Predestination, Fatalism and the Nature of Good and Evil

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(This brief rendition is based on the detailed study made by Maulana Muhammad Ali on the topic as presented by him in chapter 7, entitled ‘Taqdir or Predestination’ in his ‘The Religion of Islam’. Anyone interested in a more in-depth study of the topic, is encouraged to read the said chapter. Copies of the book are available from the editor.)

Background
There is a general misconception that Almighty God has predestined everything that will happen in the life of a person whether it is good or bad. There is also the belief that we should accept our fate as there is nothing we can do to change what is pre-ordained. This is known as fatalism. Therefore we often hear when a disaster befalls someone, like when someone dies in an unfortunate accident, it is said that it was predestined by God as if it was God’s plan that those things should take place. It is also often argued that God, having foreknowledge of things, must have predetermined the fate of things.

The ideas of predestination, fatalism and the creation of good and evil as being part of God’s law are not known to the Holy Qur’an. These are of later growth among Muslims that came in contact with Persian religious thought known as the Magian or Zoroastrians that taught the doctrine that there are two creators, a creator of good and a creator of evil. In addition to this, much of the confusion stems from a lack of knowledge of the Divine Law pertaining to creation, especially the creation of the human species with its special attributes as well as the nature of good and evil as taught in the Holy Quran.

The Universal Law of Creation in the Holy Quran:

‘Glorify the name of thy Lord, the Most High!
Who creates (khalaqa), then makes complete (or brings to maturity or perfection), (sawa)
And Who measures (qadarra), then guides (hadaa),’ - (87:1-3)

Four specific elements of the immutable Law of Creation are mentioned here, namely:

1. **Khalq** – Creation
2. **Taswiya** – Completion, Maturity, Perfection

3. **Qadir or taqdir** – The measured path of growth and development assigned to every created being by the Creator, referred to as the Evolver to Perfection (Rabb) in the Holy Quran. This is the Law of Nature that we see operating throughout the universe - a manifestation of Almighty God’s **creative power - Rabbubiyat**.

   Thus we see, for example, an apple seed growing into an apple and nothing else; a date-stone growing into palm trees and dates and nothing else; the sperm of an ape giving rise to an ape and nothing else; the human sperm giving rise to a human being and nothing else. So an ape cannot give rise to a human and a human cannot give rise to an ape. This law of taqdir, according to the Holy Quran, applies to every created thing:

   ‘Surely We create everything according to a measure (qadr) - (54:49)

4. **Hidaya** – Guidance. Man, however, is the only creature that has been given **discretionary powers** which means he can make good or bad choices. The All Wise has thus made provision for his guidance (hidaya) as to how to make the right decisions and steer away from evil. This is the only way he can reach a stage of maturity of the soul. The guidance comes in the form of revelations to His chosen Messengers and captured in their Scriptures. It also comes in the form of Divine inspiration to man in general.

   Of note is the fact that whereas the taqdir of the lower animals is limited to this world; the taqdir of man will continue into the next life until the soul reaches a spiritual fusion with the Divine. The Holy Quran makes it very clear that our final destination or goal is our **Rabb** (Lord) Who brought us into existence:

   ‘And that to thy Lord (Rabb) is the (final) goal (muntaha)’ – (53:42)

   However, we should remember that only once the soul has attained the stage of ‘perfection’ will it reach muntaha - its final goal:

   ‘And the soul and its perfection (sawaha)!’ — (91:7)

   The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of God be upon him), showed what this perfection (sawaha) of
the human soul entails in his experience on
the night of his Mi’raj (Ascension) as
recorded in the Holy Quran:

‘So he (Muhammad) attained to
perfection’ – (53:6)

‘The heart was not untrue in seeing
what he saw.’ – (53:11)

‘And certainly he saw Him in
another descent.’ - (53:13)

Note the Prophet did not see God with
his physical eyes. The declaration ‘he saw
Him’ with his heart signifies the highest
degree of spirituality the soul of a mortal is
capable of reaching. This is the path
taqdir and end goal (sawa) that the
human soul is destined for. For the
ordinary man its fulfilment will most
likely not be achieved here on this earth,
but will progress further in the next life. In
this regard the Holy Quran makes it clear
that death is not the end of this journey
taqdir to perfection of the human soul:

‘We have ordained death among
you and We are not to be
overcome,

That We may change your state
and make you grow into what you
know not’ – (56:60, 61)

Good deeds facilitate the progress of the
soul to perfection (taqdir); evil deeds
retard it

As mentioned above, Almighty God
has endowed man with a free will to
choose what or what not to do. He can
follow God’s laws or choose to go against
it and face the consequences. Thus the
Holy Quran says:

‘The truth is from your Lord; so let
him who please believe and let him
who please disbelieve.’ – (18:29)

It is the exercise of his
discretionary power to pursue a path of
either good or evil either of which will
give rise to specific consequences
according to the Divine Law of taqdir.
Man is thus the author of his own destiny.

Ignorance of the nature of good and
ever also led to the misconception that
Almighty God is the Creator of good and
ever. As we already indicated, good or evil
comes into being as a consequence of
man’s own actions. Any actions that are
conducted within the laws of God are
conducive to good consequences but
actions that violate the laws of God
produce disastrous consequences.

For instance, God has gifted man
with the power of speech, which he can
use either to tell a truth, or lie, slander or
defame and face the consequences of such
actions. He has also been given
intelligence to harness natural energy
which he can use to his advantage or to
destroy himself. We have already witnessed examples of these, respectively, in the prevailing advanced technology and the destructive weaponry of the 21st century. Thus we find that the use of the same Divine resources may be a virtue on one occasion or an evil on another, depending on the circumstances and intent.

For example a blow struck in self-defence or in defence of a helpless person will be looked upon as a virtuous deed; whereas an unprovoked blow struck aggressively is frowned upon as downright evil. Hence evil is also called zulm, in Arabic, which, according to Raghib, respected Arabic lexicologist, means the placing of a thing in a place other than that for what it is meant; either by falling short or by excess or by deviation from its time or its place.

Thus exercising power in the right manner, at the right moment, for the right reason is a virtue or an act of morality, and its use in a wrong manner, at the wrong moment, for the wrong reasons is a vice or evil. This is in accordance with the Divine law of cause and effect prevailing in the universe.

Nowhere does the Holy Quran say God created good and evil.

However, the persistent acts of evil in disobedience to the laws of Almighty God, may lead to a guilty person’s fate being ordained for punishment. Thus speaking of the wife of Lot, the Holy Qur’an says:

‘We ordained (qaddarna) that she shall surely be of those who remain behind.’ - (15:60; 27:57).

But even here it does not mean that God had ordained that she should be a doer of evil and that she had no choice in the matter. Nay! This verse points to an ordinance which holds good for all evil-doers that they should suffer the evil consequences of what they have done. She was not one of the faithful, but a disbeliever, so that when Divine punishment overtook the evil-doers, she was ordained together with them to suffer the well-known dire consequences of their evil deeds.

As already indicated above, it is important to understand that the Divine Will does not compel man to take a certain course as clearly stated in the Holy Quran:

‘There is no compulsion in Religion – the right way is indeed clearly distinct from error’ – (2:256)

Thus there may be a hundred and one causes that lead man to decide on a certain course in a particular case and his responsibility may vary according to those circumstances; but still the choice is his
and so is the responsibility and the consequences that will follow according to Divine law.

So there is no inevitable ‘cast in stone’ predestined good or evil fate awaiting us, but there are definite consequences that we will face and these might be good or evil depending on the nature of our actions at any given time as described above.

In the end, it is man who determines his own destiny. Even if most of his life he pursued a path of wrongdoing that brought about stressful consequences, he may proactively change course for the better by doing good and avoiding evil and never give up on God’s Forgiveness and Mercy.

We strongly condemn all forms of human rights and environmental abuse. We especially condemn the ruthless killings of all innocent parties in the name of Religion or State!