

MUHAMMAD ABDUH ON PREDESTINATION AND FREE WILL

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Abstract

In this article, it is discussed the two concepts of Islam, predestination and free will according to Muhammad Abduh's opinion. Hence, it is especially treated his refutation the doctrine of compulsion. According to him man has got free will. In this conjunction it is subjected the belief of fatality and Jabriyya in early Islam. So, it is pointed out that in Abduh's opinion, the absence of difference between an individual moving his way to eat and its being moved by shivering from cold. According to Muhammad Abduh, Muslims have fallen in conflicts and separated as many groups. His classifications of all those groups are listed. Some related concepts, like acquisition, the acts of Allah, pre-determination, polytheism, created thing, divine prosperity in creation are pointed out. Finally it is underlined that Abduh might not be a fatalist. Hence, it is aimed that two concepts of fate and destiny in Qur'an do not support fatalism.

Key Words: Abduh, predestination, free will, fatalism, acquisition

Muhammed Abduh'un Kader ve Özgürlük Anlayışı

Özet

Bu makalede, Muhammed Abduh'a göre kader ve özgürlük kavramları incelenmiştir. O, özellikle İslâm'da cebr inancı olduğunu reddetmektedir. Bu kavramlar özellikle onun cebr doktrinini iptal etmesi çerçevesinde değerlendirilmiştir. Zira ona göre insan özgür irade sahibidir. Bu bağlamda, makalede cebr inancı ve İslâm'ın ilk dönemlerinde ortaya çıkan Cebriyye üzerinde durulmaktadır. Abduh'un konuyla ilgili düşüncesi ve kendine özgü yorumu, farklı görüşlerle kıyaslanarak ortaya konulmuştur. Ona göre bu konuda müslümanlar arasında fikir ayrılıkları meydana gelmiş ve onlar çeşitli fırkalara ayrılmıştır. Onun bu grupları tasnifi ve konuyla ilgili temel kavramlar olan kesb, Allah'ın fiilleri, kader, şirk, yaratma, ilahî takdir hakkındaki yorumları verilmektedir. Sonuçta Abduh'un fatalist olmadığı belirtilmektedir. Bu yüzden onun, Kur'ân'daki cebr ve kader ifadelerinin fatalizmi desteklemediğini ifade ettiği vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Abduh, kader, irade özgürlüğü, cebr, kesb

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Introduction

Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) was a religious revivalist who sought to modernize Islam and correct it in order to conform to rational principles. He has been named in the different studies sometimes as a 'reformer', an 'apologist' and sometimes 'religious scholar' and 'pioneer of Islamic modernism'. These names show that he is a Muslim thinker, arguing the revitalization and the reconstruction of Islamic thought and civilization. He observes on the causes of the decline of the Muslim world and refers to the revitalization and the reconstruction of Islamic civilization¹. Hence, in this article we will concentrate on his opinions of predestination and free will.

The Meaning of Predestination and Free Will

Unlike Western orientalist's claims, Abduh has said that the two concept of Islam, predestinations and free will did not prevent them from material developments. For him, predestination (*qadâ*) is happening of thinks in their orders, conditions and in their situations, and is Allah's knowledge of it. Yet for him free will, things made occurred by Allah when their causes matured up². Divine knowledge, is not a preventing one's having being a free-willful. Such knowledge embraces over all the actions he/she will do. He says on that:

"When the facts in all their unmistakable reality have brought home to him that events in the world are in their entirety derived from a necessarily existent Being ordering them according to His knowledge and will, man will submit with reverence and humility, and come to terms with his situation in that light. But with that he will keep in mind his own share in events. The believer witnesses to the evident and visible proof of the power of contingent beings. He confesses in like manner that in all his acts of choice, whether rational or physical, he is proceeding upon powers and capacities given to him by Allah for these ends."³

He believed in predestination with regard to the mores, temperament, and characteristic behavior of nations. Allah created them the way they are. Nevertheless, as far as individual behavior is concerned, Abduh refuted the doctrine of 'compulsion' (*jabr*) and said that the Qur'an condemned it and affirmed acquisition (*kasb*) and free will (*ikhtiyar*) in no less than sixty four verses. The Prophet of Islam also endorsed this in his words and conduct⁴.

1) For a detail analysis in this issue see, Mehmet Zeki Iscan, *Muhammed Abduh'un Dini ve Siyasi Görüşleri (Religious and Political Sights of Muhammed Abduh)*, Dergah Publications, Istanbul 1998, pp. 203-295.

2) Abduh, Muhammad, *al-A'mal al-Kamilah*, Beirut 1980, vol. II, p. 467.

3) Abduh, *Risalat al-Tawhid*, Dâr al-Sha'b, Cairo, pp. 51-52. Translation of Arabic texts is heavily based on Ishaq Musa and Kenheth Cragg, *The Theology of Unity*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966.

4) Siddiqi, Mazheruddin, *Modern Reformist Thought in the Muslim World*, Islamabad: Islamic Research Institute, 1402/1982, n. 16, p.58.

On the issue of predestination and free will, Abduh is take sides man's free will. According to him, the man of sound mind and sense is conscious of own deeds. He says:

"The man of sound mind and sense knows and affirms of himself that he exists and needs no guide or teacher to bring him to this conclusion. It is the same precisely with his awareness of his actions of will. He weighs them and their consequences in his mind and evaluates them in his will, and then effectuates them by an inward power. To deny any of this would be tantamount to a denial of his existence itself, so opposed would it be to rational evidence."⁵

Furthermore, he strongly implies that it may be that he will anger a friend in the very will to please him or lose what he sets out to acquire. He may endeavor to save himself and fall prey to destruction⁶. He goes on say:

"If, in such cases, he has not properly directed his mind to the weighing of his act, he will blame himself and take his initial disappointment as a subsequent guide, he will come back to the action in a surer way and with wiser means. Should his failure in the enterprise be due to the competition of a rival for the same end, he will kindle with indignation against him, for his intervention, recognizing in the other the source of his frustration."⁷

He, in his *Sarh Nahj al-Balagh*, defines the free will and the predestination as such: "the predestination (*qadā*) is the occurrence of the things just as is in their conditions and situations, and is the eternal knowledge of Allah while determination/fatality (*qadar*) is the existences of the things by Allah in the time of their reasons happen."⁸

He, himself expresses that such a belief of fatality (*qadar*) does not necessitate the actions of a servant to be existed as an obligatory. The servant has a motive for the tendency of good and wicked in his Self. By this motive, he does whatever he wills. Allah, too, knows this servant's saintness or rebellion as a person acting by his/her free will. That is the essence of the predestination and the fatality⁹. In this sense to be perceived, it is clear that such an understanding of the predestination and the fatality will not be problematic in the context of free will.

Abduh says that the true meaning of the phrase *al-qadā wa al-qadar* is not predestination but destiny. Faith in this concept, he says, has been impulse in Muslim history to courage and action. He who trusts in God has the sense of observing God's will without fear of the consequences of possible failure. This is the meaning of the Qur'anic verse: "Men said to them: "A great army is gathering against you": And frightened them: But it (only) increased their Faith: They said: "For us God sufficient and He

5) Abduh, *Risalat al-Tawhid*, p. 51.

6) Ibid, p. 52.

7) Ibid, p. 52.

8) Abduh, *al-Am'al*, vol. II, p. 467.

9) Ibid, vol. II, p. 467.

is the best disposer of affairs.” (3: 173)¹⁰ This faith, at the same time, is the antithesis of the doctrine of the Jabriyyah of early Islam that “there is no difference between an individual moving his jaw to eat and its being moved by shivering from cold”¹¹.

For Abduh, The Holy Qur’an affirms the divine knowledge and power embracing all as well as it confirms, almost in its 64 verses, that human being is in his free will in his actions. Yet, in many verses, it condemns the fatalism (*jabr*). Actually, it is said in a verse that:

“Those who give partners (to Allah) will say: “If Allah had wished, we should not have given partners to Him nor would our fathers; nor should we have had any taboos.” So did their ancestors argue falsely, until they tasted of our wrath? Say: “Have ye any (certain) knowledge? If so, produce it before us. Ye follow nothing but conjecture: ye do nothing but lie.”(6:148).

In the verse, pre-determination (*jabr*) described as the false arguing and presupposition of polytheists (*mushriks*) and is declared that it has no concern with the reality¹². Abduh says of the verses expressing some compelling (*jabr*), and alluding that there is no free will of human beings as such: these are not the verses dealing with the human will, actually these were sent down in order to mention about the laws of the Nature known as ‘*Sunnat Allah*’ (Divine Nature)¹³. He goes on to say:

“The Belief in the predestination and the fatality refrains man from all descriptions far from his glorious character. Who believes in that the life is limited, that divine bestowing are warrantable, and that all the providence is of Allah, he leads his life in the manner of defending the truth and exalting his nation he belongs to. He can die for even in this case. In order to reinforce the reality and the truth, he even does not prevent himself from expending his property. For, he does not fear that he would fall in misery and in need.”¹⁴

According to Abduh the belief in the oneness of Allah does necessitate these two things; first, to believe in the fact that Allah granted upon the responsible person all his forces and faculties so as to perform his responsibilities, and so to believe the fact that he acquired all his faith and responsibilities/actions given by Allah to him¹⁵. He expresses that it is undisputable fact that the actions must belong to their doers. To this, he proofed by these verses:

10) Kerr, Malcolm H., *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida*, Cambridge University Press 1966, p. 116.

11) Kerr, *Islamic Reform*, p. 116.

12) Abduh, *Tafseer Surah al-‘Asr*, Dâr al-Kitâb al-Jadeed, Beirut 1976, pp. 40-41.

13) Abduh, “The Response of Abduh to Hanoutoux”, translation to Turkish Muhammad Akif, *Sirat-i Mustakim*, vol. 3, nu 62, 1327, p. 146.

14) Abduh, “Qadâ and Qadar”, translation to Turkish Muhammad Akif, *Sirat-i Mustakim*, vol. 2, nu. 35, 1328, pp. 135-136.

15) Abduh, *Risalat al-Tawhid*, p. 54.

"O ye who believe! Guard your own souls: If ye follow (right) guidance, no hurt can come to you from those who stray. The goal of you all is to Allah: it is He that will show you the truth of all that ye do." (5:105); "Whatever misfortune happens to you, is because on the things your hands have wrought, and for many (of them) He grants forgiveness." (42:30).

Yet he claims that even though the verse of "But Allah has created you and your handwork!" (37:96) can be considered as the evidence for that creator of the actions of servants is Allah head, it also expresses that by the words of "your handwork" it shows that the servants are having their own actions¹⁶.

Secondly, to believe in the fact that the Divine Power is more superior to that of human being. Divine Power, by alone is the upper-most power of occurrence of the actions that human being wills, and is the highest one in removing all the obstacles, and in perpetrating of all the reasons transcending the servant's knowledge and his free will¹⁷.

According to Abduh, if Allah wills, he can remove our power of willing that He has granted us. For instance, despite the fact that we decide to do some work, there comes out a sudden obstacle for it even that is not predicted, and it prevents us from performing that work. These all are showing us that all the works that considered as possible to be are under Divine eternal power¹⁸.

According to Abduh, completely the creeds of faith about man's actions that we should believe in are all these. To study more than that, or to search in deeper and deeper is not of the faith. He writes:

"However, to discuss further the reconciliation between the Divine prescience and the Divine will, already proved, and the evident power of human choice, is to attempt to penetrate the secret of destiny (*qadar*). In this, we are forbidden to involve ourselves. It is useless to busy our minds with what they can scarcely attain."¹⁹

The Dangers of Thinking on Predestination

Abduh pays attention to the dangers of dealing with these matters of fatality as well. For him to concern in that matter cannot utilize any either. Yet over searching persons both from Muslim side and Christian side would have rooted up in deep, but then soon after that they had returned to their starting points without any fruitful result. He writes:

"However, to discuss further the reconciliation between the Divine prescience and the Divine will, already proved, and the evident power of human choice, is to attempt to penetrate the secret of *Qadar*, -or-destiny. In this, we are forbidden to involve ourselves.

16) Abduh, *Tafseer Surah al-'Asr*, p. 39.

17) Abduh, *Risalat al-Tawhid*, p. 54.

18) Abduh, *Tafseer Surah al-'Asr*, p. 39-40.

19) Abduh, *Risalat al-Tawhid*, p. 54.

It is useless to busy our minds with what they can scarcely attain. Those in every religious community, and especially among Christians and Muslims, who over-step the bounds in this field, find that when all argument is done they are back where they started. All they have achieved is division and disunity. Among them are the champions of the complete freedom of man, the servant, over all his actions and his absolute independence. This is a manifest delusion. Others have asserted *jabr* or pre-determination, with or without naming it so. Nevertheless, this is a destructive notion inimical to the sacred law and tending to the extinction of the ordinances of morality. It is a final proscription of rational judgment which is the pillar of faith"²⁰

Abduh expresses that who searched in deeper and deeper about that, at last have fallen in conflicts and separated as many groups. He classifies all these groups without naming them such as:

1) The first is that they claimed the complete freedom of man over all actions and his absolute independence. For Abduh this is a manifest deception²¹. This opinion is of *Mu'tazilah*.

2) Second is the ones who adapt the opinion of obligation (*jabr*) and say this in public. These are appropriate to compulsion and explain this evidently²². They claimed that there was no difference between compulsory and voluntary actions. According to this claim, man has no will and no real action, and that he is just like a feather in the wind²³.

3) The third group is consisting of the persons who adapt the opinion of predestination (*jabr*) but refrains to pronounce it. According to Abduh this perception is to injure the Faith to destroy the responsibilities and to distort the pure intelligence as the basis of the Faith²⁴ this group that he cites of them without giving name, are *Ash'arities*. According to *al-Ashari*, Allah is the creator of the universe, including the voluntary and compulsory actions of man²⁵. This mean that he can be associated with the *Jabarites*, for he maintained that man is responsible for what he does through the theory of acquisition.

Abduh did not mention about to which group he belonged. However, it can be said that he preferred the opinion of *Mu'tazilah* by presuming from his explanations. But by considering his manner of explanation, it is very clear that he is more much closer to *Maturidiyyah* than *Mu'tazilah*²⁶.

Muhammad Abduh, on the issue of free will, is versus predestination in the literal meaning of it, and is pre-fixing the fate of someone or something. Predestination

20) Abduh, *Risalat al-Tawhîd*, p. 51

21) *Ibid*, p. 53.

22) *Ibid*, p. 53.

23) See for details in the opinions of Jabriyyah in this issue: *al-Ashari, Makalat al-Islamiyyin*, ed. Hellmut Ritter, Wiesbaden 1980, pp. 279-280.

24) Abduh, *Risalat al-Tawhîd*, p. 53.

25) See *al-Ashari, al-Ibanah an Usul al-Diyanah*, Beirut, pp. 52-53.

26) See Iscan, *Muhammed Abduh'un Dini ve Siyasi Goruserleri*, p. 135.

(*Qadar*), according to him, is the Divine presence and this is not dislike to freedom. Nevertheless, he argues that there can be suit between human freedom and divine prescience²⁷. We can conclude this fact from his method of study as well as from his above statements. He, in "*Risalat al-Tawhid*" studied firstly on "the acts of Allah" (*af'al al-Allah*) and then "human actions" (*af'al al-'ibad*)²⁸. This title has clearly shown that he admits that besides the acts of Allah there have been also the human actions.

Human Free Will and Polytheism (*Shirk*)

Abduh, expresses that the acceptance of human free will explicitly should bear the meaning that human will be considered at the level of the acts of Allah and by this claim to ascribe someone by polytheism (*shirk*) is a cruelty obviously. He goes on say:

"There are those who claim that belief in man's 'acquisition' *kasb* of his actions leads to the sin of *shirk* against Allah, which is, of course, the supreme wrong. But such views have not taken account of the Qur'anic significance of *shirk* and it's meaning in the *Sunnah*." ²⁹

This question was discussed in the classical periods of Islamic Theology (*Kalâm*). The essence of the discussion was focused on the fact that human action has happened from two distinctive and particular powers (namely that of Allah and that of Human)³⁰.

al-Bazdawi, called Fakhr al-Islam, Muhammad Bin Muhammad (d. 483/1100), a Hanafite theologian in his book *Usul ad-din*, declares that such a concept of human free will can not be considered as polytheism (*shirk*):

1-To suppose -on the context of human beings- for one action, two different powers may be possible. Since, there is no creative power except of that of Allah.

2-Now that knowledge of something by two shcolars or seeing of something by two person is possible, why not is possible for two powerful to have a created thing (*maqdûr*), and for two acting ones to have one acted (*maf'ul*).

3-An action is an accident. Since while there is no power for humanbeings to create essences, how can they create accident that are far more thinner and detailed than essences³¹.

Abu al-Muin an-Nasafi is also suggests who claim that belief in *kasb* of man actions leads to the *shirk* which is the insistence of ignorant³². He says:

27) Abduh, *Risalat al-Tawhid*, p. 51-52.

28) See, *Ibid*, p. 46, 51.

29) *Ibid*, pp. 52-53.

30) For details see Omer Aydin, *Predestination and Freedom in the Light of Qur'an (Turkish)*, Beyan Publications, Istanbul 1998, pp. 125-128.

31) al-Bazdawi, Muhammad bin Muhammad, *Usul ad-din*, tranlation to Turkish: Serafeddin Golcuk, Istanbul 1988, p. 153.

32) an-Nasafi, Abu al-Muin, *Tabsira al-Adillah fi Usûl Al-Dîn*, ed. Claude Sallamah, Damascus 1993, vol. II, p. 655; *al-Tamhid*, ed. Dr. Abd al-Hayy Qâbil, Cairo 1987, p. 68.

"*Shirk* is a seperative-condition on a distinctive thing of himself, not of his partner for instance, the partners of the village or a district. The type of *shirk* in Magians is that such. Allah has bestowed upon them all kinds of prosperity these are the Divine prosperity in creation (*takhlık*). In that case servants are not to be considered as partners of Allah, but the prosperity belongs to the servant in his spending out."³³

Conclusion

In conclusion, I think that Abduh does not have a fatalistic mind. Because his appropriating revivalism in Islam shows that, he is not a fatalist. The man who appropriated revivalism in Islam might not be fatalist. Abduh clarifies that the concepts of "fate" or "destiny" (*qadar*) which occurred in the Holy Qur'an do not support fatalism; on the contrary, they give support to free will.

33) See, an-Nasafi, *at-Tabırah*, vol. II, pp. 655-656; *al-Tamheed*, p. 68; Cf. at-Taftazani, Sa'd al-Din, *Sarh al-Akaid*, Istanbul, pp. 118.