



## FREE WILL

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i. *In Twelver Shi'ism.*

ii. *In Isma'ili Shi'ism.*

#### i. IN TWELVER SHI'ISM.

On the question of free will, the whole view of the Imams amounts to a famous saying by Imam Ja'far al-Šādeq (d. 148/765): *lā jabr wa lā tafwīz wa lāken amr bayn amrayn* “neither complete constraint nor complete freedom but something in between” (Kolaynī I, p. 160, Hadith no.13; Ebn Bābawayh, 1387, p. 362 sec. 8, Madelung, 1970, p. 18, footnote 1). The saying could be interpreted in different ways. It could be read in a way conforming to the Mu'tazilite thesis that human beings have real freedom to act (*lā jabr*) but this does not, morally speaking, give them a license to do as they please (*la tafwīz*); for God has fixed rules and allowed certain things and forbidden others. This was the position adopted by Shaikh Mofīd (*Šarhā*, pp. 201 ff.), and before him, according to Moḥammad-Bāqer Majlesī (V, pp. 23.6 ff., 72.17 ff.), by Imam Abū Moḥammad Ḥasan b. 'Alī 'Askarī (q.v.). This appears to be Ja'far al-Šādeq's own preferred gloss on his comment, for when he was asked what the “something in between” was, he replied, “Suppose you come across a man about to commit a crime, you try to dissuade him but he does not desist. You let him do it, and he commits the crime. Now it is not because he did not listen



to you and you did not manage to dissuade him that you are the person who ordered him to commit the crime” (Ebn Bābawayh, tr. Fyzee, p. 33). As quoted in another Hadith, Ja‘far al-Šādeq appears even more explicit: “If God had granted full authority to mankind (*law fawwaza elayhem*), he would not have bridled them with commands and interdictions” (Kolaynī, I, p. 159, sec. 11). It would seem implausible, however, that this would have been, at the beginning, the intended sense of the dictum in question; for, as Aš‘arī explained (p. 41.4-5), the real intention of the supporters of this formula was to range themselves against both the Mu‘tazilites (regarded as followers of the doctrine of *tafwīz*) and the Jahmites (advocates of *jabr*). It was a matter of defining a doctrine of the golden mean between these two contradictory views, not a simple and self-evident proposition. According to some accounts, when asked to elucidate the problem, Ja‘far al-Šādeq would resort to evasive answers (Kolaynī, I, p. 159, sections 8-11) going as far as saying to his interlocutor, with a wave of his hand indicating his perplexity, “Were I to answer that question, I might commit a blasphemy,” (Ebn Bābawayh, 1387, p. 363, sec. 11). It would be true to say that the very manner in which Ja‘far al-Šādeq enunciated these two conflicting theses lacked clarity. At times, he apparently took *jabr* to mean that God could “compel mankind to trespass” and yet punish them afterwards for it (Kolaynī, I, p. 159, secs. 8-9, 11; Ebn Bābawayh, 1387, p. 360, secs. 5-6), and at other times that God “was capable of imposing upon them things beyond their capability” (Kolaynī, I, p. 160, sec. 14; cf. also Ebn Bābawayh, 1387, p. 362, sec. 9) both instances negating divine justice. As for *tafwīz*, that would imply either that things could happen here on earth without His wish (Kolaynī, I, p. 158, sec. 6; p. 159, sec. 9; p. 160, sec. 14) or that the transgressions of mankind did not depend on His might (*al-ma‘āšī be-ġayre qowwate’llāh*, *ibid.*, p. 158, sec. 6) both cases denying or limiting His absolute sovereignty (*solṭān*).

It will be noted that in the terminology used by Ja‘far al-Šādeq and others of the same view, the essential question of knowing if, given the preceding account, human actions are or are not created by God, was not posed (cf. Aš‘arī, p. 41, sec.6). The theologian who did confront this problem was Ja‘far al-Šādeq’s contemporary Hešām b. Ḥakam. Hešām, too, acknowledged an “intermediary doctrine” in this matter. According to him, although human acts are created by God, they could be said to be both free and compulsory at the same time: free, because they depend on human volition and compulsory, because they proceed from a cause (*sabab*) produced by God (Aš‘arī, p. 40, 12 ff. and p. 43, 1-4).



Based on the sayings of the Imams (Ja'far al-Şādeq, and also 'Alī al-Rezā,) the doctrine of *lā jabr wa lā tafwīz*, in the anti-Mu'tazilite sense of the expression, has remained in force in traditionist Imamism, for which Qom became, in the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries, the principal center. The doctrine was expounded by Kolaynī and, chiefly, Ebn Bābawayh (q.v.). In his *E'teqādāt*, Ebn Bābawayh also strove to define this middle position advocated by his predecessors. On the one hand, he upheld the principle that God wills whatever exists, making use of the saying "what God wills, exists, what he does not will does not exist" (p. 71, sec.1). On the other hand, he interpreted that as simply meaning that God "has willed it so that nothing happens without His knowledge (p. 69, sec. 12). Ebn Bābawayh did not, anymore than Ja'far al-Şādeq, clearly state that God willed the transgressions of mankind. In this respect he used somewhat convoluted formulae reminiscent of those used by the sunni theologian Aş'ārī (p. 70.8-14; cf. Gimaret, p. 306 ff). Like Heşām, he maintained that human deeds are created by God, but not to the extent that God makes them happen (*kalq takwīn*) but only to the extent that He predetermines (*kalq taqdīr*) them, i.e., to the extent that, in all eternity, He knows how they will be.

A major change took place at the end of the 4th/10th century. The Imamite theologians of the School of Baghdad, following the Mu'tazilite theses in this respect, managed to impose their views against those of the traditionists of Qom. In his *Şarḥ 'aqā'id al-Şadūq*, Shaikh Mofīd completely rejected Ebn Bābawayh's position. In his view, following Mu'tazilite doctrine, God does not will in any way the sins of mankind (*Şarḥ*, pp. 202-7), and he is in no sense the creator of their actions (pp. 197-201). The term *lā tafwīz*, as said above, simply meant, according to him, that God had imposed a law on mankind (pp. 201 ff.).

This became accepted, from this juncture, as the established position in Twelver Shi'ism, as adopted by Şarīf Mortazā, Abū Ja'far Ṭūsī, later by 'Allāma Ḥellī, and later still by Majlesī. From then on, the Imamite theologians differed only on points of detail, depending which Mu'tazilite school they followed. Thus Shaikh Mofīd, a disciple of the Mu'tazilites of Baghdad, denied that mankind could be qualified as *kāleq* (*Awā'el*, pp. 64, 13 ff.) while, as disciples of the Basran Mu'tazilites, Şarīf Mortazā and later Shaikh Ṭūsī thought otherwise (cf. Ṭūsī, VI, pp. 234-35, 369-70). On the question of the way human action was produced, 'Allāma Ḥellī, like his teacher Naşīr-al-Dīn Ṭūsī, followed the doctrine of Abu'l-Ḥosayn Başrī (Schmidtke pp. 125-35).

*In Zaydī Shi'ism.* Zaydī Shi'ism on the whole went through the same evolution



as Twelver Shi'ism but from an earlier date. On the question of the status of human actions, the earliest Zaydī authors, notably Abū Kāled Wāseṭī, were very clearly anti-Mu'tazilite (Madelung, 1965, pp. 53-69; Sezgin, *GAS* I p. 557). But from the 3rd/9th century, with the imam Qāsem Rassī (Madelung 1965, pp. 117-29) and later specially with the imams Ḥasan b. Zayd and Yaḥyā b. Ḥosayn al-Hādī elā'l-Ḥaqq, it was the Mu'tazilite point of view which definitely carried the day (ibid, pp. 153 ff.).

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(DANIEL GIMARET)

## ii. 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 recognized 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 Qur'ān 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 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 Ḳosrow (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-Şādeq (d. 148/765). Concerning human free will versus predestination, the Imam had said “*lā jabr wa lā tafwīz [qadar] wa lāken amr bayn amrayn*” (see Kolaynī, I, pp. 159-60). Nāşer-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 the Qur'ān and, indeed, the immutable spiritual truths (*ḥaqā'eq*) of religion. By emphasizing a fundamental distinction between the exoteric (*ẓāher*) 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'şūm*) authorities who are “firmly versed in knowledge” (*al-rāseḳūn fi'l-'elm*); they alone truly understand the real meaning of the Qur'ān and the commandments and prohibitions of the sacred law of Islam (*şarī'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 Şīrāzī*, I, pp. 276, 452-53; Nāşer-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 *waşī*, or legatee, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭāleb, and subsequently, until the end of time, by the rightful imams in 'Alī's progeny—the imams acknowledged by the Isma'ilis. More than any of his Isma'ili predecessors, Nāşer-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 Isma'ili 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 Qadarite 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, Isma'ili 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 Isma'ili theologians.

Later, the inadequacy of human intellect (*'aql*) in knowing God and the necessity at all times of an authoritative teacher (*mo'allem-e ṣādeq*) for the spiritual guidance of men were restated by Ḥasan-e Ṣabbāḥ in terms of the doctrine of *ta'līm*, or authoritative teaching, which provided the basis for all the Nezārī Isma'ili 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 Isma'ilis of Persia.

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