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The Concept of Predestination in Judaism

1 Introduction

Predestination today is more at home in Christian than in Jewish discourse. If salvation depends on faith, and faith depends on grace, serious questions arise as to God's election of those to be blessed with faith and thereby with salvation. In Judaism, however, this human life is not generally thought of as a fate from which we need to be saved. Our goal is more broadly conceived as dedication to sanctifying this life than as moving on to another. Ideas about immortality did take hold in post-biblical Jewish thinking. But ideas about an afterlife and ritual practices meant to advance one toward such a condition were rather pointedly eschewed in Mosaic norms and thinking. Perhaps the dearth of ritual surrounding death in the Mosaic Torah and the absence, throughout the Hebrew Bible, of a well-developed mythology of an afterlife mark a reaction to Israel's experience in Egypt, where death and the afterlife played so central a role.[1] We certainly observe a riposte to Egyptian laws regarding both slavery and land tenure in the Mosaic law, where fugitive slaves may *not* be returned to their masters (Deuteronomy 23:16), and priests and Levites are not to hold land (Numbers 18:20–21, Deuteronomy 18:1–2). Kant may fret that the absence of biblical interest in immortality disqualifies Judaism as a religion.[2] But the focus of the Torah on God's covenant disarms Kant's critique. Faith, moreover, pace Christian theory, was not conceived by Jewish thinkers as a way of knowing, let alone the highroad to salvation.

Consider the key prooftext in Christian polemics that affirm faith's primacy. In the King James Version, we read of Abraham, "he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." (Genesis 15:6). Paul had pressed the point in Galatians (3:1–14). But we Jews read Genesis rather differently. In the 1962 Jewish Publication Society translation the verse reads, "And because he put his trust in the LORD, He reckoned it to his merit." Everett Fox, similarly, translates the

1 See Goodman, Lenn, *On Justice: An Essay in Jewish Philosophy*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991; updated edition, Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2008, Chapter 6.

2 See Kant, Immanuel, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* (1793), in Writings on Ethics and Religious Philosophy, vol. 4, Wiesbaden: Insel-Verlag, 1956,.789–90. For Kant's views on Judaism, cf. Fackenheim, Emil, "Kant and Judaism," *Commentary*, December, 1963; Axinn, Sidney, "Kant on Judaism," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 59 (1968) 9–23.

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verb *he'emin* in terms of trust.[3] So does Robert Alter. And Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, similarly, has: "because Avram put his trust in the LORD, He reckoned it to him as righteousness."[4] These modern translators concur here with Rashi (ca. 1040–1105), who shows that what God counted as righteousness (*tzedakah*) was trust. For, as Rashi reasons, Abraham "did not ask God for a sign" to seal His promise, as he did regarding the land God promised Abraham's descendants—the sign then given, in what is called the "covenant between the sections" (15:8–21).

The idiom 'was accounted to him as *tzedakah*' recurs at Psalm 106:31. But the reference there is not to an outlook but to an act: Phineas' slaying of Zimri and Kozbi (Numbers 25:1–15). What counted as righteousness on Abraham's part, as Maimonides reads Genesis 15:6, was loyalty, standing in for the moral virtues at large—all of them practical, as the Torah later stresses: "It will be *tzedakah* in us carefully to keep all this command" (Deuteronomy 6:5).

The Torah's favored metaphor for a bond with God is that of a covenant, a pact that parties may agree to, as Abraham did with Avimelekh at Beer Sheva, the city named for the oath the two men swore there, and the well at which they made it (Genesis 21:22–32). God's covenant with Israel is bestowed, not negotiated. Even so, its terms must be accepted. Hence the stirring biblical ceremonies of acceptance (Deuteronomy 10:12–12:31; 27–28), ancestral to modern canons of the consent of the governed. So, when God gave Israel His laws and the attendant promises, Moses proclaimed the terms of the covenant to the people, and "they all answered with one voice: 'All that the Lord has spoken we shall do.'" And, as if to leave nothing in doubt and no provision of the covenant open to alteration, Moses wrote out its terms and with due ceremony read them to the people, who again accepted it: "All that the Lord has said we will do and obey." (Exodus 24:3–8).

If God chose Israel, then, that was possible only because Israel accepted God—and, by so doing, chose adherence to His laws. There are ideas of chosenness and grace here. But this election is communal and conditional, not arbitrary or categorical: Israel accepts God's rule and with it His law. Our chosenness is for a special role and responsibility before God. The providential regard won by Israel's acceptance, moreover, is dependent on our continued adherence to that

3 The 1917 Jewish Publication Society of America translation, still in use in Rabbi Joseph H. Hertz's widely used text and commentary, *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs* (London: Soncino, 1937, etc.) does render Genesis 15:6, "And he believed in the LORD; and He counted to it him for righteousness," revealing the prevalence of Christian theological thinking.

4 Fox's translation is from Fox, Everett, trans., *The Five Books of Moses*, New York: Schocken, 1995; Alter's is from Alter, Robert, *The Five Books of Moses*, New York: Norton, 2004. Rabbi Sacks' rendering is from Sacks, Jonathan, *The Koren Shalem Ḥumash with Rashi and Onkelos*, Jerusalem: Koren, 2024.

law. Since Israel's election is covenantal, it is voluntary, communal, and public, not private, personal, or secret. Above all, despite some rabbinic homilies to the contrary,[5] Israel's covenant with God is consequential. But its consequences come not by faith but by practice and the ethos practice can instill. The Torah's weightiest consequences, moreover, are constitutive in the practices it ordains, allowing Israel to make themselves worthy to be treasured by God as a holy nation, and a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:5–6).[6]

2 In the Womb

Jeremiah opens the collection[7] of his oracles by reporting God's words: "I knew you before I formed you in the womb. Before you were born, I consecrated you as a prophet to the nations" (1:5). Surely the Hebrew Bible holds no better proof-text in behalf of predestination.[8] But we should read on. For context is

5 At B. Shabbat 88a, one of the rabbinic Sages, seeking to stress the cosmic import of the Torah (and of Israel's acceptance of it), played upon the Torah's words, "they stood at the foot of the mount" (Exodus 19:17). Since the Hebrew for "at the foot of the mountain," if read too-literally, would have them standing *under* the mountain, one of the Rabbis proposed a now famous fantasy that God turned the mountain upside down and held it over all Israel like a cask, threatening that if they failed to accept God's law, the site would be their burial ground. Hence their alacrity in accepting God's law. But since coerced acceptance would render the covenant non-binding, the Talmud posits that God's law was accepted freely many generations later (Esther 9:27). The midrash here was fanciful, of course. But the premise is unquestioned, that a coerced acceptance would have nullified the covenant.

6 For extensive and reliable reflections on the Jewish ideas of covenant and election, see Novak, David, *The Election of Israel: The Idea of the Chosen People*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995. For Jewish reflections on the pathways to solidarity so critical in a modern society, Lesch, Charles H. T., *Solidarity in a Secular Age*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2022; and his *Maimonides and Jewish Theocracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. For the core commitments and ideals of covenantal Jewish nationhood, Mittleman, Alan, *The Scepter Shall not Depart from Judah: Perspectives on the Persistence of the Political in Judiasm*, Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2000; *Hope in a Democratic Age: Philosophy, Religion, and Political Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

7 God commanded the prophet to collect his oracles, Jeremiah 36:2.

8 Christian commentators do find predestination here. Cf. Thompson, J.A., "Jeremiah," in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980, 145; Bright, John, *The Anchor Bible Jeremiah*, The Anchor Bible, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965, 6–7; Nicholson, Ernest W., "The Book of the Prophet Jeremiah", in *The Cambridge Bible Commentary*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973, 24. Gunther Plaut follows suit in Plaut, Gunther, *The Haftarah Commentary*, trans. Chaim Stern, New York: UAHC Press, 1996, 408. John Skinner, who also finds predestination in the verse, reads it more subtly, as an expression of Jeremiah's sense of his

our best commentary, The balance of Jeremiah's exchange with God proves revealing:

> I said, "Ah! LORD God, I know not how to speak. I am but a boy." The LORD answered, "Do not say you are but a boy. Go wherever I send you and say all that I command. Fear them not. I am with you to protect you. The LORD's word on it!" (1:6–8).

Jeremiah sees God reach out and touch his mouth, saying that He has put His words there and has set him over nations and dominions, "to raze and uproot, to ruin and overturn, to build and to plant" (1:9–10). God's touch is part of the vision, sufficing to show us that the content of Jeremiah's experience was symbolic. What it symbolizes, in part, is Jeremiah's need for preparation. A prophet of Israel is no mere foreteller but a forth teller. So, the message Jeremiah is charged to bring is no mere tidings of doom but an admonition to be heeded, a promise alongside a warning. The future is open, and outcomes are contingent on human choices.

The Hebrew Bible often exposes the dynamic of an action by calling its outcome the intent of the thoughtless agents who will face the consequences of their actions. A prophet's words lay bare such consequences, of which the complacent are unaware and to which the vicious are willfully self-blinded. I call such rhetoric prophetic irony. Like dramatic irony, it renders visible the dynamic of a trend, marking the destructive fruition implicit in personal habits or foolish policies. The prophetic vantage point and sensibility opens vistas not of hindsight or foresight but of insight.

Prophetic admonitions typically, spell out biblical precepts in very immediate terms, aiming to help keep hearers on course and call back the errant to paths they may have lost (2 Chronicles 24:19). Maimonides (1138–1204) candidly encapsulates the mission of the prophets of Israel:

> All the Prophets after our Teacher Moses, as you know from their histories, took the role of admonishers, urging the people to keep the Law of Moses. They issued warnings to those

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mission as his destiny, perhaps leaving more room for the prophet's agency; see his Skinner, John, *Prophecy and Religion: Studies in the Life of Jeremiah*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1936, 27. For predestinarian readings elsewhere in the Hebrew scriptures, cf. Genesis Rabbah 63.6 on the struggles of Jacob and Esau in the womb (Genesis 25:22); Numbers Rabbah 10.5, on the need for Samson to be a nazir (Judges 13:5). But Rebecca's twins do struggle with one another. It is not as if the outcome this intramural wrestling were somehow fore-ordained. Samson, too, must struggle with his weaknesses. No such outcome is a foregone conclusion. As for Ecclesiastes 6:10, "What was to be was named long ago," the rabbinic homilists read the verse as referring to human mortality, Moses' mission, and Jeremiah's calling, not to a universal fatalism.

> who spurn it and promises to those who hold it fast. This, we believe, will ever be so—as it says: "It is not in heaven" (Deuteronomy 30:12). (*Guide* II 39, 84b).[9]

Some moderns seize upon the line Maimonides quotes, "It is not in heaven," to claim for themselves willful arbitership of the precepts of the Law. But what Maimonides sees here is a firm denial that the Torah needs supplementation: No further law remains pent in heaven to be revealed. God's legislation is in our hands and hearts, to live by and live up to. The post-Mosaic prophets will underscore and the rabbinic Sages will interpret the Torah's precepts (cf. B. Bava Metzi'a 59b), but there will be no new revealed law.

Jeremiah, like the other prophets of Israel, then, is called as an admonisher. But his role, like theirs, and indeed like that of Moses himself (Exodus 3:7–18), is active, not passive. It demands commitment, engagement, and consent. It is not a mere script, a part to be acted out or a set of moves like those of a chess piece in a game. None of the modalities of a prophet's style have been written out in advance; and none of the possibilities of excellence or error, ranging from poetic brilliance to moral failure are ironclad.

The message each prophet is called to deliver, moreover, presumes the moral freedom and agency of those addressed. It is for them to assay and heed a prophet's words. They have the power to respond, to correct and improve their own course, to alter or indeed reverse it where that is needed, if the message they receive takes hold.

To the imagery suggesting that one might be born to prophesy, Maimonides adds a vital caveat:

> For a vulgar ignoramus to prophesy is no more possible in our view than it is for an ass or a frog. That training and cultivation are indispensable is a core belief for us.[10] Only so is the link with God's power made possible. Do not be misled by its saying, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew you. Before thou didst leave the womb did I consecrate thee" (Jeremiah 1:5). That is true of any prophet. His nature must fit innately… (*Guide* II 32, 74a).

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9 All references here to Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* are to the translation with commentary: Maimonides (Rabbi Moses ben Maimon, called the Rambam), *Guide to the Perplexed*, trans. with commentary, Lenn E. Goodman/Phillip I. Lieberman, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024, keyed to the pagination of Rabbi Salomon Munk's critical edition, Paris, 1856–66. Those pages are shown marginally in the Goodman-Lieberman translation. The present citation is to Part II, Chapter 39, pages73 verso and 74 recto in Munk.

10 When Maimonides says "for us" here, he aligns himself with his fellow Jews and the rabbinic sages, but also the philosophers of the Neoplatonic/Aristotelian tradition; but cf. Seder Eliyahu Rabbah, ed. Friedmann, p. 48, quoted in Marmorstein, Arthur, *Studies in Jewish Theology: Marmorstein Memorial Volume,* J. Rabinowitz/M. S. Lew (eds.), London: Oxford University Press, 1950, 129.

As Maimonides goes on to explain (*Guide* II 36, 79ab), the inborn disposition for prophecy, resident in a poetic imagination attuned to the use of tropes and the creation or reception of symbols, is a necessary but hardly sufficient condition of prophecy. Poetic gifts are free expressions of God's bounty, all too readily withheld. But discipline and training remain critical, lest a would-be prophet merely blather on about whatever attitudes, passions, fads, or sensations strike his fancy. Moral purity and intellectual chastity are as critical as training. But they, too, far from suffice. Enlightenment is a gift of God. Discipline and direction are needed to consummate a prophet's quest; and the poetic gifts that distinguish prophets from scholars, philosophers, and statesmen do not suffice without moral purity, intellectual diligence, and the fruits in insight they can bear.

3 Isaiah Anticipates Jeremiah's Imagery

> Hear me, islands; and heed me, far-off nations! The LORD called me from the womb, from my mother's bowels—called me by name. He made my mouth keen as a sword, hidden in His hand, a polished dart concealed in His quiver. He told me, "You are My servant, Israel, through whom I'll shine." I said, "I've toiled in vain; my strength is spent and wasted." But I'll leave it to the LORD. My work is in His hands. And now He speaks, who formed me from the womb to be His servant, to bring back Jacob and re-gather Israel to Him. I am honored in the LORD's sight; and my God now gives me strength. For He said: "It is not enough to be My servant to raise Jacob's standard and restore Israel's survivors. I shall make you a light to the nations, that My salvation may reach the ends of the earth. (49:1–6)

The great exegete Abraham Ibn Ezra (ca. 1093–1164/67) notes the tension between Isaiah's saying that his mission was ordained before his birth and the morally critical affirmation of human freedom, on which a prophet's mission depends.[11] Ibn Ezra promises to resolve the tension in his commentary on Jeremiah. But that commentary, if it was written, is not known to survive. What we can see here is that Isaiah speaks from his sense of dedication, not in any sense of helplessness before destiny's decree. Quite the contrary. He embraces his mandate, trusting God's promises of protection—and the assurance that Israel is ready to hear him. Thoughts of danger, paired with the hope that risks can be overcome, preclude fatality. Deaf ears may prove more deadly than bodily injury to a prophet's hopes. But God assures Isaiah that ears can be opened. That promise of God's bespeaks an open future.

11 Cf. Ibn Ezra at Isaiah 48:8, and cf. 44:1–5.

Isaiah's charge, like Jeremiah's after him, is moral. So, it presumes the prophet's freedom to rise to the occasion: He is called to a charge and urged to make it his own. Poetically his destiny may be called innate. But his role is emergent, to be learned even as he engages with it. The task is too weighty to be shouldered passively and too delicate to be executed blindly. Isaiah is chosen in part for his talents: The eloquence that makes him a dart and the expressiveness that he likens to a sword are his own, gifts of God, but deeply and uniquely personal. And he is called, not forced. Likewise, those who hear him: They must be urged to heed his deliverances. For their response to him, like his to God, is theirs alone.

Every prophetic message is prescriptive,[12] and the warnings and promises it bears would be empty if obedience were automatic or compelled by destiny. The impact of God's message is not fore-ordained. It depends, crucially, on the poetry and probity of the speaker, and the conscience and clarity of his hearers.

Prophets know that their messages must use language intelligible to those they address and effective in reaching and moving them. That knowledge helps prophets to see why God chose them. When Isaiah calls himself God's shining dart, he knows that the message given him is God's. But it will be a human mind that finds the words for it, and a human mouth that is trusted to utter them. He calls the instrument of his speech an unseen blade, polished but held in reserve, a gift of eloquence granted him for God's purpose. So, his talk of being called by name, singled out even in the womb, vividly voices the phenomenology of prophecy: human insight raised to a higher pitch and power by the sanctity that prompts it.

Isaiah's inspirations are elevated by the moral depth and universal breadth of his charge, which touches many lands. Its record will, in fact, long outlast the breath that bears his spoken words. Like any great poet, he senses that. And this awareness does throw a mantle of destiny over his vision. He wraps himself in it, he embraces his call. But the sense of destiny he feels is not predestiny. If it were a predestined plan that he was called to enact, its fixity would obviate the impact of his message and the eloquence he brings to bear to voice it.

Ideas of predestiny may suggest to some that God alone can act. But when an Isaiah or a Jeremiah is called by God, the unspoken subtext is that there are things that God alone cannot do. Why, after all, does God call Moses to liberate Israel from Egypt? A human leader is needed, an Israelite himself, but also an outsider, one who can address his people in their own tongue, but with words and deeds beyond their reach, and eyes capable of raising theirs beyond the beetling horizon set over them by their burdens. The people need a human leader who can enable

12 Cf. Heschel, Abraham Joshua, *The Prophets*, New York: Harper and Row, 1962.

them to raise themselves beyond the habits they have come to live with and think of as immutable, a leader who can take them beyond the land they've lived in for generations, and teach them to leave behind the customs, myths, and rituals, and the virtues and vices of submission that they have learned in captivity. They need a human leader whom they can follow intellectually, morally, spiritually, actively in protest, and then in migration and, at Sinai, in a shared revelation.

God, then, needs His prophet if He is to shine. That is part of what He confides to Isaiah: To be seen by others, God needs others who can hear Him. He will not be His own prophet. That is the task Isaiah and other prophets are called to. Nor can He take up the charge that His prophets will convey: That task belongs to their hearers. Thoughts of predetermination here would obviate the impact of a moral message, short-circuit its spiritual charge. So, it would vitiate the very idea of prophecy—as if God were talking to Himself.

There's an odd word at the close of Genesis 2:3, the verse relating how God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, "For it was then that He ceased (*shavat*) all the work that God had created…" The word that follows here seems pleonastic: *laʿasot*, to do. Grammatically, one could take the Hebraism as supplying an infinitive as the direct object (cognate accusative, as it were) of the verb 'created'. So, allowing for the idiom, one might render the verse: "For it was then that He ceased all the creative work that He had done." But the Rabbis find no word in the Torah redundant; every word is a portent. So, midrashically, they exploit any hint of verbal redundancy to extract homiletical nuances. Here, they take the added *laʿasot* to allude to the work God left to be done by us. Rabbi Simḥa Bunim of Przysucha (1765–1827) put it eloquently:

> The Lord created the world in the rough. The universe is always incomplete, always unfinished. It is not like a craftsman's polished jar. It needs constant work and creative renewal. Should these cease even for a moment, all would revert to chaos.[13]

Some of the ongoing work and creative maintenance that the rabbi sees the Torah alluding to is left for us to do. This thought, too, fathered on Scripture by many of its most faithful readers, keenly sensitive to the moral imperatives implicit in the

13 Rabbi Simḥa Bunim (ca. 1765–1827) was a Ḥasidic master in Poland who sought to reconcile rationalism and pietism in his Ḥasidism. He also worked to overcome the dynastic tendencies prominent in the Ḥasidic movement. His work at the interface of Ḥasidism and the Enlightenment was foundational for other Ḥasidic thinkers. His gloss of Genesis 2:3 is from his biblical commentary (ad loc.), Bunim, Rabbi Simha, *Kol Simḥa*, Breslau, 1859. They're quoted in Newman, Lewis I., *The Hasidic Anthology*, New York: Bloch, 1944. Ibn Ezra ad loc., in a kindred gloss, sees in the added verb an allusion to God's bestowal on His living creatures of creative powers of their own: specifically, the power of procreation.

inchoate state of nature and the human condition, is radically incompatible with the idea of predestination.

For Isaiah, as for Jeremiah, a prophet's mission and message play vital parts in God's plan. They make room for change and course corrections that will have significant impacts on human destiny. God's idea, like His Law, whether in the governance of nature at large or in the detailed prescriptions of the Torah, does not execute itself. It asks an active response, first from the messenger and then from his hearers—and even from the elements and energies active in the world. The content of God's command to human beings is a nest of moral and spiritual imperatives. That basic fact is inconsistent with the very idea of predestination. If there's a question of election here, its bite comes when those chosen to hear God's message, voiced for them in human language by God's prophets, are faulted for stopping up their ears.

The same phenomenology that we've seen in Isaiah and Jeremiah is vividly expressed in the imagery of Amos:

> Will two walk together unless they are agreed?
> Doth a lion roar in the forest if it hath no prey?
> Or will a beast give voice from its den when it hath taken nothing?
> Does a bird alight in a trap that holds no bait,
> Or doth a snare spring up from the ground when it hath caught nothing?
> Will the alarm horn blast in the city and folk not tremble –
> Or ill befall a city that the LORD hath not brought on?
> The LORD God doth nothing
> Without revealing His counsel to His prophet servants.
> The lion hath roared. Who will not fear?
> The LORD God hath spoken. Who will not prophesy? (Amos 3:3–8)

God's counsel here (*sodo*) is not a secret, as the term *sod* is sometimes taken to mean. Its sense is as clear as the warning Amos conveys: It means God's counsel; and thus, God's plan. But, as Andersen and Freedman note, a prophet's warning may allow time for a suitable response. Thus Jonah (3:4): "In forty days, Nineveh shall be turned upside down." Execution of the sentence of wrongdoing typically awaits the impact of an act or an ethos. So, the same delays that may prompt impatience also afford a respite. A prophet's moral sensitivity[14] may offer an early warning, allowing time for a change of heart and change of course.[15]

14 Cf. Maimonides, *Guide*, II 38.

15 Cf. Andersen, Francis I./Freedman, David Noel, *The Anchor Bible Amos*, New York: Doubleday, 1989, 400.

the man he'd meant to hang." Hardly has Haman reached home and been warned by Zeresh that if Mordecai is a Jew, Haman himself is likely to be the loser in the deadly game he has initiated, than the Queen's invitation arrives (6:1–14).

Only at her private party does Esther denounce Haman for his genocidal plot, begging her royal spouse to save her people: "Had we merely been sold as bondmen and bondwomen," she pleads, "I'd have held my peace. It would not have been worth troubling the king," but, in fact "I and my people have been sold, to be slain, destroyed, annihilated" (7:4). Returning from the garden, where he'd walked out to relieve himself, Ahasuerus finds Haman fallen on the couch where Esther lay, begging her to spare his life. Incensed, he cried, "Will he try to take the Queen right here while I am in the house!" (7:8).

Haman is hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai, the decree against the Jews is rescinded, and they are freed to defend themselves and strike back against those who had been preparing to take advantage of the royal order to massacre the empire's Jewish population. Esther and Mordecai send letters setting a time for celebration on the anniversary of the date that Haman's lots had marked propitious. The Purim holiday continues to be marked joyously each year, with feasts, exchanges of edible treats, gifts to the poor, and reading of the scroll of Esther.

But do notice that everything depended on the courage, tact, and resource of one woman. Nothing was done for Esther to make her choice easier or take from her hands the decision that events had set before her. If God had determined in advance that the Jews of the empire be saved, there's no denying that it was by Esther's brave decision. The irony was in the promises of Haman's lots. But whether Mordecai was right in hoping that if the lovely queen had failed to act God would have found another means of saving His people is something we shall never know.

11 A Touch of Transcendence

Sabbaths, the ancient rabbinic Sages say, give Israel a foretaste of immortality (B. Berakhot 57b, Genesis Rabbah 17.5). Making the Sabbath a day of rest and respite offers us here in this world, the Sages suggest, a touch of transcendence. It is with such thoughts in mind that Maimonides writes that the Sabbath, as an institution, attests to God's reality, by harking back to the act of creation, and to God's providence, as manifested in the liberation of Israel from slavery in Egypt (Genesis 2:3, Exodus 20:11, Deuteronomy 5:6). As he writes,

> Beliefs do not last without actions to make them permanent, prominent, and public. That is why the Torah commands us to honor this day: to institute the idea of the world's creation and make it known throughout the world....
>
> The Torah, in fact, gives two different reasons. For the impact is twofold: In the first statement of the Decalogue, the reason given for celebrating the Sabbath is *in six days did the* LORD *make* ... (Exodus 20:11) ... But in Deuteronomy, it says, *Remember thou wast a slave in Egypt....Therefore did the* LORD *thy God command thee to keep the Sabbath day* (5:15). That is true. The object in the first formulation is to elevate and celebrate this day, as it says, *Therefore did the* LORD *bless the Sabbath day and make it holy* (Exodus 20:11), reflecting the first reason, *in six days...* The command is for Israel; and, for us, it regards remembrance of our liberation from bondage in Egypt. We did not serve freely or when we liked. We had no relief. So, rest and respite were instituted for us. We combine the two obligations: belief in the truth as to the world's origin (clear evidence of God's reality, on the least thought and reflection), alongside commemorating God's grace in giving us respite from the *burdens of Egypt* (6:7). The Sabbath is a double gift, in effect, imparting a sound intellectual conviction along with a bodily good. (*Guide* II 31, 72ab).

Our emulation of God's exemplary rest, we add, reflects a recognition on our part that God, too, is free. It is the freedom we share with God that Rabbi Hertz recognizes when he links the freedom we were given in the Exodus with the freedom of God's creative act:

> The Talmudic mystics tell that when the heavens and earth were being called into existence, matter was getting out of hand, and the Divine Voice had to resound: 'Enough! So far and no further!' Man, made in the image of God, has been endowed by Him with the power of creating. But in his little universe, too, matter is constantly getting out of hand, threatening to overwhelm and crush the soul. By means of the Sabbath, called 'a memorial of creation,' we are endowed with the divine power of saying 'Enough!' to all rebellious claims of our environment, and are reminded of our potential victory over all material forces that would drag us down.[49]

We are not the mere creatures of heredity and environment, as Rabbi Hertz observed. And we, like God, are not mere slaves to our own projects. Freedom is the element of transcendence that belongs by right to every human being. Freedom, paradoxically, is human destiny.

12 All Is Foreseen

What, then, of situational constraints, the limits that heredity and environment do impose on us? Whether the constraints we face are laid to nature and history or

49 Hertz, *Pentateuch*, 298.

ascribed to God, whose work so often is seen in the play of nature and history, the reality of constraints is not to be denied. But to think of them as a cage in which we are trapped is a grave error. The parameters that limit our actions typically leave multiple openings to human choices, some obvious, some difficult, some demanding creativity or sacrifice. Fatalism is, in that sense, a delusion: Every cause has its effects, and every outcome has its causes. But the inference from causal necessity to fatality is fallacious: It ignores the existential role of the individual (for we too are subjects) and the possibilities for personal, communal, cooperative, and creative action.

The locus classicus of rabbinic texts applied to questions of predestination reads on the face of it like a paradox. To the great Rabbi Akiva (d. 135), doyen of the Talmudic sages, the words are ascribed that are translated as follows by Herbert Danby in his learned rendering of the Mishnah: "All is overseen, but freedom of choice is given" (M. Avot 3.16). Rabbi Hertz gives the same sense.[50] Martin Jaffee, similarly, renders Akiva's apothegm, "Everything is foreseen, yet choice is still possible."[51] If divine omniscience is deemed incompatible with human free agency, the best that can be said of Rabbi Akiva's famous words is that he blankly denies seeing any problem here. As Rabbi Hertz writes in his commentary:

> This saying of Rabbi Akiba is among the most important in the Aboth and lays down a fundamental doctrine of practical religion. Even though God foresees the course which a man will adopt when faced with the choice of two paths, man has free choice. God's foreknowledge and the freedom of man's will are reconcilable.... Everything past, present, and future, is seen by God – even as a watchman in a lighthouse tower sees ships in the distance coming and going and can foresee which among them must dash itself to destruction.[52]

That gloss does help a bit since it lays responsibility squarely where it belongs morally, on the human subject. Hence Rabbi Hertz's talk of "practical religion" and his assignment of the fate awaiting the ships seen from a lighthouse in the distance to their own skillful or faulty seamanship or navigation. God here is reduced to an observer; the idea of His governance is reduced to passive watching, as if from a distance. But if God's oversight is understood to mean providential governance, the paradox that seemed implicit in Akiva's words returns in full force. Was the great rabbi merely stating a paradox? Or was he, perhaps, pointing

50 *The Mishnah*, trans. Herbert Danby, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933, repr. 1977, 452; Hertz, Joseph, *The Authorised Daily Prayerbook: Revised Edition*, New York: Bloch, 1957, 660–61.
51 *The Oxford Annotated Mishnah*, Shaye Cohen/Robert Goldenberg/Hayim Lapin (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022, 731, where the dictum is numbered 3.15.
52 Hertz, *Prayerbook*, 660.

out that what may seem a paradox is nothing of the sort—at least not if we recognize that God's oversight does not preempt every outcome.

Rabbi Hertz said, "God foresees the course which a man will adopt." On that account it is the individual who chooses a course. God may know how one will choose, but His knowledge does not determine or pre-empt one's choice. That thought may still seem to paint a rather passive picture of God's knowledge. But isn't what God knows inevitable?

That question, as Maimonides knew, was well answered by the Muslim philosopher al-Fārābī (d. 950), when he argued (in his commentary on Aristotle's *De Interpretatione* 9), that the truth of a proposition, *does* necessarily imply the corresponding state of affairs; but that necessity does not infect the state of affairs itself: God's knowledge of what one will choose is still knowledge of a choice that is one's own. It does not somehow necessitate that choice, or it would not be knowledge of one's choice at all. What makes an event necessary are its causes, not the knowledge of them, even if that knowledge is God's.

Here we are brought back to Genesis and specifically to God's giving natures to the beings He created: The rock will fall, the fish will bite, and the man will choose (*Guide* II 48). God did not create His creatures powerless or without natures and dispositional properties and capacities of their own. To follow Maimonides' thoughts here, we need only remember that without agency creation is empty.

Here we confront the idea of delegation, and an understanding that reveals Rabbi Akiva's words to be no mere paradox. He did not just dogmatically assert that God's omniscience does not obviate human freedom. What Rabbi Akiva said, as Maimonides reads it in his Commentary on Avot, was this: "Everything in the world is known to God. He is cognizant of it, as Akiva said, 'All is overseen.' But then he adds, 'But do not think that what follows is predestination,' that is, that one's actions are externally determined. Not so. Rather, one is given the power to act. Agency is delegated."

What Akiva saw is that it does not follow from God's omniscience that human acts are externally compelled. For man is given agency: The power to act is ours. Rabbi Akiva's choice of the Hebrew word *reshut* is the key here. Literally it would mean permission. But to translate it as "freedom of choice" comes close to merely restating the problem—or begging the question. Taken more strictly, Rabbi Akiva's reference is to agency. The power to act and choose, as he saw it, is *delegated* to us. It is in those terms that Maimonides glosses the idea:

> Agency is delegated to every human being. If one wants to follow a good course and become righteous, he has the power to do so. If one wants to take a bad course and grow wicked, he has that power too—as it says in the Torah, "Lo, man hath become as one of us, knowing

> good and evil" (Genesis 3:22)—in other words, humans, uniquely in the world, know good and evil. Unlike any other species, they know good and evil by their own rational intelligence and can act as they please with none to keep them from doing right or wrong. They might even "reach out [and take from the tree of life and eat and live forever."][53] (*Mishneh Torah* Laws of Repentance 5.1)

Maimonides gives a corresponding account of all natural causality, upholding the causal powers of all natural things, and rejecting the claims of Muslim occasionalist theologians, who denied all "horizontal" (or natural) causality and confined causal agency to God alone. On their account, Maimonides argued, there is no nature, and things have no natures such as we study in the sciences and employ in our practical arts. The occasionalists have, in effect, erased the meaning of creation itself, which they had intended to defend. For creation cannot mean the mere bestowal of bare existence on things without any character or dispositions—or lives or actions of their own.[54]

God, as Maimonides reads Genesis, created the natural world, assigning things the natures by which they interact, from the primal qualities of the elements and compounds to the capacities found in animals and plants, and the moral and intellectual capabilities of human beings—including the human capacity to make rational choices. Just as God did not (and does not) begrudge existence to beings other than Himself, He does not deny agency to other beings, including choice and efficacious action to His human creatures.

Where many a modern philosopher pits natural necessity against human freedom, Maimonides sees human agency as a part of nature (not apart from it): Rocks fall, fire rises, foods nourish, medicines do their work, plants grow and reproduce, animals pursue what they take to be beneficial and shun what they take to be harmful—and human beings make choices, reliant on the rational soul that God gave us. Elements, compounds, plants, animals in general and human beings specifically all belong to nature and act in keeping with their God-given natures.

Rabbi Ḥanina in the Talmud (B. Berakhot 33b) understands perfectly what Rabbi Akiva meant when he posited God's delegating to us the power and the freedom by which we human beings act. Very much to the point are Rabbi Ḥanina's

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53 Maimonides does not believe eternal life to be unattainable. The same spinning, glittering sword, which he has rabbinic grounds to take to symbolize the Torah, both guards and by its scintillations guides one to the Tree of Life. Cf. Goodman, *Maimonidean Midrash*, forthcoming.
54 Creation, as Maimonides explains, is not confined to the absolute imparting of existence where there was nothing. It also means "giving things their specific forms or natures." *Guide* II 30, 71b.

words, "All is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven." His prooftext: "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God ask of you?" (Deuteronomy 10:12). The Sage hears a special emphasis in the word *ask* here. For one does not ask for what one controls.

Rabbi Ḥanina, did affirm a form of determinism, voiced clearly in his saying, "All is in the hands of Heaven…" He held, in fact (B. Ḥullin 7b), that "No one hurts his finger here below were it not decreed on high. For it is written, 'By the LORD are a man's steps set' (Psalms 37:23)," words repeated in Proverbs, and capped there by these words: "So how can a man know where his path may lead?" (20:24; cf. Jeremiah 10:23). We can trace the inference that Rabbi Ḥanina meant to draw here when the Talmud quotes him as saying:

> The same angel appointed over conception, Night by name, takes the drop of semen and sets it before the Holy One, blessed be He, saying to Him, "Master of the Universe, what will become of this droplet? A man strong or weak, wise or foolish, wealthy or poor?" (B. Niddah 16b)

But then the Talmud intervenes, restating Rabbi Ḥanina's critical exception of the moral realm:

> But it does not add 'wicked or saintly.' For, as Rabbi Ḥanina said, "All is in the hands of Heaven except the fear of Heaven." (Loc. cit.)

Moral truth and spiritual callings preempt the play of external determination, and lay fate itself, when human callings and obligations are at stake, squarely in our own human hands.

There are passages in Ecclesiastes, given the dark mood wrestled with in that work's reflections, that seem redolent of determinism and indeed predestination. Those excrescences persist only on the surface in this profound and swiftly moving text. Here we read, "I have learned that all that God doeth will be forever, unaugmented and undiminished. This God doeth that He be revered" (3:14). The words affirm the immutability of the laws of God's creation (cf. 1:9). But do they accept the sense of destiny pronounced by fatalists? True, "one cannot contend with One stronger than he" (6:10). True, also, that to us the future is unknown: "Righteous and wise, their works are in God's hands, and no one knows if love or hate awaits him" (9:1). And, yes, "the race is not to the swift" (9:11)—goodness is not consistently rewarded, and wickedness is not consistently requited (9:2). But that thought speaks more of contingency than of a sealed future.

Jeremiah hears God say, "I, the LORD, do plumb the heart and search the reins to requite every man as he merits, according to the fruit of his deeds" (17:10). Far

from affirming a predestined fate, the verse affirms an accountability consequential to (and, as I've proposed, often constitutive in) our choices.

In Proverbs we read a verse we've already mentioned: "A man's heart may plot his path, but the LORD directs his steps" (16:9). The reference, as I read the verse, is to no marionette or automaton but to the history's twists and ironies, personal or communal. As the proverb has it, "Man proposes, God disposes." The Yiddish counterpart: *Mann tracht, Gott lacht.* Such words of practical wisdom warn against cocksureness. But they are not oracles of helplessness. For even these presume a measure of human corrigibility and thus of freedom. Otherwise, the advice would be otiose.

13 Conclusion

We have surveyed quite a body of biblical and rabbinic literature that sustains our thesis that, despite the prominence of the idea of God as the Creator and Ruler of the world, the idea of predestination tends to be rejected in the normative Jewish sources. For such thinking is scotched by the prevalence of moral and spiritual norms. The prophets of Israel, we stress, are not "foretellers" but forth tellers: Their calling is first to free their people and then to guide them to a God-given way of living, in fellowship with one another and with all of our fellow human beings, guided by loyalty and love of God. The courage called for in the exercise of that calling belies the notion that its outcome is somehow assured. Prophets need trust as well as courage to rise to the call they hear from God. But trust would hardly be a virtue if the outcome of every contest were assured from the very outset and known to be assured. The same is true, of course, of those to whom the prophets and sages of Israel have addressed their call.

God, as the Torah makes clear, has a strenuous mission for His people Israel: to become and steadfastly remain a nation of priests, holy by the lives they seek to lead and exemplary in their thinking as well as in those lives. Only so is God's promise fulfilled, that Abraham's descendants will be a blessing to all the families of the world (Genesis 12:2, 18:19). Israel's election, despite a shoddy brickbat among those who hate this people, is not a privileging of God's people in His grace but a long and difficult mission, to themselves, to one another, and to others called by God to missions of their own.

Prophets like Jeremiah and Isaiah may sense that they were chosen even before their birth for the charge to which they find themselves called. But what they sense is more a matter of their dedication than of election of any arbitrary sort. Viewed through a Maimonidean lens, their sense of destiny reflects an inspired spirit's recognition of the necessary talents, the spark of motivation to pursue

the moral and intellectual discipline demanded by the role for which they feel themselves to have been called. And such a sense of calling arises in and answers to the recognition of a need. That is paramount in the case of Moses: His first calling was to free his fellow Israelites from slavery in Egypt. But beyond that, he finds, that he must re-introduce them to the God of their fathers and teach them the Law and way of life that their God will lay out for them to live by. And finally, before his mission lapses, he must return them to the land God promised their forbears.

In prophets like Amos, or like Micah or Hosea, the need was less comprehensive—partly because so much had been done by Moses—but no less pressing and immediate as they viewed the moral and spiritual misprision that attacked their people with no less devastating impact than the plagues that repeatedly grew rampant among them, not infrequently associated with their reversion to practices condemned in the Mosaic law and warned against by Moses and by later admonishers as well. The damage might be spiritual, moral, or hygienic. But the prophets of Israel were probably not misguided in linking the dimensions of the risk, as Moses had sensed when he promised his people (Deuteronomy 7:15) that keeping God's laws would help protect them from the diseases they had known as slaves in Egypt.

Later heroes, biblical and postbiblical, judges, sages, and martyrs, also rose to callings of their own times that were situational. And the uniqueness of each circumstance shows the need for a certain creativity in each case, alongside moral courage. For each saint or hero must find a unique response to a unique situation. The psalms of David were not pre-scripted. Nor were those composed by Levitical successors, called to service in the Temple in Jerusalem. Their new themes and tropes, and the lost melodies and harmonies they devised created new canons in harmony and resonance with the older ones they had received. We see a like rise to creativity in Hannah, when her longing for a child and frustration at the jibes of her rival wife (1 Samuel 1:6) prompted her to prayer, opening channels of communion with God unfamiliar enough in personal and private acts, to be unrecognizable as prayer to Eli, the priest at Shilo, leaving him to assume that this woman must be drunk if her lips moved without a sound.

Ruth, acting from love and loyalty, had no reason to expect that her choice of poverty and near beggary with her widowed mother-in-law would lead ahead to a glorious future. Her choice to remain with Naomi would be trivialized had she possessed an inkling of what was to ensue. Indeed, it's only in retrospect that later observers could detect a plan here. But even then the future remained open: David was a bold and generous spirit, but neither his poetic and musical tropes nor his military prowess, neither his friendship with Jonathan nor his mor-

tal sin against Uriah, neither his dancing before the Ark nor his grief at the loss of a son, nor the lost loyalty of another son of his own, are foretold by his ancestry.

Esther and Deborah are unique individuals, each acting in the circumstances that life has set before them. Kohelet may complain that there is nothing new under the sun. But each circumstance that life presents is distinctive enough to demand creativity from each of us, if only to determine whether what we face is a time to laugh or a time to weep, a time for war or a time for peace, a time to mourn or a time to dance.

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Jesse Couenhoven

The Concept of Predestination in Christianity

1 Introduction

There are few Christian doctrines as contentious as the doctrine of predestination.[1] It has seemed at times that the doctrine would surely fade away, through neglect if not outright rejection. Such, however, has not been our fate. Although belief in predestination is far from fashionable, it continues to be part of official doctrine in the Catholic church as well as in numerous Protestant and Orthodox circles.[2] Theologies of election and predestination also have a long history in Jewish and Muslim thought, influences which Christians have both sought to appropriate and to distance themselves from.

Perhaps the main reason for its enduring influence is that predestination, along with related ideas, such as being God's chosen (or "elect") people, is clearly mentioned in the Bible. In addition to its widely accepted status as revealed doctrine, predestination is personally significant to many Christians. Especially among Catholics and magisterial Protestants, many continue to find it deeply meaningful and reassuring to trust that God directs our ultimate ends. The idea of divine preordination is often implicitly raised as well by charismatic or anabaptist Christian communities, even though it is not typically part of their official teaching. These communities may have little official interest in topics like election, but they nevertheless find it natural to ascribe many aspects of life to God's providential design and purposes. The question for most Christians across the centuries, then, has not been whether to affirm that God predestines but, rather, what it might and should mean to say so.

Even outside of church contexts, talk of destined events that "had to be" can be hard to avoid. Love songs continue to play up romantic ideals of finding "the one" who completes you or being "made for" each other. The historian Jackson Lears and philosopher Michael Sandel have argued that American public culture has long subscribed to a kind of secular economic providentialism that operates with the "invisible hand" of the market, a quasi-religious idea that offers the com-

1 For their help with this essay and discussion of the topics in it, I'd like to thank Dylan Belton, Catherine Ricketts, Georges Tamer, Johannes Grössl, and Amy Tsou.

2 Representative conciliar statements are discussed below in Section 3.

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forting reassurance that those who succeed in the modern capitalist economy deserve to do so, and are being rewarded according to their merits.[3] More soberly, in his book on divine providence, David Fergusson quotes a chaplain from World War One who wrote that "Almost every solider in the lines has become an Ultra-Calvinist—if not a man of faith, at least a man of fatalism. He believes that he will die only 'when his number's up'..."[4] Such notions about love, money, and death might seem like mere superstition but it is worth asking why they are so attractive, so widespread, and, apparently, so natural.

From the beginning of the Christian controversies about predestination, in the time of the Roman African Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430), there have been debates concerning whether to preach openly about predestination.[5] Some, Augustine noted, thought the doctrine correct but so easily misunderstood or abused that it might be best to keep it quiet, out of the spotlight.[6] In this essay, I follow his recommendation that it is better to challenge confusion and misuse of religious teachings and practices with careful theological reflection. Accordingly, I offer here an ecumenical overview of what makes the idea of divine election both attractive and contentious. I do so by highlighting the various ways Christians have thought about predestination, how they have defended those ideas in conversation with competing interpretations of Christian Scripture and a variety of theological and philosophical commitments, and how those ideas have interacted with the practice of their faith, including their personal piety.

Although the main goal of this essay is simply to offer a thoughtful and fair-minded introduction to a topic that is rarely carefully attended to, I also make three constructive suggestions about the idea of predestination. First, even in its "strong" Augustinian forms, the idea of predestination is more defensible than modern scholars have tended to think. That argument is tied to my sympathy for "compatibilist" approaches to questions about free will and personal agency (for more on this, see section 3). Second, partly because predestination is a defensible doctrine, in at least some of its forms, it is not a theological concept that needs to divide Christians, Jews, and Muslims. These traditions certainly have significant disagreements, but this doctrine need not be counted among the more irreconcilable ones. The enormous diversity of views about divine and human agen-

3 Lears, Jackson, *Something for Nothing: Luck in America.* NY: Penguin Books, 2004, see especially the Introduction and Ch. 1–2 in Sandel, Michael J. *The Tyranny of Merit: What's Become of the Common Good?* NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020, 41–43.

4 Fergusson, David, *The Providence of God: A Polyphonic Approach.* NY: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 4.

5 All of the theological figures cited in this text were born after the death of Christ.

6 This debate was the occasion for the writing of Augustine, *Predestination.*

cy present in all three religions implies that nearly everyone in a particular faith can find allies in other faith traditions. Third, my discussion is meant to encourage adherents of all these traditions who find themselves sympathizing with what Matthew Levering calls the "priority of divine agency". As we will see, monotheists of every sort can avail themselves of philosophical resources to defend their theological intuitions about divine foreknowledge, providence, free will, and predestination.

1.1 A Few Clarifications

Before going any further, we should consider the meaning of some of the key terms in this discussion. It may seem obvious what predestination means—but as we will see, even basic claims about predestination are contentious. The word itself is somewhat self-explanatory, meaning that God destines or determines in advance. Then again, what might *that* mean? Most (though certainly not all) Christians have rejected a complete, or as some would put it, global divine determinism of all things, where absolutely everything that comes to pass in the history of the world happens according to God's divine plan.[7] Christians have typically, therefore, distinguished predestination, which has long been widely and openly accepted, from determinism. Some have thought that the former implies the latter, but this is a claim that cannot be taken for granted.

The minimal content of any doctrine of predestination is that God has a plan for a creature's ultimate end, the result of which God knows in advance. Christian versions of the doctrine naturally take a Trinitarian form: the Father has eternally elected God's people for salvation, and providentially ensures that this plan comes to pass, through Jesus Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Predestination thus involves God working in and with creation to fulfill the ultimate purposes for which God created in the first place. To be more specific, Christian doctrines of predestination have at least this much particular content: foreseeing that there will be evil in the world, God elects certain persons or communities to participate in God's providential work to save the world from sin and bring the created order to fulfillment. Accordingly, predestination is closely connected to the ideas of di-

7 For recent explorations and defenses of divine determinism, see the short overview I offer in Couenhoven, Jesse, "His Sovereignty Rules Over All: A Review of Recent Work on Divine Determinism." *Modern Theology* 37, no. 2 (2021): 508–22, and the lengthy discussions in White, Heath, *Fate and Free Will: A Defense of Theological Determinism.* Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019; Furlong, Peter, *The Challenges of Divine Determinism: A Philosophical Analysis.* NY: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

vine foreknowledge and providence. Because predestination, in the most technical sense, concerns a person's ultimate destiny, it would be possible to believe in both divine foreknowledge and providence without believing in predestination. Still, as we will see, doctrines of predestination naturally have their start in doctrines of foreknowledge and providence, and are hard to disentangle from those ideas. On many accounts, predestination incorporates these ideas while going beyond them. In particular, according to many theologies of predestination, there is a deterministic aspect to election (even if God does not determine all things), because those who are elect may not ultimately refuse the role or the future God has planned for them.

1.2 Discussion Overview

Given the moderate length of this essay and the huge number of Christian figures who have written influentially about predestination, it was necessary to make some hard choices about what and who to discuss. My strategy has been to focus my discussion by attending to a handful of key conceptual questions. In brief, these are (1) the scriptural status of predestination, (2) predestination's relation to ideas about divine sovereignty, (3) the questions about freedom raised by doctrines of predestination, and (4) the spiritual piety associated with belief in predestination. Each of the following sections of this essay take up these questions, in the order just listed.

I explore these topics in conversation with about a dozen key historical figures and texts. As much as possible I have attempted to discuss these figures in historical order, but at times it has been easier to keep my discussion brief by taking them out of order.[8] My discussion of these theologians is not meant to summarize their full views, but rather to illustrate their influence on the topics taken up in each section of the essay. I selected my theological conversation partners with two main criteria in mind. First, each theologian has significant standing as a representative of Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant Christian thought. I have attempted to prioritize and give the most space to ecumenical figures who are respected as authoritative by more than one of these traditions, though given the divisiveness of arguments about predestination that has not always been possible. Second,

8 For excellent historical theologies of predestination that address more figures at greater length than I can here, see Couenhoven, Jesse, *Predestination: A Guide for the Perplexed.* NY: T&T Clark Bloomsbury, 2018.; Levering, Matthew, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths.* NY: Oxford University Press, 2011. My discussion here is meant to compliment and expand on the work done in my earlier book on predestination, while providing a more accessible overview.

each theologian has had significant impact on the key ideas and questions about predestination I discuss. The conceptual overview offered in this essay is also, therefore, a historical survey that seeks to offer an accessible introduction to the people and ideas central to the most influential Christian theologies of predestination.

As my discussion proceeds, I will highlight important areas of ecumenical agreement as well as disagreement. I am not a neutral party in these conversations, but I do attempt to be evenhanded. This approach has the benefit of illuminating the rich array of theological issues raised by doctrines of predestination—topics that are of interest to all who care about theology.

In attending to predestination, we will be attending to multiple aspects of Christian thought and life. As we have already begun to see, to talk about predestination is, unavoidably, to talk as well about numerous topics central to any monotheistic theology. Most obviously the topics closely tied to the idea of predestination include the questions of how to understand, and how to relate, human and divine free will and agency. Predestination is also closely related to beliefs about God's care for creation (i. e., providence and foreknowledge), and the always controversial topics of heaven, hell, and the possibility of universal salvation. Any discussion of predestination must also address what it means to affirm God as sovereign, the possibility that God determines some or all the events of history, the role of grace in the moral and religious life, and the problem of why evil exists in a world made by a good God. Discussion of predestination, therefore, requires significant work in systematic theology, not to mention attention to biblical theology. It need not be thought of as the most important or architectonic of doctrines for it to be, nevertheless, a highly significant theological meeting-place.[9] How a person thinks about predestination has considerable implications for the way she or he thinks about God, human agency, the nature of sin and salvation, and vice versa.

9 A side note is relevant and interesting here. Calvinist theologians sometimes claim that predestination is the central and unifying theme of their church's theological approach. By my lights, they have been shown to be wrong, at least as far as the thought of their most important theologian, John Calvin, is concerned. Calvin's central theme, the unification of humanity with God in Jesus Christ, was similar to the central theme of many Christians who preceded him. They too emphasized participation in the life of the Triune God as the essence and goal of Christian life (on this point in Calvin's thought, see Billings, J. Todd, *Union with Christ: Reframing Theology and Ministry for the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011). In many ways, however, this erroneous claim about predestination is understandable, because of the nature of doctrines of predestination as a kind of theological crossroads.

This essay is organized into six major sections, the first being this introduction. In section two, I survey the Biblical background of the doctrine of predestination. Christians have, perhaps, been more inclined than Jews to believe in predestination. One reason for this is the fact that the term "predestine" is explicitly written in the New Testament. Predestination and related ideas, such as that of election, are not mentioned often in Scripture, but they are certainly present. Thus, the Bible is naturally interpreted as teaching predestination both implicitly and explicitly. Christians who hold Scripture in high regard need to explain the meaning of these passages and their relationship to other aspects of Christian theology.

That brings us to section three, which takes up the relationship between predestination and Christian ideas about God. The most obvious questions about predestination regard human agency, but those questions are tied to the ways in which the doctrine seeks to honor the theological centrality of God's agency. It is easy to say that predestination honors divine sovereignty, given its suggestion that God is in charge, since God's ordained plan will come to pass. But giving God the credit for the events of history can just as well seem to lead to giving God the blame, given the imperfections of our world. It would be easier, in some ways, for theologians to defend the goodness of God if they placed less responsibility at God's feet. Would doing so, however, undermine belief in divine providence and God's care for the world? To address such questions, we will need to inquire into the theological and philosophical motivations that might lead one to speak of God as predestining, and the implications of such commitments, which we will do via an extended conversation with the late-Roman theologian Boethius (480–524). Although his work is somewhat neglected today, Boethius was hugely influential for both Orthodox and Catholic (and, later, Protestant) theologians, and his exploration of predestination deserves renewed attention.

Section four addresses the pressing questions about human agency raised by the doctrine of predestination. If God destines, what does this imply for human freedom? In conversation with John of Damascus (675–749), Augustine of Hippo (354–430), Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), and Luis de Molina (1535–1600) we will see that Christians have thought about free will in a variety of ways, some compatible with the others, but some in tension with one another. Among the questions taken up in this section are whether predestination tends to become, in practice, a kind of determinism, or fatalism, and, if not, how the interplay between human and divine agency should be understood. Here the example of Jesus Christ, the central figure in Christian talk about predestination, will be especially important.

In section five we will consider a handful of more minor controversies about predestination, all of which have played a significant role in shaping the impact of

belief in predestination on Christian piety. In conversation with Martin Luther (1483–1586) and John Calvin (1509–1564) we will ask whether there is a difference between double and single predestination—and why one should care. Addressing that question leads inevitably, in turn, to questions about heaven and hell, and the hope, popular both recently and in the early days of Christianity, that all might be saved. Here we will converse briefly with the influential universalists Origen of Alexandria (184–253) and Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). The common Christian teaching that only some are likely to be saved has often raised questions about whether it is possible to be assured of one's eternal status. In fact, at times cultures of religious devotion such as that of the American Puritans (1629–1728) have raised hopes and fears about the "problem of assurance" to a fever pitch. Is it better, then, to reject belief in predestination, or at least to minimize it? This section also takes up the famously complex distinction between infralapsarian and supralapsarian approaches to predestination.

In the sixth and final section of this essay I wrap up my discussion by offering a few observations about how predestination is thought of today, both among Christians and in conversation between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. In the interest of furthering that conversation, I also offer some tentative constructive suggestions about how Christians might most fruitfully approach the doctrine of predestination. I conclude by reflecting on potential directions for future ecumenical reflection on the topic.

2 Predestination in Scripture

The Bible is naturally interpreted as teaching predestination both implicitly and explicitly. As noted above, Christians have historically been more inclined than Jews (though not Muslims) to believe in predestination. A major reason for the difference between Christianity and Judaism is that the New Testament explicitly uses the term, arguing that unifying humanity with the divine in Jesus Christ was God's plan for creation from the very beginning.

2.1 The Pauline View of Predestination

In the central text for all Christian discussion of predestination, the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Christian church in Rome that "those whom [God] foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he

might be the firstborn within a large family." (Romans 8:29).[10] Similarly, the Pauline letter to the Christians who lived in and around Ephesus states that, "he [God] chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ…" (Ephesians 1:4–5). In these passages Paul claimed not only that God has advance knowledge of forthcoming events, but that this divine foreknowledge is tied to a divine choice, in which God selected those who would become members of the divine family headed up by Christ, in whom the Son is unified with a human nature.[11] God's redemptive plan to relate humanity and divinity together in Christ is thus presented as having been willed even before the world was created, and as guiding divine providential action throughout history. Elsewhere, this plan to bring all things to fulfillment in Christ is spoken of as "God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory." (1 Corinthians 2:7).

It can be tempting to immediately turn from these passages to questions about what such claims amount to, conceptually. Many modern readers are inclined to focus on philosophical terms like determination and free will, as we attempt to balance and relate the importance of divine and human agency. Notably, however, the interest of the Biblical authors was not mainly in such questions. As we have already begun to see from the brief quotations from Pauline epistles above, the Biblical authors attended most to questions about God—querying about the nature of the divine plan and whether it can be trusted, or what it means to do so. They were also deeply interested in questions about the divine covenant made with Israel and then the church, how those covenants relate, and what the place of their readers might be in relation to them. These topics do naturally raise further questions about predestination, determinism, free will, and more, and the Biblical authors and texts are not uninterested in those questions. Nevertheless, what is central throughout the Bible is not solving a philosophical problem but embracing a divine promise to free an elect people.

We can see this in the way St. Paul framed his discussions of predestination and divine foreknowledge in Romans and Ephesians. The explicit context of his remarks in Romans (and the implicit context of the passage in Ephesians) is a question about the place of Israel in the overall divine plan. Paul was striving to make sense of a situation that puzzles and concerns him—Israel is clearly

10 Biblical quotations in this essay are taken from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Romans is widely thought to have been written between 55 and 57 A.D.

11 A clarification for readers unfamiliar with the Trinity: "Christ" or Messiah refers to the historical Jesus, a person composed of divine and human natures, while the "Son" is his divine nature, and the second person of the Trinity.

God's chosen people, but many of his fellow Jews have rejected the one he regards as the Messiah. Moreover, God's promises to the Jews seem far from being fulfilled, given their oppressed situation under the control of a foreign power. Does this mean that God has failed, or has given up on the people God had elected as God's own? Paul was, clearly, at pains to argue that this is not the case; God's word has not failed, but it must be understood properly. This led Paul into a succinct discussion of the entire Hebrew Bible, in which he attempted to put salvation history into proper perspective. God gratuitously elected Jacob and all Israel to serve God's purpose, and now also elects the church, so that the divine plan may be brought to completion. Although God's ways are often mysterious to us, Paul's overall point was that human or angelic evil cannot thwart God's redemptive purposes, because divine control of history has operated with salvation from sin in mind from the start.

Paul's telling of this history of the people of God exemplifies what Matthew Levering aptly calls the primacy of divine agency.[12] For Paul, human actions matter greatly. Indeed, human attitudes and actions are the occasion for his discussion, which was intended to instruct his readers as they thought with him about how to respond to the divisions between God's people. God is being patient in this time, he argued, so that Israel may repent, and be brought back in. Others, he noted, have hardened their hearts and turned away, but he remained hopeful that this would not be the fate of his own people. His hope, however, was based not on the notion that human beings ultimately are likely to make good choices but, rather, in God's mercy. God's redemptive action in Christ, Paul argued in Romans 8, is so powerful that ultimately nothing will be able to separate God's elect from resting in God's love. In Ephesians, Paul urged his readers to be grateful, because all reality finds its meaning and fulfillment in Christ, and in due time will be set free from the evil powers that now seem to prevail. His affirmation that God's plan can be trusted was, therefore, not a presentation of an abstract theological dogma but an expression of pastoral care.

2.2 Predestination throughout the Bible

This Pauline defense of predestination was clearly meant as reassurance that God is in control. It is sometimes thought that Paul's explicit references to predestination set him apart from other Biblical authors, but when we approach his views as we have, by emphasizing not the rarely used terminology of predestination but,

12 Levering, *Predestination: Biblical and Theological Paths*, 19.

not presuppose the act of creation and the existence of creatures but is itself their presupposition."[80] This implies that predestination is not a response to sin, but a plan for a relationship. God first elected Jesus Christ, and in doing do elected God to be human, and humanity to be with God. That is the goal of history, which salvation from sin is meant to serve.

Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar recently echoed Barth's approach to universalism in a short, biblically focused book titled *Dare We Hope?*[81] Balthasar's meditation on proper Christian hope particularly highlighted Barth's argument that Christians are not in a good position to know God's ultimate plan. Divine judgement should be feared, he argued, and divine love and mercy cannot be taken for granted. Nevertheless, God's love and expressed desire to save gives grounds for hopeful expectation of salvation, if not in this life, then via a purgatorial process, in the next.

Other figures could easily be mentioned as contributors to this growing movement, which includes Christian philosophers as well as theologians, but let it suffice to say that in recent years, increasing numbers of Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic Christians have either affirmed universalism or have defended a hope for it. This has highlighted the possibility of doctrines of predestination that have no corresponding doctrine of reprobation, thus doing away with some worries about both assurance and divine goodness, while raising questions about whether the Christian tradition was wrong to emphasize the idea of hell for so long.

5.5 Conclusion

Theologies of foreordination, and arguments about them, can seem complex and abstract, but the long and broad historic popularity of the idea that God directs human paths shows the deep personal appeal of predestination. Theists believe in God not simply out of rational conviction that a supreme being exists, but in the hope that there is a just judge over all human affairs who can be trusted to order the world rightly. This desire for meaning and the assurance that in spite of the many evils of earthly life, the world is headed towards a better place, is central to Christianity, and explains why belief in the priority of divine agency endures. When Christians debate double or single predestination, and so on, they are not simply arguing about abstract theological minutia but about very real

80 Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics, III/3.* Edited by G. W. Bromily and T. F. Torrance. Translated by G. W. Bromily. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960, 4–5.

81 Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved? With a Short Discourse on Hell.* San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2014.

and practical matters. What can I trust God for? To what extent does God direct our paths? What sort of justice is it best to seek, and how? What practical forms might the affirmation that God is love take? These and other questions are taken up in the arguments surveyed above about supralapsarianism, universalism, and so on. This is a point we will see even more clearly in the next and last section of this essay, which takes up contemporary Christian attitudes toward predestination.

6 Predestination Today

Christian theologies of predestination are often associated with Calvinism. As this survey has suggested, however, the doctrine has a much broader heritage—a point that has been underlined by a number of recent attempts to revive the doctrine's influence in Catholic and other circles, along with increased attention to the related topics of providence and divine determinism.[82] Resistance to the idea of predestination continues to be strong, however. What, then, are its prospects as we look forward?

6.1 Predestination, Universalism, Open Theism, and Providentialism

Approaches to predestination appear to be splitting into three major camps. There are the traditionalists, particularly among Catholic and Reformed communities, who hold onto something much like Aquinas, Anselm, or Calvin's views, and who have begun to offer renewed defenses of those approaches. Second, there are the universalists, just mentioned, most of whose views about predestination

82 In addition to the discussions cited already, see Pereboom, Derk. "Theological Determinism and the Relationship with God." In *Free Will and Classical Theism: The Significance of Freedom in Perfect Being Theology*, edited by Hugh J. McCann, 201–19. NY: Oxford University Press, 2017.; Churchill, John Ross. "Determinism and Divine Blame." *Faith and Philosophy* 34, no. 4 (November 16, 2017): 425–48. https://doi.org/DOI: 10.5840/faithphil201711691.; Murphy, Francesca Aran, and Philip G. Ziegler, eds. *The Providence of God : Deus Habet Consilium.* NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2009.; Jensen, Alexander S. *Divine Providence and Human Agency: Trinity, Creation and Freedom.* Burlington: Routledge, 2014.; Schildgen, Brenda Deen. *Divine Providence: A History: The Bible, Virgil, Orosius, Augustine, and Dante.* NIPPOD edition. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014; Long, Steven A., and Roger W. Nutt, eds. *Thomism and Predestination.* Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2017.; Furlong, Peter, and Leigh Vicens, eds. *Theological Determinism: New Perspectives.* NY: Cambridge University Press, 2022.

and related theological topics might fit well with the Augustinian tradition, were it not for their unorthodox rejection or at least marginalization of hell. Their numbers are small but seem to be growing. Third, there is a group not yet mentioned in this essay, the "open theists." Although the first two groups are divided between libertarians and compatibilists, this third group is entirely committed to libertarian ideas about free will.

Open theists reject any talk of predestination, and thus in a way have returned to the precedent set long ago by John of Damascus.[83] Their views are more radical than his, however, because of their adherence to a doctrine of God that departs from the perfect being theology embraced by Boethius and most of the Christian theologians discussed in this essay. Their name suggests one central commitment, that God lacks control over the future, or even foreknowledge of it, because the future is entirely open, not having yet happened. Even God, they argue, cannot know what has not yet come to pass. Moreover, they maintain, it would either be unfitting or impossible for God to control the choices made by other personal agents. Indeed, one way to understand this movement is as a radicalization of Anselm's libertarian ideas about human free will, in which that idea of freedom is used to critique Anselm's doctrine of God. The doctrines of God as eternal, immutable, omnipotent, and omniscient (at least, as traditionally understood) are rejected in favor of a picture of God who takes genuine and significant risks. Indeed, creation itself is a risk, because God does not know how it will turn out. Divine attempts to save and redeem are a further risk, because human beings might very well reject God and seek evil. To be sure, God is perfectly good, but on many of these views God may make mistakes, or find in certain instances that there is no way to defend the good. Christians can, however, continue to trust in God's promises because God remains supremely powerful and wise, capable of influencing history in subtle and complex ways. The odds are, therefore, that God will win out.

The attraction of such views is in part that they offer an obvious answer to questions about why a good God would permit evil. The open theist God is clearly not implicated in evil, which God is no sense wills or even permits, because God has a limited ability to combat the powers of darkness. Hell of a certain sort may exist—as a state of separation from God—but this too is not under God's control. Those who wish to reject God may do so.

Most everyday Christians are not clear adherents of any of these three groups. They may feel reluctant about endorsing predestination, or universal salvation,

83 The best-known proponents of this view include Sanders, *The God Who Risks*; Boyd, *God of the Possible*; Hasker, William, *Providence, Evil, and the Openness of God.* NY: Routledge, 2004.

yet they are typically attracted to a stronger doctrine of divine providence than open theism makes possible. We might follow the historian Jackson Lears in calling one typical Christian view of this mixed sort "providentialism".[84]

In his book on predestination, Thuesen noted the prevalence of both libertarianism and predestination-like language in popular American Christianity. He offered as an example Rick Warren's massive bestseller *The Purpose Driven Life.*[85] "The idea of divine foreordination could not have been stronger in Warren's book. 'Nothing in your life is arbitrary,' [Warren] declared. From the moment of a person's birth, God is behind every seeming twist of fate…"[86] At the same time, Warren's book also emphasized the importance of each person's individual choices, suggesting that God so orders life and world events that people get what they deserve. A similar emphasis on God making things right for those who make the right choices has been a part of the flourishing charismatic and Pentecostal movements. Theologies of divine blessing of human choices to align oneself with God's purposes have sometimes taken quite radical forms, the best known being the so-called "prosperity gospel" of figures like Joel Osteen. Such views suggest not only, as Warren did, that choosing to seek good relationships and developing one's character will result in a happy life full of moral and spiritual rewards, but that trusting God will bring material success as well.

Michael Sandel has argued that providentialism continues to influence secularized aspects of Western culture, as well, especially through capitalist ideologies that were initially developed in a theistic (and predestinarian) context. Although many westerners have abandoned explicit belief in divine rewards or punishments in this life or the next, the "optimistic" faith that things work out as they should still thrives. Associated with the myth that Western democracies are meritocracies, he suggests, is the still widely embraced attitude that people get (more or less) what they deserve, economically speaking.[87] If a person is not successful, it has become easy to assume that they have not worked hard or intelligently enough.

What this brief survey suggests is that even those who do not officially subscribe to a doctrine of predestination often find it hard to avoid predestinarian elements in their thought. This happens not merely because so many aspects of Western culture (and not only Western culture!) remain indebted to religious ideas about divine oversight and ordering, but also, I would suggest, because of the natural human desire for life to be ordered toward genuine goods, and for

84 Lears, *Something for Nothing.*

85 Warren, Rick. *The Purpose Driven Life.* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002.

86 Thuesen, *Predestination: American Career,* 210.

87 Sandel, *Tyranny of Merit*, 42–45.

things to make sense. As we have seen, ideas about predestination are tied to deep questions about meaning, and the hope that creaturely existence is more than an accident, subject to the power of luck.

6.2 What may I Hope?

Clearly, providentialism is popular because it offers a comforting reassurance, at least for those who are successful, that positions of power are appropriately rewarded and fairly earned. Increasingly, however, this sanguine assumption is being called into question, as what has been claimed as merit has been revealed as inherited privilege, and what has been claimed as just deserts has been revealed to be the product of chance, or inequity. Providentialism thus has its own problem of evil, the problem of calling a great deal of suffering and injustice deserved when it is not.

Although providentialism's combination of divine ordination and human self-help is problematic, its popularity and tendency to survive in varied forms attests to the deep human desire for meaning that motivates it. The best response to providentialism is not, I think, to attempt to give up on trust in providence altogether. Indeed, it is unclear whether human beings are really capable of doing so, at least at the collective level. At any rate, theists will certainly not find that option attractive, since it would imply giving up on their prayers for a better world. It is just here that engaging with doctrines of predestination can offer significant spiritual challenge and insight, because of the deep questions they pose about what we may hope for. I close this essay by reflecting on those questions and their implications for inter-religious dialogue.

Fundamentally, as we have seen, the idea of predestination is tied to a belief that divine agency has an explanatory priority over chance or human agency. Here I want to recast predestination not as an assertion but as a query, and a hope. There are two basic questions at the heart of the doctrine of predestination. First, what kind of God is most worthy of worship? Second, what sort of agency do human beings have (and what should they desire to have)? In response to these questions there are two associated hopes.

In my view, the "weak" theologies of predestination I have associated with Anselm have an advantage over open theist approaches that reject predestination entirely, because the Anselmian doctrine of God is more hopeful and less defensive. Both views share a similar assessment of human agential possibilities and aspirations, maintaining that we are ultimately responsible for our own destinies. But weak theologies of predestination balance their high expectations for individual personal agency with attention to the hope that God can offer significant prov-

idential oversight. Because they are guided less by a need to minimize God's responsibility for evil by minimizing divine sovereignty, they are more able to highlight the positive possibilities of belief in God. That may, in turn, give them more resources for grappling with the ways in which the meaning of our lives often seems outside our control. Because of their libertarian tendencies, however, both of these theologies tend to wrestle with internal tensions as they attempt to make a place for both divine and human agency that count.

I consider "strong" theologies of predestination more attractive, because their "non-competitive" approach makes it easier to relate human and divine agency, and their emphasis on ultimate divine sovereignty offers the greatest hope of an eventual victory over evil. Their account of God's nature is typically traditional, referring to an immutable, impassible deity who does not change or respond, but it need not be. What is required for a strong theology of predestination is not a full-fledged commitment to the traditional idea of divine perfection, but a more limited vision, involving trust in an all-knowing and all-powerful God whose loving plans for creation can be fully believed to guide history to a happy end.

Strong doctrines of predestination are the most undividedly hopeful, and God is most easily defended as loving, in perspectives that are universalist in orientation, or at least hopeful about universalism. On such views, the goodness of God guarantees the ultimate happiness of all creation. This does not entirely solve the problem of why evil and penultimate suffering exist in this life, but it does recontextualize it in significant ways. Strong predestinarians thus have a further advantage over weak predestinarians, because compatibilists can consistently affirm their trust in universal salvation, while libertarian approaches put any such claims in doubt, given God's relative lack of control.

Strong predestinarians who are reluctant to reject the possibility of reprobation to hell are, surprisingly enough, not in a much worse position than weak predestinarians who believe that God allows human beings to autonomously choose damnation. That is because, in both cases, God's decision to permit some to be trapped in eternal punishment raises similarly difficult theodical questions and is hard to defend logically (except on Scriptural grounds). The central challenge here is hell itself, which overshadows any talk of predestination. A God who permits foolish human beings to "freely" choose eternal suffering and damnation, a choice they can not fully comprehend or understand, is not much different from a God who reprobates by failing to offer sufficient grace. Libertarian free will hardly makes it fair to assign eternal consequences to finite, penultimate choices.

These claims are, of course, connected to my preferred answer to the question about human agency, which is inspired by Augustine's compatibilist, non-competitive view. Modern Western culture has been inclined to think of humanity as masters of our fates, but that hardly seems to comport with our experience of ev-

eryday life. It is good to reflect, perhaps with assistance from empirical research, on how much control of our lives typical human beings really have.[88] The implications of such reflection can seem demoralizing, but we should also consider how much we should *want* to be in control. The idea that God might predestine unconditionally suggests that we should accept some (not necessarily all!) of the gratuitous and out of control aspects of our lives as a gift, potential forms of blessing. Given our limited horizons, it might be better if we were not the ultimate authors of the world's story, but are instead under the direction of one who is wiser and more loving.

This hope in unconditional (strong) predestination is hard to prove—one cannot be sure if ultimate concerns are under divine direction or not. At the same time, like physical determinism, this hope is also hard to disprove. It makes sense, therefore, to hedge our bets by endorsing a conception of human agency that is open to the possibility of strong predestination. At the same time, precisely because it is not a certainty, it is necessary to set questions of assurance aside. As an expression of hope in God, the actuality of predestination is not self-referentially knowable, and expectation of it should remain tentative.

6.3 Prospects for Dialogue

How might the approach(es) to predestination discussed in this essay contribute to dialogue among people of faith? It will be obvious that the questions raised by the idea of predestination—questions about the nature and role of God, what hope we may have in and for the created order and the trajectory of human history, and the puzzle of human free will and responsibility—are central to all monotheistic faiths. Discussion of predestination therefore reaches to the heart of the concerns of all theists.

We have seen hints that the long and complex career the doctrine has had in Christian thought is paralleled by a similarly multifaceted history in Judaism and Islam. Even if explicit doctrines of predestination are somewhat unpopular today, ideas of divine election and ordination, and associated views of foreknowledge and providence, have an influential place in each of these faiths. We have noted, for instance, the antecedents of Christian arguments about predestination in the Qumran documents, and the emphasis on the priority of divine agency in the in-

88 For further reflection on these themes, see Couenhoven, Jesse, "The Justice in Mercy." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 48, no. 3 (2020): 399–417.; Couenhoven, Jesse. "On the Alleged Empirical Verifiability of the Doctrine of Original Sin." In *Augustine and Contemporary Social Issues.* Routledge, 2022.

fluential Sunni Asharite school is well known. In these religions there is, clearly, no one way of thinking about predestination. The fact that the term can be understood in strong or weak ways opens significant possibilities for dialogue, since those who mislike the famous Augustinian tradition of predestination in Christian thought can easily ally with other influential conversation partners who dissent from Augustine's views.

At the same time, as an Augustinian compatibilist I am particularly hopeful that the non-libertarian ways of thinking about human and divine agency presented in this essay will be an encouragement to non-Christians who are attracted to strong conceptions of divine providence and predestination (or even determinism). These views are, we are finding, not as problematic or impossible to defend as has long been taken for granted—at least, in a Western culture dominated by libertarian intuitions and ideals. This philosophical contribution may enable theists of every sort to appropriate aspects of their traditions that have for too long been marginalized and neglected.

In short, although there certainly are areas where the great monotheistic traditions have deep disagreements, a thoughtful emphasis on the priority of divine agency need not be among them.

6.4 Conclusion

Doctrines of predestination have suffered from a good deal of bad press in recent decades. They have been perceived as dour and negative, primarily because they are widely thought to imply a rejection of human agency, an acceptance of divine determinism, and a callous view of God as a tyrant who arbitrarily sends some persons to hell regardless of their own wants. We have seen, however, that these are misconceptions. Although it is possible for doctrines of predestination to have negative implications and to be abused in a variety of ways, we can say the same about most theological convictions. A central goal of this overview of Christian debates about predestination has been to show that it is entirely possible to believe in both predestination and human free will, to accept predestination without accepting divine determinism, and to believe in both predestination and determinism while hoping that all will ultimately be saved. To put these points negatively, in order to make them as strongly as possible, it is conceptually consistent to believe in predestination without rejecting free will, to believe in predestination but not determinism or fatalism, and to believe in predestination but not hell. As a result, I have contended that the doctrine need not be considered as objectionable or divisive as has sometimes been thought.

Indeed, there are reasons to find doctrines of predestination appealing. We have seen that predestination (along with the conceptions of divine sovereignty that go along with it) is in fact an ecumenical doctrine, one that has been embraced across Christian traditions. That is in no small part because affirmation of divine providence sets theists apart from the pagan idea that we exist by accident in an uncaring universe. This piety, which trusts God to direct our ultimate destinies, has been embraced—in various ways and to various degrees—by Catholic and Orthodox Christians as well as Protestants. In fact, we have even seen that non-theists, too, have a hard time letting go entirely of consoling ideas about destiny. There is something in human nature that desires things to be sensibly ordered, and if the choice is between absence of meaning and some idea of fate, human beings have a tendency to move towards the latter. Doing so can have dangerous implications, though, since belief in destined social or economic orders can lead to complacent justifications of problematic political and cultural systems and false attributions of merit and virtue. By comparison, the dangers of belief in a personal God who orders the universe according to a law of mercy, rather than simple desert, may seem diminished. Theologies of predestination that encourage an active hope—that the final word about our messy and often tragic created order will offer a corrective, that the ultimate authority is guiding an unjust world towards an ultimate grace—quite naturally inspire activism on the part of those who seek to live in a manner that follows the divine lead. Notably, such hopes were a significant part of Augustine and Boethius's rationale for embracing the idea of predestination in the first place. Their trust in God led not to complacency but to remarkable agency.

There will, of course, always be those who dislike the doctrine, for one reason or another. They too should be able to agree, however, that ecumenical and interreligious discussion of predestination is entirely worthwhile. It can be natural to avoid talking about theological ideas we find worrisome, and predestination has been one of those ideas, as we have noted. However, is a mistake to ignore it—not only because it remains an attractive aspect of the personal piety of so many people of faith, but also because the doctrine touches so closely on so many central theological convictions. The ideas and questions at the heart of doctrine are theologically central. Any reasonably well-developed theological view will inevitably imply a conception of how to honor God's greatness, and of divine providence or absence. Any theological view will inevitably imply a conception of the relationship between divine and human agency, and the nature and meaning of human freedom. These ideas will form a basis for trust in God and one's assurance (or lack thereof) of divine care and mercy. Under the circumstances, therefore, it is wise to engage theologies of predestination as openly and clearly as possible. Doing so allows us to be more articulate about the ultimate hopes and fears that drive so much of both theology and religious life.

Catarina Belo

The Concept of Predestination in Islam

1 Introduction

Predestination is a central topic in classical Islamic theology. It is expressed as *qadar* in Arabic, a word which is a cognate of "measure" (*qadr*). As a theological concept it denotes the notions of predestination, fate, destiny. It signifies God's power to determine his creation. It can mean the creation of human acts by God.[1] The term also applies to God's determination of present and future events. It pertains to God's omnipotence, "all-powerful" (*qādir*) being one of God's attributes. For some theologians this is his most important attribute. This power implies the creation of the world and the subsequent creation and production of things and events. God created the world and keeps creating new events and things. This includes not just natural events and substances but also human action. According to the concept of predestination, any change—not just any human action—would be produced by God.

Medieval Islamic philosophers and theologians debated the theme of God's nature and attributes. While theologians based their views primarily on their reading of the Qurʾān and the Sunna (primarily drawn from Hadith literature), philosophers drew heavily on concepts and arguments made by ancient Greek philosophers. In this, God is creator in the Qurʾān, and for philosophers he is also agent and cause. Theologians and philosophers dispute what the terms "agent" and "cause" mean when applied to God. God's power is one of his most significant attributes, alongside goodness and knowledge. Different theologians and philosophers have different conceptions of these attributes.

In addition to a diversity of views on God's attributes, and his power to determine events, theologians and philosophers have also had to grapple with a significant consequence of stating God's power to determine events, namely human freedom. If God determines all events, then human beings are not the causes or the agents of their actions. In that case, they are also not responsible for their actions and cannot be blamed for them. Consequently, they should not be rewarded or punished for their deeds. However, this clashes with the Qurʾānic view that God justly rewards the good and punishes the wicked, in this life and in the afterlife. In addition, God is wholly good, and justice is another essential divine attribute. God's determination of events, and predestination, could shake the very founda-

1 Gimaret, Daniel, *La Doctrine d'al-Ash'arī*, Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1990, 12.

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tion of ethics, and the notion that there is a difference between good and evil deeds, and that human beings determine their own actions and are responsible for them, and thus should be held accountable for those actions.

One could view this problem in terms of the harmonization between an understanding of human nature as being essentially free and capable of moral action, and the notion of an omnipotent God. However, some scholars argue that this is essentially a problem of articulating the various divine attributes. It is important to stress God's power and omnipotence; however, if human beings are not free or not responsible for their actions, they cannot justly be held accountable or rewarded and punished. Reward and punishment of human beings is an essential consequence of God's justice. Therefore, the issues pertaining to God's determination of events can be seen to generate problems already at the level of the articulation between different divine attributes. There are several related issues when it comes to predestination. One of them is the creation of human acts. Is God the sole creator, or can human beings create their acts? Theologians who stressed God's omnipotence, especially the Ashʿarites, tended to view him as the sole creator, while some Muʿtazilites accepted that human beings create their acts.

Another theme is that of human capability (*istiṭāʿa*) or the power to act. Do humans have power, and does that detract from God's power? Another related theme is God's guiding and leading astray. This pertains specifically to the question of faith. In the same way that acting can be the subject of human or divine action, and it can be disputed whether human acts are created by humans or God, one's assent to faith and the acceptance of the existence of God and his messengers can be attributed to God or to humans. The Qurʾān sometimes mentions faith as a free act, but the theme of God guiding and leading astray or sealing men's hearts indicates that faith is something that is not acquired by human beings but is bestowed by God. Divine action could influence or determine both human acts and thoughts or decisions. Faith is important because it is a necessary condition for salvation in the hereafter.

These related issues are mentioned by Gimaret in his detailed study of the theory of human action in Islam which focuses on the question of whether human actions are created.[2]

The present study will concentrate on God and his determining power, and therefore on the question of *qadar* and *qaḍāʾ*, God's decree or predestination and determination. Issues pertaining to human action and responsibility will be mentioned in so far as they bear on the issue of predestination. Regarding terminology, it will be helpful to distinguish related but different terms. We could trans-

2 Gimaret, Daniel, *Théories de l'acte humain en théologie musulmane*, Paris: Vrin, 1980, ix.

late *qadar* as "predestination," which has the general connotation of God's power. Predestination means generally that God determines everything that happens, and everything that will happen in the future. More specifically, predestination means that human beings will be saved or damned in the afterlife and thus implies God's previous knowledge of this fact, and indeed God's omniscience. In addition, *qadar* as predestination means also that God knows and determines the living conditions of human beings in this world, namely, how long one will live and how one will live. In the Islamic tradition, these concepts are denoted respectively by the terms *ajl*, the term of one's life, and *rizq*, one's livelihood.[3]

Determinism implies the determination of a certain event, including natural events and voluntary actions, through intervening causes. In this sense, someone is saved or damned on condition of certain intermediate causes that revert to God. Fatalism means the result of being saved or damned regardless of intervening events or causes. Fatalism can be understood more generally as stating that everything happens as determined by God, without taking account of the process through which this happens. There is a kind of fatalism in pre-Islamic poetry that attributes the occurrence of events to an impersonal entity, like *dahr*, which means "time". In the context of the present analysis, *qadar* means predestination as God's power to determine events, and it can include the concept of determinism, which has stronger philosophical connotations, while predestination is more closely related to theology. The two terms can be found together, especially in philosophical literature that considers theological debates.

2 Predestination in the Qurʾān and in Hadith Literature

Qadar appears in the Qurʾān as meaning the divine decree in fixing "limits of each thing, or the measure of its being."[4] More generally, *qadar* means "measure, evaluation, fixed limit."[5] Other forms of this root, *q-d-r*, appear in the Qurʾān, for instance *miqdār*, which means "measure", while *qadīr* is a divine name which as ap-

3 Gimaret, Daniel, *La Doctrine d'al-Ashʿarī*, 423.

4 Gardet, Louis, "al-Ḳaḍāʾ wa'l-ḳadar," in: P. Bearman/Th. Bianquis/C.E. Bosworth/E. van Donzel/W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.aucegypt.edu:2048/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0407 (accessed on 02 November 2021).

5 Ibid. Cf. also, Gardet, Louis, *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme*, Paris : Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1967, 117. According to Gardet, for the Ashʿarites *qaḍāʾ* and *qadar* are attributed to God's will, while for the Maturidites, they depend on God's knowledge, Gardet, *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme*, 118.

plied to God means "powerful", or "omnipotent". The term *muqtadir* also means "omnipotent". *Qadar* appears often in conjunction with a related term, *qaḍāʾ*, and the expression *al-qaḍāʾ wa-l-qadar* refers to God's *qaḍāʾ wa-qadar*. The expression can be translated as "the divine decree and predestination".

> Based on the Ḳur'ān the word *ḳaḍā'* can be understood as God's "eternal decision or decree" concerning all beings. It is given different interpretations, especially when contrasted with another term, *ḳadar* … For instance, according to al-Bukhārī, *ḳaḍā'* is the eternal, universal and all-embracing decree of God, while *ḳadar* denotes the details of His eternal, universal decree.[6]

Some Qurʾānic suras explicitly include the term *qadar*. "Verily, all things have We created in proportion and measure (*bi-qadar*)" (54:49),[7] which can be translated literally as "we have created everything through *qadar*", or "No misfortune can happen on earth or in your souls but is recorded in a decree before We bring it into existence: that is truly easy for God" (57:22). These verses serve to illustrate God's omnipotence. There are also verses stressing human responsibility, with the assumption that human beings can freely choose their actions. Without this freedom, God would not be just, but the Qurʾān also stresses God's justice in rewarding good deeds and punishing any evildoings. The following verses point to God's justice and the idea that human beings are responsible for their acts and their choices:

> "Then, on that Day [the Day of Judgement] not a soul will be wronged in the least, nor will you be recompensed except for what you have done" (36:54).[8]
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> "It [the soul] gets every good that it earns, and it suffers every ill that it earns" (2:286).
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> "As to the Thamūd, We gave them guidance, but they preferred blindness to guidance" (41:17).
>
> "Whatever misfortune happens to you, is because of the things your hands have wrought" (42:30).

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6 Káldy-Nagy, Gy., "Ḳaḍāʾ," in: P. Bearman/Th. Bianquis/C.E. Bosworth/E. van Donzel/W.P. Heinrichs (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.aucegypt.edu:2048/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_3751 (accessed on 02 November 2021).

7 Translations of the Qurʾān are from *The Meaning of the Holy Qurʾān*, trans. ʿA. Yūsuf ʿAlī, Beltsville, Maryland, Amana Publications, 1997, unless otherwise indicated.

8 Modified translation. According to Dmitry Frolov in the early Meccan verses we find an emphasis on fate, while the later Meccan verses emphasize God's mercy. Cf. Frolov, Dmitry V., "Freedom and Predestination," in: Jane Dammen McAuliffe (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, Washington DC: Georgetown University. http://dx.doi.org.libproxy.aucegypt.edu:2048/10.1163/1875-3922_q3_EQSIM_00163 (accessed on 22 October 2021).

> "Or He can cause them to perish because of the (evil) which they have earned; but much does He forgive" (42:34).[9]

Here God is seen as just but also clement. These verses appear to stress the power of human action, in the sense that human beings choose and perform their actions and are judged accordingly. In his treatment of the issue of *qadar*, Averroes (Ibn Rushd, d. 595/1198) quotes these verses as proof that human beings can choose their own actions, as we will see later. There are several important themes mentioned in the Qur'ān in connection with *qadar*. Some of the verses which mention *qadar* refer to the creation of faith in human beings, which is brought about by God, as well as physical sustenance. Another aspect of creation of faith is the closing or sealing of the heart to faith. Montgomery Watt, who wrote in detail on predestination in Islam, refers to the theme of the *term*, which indicates God's determination of the time of a person's death, as stated in the Qur'ān "He it is Who created you of clay and then decreed a stated term" (6:2).[10] Predestination also features in Hadith literature, which narrates the deeds and sayings of Prophet Muhammad. According to some of these originally oral reports, events are predetermined before they happen. They are written down beforehand, and Montgomery Watt designates this the theme of the *pen*, as in the following Hadith:

> I heard the Apostle of God say ('Ubāda b. al- Ṣāmit is reported to have said): the first thing God created was the Pen. He said to it: write. It asked: Lord, what shall I write? He answered: write the destinies of all things till the advent of the Hour. My son, I heard the Prophet of God say: Whoso dies with a belief differing from this, he belongs not to me.[11]

The way in which the embryo develops in the womb is another theme associated with *qadar* in the Hadith tradition:

> When the embryo has passed two and forty days in the womb, God sends an angel, who gives it a form and creates his hearing, sight, skin, flesh and bones. This having been done, the angel asks: O Lord, shall this be male or female? Then the Lord decrees what He pleaseth, and the angel writes it down. Then he asks: O Lord, what shall be his term? Then the Lord

9 Slightly modified translation.

10 Watt, William Montgomery, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam*, London: Luzac, 1948, 17.

11 Ibid., 17. According to Claude Gilliot, there was a debate regarding light and darkness, the throne and the pen, and which was created first, Gilliot, Claude, "Mythe et théologie: calame et intellect, prédestination et libre arbitre," *Arabica* 45/2 (1998), 151–92, 155. Gilliot stresses that especially the Hanbalites, including Ibn Taymīya (m. 728/1328), held as an article of faith the tradition of the *pen*, as denoting that that which will happen until the resurrection of the dead is written down beforehand, Gilliot, "Mythe et théologie," 160.

> will say what He pleaseth, and the angel will write it down. Thereupon the latter will go away with the scroll in his hand, and nothing will be added to or subtracted from the decree.[12]

Yet another Hadith conveys the same idea: "The Prophet said: Verily, one of you is gathered together in his mother's womb forty days, then he is a clot of blood the same time, then an angel is sent to him and four things are ordained: his sustenance, his term, whether he is to be miserable or happy".[13]

We have seen that some Qurʾānic verses emphasize divine omnipotence and predestination, while others emphasize human agency and responsibility. Some scholars hold that the Hadith presented a varied picture of the issue of predestination, but from 700 AD the tradition emphasizes God's control of human destinies. Montgomery Watt contrasts this view with what he sees to be the emphasis on human freedom in the Qurʾān. This tendency to emphasize destiny goes back to pre-Islamic literature, according to Montgomery Watt. In pre-Islamic literature, created in the Arabian Peninsula before the rise of Islam, the theme of destiny is an important one. A significant theme in pre-Islamic poetry, as we have mentioned, is time (*dahr*), which can also mean "destiny" and constitutes an impersonal force that must be reckoned with.[14] A certain fatalism is noticeable in pre-Islamic poetry, although it is not attributed to the gods. In Noeldeke's words, "The poets are continually alluding to the action of Time (*dahr, zamān*), for which they often substitute "the days" or "the nights". Time is represented as bringing misfortune, causing perpetual change, as biting, wearing down, shooting arrows that never miss the mark, hurling stones and so forth".[15] Later, some Islamic theological schools went on to highlight the notion of human freedom while other schools would stress the concept of divine predestination.

12 Watt, *Free Will and* Predestination, 18.

13 Ibid., 18.

14 According to Gilliot, the connection between *dahr* and God is not clear in pre-Islamic poetry, and while predestination is present in the Qurʾān, the theme of *dahr* is not, 161, 163. The theme of *qalam* (the *pen*) is also present in the Shiʿite tradition, which, however, privileges the creation of intellect, *ʿaql*, by God, Gilliot, "Mythe et théologie," 171. Traditions about the *pen* would reinforce the predestinarian current among theologians, against Qadarite and Muʿtazilite positions, Gilliot, "Mythe et théologie," 187.

15 Quoted in Watt, *Free Will and Predestination*, 21.

3 The Theological Principles of the Concept in Islam

Within Islamic theology, one can distinguish between articles of faith and principles of action. The principles of action are embodied in the five pillars of Islam, which are the creed (*shahāda*), fasting (*ṣawm*, particularly during Ramadan), almsgiving (*zakāt*), pilgrimage to Mecca (*ḥajj*), and prayer (*ṣalāt*). In addition to these practical principles, there are the principles of faith, and according to most Muslim theologians, *qadar* is an article of faith. The articles of faith (*īmān*) are the belief in God and his attributes, in the prophets, the angels, the sacred books, and the Day of Judgment. These five principles of faith are followed by the belief in *qadar*, the principle that everything that happens is divinely ordained. We have seen that the notion of predestination is clearly present in the Qurʾān and in Hadith literature and it constitutes an article of faith within Islam.[16] Islamic theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*) is an Islamic discipline that grew out of the study of the Qurʾān and the Sunna. While the influence of philosophical sources is not to be excluded, the themes typically to be found in Islamic theology concern scriptural issues. Unlike Christian theology, Islamic theology is not dogmatic; rather, it is speculative and admits of many different positions. In addition, there is no central authority to define which positions are to be adopted, except for the situation in the early ninth century when the ʿAbbasid caliph imposed the views of a particular school, the Muʿtazilites, on all theologians and scholars. Debates over predestination go back to early Islamic history, having started in the late first/seventh century.[17]

One early theological movement was named after the term *qadar.* They were known as the Qadariyya or Qadarites. In this case, it appears that *qadar* referred to the power and freedom of human agency and action. *Qadar* in this sense is related to *qudra*, which means power, and in this instance, it can be attributed to human beings. In fact, the term "Qadarite" was used refer to those who upheld either God's predestination or human free will.[18] More commonly, however, "Qa-

16 Hadith literature also mentions the prohibition to discuss the issue of predestination, Cf. Klein-Franke, Felix, "Rashīd ad-Dīn's Treatise 'On Free Will and Predestination': An Attempt to Overcome Inner-Islamic Differences," *Le Muséon* 117 (2004), 527–45, 539.

17 Mourad, Suleiman Ali, *Early Islam between Myth and History: Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110 H/728 CE) and the Formation of His Legacy in Classical Islamic Scholarship*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2006, 162.

18 According to Suleiman Mourad, for "Sunnite and proto-Sunnite theologians, *qadar* meant God's predestination." *Early Islam*, 161. He reminds us that in the Hadith collections by al-Bukhārī

darite" is associated with those who uphold the power of human beings to act.[19] It is not clear whether they were a united religious or political group. According to the Qadarites, all good comes from God, and any evil is perpetrated by human beings. God cannot do evil. Moreover, power belongs to human beings as well as to God, and God delegates his power to human beings. Some of the actions that human beings can perform of their free will are eating and drinking, sleeping and waking, as well as standing and sitting. Belief in God is also a free act performed by human beings. The Qadarites comprised several groups, one of which denied God's foreknowledge of human actions. Any evil act, such as adultery, is not created by God but by human beings. God only does and provides what is legitimate, such as food that has been legitimately acquired.[20] There were political implications to this view. Even the caliphs were to be held accountable for their actions.[21] In addition, this theological group opposed the Umayyad dynasty and the principle that the caliph was God's deputy on earth. [22]

A prominent figure associated with the Qadarites was al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110 H/728 CE), given the similarity of his position to that of the Qadarites. Al-Ḥasan was a successor to the Companions of Prophet Muhammad.[23] Like the Qadarites, he believed in the principle of human agency. According to him, God has knowledge of future events but does not determine them. However, he believed that

(d. 256/870), Muslim (261/875), and Abū Dāwūd (d. 275/889) there were chapters on *qadar*, *Early Islam*, 161 – 62.

19 "We must distinguish between the terms *qadar* and *Qadarīya.* According to proto-Sunnite and Sunnite theologians, *qadar* meant God's predestination, as in such books on the topic as *Kitāb al-Qadar* (On Predestination) by al-Fārābī (d. 301/903), and *al-Qaḍā' wa-l-qadar* (On Preordainment and Predestination) by Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī (d. 606/1210). Moreover, in the major collections of *Ḥadīth*—such as those by al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870), Muslim (d. 261/875), and Abū Dawūd (d. 275/889)—one finds chapters on *qadar* (predestination). In Mu'tazilite circles, however, the word *qadar* was not taken as a reference to predestination but rather as a reference to *qudra*, meaning the ability of humans to act independently of God." Mourad, *Early Islam*, 161 – 62.

20 Marmura, Michael E./Watt, William Montgomery, *Der Islam*, vol. 2, *Politische Entwicklungen und theologische Konzepte*, Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 1985, 87.

21 According to Suleiman Ali Mourad, during the reign of ʿAbd al-Malik, the Umayyads defended the doctrine of predestination to indicate that their power came from God. Mourad, *Early Islam*, 196. In addition, the predestinarian view justified the Umayyad caliphs' behavior, regardless of whether it was good or not, Cf. De Cillis, Maria, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, al-Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī*, London and New York: Routledge, 2014, 26.

22 Mourad, *Early Islam*, 72.

23 Ibid., 16.

some events in human life were determined.[24] There are anecdotes which present al-Ḥasan's views as stating that God does not do evil, and that human beings "are responsible for their sins and evil actions."[25] Qadarite views on human action were taken up by the Muʿtazilites, a rationalist school of Islamic theology that was founded in the eighth century CE, became dominant in the early ninth century, and became particularly influential during the caliphate of al-Maʾmūn (d. 218/833). There was some degree of overlapping between the views of the Qadarites and those of the Muʿtazilites, but they were distinct theological schools. The Muʿtazilites also championed the doctrine of human agency and free will, and the term Qadarite could be applied to Muʿtazilites and Shiʿites, although they rejected it, and in turn used the term to refer to predestinarians.[26] However, both Muʿtazilites and Shiʿites claimed an association with al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī.[27] The Muʿtazilite school developed because of debates which were taking place among a group of Successors to the Companions of the Prophet in Basra, and al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī was associated with that group.[28] Many of the founders of the Muʿtazilite school were believers in free will.[29] The Muʿtazilites defended a set of principles which entailed human freedom and power to act. They were dubbed the "champions of (God's) justice and oneness" (*ahl al-ʿadl wa-l-tawḥīd*), since these were two of the main principles which they espoused. The attribute of justice meant that God could not justly punish human beings unless human beings had responsibility over their actions, which presupposed the power and freedom to act. Therefore, to safeguard God's justice, they held that human beings were free and were therefore responsible for their actions. In addition, God was not responsible for any evil and he could not command the evil. According to al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915–6), man is agent and can create, and his act is not caused by God.[30] According to Abū l-Hudhayl (d. c. 227/842), who directed the Muʿtazilite school in Basra, human beings require will and power in order to act, and it is the will in particular which signifies the freedom and capability to act.[31] Other doctrines held by

24 Suleiman Ali Mourad states that al-Ḥasan was also claimed by the predestinarians as one of their own. "With regard to theology, al-Ḥasan […] believed in the doctrine of free-will, namely that sins are the result of human choice and cannot be attributed to God," *Early Islam*, 241–42. However, he does not believe that al-Ḥasan was the author of the *Epistle to ʿAbd Al-Malik*. Cf. *Early Islam*, chapters five and six.

25 Mourad, *Early Islam*, 171.

26 Ibid., 162.

27 Ibid., 170.

28 Ibid., 162.

29 Ibid., 162.

30 De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought*, 37.

31 Ibid., 37.

including human actions. God provides the secondary causes, and these determine our will, and even our will is determined by God in the way that he creates dispositions in us which settle our desires.[122] For Averroes, human action and free will have to be articulated with God's omnipotence. He does not lose sight of the Ashʿarite theory of human acquisition of actions that were created by God, and the question whether someone can be free in acquiring actions created by God. As a result of his analysis, Averroes emphasizes that God is not only the first creator, but also the only agent (*fāʿil*). However, free will must be presupposed in order for actions to be attributed to the human subject—in other words, human beings can only be made responsible for their actions if they are not coerced, but free to perform them. For Averroes, God creates in us the power to act and to choose. The causes of human action are made available by God, who also removes any obstacle to those actions. The actions are attributed to us because the external causes lead to these voluntary actions only in combination with our will. In this sense, we become responsible for our actions. Moreover, we choose between two opposites, even if that choice is conditioned by the external causes. Although Averroes makes a distinction between voluntary and natural actions, his approach to the question of God's predestination can be construed as deterministic. As we have seen, Averroes explains the mechanism of human action as forming an idea of something we aim at. We assent to that idea, and the assent (*taṣdīq*) is not due to our choice. Our intentions and acts, then, are dependent on external causes. Our acts result from external causes and internal causes, and in the sense that the external causes appear to determine the internal causes, a deterministic position can be discerned. There appears to be a strong defense of the idea of God's omnipotence in Averroes' writings, including in his commentaries on Aristotle's works. For Averroes, as for Avicenna, this deterministic outlook is something good because God works for the good of creation. The universe is determined according to God's order of the good.

In medieval Islamic philosophy, we find that some of the most representative philosophers, except for al-Fārābī, defended some version of determinism. Avicenna privileges efficient causation while Averroes favors final causation, but in the end, both promote determinism. While the classical Islamic philosophers were close to the Muʿtazilite approach to Islamic theology, noticeably on the question of divine attributes and a more metaphorical reading of the Qurʾān, they considered Ashʿarite and even Hanbalite positions on the question of God's decree and determination. They combined deterministic elements of Aristotelian philos-

122 Hourani, George F., "Averroes on Good and Evil," *Studia Islamica* 16 (1962), 13–40, 24–26.

ophy with the predestinarianism that was patent in the theology of al-Ashʿarī and Ibn Ḥanbal.[123]

5 Modern and Contemporary Sunni and Shiʿite Views

In the Ottoman empire, a range of views on the issue of God's power and predestination were developed. Among those who defended the notion of God's predestination, there were attempts to unify the views of Ashʿarī and Māturīdī. A distinction was made by scholars between a general will and the particular human will, in order to reconcile God's omnipotence and human free will.[124] One Ottoman scholar, Mehmed b. Mustafa Hamid el-Kefevī Akkirmānī (1760), writing as a representative school, held that God created human actions, and human beings acquired them by exerting their particular will in the direction of an action. God produces the action after the human process of using the will.[125] Contemporary views on predestination in Islam are expressed by a variety of scholars from different Muslim countries and represent varied positions which sometimes differ from the classical ones.[126] For a modern scholar such as ʿUmar al-Ashqar (1940–2012), predestination, *qadar* means that God knows and decrees those who will be saved and those who will be consigned to hell.[127] Another influential contemporary Islamic thinker, Muhammad Iqbal (1876–1938), defends the notion of human free will, and the possibility of acting freely and independently of God's compulsion, who does not predestine events.[128]

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123 There is some debate as to whether the Muʿtazilites were true champions of human freedom of action. Gimaret holds that the mechanism of human action as described by leading Muʿtazilites, such as Naẓẓām and al-Jāḥiẓ, meant that the act was determined, while Frank and Madelung state that free will was championed by some Muʿtazilites, such as ʿAbd al-Jabbār; Cf. Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, 232, n. 9.

124 Menchinger, Ethan L., "Free Will, Predestination, and the Fate of the Ottoman Empire," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 77/3 (2016), 445–66, 449, 453.

125 Ibid., 454.

126 Views on predestination and free will in the Arab world were influenced by the Arab Renaissance of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Kassab, Elizabeth, *Contemporary Arab Thought: Cultural Critique in Comparative Perspective*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, 205.

127 Levering, "Providence and Predestination in al-Ghazali," 58. Levering compares al-Ashqar's views with those of John Calvin, "Providence and Predestination in al-Ghazali," 58, n. 13.

128 Mohamed, Yasien, "The Concept of Predestination and Free Will in Iqbal and Nursi," *Afkār*-BIL 7 (2006), 93–120, 102. With reference to Iqbal's views, Cf. also, Zakaria, Wan Fariza Alyati

Said Nursi (1873–1960), in turn, emphasized God's predestination of events.[129] At the same time, human beings are endowed with free will, which makes them responsible for their deeds, although human acts are created by God.[130] Nursi does not believe that we can understand the exact nature of free will.[131] According to Muḥammad Mutawallī ash-Shaʿrāwī (1911–98), an Egyptian scholar, God is the creator of everything, but he is also just.[132] We direct our acts while God is the true agent.[133]

Shiʿite views in the classical period were influenced by the Muʿtazilite school. The Shiʿite tradition has a different approach to political authority within Islam, favoring leaders that descend from Prophet Muhammad. Regarding religious authority, they favor the teaching of the Imams, and do not accept many of the Hadiths that are part of the Sunni tradition. From a theological perspective, the Muʿtazilite influence is observable for instance in the way one scholar, al-Mūsawī (d. 1044), accepts the Muʿtazilite view developed at Basra which holds that acts performed by human beings are done by them.[134] According to De Cillis, a focus on compulsion and the delegation of God's power were both avoided by Ismaili authors.[135] Twelver Shiʿism scholars sought to harmonize God's power and human agency. One medieval scholar, Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam (d. 179/795–6), held that individual actions were created and ultimately produced by God, but by virtue of being chosen they were free. Another scholar, who was close to the Muʿtazilites, ash-Shaykh al-Mufīd (d. 1022), defended the theory that human actions were not created by God and God did not seek evil.[136] Contemporary Shiʿite theologians such as Muḥammad al-Bāqir (d. 2003) made a distinction between inner and outer freedom, the former meaning freedom of choice, which allows human beings to act or refrain from acting or choose good and avoid evil. Outer freedom

Wan, "Qadar in Classical and Modern Islamic Discourses: Commending a Futuristic Perspective," *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 7 (2015), 39–48, 46.

129 Mohamed, "The Concept of Predestination and Free Will," 105.

130 Ibid., 113.

131 Ibid., 117.

132 ash-Shaʿrāwī, Muḥammad Mutawallī, *Al-Qadā' wa-al-qadar*, ed. Aḥmad Faraj, Cairo/Beirut/Jedda: Dār al-Shurūq, 1975, 42.

133 Ibid., 44.

134 Abdulsater, Hussein Ali, "To Rehabilitate a Theological Treatise: Inqādh al-Bashar min al-Jabr wa-l-Qadar," *Études Asiatiques* 68/2 (2014), 519–47, 526.

135 De Cillis, Maria, "Muslims and Free Will," *Oasis: Christians and Muslims in the Global World* 26 (2017), https://www.oasiscenter.eu/en/muslims-and-free-will (accessed on 2 May October 2021).

136 Ibid.

is the kind of freedom that has its limits within external social and political factors.[137]

6 Medieval Christian and Jewish Views on Predestination: Aquinas and Maimonides

The question of Christian and Jewish views on predestination is covered in detail elsewhere in this work. However, it is appropriate to compare the Islamic view with Christian and Jewish positions, particularly medieval positions. Predestination is a central concept within Christian theology from an early stage, such as the Patristic period, and into the later medieval period, and remains a classical theme in Christian theology. Predestination and the articulation between divine agency and human agency are also central to Protestant theology, which emerged as a result of the Lutheran Reformation. Aquinas has a systematic treatment of a complete range of theological issues in his works, including the question of predestination. His works have a pedagogical and systematic nature which give us insight into the medieval Christian position on the question of predestination. Moreover, Aquinas was familiar with the works of Avicenna, Averroes, and al-Ghazālī, and with the commentaries on Aristotle's works composed by Averroes, as well as other works by Avicenna, al-Ghazālī, and al-Fārābī. His major final work is the *Summa Theologiae*, which begins by studying the question of God, his existence, and his attributes, then proceeding to human nature and human beings' role in creation, and finally debating the nature of Jesus Christ and our return to God. In Question Twenty-Three of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas addresses the question of predestination. The *Summa Theologiae* follows a specific set format of presenting a given topic; this consists in stating various objections, followed by the main thesis, and replies to the objections. The question on predestination consists of eight articles covering various issues in connection with God's predestination. This analysis comes in the wake of the discussion of God's attributes, such as his will and his justice. In order to understand Aquinas' treatment of predestination, it is important to bear in mind that he uses the term "predestination" in a very precise way. "Predestination" indicates God's choice and foreknowledge of those who will be saved in the afterlife. The opposite of someone who is predestined

137 El Kaisy-Friemuth, Maha, "The Concept of Freedom in Islam," in: Georges Tamer and Ursula Männle (eds.), *The Concept of Freedom in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, Key Concepts in Interreligious Discourses 3, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019, 101–46, 139.

to be saved is "reprobate," a term referring to those who will not be saved.[138] God predestines those whom he wishes to be saved in the afterlife. To understand Aquinas' position on God's causation more generally, as well as human agency, several works would need to be analyzed, but we will limit ourselves to this work and topic and how God determines events. Among the issues pertaining to predestination Aquinas raises the question whether it is God who predestines human beings. An objection to this position would invoke human freedom, and the role of human beings in bringing about their own salvation. Aquinas replies in the affirmative, to the effect that it is God who predestines men, stating that this question is related to God's providence, which orders everything, and which is treated earlier in the *Summa Theologiae*; more specifically, providence is the subject of Question Twenty-Two of Part One of the *Summa Theologiae*, immediately preceding the question on predestination. In it Aquinas defines providence as an order towards the end, involving the notions of end or goal, which is planned in an orderly way. Providence furthermore presupposes the reason and execution of the order, and this is the order of the good. Everything is subject to God's providence, which means that chance is not a real cause. Providence includes the principle of God's causation and agency, and he conceives this order of providence and executes it. This order means that some things are created as necessary and others as contingent; more specifically, the causes of some beings are necessary while the causes of others are contingent. Because God knows all things, the order of a universal cause is adhered to. However, Aquinas accepts the existence of other causes besides God, and that God delegates his power.[139] Regarding predestination, it is a principle which belongs to God, and it involves directing human beings towards eternal life, predestination constituting part of God's providence.[140] Only God knows who is predestined to be saved or not, and this knowledge exists in God's mind from eternity. Reprobation is the opposite of predestination and according to Aquinas it is earned by some human beings on account of their sins. It includes the notion of God's will allowing some to sin and thus not to be saved but damned. Aquinas does make a distinction between predestination and reprobation in the sense that predestination includes the divine granting of grace in this life and salvation in the next, whereas reprobation

138 However, according to Louis Gardet, Catholic theology defended the notion of positive predestination the view that some human beings are predestined to be saved, but it did not accept the notion of predestination with reference to hellfire. Gardet, *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme*, 126–27.

139 Aquinas, Saint Thomas/Sancti Thomae de Aquino, *Summa Theologiae*, Milan : Editiones Paulinae, 1988, Part One, Question Twenty-Two, 119–23.

140 Ibid., Question Twenty-Three, Article Two, 125.

does not cause sin in this life, but rather sin comes from human free will.[141] In the same way, those who are predestined will necessarily be saved, but this implies a conditional necessity, since divine grace also presupposes human free will, and the freedom of choice. Predestination requires election or choice on the part of God as well as love. Love leads to election, which leads to predestination. In other words, God chooses some people to be saved. God wills everyone to be saved through his antecedent will, through which God always wills the good for every creature, but not through his consequent will, which considers particular cases, such as human sins.[142] Aquinas adds that God's foreknowledge is not the cause of predestination; this must come from human free will. However, Aquinas does not see a conflict between predestination, which ultimately comes from God, and free will. Predestination is a first cause while the latter is a secondary cause. Even free will ultimately come from predestination. Predestination issues from the goodness of God in general, but human action is involved. Aquinas adds that predestination is certain, just like providence, but it does not impose necessity on the event, so that it does happen through free will. God's divine knowledge and will do not do away with contingency or human free will. God wills things to happen contingently.[143] This means that the number of people who are predestined is certain, even if only God knows this number. Regarding the question of prayer, and whether it influences predestination, Aquinas states that predestination comes from God; however, prayer can be part of predestination according to God's plan; in other words, predestination can be helped by prayer, as a secondary cause, as part of God's plan. This also includes good work. In this question, while Aquinas admits the existence of secondary causes, these are subsumed under God's agency.[144] God can do something directly or through secondary causes. Consequently, it is determined in advance whether someone will be saved or not. However, in another question, Eighty-Three, on human free will, Aquinas affirms that human beings have free will, otherwise commands, prohibitions, rewards, and punishment would be in vain. Human beings unquestionably possess free judgement and inclination, which contrasts with other beings, such as inanimate beings (like a stone, which naturally falls to the ground) and animals (the sheep, for instance, naturally avoids the wolf). However, Aquinas, notes that God is the first cause, moving natural and voluntary causes. While moving voluntary causes, they remain voluntary, since they act based on their own nature, and the same applies to natural causes. Aquinas affirms that free will is a power, rather than

141 Ibid., Question Twenty-Three, Article Two, Reply to the Second Objection, 126.
142 Ibid., Question Nineteen, Article Six, Reply to the First Objection, 107.
143 Ibid., Question Twenty-Three, Article Six, Response, 129.
144 Ibid., Question Twenty-Three, Article Eight, Reply to the Third Objection, 131.

a habit or an act, because it stays with human beings even when they are not exercising their free will. Its proper act is choice, free will being the power of choice, and it is closely connected to the notion of will in general. Will goes hand in hand with the end, whereas choice regards the means to the end. As for fate, which is the subject of Question One Hundred and Sixteen, Aquinas states that it exists, while denying that things that happen by accident on earth, natural or human, are due to a heavenly body—instead, they are due to God's providence. Aquinas accepts the existence of fate insofar as it is related to God's providence, with the meaning of something foresaid, since Aquinas traces "fate" to the verb *fari*, meaning "to speak" in Latin. Fate means something that is preordained or foresaid. Chance can be accepted as an accidental cause, as pertaining to secondary or proximate causes, but ultimately it goes back to God. Fate inheres in created causes and pertains to the production of their effects, particularly consisting in the ordering of secondary causes.[145] In this sense, fate here does not mean direct causation by God, but the causation by God through secondary causes. Regarding God, fate is not changeable, although it can be considered as changeable with reference to secondary causes, and moreover fate does not imply that everything happens of necessity.

In addition, not everything is subject to fate—for instance, something that is effected directly by God, such as creation.[146] In his views on free will, predestination, and fate, Aquinas seeks to champion a position which admits of human free will without calling into question God's omnipotence.[147]

Maimonides (d. 1204) was a contemporary of Averroes, and like him a native of al-Andalus, having migrated to North Africa and finally to Egypt as a young man. While being part of the Jewish community, he lived in the Arab and Islamic world all his life and was conversant with the debates of the Islamic theologians. In addition, he greatly admired al-Fārābī's work. On the question of predestination, some scholars hold that he was a libertarian and defended the notion of free will, others that he was a determinist. There are various views within the *Guide to the Perplexed* and his religious writings which admit of several interpretations. Some scholars hold that he defended the notion of the strict determinism

145 Ibid., Question One Hundred and Sixteen, Article Two, Response, 539 – 40.

146 Ibid., Question One Hundred and Sixteen, Article Four, Response, 541.

147 For a discussion of Aquinas on predestination, s. the contribution of Jesse Couenhoven in this volume, especially pp 75 – 76.

in the *Guide to the Perplexed*, based on a causal chain that goes back to God, while the religious or popular writings stress human responsibility.[148]

7 Conclusion

The question of predestination has occupied Muslim theologians and philosophers over the centuries. In the classical Islamic tradition, we find different kinds of religious texts. The Qurʾān contains verses supporting divine determination of events and human responsibility, while Hadith literature has a strong tradition of predestinarian reports. It should be noticed that fatalist views were clearly represented in pre-Islamic poetry and appear to have been central to pre-Islamic Arabian culture. Within classical medieval Islam, some early schools of theology defended the idea of human freedom, like the Qadarites and the Muʿtazilites. Others emphasized God's determination of events, such as the Jabarites. The Ashʿarites endeavored to emphasize God's omnipotence without undermining his justice. Therefore, they developed the notion of acquisition, whereby human beings' appropriate actions created by God and accordingly become responsible for them. In classical Islam there were some tendencies towards favoring human free will and freedom of action, but later Sunni theological schools stressed the notion of God's omnipotence such that God was the only agent. This position seems to have influenced some philosophers, in particular Avicenna and Averroes, who held deterministic views about human action. They admired the Muʿtazilites in many ways, as in the rejection of anthropomorphism and the acceptance of a metaphorical reading of the Qurʾān, but they did not espouse their views on human free will. They accepted a theological version of determinism informed by Aristotelian views on causation. In the modern and contemporary period, several Muslim scholars addressed the question of divine predestination, seeking to reconcile the notion of human free will and divine omnipotence. While some scholars have favored the notion of free will, for most the attributes of God's power and omnipotence remain central to Islamic theology.

148 Sokol, Moshe, "Maimonides on Freedom of the Will and Moral Responsibility," *The Harvard Theological Review* 91/1 (1998), 25–39. For an elaborated account on Maimonides' position regarding predestination, s. the contribution of Lenn Goodman in this volume, especially pp. 14–15.

Ramy Abdin and Georges Tamer

Epilogue

1 Introduction

> Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
> And sorry I could not travel both
> And be one traveler, long I stood
> And looked down one as far as I could
> To where it bent in the undergrowth[1]

The exploration of predestination, rooted in theological and philosophical inquiry, brings forth reflections on human choice and divine sovereignty. This discourse spans various religious traditions, notably those in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, and raises a crucial question: To what extent does human agency shape one's destiny in the presence of an omnipotent deity?

Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" serves as an apt metaphor for this theological crossroad, where humanity faces two diverging paths: one of divine preordainment and the other of individual free will. The speaker's recognition that choices profoundly influence life's trajectory embodies the tension between fate and personal decision-making.

The subsequent sections will summarize the presented perspectives on predestination in Jewish, Christian, and Islamic contexts, highlighting similarities and differences in their views on divine foreknowledge and human agency. Through this examination, the essence of faith, morality, and destiny will be assessed, revealing the intricate relationship between God and humanity, akin to the choices depicted in Frost's reflective journey. Ultimately, this inquiry intends to unravel the complexities of predestination, illustrating that the interplay between divine sovereignty and human responsibility defines the theological landscape across cultures.

1 The first Verses are from the poem "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost: Frost, Robert and Lathem, Edward Connery (ed.), *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, New York/Chicago/San Francisco: Holt, Rineheart and Winston, 1969, 105.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783112205990-005

2 The Concept of Predestination from a Jewish Perspective

The Jewish perspective on predestination presented here is first and foremost a philosophical one. In particular, texts from the Tanakh as well as a selection of exegetical works that present various reflections[2] on predestination have been consulted here. Goodman shows, that the dichotomy between divine predestination and human free will is undoubtedly reflected in the Jewish tradition. Of great importance in this regard is the idea of prophecy, which can be seen as a starting point here: First of all, it should be noted that the prophets of Israel, sent by God after the prophetic ministry of Moses, basically acted as forewarners of their people. The primary task of the prophets was to uphold the Mosaic Law among the people of Israel, for their warning was especially directed to those believers who deviated from the divine law. However, in order to persuade the faithful to return to God's legislation, they were promised significant rewards. Maimonides emphasizes that the prophetic warning does not involve a renewal of the Torah, since the divine Law is complete, it serves merely as a reminder for the believers so that they may return to the path of God. What is important here, is that it is up to the believers how they receive the message of the prophets, as they demonstrate the ability to better their way of life by restoring the divine order: This is the very basis of prophecy. Undoubtedly, this implies the freedom of will on the part of the believers; freedom to either accept and apply the message of the prophets or to reject and discard it. Therefore, the argument for human agency is strengthened by the divine calling of a prophet. Thus, Maimonides argues that while the predisposition to prophecy is certainly present, to speak of complete prophethood requires the independent discipline and action of the aspiring prophet. Discipline and leadership are necessary conditions for prophecy, as is the poetic gift, but God grants this gift only when the prophet exercises moral purity and intellectual diligence.

In Isaiah's statement: "The LORD called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name," (Isaiah 49:1–6),[3] there is a tension between divine predestination and the morally critical affirmation of human free agency. Nevertheless, Isaiah's statement can be understood as an expression of devotion

2 In particular, the views of Maimonides and Rabbi Jonathan Sacks have been considered; for example: Maimonides, Moses, *Guide to the Perplexed*, trans. Goodman, L. E. and Lieberman, Philip, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.; and: Jonathan Sacks (ed.), *The Koren Yom Kippur Mahzor*, Jerusalem: Koren, 2012.

3 Translation according to the ESV.

to God. Although God acts as the protector of the prophetic mission, whether or not the nations are convinced by the message depends on human freedom of choice. The prophetic message would be obsolete if the obedience of a people were merely a matter of predestination. Otherwise, not only the necessity of prophetic messages like those of Isaiah and Jeremiah, but also the prophecy of Moses could be questioned. The purpose of prophecy is very simple: People need a human leader; someone who is relatable and familiar and who speaks the same language. That is why God needs the prophet, so that He can shine. Rabbi Simha Bunim of Przysucha adds that God always leaves the world in a preliminary state, which is why human activity is necessary to maintain the world. It is therefore up to the humankind to establish the (moral) order. The very existence of human morality is justified by the imperfection of the world. Human responsibility and freedom of action to establish moral order in the world is therefore in no way in harmony with the belief in God's absolute predetermination. Moreover, God repeatedly gives humanity the opportunity to respond to the prophetic message. In the sending of Jonah, for example, God gives Nineveh forty days to respond to Jonah's message. Something similar can be seen with Abraham and Amos. God promised Abraham the salvation of Sodom and Gomorrah if he could find ten innocent people among them. Amos received the divine warning directed to the kingdom of Israel, reminding the sinners of God's past judgments against a number of cities (including Damascus, Gaza and Tyre). The warning is to be understood as God's response to moral depravity. However, God's punishment can be avoided if man overcomes his hubris and recommits him- or herself to the Torah. Thus, it is not predestination, but man's intransigence that makes divine punishment inevitable. Nonetheless, divine punishment can be avoided if a person repents and turns to God. Repentance as a change of human fate is particularly evident in the story of Jonah. Jonah was able to convince the people of Nineveh to return to God, which meant that He did not carry out his decision to destroy Nineveh in forty days, but showed mercy instead. The possibility of different paths of predestination was also announced by Moses in the *Dewarim.*[4] The central issue then, is not the question of predestination at all, but how faithful humankind remains to God. God's promises are therefore contingent, which means that the future is indeed uncertain and therefore depends on human decisions and actions. Naturally, the question arises as to why God does not simply compel humankind to obey His law. Maimonides replies that it is precisely through the possibility of disobedience that man is able to distinguish himself as a moral being. If God imposed His will on man, he could not be receptive to the divine

4 e.g. Deut 30:15–20

messages, for in that circumstance he would be nothing more than an automaton. According to Rabbi Joseph Hertz, it is inherent in human nature to have freedom of choice in the field of morality: Man is capable of choosing between good and evil. Even Jewish thinkers such as Bahya Ibn Paqudah, who believed that God is in control of all things, had to acknowledge man's moral and spiritual responsibility. Otherwise, all worldly matters are to be left to God. Alongside the voices of the time that argued for the need for moral responsibility and an open future, there was also a tradition of predestinarian determinism rooted in astrology. A major proponent of religious fatalism was Abraham Ibn Ezra, who saw moral responsibility and spiritual purity, promoted by astrology, as predestined: "For God is the ultimate Creator of all causes."[5] However, Ibn Ezra's view can be relativized as he discusses the divine book of fate, since Ibn Ezra also believed that God is capable of changing His decrees. The Book of Fate refers to the predetermination of all things, which probably goes back to the ancient Mesopotamian belief in the *Tablet of Fate* (Akkadian: *ṭup šīmātu*).[6] Moses may have alluded to such a book of fate when he said that if he was no longer allowed to lead the Children of Israel because of their sinful worship of the golden calf, God should erase him from His book. However, God allowed him to proceed his leadership of the Israelites. Thus, if such a book existed, it would be possible to change its contents, leaving the course of the future in human hands. The dichotomy between fate and human action is also echoed in the piyyut of the Unetanneh Tokef: Although every person's fate, even every calamity that will befall humankind, is fixed, there is still a moment when through repentance, prayer, and acts of charity, the evil of that fate can be averted. Fate is therefore not final, for God's forgiveness affirms not only the possibilities of human action, but also the freedom and dignity of the human being. Through repentance (*teshuva*), the individual is able to escape the clutches of a bad destiny. It is therefore up to man to hope for good fate, but it is equally his task to influence his destiny through responsibility, morality and repentance. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks points out that atonement means that we can begin again. This is especially evident in the story of Judah, Jacob's son, who suggested that Joseph should be sold into slavery. Later, Judah chose slavery himself so that his brother Benjamin could go free. Sacks also highlights the importance of human action in Deborah's prophecy. The prophecy was fulfilled precisely because Deborah took the right initiatives and because Yael decided to kill Sisera. The same is true of Ruth, who influenced her destiny through love and

5 Quote taken from Goodman's contribution. See section: *In the Stars.*

6 Sonik, Karen, "The Tablet of Destinies and the Transmission of Power in *Enūma Eliš*." In: Gernot Wilhelm (ed.), *Organization, Representation, and Symbols of Power in the Ancient Near East*, Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2012, 387–95.

mercy by helping Naomi in times of poverty. This brought Ruth the attention of Boaz, which made her an important figure for the Israelites: the grandmother of King David. Esther's decisions also led to momentous and fateful events. If God truly predestined the salvation of the Jews, it was only through Esther's courage and integrity that this predestination could be realized. Even if God is able to foresee all things including all human actions, as Rabbi Akiva emphasizes, this does not exclude human freedom of choice and action: The power to act is ours. Maimonides affirms this view, especially in the context of his criticism of Islamic occasionalism.[7]

3 The Concept of Predestination from a Christian perspective

In the Christian view presented, Jesse Couenhoven distinguishes between strong (unconditional) and weak (conditional) predestination. Both views have a long theological tradition in which certain nuances and approaches to predestination have been defined. Strong predestination generally argues that God determines human existence, at least to a large extent, while weak predestination tends to emphasize the responsibility of human beings, so that it is not so much God as human beings who determine their own destiny. Strong predestination is a matter of placing one's complete trust in God as the planner of world events. Believing in God as an absolute being who watches and influences events might function as a psychological comfort for many believers, as they can justify negative experiences with God's inscrutable wisdom: Meaning God is in absolute control. Nevertheless, the problem of evil, that is, why God allows evil to happen, is difficult to solve within the framework of a strong predestination. Is it not man who should be considered to cause evil? This is where weak predestination comes in. The existence of evil cannot be attributed to God, for He is absolutely good and benevolent. The fact that humans *make* their own destiny and that God grants them a certain autonomy makes it easier to solve the problem of evil: It is man, not God, who causes suffering and disaster. Based on these two theological observations about predestination, there are important theologians and scholars who have addressed this issue. Boethius, for example, sought to combine the approaches of theology and

7 Islamic occasionalism refers to the belief that God alone creates people's activity. People are only entitled to make decisions about their actions; see for example: Belo, Catarina: "Freedom and Determinism", in: Luis Xavier López-Farjeat, Richard C. Taylor, *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy*, 2015, 327.

philosophy in order to address the question of God's predestination on different levels. For Boethius, God is omniscient and omnipotent through His Self (*Godself*): God knows not only everything in the universe, but also His own agency. But if God is omnipotent and benevolent, how can evil be justified? Here Boethius consoles philosophy, arguing that God's work cannot be fully understood. After all, suffering and misfortune can also lead to self-improvement and good insight, which means that at least traces of the divine plan can be discerned. Despite the wickedness in the world, however, God should be seen as the ideal ruler precisely because of His wisdom and omniscience: "You should not doubt that everything happens as it should."[8] Here Boethius distinguishes between providence and fate. Providence is the order of affairs that comes from the divine reason itself, which unites all things in the unalterable mind of God. In contrast, fate is the disposition inherent in each of these things that unfolds over time. Both aspects, providence and destiny, refer to the idea of predestination. Accordingly, God acts as the guide of history, which thus follows his divine plan. However, God's foreknowledge of events implies their necessity, which would be an implication of absolute predestination. But Boethius responds that God's foreknowledge in no way indicates predestination, because foreknowledge does not always make an action necessary. Only past events become necessary by virtue of their immutability. Hence, man is responsible for his actions.

In contrast, Augustine argued for a conditional determinism. Conditional in the sense that while God permits evil deeds, He has nevertheless determined the salvation of every human being (*gemina praedestinatio*). In principle, man is free to choose his actions, though his choices are guided by God, especially since God seeks to lead man to goodness. According to Augustine, because of the Fall, man is no longer capable of making the right choices. God's action is therefore not to be regarded as obligatory, because His salvation is in the self-interest of man: Every human being is therefore in need of God's grace. However, according to Augustine, God's grace also occurs as single predestination, in the sense that God chooses the faithful, while other individuals are not chosen because their receptivity for divine grace is insufficient: The reprobate are those who have not been chosen.

Reconciling human and divine agency was a particular concern of Thomas Aquinas. Therefore, he distinguished between primary action being ascribed to God and secondary action being given to human beings: God, however, enables all action and oversees them at the same time. Like Boethius, Aquinas assumed a divine providence that directs human history toward a specific end. This does

8 Quote taken from Couenhoven's contribution. See section: *Fate and Providence*, p. 63.

not mean that man is absolved of responsibility; he is especially responsible when he acts according to his *inner principles:* Will and Reason. It is up to man to bring these two principles into a harmonious relationship, which Aquinas calls self-control.

In contrast, John of Damascus took a libertarian view of human action and thus rejected the idea of predestination. Although an action can be judged as either good or bad, a deed can only be truly attributed to man if man is in fact the ultimate source of activity. Whereas the will of God expresses the desire that all people attain salvation, humans must be given full autonomy in their decisions and actions, for it is the intention of God that humankind should bear responsibility. Divine providence, however, influences the effects of actions so that they conform to the God's Will. Evil, by contrast, is in no way subject to His will, which means that it is separated from Him. He rewards or punishes people for their choices and actions: God's grace is therefore conditional. Like John of Damascus, Anselm of Canterbury held a similar view of human responsibility. Man can only be responsible if he is also the originator of his actions. Moreover, God never assigns people to specific roles; as noted above, humans are solely responsible for their own destiny. God deliberately withholds His power so that human beings can act freely. However, God is never in agreement with evil, but permits its occurrence. Nonetheless, Anselm understands predestination as a divine response to human choices and actions, so that they conform to the divine purpose of the world's existence.

Louis de Molina also belongs to the libertarian tradition, though his work is primarily concerned with the theological defense against Martin Luther and John Calvin. Luther argued that divine foreknowledge ultimately makes all actions necessary, since God does not err. This, therefore, speaks in favor of a deterministic view. Molina responded by arguing that God possesses three categories of knowledge. For example, God is aware of all *natural truths*, such as those in mathematics. In addition, there are *free facts* that are God's determinations. These include creation and certain events in history. But God also has what is called *middle knowledge* about the potential consequences of human choices. This knowledge is therefore not necessary, but contingent, meaning that it depends on man's decision being made. Human freedom of choice is therefore assured. Luther, instead, followed a deterministic perspective. Everything that happens takes place because of the divine will, even if it is an apparently bad event. The consequences of such events, however, ultimately lead to good. It should be emphasized, though, that both Luther and Calvin adhered to the idea of *double predestinatio*n. It is double in the sense that God is responding to the deeds of both the righteous and the wicked. Both salvation and reprobation then are active interventions by God that must be seen as a reaction to the actions of human beings. Whether an indi-

vidual goes to heaven or hell therefore depends on free decisions that were not necessary (meaning determined by God). In contrast to double predestination, there is the aforementioned single predestination, which does not involve God in evil actions. Orthodox and Catholics in particular follow the latter view.

There has also been much debate about why God creates the reprobate in the first place. Was the divine plan determined before (*supralapsarianism*) or after the Fall (*infralapsarianism*)? Friedrich Schleiermacher was a proponent of supralapsarianism. For him, God has chosen humanity in Christ from the beginning. Human freedom is relative, especially since freedom cannot be separated from the agency of God: Human (free) will is grounded in God's will. Sin, foreseen by God, makes redemption necessary and serves as an opportunity for human self-improvement. In contrast to Calvin, for Schleiermacher divine salvation was intended for all creatures. Schleiermacher's universalism has been embraced by Christian scholars in both the West and the East, including Orthodox theologians such as David Bentley Hart and Sergei Bulgakov, as well as Protestants such as Karl Barth and Catholics like Hans Urs von Balthasar.

In contemporary theological discourse on predestination, three major camps can be identified. The traditionalists,[9] the universalists, and the open theists. The latter have departed from the theology of perfect being by attributing to God uncertainty about the future. Moreover, since decisions are not made by God but by human beings, He cannot control the future. God is absolutely good, which is why He does not interfere directly in the affairs of human beings, since He can make mistakes and fail to protect what is good. Nevertheless, God can be trusted because He is powerful and wise. In this view, evil in the world would not really have anything to do with God because He has no part in it. Most everyday Christians do not entirely follow any of these three theologies. They neither believe in absolute determinism nor universal salvation. Nevertheless, the doctrine of divine providence (*providentialism*) is probably widespread among practicing Christians.

4 The Concept of Predestination from an Islamic Perspective

The concept of predestination is one of the main beliefs in Islam. There are two Arabic terms to express this concept: *qadar* and *qaḍā'*. *Qadar* means *measure*,

9 Traditionalists are found especially among Catholics and Reformed. They follow, in particular, the views held by Thomas Aquinas, Anselm of Canterbury, and John Calvin. See section *Predestination, Universalism, Open Theism, and Providentialism* in Couenhoven's contribution.

evaluation, fixed limit; Qaḍāʾ, by contrast, refers to *decision* and *verdict*. Catarina Belo shows the Islamic discursivity of the concept of predestination, as this concept depends on the different approaches and dogmas within the various theological schools in Islam. In principle, God is regarded as the planner of the world by virtue of His omniscience and omnipotence. Islamic tradition[10] shows that God has indeed predetermined the lifetime (*ajal*) and the provision of human beings (*rizq*) on earth. The question regarding the concept of predestination is therefore to what extent God actually intervenes in human existence, and to which degree divine intervention affects the possibilities of human action and responsibility. This view indicates the idea that certain events and actions are preordained, and that their effects consequently determine a person's destiny in the next world. In contrast, the idea of fatalism can be found in discourses within Islamic theology. Fatalism means that a person's existence in the hereafter is already determined by God, regardless of events, actions, and decisions: Human free will would therefore not exist.

In the Qurʾān and the Sunni Hadith literature, the term *qadar* is always in the forefront. The Qurʾān states that God created all things according to proportion and measure (*bi-qadar*). Moreover, nothing happens on earth that is not determined by Him. Nevertheless, humans are responsible for their actions, which means that at least a certain degree of free will can be assumed. In the Hadith, God determines the provision, the life span, as well as joy and sorrow of every individual. Thus, Islamic sources generally point to a divine providence that nevertheless allows for human choice. How the discrepancy between predestination and free will can be reconciled, is shown in particular by the attempts of several Islamic theologians and philosophers.

The principle of *qadar* and *qaḍāʾ* has often been addressed in Islamic discourse theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*). However, there are several schools of thought within this field that have different perspectives on predestination. The most widespread school of thought in Sunni Islam is that of the Ashʿarīs, whose principal proponents include Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and Fakhr ad-Dīn ar-Rāzī. The former was especially notable for his criticism of the philosophers. Al-Ghazālī believes that although man is free in his actions, he is nevertheless compelled by God to make his decisions. For this reason, he distinguishes between three actions: natural actions (such as casting a shadow), voluntary actions (such as breathing), and actions, which are freely chosen, like writing. Man's actions are created by God Himself, whereby man attains these actions through choices. However, free will is central to the question of whether a person chooses good or evil, although

10 With Islamic tradition, we refer to the overview presented in Catarina Belo's contribution.

this freedom is not actually completely free because of the compulsion to decide. By good, al-Ghazālī means all actions that are in accordance with the divine command. Conversely, his statement indicates that evil refers to everything that contradicts divine law. Regarding predestination, al-Ghazālī points to the *preserved tablet* mentioned in the Hadith, on which God's decree is recorded. Thus, God has already determined everything, including man's actions. Thus, God creates human actions, which man *attains* during his existence on earth (*iktisāb*). Therefore, a person's task in this life is to choose the right actions.[11] Sunni scholars such as Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawzīya, and Ibn Khaldūn hold similar views despite their different approaches. All of them agree that although human beings have the ability to choose their actions, God determines and creates both the choice and the actions: God is thus actively involved in human activity

Besides the Muʿtazilite school of thought, which holds a libertarian view of predestination,[12] several perspectives within Islamic philosophy are also to be emphasized. One of the most prominent philosophers is al-Fārābī. For him, there is a difference between divine foreknowledge and human action. God knows all the possibilities and consequences of actions, but His foreknowledge does not necessarily lead to the action itself. Thus, God's knowledge of the future and its possibilities in no way interferes with free will. To be more precise: God's foreknowledge never prevents the possibilities of the future. Therefore, man chooses his actions and carries them out on his own, without God having created them. For Avicenna, Determination (*qadar*) is the existence of causes and reasons as well as their harmonization in accordance with their arrangement and order. However, God acts as the creator of the first cause, from which every other effect arises. For Avicenna, God indirectly determines human actions insofar as human activity is caused by secondary causes. Avicenna also follows the distinction between *qadar* and *qaḍāʾ*, understanding *qaḍāʾ* as a single decree or command from God. His divine command constitutes the first effect mentioned above. *Qadar*, meanwhile, is regarded as the indirect determination of the events that result from this first effect.

Averroes follows the principle of causality in the same way as Avicenna. The world is based on laws and effects constituted by God. Contrary to the view of his

11 Likewise, ar-Rāzī distinguishes between man's free will and God-created actions. Man's actions are created by God and are therefore determined. Although man has free will, his actions are still compelled by God. See for example: Lagerlund, Henrik (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy: Philosophy between 500 and 1500*, Heidelberg: Springer, 2011, 344.

12 The Muʿtazilites assume that man is completely free in his decisions and creates his own actions: God merely assumes the role of an observer. See: Syed, Mairaj U., *Coercion and Responsibility in Islam: A Study in Ethics and Law*, Oxford University Press, 2017, 38 ff.

philosophical colleagues, for Averroes God remains active not only in the creation of the first effect, but also in all subsequent effects, by virtue of his self-thinking activity. Thus, God Himself brings everything into existence. Averroes also justifies man's freedom of choice in particular with the hadith of *al-fiṭra*, which states that every person is born a Muslim but is later led to another religion through parental education. Although human choices unfold through man's independent ability to act, this ability must always be in harmony with the external causes, which in turn are created by God. Hence, man's internal faculties and external causes are directly related. The former is expressed by man's action, though enabled by God; the latter is the sole domain of God, which is why man can never be completely autonomous. Averroes describes *qadar* as a combination of human will and external causes which altogether are provided by God. These external causes in turn affect human choices. Therefore, external causes are not only a prerequisite for human action, but also a factor in human decisions: Human will is thus determined by external factors. Accordingly, God determines the causalities that promote human action. God's determination therefore involves maintaining the relationship between internal and external causalities. Moreover, Averroes argues that human action must express the omnipotence of God. Thus, human agency is nothing than the derivative of divine agency, but one that allows for human freedom of choice. Averroes' view can be seen as a middle way between the Ashʿarite view and that of the philosophers as well as Muʿtazilites.

More modern views of predestination range from the continuation of the Ashʿarite idea of divine determination and creation of human actions to the complete autonomy of man. The Ashʿarite view includes, for example, the Ottoman scholar Mehmed Akkirmānī, who believed that man attains his actions through his choices, but that these actions are created by God. Muhammad Iqbal, in contrast, believed that a completely free will, independent of God, was possible. Although Said Nursi followed the traditional Sunni view of predestination, he was convinced that the nature of free will could not be fully understood.

Many Shiʿi scholars[13] were influenced by the views of the Muʿtazilites. These include scholars such as al-Shaykh al-Mufīd and al-Mūsawī, both of whom held that man creates his own actions, not God. Nevertheless, the doctrine of man as the creator of his actions was also disputed within Shiʿism. Hishām ibn al-Ḥakam, for example, held the view that God creates the individual actions, even though man can choose to carry them out.

13 This mainly includes the Imamites (also known as the Twelver Shiʿites). See section: *Modern and Contemporary Sunni Views, and Shiʿite Views* in Catarina Belo's elaboration of Predestination in Islam.

5 Commonalities and Differences

5.1 Commonalities

In order to elaborate the similarities among Jewish, Christian and Islamic perspectives on the concept of predestination, it is necessary to emphasize that all three presented views pursue the question of God's intervention in human existence. How does God's work affect human beings in general? As these three perspectives show, this question raises a number of sub-questions, all of which lead to a rather complex discussion. From absolute determinism, in which every human action is determined by God, to the doctrine of open theism, which even relativizes the omnipotence of God. Judaism, Christianity and Islam are thus united especially in the following questions: How free is mankind truly? Has God already determined everything conceivable on earth? To what extent are human beings capable of taking responsibility for their actions? How can we justify the discrepancy between God's absolute goodness and the existence of evil in the world? Struggling with these and related questions, all three perspectives recognize that God is omnipotent and absolutely good. He is omniscient and therefore knows all that what happens in the world.[14] God has a specific plan, according to which man must make decisions for his actions, which he must then justify to the Creator. This already implies a fundamental determinism in which man, at least here, is not really allowed to choose. God's decision to create the world and the human beings is thus based on God's literally unrestricted will. In Judaism and Christianity, God creates man in His image (*Tzelem Elohim*, *Gen* 1:26–27) to establish him as ruler on earth. In Islam, God is also said to have appointed man as a representative (*khalīfa*) on earth (Q 2:30).

However, man's rule implies responsibility, which is therefore imposed by God. Man bears responsibility insofar as he or she has to follow the divine will in his or her decisions and actions.[15] This unifying *basic determinism*[16] does

14 An exception would be the doctrine of the Open Theists within the Christian tradition. They believe that God *abstains* from the knowledge of the future. See for example: Maness, Michael G., *Heart of the Living God: Love, Love, Free Will, Foreknowledge, and Heaven / A Theology on the Treasure of Love*, Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2004, 467.

15 See for example in the Old Testament: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse." (*Deut* 30:19–20) translations of the Old and New Testament follow the ESV; in the Qur'ān: "He shall not be questioned about what He does, but they shall be questioned." (Q 21:23), Qur'ān translations are taken from: Hossein Nasr,

not, however, suggest a thoroughly calculating Creator who uses man only as a means to an end. God is not only omniscient and immensely wise, but He is also concerned about humankind. God's concern means that He always desires the higher good for human beings.[17] He wants to guide them towards the right choices and actions so that they become receptive to His divine grace. At the same time, God seeks to protect human beings from evil and wickedness, since humanity was chosen as a special kind of being to bring forth that which is right and good.[18] God's intervention in human affairs can therefore be seen as being potentially positive. However, the possibility of choosing between good and evil[19] must inevitably lead back to a certain degree of freedom of choice, otherwise the doctrine of responsibility in all three monotheistic religions would be invalid. However, if man fails to do what is right,[20] man is still free to repent and turn to God. In the Jewish tradition, the idea of *returning* (*teshuva*) exists as an opportunity to repent from transgressions and sins in order to be reconciled with God.[21] The Christian and Islamic view largely corresponds to the Jewish view. While Islam uses the Arabic term *tawba*[22] as the equivalent of

Seyyed (ed.), *The Study Quran: A New Translation with Notes and Commentary*, New York: HarperOne, 2015.

16 Basic determinism is the divine plan for humanity as we generally understand it.

17 Rabbinic literature mentions in particular God's grief over man's fall into sin. (e.g. *Ber.* 28:8); in the New Testament, God is described as someone who sent his son out of love for mankind (*John* 3:16); In the Qurʾān, God's description of Himself is that He is close to man. (Q 2:186)

18 In the Old Testament: "Trust in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness." (*Ps* 37:3); in the New Testament, for example, it says: "Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." (*Phil* 2:12); in the Qurʾān: "And spend in the way of God and do not, with your own hands, cast yourselves into ruin. And be virtuous. Truly God loves the virtuous." (Q 2:195)

19 The concept of evil according to the three monotheistic religions, is discussed in: Rachik, Catharina and Tamer, Georges (eds.), *The Concept of Evil in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2024.

20 By *right*, we mean *acting according to what God commands.*

21 For a more detailed explanation of the idea of *teschuva* see e.g: Moshe, Navon/ Söding, Thomas, *Gemeinsam zu Gott beten: Eine jüdisch-christliche Auslegung des Vaterunsers*, 2018, f. 61.; Katz Jacob/ Brenner, Michael, *Tradition und Krise: der Weg der jüdischen Gesellschaft in die Moderne*, Munich: C.H. Beck, 2002, 171.

22 Especially in the Sufi literature one can find a detailed description of the concept of *tawba*, for example: al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm ad-dīn*, vol. 4, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2008, ff. 3.; al-Qushayrī, *ar-Risāla al-qushayriyya*, Jeddah: Dār al-Manāhij, 2020, f. 295.; also note the work of Khalil, Atif, *Repentance and the Return to God: Tawba in Early Sufism*, State University of New York Press, 2018; in the Qurʾān, the idea of *tawba* is mentioned in several Verses, such as: Q 2:160,

repentance to God, Christian sources use either the Greek term μετάνοια (metanoia) or *paenitentia*.[23] The return to God in repentance seems to be important for the consideration of predestination in the sense, that it affects the fate of man positively: According to all three views, man is dependent on God's grace.

The three perspectives presented here therefore have four aspects in common:

1. questions of predestination in relation to human free will, fate, evil, etc.
2. The belief in an omnipotent, omniscient God who has planned the existence of mankind.
3. God's goodness, justice and concern for humanity
4. The concept of repentance to God in order to strive for a good destiny.

5.2 Differences

In presenting the Jewish perspective, Len Goodman followed the premise that human existence is not actively determined by God. Human beings are solely and exclusively responsible for their own actions, thereby shaping their own destiny. However, there is a certain divine purpose, which is realized through moral human activity. The prophecies, which are to be understood as announcements of the divine plan, are of great importance here. Yet at the same time, man is responsible for his or her actions, for he or she must follow the divine law on earth. From Goodman's perspective, God is also dependent on the actions of man, since the prophecies must be fulfilled as a result by human agency. This fulfillment, though, cannot occur primarily by divine action, but also by human activity. God therefore recedes into the background as an observer and *passive planner*, reminding His chosen people of the importance of prophecy by repeatedly sending prophets to the Children of Israel; to put it briefly: It is God who needs man.

Couenhoven's Christian perspective, in contrast, focuses on the multidimensionality of predestination within the theological trends of Christianity. Unlike Goodman, who assumes the principle of genuine free will, Couenhoven emphasizes the Christian discursivity of the concept. The range of views on predestination extends from Calvinistic to Orthodox. In particular, the Christian outlook is characterized by the ideas of double predestination, supralapsarianism, and infralapsarianism. The idea of double predestination-that is, that God ordains

Q 5:74 and Q 11:3. Moreover, the Qurʾān states that God's love is for those who return to Him constantly in repentance (Q 2:222).

23 J. Boda, Mark and T. Smith, Gordon (eds.), *Repentance in Christian Theology*, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2006, 88, 163.

both the saved and the damned-might be compared to the Jewish belief in the chosen people. However, from the Jewish point of view, God favored the Jews over all other nations. In contrast, from the Christian perspective, the redemptive faith is not limited to a particular people, but extends to all who follow Jesus. God's dependence on human beings, though, is found only in the modern strand of Open Theism. In widely spread theologies in Catholicism and Orthodoxy, God is not dependent on man; on the contrary, man is dependent on God's grace. In Judaism and Islam there is no equivalent to the dichotomy of supra- and infralapsarianism. Neither is there a question in Jewish theology as to whether God predestines human beings in relation to or apart from the Fall. The same goes for Islamic tradition, in which predestination is not really linked to Adam's sin.

A similar discursivity to Christianity certainly exists in the Islamic view, as Catarina Belo has pointed out. While Judaism and Christianity emphasize human freedom, the widely held Sunni view places more emphasis on divine predestination.[24] Similar to the Christian view, God is completely independent and exalted, which means that He is in no way dependent on His creatures. Like in Christianity, man is dependent on God's mercy. Moreover, God is strongly involved in human activity.[25] God is constantly and incessantly active, which is how Islamic Sunni theologians in particular formulated the idea of occasionalism.[26] Ideas such as occasionalism, which is widespread in Islam, do not appear in the Jewish and Christian perspectives that have been presented.[27] Although theological

24 See e. g. the work of Griffel, Frank, *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam*, Oxford University Press, 2021, 488.; also the section *The Mystery of Predestination* in: Izutsu, Toshihiko, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, University of California Press, 1984, f. 175.; Wolfson, Harry Austryn, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, Harvard University Press, 60 – 61.

25 The Mu'tazilites are an exception here. They believe that human beings create their own actions. See e. g.: Yesilhark Ozkan, Tubanur, *A Muslim Response to Evil: Said Nursi on the Theodicy*, London/New York: Routledge, 2015, 41.

26 Fakhry, Majid, *Islamic Occasionalism: And its Critique by Averroës and Aquinas*, London/New York: Routledge, 2008 f. 14.

27 In the Western context, representatives of occasionalism who were also skeptical of natural causality such as William of Ockham (d. 1347), Nicholas of Autrecourt (d. 1369) and David Hume (d. 1776) could be mentioned here. See the section *Occasionalism* in: Bowden, John (ed.) / Richardson, Alan (ed.), *A New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, London: 1989, SCM Press, 406. However, occasionalism has been rejected by several Jewish and Christian thinkers, such as Maimonides and Thomas Aquinas. See e. g.: Goodman, Lenn, *Jewish and Islamic Philosophy: Crosspollinations in the Classic Age*, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1999, 178.; C. Chao, David, "Different Expressions of Justice in Salvation and Providence: Eberhard Jüngel on Theological Anthropology and Justification-With Help from Thomas Aquinas," in: Piotr J. Małysz and R.

schools of thought such as those of the Muʿtazilites assume a more libertarian view, the Ashʿarites are of the opinion that human freedom is never without limits, because God creates every conceivable human action. A similar doctrine is held by the widespread school of thought of the Māturīdiyya.[28] However, the view of occasionalism was disputed by a number of Islamic philosophers. They argued for human autonomy in order to justify human responsibility.[29] However, the categories of *qadar* (predestination) and *qaḍā'* (The realization of God's Will) have no equivalent in either Jewish or Christian thought. Certainly, one can see a certain similarity to the Islamic concepts of *qadar* and *qaḍā'* in the ideas of supra- and infralapsarianism, but the Islamic focus in regards to predestination is more on God's plan with his creation and not really on the Fall of man.[30]

Compared to Judaism and Islam, Christianity seems to grant human beings a greater sphere of freedom in their decisions and actions. This is especially evident when we look at two central events in the New Testament: 1) Mary's attitude during the Annunciation: When the archangel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will conceive and give birth to the Son of God without the usual act of procreation, she is confronted with an extraordinary situation in which divine predestination and human freedom encounter. Mary could have reacted differently; she could have experienced doubt or rejection. But she consciously and freely chooses the path of obedience and acceptance, thus making possible the event of salvation and the incarnation of Christ (cf. Luke 1:26–38). This choice underscores that even in the face of a divinely ordained plan, human beings can act actively and responsibly. 2) Jesus' prayer before the crucifixion: Just before his death on the cross, Jesus of Nazareth, who is both fully human and the Son of God, experiences a profoundly human moment of fear and despair. In an intimate and thrice repeated prayer, he turns to God the Father and asks that the "cup" (that is, the inevitable suffering and death) be taken from him (cf. Matt. 26:36–46; Mark 14:32–42; Luke 22:39–46). When his request is not granted, Jesus does not protest or try to flees, but subordinates his own will to the will of his Father. This voluntary submission demonstrates that even in moments

David Nelson (eds.), *The Freedom of Christian Theology: New Studies in Dialogue with Eberhard Jüngel*, Lanham (Maryland): 2025, 51.

28 Tubanur, *A Muslim Response to Evil*, 41–43.

29 This is especially true for Islamic Philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Avicenna. See the section *The Views of the Philosophers* in Catarina Belo's elaboration on Predestination in Islam.

30 An Islamic parallel to supralapsarianism can be seen in the moment of pre-temporal covenant that is specifically described in the Qur'ān. The day on which God gathered all human beings together and asked them whether He was indeed their Lord (Q 8:172). See also: Hossein Nasr, *The Study Quran*, 1037.

of extreme human weakness and fear, faith and trust in the divine will can prevail. By accepting suffering, he affirms the conviction that there is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's beloved (cf. John 15:13).

Despite this emphasis on human freedom of choice, Christian theology also recognizes that God actively intervenes in the lives of certain individuals, fundamentally changing them in order to fulfill divinely predetermined purposes-as seen, for example, in the cases of Jonah and Paul, though sometimes with reservations. Thus, within the Christian understanding, the tension between divine predestination and human freedom persists. This dialectic is central to the Christian understanding of grace, responsibility, and the interplay between the divine and the human.

Finally, there is the problem of the existence of evil. How can evil be reconciled with human predestination? From a Jewish perspective, the problem of evil is linked to the abuse of free will. But God is by no means the source of evil. In order to counteract evil, it is imperative that man first obey the divine law and live virtuously. However, the decisive factor in eradicating evil is repentance, which can change fate for the better. In the Christian view, efforts are made to reconcile the absolute goodness of God in relation to his creation. Boethius and Augustine, for example, see evil as a mean that ultimately leads to a higher good. Although there might be discussions about weak or strong predestination, God's goodness makes it impossible for Him to be the actual originator of evil. The Islamic perspective is similar: Evil also serves a higher purpose unknown to man. Whether evil is seen as a deprivation of goodness or as a lack of perfection, God allowed or determined the possibility of evil by granting man the possibility to choose. The role of the devil whom God has already condemned to hell by his refusal to prostrate before Adam (Q 38:71–83), or the people of Gog and Magog who will constitute the majority of the inhabitants of hell,[31] as well as the determination of the prophecies, which at the same time predict great calamity for mankind, should be indicated to at this point.[32] Thus, the divine determination corresponds to God's plan in which humankind must undergo its trials on earth.

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31 This is narrated in a Hadith attributed to the Prophet Muhammad in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī. Sahih al-Bukhari* 4741 (Book 65, Hadith 263), published online: sunna.com, https://sunnah.com/bukhari:4741 (accessed on 01.02.2025).; see also on Gog and Magog in Islam: Ramy Abdin, "The Faces of Gog and Magog in Islam," in: Tamer, Georges, Mein, Andrew and Greisiger, Lutz (eds.), *Gog and Magog: Contributions Toward a World History of an Apocalyptic Motif*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2023, 810 f.

32 We are referring here to the Signs of the Hour (*ʿalāmāt as-sāʿa*) in Islam that proclaim the end of mankind on earth. See e. g.: al-Barzanjī, Muḥammad, *al-Ishāʿa li-ashrāṭ as-sāʿa,* ed. Ḥusayn Muḥammad ʿAlī Shukrī. Beirut: Dar al-Minhāj, 2005.