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FREE WILL

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Reference

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Abstract

The different views on freedom of human action in Shia traditions stem from the saying of Imam Jafar al-Sadiq. The Mutazilites, Jahmites and the Ithna Ashari schools have evolved their views on Free Will according to varying emphasis on '*al jabar*' or '*al tafwiz*' from al-Jafar's saying.

The Ismaili view on Free Will takes the intermediate position between constraint (*jabar*) and empowerment (*qadar*). It emphasises the permanent need of mankind for divine guidance.

Key Words

Lā jabar, Lā tafwīz, Jafar al-Sadeq, Moallem-e sadeq

IN ISMA'ILI SHI'ISM

Free will versus predestination was an important theological debate, with political implications, in Muslim society dating back to Omayyad times. The Isma'ilis adopted an intermediate position in this debate and eventually accommodated the relevant issues within their theological doctrines. At one extreme, a variety of Islamic movements and schools of thought espoused the predestinarian view, initially designated as Jabrīya, holding that man's deeds as well as good and evil resulted from God's decrees and pre-ordination. At the other extreme, there were those, originally designated as Qadarīya by their opponents, who recognised the freedom of human will and the individual's moral responsibility for his deeds. Both the Jabrīya and the Qadarīya based their arguments on verses from the Koran that supported their views. By early 'Abbasid times, the Mo'tazilites took over the Qadarite belief in human free will and argued that man can establish the truths of religion on the basis of reason, without any need of divine guidance. In other words they held that God in the Islamic revelation had shown the believers the "right path" for attaining salvation and reward in paradise, and had then left it to man to determine rationally what was good or evil. Thus, man's ultimate destiny as a rational and free agent depended on himself. However the

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majority of Sunni traditionalists, representing the mainstream of Muslim thought, eventually rejected Qadarism and adopted a form of predestinarianism as propounded by Ash'arism.

The classical Isma'ili view in this theological debate dates to the 4th/10th century, the early Fatimid period of Isma'ili history. The earliest evidence for the "intermediate" Isma'ili position may be found in the numerous extant works of the *dā'ī* Abū Ya'qūb Sejestānī (see Walker, 1993, pp. 107-42). Similar "intermediate" views, rejecting both *jabr* and *qadar*, were expounded by the foremost Fatimid jurist Qāzī No'mān (*Majāles*, pp. 377-82), and the *dā'ī* Ḥamīd-al-Dīn Kermānī (fols. 151-52), culminating in the writings of Nāṣer-e Kōsrow (died after 465/1072). These Isma'ili authors drew on their earlier Imami Shi'ite heritage, especially the doctrine of the imamate which articulated the permanent need of mankind in all spiritual matters for divine guidance. Indeed, it was the standard view of the early Imami Shi'ites that God does determine the course of events at any time, but He has not pre-ordained it, and that He has not created man either as an infidel or a believer without responsibility for making choices. The Imami position itself, representing an intermediate position between constraint (*jabr*) and empowerment (*qadar*), is attested to by a Hadith reported from Imam Ja'far al-Šādeq (d. 148/765). Concerning human will versus predestination, the Imam had said "*lā jabr wa lā tafwīz [qadar] wa lāken amr bayn amrayn*" (see Kolaynī, I. pp. 159-60). Nāṣer-e Kōsrow refers to this very Hadith in elaborating his own "intermediate stance in this debate" (1998, text, pp. 74-75, tr., pp. 113-14).

The Isma'ili *dā'īs* and authors of the Fatimid period further elaborated the earlier Imami views on the debate in question in their complex metaphysical systems of thought, holding that both the Jabrite and the Qadarite positions were rooted in a misunderstanding of Koran and, indeed, the immutable spiritual truths (*ḥaqā'eq*) of religion. By emphasizing a fundamental distinction between the exoteric (*zāher*) and the hidden esoteric (*bāṭen*) dimensions of religion, the Isma'ilis from early on argued that these religious truths concealed in the *bāṭen*, transcend human reason. As a result, man solely by his own efforts could never comprehend these truths and rationally choose the "right path" to salvation, even though he is endowed with the gift of the intellect and is free to make certain choices. According to Isma'ili Shi'ite theology, the knowledge of the religious truths (*ḥaqā'eq*) is available only to those infallible (*ma'šūm*) authorities who are "firmly versed in knowledge" (*al-rāsekūn fi'l-'elm*); they alone truly understand the real meaning of the Koran and the commandments and prohibitions of the sacred law of Islam (*šarī'a*) and can, thus, act as trustworthy guides, interpreting through *ta'wīl* or esoteric exegesis the true spiritual message of the Islamic revelation (Qāzī No'mān, *Da'ā'em*, I. pp. 22-24; Kermānī, fols. 134, 144-45; Mo'ayyad fi'l- Dīn Šīrāzī, I. pp. 276, 452-53; Nāṣer-e Kōsrow, *Wajh-e dīn*, pp. 11-14; Walker, 1996, pp. 26-83; de Smet, pp. 350-77).

In the era of Islam, the required authoritative guidance in religion would be provided initially by the Prophet Moḥammad, and then by his *waṣī*, or legatee, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb, and subsequently, until the end of time, the rightful imams in 'Alī's progeny – the imams acknowledged by the Isma'ilis. More than any of his Isma'ili predecessors, Nāṣer-e Kōsrow dealt with this theological issue (see also his *Dīwān*, pp. 21-22; *Jāme' al-ḥekmatayn*, pp.



135-44; *Zād al-mosāferīn*, especially pp. 430-86). All the major Ismaʿili authors of the Fatimid period held that man's destiny is not predestined as, in a sense, he is responsible for choosing between good and evil. However, they also refuted the Qaqarite position by believing that man by himself is not capable of making the right choices rationally for moving along the spiritual ladder of salvation towards knowing God and his own origins in the universe because he lacks the required knowledge. In every age or *dawr* (q.v.), therefore, man is in need of the guidance of a divinely-appointed and protected hierarchy of authoritative teachers - the prophet and after him the rightful imam of the time. In its classical statement, Ismaʿili theology, thus, remained essentially revelational rather than rational, despite its promotion of a personal quest for knowledge and the importance attached to philosophical inquiry by many learned Ismaʿili theologians.

Later, the inadequacy of human intellect (*ʿaql*) in knowing God and the necessity at all times of an authoritative teacher (*moʿallem-e šādeq*) for the spiritual guidance of men were restated by Ḥasan-e Šabbāh in terms of the doctrine of *taʿlīm*, or authoritative teaching, which provided the basis for all the Nezārī Ismaʿili teachings of the Alamūt (483-654/1090-1256) period and subsequent times. Similar views, always pointing to an “intermediate” solution, were later expressed by Naṣīr-al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) in his spiritual autobiography, *Sayr wa solūk* (text, pp. 4-5, 17-19, tr. pp. 27-29, 47-50), written while he was in the fortress communities of the Nezārī Ismaʿilis of Persia.

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