

Challenges of Reconciling Divine Decree and Predestination with Free Will in Human Destiny: A Critique of the Article "Reconciling the Divine Decree and Free Will in Islam"

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Abstract

The present article critiques and evaluates the article "Reconciling the Divine Decree and Free Will in Islam" by Justin Parrott (2017). This article, has published on Yaqeen, American institute of Islamic research, examines the role of human voluntary action in determining one's destiny. The aforementioned article is based on Sunni theology, utilizing their exegetical and theological sources. This critique focuses on three axes: "theoretical framework," "theological foundations," and "the Qur'an." The findings of this critique indicate that the article is problem-oriented in terms of subject matter and its content is free from biases. Only in limited cases concerning the definition of divine decree and predestination (*qada'* and *qadar*), the existence of evil in the universe, and the degree of certainty of the divine decree in human destiny, does it differ from the principles of Shi'a theology. This shows that recent interpretations in both Muslim groups have moved away from past rigidities and, by accepting logical and intermediary paths, have drawn closer to one another.

Keywords: Determinism and Free Will, Divine Decree and Predestination (*Qada'* and *Qadar*), Theology (*Kalām*).

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Introduction

The issue of determinism (*jabr*) and free will (*ikhtiyār*) has always been one of important issues in Islamic theology. For a long time, this question has been raised: how are the actions performed by a human being under their control, and how can they be predetermined and under the will of God, the Creator of the universe, and based on this, how is human destiny determined? The ramifications of this topic grew to the extent that it created sects among Muslims with differing opinions about it. The present article, "Reconciling the Divine Decree and Free Will in Islam," is one of the recent studies that, in addition to academic attention to the subject, has a problem-oriented and practical approach to human life. The aforementioned article was first published in 2017 on the Yaqeen Institute website and was edited again in August 2025 by an "unknown author" and republished on the same site. The Yaqeen Institute for Islamic Research is an American independent research institute and think tank established in 2016, primarily interested in advanced study in the field of Islam and Muslim communities. The Institute's goal is to Yaqeen is guiding Muslims towards discovering meaning and confidence in their faith. Justin Parrott is a scholar and researcher at Yaqeen Institute who contributes to various educational initiatives, helping Muslims strengthen their connection with the sacred text through scholarly yet understandable explanations.

The introduction of the article under discussion states that the idea of divine providence, also known as the divine decree and predestination (*qada'* and *qadar*), has troubled theologians and philosophers for centuries. How can we reconcile two apparently contradictory facts that Allah has absolute power and sovereignty over all creation, and yet we are responsible for our actions? Are we forced to do what we do, or are our choices meaningful? This question led to one of the first sectarian splits in the Muslim community, between the the Qadarites, who believed in absolute human free will (God has no control over us), and the Jabarites, who believed in absolute determinism and fatalism (we have no control over our actions). Each of these groups developed an extreme and misleading theology. If God has no control over our lives, then why should we pray to God? Conversely, if we have no control over our actions and destiny, why should we do good deeds at all?

This question was not only a hot topic in early Islamic history but has been an important issue throughout history for both religious and secular reasons. Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, wrote seriously about this issue over two thousand years ago due to its implications for understanding order in the world, the origin of life, human freedom, and happiness. Today, this subject is a topic of complex academic debates, under the title of



determinism, in scientific disciplines such as mathematics, physics, biology, psychology, and social sciencesⁱ. It is clear that our understanding of destiny plays a decisive role in our view of the world and, perhaps more importantly, our behavior within it. Muslims have also had doubts in their faith due to the multitude of philosophical puzzles arising from it. How does Islam solve this puzzle? The answer is that the Qur'an and Sunnah tread a middle path between the two historical extremes, affirming both God's sovereignty and human responsibility. Looking at these two aspects purely rationally, they seem to be mutually exclusive, and it appears that both cannot be true simultaneously. However, we must remember that God exists outside of time and space, beyond the cosmic veil, in the Unseen (*ghayb*). In contrast, we humans can only conceive of realities within the framework of time and space. Divine providence or destiny is a reality that exists beyond time and space, meaning we are simply incapable of conceiving it with our limited rational faculties. For this reason, God expressed the reality of providence using linguistic tools (especially literary images) which in Qur'anic science is "expressing a subjective meaning using sensory and visual images," images that are neither imaginary nor merely metaphorical. On the contrary, they form profound truths in the universe. These images include the Pen (*Qalam*), the Preserved Tablet (*Lawh Mahfūz*), and the angelic records of deeds. They express the nature of providence, that God has complete control over everything. And while everything has been decreed from eternity, God has the power to change destiny based on our choices. In fact, we are morally responsible for our actions, and our free will, combined with a measure of control stemming from God's sovereignty, determines our ultimate destiny.

The Nature of Divine Providence in Parrott's View

Divine providence in Islam is referred to by the term *qada'* and *qadar*, which in the precise meaning of the words means "decree and measure." This term is a combination of two words that refer to the dual aspects of divine providence. Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani writes: "The scholars said the divine decree (*al-qada'*) consists of the entire and complete judgment forever, and the divine measurement (*al-qadar*) consists of the particulars of the judgment and its details."ⁱⁱⁱ

Although scholars sometimes define these terms differently, the definition provided here is based on two sets of texts in the Qur'an and Sunnah: texts that speak of the decree as absolute and unchangeable, and texts that speak of changes and modifications related to the decree as it is brought into being. These two sets of texts appear contradictory on the surface, but they are two aspects of one reality, and their apparent contradiction is merely the result of the limited frame of reference of the



human mind. Both sets of texts are reconciled towards the single goal of guiding us to correct behavior in relation to God and our fellow humans.

The idea of the absolute and unchangeable decree is embodied in the literary image of the "Preserved Tablet" (*al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz*), which contains everything that will come to pass, including the revealed scriptures.

Allah said: *This is truly a glorious Qur'an [written] on a Preserved Tabletⁱⁱⁱ*

This term conveys the absolute reality of divine providence through a mental representation of something we are already familiar with, although the Preserved Tablet is different from any tablet we know. The concept of the Preserved Tablet is that God knows all things before they come into being, as He said:

"Are you [Prophet] not aware that God knows all that is in the heavens and earth? All this is written in a Record; this is easy for God (22:70)."

Other verses indicate that not only does God know everything, but also that He grants full permission for everything to occur:

"It is He who has control over the heavens and earth and has no offspring—no one shares control with Him—and Who created all things and made them to an exact measure (25:2)."

In the continuation of the article, the author mentions some hadiths from the Prophet (pbuh), such as one narrated by Ibn Abbas:

"Be mindful of Allah and He will protect you. Be mindful of Allah and you will find Him before you. If you ask, ask from Allah. If you seek help, seek help from Allah. Know that if the nations gather together to benefit you, they will not benefit you unless Allah has decreed it for you. And if the nations gather together to harm you, they will not harm you unless Allah has decreed it for you. The pens have been lifted and the pages have dried.^{iv}"

The author explains that the Prophet (pbuh) informed us, that the decree has already been made. However, the Prophet (pbuh) also prescribed action: being mindful of God and seeking help from God.

The important point here is that everything happens by God's will, although God is not pleased with everything He permits to happen. There are two ways to understand the "will of God": the universal will and the legislative will of God. The universal will encompass everything that is permitted to happen, whether good or evil. Meanwhile, the legislative will encompass the good deeds that God commands us to do.

Ibn Abi al-Izz, the commentator on the early and agreed-upon Aqidah al-Tahawiyah, writes: *"The researchers among Ahl al-Sunnah say that 'will' in the book of Allah is two types: a will that is preordained, universal, and*



creative, and a will that is religious, commanding, and legislating. Thus, the legislative will include what Allah loves and is pleased with, and the universal will is what is willed, including all things that occur."^v

The confusion that led to sectarianism in early Islamic history arose from not understanding this point by the Qadarites and Jabarites. Parrott, citing another part of *Sharh al-Aqidah al-Ṭahāwī*, summarizes the beliefs of the Jabarites and Qadarites as follows: the Jabarites said God issued the command for good and evil, so He is pleased with both; whereas the Qadarites said that the command for evils is not from God and these are created by another power. The Jabarites have denied humans of moral responsibility, and the Qadarites have denied God of absolute power.

Continuing, to explain the creative (*takwini*) and legislative (*tashri'i*) will, the article's author refers to a hadith from Ibn Abbas in the interpretation of verse 39 of Surah Ra'd:

"There are two books: a book in which is erased whatever Allah wills, and with Him is the mother of the Book."^{vi}

In fact, every day, angels record everything and destinies are determined or changed. The factor for changing destiny is our deeds, including supplications (*du'a*), humble pleas, good deeds, and intentions. The power of our deeds does not create change by itself; rather, it is a reward that God grants us for submitting to His will. In this way, humans are held responsible for their actions.

Human Will, Action, and Responsibility in Parrott's View

The Qur'an and Sunnah are clear in expressing human moral responsibility. God said:

"Each soul is responsible for its own actions; no soul will bear the burden of another. You will all return to your Lord in the end, and He will tell you the truth about your differences."(6:164)

This is the whole purpose of life, the great test that culminates on the Day of Judgment, which would have no meaning unless judgment is just and meaningful. Therefore, God has delegated will to humans to be used in the service of good. Our will is "free will" in the sense that we are not compelled to do what we do. We will be rewarded or punished in the hereafter based on what we have done with the will God has given us.

Parrott then, by quoting numerous sayings from the Prophet (pbuh), explains the direct impact of human behavior and actions, along with supplication and seeking means (*tawassul*), on his destiny. To correct a common mistake among people, he says that someone who thinks that reliance on God (*tawakkul*) requires no action is like a person who sits in their car and does not fasten their seatbelt, thinking that it has no effect on what God has destined for them. This notion is wrong. In reality, in a world



full of cause and effect, we pursue the causes of a good destiny, while acknowledging that we do not rely solely on the causes themselves. This is the true meaning of reliance on God (*tawakkul*). The Prophet said, "There is no contagion," meaning all diseases occur by God's will, yet he also said, "Do not mix those who are the sick with those who are healthy," thus acknowledging the role of worldly causes in treating illness^{vii}. Therefore, any action we intend to do in the future should be qualified as an action that will only occur under God's will because we know that it will not be realized by our will and ability alone, as He said:

Do not say of anything, 'I will do that tomorrow,' without adding, 'God willing'. (18:23-24)

Ibn Taymiyyah writes:

The servant has two states of being in relation to what is decreed: a state before the decree and a state after the decree. It is a duty upon him before the decree to seek refuge in Allah, to depend upon Him, and to call upon Him. If the result of the decree is not from his actions, then he must be patient over it and satisfied with it. If it was the result of his actions and it is a blessing, he praises Allah for that. If it was the result of sin, then he seeks forgiveness from Him for that.^{viii}

Before the occurrence of the decree (*qada'*), we must seek refuge in God, supplicate and humble ourselves, rely on Him, and do the necessary work to achieve a good outcome. After the decree is realized, we must accept it and continue on our path. If it was a calamity unrelated to our actions, like a natural disaster, we accept it as part of life's trials and remain steadfast in our faith. If the decree was a blessing, we praise God and remain grateful. If the decree was the result of our good deeds, we praise God for granting us success in performing them. If the decree was the result of our sins, we ask God for forgiveness and do whatever is necessary to make amends. At every moment in time, believers respond to the decree by acting.

The Secret of the Divine Command in Parrott's View

Why does the divine command seem to conflict with human free will? This apparent contradiction is based on our inability to conceive of a reality beyond time and linear sequence, let alone the essence of the acts and commands of God Almighty from beyond the confines of time and space. Since the human mind cannot escape the categories of past, present, and future, we find it counterintuitive that our future actions were determined in the past. But for God, there is no past, present, or future, because He is the only one who regulates time. Consequently, scholars consider providence a divine mystery, and philosophical inquiry into it leads to misguidance, just as the Holy Prophet prohibited this. Imam Ahmad ibn



Hanbal recommended accepting providence, both good and bad, and not asking why and how it is^{ix}. This is a rule called *bi lā takyif* (without asking how). The rule of *al-tawqīf* (stopping at the text) also says, with a similar meaning, that one must stop (and not inquire further) when faced with the sacred text.

1. Critique of Justin Parrott's Article

The author's perspective in this article is unbiased and applicable to human lifestyle. The author's point that in the extremist view of the Jabarites, moral responsibility is denied from humans, is an accurate one, just as tyrants and oppressors in the past used this school to justify their actions, and extremists in the present day similarly justify their inhumane violence. It has been said, "*The best school for tyrannical and unjust governance is the school of determinism (jabr)*."^x On the other hand, the author describes the corrected view, using the two definitions of God's creative and legislative will, as a hopeful and industrious perspective, stating that human destiny is not outside their will. He recommends supplication (*du'a*) and seeking means (*tawassul*), and speaks of their definite effects in receiving help from Almighty God. He also recommends satisfaction and patience in the face of that part of divine providence that is outside human will and not the result of his actions. The author also considered parts of the sayings quoted from the Prophet (pbuh) and religious leaders that prohibit deep speculation about divine providence and warn against going astray thereby. It is worth mentioning that all the sources cited in the article are from Sunni commentators and theologians.

1.1. Divine Providence

First, in discussing divine providence and *qada'* and *qadar*, the sentence quoted from Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani, "*The scholars said the divine decree includes the complete and eternal judgment, and the divine measurement (al-qadar) includes the details and components of that judgment*" can be elaborated upon. Although clearer definitions of the meanings of *qada'* and *qadar* appear later in the article, it is useful to point to these meaning by Allamah Hilli. In defining the terms *qada'* and *qadar*, he first extracts their meanings from the Qur'an. One of the meanings of *qada'*, according to the verse

Then He completed them as seven heavens within two days. (41:12)

is completion which is mentioned in the context of the creation of the heavens. The second meaning of *qada'*, using the verse

And your Lord has decreed that you not worship except Him. (17:23)

is command and obligation as in the verse where the command to refrain from worshipping other than God is issued. And the third meaning of *qada'*



is declaration and announcement. God announces something, and this announcement is referred to as *qaḍa'* in the Qur'an:

And We decreed (qadayna) to the Children of Israel in the Book. (17:4)

Meaning We informed the Children of Israel (Helli, 1372 AH, 2:88). According to Allamah, when *qaḍa'* and *qadar* are mentioned regarding existential matters such as the descent of rain or the growth of plants, each of these meanings can be applied. But regarding human actions, only the meaning of declaration and announcement is correct for *qaḍa'* and *qadar*, and the meanings of completion and command do not apply, as they would imply determinism. God Almighty has written all human actions in the Preserved Tablet (*Lawḥ Mahfūz*) and informed the angels about what action each human will perform in the future. In another version of *Kashf al-Murad*, it is mentioned that Avicenna (Abu Ali Sina) stated in the technical meaning of *qaḍa'* and *qadar* that *qaḍa'* refers to God's universal knowledge, and *qadar* refers to His knowledge of changing particulars, and many rational scholars followed him. (Helli, 1372 AH, 2:446) Therefore, for human actions, only this meaning is correct because there is a consensus on the obligation to be pleased with divine *qaḍa'* and *qadar*, and being pleased with disbelief (*kufṛ*) and other reprehensible human actions is not permissible. (Helli, 1372 AH, 2:88) Thus, it can be seen that according to this view, *qaḍa'* and *qadar* pertain to God's knowledge, not His will, and God's knowledge is not the cause of human actions. God decrees in existential (non-voluntary) matters, meaning He issues a command, but regarding voluntary human action, if *qaḍa'* and *qadar* exist, what is meant by it, is God's knowledge. God knows both the totality of our action and its details. God knows that I will do a certain thing, and He also knows that I will do this thing at this specific time and place. Thus, the difference between this expression and the sentence quoted from Ibn Hajar al-Asqalani becomes clear.

1.2. Creative and Legislative Will

In explaining God's creative and legislative will, the article's author uses the book *Sharḥ al-'Aqīdah al-Ṭahāwīyah*. Abu Ja'far al-Tahawī (d. 321 AH) was one of the three figures who initiated a reformist movement in Sunni creed in the 4th century AH. He was born in a village called Taha in Upper Egypt. Tahawī was mostly interested in hadith and fiqh and was considered one of the greatest narrators of Hadiths and jurists of his time. It is said that he was initially a follower of the Hanafi school, and it is better to say that the school of Abu Hanifah satisfied his critical view more than the Shafi'i school (Fakhouri, 1392 AH, 1:347). In theology (*kalām*), Tahawī authored a small treatise called *Bayan al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah*, which became known as *Aqidah al-Tahawīyah*. In its introduction, he states that this



treatise will express the beliefs of Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jama'ah according to the views of Abu Hanifah, Abu Yusuf, and Mohammad al-Shaybani (Golpaiegani, 1385. Some commentaries on Aqidah al-Tahawiyah have been written up to the present century and are available to researchers.

In Aqidah al-Tahawiyah, it is stated that the cause of the misguidance of the Qadarites (*Mu'tazila*) and Jabarites is that they consider God's will to be one kind, whereas the divine will is of two types: legislative and universal will. The universal will is synonymous with God's will or providence for everything in the universe, while God is not pleased with the disbelief of His servants. God does not will something legislatively unless there is good in it for humanity. So, the universal will is not necessarily beloved to God, whereas the legislative will is definitely beloved to God. Another difference between the legislative and universal will is that the legislative will may or may not be realized. For example, God wills (legislatively) that a disbeliever believe, but he does not believe, and thus the legislative will, is not realized. Whereas in the believer's coming to faith, both the universal and legislative wills come together, and the individual believes. The Jabarites say that God's will, is only universal. God has willed everything that exists, and all of it is pleasing to Him, both good deeds and sins. They did not differentiate between the legislative will and the universal will. The *Mu'tazila* also consider God's will to be one kind, and only the legislative will, which God loves. Since sins are not pleasing to God, they are not His act or His creation (Nooristani, 298-300), but rather the act and creation of humans.

In explaining the division of God's universal and legislative will, it is mentioned in Tasnim commentary under verse 35 of Surah al-Nahl that believers, under the training of divine prophets (as), say, "Indeed, for God, glory be to Him, there are two wills": God has one creative will and one legislative will. God's creative will pertains to His own act: God creates the heavens, creates the earth, gives life and death, constricts and expands, provides sustenance, all management of the universe is in God's hands, and whatever He wills, is accomplished. God said:

His command is only when He intends a thing that He says to it, 'Be,' and it is. (36:82)

The legislative will, is where between the will of God and the external realization of the act, the human will intervenes, and God asks the human to obey, believe, do righteous deeds, etc., by their own choice and will. Because God wants the human to do something with their own choice and will, sometimes the human chooses, sometimes the human does not choose, and the Holy Essence of God has left the human free in terms of creation, meaning God created the human in such a way that they have free choice,



have thought, have motivation, agreement, and opposition. Because human perfection lies in this way; if the human were compelled to follow a one-way path and be obedient, this would not be perfection. Perfection is in the path being two-way: they think, evaluate, study, and fight against the desires of the self (*nafs*), the tempting (*mosawwala*) self, the commanding self (*nafs al-ammara*), instincts, lusts, anger, defeat them, and make victorious for the intellect in order to achieve perfection. So, if these were not present, the issues of struggling against the self (*jihad al-nafs*), self-purification, and spiritual growth would not arise. Therefore human freedom is among the greatest divine blessings.

As we see, things that God wills creatively are inevitable, because the entire universe is His army and forces, God said

To Allah belong the soldiers of the heavens and the earth. (48:4)

If the power of God is infinite and whatever is in the world are His agents, then non-occurrence is inconceivable. There is nothing outside the system of creation that could prevent God's will, and within the structure of creation, all are God's agents, as said

And none knows the soldiers of your Lord except Him. (74:31)

So, it is inconceivable that the Holy Essence of God wants something to happen and it does not occur. But in legislative matters, to preserve human perfection, He placed human will and choice in the middle. He said,

Say, 'The truth is from your Lord. So, whoever wills - let him believe; and whoever wills - let him disbelieve'. (18:29)

Or

Indeed, We guided him to the way, whether he be grateful or ungrateful. (76:3)

Humans stand at a crossroads. The Holy Essence of God, in Surah Ma'idah, when mentioning religious rulings says that He willed to purify you. This is a type of legislative will, meaning He willed to purify you through your deeds and your acts of worship (Javadi Amoli, 1385).

1.3. Good and Evil in the Universe

As can be seen, the explanation of the creational and legislative will quoted from Tasnim's commentary and what was quoted from Tahawi in the article under discussion, despite a very long-time gap, have a lot of semantic similarities, except in the case where Tahawi's text states that the will of the universe is not necessarily beloved by God, whereas the legislative will definitely is. The root of this statement becomes clear in the definition of good and evil. What is not beloved to God in the creative will is the evils in the universe, which, based on principle of intellectual goodness and badness, would not be pleasing to the Wise God.



One of the comprehensive definitions in the discussion of evil is that of Avicenna, which he addressed in his important works like *Al-Shifa*, *Al-Najāt*, and *Al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbihāt*. He initially defines well as something desirable, sought after, and wished for by humans. He says that good, in brief, is something that everything is attached to, and what everything yearns for, is existence or the perfection of existence. And evil is something that has no essence; it is either the non-existence of a substance or lacks qualification for being a substance (Avicenna, 1376 AH: 380). So, in reality, it is existence that is yearned for, and no existent has a desire for non-existence. Avicenna enumerates the instances of evil and says that evil is of several types. For example, deficiencies such as ignorance, weakness, and physical defects are called evil. Or pain and grief, which result from perceiving a loss or non-existence (Avicenna, 1376 AH: 380). In *Al-Najāt*, he also mentions other types of evil: first, moral evils and ugly, reprehensible behavior, such as murder and adultery; second, the sources of moral evils such as lust, anger, miserliness, and deceit; third, perceptive evils like pain, suffering, and grief; and fourth, non-existential matters like poverty and death (Avicenna, 1364 AH :669). According to Avicenna, evils can be viewed in two categories: the first category are those that are themselves non-existential matters, like ignorance, inability, and deficiency in creation; the second category are those that are existential matters, but whenever they become the source of non-existential matters, they are considered evil, such as floods, earthquakes, venomous and predatory animals, etc. The first category is evil by essence and the second is evil by accident (*sharr bi al-'arad*). Evil by accident is an existent that, due to its existence, is good, but in connection with some matters, evil appears from it, although its good outweighs its evil. Even though evils are numerous in the world, when compared to all the goods in the world, they are small. For this reason, Avicenna and other philosophers consider evil to be "much" but not "most" (Avicenna, 1376 AH: 459).

With the explanation of good and evil, it can be seen that, contrary to Tahawi's statement, in the world of creation, which is the world of existence and is formed by God's universal will, evil by essence has no existence, and all of existence is good. If evil is observed in a phenomenon, it is due to its weakness in existence, such that in the most perfect existence, no evil enters. In the hierarchy of creatures, any existent that possesses higher levels of perfection has, to that extent, less evil—in fact, less deficiency. But in the lower levels of creatures, proportionally to the deficiency and non-existence inherent in them, evil also finds its way in (Orovti Mowafaq, 1401 AH:16). For example, evil caused by natural disasters is due to flaws in planning or safety systems, or destruction of nature caused by humans.



Evil caused by predatory animals is due to damage to their environment or lack of knowledge of their behavior. Therefore, the world that came into being through God's universal will is entirely good and beloved by God.

1.4. The Unchangeable Book and the Changeable Book

In Justin Parrott's article, mention is made of the changeable and unchangeable book with God, and that the cause of change in the book is our actions and intentions. There are many traditions regarding supplication, charity, and benevolence for achieving a good end, improving one's life situation, and changing human destiny. The blessed verse also confirms this truth:

"But Allah would not punish them while you, [O Mohammad], are among them, and Allah would not punish them while they seek forgiveness" (6:33)

God has called people to supplicate and said:

"And your Lord says, 'Call upon Me; I will respond to you.' (40:60)

And elsewhere He said that if people did not supplicate, God would not pay attention to them:

Say, 'What would my Lord care for you if not for your supplication?' (25:77)

Supplicating can be compared to skills that humans are currently developing and teaching, such as "anger management techniques," which can change destiny or measures (*qadar*). And of course, supplication, by connecting to the eternal divine power and wisdom, will be much more intelligent and powerful.

In Al-Mizan commentary, this topic is mentioned under the titles of "definite" and "non-definite" divine decree. There is a fundamental distinction between "*qada*" (decree) and "*qadar*" (measure/destiny), and also between "definite decree" and "non-definite decree", which directly impacts the possibility of change or lack thereof. *Qadar* means measuring and determining the limits and characteristics of things (such as length, width, shape, duration, etc.). And *qada* ' is the divine judgment issued after *Qadar* and upon God's ratification. If *qada* ' arises from a complete chain of causes, it is a definite or unchangeable decree. That is, when all components of the cause (agent, matter, conditions, and preparatory factors) are present and no obstacle exists, the existence of the effect becomes necessary and definite. Such a decree is unchangeable. And as previously stated, the definitiveness of the decree does not contradict the voluntary nature of human actions. Human happiness and misery are acquired and are the effects of their own deeds and beliefs.

Whenever the chain of causes is incomplete, the decree is non-definite or changeable. In this state, some causes and conditions exist, but the



realization of the effect may not be certain due to an interfering obstacle or a change in conditions. This type of decree is subject to change and alteration (Tabatabai, 1378 AH 14:500).

What is kept in *Umm al-Kitab* (the Mother of the Book) or the Preserved Tablet pertains to the definite and unchangeable decree, which is the origin and source of all other decrees (Tabatabai, 1378 AH 11:506). Among such unchangeable decrees, we see that He said,

That has been inscribed in the Book. (17:58)

Its meaning is that the destruction of oppressive nations and their punishment is a definite destiny written in the Preserved Tablet (Tabatabai, 1378 AH 13:183). Also, the creation that God will have in the other world, called the second creation, is a definite divine decree (Tabatabai, 1378 AH 19:79). As he said

And that [incumbent] upon Him is the other creation. (53:47)

God has also considered mercy as a definite decree:

Your Lord has written (kataba) mercy upon Himself. (6:54)

In this verse "Writing" means proof and definitive judgment. Since mercy, which is the effusion of grace upon the deserving and conveying everything to the happiness it is worthy and capable of attaining, is among God's attributes of action, He attributes to Himself through "writing" or a definite decree (Tabatabai, 1378 AH 7:35). Alongside all this, it must be said that although according to God's definite decree, when He makes a thing obligatory, it becomes definite, yet it is not such that He has stripped Himself of the power to abandon it. So, His power over everything, whether it is His decree or not, is absolute. Every definite punishment and any other definite matter, if God wills, He creates it, otherwise, no. (Tabatabai, 1378 AH 7:122)

In contrast to the definite decree, there is the non-definite or changeable decree. The verse *Allah eliminates what He wills and confirms, and with Him is the Mother of the Book. (13:39)* mentions these two types of decree and, similar to what has been said so far, considers the definite decree to be in *Umm al-Kitab*. In the definite decree, the complete causes are present and lead to the occurrence of the measured thing, whereas in the non-definite decree, the complete causes are not present.

Verses and traditions indicate that, in summary, humanity is divided into two types and two categories (misguided and guided) based on divine decree. However, the elaboration of this summary—who belongs to which category—is related to their own voluntary actions and depends on their deeds. In other words, the decree that passed upon them at the beginning of creation and the start of their existence was a conditional decree (non-definitive or changeable). But in the stage of permanence, that conditional



decree becomes absolute and definitive when voluntary actions come into play, because it is voluntary actions that cause happiness or misery and entail guidance or misguidance (Tabatabai, 1378 AH 8:122). Conditional decree and measure (*qaḍa'* and *qadar*) pertain to the dimensions of an individual's entry into life—such as family, society, time and era, gender, race, abilities, etc.—and the details of destinies are revealed annually according to the blessed Surah al-Qadr. These are not yet the complete causes for a person's final destiny. Their deeds, including good and bad, supplication, effort, etc., can determine the definitive decree and destiny.

1.5. The Permissibility of Discussing Divine Providence

In one part of the article under discussion, this statement from Ibn Taymiyyah was mentioned: "*The servant has two states of being in relation to what is decreed: a state before the decree and a state after the decree. It is a duty upon him before the decree to seek refuge in Allah, to depend upon Him, and to call upon Him. If the result of the decree is not from his actions, then he must be patient over it and satisfied with it. If it was the result of his actions and it is a blessing, he praises Allah for that. If it was the result of sin, then he seeks forgiveness from Him for that.*"¹ Regarding this statement, it must be said that what is meant by "before the decree" could mean one's entire life, the nights of *Qadr* each year, or before making a decision—for example, choosing a city to live in. It seems that knowing when a result will occur is not easy, and that the decrees of this world are subject to God's worldly laws, including mercy, forgiveness, vengeance, gradual seizure (*istidrāj*), respite (*imhāl*), etc. Furthermore, knowing whether a result or decree from God is a reward for a good deed or a punishment for our sins is also not easy, as He said:

But perhaps you hate a thing and it is good for you; and perhaps you love a thing and it is bad for you. (2:216)

Therefore, in any case, the believer is grateful and hopeful. The Prophet (PBUH) also said: *Wondrous is the affair of the believer; for all of his affairs are good. No decree (qaḍa') is decreed by God for him except that it is good for him—if he is afflicted with hardship, he is patient, and that is good for him; if he is given ease, he is grateful, and that is good for him.* (Majlisi, 71:139)

Furthermore, the article's author, using a hadith narrated in Sunan al-Tirmidhi from Abu Huraira who said: "With this I have commanded you? With this I was sent to you? Verily, the people before you were destroyed when they argued over this matter. I am determined for you not to argue

¹ Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 8:76.



over it.¹" This warns that delving deeply into divine providence might lead to misguidance. Although the narrator of this hadith is not considered completely reliable, a similar saying has been transmitted from Imam Ali (as) who, in response to three consecutive questions about the issue of divine destiny, said:

It is a dark path, so do not tread it; [then he was asked a second time, and he said:] it is a deep ocean, so do not enter it; [then he was asked a third time, and he said:] it is the secret of God, so do not burden yourselves with it. (Razi, 1414:527)

It is obvious that philosophers and religious thinkers, especially specialists in theology, have throughout history engaged in lengthy and detailed discussions on the subject of *qada'* and *qadar*, citing the sayings of the Prophet (pubh) and other traditions, and have largely clarified the aspects of this issue. However, the advice of Imam Ali (as) against engaging the mind with the issue of divine *qada'* and *qadar* is directed at those who do not specialize in this matter. In other words, the Imam advised these people to know just this much: that one should not believe in determinism, but it is not necessary to become aware of all the intricacies of the subject of *qadar*. In this same vein, Imam Ali (as), in response to another person (who perhaps had greater intellectual capacity), clarified some aspects of divine *qadar* (Razi, 1414:481), and both the questioner and others were satisfied with that answer.

2. Conclusion

The article under discussion, despite being a practical academic article and, as the officials of the institute that published it state, aiming to create an understanding of Islam for people that inspires faith in their hearts, faces certain shortcomings. The critique of the article sought to examine these shortcomings by comparing them with more sources on the issue of determinism and free will. The first point observed in this comparison is the emphasis that *qada'* and *qadar* mean God's knowledge of what humans do voluntarily. The second point is that the entire universe of existence is the source of good, and evils arise from non-existence (*'adam*). The third point is that the outcome of affairs and human destiny is shaped by their own hands, and throughout their lives, through performing deeds, supplicating (*du'a*), and asking God, they make it possible for themselves to perform good deeds. Of course, human destiny is entirely in the hands of the All-Knowing, All-Wise God, and a believing person, knowing this, is a

¹ al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī*, v.4 p.11 #2133; declared fair due to external evidence (ḥasan li ghayri) by al-Albānī in *Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ* (Bayrūt: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1985), 1:36 #99.



hardworking, calm, and contented individual who, using the skill of supplication, is always hopeful. The remaining point is that the diversity of humans and destinies can create a feeling of failure in people of weak faith. Therefore, it has been recommended that such individuals not engage themselves in discussions of destiny. However, as seen throughout this article, scholars are constantly discussing, researching, and uncovering hidden points in the topics of this field, and there is no prohibition for them. In conclusion, it can be said that the detailed critique and examination of works such as this play a vital role in further elucidating theological issues in Islam and highlighting their role in the individual and social lifestyle of Muslims, leading to the attainment of a pure life (*hayāt tayyibah*).

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ⁱ Atmanspacher, Harald, and Robert Bishop. *Between Chance and Choice: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on*

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ⁱⁱ Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, Aḥmad ibn 'Alī. *Fath al-Bārī bi-Sharḥ al-Bukhārī*. (Bayrūt: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1959), 11:477.

ⁱⁱⁱ Sūrat al-Burūj 85:21-22; Abdel Haleem, M. A. *The Qur'an: English translation and parallel Arabic text*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 591

^{iv} al-Tirmidhī, Sunan al-Tirmidhī, 4:248 #2516; declared authentic (ṣaḥ īḥ) by al-Tirmidhī in his comments.

^v al-Ṭaḥāwī, Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad, and 'Alī ibn 'Alī Ibn Abī al-'Izz. *Sharḥ al-'Aqīdah al-Ṭaḥāwīyah*. (Bayrūt: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 1997), 1:79.

^{vi} al-Ṭabarī, Abū Ja'far. *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al-Qur'ān*. (Bayrūt: Mu'assasat al-Risālah, 2000), 16:480 #13:39

^{vii} Muslim, *Ṣaḥ īḥ Muslim*, 4:1743 #2221

^{viii} Ibn Taymiyyah, *Majmū' al-Fatāwā*, 8:76.

^{ix} al-Lālakā'ī, Hibat Allāh ibn al-Ḥasan. *Sharḥ Uṣūl I'tiqād Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamā'ah*. (al-Sa'ūdīyah: Dār al-Ṭibah, 2003), 1:175 #317

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