

INSHAH ALLAH (GOD-SO-WILLING): THE METAPHYSICS OF THE FUTURE

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In the life of devout Muslims, a day never passes without using the Arabic phrase *Inshah Allah* (God-So-Willing) at the end of any conversation about future events. Without an understanding of the meaning of this phrase, we cannot begin to comprehend God’s relationship with His creatures, the concept of Creation, and the role of free will. Nor can we offer a rational, internally consistent argument against materialist exclusion of God in the evolution of life and the universe.

Materialists among scientists argue that biological evolution is an “inherently mindless purposeless process.”¹ They preach that impersonal natural laws rule the universe and that atoms are at work in the operation of life. Biologist and atheist Richard Dawkins insists that contingency and natural selection, operating over a long period of time, account for evolution. Dawkins assumes that blind forces of physics, chemistry, and natural selection are sufficient to explain the origin and expansion of life.^{2&3} He claims that the unfolding of life springs from the selfish desires of genes to increase their opportunities for survival and reproduction. Similar opinions prevail among other practitioners and admirers of science who argue that there is no reason to include God in the evolution of life. One extremist states that “materialism is absolute [and] we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.”⁴

Such fervency stems from an unshakable, unwavering faith in the Law of Causality, which most people acknowledge and which states that a given cause always produces the same effect. Gravity always pulls an apple down to the earth; spring season melts snow; drought brings destruction of crops. Chemical reactions in any organism, amoeba or human are explainable by the same laws of physics and chemistry that govern the universe.

Based on causality, scientists maintain that the future is predetermined and can be predicted through accurate knowledge of past causes. The laws of nature, they argue, are invariant, and scientific observation reveals the past as the product of those laws. Any natural event that departs from the anticipated effect of a uniform cause is classified as an “accident.” However, scientists’ predictions are based on the observation of matter and invariant laws of nature and are limited by their own earlier conclusions and experiences.

To gather data, scientists peer into nature, from atoms to stars, amoeba to humankind, fungi to maple trees, and into any other phenomena within our universe. Science has categorized the collected data into defining disciplines such as paleontology, comparative anatomy, biogeography, embryology, molecular genetics, and so on. These disciplines of past experiences guide materialists to portray the unfolding of life as a “purposeless, mindless process.” Materialistic predictions are limited by their own earlier conclusions and experiences. John F. Haught, professor of theology at Georgetown University, calls such materialistic metaphysics “metaphysics of the past.”⁵

Haught’s outstanding treatise *God After Darwin* helped me to develop a stronger understanding of Islam and the concept of Creation as described in the Quran.⁶ I find his mode of thought to be as perceptively Islamic as his belief system, so I shall apply his metaphysics in an Islamic context.

In the Islamic universe, unlike that which is catalogued by science, the past and the present are not the authors of the future, nor are humans or any other creatures, because “. . . God is the creator of everything . . .” (The Qur’an 13:16). Even creations that we claim as our own emanate from God. The Quran states, “And God created you and what you make” (The Qur’an 37:96). God created everything—computers, airplanes, cars, and even the atom. Similarly, according to the verse Qur’an 2:7, God has sealed the heart of disbelievers from receiving divine guidance. Every sermon on Friday begins with the statement, “Those whom God has guided no other creature will lead them astray and those whom God has misguided no one will guide.”

It is prudent to ask: If God is the creator of that which humans make, is God not also the creator of our good and bad deeds? Why should there exist rewards for the pious and retribution for the impious if God is the source of our actions? The answers to these questions lies in the Islamic metaphysics of the future.

In the Islamic context, time is a conveyor belt carrying messages from God. The experienced past is irretrievable, while the present is only a fleeting moment that we cannot hold. On the other hand, we experience the continuous coming of the future. The future in the material world does not exist until God creates it. The future is not simply the birth of a moment. Future means the yet-to-be-born or created moment packed with contrasting or diametrically opposite possibilities only as information. Islamic faith decrees that God is the source of all information. Therefore, Muslims pray, “My Lord, augment me in knowledge.” (The Qur’an 20:114).

Islamic teachings regarding the coming of future events are grounded in the phrase *Inshah Allah* (God-so-willing) and the verse, “And never say about anything, ‘Behold, I shall do this tomorrow,’ without [adding] ‘if God so wills’” (The Qur’an 18:23). Muslims say *Inshah Allah* (God-so-willing) after every statement pertaining to the future, even for simple tasks such as meeting a friend at 4 P.M. tomorrow. Muslims believe that the future is not simply born without cause. It occurs only when and if God creates arriving moment loaded with information. Our planning and our desires may or may not be what God is going to present to us in our future. Allah states: “. . . and they contrived, and God contrived, but God is the greatest of contrivers.”(The Qur’an 3:54)

All creatures, whether it is a quark or an elephant, participate in actualizing the information contained within future moments into visible monuments of divine creation. The present is the pivotal moment between past and future. God tests us by asking us to make moral choices of possibilities—the good, bad, and neutral, the moral and immoral—that are contained in each approaching moment only as information. These choices have no negative or positive charge in the material world until creatures actualize the possibilities into material-world realities. Thus we are necessary participants in the ongoing process of creation. Otherwise, the stream of future moments would remain only as idle information and possibilities. God calls humans to account for our act of choosing from the alternatives within the arriving future moments and also for rejecting information that appears logically correct to each individual.

Divine messages within arriving moment of the future is different for each individual, and the lessons of the past and present are tools that can help us make the right choices. God revealed His words to the prophets and provided holy books to both human and *jinn* (beings who inhabit a different plane of existence). These scriptures explain what is right or wrong, moral or immoral, preferred or not preferred, and rewarding or punishable. God narrates stories of the past in the Quran in order to help

human and jinn to make the right choices, as He has graced both of them with relatively higher levels of limited free will compared to other creatures. Living creatures have the freedom to actualize only those possibilities contained as information in each arriving moment of the future from God. To label the above belief, we shall borrow John F. Haught's phrase "metaphysics of the future"⁷ and modify it to read "Islamic metaphysics of the future." If a future moment arrives lacking in novel possibilities, humans and other creatures cannot change their present condition, which then becomes stagnant and may remain so for an unlimited period of time.

Within Islamic metaphysics of the future, the universe is always within God's providence. Therefore, God is the creator of all things. Nothing comes into existence without the information about it initially available. For example, the results of standardized research studies coming to various sectors of society—such as politicians, heads of corporations, and others—provide them guidance to manage their vocations. Those who understand the information can then actualize it into cars, airplanes, nations, and so on.

The metaphor of a factory worker illustrates our relationship to God. While the ordinary assembly-line worker can choose the manufacturing plant in which he wishes to be employed, factory workers have no freedom to manufacture any products of their choice; they must assemble a product using components coming through the conveyor belt of the factory. The physical and spiritual universe is the manufacturing plant of Islam owned by God, the supreme Scientist and Technician. Here, creatures at large and humans in particular are like assembly-line workers. The chain of arriving moments of the future is a conveyor belt and it delivers the components (possibilities as information) necessary for the making of many products and events. In this divine factory (universe), the worker is free to select any of the components (possibilities) from the conveyor belt (arriving future) and actualize those possibilities into visible monuments of God's creation. If there is no flow of information from scientists and researchers, the assembly-line worker is unable to produce anything. Even the factory would not exist. Likewise, human or any other creature cannot produce or act upon the world until the future moment arrives with possibilities as information from God. Belief and disbelief in God also come as possibilities in the flow of moments of the future. If human beings choose and accept disbelief in God, their minds become unreceptive to divine revelations until they are willing to give up their disbelief. Consequently individuals opt to receive reward or retribution in the Hereafter universe (*al-Akhirah*) based upon their earthy choices.

The universe from the Big Bang to the Big Crunch is a maze. On both ends there exists a singularity in which all matter is condensed into a mathematical point. The maze is made out of alleys, roads, highways, and byways that lead to different futures for the universe and its components before it faces the Big Crunch (the Last Day). (Figure 1-1). God has already mapped out (created) all the possible and available futures that His creatures can choose, but it is still up to humans and other components of the universe—day by day or moment by moment—to decide for themselves which alleys or roads or highways to step into. God, the Merciful and Benevolent, does not interfere or force us into making choices by voluntarily limiting His Absolute Power as stated in the Quranic verse: "And had your Lord willed, whoever in the earth would have believed altogether. Will you then coerce the people to become believers?" (Quran 10:99). God knows that free will would remain nonexistent for His creatures without putting limitations on His omnipotence and omniscience. Creatures would not have the freedom to choose any information out of the arriving future without a voluntary self-control of Divine power and absolute knowledge.

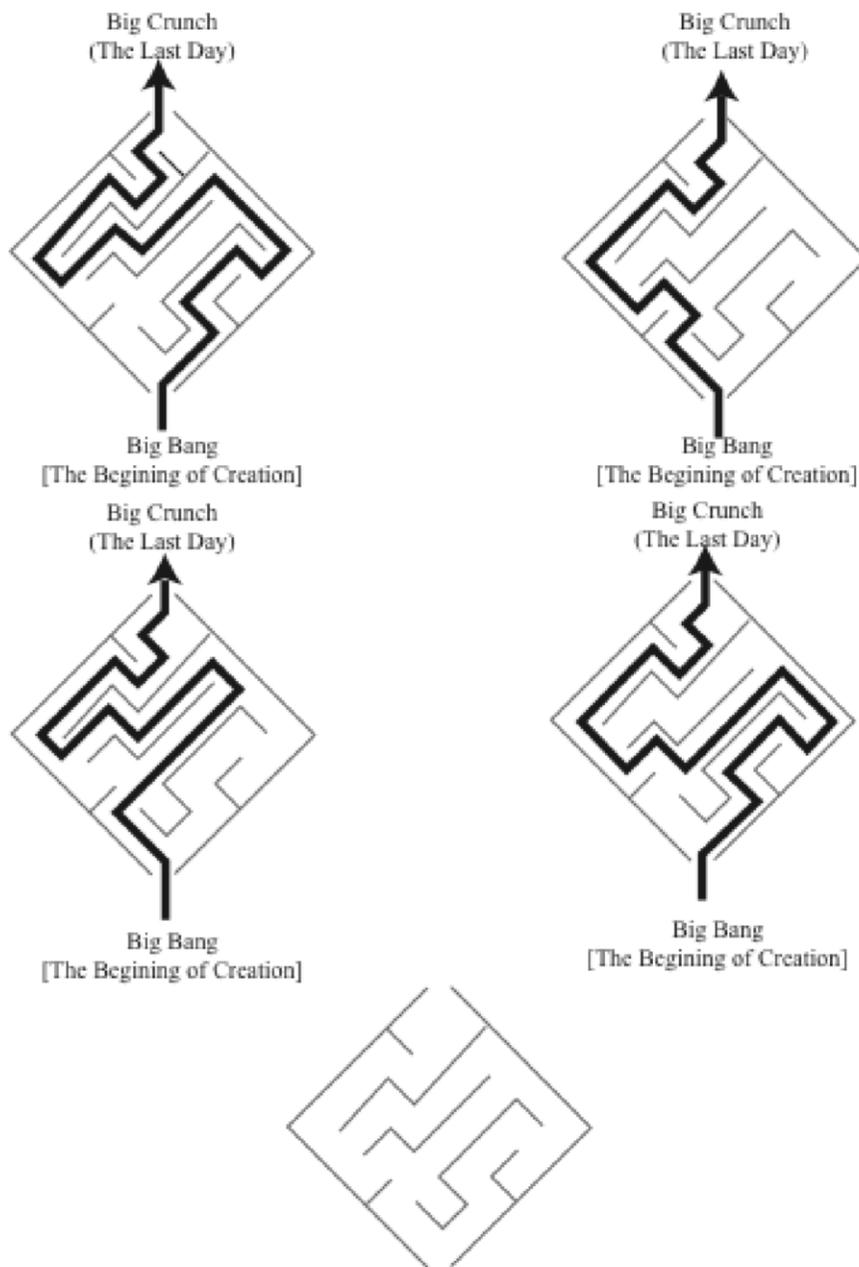


FIGURE 1-1. Maze of evolving Universe. In this maze of evolving universe, there are four potential routes that the universe could travel from Big Bang (The beginning of Creation) to the Big Crunch (the Last Day).

Therefore, Al-Rahman (The Beneficent) and Al-Rahim (The Merciful) set a voluntarily self-imposed limitation on His Omniscience and Omnipotence to create free will for His creatures. Because the self-imposed limitation is voluntary, it does not imply any inherent limitation in God’s ultimate power and omniscience. At the same time we are free to choose and actualize any of the worldly possibilities available to us—atomic power, computer technology, biological engineering—but our future remains limited by possibilities that God has in store for us. In another words, God knows all available futures for creatures, but in order to create free will for His creatures, God, being the Most Merciful and Most Benevolent, voluntarily opted not to know which future path that His creatures would choose to step into until it is done.

Furthermore, He made time relative. This topic is detailed in the next chapter. According to the theory of relativity, time is elastic and can be stretched or even frozen. God strung His time into a constant present or “now.” So, human events of yesterday, today, and tomorrow are current events in an infinite Divine Milieu. Suh a construction of time eliminates any conflict between human free will and divine omniscience. So, Jalaluddin Rumi, a well-respected Muslim sufi, stated in his *Masnavi*: “In the space-less realm of light of God, the past, present, and future do not exist. Past and future are two things only in relation to you; in reality they are one. Thy thought is about the past, and future; when it gets rid of these two, the difficulty will be solved.”

In the mandatory daily prayers, Muslims recite the opening chapter of the Quran, al-Fatihah: “Guide us (O Lord) to the path that is straight, the path of those You have blessed, not of those who have earned Your anger, nor of those who have gone astray.” These verses imply for many Muslim and non-Muslim minds that God does lead some of us astray. Based upon the Islamic metaphysics of the future, God is the source of contrasting and diametrically opposite possibilities within arriving moments of future. So, God is the source for good and sinful possibilities as information and also the source of guidance to choose between evil and righteous of possibilities. God does not interfere with human freedom to choose.

The sinners’ own confessions, as repeatedly mentioned in the Quran, includes statements that their great leaders or the Devil misled them. Not once do they put forward the excuse that God Himself misled them: “And they (shall) say, ‘Our Lord, we obeyed our masters and our notables, but they led us astray from the path.’” (The Qur’an 33:67) “And those who disbelieved shall say, ‘Our Lord, show us those who led us perverse of men and jinn, and we shall put them under our feet that they may be at the bottom.’” (The Qur’an 41:29). If God had really led them astray, the sinners’ best excuse on the Day of Judgment would have been that they did not deserve to be punished because God Himself led them astray. Therefore, based upon the Islamic metaphysics of the future, the phrases “God misled” or “God guided” refer to the idea that God simultaneously created good and bad possibilities as information within the arriving future moments.

Based upon the far-reaching meaning of the phrase *Inshah Allah* and the concept of “Islamic metaphysics of the future,” accidents or contingencies are novelties coming from God, even though these novelties appear as random to a human mind fixed in the materialists’ “metaphysics of the past.” For example, God created for Hind bint Utba, one of the foremost enemies of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the possibility to join the distinguished company of the Prophet as Hamzah did, or the decision to kill and mutilate Hamzah. God did not compel Hind to choose any one of the paths. God created good and bad choices within Hind’s arriving future, and she decided to actualize the bad choice to kill and cannibalize him.⁸

The Quran supports the above when it states: “Surely God does not wrong anyone, they wrong themselves.” (The Qur’an 10:44). No conflict arises, therefore, between the belief that God is the creator of the world and the belief that all creatures are endowed with limited free will to act upon the possibilities that come through the flow of moments of the future. Such a construction of the universe along with merciful voluntary limitation of His power distances God from the concept of a tyrant. If we take a global snapshot of all earthly creatures, we witness a universe with a mixture of pain, happiness, and peace. Christian theologian and biochemist Arthur Peacocke describes the universe as a musical play wherein actors (God’s creatures) in their individual hierarchical ranks freely choose their roles from possible scenarios presented to them by the choreographer (God).⁹

Chance and unpredictability are inevitable and are, in fact, built into such an atmosphere. In real life, however, the pain and suffering result from the free choices of worldly creatures to satisfy

their selfish benefits. It serves as God's way of testing and perfecting to enter into eternal world of absolute happiness and peace. Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi describes this universe as a battlefield where atom struggles with atom like faith against infidelity. In this struggle some benefit and others suffer. Islamic metaphysics of the future blends chance, unpredictability, and limited levels of free will to form our universe, within the providence of a Most Compassionate, Most Just, and Omnipotent God. Based on the Islamic metaphysics of the future, God proposes and humankind as well as other creatures together transcribe divine proposals into monuments of divine creation in the material world. God's rewards or retributions in the Hereafter world are based upon our intention and selection and actualization of the righteous or evil information within the messenger-moments called the future into visible monuments of God's creation in the material world. This conclusion is supported by the Qur'an verse 4:85:

“Whoso interveneth in a good cause will have the reward thereof; and whoso interveneth in an evil cause will bear the consequence thereof. Allah overseeth all things”

Reference

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9. Barbour, Ian G. *Religion and Science*, p. 314