pose that the human being is an intermediary cause between Allah and the human action, which is why Mulla Sadra emphasises that contingency is always the agent by which essences are brought into existence, and not a hierarchal chain. The human being, his action and his attributes are all neutral in their relationship to existence and non-existence, and so they are contingent, and the only being who can bring a contingent essence into existence is the self-necessary and independent being.

For example, consider a wall, and consider the wall's whiteness. The wall is a contingent being, and so is the colour white. Allah gave both the wall and its whiteness their existence. It is not that Allah creates a wall to act as an intermediary and hierarchal cause, whilst its colour is independent from creation. Rather He brought both contingent essences, the wall and the walls whiteness, into existence.

It is true that unlike a wall, the human being possesses will-power, though Allah brought both the contingent human being and his contingent action into existence and it is not that He creates the human being to act as an intermediary whilst human will and action be independent from creation. Human will is created, as is human action, for they are both contingent.

This is further understood when we divide a cause into a complete cause, and incomplete cause:.....

‘Actions are attributed to their complete cause necessarily, just like every other existent. Likewise, actions are also attributed to the prerequisites of that complete cause, for example, the human being who exists in order to perform said action.

This relationship between the human being and his action is not a necessary one, because by just existing it does not mean that the individual is performing an action (because the existence of an incomplete cause does not necessitate the effect’s existence). If we perceive the action from the perspective of the complete cause, then the relationship is a necessary one, and if we perceive it from its incomplete cause, then it is a contingent one, and the two do not negate each other. These two relationships exist at the same time without contradicting one another. This defies the idea of determinism, because everything that occurs is either necessary when attributed to its complete cause, or contingent when attributed to its part cause – and this is the case regarding the actions of the human being.’

- Allamah Tabatabaei, Tafseer al-Mizan,
Volume 1, page 109-110

Allamah Tabatabaei: Al-Mizan

Allamah explains that a human being is indeed a true performer of his action just as Allah is, whilst the action is attributed to the individual in accident (*araz*) and to Allah in essence (*dhat*).

- If a cause includes all the prerequisites upon which the existence of the effect depends, so that the effect cannot fail to exist when it is there, then it is a complete cause.
- On the other hand, if a cause includes only some of those prerequisites, it is an incomplete cause.
- Concerning human action, one such prerequisite is the will of the human being, which is itself a contingent existent. Once all the contingent prerequisites are met, the cause becomes complete, and the effect exists necessarily

In al-Mizān, Allamah Tabatabaie states that in the entire world of existence, there is only one, true, independent, self-necessary Essence. In the same way that every other essence, including the human being, is reliant in existence upon the Divine Will of God, likewise an individual's actions are also reliant in existence upon the Divine Will, and therefore all action is regarded as His.

Fire is a contingent essence, and its heat is also a contingent essence, whilst Allah brings them both into existence. The same way Allah brought Zaid into existence, He also brought Zaid's will and action into existence, as they are all contingent.

Therefore, Zaid's action is never independent of God in its existence, for He is the only Independent being and the contingent world is utterly encompassed by the Divine, in the same way that a bright light encompasses a dim light.

Copulative existence

Contingent beings are not simply related to the Necessary being, but as copulative existences are actually the very relation itself

- The very essence of the human being and the human action are both copulative in relation to the Necessary as is every other contingent being in the universe.
- The human being, human action and the entire world of contingency are the very binding point with the Necessary itself ('ayn al-rabt).
- **Attributing Zaid's action to Zaid is then the exact same as attributing the action to Allah, because Zaid is the very binding point to Allah as is his action.**

Allamah Tabatabaei's conclusion:

- The Necessary being's Divine Will is attached to the action performed by the human being through the said individual's own will and choice, because it is the decree of the Divine Will that a man is to act by his own free-will and choice.

If Zaid was to perform an act without free will and choice, and rather through determinism he was to drink from the cup of water, then it would contradict the decree of the Divine Will, which is impossible. Allah knows Zaid will choose, through his own free will and choice, to act in a certain way and He has decreed it so.

Therefore, Allah's will and knowledge is intertwined with Zaid's free will and choice. If Zaid did not exercise his free will to choose how to act, then Allah's decree would be deemed powerless and his knowledge incomplete, which is again, impossible.

- Having a choice and free-will is what is actually divinely determined for the human being.

As a simple logical formula, the argument would be set as follows:

First premise: Human action is contingent, just like the human essence.

Second premise: Allah is the direct and proximate cause of every contingent existent.

Result: Allah is the direct and proximate cause of human action.

In his commentary on Dua al-Sahar, Imam Khomeini states that understanding the secret of ‘the theory between two theories’ (amr bayna amrayn), is a gift not bestowed on one unless they witness that every existent in its essence and action, esoteric and exoteric, is a manifestation of the Divine:

‘The One who is distant in His closeness, and is close in His distance. The power of an individual is simply a manifestation of the power of Allah, as explained in the Quran: {And you threw not when you threw, but it was Allah who threw}. Despite this truth, manifesting the Lord’s power does not make an individual the Lord. Haqq remains Haqq, whilst khalq remains khalq. One cannot attribute an action to the khalq and not attribute it to Haqq without oppressing their own selves and deviating from true Tawheed and Oneness of Allah. And to attribute actions to Haqq without attributing it to khalq is to blind one’s self from reality. True Tawheed, and the straight path is to recognise that both the human being and his actions are creations of Allah’.

- Imam Khomeini