GENETIC DETERMINISM: A MODERN CHALLENGE TO ISLAMIC BELIEF IN HUMAN FREEDOM OF CHOICE

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Introduction

Man is a slave of God; willingly or unwillingly, he has to submit to His Will, for he is created to serve Him (56:56). For his existence in this world, man owes God a debt. On the side of God, human existence is His gift to humanity; on the side of man, the rightly-directed feels indebted, for he knows it is like a debt he owes God for bringing him into existence, and more, for maintaining him in his existence. Man has a duty to fulfill his responsibility in this world out of his feeling of gratefulness and sense of indebtedness which lead to obedience to God (33:72). He has to do the best he can to serve Him, and in this sense, action presupposes knowledge of what is good (90: 8-10, 32: 9, 67: 23, 23: 78).

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1 In Islam, the idea of man’s indebtedness to God is closely related to the concept of religion (din). According to al-Attas, the primary significations of the term din are reducible to four: indebtedness, submissiveness, judicious power, and natural inclination or tendency. These fundamental significations denote faith, beliefs, practices and teachings as interpreted by Islam. See al-Attas, Syed Muhammad Naquib, Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization (ISTAC), 1995), pp. 41–62.

2 Al-Māturīdī also argues that although the freedom of choice is inherent in the nature of the willed act, yet he asserts that this does not lead to the idea that man is unconditionally free. The condition for free choice is not that one can do whatever he or she wants, but one should choose the most appropriate thing to do. What is directly confronted is the question of the impact of God’s creative power on the nature of human action. In this respect al-Māturīdī is of the opinion that it is only through the Divine creative act that human freedom is established.
The most appropriate action or the choice for the better depends heavily upon an individual's knowledge; even the availability of choices itself depends on his knowledge of what choices are available; moreover, it is only with knowledge that he can determine what is for the better, since that which is worse is not a choice, as it is based upon ignorance of what its effects and consequences are and due to instigation of the carnal soul.³

Free will, Responsibility and Accountability as Religious Doctrines

Islam and other Abrahamic religions preach about the Hereafter in which man is either rewarded or punished for whatever he had done in this life. This belief must obviously first assume that there is a Divine revealed code of ethics specifying what is morally good and what is morally sinful or evil. Furthermore, that man, unlike other animals, is bestowed with a soul and mind that enables him to carry out the dictates of his revealed religious commands. Accordingly, he must be responsible for the good or sinful actions he had performed during his lifetime in this world. This belief in human responsibility is also firmly based on the conviction of freedom of choice. Divine Justice necessitates that if man is to be punished or rewarded in the