

# ISLAMIC THOUGHT & THE CONCEPT OF GOD

## Holistic Evaluation of Metaphysical Models



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## **Abstract**

This article argues that the conception of God in Islamic thought should be evaluated not only in terms of individual arguments but also in a holistic approach through the interrelationships between these arguments. In particular, it is emphasized that fundamental metaphysical concepts such as the hereafter, free will, test, fate, justice, and evil should be addressed systematically through their connections with God's way of knowing and intervening. It is argued that fragmentary approaches may reflect incomplete or erroneous understandings of God's moral responsibility and justice in the universe. In this context, the distinction between God's fixed codes operating at the systemic level and the variable domains of human will is central to analyzing the tension between free will and divine knowledge. The article also discusses the limits and conditions of the integration of the intellectual models of Islamic metaphysics into other systems, arguing that the positioning of an argument within another metaphysical structure can lose its meaning if it is decontextualized.

**Keywords:** God, Metaphysics, Islam, Religion, Philosophy, Ontology, Epistemology, Rationality, Atheism, Agnosticism, Nontheism, Argument from Evil, Problem of Evil

## **Introduction**

Metaphysical ideas are deep intellectual models that seek to understand the nature of the universe, human beings, God and existence. These models are usually structured as a whole, and each component within it has a functionality that is compatible with and mutually supportive of the whole system. In Islamic thought, arguments such as God's existence, justice, free will and belief in the hereafter should be considered together and evaluated within this holistic structure. Otherwise, it would be inevitable to misunderstand these ideas and make erroneous inferences.

In order to evaluate metaphysical models correctly, the parts must be put together and the functional connections between these parts must not be disturbed. This offers a flexibility in which each metaphysical argument can be integrated within other intellectual structures, in the same way that the functional parts of a machine can be used in other machines. This demonstrates not only the flexibility of the elements within a model, but also the accuracy of that model. In this context, we argue for the fact that when dealing with the metaphysical structure of Islam, each argument and concept must be considered together and holistically.

### **1. The Necessity of Holistic Evaluation in Metaphysical Systems of Thought**

Metaphysical ideas are inherently complex, multilayered and interconnected structures. These structures, like a functional machine, are composed of components that complement each other and gain meaning when they work together. In such structures, each argument or principle becomes meaningful not only in its own context but also through the relations it establishes with the system as a whole. Therefore, taking any component of a metaphysical system out of its context and evaluating it in isolation, as is the case with theological ideas, both damages the internal coherence of the system and leads to wrong conclusions.

#### **1.1. The Machine Model: Functional Representation of Metaphysical Totality**

To explain this better, an analogy with machines may be illustrative. The parts that make up a machine may individually have complex structures. However, since these parts are designed according to the specific function of that machine, when they come together, they work in harmony for a specific purpose. The same part can be integrated into another machine, but either its function changes or the structure of the machine is re-adapted accordingly. The original function of the part is only fully realized in the context of its own system.

Metaphysical ideas work in a similar way. For example, the principle of "*free will*" in one system of thought can be used in another. However, its meaning in this second system may not be exactly the same as its context in the first system. Each argument is closely tied to the internal structure of the metaphysical model in which it takes place. Therefore, the transfer of an argument to another model should be carried out by considering the integrity of that model and making the necessary transformations. Otherwise, shifts in meaning, contradictions and misinterpretations become inevitable.

## 1.2. The Importance of the Principle of Holism in Theological Thought

This holistic approach to evaluation is especially crucial in theological models. Conceptions such as God are tightly interwoven with concepts such as belief in the hereafter, free will, fate, justice and trial. This structure is built as a whole with its own internal logic and internal consistency. In Islamic thought, God's attributes (*e.g. just, merciful, omniscient, etc.*) are only a part of such a unity. These attributes gain meaning through other metaphysical elements such as the testing of human free will, the realization of this testing in the life of the world and the manifestation of its results in the hereafter.

If this conception of God is detached from this context and dealt with only through an isolated question such as “*Why doesn't God intervene in evil?*”, one would actually be going beyond the basic logic of the model. For this question to be meaningful, complementary concepts such as why God is not an absolute non-interventionist in Islamic thought, how this is related to human free will and the test, and ultimately how the outcome of this test will be evaluated in the hereafter must be addressed together.

Here, God's preventing any evil means an intervention within the Islamic system of free will and testing, and this intervention prevents the individual from making a free choice. In this case, that person's responsibility in the hereafter also falls. Therefore, the intervention renders the system inoperable. Within the framework of the logic established within the system itself, it is considered necessary to allow such evils in order to establish a balance between freedom and responsibility.

## 1.3. Use of Parts in Other Models: Compatibility and Danger

Of course, parts of a metaphysical system can be carried over into other intellectual models. This is a constructive process for philosophical development and interdisciplinary discussions. However, there are two important conditions here:

**a) Contextual Adaptation:** The argument or principle carried must be adapted to the logic and general structure of the new system.

**b) Consistency Test:** The meaning of the argument in the new system must not contradict its function in the previous system or be transformed in such a way as to distort the holistic meaning.

Otherwise, for example, evaluating the understanding of God in Islam by excluding the concepts of free will and the hereafter would be a superficial criticism that ignores the internal logic of the system. Such approaches reveal what we want the system to say, not what it says. This is both philosophically irrational and intellectually incoherent.

## 1.4. Conclusion Holistic Reading is Essential for Criticism

Each metaphysical model functions as a “*universe*” in itself. This universe has rules, operating mechanisms and value systems. If we want to understand or criticize a model, we have to understand the internal dynamics of this universe. It would be both fair and philosophical to consider the conception of God, belief in the hereafter, free will, the understanding of fate and testing as a whole, rather than independent of each other. The whole of this structure can be found meaningful or meaningless, but evaluations made by separating it into its parts and detaching it from its context will never form a solid ground for criticism.

In this framework, when evaluating the metaphysical modeling in Islam, it is necessary to adopt an approach like the holistic functioning of the machine analogy. Only by evaluating the parts not separately but together with their place in a system can we make a true meaning. This approach applies not only to Islamic metaphysics but to all metaphysical systems.

## **2. The Test and Free Will**

According to Islamic thought, human beings are put to a test in this world. This test is based on the human being's free will to distinguish between right and wrong and to make choices accordingly. One cannot speak of a test without free will, because a being who cannot make choices cannot be responsible for his actions. In this case, reward and punishment lose their meaning and God's justice becomes questionable.

God's preventing an evil, even if it looks positive from the outside, is an intervention in free will. Such an intervention takes away a person's right to be tested and at the same time removes the opportunity to take responsibility for the consequences of their actions. The meaning of the test is that a person freely makes a choice and bears the consequences of that choice. Therefore, free will and testing are parts of an inseparable whole.

### **2.1. What Is Not Free Will?**

First of all, it is necessary to clarify some points where the concept of free will is misunderstood. Especially in nontheist circles, free will is interpreted as a divine liberty, and it is thought that human beings should be able to make choices completely independent of nature, society, history and genetics. However, this is contrary to human nature. Man is not God; therefore, there is not "*absolute freedom*" but "*conditional and limited freedom*".

Human beings cannot choose the family they are born into, their geography, their genetic characteristics, or even their language. He is born into a society and culture shaped by the historical process. These conditions determine his life potential. However, the choices he makes among the options he encounters within this potential constitute his free will. This is where free will comes into play: It is the capacity to make choices within the possibilities.

### **2.2. The Proportionality of Freedom**

There is free will, but the degree and extent of this will is proportional. Human beings are not always absolutely free; various responsibilities, expectations and obligations limit their will. For example, an individual who is obliged to take care of his/her family may not be able to react completely freely to injustices in the workplace. Social rules, moral norms and legal systems frame the individual's freedom. At this point, freedom does not disappear completely, but is shaped according to the impact of the context.

However, some circles ignore these limitations and claim that human beings are either completely free or not free at all. This binary mindset (*all or nothing*) is not a rational but an emotional response. In reality, people make dozens of choices throughout the day, indicating that free will exists at least to some extent. The fact that freedom is not absolute does not mean that it does not exist at all.

### **2.3. The Limits of Testing and God's Intervention**

In Islam, a person is tested only within his or her potential. In other words, a person is not held responsible for an area in which he is not tested. The options that confront a person are directly related to his living conditions and inner equipment. By choosing among these options, he or she realizes his or her own journey of self-improvement.

If God were to prevent an evil-doer's action every time, that person's free will would be eliminated and therefore his punishment would be unjust. Because there would be no action committed. Likewise, that person would not be able to build his or her personality, character and moral development (*or regression*) through the choices he or she makes. The basic dynamic of the test is the construction of one's own self in the relationship between action and consequence. This development is not necessarily positive. People develop through their mistakes, contradictions and opposites. This is a consequence of the dualistic nature of life.

### **2.4. Emotional Reactions and Ontological Reality**

Some people have a hard time accepting this system, so they react with anger: "*Why does God test?*", "*Why doesn't God intervene in evil?*". However, such reactions do not undermine the integrity and meaning of the system. On the contrary, even while asking these questions, the person is exercising his or her free will and searching for meaning.

Philosophy seeks to understand and explain what exists. Rebelling against existential constants is an emotional reflex, not a philosophical one. Outbursts such as "*Why did God create this and not that?*" are expressions of individual discontent, not arguments about ontological reality. One can, of course, reject the system as a whole with such questions; however, it is incompatible with intellectual honesty to take the system piece by piece and try to make it seem meaningless by detaching it from its context.

## **3. Belief in the Hereafter and Justice**

Belief in the Hereafter is one of the cornerstones of the metaphysical structure of Islam. When the evils, injustices and inequalities encountered in worldly life are evaluated from a perspective limited to this world, an incomplete and inconsistent picture emerges. The Hereafter comes into play as a complementary element that overcomes this deficiency. Because according to Islam, every human being will sooner or later be rewarded for the actions he or she has taken of his or her own free will, and this is only possible in the afterlife, that is, in the hereafter. This belief makes God's absolute justice and human responsibility meaningful on a philosophical level. Therefore, the belief in the hereafter should be considered and evaluated as a whole together with the concepts of free will, trial and justice. If any one of them is removed from this structure, the remaining elements lose their meaning and the system loses its coherence.

At this point, one of the most fundamental mistakes or shortcomings of nontheistic approaches emerges: Lack of a holistic view. Belief in the afterlife is usually either ignored or rejected prejudicially on the grounds that it is an unrealized phenomenon. Of course, there is something to criticize here: We have no objective data on the afterlife that is directly experienced and universally accepted. Knowledge of the afterlife is largely based on scriptural statements and faith. But the issue here is not the "*provability*" of the afterlife, but the internal coherence of the metaphysical system. To ignore the belief in an afterlife is to break the network

of meaningful relationships that this system has established within itself. Because accepting the existence of God but excluding the hereafter renders concepts such as free will, justice and testing meaningless. The existence of God may make meaning possible, but without the hereafter, the manifestation of justice and the existence of testing cannot be rationally grounded. Therefore, if this model is to be criticized, it should be done holistically and fragmentary approaches should be avoided. Otherwise, the attitude can be explained by individual discontent or a lack of comprehension of the conceptual depth of the system rather than rationality.

Another point that should also be noted is this: This metaphysical model of Islam offers meaningful answers to the fundamental existential questions that human beings ask. Questions such as *“What is the meaning of life?”*, *“Why do I exist?”*, *“What do I live for?”* are answered not only theologically but also philosophically in this model. In contrast, a significant number of nontheist arguments either sidestep such questions or reject them outright. Answers such as *“Does life have to have a meaning?”*, *“Why do you ask why?”*, *“Purposelessness is also a way of existence!”*, which are frequently encountered in debates, are in fact not answers to these questions, but an evasion of the unanswerable. The human mind's inherent tendency to ask *“why”* and *“what for”* questions has formed the basis of both scientific developments and philosophical thought. Considering these questions absurd is philosophically inconsistent and anti-developmental.

In conclusion, Islam's metaphysical model offers a meaningful and coherent structure on both the existential and social planes by considering concepts such as free will, trial, justice and the hereafter as a whole. On the other hand, the fact that those who object to this model are mostly unable to offer a systematic and holistic alternative shows that their criticisms are emotional or reactive rather than rational. If a metaphysical system is to be criticized, this criticism must have the same depth and integrity. Otherwise, what emerges is merely a rejection that is closed to understanding the current model.

#### **4. Coherent Criticism and Erroneous Conclusions**

The most common mistake encountered when criticizing metaphysical models is to generalize by considering only one part of the model. However, a metaphysical structure becomes meaningful with its basic principles, concepts and arguments. The metaphysical structure in Islamic thought is a good example of this: The conception of God, free will, test, justice and belief in the hereafter constitute a whole as inseparable elements. Criticism that excludes any part of this structure inevitably leads to incomplete, superficial and erroneous conclusions.

Just as multiple theories can be developed on the same subject in science, metaphysical issues are not limited to a single model. In fact, most scientific theories contain metaphysical modeling in themselves, because they provide explanations for phenomena that cannot yet be directly experienced. In the case of Islam, multiple metaphysical models can be developed based on the sacred text. The different God-human-universe relations put forward by sects and schools of thought throughout history are a clear example of this. Therefore, each of these models should be evaluated within the framework of its own internal integrity and coherence. Otherwise, criticisms would lose their context and become meaningless.

However, especially in atheist and agnostic circles, instead of a rational criticism of metaphysical models, an attitude based on emotional discontent is often observed. This attitude appears as a way of expressing their existential discontent rather than an intellectual questioning. What is even more interesting is that while criticizing the universal order created by God, these individuals try to construct alternative models with the data they receive from the universe created by God and the reason given by God. In other words, they are in an ironic endeavor of trying to produce a system against God from within the system established by God.

One of the examples of this ironic effort is their approach to the problem of evil. Statements like *“Wouldn't it be better if God didn't create evil?”* or *“Wouldn't it be better if there was only goodness on earth?”*, while they may seem logical on the surface, are actually based on a very fundamental conceptual error. They overlook the fact that good and evil are not ontological absolutes, but relative moral value judgments made by human beings. Calling events and beings *“good”* or *“bad”* is our subjective valuation. In other words, these people are confident (!) enough to believe that they can both experience God's system and reorganize it with their own narrow rational judgments.

As if that were not enough, these criticisms sometimes reach the level of giving God advice. Questions such as *“Why is God testing us?”*, *“Couldn't God have created differently?”*, *“Couldn't God have set up a different system?”* not only generate alternative thoughts, but also have the audacity to speculate on God's will, wisdom and absolute power. This attitude is an expression of hysterical discontent rather than a rational questioning. This is because philosophical stance requires evaluation based on the reality and existential constants at hand; one cannot philosophize with emotions, wishes or discontent.

Therefore, criticizing the parts of God's system based solely on feelings, and disliking God's dispositions by asking *“why this and not that?”* is a clear violation of both epistemological boundaries and philosophical method. These approaches are nothing but an attempt to read God's intentions. However, the only thing humans can do is to think, observe and draw conclusions from what is. Writing alternative scenarios for existence itself that cannot possibly come true would not be rationality, but only hysterics.

The metaphysical model put forward by Islam has a rational structure with its internal integrity and the existential questions it answers, even though it is faith as a whole. Criticisms of this model must be equally holistic, rational and consistent. Otherwise, these criticisms can only be manifestations of discontent.

## **Conclusion**

Metaphysical systems of thought are holistic structures with their own internal logic, functioning and value system, not merely the sum of individual arguments. For this reason, especially in Islamic thought, fundamental concepts such as God, free will, the hereafter, destiny and trials need to be evaluated together in contextual integrity. These structures, like a machine, can only maintain the functionality of their parts within the integrity of the system. Each metaphysical concept gains meaning through its relationship with other concepts.

Free will is at the center of Islam's understanding of test. This will is necessary for human beings to be tested and held responsible for the choices they make. God's absolute non-

interventionism is directly linked to the system's principles of justice and responsibility. Non-intervention makes it possible for human beings to choose a good or bad action by their own choice, and this constitutes the meaning of the test.

Approaches that evaluate or criticize metaphysical systems should be made by considering the holistic structure that these parts constitute, not only on the basis of certain parts. Evaluations made by detaching the parts from their context both misrepresent the system itself and are philosophically incoherent. This is especially evident in theological models, with the shifts in meaning that can arise when the understanding of God is considered independently of elements such as justice, free will, and the afterlife.

As a result, holistic reading and contextual coherence are imperative when approaching metaphysical models, whether in defense or criticism. This approach is a universal method valid not only for Islamic thought but for all metaphysical and theological structures. Evaluating the parts in their proper place and within the system ensures that philosophical discussions are conducted in a healthy, in-depth and fair manner.