CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought

Theoretical compromises in the works of Avicenna, al-Ghāzālī and Ibn ʻArabī

Maria De Cillis

ROUTLEDGE

Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought

The subject of ‘human free will’ versus ‘divine predestination’ is one of the most contentious topics in classical Islamic thought. By focusing on a theme of central importance to any philosophy of religion, and to Islam in particular, this book offers a critical study of the intellectual contributions offered to this discourse by three key medieval Islamic thinkers: Avicenna, al-Ghāzālī and Ibn ʿArabī.

Through investigation of primary sources, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought* establishes the historical, political and intellectual circumstances which prompted Avicenna, al-Ghāzālī and Ibn ʿArabī’s attempts at harmonization. By analysing the theoretical and linguistic ‘techniques’ which were employed to convey these endeavours, this book demonstrates that the three individuals were committed to compromise between philosophical, theological and mystical outlooks.

Arguing that the three scholars’ treatments of the so-called *qaḍā’ wa’l-qadar* (decree and destiny) and *ikhtiyār* (free will) issues were innovative, influential and fundamentally more complex than hitherto recognized, this book contributes to a fuller understanding of Islamic intellectual history and culture and will be useful to researchers interested in Islamic Studies, Religion and Islamic Mysticism.

Maria De Cillis is a Research Associate and the Shiʿi Studies Co-ordinator at the Institute of Ismaili Studies, Department of Academic Research and Publications, London. Her research interests focus on the Islamic tradition in the formative period, including Islamic theology, the study of the Qur’an, Islamic philosophy, Islamic spirituality and mysticism.

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Introduction

The subject of 'divine predestination' (*qaḍā' wa'l-qadar*) *versus* 'human free will' (*ikhtiyār*) is one of the most contentious topics in classical Islamic thought. By focusing on a theme of central importance to any philosophy of religion in general, and to Islam in particular, this book offers a critical study of the contributions given to this discourse by three key medieval Islamic scholars: Ibn Sīnā, known in the Western world as Avicenna (d. 428/1037), al-Ghāzālī (d. 505/1111) and Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240). This volume aims to attain a proper understanding of Islamic intellectual history and culture by arguing that these three scholars' treatments of the issues of *qaḍā' wa'l-qadar* and *ikhtiyār* were innovative, influential and fundamentally more complex than hitherto recognized. This work shows that Avicenna, al-Ghāzālī and Ibn ʿArabī were making compromises between philosophical, theological (*kalāmic*) and mystical (*ṣūfī*) outlooks on the subject of free will vs predestination. Their compromising stances are clearly remarkable when it is considered that the subject matters and the methodologies of *kalām*, *falsāfa* and *taṣawwūf* have often been perceived as starkly distinct or even mutually incompatible. This work investigates the historical, political and intellectual causes which spurred these scholars' attempts to harmonization, and focuses on the nature of their speculations and the techniques which they employed to convey them.

Objectives and methodology of this volume

The intellectual dynamism which the issue of divine *qaḍā' wa'l-qadar* vs *ikhtiyār* had triggered, since its origins, amongst endless numbers of intellectuals, together with the social, cultural and political implications embedded in what was only initially a theological question, are all well reflected in the works of Avicenna, al-Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī. Their attempts to ingeniously engage and reconcile the numerous forms of knowledge available to them are captured in this book which provides a critical reading of subject matters such as creation, emanation, causality, the nature of divine knowledge and divine will, and shows how these, strictly intertwined with the core topics of free will and predestination, were employed by these three scholars in their relentless attempts to bring their theoretical systems closer to the position of Ashʿarite 'orthodoxy', without renouncing, consciously or unconsciously, the Aristotelian, Neoplatonic and Sufi teachings.

In order to explain why the three scholars' tactics of harmonization or 'compromise' were so different and yet necessary, the present work takes into account the historical, social and political circumstances in which Avicenna, al-Ghāzālī and Ibn ʿArabī lived and worked. It is shown that Avicenna's and al-Ghazālī's endeavour to reconcile the Ashʿarite view of God with Neoplatonic emanationism was not done simply because they probably were convinced of the validity of such reconciliation, but also because they needed their speculative systems to be accepted by the teachings of mainstream Islam of the time. In contrast, it is demonstrated that Ibn ʿArabī adopts the philosophers' and the theologians' theoretical findings, yet supersedes them with the intent to better communicate to his readership the nature of the mystical events.

This book sets out to discuss the topic of *qaḍā'* and *qadar* using the notions of divine predestination and determinism in different ways. More specifically, it distinguishes between a 'predestinarian view' and a 'deterministic perspective'. The former refers to instances in which the discourse emphasizes God's direct intervention in the creation of existents, particularly in conjunction with the topics of creation *ex nihilo* and perpetual divine creation. The latter is used with reference to cases which stress the Aristotelian idea that destiny (*qadar*) and the determination of all existents are basically due to their inherent natures rather than being dependent on the occasionalistic inference of the deity.[1] In line with this reasoning, this will explain both why it is more suitable to speak of determinism for Avicenna and predestination for al-Ghazālī, whilst also discussing the reasons which led Ibn ʿArabī's construct to acknowledge both precepts.

Besides providing a critical assessment of secondary sources and studies on the topic of ethics and theodicy strictly linked with the topic of free will and predestination, this study offers a perusal of primary sources in order to explore the varieties and nuances in the thought of these three major thinkers. The analysis of primary sources does not follow a strictly chronological order: this together with the choice of introducing significant extracts from major primary literatures – followed by comments and critical observations – are intended to better convey each scholar's overall position and to draw attention to the exact points where the intellectuals' approaches intersect and where differences, affinities and correspondences may be identified.

With regards to Avicenna, this volume examines his Persian work, the *Dānish nāma-i ʿalā'ī* (*The Book of Knowledge*), and his Arabic literary production, considering the *Kitāb al-Shifā'* (*The Book of the Healing*), the *Kitāb al-Najāt* (*The Book of Salvation*), the *Kitāb al-Hidāya* (*The Book of Guidance*) the *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya fī'l-maʿād* (*The Epistle of the Afterlife*), the *Risālat al-Qaḍā'* (*The Epistle of the Qaḍā'*) and the *Risālat al-Qadar* (*The Epistle of the Qadar*). Moreover, the investigation makes use of Avicennian works regarded to be 'mystical' in their contents and style such as the *Risālat fī'l-ʿishq* (*The Epistle of Love*), *Ḥayy b. Yaqẓān* and the *Risālat al-Ṭayr* (*The Epistle of the Birds*).[2] The first Ghazālīan works to be investigated are the ones more openly declared to be influenced by Sufi connotations such as the disputed *Mishkāt al-anwār* (*The Niche of Lights*), the *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* (*The Revival of the Religious Sciences*) and the *Maqṣad*

al-asnā fī sharḥ maʿānī asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā (*The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*). The priority given to these works is based on the premise that it is mainly through mysticism that it is possible to recognize similarities between Avicenna, Ibn ʿArabī and al-Ghazālī, with Sufism becoming for al-Ghazālī the meeting point which conveys both clear philosophical tenets and rigid Ashʿarite dogmas. Works such as *al-Iqtiṣād fīʾl-iʿtiqād* (*The Just Mean in Belief*) and the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*The Inchoerence of the Philosophers*) are also studied. Even if labelled as mainly *kalāmic* compositions, this study shows that even these works have never been entirely immune from philosophical 'aggressions'. The extensive compass of Ibn ʿArabī's literary works imposes a selective approach.[3] Renowned works such as the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* (*The Bezels of Wisdom*) and, above all, the *Shaykh al-akbar*'s magnum opus the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya* (*The Meccan Openings*) are examined.

This book is divided in six chapters. The first chapter, which is dedicated to Avicenna, marks a departure from the traditional approach on the subject of *qaḍāʾ waʾl-qadar*, to explain why Avicenna speaks of natural determinism rather than divine predestination, through an analysis of the concept of relative necessity (*wujūb biʾ l-ghayr*). It shows the extent to which Avicenna absorbs and expounds Platonic, Neoplatonic, Aristotelian, Muʿtazilite and Ashʿarite teachings. It analyses the tactics employed by the philosopher to develop an original perspective on *qaḍāʾ waʾl-qadar* which harmonizes deterministic and 'libertarian' aspects. It is argued that these facets are particularly evident when Avicenna reconciles the notion of *ibdāʿ* (origination) with the concept of *fayḍ* (emanation) by way of referring to God as a Necessary Existent which – as stated by the Peripatetic philosophers – does not have a real intentional nature and yet is a subject of power – as stressed by *kalām* theology. First the investigation focuses on the notion of prime matter: as one of the four Aristotelian causes, prime matter is portrayed as entailing the concept of freedom in relation to its role in determining the existence of the substantial compound. Particularly, the discussion on matter investigates both Alfred Ivry's opinion, for which matter can be held responsible for the determination of events, and the contrasting view of Catarina Belo, who insists on the priority of form over matter. In order to examine matter's influence on the topic of determinism, this volume also analyses arguments such as the difference between possibility and potentiality, passive and active receptivity, and specifically, the issue of privation. The second half of this chapter surveys Avicenna's view of matter and evil: Aristotelian, Plotinian and *Kalāmic* elements are merged as matter is described, not merely as a recipient, but as the Aristotelian 'substance',[4] which is responsible for changes and whose final existence – as the Ashʿarites argue – depends on God. This chapter also explores how Avicenna employs Qurʾānic hermeneutics in order to show that his positions on matter and evil are rooted in the Qurʾān. Avicenna demonstrates that questions mainly influenced by Aristotelian and Neoplatonic thought such as the notion of *ʿiṣyān al-mādda* (the disobedience of matter) and the ontological nature of evil are clearly 'Islamic' concepts to be found in the source of Islamic revelation.

Avicenna's system is often accused of undermining God's omnipotence by arguing that God knows particulars only in a universal way; so the second chapter

expounds the role of matter explored in the first chapter and employs it to address Avicenna's intention to link God's knowledge of universals with his idea of divine determinism by stressing how both notions are influenced by the potentiality of matter. More particularly, the second chapter explores how Avicenna's speculations replace the Ashʿarite with the view of God who, having a limited knowledge of particulars, does not exercise a 'direct' control over material compounds. Resembling the Muʿtazilite view for which God, through delegation (*tawfīḍ*), invests created beings with the capacity to perform acts, Avicenna perceives God as able to 'entrust' matter with an efficient causality which shapes the destinies of future existents. This chapter also analyses Avicenna's unconventional stance on the Qur'ānic notions of rewards and punishments and demonstrates that he 'naturalizes' these concepts in order to solve the problem of theodicy. The concept of human free will, previously examined in philosophical and theological terms, is explored also from a mystical perspective by analysing freedom in association with the rational faculty and the human innate desire to strive towards perfection. The realms of divine and human responsibility in acting are investigated, first in terms of love, and second in accordance to the dictates of an esoteric type of mystical philosophy which makes a wide use of angelology. This is done with the intent to show how Neoplatonic and Aristotelian stances on free will and determinism can be associated with Sufi perspectives. The first part of the third chapter places al-Ghazālī in his intellectual contexts and argues that, particularly in the *Mishkāt al-anwār*, the scholar is able to reconcile the theory of emanation with that of creation in a way which differed from Avicenna's view. Al-Ghazālī reads the emanative arrangement primarily in gnoseological terms, thus challenging the idea that emanation is utterly incompatible with the 'orthodox' doctrine for which God is the Creator, as argued by his Ashʿarite peers. This chapter also shows that in al-Ghazālī's masterpiece, the *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn*, his view on free will and predestination is shaped in a rather convoluted way. Ashʿarite theological issues like the concepts of God as the only Creator, the pervasive character of the divine will, the nature of the divine justice and the concern about the theodicy are progressively 'coloured' by philosophical and mystical resolutions. This, it is argued, is the result of a series of 'immersions' within the different intellectual systems al-Ghazālī came into contact with. After analysing al-Ghazālī's new reading of the Ashʿarite theory of acquisition (*kasb*) – which on the surface is substantially Ashʿarite but which betrays more metaphysical trends – this chapter explores the concept of the human being as a 'compelled chooser' stressing that, despite strong Ashʿarite underpinnings, al-Ghazālī's discourse remains within a philosophical framework, particularly with regard to the role played by human nature. The fourth chapter is directed to the study of the *Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ maʿānī asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā*, *al-Iqtiṣād fī'l-iʿtiqād* and the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. Even in works where the Ashʿarite view of divine predestination prevails, the use of Aristotelian logic – intended to rebuff philosophical inconsistencies – has led al-Ghazālī to absorb some philosophical constructs. Chapters Five and Six are dedicated to Ibn ʿArabī. They open with a discussion of the intellectual *milieu* within which Ibn ʿArabī operated. The exploration of this theoretical context which assesses,

amongst other things, the status of Sufism in the twelfth century, makes it possible to explain why Ibn ʿArabī's strategy of compromise is less radical if compared to that of Avicenna and al-Ghazālī. The complexity of his speculations requires a theoretical excursus through the key topics of his thought based on the theory of the 'unicity of existence' (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). This study explores the Akbarian approach to issues like the divine names, attributes and knowledge, also dwelling on the concept of the immutable entities (*aʿyān thābita*). The latter, expressions of eternal divine predispositions, are revealed to be the element most closely linked with the topic of predestination in Ibn ʿArabī's system. The analysis also focuses on defining the essential nature of man as a servant of God in order to address the concept of freedom through the mystical understanding of 'servitude'. Ultimately, this volume shows that the Akbarian system, with its alleged theosophical and monistic underpinnings, entails means and pathways to absolute freedom as individuals strive to draw near the divinity. By surveying the notion of 'the Perfect Man' created in the image of God, the discussions attempt to exemplify this supposition.

Historical and cultural context: The status of *Kalām, Falsafa* and *Taṣawwūf*

From a very early stage Islamic thought was perceived to be characterized by cultural divides inclined to trap the contributions of luminaries within specific investigative niches. This has often led to a false perception of the Islamic faith as being incapable of an effective development. For instance, *kalām* or speculative theology, emerging around the second/eighth century, faced opposition since its very beginnings. Theoretical conflicts were probably triggered by the inherent nature of the *kalāmic* discourse.[5] The latter, as Oliver Leaman has observed, is per se dialectical and hence 'open to be directed against some other position';[6] and it was born to address early debates about anthropomorphism, the divine attributes, atomism, the nature of reality, etc. amongst the Muʿtazilite, Ashʿarite and Maturidite protagonists.

The exponents of *kalām* have often been branded as 'Rationalists' paired in opposition with the traditionists or *muḥaddithūn*.[7] Customarily, the views of *mutakallimūn* and *muḥaddithūn* have been polarized because scholars tended to believe that, in matters of theology, the former privileged reason, whilst the latter condemned it. In truth, both used rational approaches, divided solely by their application of rational questions, which reveals the sterility of intellectual 'labelling' activities.[8]

Tendencies towards categorization have also led scholarship towards a too radical distinction between *kalām* and *falsafa*.[9] *Kalām*'s dependency on rational arguments, which were employed to structure and support its theoretical points, was surely shared by the philosophers and yet there has been a general tendency to overemphasize the fact that theologians were fiercely critical of Islamic philosophers because of the fact that the latter's concerns and methodologies were detached from purely theological issues. Significantly, at the dawn of *kalām* –

considered by Richard M. Frank a philosophical science rather than a theological one – Islamic theologians did not seem to be particularly keen on separating their 'theological' activities from other disciplines such as grammar, logic, jurisprudence or even philosophy and Sufism.[10] Even more interestingly, in the first/seventh and the second/eighth century, theologians developed a new multifaceted investigative quest often invoking philosophical arguments in order to hone their ideas and methodologies.[11]

Occasionally, theological debates were employed to deal with political issues: a clear example for this is provided by the discussion questioning the legitimacy of the Umayyad rule established by Muʿāwiya in 41/661 following the events of the civil battle of Ṣiffīn (35/675). The official view of the Umayyad caliphs argued that all actions, including wrongdoings, were all determined by God's will. This belief was held because it allowed the caliphs' corrupted behaviour to be left unpunished, evil actions becoming justified because they were believed to have been established by the divine decree. Condemning the Umayyads' position, the Qadarites of Damascus and Baṣra – amongst them Maʿbad al-Juhanī (d. 83/703) and Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (d. 105/723) – questioned whether a new perspective could be adopted with regards to the question of divine predestination. They supported the theory that humans act according to free will, a feature which was to become the hallmark of the Muʿtazilites' creed. The Qadarite view was condemned by the Jabarites who, led by Jahm ibn Ṣafwān (d. 128/746), became proponents of strict predestination, followed by the traditionalists and the Ashʿarites.[12] Similarly, the issue of the createdness of the Qurʾān, linked to the rivalry between the caliphate and the religious scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) about the exercise of religious authority in Islam, forced the majority of *kalām* theologians (with the exception of a few cases like that of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal),[13] to adopt conciliatory positions in order to harmonize fundamental religious concerns within political interests.[14] It is evident that all these groups were combining highly theological issues (such as predestination) with philosophical questions (such as the temporality of the divine speech or the eternality of the divine will), and that all used these arguments to face political controversies.

It is with the advent of the fourth/tenth century that *kalām* theologians commenced showing some kind of preoccupation with the more explicit Aristotelian aspect of metaphysics intended as the science of ultimate realities, or being-*qua*-being. By the end of the fifth/eleventh century Sunni Islam had found its stability and defined its 'orthodoxy', structuring itself around established schools of law (*madhāhib*) and the three main 'schools' of theology (represented by Ashʿarites, Maturidites and Traditionists with the Muʿtazilites' influence being partially shunned). Once the make-up of Sunni Islamic faith had been shaped, the Aristotelian worldview rooted as it was in causality, that is the belief in the efficacy of secondary causes other than God, and the uniformity of nature, that is the concept that in nature 'nothing occurs in vain', since nature operates in accordance with fixed and invariable laws, began to be at odds with the Islamic perception of God as the only Agent free to choose, whose creation of the world is a favour not necessitated by His nature. The Islamic God was considered a Being

endowed with unlimited power and capable of acting miraculously, freely intervening at each moment in time, shaping the destiny of any existent thing, a view which culminated in the fourth/tenth century Ashʿarite occasionalism. *Kalām*'s preoccupation with Aristotelian metaphysics started to rise when Islamic philosophers (*falāsifa*) began to focus on the possibility to prove the validity of the philosophical science independently from the Islamic paradigm. It is well known that Avicenna (d. 428/1037) was determined to distinguish between the subject-matter of theology (God) and that of metaphysics (being-*qua*-being), and that Ibn Rushd (Averroës) (d. 595/1198) was preoccupied in cleansing the philosophical corpus by way of distinguishing philosophy from more explicit theological components, thereby restoring a purely Aristotelian philosophical system.[15]

It is as a reaction against these circumstances that, by the middle of the fourth/tenth century, the religious establishment mainly represented by members of the *ahl al-sunna wa'l-jamāʿa*, supported by the political institutions and their traditionalist legal representatives, engaged in violent disputes against philosophical rationalism, particularly its legitimization of the universal and encompassing validity of reason. Theologians also raged against the authority of the philosophers in the attempt to defend the supremacy and true authority of the Islamic Revelation over reason.[16] In these conditions, Islamic philosophy inevitably started to be affected by the dialectical quality which had initially characterized the speculative theological discourse: the necessity to compromise between philosophy and theology began to permeate the thoughts of the *falāsifa* who, confident of the validity of some 'foreign' philosophical argumentations, found themselves compelled to reconcile apparent inconsistencies between topics derived from the Greek thought and apply these to Islamic religious subject matters. Although, as Ian Netton observes, the possibility to include amongst the preoccupations of metaphysics 'the knowledge of the first of things' (i.e. the knowledge of the principle common to all beings) would not have meant to turn metaphysics into pure theology,[17] it is undeniable that Muslim philosophers like Avicenna were deeply concerned with the necessity to make their *falsafa* acceptable to the Islamic religious and political authorities. This status of affairs explains al-Kindī's (d. 259/873) attempt to legitimize philosophy as being expressive of a universal *ḥikma* (wisdom), capable of a harmonious reconciliation between the teaching of the ancient philosophers and Arabic-Islamic wisdom. This also justifies al-Fārābī's (d. 339/950) defence of the 'particular science' of theology which was considered to participate in the 'universal' science of the First philosophy (metaphysics) – the subject-matter of theology falling under the principle of Absolute Being.[18]

The philosophers sensed that the reconciliation between their *falsafa* and theology was by no means an impossible task; after all, the universal character of Peripatetic metaphysics was meant to deal with all that beings have in common merely by virtue of their reality. This meant that the science of metaphysics implicitly contemplated theological issues like existence and unity.[19] Without doubt then, the intellectual cultures of the *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa* were bound to intersect with metaphysics becoming classifiable as a divine science.[20] If it is undeniable that many theological debates were highly philosophical in nature, it is also true

that philosophy emerged out of what were originally theological disputes. By the first/seventh century the Arabs had conquered Egypt, Syria, Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Persia (Iran), coming into contact with substantially developed cultures, traditions and beliefs. Alexandria, captured in 20/641, had become a cultural melting-pot for Greek speculative thought, Christian and Jewish religious traditions.[21] It is here that Neoplatonic ideas were first devised and developped: given definite form by Plotinus (d. 270) and his disciple Porphyry of Tyre (d. 303), Neoplatonism emerged as an attempt to gather currents of thought such as Platonism, Aristotelianism, Pythagoreanism and Stoicism.[22] Neoplatonism became alluring for different classes of intellectuals: theologians were initially enticed by Neoplatonism's focus on the unity and transcendence of God and its pointing towards a supreme Principle capable of originating the descending order of all beings. Although the *mutakallimūn* condemned the concept of Neoplatonic emanation (*fayḍ*) because it clashed with the Islamic notion of creation, they were certainly aware of some advantages inherent in it. Ultimately, this was a principle which allowed tracing the production and reproduction of everything back to the One Being.[23] Neoplatonic emanation, in turn, appealed particularly to the philosophers because it allowed them to depict a world where the reconciliation between immaterial essences, in their descending from the One through a series of intellects, implicitly admitted a reconciliation between the Islamic notion of God as the Creator and the principle, derived from Greek metaphysics, that '*ex uno non fit nisi unum*' (from the One only the one can come/ *lā yaṣdur ʿan al-wāḥid illā wāḥid*). In addition, the Neoplatonic agenda which speaks of the soul destined to return to its original celestial abode after having been cleansed from the impurity of earthly desire (partially adapting the Platonic theory of recollection – *anamnesis*)[24] was very alluring for the Islamic mystics and their quest for spiritual pathos.[25]

In the course of its history, Sufism too can be said to have appealed to an intrinsic openness and a 'willingness to compromise' that has made it reconcilable with philosophical tenets and 'mainstream' Islamic theological stances.[26] In its formative period, *taṣawwūf* was mainly regarded as a means to obtain a personal experience of *tawḥīd* – the central mystery of Islam – with Sufi followers being free to pursue their gnoseological quests independently from any theological school. The initial liberty enjoyed by the mystics of Islam, however, was soon to be threatened by polemics arising within the Sufi circles. Tensions began to develop, for instance, on the interpretation of the concept of *ʿishq*, the intense reciprocal love between God and the mystic. Such a notion, different from the more moderate concept of *maḥabba/ḥubb*, indicated that some individuals are loved by God without reason or cause and this implied that those Sufis blessed by *ʿishq* were divinely chosen people. The Ḥanbalite jurist Ghūlam Khalīl (d. 275/289), himself a follower of mysticism, condemned the mystics' use of this notion particularly for the unacceptable amorous and intimate way to talk about God it entailed.[27]

The elitism implied in the concept of *ʿishq* was to be found also in the idea of *tawba* (repentance). Interpreted as the moment of radical re-orientation to God and the beginning of a direct access to Him, *tawba* nourished the Sufis' idea that their spirituality was superior to that of the ordinary believers and that it equalled the

spirituality of the prophets. The thought that God communicates with the mystics directly, by means of insights on the true meaning of the Qur'ān, led to quarrels between the Sufis and the rest of the Muslim community.[28] Moreover, different interpretations of asceticism brought about dissension at the suggestions certain mystics made about the impossibility of circumscribing the plenitude of the mystical experience within the confines of exoteric norms. Among the representatives of what can be called a spirituality of antinomianism there were Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 261/874 or 264/877–8) and Ḥamdūn al-Qaṣṣār (d. 271/884). These Sufis condemned any form of spiritual ostentation (*riyā'*) and saw their emphasis on spiritual 'introversion' being developed in the creeds of the *Malāmatiyya* of Nīshāpūr.[29] Conversely, ostentatious asceticism led to the proliferation of the religious institution of the *khānqāh* (convent) promoted by mystics such as Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn Karrām (d. 256/870), whose theological teachings were rejected by the authorities because they were thought to be informed by corporealist underpinnings. In the third/ninth century religious scholars and reformers began to react against these forms of excessive asceticism, attacking those aspects of mysticism influenced by Plotinian emanative stances suggestive of pantheistic and monistic principles as evident in the speculations of Sufis such as Ibn Mansūr al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922).[30]

Even if the hostility between the mystics, theologians and jurists has never been characterized by a unique pattern, Sufis felt bound to defend their practices and doctrines especially when their teachings began to be proclaimed in public.[31] Basically, they felt compelled to justify their provocative claims to be an elite and to prove the 'Islamicity' of their most daring positions. To this end, between the fourth/tenth and the fifth/eleventh century, the compilation of Sufi manuals (containing creeds –*ʿaqīda*) started to emerge, seeking to show that Sufism was rooted in the Qur'ān and Traditions and that it was therefore in conformity with the newly shaped 'orthodoxy'.[32] *Taṣawwūf*'s survival became dependent on its capacity to show that the Sufi message was anchored within the Qur'ānic revelation and its prescriptions, and that Sufism was an essential element of Islam necessary to establish the vitality of religion. This attitude found voice in thinkers such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996) and Abū'l-Qāsim ibn Muḥammad al-Junayd (d. 298/911). The latter in particular, attempted to liberate Sufism from accusations of incarnationism and monism and insisted on the subjectivity of the mystical experience of *fanā'* (dissolution or cessation of being) and the necessity to supersede it returning to a sober (*saḥwī*) creator–creature distinction (through *baqā'*– subsistence in essence).[33] A century or so later, Abū'l-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1074) characterized his 'apologetic agenda', as Alexander Knysh elucidates, with the necessity to defend the teachings and practises of Sufism by demonstrating its full conformity with the main principles of the then triumphant Ashʿarite theology.[34]

The trend of acknowledging Sufism as an integral part of Islam was to be perpetuated by Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and confirmed by Muḥyi'l-dīn Ibn ʿArabī. The former achieved this goal by becoming the full confirmation of mysticism's centrality to Islam as a living theocratic civilization.[35] The latter harmonized the ascetic way of the Sufis with a life of strict adherence to religious dictates and

legal obligations obtained by objectifying the esoteric experience through exoteric practices.

By the fifth/eleventh century, Sufism had become a movement with distinctive features and trends, characterized by a transformative edge directed to show mankind new pathways to attain knowledge of God (*maʿrifa Allāh*) through means different from the theological dialectics of *kalām* or the universal orientation of metaphysics. As Ayman Shihadeh explains, in Sufism the emphasis was placed on the individual experience to achieve gnosis even when the mystical experience was concerned with questions of theology such as *tawḥīd*. Journeying on the mystical path meant that any 'individual' experience of the divinity was to be reached by way of personal ethico-spiritual effort and discipline in the attempt to shatter any form of ego-consciousness.[36] Despite the 'disciplinary compartmentalization in Islamic religio-intellectual culture'[37] Sufism and theology saw their issues often overlapping with many theologians being simultaneously mystics.

A brief sketch of the free will and predestination issue: The Muʿtazilites

The question of free will and predestination has captured the attention and imagination of endless thinkers and still remains a sort of perennial issue whose definitive solution is improbable. Avicenna's, al-Ghazālī's and Ibn ʿArabī 's views on these topics have certainly been informed by the Islamic tradition based on Qur'ānic passages supporting both ideas of God's predestination and of humans' responsibility for their action, the latter being the corollary to human free will.[38] Great influence in the discussion of the topic has been played by the *ḥadīth* literature mainly orientated towards a predestinarian view which denies man's control over his actions whilst addressing God in terms of absolute omnipotence.[39]

Generally, in the Qur'ān the term *qaḍā'* is used to indicate a measure, a judgement and a decision. Its verbal form, *qaḍā'*, is usually employed to signify 'to decree', 'to judge', 'to accomplish'. *Kalām*, in particular, embeds this term with a sense of predetermination referring to it as a divine 'universal' decree. *Qaḍā'* is conceived as a perfect and precise divine plan, projected by God *in aeternitate*, determining all things and occurrences.[40] Q *adar* generally refers to the divine decree operating in time and as being determined or fixed. In the Qur'ān it appears in the second verbal form, *qaddara*, meaning to determine (something) ineluctably or according to a specific measure.[41] Many theologians have debated the argument starting, as previously mentioned, with the Qadarites and Jabarites but within *kalām* the issue has been mainly tackled by the Muʿtazilites and the Ashʿarites. Thinkers of both theological 'schools' have been particularly preoccupied with the daunting task of reconciling the idea of an omnipotent God who creates everything, including human acts, with that of a righteous God who cannot make humans culpable for deeds never chosen, rewarding or punishing them in relation to necessary actions. The question is resolved by the Muʿtazilites in an unprecedented manner: first, they understood that divine justice meant that God can only do what is salutary (*aṣlaḥ*) to man and that, second, God can only command what is good or com-

mendable (*maʿruf*), prohibiting what is reprehensible (*munkar*). In addition, they believed that God cannot be held responsible for evil acts which are necessarily carried out by humans.[42] Implicit in this was the idea that humans act freely and are accountable for punishment or reward in the hereafter according to their deeds. The question of man's freedom was considered by the Muʿtazilites as a postulate of the moral sense which refuses the ascription to God of evil actions as well as injustice; this view – which stresses the impossibility of crediting men with the responsibility of necessary acts – was aimed in reality at safeguarding the ethical nature of God.

From the third/ninth century, the problem of human freedom came to be discussed in terms of 'power of origination' (or capacity-to-act – *istiṭāʿa*), and the issue of human freedom started focusing on whether or not a man had the power to originate his acts. The Muʿtazilites concentrated their attention on the notion of *qudra*, or power of efficient causality, and began to regard the human being as a *fāʿil* (doer), an *ʿalim* (knower), a *qāṣid* (a being able to act consciously), and a *murīd* (a willing being). Accordingly, the human being began to be seen as a real agent, namely, as the Aristotelian efficient cause of the actual status of things.

Al-Jubbāʾī (d. 303/915–6) considered human causality to be a creative causality by which man is able to create (*khalq*) anew.[43] God was still regarded as the Creator of the potentiality of human causality, but He did not constitute, ontologically, the cause of man's act.[44] According to al-Jubbāʾī, the human capacity to put things into being made the human being a *muḥdith* (an innovator), a real agent and the inventor of the act (*munshīʾ*).[45] *Qudra* is regarded as an enabling power positioned between the two poles of the act (i.e. its realization and not-realization). Al-Jubbāʾī also believed that the human will is able to choose between the two poles of the act, this implying that the power to act is before the act itself.[46]

Abūʾl-Hudhayl (d. 226/840–1), head of the Muʿtazilite school of Baṣra, advanced a different understanding of the notion of power. The *istiṭāʿa*, in his view, referred to the power of the will rather than the physical power to realize the willed act and became synonymous with the potentiality of 'effecting a deliberately chosen end', when the condition of an unconstrained choice was present.[47] According to his theory of moments, the human being was said to act in the first moment (the moment of doing – *yafʿalu*), whilst the act was believed to occur in the second moment (the moment of the action done – *faʿala*).[48] Implicit in this position were the ideas that (a) power is classifiable as power merely before the act, (b) the will is necessary (*mūjiba*) and (c) the capacity, necessary before the act, is no longer necessary after the occurrence of the act.[49] For Abūʾl-Hudhayl, in the inward dominion of willing and choosing, any individual exercises a definite freedom of initiative to accomplish certain deeds in the outward sphere of nature by causing, through his will, the occurrence of these acts. It is worth noting that in this position, the core of the Aristotelian notion of causality – entailing the counter-intuitive idea that the cause needs its own effect – is tacitly presupposed. Aristotle (d. 322 bc) was not only the first to claim that effects depend upon causes but he was also the first to suggest that the notion of a reciprocal causality occurring between causes and effects was intended as a relation of mutual dependency between these two elements. In the

ninth book of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle discussed the theory of potentiality by distinguishing between the active power (*quwwa fāʿiliyya*) of the cause – such as the power which fire has in burning – and the passive power (*quwwa munfaʿila*) of the effect – such as the power occurring when a piece of cotton is burnt. Aristotle linked these concepts with his own understanding of the nature (*ṭabīʿa*) of things by saying that once the two elements come together, their potentialities – that are part of their natures – are necessarily actualized. By acknowledging the existence of active and passive powers in the nature of beings, Aristotle was implying that causal relations are necessary.[50] Significantly, Abū ʾl-Hudhayl's ideas allowed the Aristotelian concept of 'causal connection' to emerge as they identified the will as the cause and the act as the effect. Moreover, Abū ʾl-Hudhayl's theory seemed to infer that the human being was able to exercise his choice thanks to his freedom and his capacity to discern between right and evil actions, the notion of justice thought to be attainable independently from Revelation through man's own reasoning and intuition. Consequently, the agent (being both a powerful being – *qādir* and a knowing individual – *ʿālim*) represented a moral 'situation' accompanied by the corollary that no human action could actually escape a moral qualification.[51] Even if the *istiṭāʿa* were perceived as a permanent feature and as an 'enduring accident' in humans, the real possibility of realization of the act was given, for Abū ʾl-Hudhayl, only within the confines of a specific situation which could not be chosen.[52] The human possibility to transcend the actuality of things was, therefore, not a creative spontaneity but a restricted choice between two alternatives offered within a defined context.[53]

Muʿtazilite occasionalism

The Muʿtazilites theoretically substantiated their belief that human actions are not divinely predetermined. They achieved this result by resorting to the philosophical metaphysics of atoms and accidents generally designated as 'occasionalistic'. Based on the idea that everything in the world consists of atoms (*jawāhir*) and accidents (*aʿrāḍ*), the Muʿtazilites adapted the theory of atomism to their notion of human capacity to act freely by way of distinguishing between a primary and secondary causality that were not necessarily coincident in their spheres of action.[54]

Muʿtazilite occasionalism was certainly indebted to Aristotle's worldview for which the realm of generation and corruption resulted from the combinations of forms and matters. It identified form with a self-subsisting substance whilst regarding matter as a different kind of substance (specifically, a substrate in which changes occur). According to Aristotle, bodies (*ajsām*, sing. *jism*), resulting from the arrangement of matter and form, were made of atoms. For the Muʿtazilites too bodies consisted of atoms but, differently from Aristotle's view, they could not be divided. The majority of the Muʿtazilites focused their atomistic theory on the cardinal tenet that the *jawhar* was merely the bearer of accidents, incapable however, like the Aristotelian compounds, of autonomous subsistence.[55] They believed that, not simply the atoms, but also the accidents were in themselves devoid of power and needed to be combined to create bodies.

In spite of this view, the notion of accidents allowed the Muʿtazilites not to deny the efficiency of human causality altogether; by focusing on the duration of the accidents' transience, the Muʿtazilites de facto assigned a certain durability to the accidents. Abū ʾl-Hudhayl, for instance, credited to the category of perishable accidents those of will and motion, and to the category of durable accidents a number of others such as colour, life, knowledge etc. Muʿammar (d. 215/830), intending to relieve God from the responsibility of creating evil, argued that the existence of bodies (as aggregates of atoms) had to be ascribed to God, whereas the existence of accidents had to be credited to the 'actions' of the bodies themselves. In his opinion, God could not be said to cause the accidents, except indirectly, that is through the agency of the body which caused its own accidents naturally.[56]

It can be argued that the Muʿtazilites successfully managed to adapt their version of atomism to their theory for which the human being acts freely in this world. They regarded humans as being responsible for the generation of accidents which were believed to occur through the activity which humans exercised on all bodies created by God.[57] So, for the Muʿtazilites, a man could – through his power of autonomous action – create the accident of force which could then engender the motion of a stone which could, in turn, generate pain were it to strike someone.[58]

The notion of the power to act came generally to be understood by the Muʿtazilites as a distinct accident which made the owner of such a power a potential agent. This potentiality also implied that the subject of power had the possibility of becoming something different from what it was. Here the Muʿtazilites are clearly borrowing from the Aristotelian use of the term *qudra* designated as 'the potentiality to become other'. The Muʿtazilites clearly appealed to the Aristotelian theory of causation for which all things that exist have, by nature, within themselves a principle of motion and rest. Nature was identified with a principle and a cause of change in those things in which it inheres primarily.[59] Implicitly, the Muʿtazilites condemned the Ashʿarites' positions for which beings were not endowed with natural potentialities. The Ashʿarites, in fact, believed that material beings could hardly be said to contain within themselves any principle of becoming because all things were regarded as being no more than they were, i.e. complete and fulfilled at any moment of their existence.[60] They rejected the idea that existents were actually bestowed with a nature capable to influence their future developments, this believed to be limiting God's predestinarian creative activity.[61]

A brief sketch of the free will and predestination issue: The Ashʿarites

For the Ashʿarites in general, and al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/935) in particular, the whole issue of free will and predestination was encapsulated within the argument of God's omnipotence, namely, the notion that God is the Creator of both good and evil acts.[62] The Ashʿarites believed that what is created by God is without a reason (*sabab*) which makes it necessary and that God is not bound to any compulsion or any duty towards mankind: what He commanded was believed to be necessarily right, and what He condemned necessarily wrong.[63]

Despite their predestinarian views, the Ashʿarites found a way to confer some form of responsibility on humans by way of recognizing the existence of a power which enabled them to acquire (*iktisāb*) the action created for them by God. Generally speaking, the Ashʿarites distinguished between compulsory actions – such as trembling – and voluntary actions – such as eating – and believed that all human acts were the result of a created power.[64] Particularly, according to Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, God created a power in man (a generated power – *quwwa*/*qudra muḥdatha*) through (*bi*) which man was allowed to become the agent over or the 'proximate cause' of an act. Al-Ashʿarī conceived the *qudra* as 'a power of causation', namely, as the actual causative capacity over the act occurring with the occurrence of the act. More specifically, it was believed that the human act occurred by virtue of the human agent's power (*yaqiʿu bihā*),[65] and by virtue of what was defined as a concomitant act of the will.[66]

Richard Frank has questioned the above interpretation by pointing out that the verb 'to occur' (*waqaʿa, yaqiʿu*) is an equivocal expression. This seems to imply that, in truth, for al-Ashʿarī God did not cause the existence of the event through the human agent's power.[67] It is only because there is simultaneity between the individual instance of created power and a given event, Frank argues, that the human agent could be perceived as the performer of the act.[68] It is only simultaneous with the realization of the act that God created in the human agent such 'generated power of causality' which, as a temporarily created power, belonged to the *qādir* (man).[69] Consequently, the human being was seen as the *muktasib* of the act, i.e. the person who actually realizes the act by acquiring it (*kasb*) through a *qudra* which was created by God on behalf of man.[70] The *qudra*, created by God with the act and for the act, became for al-Ashʿarī the proof that the human being was the *qādir* exclusively by way of being the locus (*maḥall*) in which the divinely created power to act took place.[71] Even if the human being could be seen as the agent (*fāʿil*) and the cause of his action, God was still considered to be the creator of humans' causation. The reason for this was given by the fact that the human action was regarded as the causal effect of the created power to act, the latter, in turn, being the secondary cause which was used by the Creator to achieve its effects.[72] The human power had no effect on the coming to be (*ḥudūth*) of any act,[73] and its only effect was on the status of the act with regards to the human subject in which God created it.[74]

In the majority of cases, the way in which the Ashʿarites' interpreted the notion of *qaḍāʾ* and *qadar* originated from these speculations. In order to stress the sovereignty of the divine decree, *qaḍāʾ* came to be identified with the divine creation which included what is right and vain. *Qaḍāʾ* became, for the Ashʿarites, a pre-eternal divine decree encompassing the universality of existents endowed with God's judgement (*ḥukm*) able to guarantee their immutable status within the divine knowledge. *Qadar* was intended as the divine decree destined towards a specific act or thing, capable of ensuring for all beings a passage from the state of non-being to the state of being according to the actual will of the deity. Through *qadar*, God was able to characterize all creatures with their measures and limitations. *Qaḍāʾ*, instead, came to be linked with the divine pre-eternal will and was

classified as one amongst the attributes of existence (*ṣifāt al-dhat*) because coexisting with God. *Qadar*, on the other hand, was connected to a specific or temporal will of God (sometimes called God's wish – *irāda*) and, as one of the attributes of the act (*ṣifāt al-fiʿl*), was considered a contingent being.[75]

Ashʿarite occasionalism

In their intent to vindicate the absolute power of God and to ascribe to His direct intervention not only the coming into being of things but also their persistence in existence from one instant to another, the Ashʿarites formulated a new kind of atomistic occasionalism. Amongst the Ashʿarites, al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) offered a major contribution to the discussions of atoms and accidents. He inherited from al-Ashʿarī the classification of the atom as 'the part which does not admit divisions' (*al-juz' alladhī lā yatajazza'a*), and he divided accidents between primary and secondary. The former were characterized by modes of being (*akwān*) like motion and rest, composition and position – inseparable from the body, whilst the latter, including accidents such as taste, smell, length etc. were considered separable from the body. Al-Bāqillānī spoke of the atom as 'that which receives from each of the various classes of accidents a single accident',[76] and stated that the atom was 'characterized' by its own reality which, inhering in it, becomes the ontological basis for the existence of the same characteristic.[77]

According to the majority of the Ashʿarites, atoms gained their sensory 'attributes' only as substances, namely, only as atoms assembled in bodies.[78] By condemning the Aristotelian worldview dominated by causal processes unfolding mechanically and by rejecting the Aristotelian principle of the infinite divisibility of matter, the Ashʿarites found in the most characteristic feature of atoms – their perishable nature – a perfect tool to fulfil their intent to depict God as the ultimate Provider and Sustainer of existence.[79]

Following al-Ashʿarī's claim that 'everything in the world comes into existence through God's *fiat* . . . and ceases through His commanding it to cease',[80] the Ashʿarites believe accidents were, like atoms, perishable by nature and that they belonged to the class of the 'transient things' of this world referred to in the Qur'ān. The existence of bodies was made contingent upon the inherence in them of the accident of being (*kawn*), whilst their endurance was seen as depending on the accident of duration (*baqā'*), which, not being capable of duration per se, presupposed the existence of other accidents of duration ad infinitum.[81] Because of this infinite dependence, the durability of either bodies or accidents had to be referred to a different principle of durability beyond accidentality. The Ashʿarites identified this principle with God's own decree to preserve in being or destroy at His will the ultimate components of the world. Accordingly, both the atoms and the accidents – in which atoms were believed to inhere – depended for their duration on God's decree to repeat the process of their creation as long as He wished. Any possibility of a transitive action between two bodies was denied, whilst the changes inherent in the bodies were explained as the result of God's will ceasing to create the same accident in the same body.

The negation of any transitive action between bodies together with their own dependence on the absolute divine voluntarism implied the denial of any real efficacy habitually attributed to the natural laws. For the Ashʿarites, God was not constrained by the law of nature, but created the single phenomenon moment by moment, thus invalidating the common belief that effects necessarily depended on their direct causes. This perspective, which will be covered at great length in the discussion on al-Ghazālī, basically indicated that the predictability of the supposed cause-effect relationship, far from being necessary and rooted in the intrinsic nature of things, was dependent on God's custom – *ʿāda Allāh* or *Sunna Allāh*. This equalled to saying that God chooses to simply follow a habit by bringing causes and effects in this temporal order being nonetheless free and capable, at His will, of violating His custom.[82]

The problem of atoms, discussed in 'naturalistic' terms by Aristotle and reinterpreted by both the Muʿtazilites and the Ashʿarites, bears witness to the Islamic attempt at reconciling theology and philosophy in a very original way. The Muʿtazilites' championing of occasionalism showed their capacity to provide a philosophical substrate to their theology even when philosophical assumptions seemed to be not entirely 'compatible' with it. It is evident that the Ashʿarites' adhesion to atomism was a much easier option when the legacy between atomism and anti-causality (God ultimately being the only Real Cause) is considered.

Notes

1 Aristotle perceives nature as the principle which allows any being to be what it is. It is also the principle through which any being manifests a predisposition to realize the potentialities (*dynamis*) with which it has come to exist. See Aristotle, *Metaphysics, Books H and Z*, trans. D. Bostock, Clarendon Aristotle Series, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 19941050a 21ff.; idem, *De Anima*, 414a 16–7, cited in Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 135.

2 This book will argue against Dimitri Gutas' dismissal of any mystical dimension in Avicenna's system and his questioning the nature of the so-called Avicennian 'Oriental Philosophy'. This will be achieved by referring particularly to two of Gutas' articles: 'Intellect without Limit: The Absence of Mysticism in Avicenna', *Rencontres de Philosophie Médiévale Intellect et Imagination dans la Philosophie Médiévale*, Brepols: Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Philosophie Médiévale, 2006, pp. 351–72; and 'Avicenna's Eastern "Oriental" Philosophy; Nature, Contents, Transmission', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 10, 2000, pp. 159–80.

3 The standard biographical reference work by Osman Yahia, *Histoire et Classification de l'Œuvre d'Ibn ʿArabī*, Damascus: Institut Français de Damas, 1964, mentions 846 Akbarian works. On this argument see J.W. Morris, 'Ibn ʿArabi and His Interpreters I: Recent French translations', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106, 1986, p. 540.

4 Aristotle distinguishes four causes: (i) a formal cause, informing on what a thing is by virtue of its shape or form; (ii) a material cause, describing the material out of which something is composed; (iii) a final cause, as that purpose for the sake of which a thing exist or is done; and (iv) an efficient cause, suggesting that all sort of agents act as the sources of change, movement or rest. See Aristotle, *Physics*, 198a. 14–9; idem, *Analytica Posteriora*, 94a 20–3, Cf. Johannes Hubner, 'Ursache/Wirkung', in J. Ritter, K. Grunder and G. Gabriel (eds), *Historisches Worterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 11, Basle: Schwabe Verlag, 1971–2007, pp. 277–84.

5 On the rise and development of *kalām* see J. Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra*, 6 vols, Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1991–1995; idem, 'The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology' in G.E Grunebaum (ed.), *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture*, Giorgio Levi Della Vida Biennial Conference, University of California, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1970, pp. 21–50; idem, 'The Beginnings of Islamic Theology', *The Cultural Context of Medieval Learning, Proceedings of the First International Colloquium on Philosophy, Science, and Theology in the Middle Ages*, Dordrecht, Boston: Reidel, 1973, pp. 87–111; idem, 'Political Ideas in Early Islamic Religious Thought', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 28, 2001, pp. 151–64; M. Shah, 'Trajectories in the development of Islamic Theological Thought: The Synthesis of *Kalām*', *Religion Compass* 1, 2007, pp. 430–54; M. Cook, 'The Origins of *Kalām*', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and Africa Studies* 43, 1980, pp. 32–43; R.M. Frank, 'The Science of *Kalām*', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 2, 1992, pp. 7–37.

6 O. Leaman, 'The Developed *Kalām* Tradition (part I)', in T. Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 80.

7 Christopher Melchert does not accept the division between *mutakallimūn* and *muḥaddithūn* and distinguishes between the 'Traditionists' – identified with those who collected *ḥadīth* reports (*Muḥaddith*) – and the 'Traditionalists' or those who required a 'textual basis for all law and theology'. See C. Melchert, 'The Adversaries of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal', *Arabica* 44, 1997, p. 234 and p. 35 note. 4. The same distinction is stressed by George Makdisi in 'Ashʿarī and the Ashʿarites in Islamic Religious History I: The Ashʿarite movement and Muslim orthodoxy', *Studia Islamica* 17, 1962, p. 49.

8 On this topic see A. al-Shamsy, 'The Social Construction of Orthodoxy', in T. Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 105–7.

9 G. Endress, 'The Defense Of Reason: The Plea for Philosophy in the Religious Community', *Zeitschrift fuer Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften Majallat Taʿrīkh al-ʿUlūm al-ʿArabiyya wa'l-Islāmiyya* 6, 1990, pp. 1–49.

10 R.M. Frank argues that *ʿilm al-kalām* does not rest, as theology does, on presuppositions which are accepted as certain on the sole basis of belief but, by employing reasoning and logic, it claims itself to be a 'theoretical science which is fundamental, formal, conceptual, critical, and exclusively rational in its foundation and justified in its conclusions'. Moreover, in Frank's estimation, the *kalāmic* compendia on the *uṣūl al-dīn* treated themes essentially philosophical like the proof for the existence of the Creator, the attributes of the Creator, God's governance of the world together with the topics of decree and predestination (*qaḍā' wa'l-qadar*), prophecy and the next life. All these subject-matters, dealing with the issue of 'being' in general and with the 'necessary source of all beings' in particular, are eminently metaphysical. Their nature as metaphysical subject-matters, Frank claims, mainly depends on the Neoplatonic philosophers' belief for which metaphysics was truly a divine science (*ʿilm al-ilāhī*). See Frank, 'The Science of *Kalām*', pp. 14–6; D. Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, Leyden and New York: Brill, 1988, p. 359.

11 On this argument see F. Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 2009, p. 133; R. Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, London: Gerald Duckworth, 2003, p. 266.

12 For a general overview on these topics see H.Q. Murad, '*Jabr* and *Qadar* in Early Islam: A Reappraisal of Their Political and Religious Implications', Wael Hallaq and Donald Little (eds), *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams*, Leiden: Brill, 1991, pp. 117–32; L. Gardet, 'Quelques Reflexions sur un Problème de Thèologie et de Philosophie Musulmanes: Toute-Puissance Divine et Libertèe Humaine', *Revue Occidental Musulman Mediterranéen* 13–14, 1973, pp. 381–94.

13 On the position of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and his assertion on the uncreatedness of the Qur'ān see W. Madelung, 'The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation

of the Qur'ān', *Orientalia Hispanica: Sive studia FM, Pareja Octogenaria Dicata*, in Félix M. Pareja Casañas (ed.), Leiden: Brill, 1974, pp. 523–5.

14 The createdness of the Qur'ān is related to the discussions on the nature of God, His Attributes and His revelation to mankind, raising the question of whether divine revelation was eternally with God or created as a vessel of communication from God to His creatures. The Muʿtazilites opted for the createdness of the Qur'ān, bound to the necessity to defend the principle of God's unity (*tawḥīd*) and the need to safeguard God's transcendence (*tanzīh*). Conversely, the Ashʿarites believed the Qur'ān to be the eternal speech of God, uncreated and one of the seven divine attributes, together with Life, Knowledge, Power, Will, Seeing and Hearing, which enjoyed an hypostatic position in God's Essence. Born as a theological question, it turned into a political issue patronized by the state during the last year of reign of the ʿAbbasid caliph al-Maʿmūn (r. 197/813–217/833). The issue saw the rise of the *Miḥna* (Inquisition) through which the public affirmation of the createdness of the Qur'ān was made a requirement for judges (*qāḍīs*), justified by the theological principle that God has the right to have His religion carried out properly. On these topics see J. Van Ess, 'Ibn Kullāb und die *Miḥna*', *Oriens* 18–9, 1967, pp. 92–142; idem, 'Ḍirār Ibn ʿAmr und die "Cahmiya": Biographie einer vergessenen Schule', *Der Islam* 44, 1970, pp. 1–70; J.A. Nawas, 'The *Miḥna* of 218 A.H./833 A.D. Revisited: An Empirical Study', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 116, 1996, pp. 698–708; M. Cooperson, 'Two Abbasid Trials: Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq', *al-Qanṭara* 22, 2001, pp. 375–93; N. Hurvitz, '*Miḥna* as Self-Defense', *Studia Islamica* 92, 2001, pp. 93–111.

15 H. Ziai, 'Islamic Philosophy (*Falsafa*)', in T. Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 68.

16 Endress, 'The Defense of Reason', pp. 14–5.

17 I.R. Netton, *Allāh Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology*, London and New York: Routledge, 1989, p. 150. On the difference between al-Fārābī and Avicenna's view of philosophy see G. Endress, 'Reading Avicenna in the *Madrasa*: Intellectual Genealogies and Chains of Transmission of Philosophy and the Sciences in the Islamic East', in J.E. Montgomery (ed.), *Arabic Theology and Philosophy: From the Many to the One. Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, Leuven: Peeters, 2006, p. 379.

18 Endress, 'The Defense of Reason', p. 5; al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-Burhān*, in R. al-ʿAjam and M. Fakhry (eds), *al-Mantiq ʿinda al-Farabi*, Beirut: 1986–7, p. 65. On Fārābī see P. Adamson, *In the Age of al-Fārābī: Arabic Philosophy in the Fourth/Tenth Century*, London: Warburg Institute; Turin: Nino Aragno, 2008; I.R. Netton, *Al-Fārābī and His School*, London: Curzon, 1992.

19 L.E. Goodman, *Avicenna*, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 15. Netton explains that by placing the science of being (ontology) at the heart of his philosophical quest, Avicenna was certainly ready to speculate on the absolute unity of God (*tawḥīd*), the very core of the Islamic faith. Netton, *Allāh Transcendent*, p. 152.

20 Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī, *Maqāla fī gharaḍmā baʿd al-ṭabīʿā*, Haydarabad: n. p., 1930, pp. 3–4.

21 G. Fodor, 'Some Aspects of the *Qadar* Controversy', *The Arabist, Budapest Studies in Arabic* 25, 1996, pp. 58–9.

22 For a general view on Neoplatonism and its legacy with Islam see A. Vanderjagt and D. Pätzold, *The Neoplatonic Tradition: Jewish, Christian and Islamic Themes*, Cologne: Dinter, 1991; P. Morewedge (ed.), *Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992; I.R. Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists: An Introduction to the Thought of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafā')*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2002.

23 O. Leaman, *A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, p. 4.

24 The theory of *anamnesis* is advanced in Plato's *Phaedo*. It suggests that knowledge is in the soul from eternity and that, once the soul is incarnated, its knowledge is forgotten. The process of learning is therefore perceived as a recovery of what one has forgotten. Genuine knowledge is attained once the soul becomes aware of this state of affairs. The soul achieves this understanding through a process of purification from the corrupted nature of the body. See Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. H.N. Fowler, London: Harvard University Press, 1966, pp. 50–70. Traces of this theory can be found in the 'Theology of Aristotle', the Plotinian work which was falsely attributed to Aristotle. On this work see A. Badawī, *Theologia Aristotelis*, Badawī (ed.): *Aflūṭīn ʿind al-ʿArab*, Cairo: n.p. 1955, pp. 29–30. This volume contains the *Kitāb Uthūlūjīā Arisṭāṭālīs* (*Theologia Aristotelis*), ed. F. Dieterici, Leipzig, 1882, pp. 3–164.

25 The Neoplatonic emanative schema allowed philosophers, as well as mystics, to combine the Aristotelian principle of *energeia* or *entelekheia*, that is, the idea that all natures incline and yearn towards perfection in the fulfilment of their acts and beings, with the 'theological' notion of a final Cause (God) which is identified with the most perfect of beings. These ideas created a cosmological system in which beings are ranked according to their more or less perfect state, depending on their proximity to the ultimate Cause, and in which all entities strive to realize their ultimate potentialities by way of attaining spiritual and intellectual approximation to God.

26 For a general overview on Sufism see Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.), *Sufīsm: Critical Concepts in Islamic Studies*, 4 vols, London and New York: Routledge, 2008; A.T. Karamustafa, *Sufīsm: The Formative Period*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007; A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension of Islam*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975. On the relation between Islamic theology and mysticism see T. Mayer, 'Theology and Sufism', in T. Winter (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 258–87.

27 Ghūlam Khalīl had the mystic Abū'l-Ḥusayn al-Nūrī arrested and imprisoned. He was persecuted for describing the intimate relationship occurring between God and His creatures in a way that was suggestive of blasphemous anthropomorphism. See J. Van Ess, 'Sufism and its Opponents', in F.D. Jong and B. Radtke (eds), *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, pp. 26–9.

28 F. De Jong and B. Radtke in their 'Introduction' to *Islamic Mysticism Contested*, pp. 3–4; on the notion of '*tawba*' see G. Böwering, 'Early Sufism between Persecution and Heresy', in F.D. Jong and B. Radtke (eds), *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, pp. 45–50 and pp. 65–7.

29 In the course of this book it will be shown why the *Malāmī* creed was highly estimated by Ibn ʿArabī.

30 Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension of Islam*, p. 5. On al-Ḥallāj see L. Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallaj, Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. Herbert Mason, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.

31 J. Baldick, *Mystical Islam*, London: I.B. Tauris, 1989, p. 174.

32 Amongst the early major treatises on Sufism, aiming to prove the legitimacy of Sufi tenets, see Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Luma' fī'l-taṣawwūf*, ed. R.A. Nicholson, London: Luzac, 1914; Abū Bakr Muhammad al-Kalābādhī, *al-Taʿarruf li-Madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*, trans. A.J. Arberry, *The Doctrine of the Sufis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977; Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-Qulūb fī Muʿāmalat al-Maḥbūb wa waṣf ṭarīq al-murīd ilā maqām al-tawḥīd*, 2 vols, Cairo: Tawzīʿ Maktabat al-Mutanabbī, c. 1985. These treatises influenced later Sufi sources; in particular it is well known that al-Ghazālī relied profoundly on al-Makkī's work.

33 G. Böwering, '*fanā' wa baqā*", in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*.

34 A.D. Knysh, 'Ṣūfism and the Qur'ān ', in *Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān*, Leiden: Brill, 2001–6, pp. 137–59. On the Ashʿarites as paragons of Muslim orthodoxy see G. Makdisi, 'Hanbalite Islam', in M. Swartz (ed.), *Studies on Islam*, London: Oxford

University Press, 1981, pp. 251–4; idem, 'Ashʿarī and the Ashʿarītes in Islamic Religious History', pp. 19–39.

35 On this argument see T. Mayer, 'Theology and Sufism', pp. 258–87.

36 A. Shihadeh, 'Introduction' in *Sufism and Theology*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007, p. 1. Significantly, at its origins, Sufism was anchored to the individual endeavour of the disciple and his total obedience to the impositions of his master. It is only from the eight/fourteenth century that Sufism comes to be organized in *ṭarīqas*.

37 Ibid., p. 2.

38 Many Qur'ānic predestinarian verses refer to God's creation of everything (6:101); (25:2); (39:62), including men and what they do (22:6); (37:93–6); (57:22). The Qur'ān also refers to human responsibility and freedom of action in, for example, (18:29–30); (73:19); (74:37); (76:29).

39 György Fodor has observed that the importance of the issue of predestination, as informed by the prophetic Traditions, is proved by the fact that many canonical *ḥadīth* collectors devoted separate chapters in their works to the theme of *qadar* as in the case of al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Cairo: n.p., 1958, vol. 9, pp. 152–4. See Fodor 'Some Aspects of the *Qadar* Controversy', p. 58 and p. 63 note 5.

40 ʿAbd al-Qahir Jurjānī, *Kitāb al-Taʿrīfāt*, ed. Flügel, Leipzig: n.p., 1845.

41 L. Gardet '*Al-Ḳaḍā' wa'l-ḳadar*' in *Encyclopaedia Islamica*, 2nd edn, Leiden: Brill, pp. 365–7.

42 So ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) considered that unbelief is necessary of its own right (*al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-ʿadl*, Anawati (ed.), Cairo: al-Dār al-Miṣrīyah liʿl-Ta'līf wa'l-Tarjamah, 1959–65, vol. 6, p. 246, p. 252, p. 348 and p. 350). On the Muʿtazilite view on the act of obedience see ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Ibn Muḥammad al-Khayyāṭ, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār wa'l-radd ʿalā Ibn al-Rawandī al-mulḥi*, ed. A. Nader, Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿah al-Kāthūlīkīyah, 1957, p. 58. On the Muʿtazilites' discussion on the nature of God's actions see Muḥammad Ibn Ishāq Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fīhrist*, ed. G. Flügel, Leipzig: F.C.W. Vogel, 1871–2, pp. 256–9.

43 According to the majority of Muʿtazilites, the verb to create (*khalaqa*) can be used in relation to the actions of human agents. See ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *al-Mughnī*, VII, p. 207 and p. 210.

44 ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-milāl wa'l-nihāl*, ed. Badrān, Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Azhar, 1951–5, p. 120.

45 Abū'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿārī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, ed. H. Ritter, Istanbul, 1929–30, re-published Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1980, p. 539. Henceforth *Maqālāt*; D. Gimaret, *Théories de l'Acte Humain en Théologie Musulmane*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1980, p. 12.

46 On these arguments see R.M. Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes: The Teaching of the Baṣrian School of the Muʿtazila in the Classical Period*, Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1978.

47 Khayyāṭ, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār*, p. 17 and p. 20; R.M. Frank, *The Metaphysics of Created Beings according to Abū'l-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf*, Istanbul: Publications de l'Institut Historique et Archéologique de Istamboul, 1966, p. 29.

48 Al-Ashʿārī, *Maqālāt*, p. 233 and p. 443.

49 Ibid., p. 232 and p. 418; Khayyāṭ, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār*, p. 60.

50 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, pp. 19–29.

51 R.M. Frank, 'Several Fundamental Assumptions of the Baṣra School of the Muʿtazila', *Studia Islamica* 33, 1971, p. 12.

52 It is for this reason that the capacity to either perform or not perform a specific act is limited to the first moment of the realization of the act. See ʿAlī Ibn Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fi al-Milal wa'l-Ahwa' wa'l-niḥal*, 5 vols, Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Tamaddun, 1899–1903, part 3, p. 22; Khayyāṭ, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār*, p. 20.

53 Frank, *The Metaphysics of Created Beings*, p. 33.

54 C. Baffioni, *Atomismo e Antiatomismo nel Pensiero Islamico*, Napoli: Istituto Universi-

tario Orientale, 1982, p. 82; N. Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām: Atoms, Space, and Void in Basrian Muʿtazilī Cosmology*, Leiden: Brill, 1994; R.M. Frank, 'Bodies and Atoms: The Ashʿarite Analysis', in M.E. Marmura (ed.), *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984, pp. 39–53; idem, 'The Non-Existent and the Possible in Classical Ashʿarite teaching', *Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales du Caire: Mélanges* 24, 2000, pp. 1–37.

55 In contrast to the view of Aristotle and the Peripatetic philosophers, the Muʿtazilites did not admit any distinction between the 'essential' and the 'accidental' properties of created things. See A. Ivry, 'Al-Kindī and the Muʿtazilah: A Reevaluation', in *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics*, Alban, NY: State University of New York Press, 1974, p. 52. Frank has argued that the *mutakallimūn* in general, Ashʿarites included, regarded accidents as concrete entities: 'beings or existent in the full proper sense'. See Frank, 'Bodies and atoms', p. 42.

56 Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, p. 50.

57 Khayyāṭ, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār*, p. 45; al-Ashʿārī, *Maqālāt*, p. 548.

58 On al-Ashʿarī's criticism of this point, see Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad Maqālāt al-Shaykh Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī: Exposé de la doctrine d'al-Aš'arī*, ed. D. Gimaret, Beirut: Dār al-Macher, 1987, pp. 132–3.

59 See H.R. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalām*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 497; R.M. Frank, 'The Divine Attributes according to the Teachings of Abū'l-Hudhayl al-Allāf', *Le Muséon, Revue des Études Orientales* 82, 1969, p. 464.

60 Frank, 'The Structure of Created Causality', p. 20.

61 On these topics see Muḥammad Ibn Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd fī al-radd ʿalā al-mulḥida wa'l-muʿaṭṭila wa'l-rāfiḍa wa'l-khawārij wa'l-muʿtazila*, ed. R.J. McCarthy, Beirut: Librairie Orientale, 1965, pp. 24–47, pp. 286–7, pp. 300–1; ʿAbd al-Qahir al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, Istanbul: Maṭbaʿat al-Dawla, 1928, p. 69; ʿAbd al-Malik ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. A.S. al-Nasher, Alexandria: al-Manshūʾat al-Maʿārif, 1969, pp. 503–6.

62 Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt*, p. 291; idem, *al-Ibānah ʿan uṣūl al-diyānah*, pp. 16–8; al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, p. 102.

63 McCarthy, *The Theology of al-Ashʿarī*, pp. 59–60, p. 63, p. 67; Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad Maqālāt*, p. 131.

64 Al-Ashʿarī, *al-Ibānah*, p. 7; idem, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, p. 238.

65 Al-Ashʿārī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, p. 42; Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad Maqālāt*, pp. 92–4 and p. 119.

66 Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad Maqālāt*, p. 93.

67 Ibid., p. 94.

68 R.M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994, p. 119 note 26.

69 Al-Ashʿārī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, pp. 77–8.

70 Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad Maqālāt*, p. 92,

71 Al-Ashʿārī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, p. 79.

72 Frank, 'The Structure of Created Causality', pp. 25–6 and pp. 40–1; Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 128.

73 Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil*, p. 182.

74 Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, pp. 119–20 note 26.

75 On the Ashʿarites view of *qaḍā'* as creation see al-Ashʿārī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, pp. 45–6, pp. 65–7.

76 Ibid., p. 17.

77 Frank explains, for instance, that when one says of an atom that it is black, what it is stated is that there is in this atom a single unit or particle (*juz'*) of black, and that 'it is the reality of this particle of black in it that is the ontological basis of the truth of the assertion'. See Frank, 'Bodies and Atoms', p. 44.

78 Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 125. On the Ashʿarites' perception of bodies see Frank, 'Bodies and Atoms', pp. 45–51. It is significant to remember that, for

the Ashʿarites, God cannot be classified as a substance given that any substance is corporeal, acting as a receptacle (*maḥall*) or a substrate (*mawḍū*) for accidents and changes. On this topic see G.C. Anawati and L. Gardet, *Introduction à la Théologie Musulmane*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1970, p. 66 and p. 155; A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932, p. 209.

79 The Ashʿarites could not accept the Aristotelian view for which atoms are infinite in number and that matter is infinitely divisible because these views implicitly deprived God of His role as ultimate and sufficient Cause for the existence of all things.

80 Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-dīn*, p. 50.

81 Ibid. Even will and *qudra* are conceived as accidents which are created occasionalistically. They are not believed to be faculties.

82 Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad Maqālāt*, p. 134.

1 Avicenna

Part one

Avicenna: a biography

Abū ʿAlī al-Husayn Ibn ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Sīnā, identified in the Western world as Avicenna, is arguably one of the most important and well-known thinkers of the entire Graeco-Arabic philosophical tradition. Often referred to by later Muslim philosophers as *al-Shaykh al-raʾīs* (the chief master), Avicenna has been extensively studied and many valuable scholarly contributions have been written about his life and works, shedding light on his character and role in the Islamic intellectual domain.[1] Here it will suffice to briefly mention a few aspects of his life which will enable the readers to familiarize themselves with one of the most influential philosophers of Islam.

Avicenna was born in 370/980 in a village near Bukhārā where he seems to have spent his youth. Son of an Ismāʿīlī, he was intended to be educated according to Ismāʿīlī doctrines.[2] At a very early age he was introduced to the sciences of the Aristotelian *curriculum* (logic, mathematics, physics and metaphysics) also studying jurisprudence under the direction of an obscure ascetic. By 385/996, Avicenna is engaged in medical practice; his intellectual independence joined to an extraordinary intelligence and memory allowed him to master all the then known sciences by the age of 18.[3] At the age of 22, after the death of his father, Avicenna was forced to enter the government in order to earn a secure income, soon becoming appreciated and consulted on both medical and political matters. Having cured the son of Prince Ibn Mansūr al-Sāmʿānī of Bukhārā in 386/997, Avicenna was allowed to access the splendid royal library. In this period he seems to have composed *The Compendium of the Soul* and two lost works.[4] After a brief stay at the court of Prince ʿAlī Ibn Maʿmūn Khawārism in Jurjān, Avicenna was compelled to flee for political reasons, reaching the court of the *Shaykh* al-Maʿālī Qābūs, but finding him dead upon arrival (402/1012). On his return to Jurjān, Avicenna met al-Jūzjānī who was destined to become his lifelong disciple and the friend who completed the writing of Avicenna's autobiography. During his long sojourn in Jurjān, Avicenna composed some of his major works, amongst which are the *Kitāb al-Qānūn fī'l-ṭibb* and the *Kitāb al-Mabdaʾ waʾl-maʿād*.[5] Avicenna left Jurjān to reach Rayy in 405/1015, becoming politically involved in a dispute related to the young Prince Majid al-Dawla (d. 420/1029). Soon after, Avicenna left for Hamadhān where, as al-Jūzjānī reports, he started a new chapter of his life. Nominated vizier of the Prince Shams al-Dawla (d. 997/1021), Avicenna

juggled between his daily political career and his philosophical writings to which he would dedicate himself at night. In this period he commenced the *al-Shifā'* and also wrote the *Kitāb al-Hidāya*. On the death of the prince, Avicenna's life took a bad turn as he was persecuted by his enemies and imprisoned for his alleged secret correspondence with rivals of the Hamadhān dynasty. During his captivity he composed the treatise *Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*.[6] Set free through a *coup d'état*, Avicenna escaped to Iṣfahān where he dedicated himself entirely to his philosophical interests producing the rest of his works in about 10 years. He completed the last part of *al-Shifā'*, the *Kitāb al-Najāt*, the *Dānish nāma-i 'alā'ī*, *The Eastern Philosophy* now lost, *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*, and a series of treatises including the *Risālat fī'l-'ishq*, *Risālat fī māhiyyat al-Ṣalāt* and the *Risālat al-Qadar*.[7] In Hamadān, during a military expedition led by the Prince 'Alā' al-Dawla, Avicenna died of colic in 428/1037.

Aristotelian and Fārābīan influences

Alfred L. Ivry has pointed out that Avicenna's view of free will and predestination is dependent on 'a cluster of related concepts, [such as] potentiality, possibility, matter and evil, and above all upon the concept of the Necessity of existence'.[8] Throughout this work, we shall endeavour to elucidate the meaning of the above notions, showing how they influenced Avicenna's views on *qaḍā' wa'l-qadar* and *ikhtiyār*.

There is no doubt that Avicenna was inspired by Greek philosophy. The two great luminaries of prime importance for him were Plato (d. 347 BC) and Aristotle. In contrast to the majority of the *falāsifa* who were convinced of a perfect harmony existing between these two major thinkers, a belief strengthened by the erroneous attribution to Aristotle of Neoplatonic writings, Avicenna was well aware of the discrepancies existing between them and attempted a reconciliation of the divergent tendencies built up during this time of philosophical history. The 'Aristotelian' tradition which Avicenna received and the Neoplatonic teachings he inherited were not mutually compatible. Incoherencies were due to the vicissitudes that the transmission of this tradition underwent both from Greek into Arabic (often through Syriac) and within Arabic intellectual history. Particularly, distortions due to textual corruption and errors in the attribution of certain works to their respective authors were quite common. The most famous case is that of the Plotinian *Theologia* A*ristotelis* which, attributed to Aristotle, led to a misinterpretation of his philosophy.[9] Avicenna's second master al-Fārābī (d. 292/950), Aristotle being the first, 'enlightened' his disciple on the real purpose of the Stagirite's *Metaphysics* thus helping Avicenna to eliminate the additions of the Islamic tradition. Avicenna confessed to have been confused when he attempted to understand Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, despite he had read it 40 times. More specifically, Avicenna encountered difficulties when he attempted to grasp the aim of the Stagirite's work. Al-Fārābī's work, *On the Purpose of Metaphysics*, provided an answer to Avicenna's doubts. By pointing out the mistakes of assuming metaphysics and Islamic theology to be identical, a tendency initiated by al-Kindī,

al-Fārābī specified that the primary objects of the metaphysical science (the study of the being-*qua*-being and its equivalent in universality, the One, as well as the theoretical enquiries into privation and multiplicity etc.), were to be differentiated from the subject-matter of theology, that is God.[10] Unfortunately, this 'cleansing' process was only partial since al-Fārābī had already integrated Plotinus, masqueraded as Aristotle, into his philosophy, thus leading Avicenna to accept certain concepts apparently irreconcilable with Aristotle's own metaphysics, such as the Plotinian doctrine of emanation.[11]

Aristotle believed that causality was at the core of creation. He viewed creation as the product of a causal chain, with causes and effects being linked in a descending succession. According to the Stagirite, an efficient cause necessarily produces its effect and, even more specifically, once the sufficient cause exists the effect cannot be delayed. This theory made the effect coexist in time with its cause so that, Aristotle believed, the cause precedes its effect not in time but with respect to its capacity of attaining existence. This means that an efficient cause, which is higher in the succession of existents, is responsible for the existence of a lower object. Existence is therefore conceived as being bestowed downwards from one cause to its effect with the latter becoming, in turn, the cause for its following effect.[12]

Avicenna expands the Aristotelian system by elaborating a new ontological doctrine which, explanatory of the phenomena of creation, absorbs the Greek philosopher's view of causality, but places it within the Neoplatonic emanative scheme based on the procession of immaterial intelligences from the Supreme Being by way of emanation. The notion of 'emanation' is amongst the most problematic concepts in philosophy; its complexity is due to the fact that, as Armstrong suggests, it has not got any precise philosophical meaning but it rather pertains to the domain of metaphor, as the classical image of the sun and the rays emanated from the luminous source demonstrates.[13] Originally Stoic,[14] the concept of emanation referred to a material overflowing of a luminous essence which was considered responsible for the generation of lower entities. Later in history, Neoplatonic thinkers endeavoured to prove that emanation, intended as a spontaneous and necessary flux of existence (or life) from the One, did not imply any diminution in the Source and that, with respect to the latter, the emanated entity occupied an inferior position in the degree of reality. Despite the efforts of describing the 'flood' of life in metaphorical terms, the philosophical sense of emanation remained an equivocal one. For this reason scholars have claimed that philosophers like Plotinus and Proclus avoided employing the Greek term emanation (ἀπόρροια).[15] Avicenna himself will alternatively frame the process of divine bestowing of existence in Neoplatonic metaphorical terms, by using expressions such as emanation – *fayḍ* and 'flood of being'– *sayl al-wujūd*, or according to the Islamic mainstream creative language, by employing terms like 'origination out of nothingness'– *ibdā*', and 'essential inception' – *ḥudūth bi'l-dhāt*.

If, on the one hand, the doctrine elaborated by Avicenna shows his 'intention to read Plotinus in the Aristotelian sense',[16] on the other hand, despite its aim of supplementing the Aristotelian view according to which from the 'One only the

one could come', the same doctrine carried within itself the threat of undermining the gulf between God and His creatures. The Neoplatonic theory of emanation he adopts, in effect, suggests that between the divine source and the emanated beings there occurs a relationship based on correspondence (*munāsaba*) and participation (*musharāka*). In other terms, God and His creatures seem to share the same essence. This clearly implies a continuity which assimilates God to the product of His own emanation.[17] In order to overcome these difficulties Avicenna elaborated a complex theory based on the differentiation between essence and existence which emphasized the nature of God as the only simple being in which the two elements coincides. God becomes for Avicenna the only Necessary Existent through Himself (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihi*), a unique case, since in no other beings is essence identical to existence. To put it in other terms, Avicenna believes that all existents other than God are characterized by ontological contingency (*imkān al-wujūd*) and that their existence is 'accidental' to their essence, or quiddity (*māhiyya*). This basically signifies that, whilst God is essentially existent, all other beings 'attain' existence because the latter is added to their quiddity as an accident. Quite clearly this view was able to implicitly re-establish the chasm between God and the product of His creation.[18]

The principle of the Necessary Existent is a formulation unknown to Aristotle, yet it is dependent on the metaphysical division of being into the impossible (*mumtani'*), possible (*mumkin*), and necessary (*wājib*), which was known to Aristotelian speculation and is also found in al-Kindī, al-Fārābī and the rest of the Peripatetic philosophical tradition.[19] Avicenna inherits this classification of existents but denounces the tautological character of the ancient philosophers' definitional methods. In contrast to his predecessors who were unable to describe impossibility, possibility and necessity without recurring to the same terms in order to formulate their definitions, Avicenna explains these notions with reference to the concepts of existence and the Aristotelian understanding of causality. The *Shaykh al-ra'īs* argues that impossibility occurs when, in the absence of any conceivable cause, even if considered simply in the mind, the quiddity of an object self-evidently demonstrates that it is not 'able' to accept existence in any way, so that such a non-entity cannot be conceived in reality. The possiblity of existence is explained as that which could be supposed to be either non-existent or existent without the occurrence of any contradiction, its coming into existence depending on the presence of a cause external to it. The necessary of existence, instead, is said to be that existent which could not be supposed as non-existent without the occurrence of a contradiction. The necessarily existent entities are furthermore divided into two 'categories': (i) the entity necessary by itself whose existence is not dependent on any cause (God), and (ii) an entity which is not necessary by itself but whose existence depends on an external cause (anything other than God).[20] Avicenna believes that the entire universe perpetually receives existence by an external cause which is essentially necessary and absolutely non-contingent: the *wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihi*.[21] This marks a significant point in the Avicennian construct which is often accused of undermining the world's dependence on God: in truth, as will be observed in more detail in the course of this study, despite the

fact that the world is pre-eternal, it still needs God to impart existence upon it from eternity.

The theory of God as the Necessary Existent, used by Avicenna 'to fulfil equally both religious and rational needs',[22] is also believed to complement the traditional Aristotelian analysis of existents divided in the constituent elements of form and matter joined in the substance (the Aristotelian *ousía*). It is well known that despite sharing Aristotle's anti-occasionalistic worldview, Avicenna evades the framework of basic Aristotelian principles.[23] Indeed Avicenna denounces the insufficiency of Aristotle's traditional dyadic formula of matter and form and replaces it with a three-term analysis of the material object. In addition to matter and form, he explains, there must be a third element which renders the substantial compound an actual compound. The third element is identified with existence which, ultimately depending on God for its bestowal upon creatures, makes the Necessary Existent the source for the coming into being of all entities, as required by the Qur'ānic perspective. In addition, Avicenna criticizes the Aristotelian method of identifying God as exclusively the First Unmoved Mover because the concept of efficient causality (*ʿilla*), reduced from the Stagirite and the physicians to the principle of movement is, for Avicenna, inadequate for explaining the nature of God as the Principle of all essences. In Aristotle's view, the world has intrinsically existed from eternity, and depends on God only with respect to its motion. In his *Metaphysics*, the Stagirite describes the universe as being made of concentric revolving spheres (probably 47 or 55 in number), whose motions are eternal and perfect. As substances, these are living entities which are provided with a rational soul acting as their form. It is important to emphasize that the Stagirite dedicates an entire section of his treatise (*Lambda 8*) to show that there is a multiplicity of unmoved movers and he does so with the sole purpose of explaining the movements of the intelligences' celestial spheres without mentioning anything with regard to their genesis. Aristotle clarifies that different movements are caused exclusively because each sphere is moved directly by one of the unmoved movers.[24]

Avicenna's cosmological proof of God as the First Cause of all existents resumes Aristotle's cosmology, including the modifications included by al-Fārābī. The latter was probably the first in the history of Islamic philosophy to reduce the number of the Aristotelian intellects and their corresponding spheres to 10 and this, Walzer argues, was done for purely astronomical considerations.[25] The drastic reduction of the number of the Aristotelian spheres to ten was inherited by al-Fārābī through Ptolemy (d. circa 168 CE) who, in the second book of his *Planetary Hypotheses*, spoke of nine spheres, the last of which corresponded to the sphere of the spheres – *falak al-aflāk* – or the all-enveloping sphere – *falak al-muḥīt* of the Arabic astronomers.[26] The point to highlight here is that Ptolemy's theory was complemented by al-Fārābī who, in addition to the spheres, talks about their corresponding separate intellects in order to establish a connection between these and the above-mentioned Aristotelian unmoved movers thus providing, in contrast to the Stagirite, not simply an explanation for the movement of the spheres but also a justification for their origins. This was pursued following the goal of identifying in God the Creator of all beings.

In al-Fārābī's cosmology emanation is a process that starting from God progresses through the series of intelligences up to the lowest and tenth intelligence, the Agent Intellect or *Dator Formarum* (*wāhib al-ṣuwar*) so-called because it is able to bestow 'forms' upon the matter of this world.[27] Each separate intellect has the double task of moving and generating its correspondent sphere. For al-Fārābī, the separate intellects become the secondary causes for the existence of the celestial bodies and given that there are 10 celestial spheres (including the sub-lunar sphere), it follows that the number of the intellects has to be 10 with the last intellect being identified with the Aristotelian Agent Intellect.[28]

Avicenna, as will be explained in more detail throughout this book, elaborates the Fārābīan cosmological system with its strict hierarchical structure whilst stressing, from an Aristotelian angle, the determined nature of the sequences of cause and effect. He goes even further by setting 'the investigation of the existence of God outside the scope of physics altogether',[29] and shifts from the plane of natural philosophy to that of metaphysics[30] by identifying the 'agent' or cause exclusively with what is able to produce the existence of its effect rather than with what can merely adduce forms of motions or changes as previously highlighted by Aristotle and other physicians:

> The metaphysical philosophers (*al-falāsifa al-illahiyyin*) do not mean by 'agent' only the principle of motion (*mabda' al-taḥrīk*), as the naturalists intend, but rather the principle and provider of existence (*mabda' al-wujūd wa mufīdahi*) as in the case of God with regard to the world.
>
> (Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 195)

In general, the *falāsifa*, following Greek theories, do not attribute any creationistic connotation to the term *fi'l*. An act is primarily thought of as the actualization of what is in a state of potentiality or as the production of an effect on a substrate which is able to receive the action.[31] More specifically, the agent (*fā'il*) is identified with the efficient cause, with the agent and the receptacle of the act (*maf'ūl*) considered being in a relation of cause-effect based on necessity.[32] In the specific case of Avicenna, as the passage exemplifies, the agent becomes a cause that bestows existence which differs from itself, whilst the actualization of an effect is believed to occur only when the agent, or efficient cause, exists in actuality and its effect is in itself possible.[33] More specifically, only when the agent is in a state of plenitude having its essence filled with being, it 'overflows' producing another existent that was previously only possible in itself.[34]

Essence, existence, matter, form and substance: A definitional survey

This sub-chapter provides a brief excursus on Avicenna's use of very specific and technical terms properly directed to highlight the concepts of essence and existence, the notions of matter, form and substance defined by Avicenna in both Persian and the Arabic.

In the *Dānish nāma-i ʿalāʾī*, the term *hastī* (being-*qua*-being) is used as a substitute for the Arabic *wujūd* or *anniyya* (existence). Avicenna differentiates between the meaning of *wujūd* as synonymous with the Latin *esse*, indicating existence in an abstract sense, and the term *mawjūd* corresponding to the Latin *ens*, signifying the existent itself, namely, existence in a concrete mode.[35]

In order to clarify the relation of essence to existence in the realm of being, a proper definition of essence intended as a 'mode of being' taken in itself should be attempted. Amélie M. Goichon has explained that the grammatical equivalent of the English term essence is expressed in Arabic by the word *dhāt* as the feminine of the expression *dhū* (which has the meaning of possessor or owner). This evokes the idea of what constitutes a thing more intimately or radically without 'charging' such a thing with any specific connotation like other terms such as *māhīyya* (or *māhiyya*, i. e. quiddity) or nature (*ṭabīʿa*) might do.[36] Avicenna does not offer a real definition of *dhāt* but explains that it conveys the essential or constitutive character of a thing in such a way that it cannot be misunderstood.[37] Overall, it can be stated that in the Arabic language *dhāt* is mostly connected to the ideas of 'thing' designated by the terms *shay', ʿamr, mā* (analogous to the Latin *quod*) or *allādhī* (synonym of the Latin *illud*).[38] The corresponding abstract term is found expressed in Avicenna's system by the idiom *shay'īya* which is translated in English as 'thingness' and is etymologically analogous to the sense of 'reality' as an abstract form of the Latin *res*, meaning the being of a thing as such.[39]

As Goichon has observed, in ancient translations it is quite difficult to trace the usage of *dhāt* as a synonym of *essentia* (which is more often rendered by the terms *māhīyya* and *ḥaqīqa* – truth) whilst *dhāt* is more frequently used as an equivalent for *esse* and *substantia*. Avicenna explains: 'All the essence (*dhāt*) which is not in a subject of inhesion is a substance (*jawhar*) and all the essence (*dhāt*) which subsists in a subject of inhesion is an accident (*ʿarḍ*)'.[40] Likewise, in Avicenna's classification, the significance of essence comes to be articulated more often by the word quiddity: *māhiyya* (a feminine abstract noun probably derived from the question 'what is it?' – *mā huwa*). This is a metaphysical definition or, rather, it is that which signifies the definition of an essence: the quiddity considered in itself.[41] According to Avicenna 'each thing (*shay'*) has a quiddity (*māhiyya*) by which such a thing is what it is, which is its truth (*ḥaqīqa*) or, rather, its essence (*dhāt*).'[42]

Goichon adds that this quiddity is 'approached' by Avicenna in its relation to the truth according to two modalities: (i) in relation to the actual realization of a thing and (ii) in relation to the exact representation of such a thing within the spirit. In the first case, the *ḥaqīqa* in the sense of '*quod quis erat esse*' (that which is what has to be) comes to coincide with what makes a thing what it is, the truth of a thing being in accordance with its essence. In the second case, the *ḥaqīqa* corresponds to the truth within the spirit, namely, what we can call a 'denomination – *tasmiya* – . . . predicable and classifiable by means of our intelligence'.[43] The essence considered in itself consists, for Avicenna, of all that is necessary for a thing to be able to exist as such. As a result it is expressed through the enunciation of those characters constituting its nature, its quiddity, with the exclusion of all the

accidents as well as the particulars following from its constitutive tracts. It is in relation to its being, both in reality and within the spirit, that the thing or essence is perceived. Following these assumptions, Goichon stresses that, in Avicenna's estimation, the essence is meant to signify both matter and form given that the definition of a physical thing cannot be considered complete without containing them both. This is because 'the quiddity of composite substances is the same composition of matter and form'.[44]

Avicenna states: 'Being (*hastī*) is recognized by reason itself (*khirad*) without the aid of definition (*ḥadd*) or description (*rasm*). Since it has no definition, it has neither genus (*jins*) nor differentia (*faṣl*) because nothing is more general (*ʿāmm*), and well known (*maʿrūf*) than it.'[45] Whilst 'being' satisfies Avicenna's idea of 'definitional primitiveness', this meaning that 'being' is the most determinable of terms, all the above-mentioned designations allow Avicenna to arrive at a well-defined classification of matter and form clearly influenced by Aristotelian parameters. The term *mawjūd* is divisible into two classes: (i) the being found in another thing subsistent in action without being either part of this thing or able to exist separately (i.e. the being which is in a subject of inhesion), and (ii) the being which is not part of anything (i.e. substance). Such a classification leads to the Aristotelian definition of substance as 'that whose essence does not exist in a subject [of inhesion]'.[46] More precisely, Avicenna explains the term substance as 'what subsists without any "foreign" *mawḍūʿ* (subject), but is the subject of inhesion itself'.[47] He goes on to clarify that a substance is that which is not an accident (*ʿaraḍ*) and whose being (*hastī*), moreover, is a reality (*ḥaqīqa*) such that the being of that reality is not subject to another thing in order to have its essence complete. Any receptacle which completes its being and becomes active by the reception of something else is called *hayūlā* (*hyle*, prime matter).[48] Therefore, Avicenna admits, it is possible to think of a substance in terms of a receptacle lacking the above characteristic.[49]

All these definitions are fundamental to an engagement with Avicenna's ideas on free will and predestination because, it is worth highlighting, this volume focuses among other themes on assessing the role played by matter and form in the formation of any substantial compound. This will be achieved by examining the above elements and their legacy with the Avicennian idea of substance. A first step in this direction can be taken by evaluating Avicenna's interpretation of the Plotinan emanative scheme carrying within its own construct deterministic elements.

Emanation and divine willingness: Attempts at compromise between Aristotelian necessity and Ashʿartite contingency

It has already been mentioned that Avicenna's theory of emanation[50] was inherited from al-Fārābī in its main traits. However, differing from his teacher's cosmological scheme, Avicenna believes that the first intelligence, together with all the intelligences following it, has a threefold contemplation: (i) on God as the reason of its existence, this leading to the production of another intellect; (ii) on itself as a

necessary existent through another (*wājib bi'l-ghayr*), this leading to the production of the soul of the first heaven; (iii) on itself as a possible existent (contingent in itself – *mumkin bi'l-dhāt*), this leading to the production of matter or the sphere of the first heaven.[51]

The whole process of emanation is said to occur through a determinism which makes the components of the supra-lunar world necessarily what they are. Their perpetual activities of cogitation are considered sufficient to emanate their direct descending effect in the hierarchy of the emanative scheme,[52] thus implying that intellects' emanatory actions are compelled by their own nature.[53] Avicenna speaks of determinism exactly because he considers that intellects are what they are due to their nature, with the latter acting as the Aristotelian cause of motion and change. The *Shaykh al-ra'īs*, however, shows an early interest in decreasing the ruthless aspect of determinism and alludes to the fact that all intellects have full awareness of the transcendence of God, and they also possess knowledge of themselves and of the position they occupy in the rank of the whole cosmological system. Basically, the intelligences know what they are and what they do and they are also conscious of their proximity to, and relationship with, the First Cause. The presence of such knowledge, Elkaisy-Friemuth has observed, means that intellects' actions certainly occur because of their nature but their production is not merely mechanical given that intellects have awareness of the functionality of the divine arrangement.[54] Intellects' self-knowledge and consciousness of their own activity becomes, for Avicenna, the proof that a form of willingness is present in them. Although he never explicitly states that intelligences have wills, it is plausible to speculate that Avicenna had exactly this in mind. He de facto implies that the notion of 'awareness' does indeed equal the concept of 'willingness' when he analyses the nature of the divine will.[55] Probably, the theme of intellects' awareness is employed to attenuate the determinism entailed in the idea that the intelligences act exclusively according to their nature.

The suggestion that intellects act with knowledge in full awareness of their actions is linked with the problematic reconciliation between Avicenna's Neoplatonic emanative scheme and the Qur'ānic notion of creation, for which God is the only efficient Cause who creates either directly or through secondary causes, but this is always in accordance with His knowledge and will, rather than accidentally through His nature as claimed by the emanative theory. Avicenna must have felt the urge of finding a compromise between Aristotelian/Neoplatonic philosophy and *kalām* theology, mainly informed by the Ash'arite stance that sees God as the only Creator, in the discussion about creation and causality. Within his emanative doctrine God is the cause of the world in general and the proximate cause of the first intelligence in particular, and He is described as the Necessary Existent who is eternal and changeless, and who necessitates the world's existence. Between God and the world exists a relationship of 'essential causality': God, Existent by Himself and sufficient cause for the existence of the world is an 'essential cause' (*'illa dhātiyya*), namely, a cause whose existence alone necessitates the existence of its effect.[56] Such a necessity, it has been mentioned, is the result of the emanation process which makes each of its components (including God) to emanate

their immediate lower being because they are compelled to do so by their nature. Despite his attempt to explain the formation of the cosmos as the result of the emanative process (employing terms such as *fayḍ*, *tajallī* and *ṣudūr*), on a few occasions, Avicenna also argues that the cosmos can be seen as the result of the divine activity of creation and adopts a safe 'creationist' vocabulary describing the divine creation as the fruit of the divine act of *ibdāʿ*.[57]

As observed by De Smet, in the Islamic Neoplatonic tradition, the notion of *ibdāʿ* played a decisive role by assisting the Muslim Neoplatonists in finding a reasonable link with the original form of Greek Neoplatonism.[58] According to the Arab Plotinus, the author of what was believed to be Aristotle's *Theologia*, God creates via *ibdāʿ* the first Intellect, the Universal Soul and the material world in one exclusive creative act (*dafʿat wāḥidat*) which defies any intermediary. In these terms, *ibdāʿ* is strategically conceived as a creation *ex nihilo* which is not preceded by anything. The great novelty of this concept lies in its capacity of excluding any act of deliberation (*rawīyya*) or volition (*irāda*) from God because God accomplishes *ibdāʿ* necessarily by way of simply being what He is (*bi-annihi faqaṭ*).[59] Consequently, God allows His goodness and perfection to emanate from Him onto the first of the created being, i.e. the Intellect and, successively, from it onto the Soul and onto all the sensible creatures. Similarly, in the thought of the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ*, *ibdāʿ* together with its synonymous *ithirāʿ* is understood literally as the creation of a thing from what is not a thing (*huwa ījād shayʾ lā min shayʾ*).[60] In the *Rasāʾil*, God is alternatively perceived as the Creator (*al-Bārīʾ*) who establishes the Intellect directly and without mediators through *ibdāʿ*,[61] and as the Creator who emanates the Intellect through a process of emanation which, however, is not a natural operation occurring in the absence of divine intentionality but is, on the contrary, an act which is freely willed by God (*ikhtiyār*). In other terms, according to the members of the Brethren of Purity, God both emanates (*afāḍa*) and instantiates (*abdaʿ*) all beings.[62]

According to Avicenna, the world, which is a necessitated effect, is said to 'share' God's eternal character and to coexist with Him. The coexistence of God (as the efficient essential cause) and its effect (the world) are linked to the notion of creation because God's priority to the world is only an essential priority and not a temporal one this meaning that the world exists through the existence of the Creator and is perpetual in existence through His perpetuity.[63] The Creator is essentially prior to the world, with the priority of the cause to the effect and this explains why the world (as the effect) still depends on God (its cause) for its existence. Avicenna adumbrates the element of divine voluntarism, essential for the Qur'ānic notion of creation, and emphasizes the condition of the world's contingency (its essential posteriority) and dependency upon its ultimate cause for its permanence in existence. It is exactly because the world lacked intrinsic existence that it is still acceptable to speak of creation.[64] Avicenna is certainly aware of the world's contingency but, in this context, any temporal value is shattered in relation to the world's intrinsic non-necessity: from eternity the First Cause must produce its effect by a necessary activity. A direct consequence of this stance is that the act of divine inception (*ibdāʿ*) becomes synonymous with the imparting of existence upon what previously lacked

it, in contradistinction to the creation of the theologians.[65] It is evident that Avicenna attempts to hold onto the notion of creation, but he is compelled to differentiate it from the traditional perspective, for which the creative act of God operates in time, according to the divine will, out of pure nothingness (*ex nihilo*). Willing to present God first as the Ashʿarite efficient cause (a position that al-Ghazālī will share) and second as the Aristotelian final cause of creation, Avicenna strips the conception of *creatio* e*x nihilo* of its temporal dimension and purportedly tries to reconcile the theory of emanation with that of creation.[66]

The rejection of the Ashʿarite idea that the world is originated in time comes to be justified by the consideration that the absolute nothingness which precedes the act of origination by *ibdāʿ* has no ontological reality at all.[67] This position represents a clear criticism of the concept of origination (*ḥudūth*) central to the *mutakallimūn*s' theory of creation: for the *Shaykh al-raʾīs*, the posteriority of any being's coming into existence after non-existence can only be an essential posteriority because it is impossible for a causal action to be temporally prior to existence. The logical postulate for this is that a real cause is only that which coexist with its necessitated effect[68] and it is therefore misleading to speak of causes and effects when they are not simultaneously existent.

In his emanation-scheme, Avicenna acknowledges a form of 'collaboration' between God and the intellects in the generation of matter and form.[69] He is aware that if he wants to comply with the Ashʿarites' understanding of secondary causality for which God is still to be regarded as the only Creator *ex nihilo* (in contrast to the Muʿtazilites' principle for which a human being can be classified as a real creator- *mukhtārīʿ*), the degree of efficiency that God and the intellects have with regard to the generation of beings must be dissimilar. These considerations have their metaphysical bearings in terms of determinism: when Avicenna speaks of the production of beings from non-beings particularly in terms of *ibdāʿ*, he shuns the deterministic repercussion that the act of divine emanation entails. In fact, if it is assumed that God 'creates', i.e. imparts existence on what lacks it, then His actions are not meant to be necessitated by His nature but by His will. Avicenna, however, limits the act of creation only to the origination of the first intellect thus making God the only One able to create something out of ontological nothingness, whilst all creatures, who originate further creatures by way of emanation, face merely a partial non-being.[70] Nonetheless, the Ashʿarite dogma acknowledging God as the only Creator is fully respected.

In essence, Avicenna is not ready to deny the metaphysical roots of his emanative system and, in order to preserve God's omnipotence, identifies the intellects as mere generators of matter and form. In their reciprocal relation, in fact, intellects are not sufficient to bring themselves into existence and it is by turning to the third element beyond matter and form that a tool for their formation can be found. Since God is the only Necessary Existent, then all existents must ultimately emerge from Him. Janssens has noticed that the gift of all further being is already implied in the very first creative act so that God appears to be the Creator of the complete Universe and of all beings. In order to integrate the idea of a 'mediated' creation with that of the divine omnipotence, Avicenna calls God the 'Causator of

the causes' (*musabbib al-asbāb*) alluding to the fact that God exercises His causal action by lending the intermediary causes their causal function, this allowing all causal activities to find their ultimate source in God.[71] The corollary of this is that the bestowal of existence is guaranteed by God as predicated by the Ashʿarites.

By acknowledging that God is the only Creator, Avicenna is implicitly attempting to moderate emanationism deterministic tone but, it will be observed, his endeavour is not entirely successful. The first step to rescue God from the accusation of acting through necessitation is to assume that if He has knowledge then, as a knowing being, God does not act merely out of His nature. Since God is knowledgeable, He is also endowed with some kind of willingness (*khʷāst/irāda*) which is eternal and unchangeable. More specifically for Avicenna, to state that God knows, implies that He is also a willing Being.[72] In particular, God knows and this means that He is aware of being the originator of every existent. Divine knowledge is perceived as: (i) conceptual, as opposed to sense perceptual knowledge; (ii) one and simple, that is primarily self-knowledge but also knowledge of other things; (iii) creative of things, as opposed to being acquired from things; (iv) changeless, that is eternal and immutable. This implies that God knows everything according to a knowledge that does not necessitate His change and which is not different from His will:[73]

> The will of the Necessary Existent does not differ from the essence of His knowledge . . . We have demonstrated that the knowledge which belongs to Him (*al-ʿilm alladhī lahu*) has to be understood as the will that belongs to Him (*al-īrāda allatī lahu*).
>
> (Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 295)

To assume that God acts according to a specific will which aims to generate particular goals, whilst previously not willing anything, is unacceptable since it infers that God's will may be subject to change (this undermining His perfection and uniqueness). Because God's willingness must have an unalterable nature, it is utterly impossible to identify the Avicennian God with the Ashʿarite Agent without this resulting in a conceptual inconsistency. For the Ashʿarites, a real agent is not only a free being endowed with a will but also a being whose actions are performed in conformity to such will.[74] Any will necessitate another will which precedes it and so on ad infinitum. Following Ashʿarite stances, al-Ghazālī, as it will be demonstrated in more details in the course of this book, advances a specific definition of the notion 'agent' (*fāʿil*) identifying it as 'an expression [referring] to one from whom the act (*fiʿl*) proceeds, together with the will (*irāda*) to act by way of choice (*ʿalā sabīl al-ikhtiyār*) and the knowledge of what is willed'. More specifically, the agent must be someone who has a will, acts according to his will (i.e. voluntarily and not compulsorily), by choice and with reason, motive and purpose.[75] Undeniably, Avicenna's intention to harmonize his Necessary Existent with the Ashʿarite notion of God as both the Creator and the ultimate Agent (not necessitated by His nature) is doomed by his own perception of the divine *irāda*. Despite this, he never denies that the deity actually wills:

> There is no exception to the facts that God is the cause of His existence and His origination and that God knows it, regulates it, and *wills* His being (*yakūn Allāh murīd al-kawnihi*); it is all subject to His regulation (*tadbīr*), determination (*taqdīr*), knowledge (*ʿilm*) and will (*irāda*).
>
> (Avicenna, Risālat fī Sirr al-Qadar, p. 31)[76]

On the basis of this claim, George F. Hourani has tried to obviate the difficulties imposed by the notion of the unchangeable divine willingness and has reminded us that, like the majority of the *falāsifa*, Avicenna distinguishes between divine will and divine purpose.[77] For Avicenna in fact, God has a will which is, however, deprived of goal (*qaṣd*), aim (*ṭalab*), desire (*ārzū*) or intentionality (*gharaḍ*).[78] This view is used, for instance, to claim that 'God's generation of the First Intellect is neither an act of will nor an act of natural mechanism'.[79] Even if God's will does not have a purpose, it acts in accordance with His knowledge and it is the subtle identification of will and knowledge – necessarily unchangeable in the unity of the divine essence – which makes the Avicennian God more of a Creator than a mere Emanator of essences *via* His nature. Such a deity, nevertheless, is said to act through a will that is an 'acceptance' of the world's creation (of which God is fully 'aware') rather than a real intention exactly because His will is deprived of goals. It can be concluded that Avicenna's experimentalism, by advancing an attempt to compromise between emanation and creation, falls short in attaining his objective: in effect, the absence of pure intentionality in God's will and the absence of free choice in His creation make God 'dispensed' from truly acting.[80] Avicenna is forced to admit that the divine will which is 'not connected with a purpose within the emanation of existence' is itself emanation.[81] Despite all this, he still manages to conceptualize God in a very much Ashʿarite way as He becomes, first and foremost, the efficient *cause* of creation.

In the *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, the Necessary Existent is conceived as a *murīd*, namely, the possessor of volition because despite the lack of intentionality, there is absence in God of anything which might contrast the emanation of His object of volition (the world) as it is.[82] It is clear that the necessary and deterministic character of divine emanation, which makes the coming into existence of the world the result of divine nature, is still implied. Avicenna, nevertheless, attempts again to rescue God's volitional nature by also introducing the concept of divine power. If, on the one hand, the divine willingness is deprived of actual intentionality, on the other, God's activity cannot be attributed with an unaware and passive necessity. In fact, it is sufficient for a thing to be perpetually willing in order to state that that thing acts with power (*bi'l-qudra*):

> [Power] it is thought to exist for those who have the characteristic of acting and the characteristic of not acting. If [power] is considered to be with the one who can only act, they do not consider that he has power. This, however, it is not true. This would be true [only] if this thing that only acts does act without wishing and willing (*ghayr an yashā' wa yurīd*), in which case with it there would be neither power nor force in this sense. If, nonetheless, he acts

> through will and choice, except that [he] is perpetually willing (*illā annahu dā'imu* al-*īrāda*) and does not change (*wa lā yataghayyaru*), then . . . he acts with power.
>
> (Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 132)

This is true, regardless of whether the will in question is an essential attribute or a perpetual concomitant.[83] God then is not only a *murīd* but a powerful being (*qadīr*) too because He wants what he wants (even though without room for changes or alternatives) also knowing that what comes from Him is good. In effect, given that God is the only Necessary Existent by Himself and that perfection equals existence, He – as ultimate Perfection and Actuality – is uttermost goodness. The latter is nothing but the absence of non-realized possibilities in *actu*. Form a philosophical perspective, goodness is fundamentally a synonymous for the perfect actualization of existence. Because God 'wills' what is good (and best in its being actual) at all given times and from eternity, God 'wills' emanation over non-emanation because emanation is actuality (i.e. existence) over possibility (i.e. non-existence).[84]

It is to be noted that the Necessary Existent's willingness and power are intertwined with the concept of Providence (*'ināya*): because God is aware of what comes from Him, knowing the good nature of what emanates from Him, He is 'satisfied' with it:

> It is necessary to know that [divine] Providence (*'ināya*) consists in the First's knowing His essence as the [cause] of existence for the [world's] good order, and [that He is] in Himself, a cause of goodness and perfection in terms of what is possible, and in His being satisfied (*rāḍī*) [with the order of the good] in the manner previously specified . . . It is emanated from Him what He knows intellectually as order and good in the manner which, in the domain of possibility, is the most complete and appropriate in being conductive to order. This is the meaning of providence.
>
> (Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 339)

The Necessary Existent becomes a subject of power because He renders the actual emanation an emanation of what is wanted rather than an emanation of what is not wanted.[85] This does not change the fact that emanation is intrinsically deterministic and that its occurrence is due both to God's nature (which is, however, reflective of His will) and the natures of the intellects. Ironically, however, the necessary nature of divine causality is 'nuanced' by virtue of the concepts of the divine purposeless will and of the divine power not-to-choose (between possibles).

Determinism vs predestination

In his interpretation of God Avicenna accommodates *kalām* within his metaphysical scheme. By stating that all determined-caused things are contingent and by

sharing with *kalām* the idea that the Necessary Existent stands outside the system of contingency, he makes God a unique '*wājib al-wujūd laysa dhā māhiyya*' (a necessary existent without quiddity). As a Muslim, a philosopher and a connoisseur of speculative theology, Avicenna skilfully manages, through the very basic principles of *kalām*, to reinterpret the notion of God in a highly philosophical way, by linking it to the concepts of impossible, possible and necessary. Generally speaking, as was mentioned before, the Necessary Existent is perceived as a 'power', imposing existence upon the essences of possible beings which are made necessary through and by such given existence.[86] The notions of possible and necessary beings are fundamental for the scope of this study, especially in the instance when these two notions combine in the metaphysical intuition of the *wujūb bi'l-ghayr* (the necessitated through something else). The being which is possibly existent in itself and necessarily existent through another, realizing the ontological paradox through which 'le possible réalisé reste possible par nature, mais il est dans l'état de realization nécessaire',[87] is a fundamental idea which, as it will be examined, leads to the distinction between the notions of determinism and predestination.

Avicenna generally conceives the divine decree (*qaḍā'*) and determinism (*qadar*) as, respectively, the necessitating primary act of God, corresponding to the first stage of His emanatory process, and as the causal unleashing of beings following God's first causative act.[88] In *Risālat fī'l-qaḍā'*, God's *qaḍā'* is His first and unique *ḥukm* which encompasses all things and from which all things derive, until the end of time, whilst God's *qadar* is described as His arrangement of things descending from His decree 'one after the other'.[89] Determination is identified with 'the existence of reasons (*'illal*) and causes (*asbāb*), and their harmonization according to their arrangement (*tartīb*) and order (*niẓām*), leading to the effects and caused beings'. The latter are said to constitute 'what is made necessary by the decree and what follows from it'.[90] In this context, determinism is not seen as the direct divine intervention in things (pertaining to strict occasionalistic *kalām*), but as an indirect determination occurring through causes necessarily arranged by God, whose order implicitly subordinates them to the divine decree. It can be argued that this perspective is not dissimilar from the Ash'arite one: in contrast to Avicenna, however, the Ash'arites often identify the divine decree with predestination, making *qadar* the temporal face of the divine eternal plan. This was done because the Ash'arites wanted to adumbrate the role of secondary causal efficacies, and to emphasize God's unique causative power. On the contrary for Avicenna, determinism is strictly linked with the concept of relative necessity of all created beings; this requires defining *qadar* as divine determinism rather than predestination. To put it in easier terms, the relative necessity exemplified by the concept of the *wujūb bi'l-ghayr* relates to the inner nature of all existents that, although necessitated by God, are still possible things in themselves, and, therefore, are still depending on their causes. Their destinies, that is the determinations of their future characters, lay exactly in their nature as possible things embedded in the divine decree. This means that destiny (*qadar*) is inherent in the nature of things and becomes consequently identical with determinism.

With the identification of destiny with determinism Avicenna sets his metaphysics beyond the conventional Ash'arite view of predestination.[91] It is not fitting to speak of God's predestination, as the Ash'arites may do, because God's eternal plan for all existents is not realized through His direct intervention nor through causes directly operating *via* the divine choosing will. Divine *qaḍā'*, instead, finds the tool for its fulfilment in the nature of possible beings which – as seeds – contain in themselves the future characteristics of existents, and which rely on efficient secondary causes for their future disclosures in actuality. This theory resembles al-Naẓẓām's version of determinism which is based on the idea that things are endowed with an inherent nature and that God is responsible only indirectly for the activities occurring in the natural domain. God is the Creator of the latent properties of things (*kumūn*) which are destined to be revealed (*ẓuhūr*) in a sequential order.[92] The significance of causes in the discourse of determinism is fundamental for Avicenna who, in his *Risālat fī'l-qaḍā'*, attacks all those who refuse to go back to the chain of causality, because they are afraid to be compelled to credit the divine '*Fiat*' with tyranny and the responsibility for reprehensible things.[93]

In addition to the first causality of God, Avicenna speaks also of a secondary causal efficacy extended both to the celestial intellects of the emanative schema and to the beings occupying the terrestrial realm whose efficacy is regulated by the unchangeable laws of nature. However, what exactly is the efficacy of these secondary causes and what does it depend on? To answer this question it is worth looking at the different causative forces operating inside and outside the celestial dimension. Whilst in the supra-lunar world the causal conditions of sufficiency and necessity are always merged so that no hindrance may fault the emanative process, the relation between causes and effects encounter variations in the terrestrial realm. It is exactly because of such variations that, in this world, the only way one can speak of an efficient cause is to refer to it only as the proximate cause of a specific effect. In the realm of generation and corruption, the conditions of sufficiency and necessity are not always joined, given the presence of materiality whose receptive capacity 'interferes' with the ways in which elements combine to give way to substantial compounds. In this realm the same cause might have a variety of effects on different receptive things. It is well known that Avicenna speaks of determinism with regards to the celestial intellects which act in an emanatory way through their nature, but he also acknowledges that, in order to speak of efficient causality in case of non-voluntary sub-lunar agents, any cause must not simply be a cause for a proximate effect but must also have an essence or a nature congenial for its 'recipient'. The latter, in turn, must be not simply predisposed for the reception of the act (effect) coming from its cause, but must coexist with it too.[94] For Avicenna, then, it makes sense to speak of naturalism in relation to the objects of this world, because the relationship of complementarity occurring between the causes and effects becomes a necessary precondition for their existence.[95] Avicenna, however, admits that in the same sub-lunar world there are also voluntary beings, so that it is sensible to speak of voluntarism in the case of humans, that is beings endowed with reason and imagination. In particular, he identifies in voluntary agents the presence of a will with two variants: (i) *irāda*

mumīla, a form of will which simply inclines the soul towards some action and that is not sufficient for producing its effect, and (ii) *irāda jāzima*, a kind of will which works as 'the resolution that necessitates the action of the organs', which is considered sufficient in necessitating its effect. It is argued that if the decisive will conjoins with power, then the latter becomes the principle of necessitating action (*mawjūb li'l-taḥrīk al-'aḍā'*), namely, the principle which is able to produce actions necessarily. However, power in itself, Avicenna specifies, does not necessitate the act, despite being a necessary condition for the occurrence of the effect. This means that each effect is actualized only through the decisive will. Power of action is, therefore, before the will and it is power over the act and its opposite.[96]

How is it possible to harmonize human voluntarism and worldly naturalism with divine determination without accepting the Islamic 'mainstream' notion of divine predestination and its 'creationist' dictates? It is possible that Avicenna was aware of the difficulty of reconciling these notions and consequently opted to adopt a purely predestinarian outlook when approaching the topic of *qaḍā' wa'l-qadar* in more direct discourses, as in the case of the treatises *Risālat fī'l- qaḍā'* and *Risālat fi sirr al-qadar* which are explicitly composed to tackle these issues. However, when his metaphysical system in taken in general it seems to be permeated with a more clearly deterministic flavour, particularly evident when Avicenna discusses the nature of matter and form.

In his *Risālat fī'l-qaḍā'*, Avicenna mentions the presence of 'some wills and diverse actions' necessitated by the order of created causes arranged by the Creator of the creatures (*khāliq al-khalīq*) and the Author of the primary organization (*Ṣaḥib al-tadbīr al-awwal*). Such an organization shows that the Being who has the capacity to create and dispose things does it in a way for which 'the first subordinates the second and what precedes is followed by what is subsequent'.[97] Here divine determinism seems to operate through proximate causes and appears to be cloaked in a predestinarian veneer which means that the divine *qaḍā'* encompasses voluntary causality and makes willing creatures operate as causes and effects in accordance to the divine disposition. Avicenna does not specify whether these mentioned volitions refer to human wills or the wills of the celestial spheres, it may be argued that, on this occasion, as also Catarina Belo observes, Avicenna wants to refer to both. The necessary nature of the celestial wills, namely the fact that the celestial wills operate necessarily in accordance to the divine order, is evident when one observes their compliance with the dictates of the emanative scheme, which is unaffected by the variations occurring in the sub-lunar world. Conversely, the necessary nature of human volitions, which is subject to the dictates of the material realm, is not as evident. When Avicenna meticulously mentions that the arrangement of causes is well-organized (the above-mentioned 'the first subordinates the second and what precedes is followed by what is subsequent'), he is directly recalling the fact that, in the sub-lunar world, causes can be efficient causes only by being proximate causes which work following God's disposition. Such a stance seems to imply that the divine determinism operating in the celestial realm can extend its authority even in the terrestrial dominion.[98] The idea of unpredictability, which may alter the causal efficiency in the material

world, depending on the relation of reciprocity occurring between forms and their specific material substrata, is here silenced.

Noticeably, Avicenna imbues his speculation with an element typical of classical Ashʿarism when he claims that God's arrangement of things arises from His first decree and that it is possible for mankind to 'decipher' creation in order to discover that everything has been disposed by God in a skilful and ordained manner.[99] However, whilst the Ashʿarites used the motif of divine arrangement in order to stress that only God is the real Agent, Avicenna utilizes this theme to stress once again the Aristotelian principle of causality. He simply explains that when a person reflects on the divine arrangement, creation appears to be regulated by cause-effect logical relations, whose necessity is due to God predisposing them 'one after another'.[100] The emphasis is not laid on the exclusive efficient causality of the Creator but on His nature as a *Causator of causes* who decrees causes and effects to be essentially (and logically) disposed in a successive order, which as previously observed, is not a temporal succession. In his *Risālat fī'l-qaḍā'*, Avicenna's language appears to be conscientiously mild, reflecting his intention of accommodating his philosophical findings within more traditional positions. To this end, Avicenna quotes a predestinarian *ḥadīth* from the collection of Ibn Ḥanbal; in it, God's *ḥukm* is described as something which is 'not concerned with what will be, for He [God] created those for Heaven and is not concerned, and those for the Fire and is not concerned'.[101] Avicenna is clearly referring to the secret of destiny espousing the conventional Islamic view which regarded it to be an unspeakable doctrine. The topic of destiny is not meant to be discussed: 'The basic principle concerning it', Avicenna explains, 'is found in a Tradition of the Prophet (God bless and safeguard him): "Destiny is the secret of God; do not declare the secret of God". In another Tradition, when a man questioned the Prince of the Believers (may God be pleased with him), he replied, "Destiny is a deep sea; do not sail out on it". Being asked again he replied, "It is a stony path; do not walk on it". Being asked once more he said, "It is a hard ascent; do not undertake it".'[102]

In the following analysis it will be shown that Avicenna breaks down the predestinarian character of the *Risālat*, replacing it with a more openly deterministic perspective. This is evident when he indulges in defining the role played by matter in the existence of any compounded thing. By way of adopting the notion of matter as a remote cause which cooperates with the proximate cause (form), Avicenna supersedes *kalāmic* creeds and points out how the disposition of matter and its inner nature are able to determine the modality of existents and their destiny.

Matter's revised passivity in relation to determinism

Avicenna fosters the Aristotelian idea for which matter has a predisposition to receive forms. This principle can be taken as a starting point to assess the role matter plays in the Avicennian system. Particularly, it can be shown that the possibility to identify matter with the Aristotelian substance allows Avicenna to speak of matter as a cause, sharing with the form a certain responsibility in the bringing into being of all things.

Avicenna often stresses that what belongs properly to matter is reception (*qabūl*).[103] This position clarifies that the specific nature of matter is primarily identified with potentiality and receptivity, making matter a receptacle, upon which the final efficacy of form is acted. More specifically, the *Shaykh al-raʾīs* fosters the Aristotelian idea of prime matter being not a provider of existence but rather a receptacle for the receiving of existence. Because it does not separate itself from the form, subsisting as existing in act, matter exists only through the form.[104] It is often stated that, in the Avicennian construct, prime matter is never identified with a substance, whilst form is commonly conceived as having a *status* superior than the one enjoyed by matter.[105] The reason for this lays in the fact that form is posited among the substances subsistent in themselves, whereas matter is recognized among those receiving their substantiality only in potentiality.[106] To explain the meaning of these two 'substantialities', one needs to remember that Avicenna understands substance as what subsists by itself and what is not in a subject (*mawḍūʿ*), and that he distinguishes between the notions of subject and receptacle (*maḥall*). The former is understood as what has become subsistent by itself and becomes a cause through which something, different from it, comes to be. The latter is seen as something in which some other thing dwells, so as to acquire a certain state (*ḥal*) through this dwelling thing.[107] Avicenna explains:

> The substance of *hyle* . . . is nothing but a substance disposed *(mustaʿid)* [to receive] things. The substantiality it has does not make it actual, but only prepares it to become something actual through form . . . The meaning of saying that it is a substance is nothing but to say that it is a 'something' which is not in a subject. The affirmation is that it is 'a something' [and] its peculiarity is that it is prepared [for the reception] of all things. Its form consists in its being prepared, receptive (*qābil*).
>
> (Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 54)[108]

Forms exist only in a receptacle but not in a subject – hence the primary substantiality of form as that which is not in a subject – whilst matter has a negative sense of substantiality as 'a something' which is a receptacle. From this it is clear that, despite its 'different' connotation of substancehood, even prime matter can be seen as a potential substance, whilst 'waiting' to receive the form which will actualize it.[109] It must be observed that matter's receptivity is propounded via the Aristotelian concept of the intrinsic potentiality (or predisposition) of matter itself in receiving forms and that matter's form is said to be receptive because form does not inhere in matter.

Many scholars have agreed on the pure character of passivity of matter: Caterina Belo, for instance, following Yaḥya Michot, has stressed that matter is merely potential rather than efficient like the form, implicitly associating matter mainly with non-existence.[110] One major point that needs to be highlighted here is that potentiality differs from mere possibility because potentiality, as Belo admits, has 'a stronger claim on existence than the merely possible'.[111] Avicenna himself defines the possibility of existence as potentiality (*quwwa*),[112] and the fact that

potentiality is traceable only at the very moment of things' existentiation[113] indicates that whilst matter, through its potential nature, seems able to supersede its own non-existential disposition,[114] the same matter by also being merely possible paradoxically seems to be orientated towards non-existence.[115] This means that on the one hand, potentiality is something inherent in matter often conceived as synonymous with matter's inner possibility with an existentiating disposition. On the other hand, it is perceived as something fully realized at the very moment of matter's existence in the substantial compound due to the active power of forms. On the basis of these findings, scholars like Belo, have argued that potentiality does not pertain to prime matter as such, but rather to the informed matter in the compound because 'something that is potential needs something which is in actuality in order to be rendered actual (existent)'.[116] These observations are certainly valid, yet it is important to bear in mind that, according to Avicenna, the form is not sufficient to grant a corporeal body its nature as a substance. In truth, each corporeal compound needs the combination of matter and form in order to achieve its 'completeness':

> Potentiality (*quwwa*) would not belong to the body insomuch as it has actuality . . . the form of the body joins it to something which belongs to it which is different from being a form. Body would be a substance made of something from which it has potentiality and something from which it has actuality. That through which it has actuality is its form, and that through which it is potential is its matter, namely, the hyle (*hayūlā*).
>
> (Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 54)

What is at stake here is the understanding that potentiality is an 'imminent' actuality in its own right; this is evident if one considers that, in Avicenna's opinion, 'nothing is in potentiality from every aspect [and that] part of what has potentiality [necessarily] goes into actuality'.[117] Matter, with its potentiality, has to be seen as intrinsically bound to actuality by way of its inclination to acquire a form. Even more subtly, matter with its potentiality must be perceived as having already left the realm of mere possibility waiting, to cross the threshold of existence. It is clear that it is also through the potentiality (disposition) of its matter that the compound is facilitated to enter actuality; indeed for Avicenna, 'that which "facilitates" (*muyssar*) is a cause, either essentially or accidentally'.[118]

The argument outlined above simply shows that matter can facilitate the compound's 'entering' into existence thus dismissing Belo's belief according to which matter 'is not deemed to contribute to existence'.[119] Avicenna's stance on this point might sometimes appear blurred. On one occasion he declares that 'matter does not avail the thing in actuality, rather it contributes to the potentiality of the thing's existence. In turn the form is that which turns it into actuality'.[120] Obviously the *Shaykh* intends to emphasize the undisputed capacity of form in superseding the confine of potentiality into actuality, but he also seems to confirm that matter contributes in making the thing potentially existent through its intrinsic potentiality. Avicenna states this clearly: 'Even though the material form is a cause of matter

in that it actualizes it . . . matter also has an influence in its existence, namely in rendering it specific and concrete.'[121]

One might object that prime matter is simply an abstraction, and that for this reason it would not be able to produce any 'effect', such as the entering into existence, separately from the form. The independence of the *hyle* however has already been proved by way of identifying it as a 'different' kind of substance, with respect to the substance of the form, and as a receptacle for forms. Moreover, as an abstraction, prime matter has a metaphysical value like the one conferred upon the notion of non-existence. The non-existent, although never actualized, still preserves its metaphysical significance as an object of knowledge, and so does prime matter which, although never existing per se, as a 'something' is still present in the mind, similar to the Platonic ideas. These, even though never actualized in the natural realm, are conventionally regarded as objects of knowledge, and as objects of thought and discussion, are in some way 'existent'.[122]

The potentiality of matter and its nature as both a substrate and a receptacle show that matter can be seen as contributing to bringing the compound into existence. This stance is linked to the notion of natural divine determinism discussed above: if matter facilitates the existence of the compound, then in Aristotelian terms, the nature of the material substance can be regarded as being responsible for determining what the material compound is in actuality, independently from any direct divine intervention. Clearly, for the Islamic philosopher, God still needs to be linked to the fulfilment of His decree, even though not through a direct involvement. Avicenna provides a resolution to this issue by saying that because matter is existent and in actuality through the form which, in turn, becomes subsistent only by virtue of that cause which bestows matter upon it,[123] the importance of form as the absolute cause of the substance of matter is de facto reduced. Avicenna postulates the existence of the Necessary Existent acting as the extrinsic cause for both matter and form, which makes them subsist with and through each other. Matter and form cannot be the simultaneous effects – 'equal in existence' (*mutakāfā' al-wujūd*) – of an external cause. He also suggests that matter cannot be conceived as the cause of the particular property which each form acquires by virtue of an external cause or as the proximate cause of the form (being rather the opposite). This does not mean that Avicenna denies that both form and matter are caused by an external third cause. He simply states that the external cause causes form directly whilst matter is caused indirectly through the mediation of form. This explains why form and matter are not 'equal in existence' and why the former is said to be the proximate cause of the latter.[124] Even if Avicenna admits that it is God who ultimately bestows existence, he imperturbably continues to discuss the interdependence of matter and form stating that 'matter does not contribute in the existence of each form except (*illā*) for the fact that it is indispensably needed for form to exist therein',[125] this being the specific characteristic of the receptive cause (*al-'illa al-qābiliyya*).[126] This passage implicitly acknowledges that matter exercises an unusual 'causative' role, not on the form as such, but on disposing the substantial existence of the whole compound.[127] Furthermore it is worth bearing in mind that when Avicenna speaks of the third element, external to form

and matter, which acts as an ontological link between the two, he is referring to a relation that is necessary. Avicenna says that this connection is due to the complementarity of matter's receptivity and form's activity, what Averroes considers a causal efficacy.[128] As Barry Kogan explains, the Avicennian principle of causal necessity which acknowledges that a cause necessitates its effect and that the latter cannot exist without its cause, characterizes these relations with reciprocity.[129] The predestinarian tone observed in the *Risālat al-qaḍā'*, which suggested that the necessary relation between cause and effect is dependent upon God's arranging them 'one after the other', is shunned in his discussions of the relation of matter and form. Avicenna focuses his attention on the fact that their combination depends on their reciprocal compatibility because this, self-evidently, suggests that it is the dispositions of matter and form's nature to influence the coming into existence of the material compound.[130] Whilst for Aristotle the natures of matter and form are considered sufficient to determine their existence, for Avicenna the deterministic power of their natures is limited to their reciprocal capacity to shape the substantial compound, which is still depending on the bestowal of *wujūd* from God. Avicenna is clearly attempting on the one hand, to safeguard the Aristotelian notion of natural determinism, which acknowledges the reciprocal responsibility of matter and form, for their existence; but he is on the other hand, simultaneously superseding the Aristotelian resolution by way of assigning the existence of the material compound ultimately to God. Finally, by way of addressing the monopoly of causation exclusively to the Final Cause, Avicenna draws his metaphysics closer to the *kalāmic* position.

These considerations show that, just as the Necessary Existent is intended as the primary efficient cause and form as the proximate cause operating on a specific matter, so matter is thinkable as a receptive cause, and more precisely, as the remote cause inherent in the substance and co-responsible with form for its constitution.[131] It is obvious that both the supposed degree of passivity inherent in matter and matter's role as a mere recipient has to be logically and metaphysically reconsidered. The often-discussed 'formal supremacy' – which allegedly characterizes the Avicennian construct and which regards form as the cause of the compound – is toned dows once it is realized that the form acts simply as the *medium* (*mutawassiṭ*)[132] in the causal relation between the efficient causal action of the Agent Intellect and the potentiality of matter.[133] Facing the task of having to harmonize Aristotelian and *kalāmic* components within the Plotinian plan of emanation, Avicenna employs the notion of the Agent Intellect in order to establish a link between the causal activity of God, His determinism in the celestial world, and the causality of matter and form in the terrestrial realm. It is worth remembering that Avicenna acknowledges that the 'causal' power of form is linked to the substantial nature of the form: the active substantiality of the form contributes to the formation of the material compound by way of that 'cause' which joins it to matter. In addition, form's causality is 'supervised' by the Agent Intellect's *informing* activity; it is the *Dator Formarum* which links matter to a specific form and which guarantees the passage from the stage of potentiality to that of actuality. In fact it is the Giver of Forms or *wāhib al-ṣuwar* that, by complying to the dictates

of the divinely established world's order, 'determines' the acquisition of a form by a specific (sub-lunar) matter, thus cutting off any 'independent' efficient causal initiative on behalf of the form. The form is not assigned to a generic matter, but to a specific and suitable one so that when the Agent Intellect produces a corporeal constitution it also emanates in it the correspondent form (or soul), positioning a generic matter (or body) in its species, for instance, by rendering a generic matter a human matter. The attribution of *that* form to *that* matter is ultimately the result of the divine power which is delegated, through emanation, to the effective causality of the secondary causes. Undoubtedly, the material substratum becomes a *dispositive cause* spurring the separate causes, i.e. celestial intellects, souls and spheres to produce forms.

Avicenna mentions that matter is, in itself, disposed to receive different measures (*al-maqādīr mukhtalifa*), because it is essentially receptive of all forms. Undeniably, however, matter's disposition to receive all forms is regulated by the *Dator Formarum*, who informs it with quantity and size exactly because matter has in itself a 'something by which it deserves to be informed by the [Giver] of forms with that size and quantity'.[134] With such a remark Avicenna emphasizes, once again, the reciprocal disposition of form and matter. From one perspective, the form has an initial inclination towards matter and the sensible world; from the other perspective, matter is 'prepared' by the celestial spheres, and the Agent Intellect, to receive its own form, this being due to the fact that, as Francesca Lucchetta explains, 'la disposizione dei corpi esige che l'esistenza delle loro anime straripi dalle Cause Separate (the disposition of bodies requires that the existence of their souls overflows from the separate causes)'.[135] Consequently and paradoxically, the nature of prime matter as a *receptacle* of forms becomes the instrument allowing divine predestination to unravel, because it is God who determines the essence of matter and form indirectly through the Agent Intellect's action whilst being Himself accountable for their ultimate existence.[136] Since the Active Intellect is responsible for all the forms that are acquired by matter, emanating them not by choice but 'as an eternal, constant and necessary expression of its being',[137] the *Dator Formarum* exercises its efficient causality using the form as the proximate cause operating over matter as its direct effect. Nonetheless, in the actualization of the substantial compound, matter's role is not simply that of a pure effect. This is because through its given nature (the 'something' mentioned earlier which is responsive to the receptivity of forms) and as the recipient of both causalities (the efficient causality of the Agent Intellect and the proximate causality of the form), matter becomes the 'distant' cause which contributes to the coming into existence of the compound.

All of the above findings are significant in relation to the issue of free will and determination: Avicenna inserts these elements within his emanative scheme focusing on the 'in-forming' activity of the Agent Intellect, whose nature and action are seen as the result of all preceding intellects which are, in turn, necessarily determined in their essences and deeds following God's Self-emanation, which is complying to divine 'willingness' for goodness/actualization. Every activity in the emanative scheme is necessarily determined and this determination, as

previously observed, extends in the world of generation and corruption. Avicenna, by way of emphasizing both the necessary relation between causes and effects and the *Dator Formarum*'s responsibility for the relation occurring between a given cause (form) and its related effect (matter), implicitly acknowledges that secondary causality is an efficient causality. He implies that causality is exercised deterministically through i) the intellects, ii) the Agent Intellect and iii) through matter and form and their reciprocal causality *via* their nature which obeys God's 'willed' emanative schema.

Potentiality and privation between determinism and predestination

Avicenna believes that both matter and essences are orientated towards a kind of 'deficiency'. Essences, as possible beings, which are defined in themselves neither by existence nor non-existence in an absolute sense, are similar to the Platonic 'ideas' which, even as non-existent per se in the material world, are still regarded as 'things' thanks to their capacity to obtain existence as a supervening accident. Similarly, despite its possible nature, prime matter is present in the mind and this allows it to be a 'something'. In particular, Avicenna explains matter's nature in terms of 'privation' (*'adam*) and, specifically, in terms of the privation of the cause which causes matter's coming into existence.

In intellectual history, the topic of privation appears often in connection with many classical theistic discussions on the two concepts of good and evil. Plotinus is probably the first to speak of evil as a privation, specifically the lack of perfection due to the resistance of matter to its ideal-form,[138] followed on this position by the *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*.[139] Thomas Aquinas considers evil as the absence or privation of a property which normally should be present in a thing.[140] Similarly, Aristotle argues that an evil and a deficient aspect, such as blindness, are to be conceived as the privation of something generally present, for example, in the case of blindness sight is the privation. Aristotle also claims that privation can only exist in a substance and that it does not deserve to be identified with 'something' substantial in itself. In accordance with their occasionalistic theory, the majority of the *mutakallimūn* would regard sight as an accident, whilst blindness would be nothing more than the absence of the accident of sight. In terms similar to Aristotle's then, the *mutakallimūn* might have conceived an evil occurrence, such as blindness, as a form of privation. In contrast to the Stagirite's view, however, for the speculative theologians, blindness would be 'something' in actuality, because accidents and their 'privation' are always existent.[141] The deficiency of blindness is also adopted as an example by Avicenna, who describes it as an essential evil: blindness can be such only with regards to the eye; and insomuch as it is related to the eye, it can be nothing but pure evil.[142] Besides essential evil, Avicenna speaks also of accidental evil and provides the example of heat which becomes evil only when a person is negatively affected by it, having nonetheless other aspects to itself for which it would not be an evil.[143] Essential evil is defined as privation and explicitly 'privation of that to which the nature of the thing necessarily leads in

terms of the perfections that belong permanently to its species and nature'.[144] On the contrary, accidental evil is perceived as the non-existent 'or that which keeps perfection away from that which deserves it'.[145]

Interestingly, Avicenna's analysis on privation supersedes that of his predecessors' by way of linking the notion of privation to that of possibility. In his estimation there is no good except in act, and evil means that perfection is not realized. This implies that if something is in the status of mere possibility, it can be classified as evil and conversely, only what is in actuality can be classifiable as good.[146] Unsurprisingly, this principle affects matter: when considered as a hyle, that is removed from any form and closer to pure possibility rather than potentiality, matter becomes 'the abode of non-existence (*muqarr al-ʿadam*)',[147] and can therefore be seen as a privation and as a principle of evil.

The *Shaykh al-raʾīs* must have faced the task of reconciling his highly philosophical understanding of good and evil with the Ashʿarite *kalāmic* stance for which God is the Creator of everything, including evil acts. Avicenna seems focused on merging the Ashʿarite notion of God as the ultimate Predeterminer of everything, including evil, within the framework of Aristotelian natural determinism which looks at the nature of things as being in themselves good or evil. This goal is achieved through an innovative view on privation that, almost paradoxically, becomes the postulate for matter's potentiality. What Avicenna does is to put forward the idea that without privation there would be neither change nor process of perfection, but only absolute stagnation and non-changeability so that each substantial compound would remain immutably invested with the same form.[148] This would be the case because 'privation is not absolute, rather it is privation in relation to existence, for it is the privation of something with inclination and preparation (*tahayuʾ wa'l-istiʿdād*) in a specific matter.'[149] In brief, privation simply represents the lack of an alternative form which matter, in a specific actualized substance and in conjunction with a specific form in actuality, does not currently have but has the potentiality to receive. By associating matter with evil, by virtue of their common imperfect/possible nature, and by making matter the element responsible for and susceptible to changes, Avicenna aims to depict evil as something inclined to transformation. Interestingly, it is matter's potentiality-to-act which becomes a substratum which enables the transformation of negative connotation of privation into a positive one. Avicenna's view endeavours to accommodate and, simultaneously, challenge both the notion of evil of Aristotelian determinism, for which evil is inherent in the natures of things, and of Ashʿarite predestinarianism, for which evil depends on God's prohibition. To explain the nature of the above challenge it is imperative to assess to what extent matter can actually be held responsible for the changes occurring in the substantial compound.

Avicenna discusses power in terms of potentiality (*quwwa*) and regards it as the principle of change which can be either active (*quwwa fāʿiliyya*) or passive (*quwwa infiʿāliyya*). The acknowledgement of a passive potentiality is significant because it is by virtue of the latent potentiality in receiving different forms, proper of matter, that a specific form is said to be joined to the *hayūlā* thus generating the material compound:

> In prime matter there is potentiality for everything, but by the intermediary of something to the exclusion of something [else]. Something may have a passive potentiality with regard to [receiving] contraries as, for example, wax has the potentiality to become hot or cold.
>
> (Avicenna, *al-Najāt*, quoted in Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, p. 60)

Avicenna's identification of matter's potentiality as a passive *quwwa* does not deprive it of its quality as a power. Passive potentiality is still a *quwwa*. This means that matter can be still identified with the Aristotelian principle of changes for the compound.[150] In order to support the hypothesis claiming that matter, along with form, can be held co-responsible for changes, one can observe another claim stressed by Avicenna worth quoting in full. Avicenna states that:

> One [body] cannot be the cause of another body by means of the substratum or by means of the form, because the substratum is the cause for the receptivity of the form. If the substratum of a body were the cause producing another body, such that a body both received and made something due to its own substratum, then the nature of the substratum would contain two powers: the power to be receptive and the power to make something. Accordingly, the power to make something would be one thing and the power to be receptive would be something else. The substratum's power of receptivity is due to itself to the extent that is a substratum. Consequently, the power to make something would be not in the substratum by virtue of its own nature, but would subsist as a form *(ṣūra)* in the substratum. With respect to the substratum-*qua*-substratum, no actuality can result from a body due to its substratum, except with respect to the fact that the substratum has a form.
>
> (Avicenna, *Dānish Nāma-i*, pp. 153–4)[151]

In this passage Avicenna specifies that a body cannot be the cause of another body either by virtue of the substratum (matter) only or by virtue of the form only.[152] The reason for this is said to depend on the substratum which is the *cause* for the receptivity of the form. It follows that it is the inner disposition of matter as a receptacle that, although classifiable as passive potentiality, still employs its power in 'accepting' the active power of forms. Without such a passive power the potentiality of the form would find no substratum to act upon thus annihilating its own functionality. This concept is reaffirmed in the same passage: the substratum's power of receptivity is 'due to itself' by its being a substratum, that is a receptacle for forms.

Belo has argued that matter owes the potentiality to become all things not to itself but to the form. She believes that the presence of form, in a particular substance, may prevent another form being conjoined with matter. Belo sees the succession of forms, responsible for the changeability of the compound, as being determined by forms rather than matter, a confirmation of Belo's opinion that matter only acts through forms. One can agree with Belo's claim that the changeability of the body and its capacity to become something else is due to the active

power of the form, as the extract highlights: 'the power to make something would be not in the substratum by virtue of its own nature, but would subsist as a form in the substratum'; but it is fundamental to acknowledge that such an activity would definitely not occur without the proven substratum-*qua*-substratum's receptivity. To conclude, it is evident that matter's responsibility for change allows Avicenna to take an alternative stance on the role played by God in the determinations of things looking at the nature of evil. Particularly, evil, originating from the lack of perfection and action, is explained in positive terms and, particularly an accidental result of the emanative goodness. This will be discussed in detail below.

Matter and evil

The following section highlights to what extent the revised role played by matter provides the basis to grasp the Avicennian understanding of evil. It has been observed that the identification of matter as a close analogue to the 'possible in itself', together with matter's internal disposition to accept changes, provides Avicenna with a good explanation of the existence of evil in the world. In fact, as a non-existent factor in itself, matter and its ability to impinge upon the form's formation makes evil latent. It will be analysed how, even more specifically, matter, as corporeal matter, is also potentially able to affect the quality of existing forms diminishing their perfection.

Alfred Ivry has observed that matter as '*privatio perfectionis*' faces simultaneously both its own defeat through the 'victory' of an actualized form, as matter is never totally divorced from the existence of a particular form, and its own success, given that a common matter is the substratum for a given form and its potential contraries.[153] Ivry claims that besides being 'frozen' in a certain way through the Necessary Existent's bestowal of existence and the activity of the Agent Intellect *in-forming* it, matter still retains its ability to procure changes. He concludes that matter's capacity renders 'the victory of actuality . . . limited to existing actual states of being', representing 'the amorphous world of potential existents and future possible events . . . not included therein'.[154] It is clear that matter with its complex identity as substance obtained through its legacy with form constitutes (i) a single aspect of that ever-present particular set of possible beings currently exhibited by an eternal nature, and (ii) an actualized reality emanated from the Necessary Existent which is 'concealed' in the instant of its actuality: a material *signata quantitate determinata*.[155] It is with reference to the first case that evil can be associated with matter. The potential evil contained in matter denounces the impossibility of its direct emanation from the Necessary Existent whose nature is absolute goodness. Clearly, matter is still recognized as an emanated element but, as the last element in the Neoplatonic emanation, it is set farthest in the scale of progressive degradation from the absolute goodness and perfection of God, thus being associated with privation, deficiency and evil.

It has already been mentioned that Avicenna considers God to have a will which is deprived of intentional purposes. Therefore, evil too must be 'willed' by God without any precise intentionality:

> God wills (*yurīdu*) things and wants evil (*sharr*) too, in an accidental way (*ʿalā al-wajh alladhī bi'l-ʿaraḍ*)' . . . The Good (*al-khayr*) is decreed (*muqtaḍā*) essentially (*bi'l-dhāt*) whilst evil is decreed accidentally (*bi'l-ʿaraḍ*), and everything is according to determination (*bi'l-qadar*).
>
> (Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 345)

The emanation of evil is 'incidental' rather than 'intentional',[156] and it is through the identification of matter and evil, with their incidental natures, that God's perfection is spared from being undermined. Since evil is still a product of divine creation which occurs incidentally, God is safeguarded both from the allegation of directly willing evil, an accusation which is inconsistent with God's nature as ultimate goodness, and from the charge, coming from theologians like al-Ghazālī, that God is not totally in control of His activity. Implicitly, Avicenna also achieves the result of transforming the philosophical idea of evil into something potentially good. In fact as a product of emanation God's production of evil, 'carried' within matter, can be explained as an 'ancillary' result of the deity's emanative goodness.[157] Should God refrain entirely from emanating the world, thus preventing evil to occur, the potential goodness of the rest of creation would be annihilated. Evil is therefore a 'conscious' risk whose non-existence would compromise the majority of goodness in the world.[158] In addition, Avicenna understands that in nature there is a distinction between the universal and the individual good, which explains why any particular evil is nothing but a peculiar necessary good, once this evil is set against the general divine 'willed' emanation of the world.[159]

The Ashʿarite viewed divine *qaḍā'* as encompassing both good and evil, predetermining salvation and damnation, as well as recompense and punishment. This outlook is perfectly respected within Avicenna's construct, in which God wills good as well as evil. Nonetheless, in the passage seen above, one cannot help but notice that Avicenna uses the word determination (*qadar*), rather than the term *qaḍā'*, in order to stress that the 'accidental' evil, although decreed by God, is rooted within the nature of possible things, specifically, in the nature of the non-permanent things which are linked with materiality. This is because evil is connected to the efficiency of secondary causes. The philosopher explains that the good causes are a sufficient condition for the accidental causes of evil, so that if the existence of the latter is denied, the existence of the former is denied too: 'in this there would be the greatest fault (*āʿẓam khilal*) in the universal order of the good (*niẓām al-khayr al-kullī*).[160]

Attempting to answer the question why evil is not prevented from occurring, Avicenna explains that without evil things would be different from what they actually are.[161] Active and passive powers, as well as celestial and terrestrial causes, have all been organized to attain to the actual universal order. This means that all existents cannot be what they are without evil, including forms of bad belief or impiety. Evil, in fact, is encompassed within the divine arrangement of creation. In the *Ilāhiyyāt*, Avicenna echoes what he mentions in the *Risālat fi'l-qaḍā'*, and quotes another version of the *ḥadīth* previously discussed, in order to highlight that God pays no attention to the consequences that occur by necessity. This time,

however, the focus of his discussion lies on the deterministic aspect of the discourse, Avicenna stressing that evil is embedded in the nature of things.[162]

The *Shaykh al-raʾīs* ventures to explain the insurgence of evil in terms of the phenomenon called the disobedience of matter (*ʿiṣyān al-mādda*), which is the object of the following section. It will be proven that such a phenomen, which refers to the non-compliance of matter to the dictates of the individual purposive nature of existents, makes evil still something encompassed within the divine decree. Matter's capacity to 'disobey' the particularized goals aimed at in the nature of things can be taken as another point to investigate the responsibility which matter has in the domain of determinism.

Matter's 'disobedience' and its compliance to the divine decree[163]

So far, matter has been identified as (i) a force cooperating with the form for the actualization of any substantial compound (via its potentiality), and (ii) a force concurrent, through its mere possibility, to the Necessary Existent, who with His bestowal of existence, renders possible beings actual existents.

In her study on the Avicennian concept of chance, Belo emphasizes how matter is not explicitly granted an active role independently from the form. Belo believes matter moves towards a certain form by natural powers according to God's will. This motion, which is always caused by a natural purpose, may sometimes fail to attain its end thus leading to an evil that was not intended. Specifically, Belo explains that, even if Avicenna thinks that nothing in nature is in vain, he also admits that sometimes nature is unable to move matter towards its end. The blame, however, is not put on nature, but exclusively on matter, which is unable to 'measure up with its task'.[164] Furthermore, this kind of failure is attributed to the so-called 'disobedience of the matter', so that when matter is 'obedient' nature's acts are successful in reaching their ends. Although expressions like 'disobedience' would themselves suggest that matter is not mere passivity, Belo clarifies that 'the emphasis is on the shortcomings of matter rather than those of nature *qua* efficient cause.'[165] She further explains that the expression 'disobedience of matter' should be taken metaphorically because, in her opinion, Avicenna has an overall negative conception of matter. Given that form reigns supreme, Belo claims, matter may 'be recalcitrant but its rejection or incapability to supporting form boils down to a form it possesses and ultimately to higher principles. The disobedience itself must come from above'.[166] One can only but partially agree with the above statements: first, the mentioned shortcomings of matter, even if accidentally, imply that matter has the capacity of tackling the 'providentially decreed' course of nature; second, it has been proven that it is the nature of matter that, even as a divinely bestowed nature and as the material element of the compound, endorses in a specific relation with forms according to its level of receptivity and compatibility with a given form. Avicenna's view of matter's disobedience it is not purely metaphorical, and this can be demonstrated by looking at Avicenna's attempt to explain this phenomenon with references to Qur'ānic exegesis.

Plotinus was probably the first philosopher who spoke of the resistance of matter to its ideal-form and employed this concept to explain the nature of evil as privation or lack of perfection.[167] Avicenna extensively borrows from Plotinus but he also draws attention to his personal understanding of the disobedience of matter and presents it as an occurrence which is inscribed in the decree of the Qur'ānic omnipotent God.

Avicenna comments on Qur'ān 41:11: 'He [God] said to it [the smoke-matter (*dukhān*)] and to the earth "Come ye together, willingly or unwillingly". They said: "We do come (together) in willing obedience"'.[168] Avicenna interprets this verse as such:

> [It] refers to what is constant (*taqarrar*) in so that the matter of the [celestial] sphere (*falak*) differs, by its quiddity, from the matter of the elements as its reception (*qubūl*) of the form of the sphere is done willingly (*ṭawʿan*). This is because prime matter (*hayūlā*) desires the form (*mushtāqa ilā al-ṣūra*) and since in it there is no reception for any other form, its reception is orientated towards only one form (*ṣūra wāḥida*).[169]

This statement not only employs an Aristotelian parlance, which stresses the relationship occurring between matter and form, but it also alludes to the Neoplatonic emanative scheme which acknowledges a quidditative difference between the matter of the celestial spheres and the matter of earthly elements.[170]

In his *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*,[171] Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) has interpreted Avicenna's explication of Qur'ān 41:11, and has emphasized that the first goal of this verse is to demonstrate the perfection of divine omnipotence against which there is no resistance because everything is and will always be in accordance to God's eternal decree (*qaḍā'*) as stated in the Qur'ān.[172] Avicenna certainly believes in the truthfulness of the Qur'ānic revelation, as well as the validity of the Aristotelian principle according to which 'in nature nothing occurs in vain', but he also admits that, on a few occasions, the natural powers embedded in the essences of things, which are established by the divine decree, may fail to attain their goals; namely, they might fail to move matter towards specific forms. The occurrence of this 'failure' is said to be due to the disobedience of matter. With regard to Avicenna's expositions on this phenomenon, one meets difficulties in understanding what he actually means. As observed, scholars like Belo have stressed that such disobedience has to be taken metaphorically because, ultimately, it is always the form which acts as a cause for motion and changes, leaving no room for any disobedience. In contrast to Belo's position, Avicenna's exegesis of (Q. 41:11) reveals that matter, with its accidental shortcomings, has, potentially, the power to tackle the purposes embedded by the decree of God in the nature of things. Matter, as the material element of the substantial compound, determines its specific relation with forms according to its level of receptivity and compatibility. This underlines, implicitly, a kind of independence resting on the side of matter. According to Avicenna's observation, in (Q. 41:11):

> The mention of the sky precedes that of the earth and this is due to the fact that the mention of obedience precedes that of the aversion in a way that obedience refers to the matter of the sphere and aversion to the matter of the earth.[173]
>
> (Avicenna, quoted in Michot, 'Le commentaire Avicennien', p. 320)

This statement can be explained if it is read with references to the emanation theory: in the celestial realm there cannot be any form of disobedience because all acts are necessarily determinated. They are what they are because of the permanent and perpetual thinking of the intellects and the movements of their celestial spheres, which do not encounter variations. In the world of generation and corruption, however, the status of affairs is different and the activity of any being is dependent, not simply on the influence of the heavenly bodies, but also on the level of receptivity which any object has derived from its material substrate. This is the reason why, in the sub-lunar realm, it is possible to contemplate the occurrence of disobedience. As al-Rāzī highlighted, the earth naturally inclines towards disobedience and aversion to the divine order since it is the locus of change and a place of darkness due to its imperfect nature.[174]

Later in his interpretation of Qurʾān 41:11, Avicenna also explains that matter is shared amongst all non-celestial elements and that all corporeal forms are non-eternal, having, rather, the characteristics of being generated (*kāʾin*) and being corruptible (*fāsid*).[175] It follows that any corporeal form is generated after an antecedent form is corrupted, which is a view also stressed by the occasionalistic perspective on atoms and accidents found in *kalām*. As long as the preceding form continues to be present (*ḥāṣila*), Avicenna observes, matter becomes receptive of the form which is generated (i.e. the successive form) through a process of coercion and aversion (*biʾl-qahr waʾl-karāha*).[176] When the matter of the celestial sphere is commanded to 'take on' the form of the sphere, this matter obeys instinctively (*min nafsiha*), since there is no obstacle whatsoever. The matter of earthly elements, however, when commanded to receive another form is *not* obedient (*lā yakūn muṭiyʿan*), or rather, it does not obey willingly. In effect, matter's reception and preparation to obey the divine command occurs with aversion, because the preceding form acts as an obstacle for the arrival (*ḥuṣūl*) of the successive form: 'Since at a specific moment, in that matter, there is no other form, the preceding form being an obstacle (*ʿāʾiq*) for the successive form, the reception of the form by the matter of the [celestial] sphere is done willingly'.[177]

Avicenna suggests that such an aversion is present in earthly matter as long as matter is preoccupied with its preparation for the reception of the divine command. Once the successive form is ready and the preceding one has disappeared, then, at that time in the substance of matter, there is no longer any obstacle to the 'new' form, and, at this stage, matter's reception occurs naturally and willingly. Avicenna concludes his exegesis with reference to the verse 'He assigned to each heaven its duty and command' (Q. 41:12) and claims that these divine words are an allusion to the separate intelligences which are the movers (*muḥarrikāt*) of the heavens by way of desire and love (*ʿala sabīl al-taʿshīq*).[178]

After such preliminary comments, Avicenna deepens his explanations and tackles the argument of matter's disobedience by reminding his readership that even the disobedient material substrate of the earth eventually complies with God's commandment and that this occurs following a change in the disposition of the substance of matter. It is significant, however, that, despite the final observance to the divine dictates, matter's initial delay to obey the divine commandment is well emphasized and scrupulously structured by Avicenna. He speaks of the aversion present in earthly matter when the latter is concerned with its preparation of its reception of the divine commandment. But what is intended here by 'preparation' and what kind of 'divine commandment' is he referring to?

The *Shaykh* had previously stated that in its substantiality 'matter has been created receptive of all the forms';[179] notwithstanding this position, he 'justifies' matter's disobedience by taking into account the fact that the combination of matter and a new form occurs only when the former is rightly prepared to receive the latter. This means that when matter, which at this stage acts as a proximate/informed matter (*mādda*) because it has already acquired lower level forms like the elemental forms of earth, water, air and fire, is not suitable to acquire a higher form, either because it is too moist or too dry, etc. in which case the Agent Intellect does not emanate any inadequate form. Before the emanation of another form, in fact, matter has to be adequately prepared by the *wāhib al-ṣuwar* and only once it has reached a stage of preparedness, can matter's resistance towards the new form be overcome. The Aristotelian necessary relation occurring between matter and form, which for the Stagirite ensures their existence, is here complemented by the presence of the Agent Intellect and its role. The *Dator Formarum*, as the last constituent of the emanative order, ensures that the divine commandment, as the divine disposition of things, is ultimately obeyed. In addition, when Avicenna states that matter's aversion occurs only at the moment of its preparedness in receiving the divine command, he refers to the distinction existing between prime and proximate matter. On the one hand prime matter, considered as a substance, is open to the receptivity of any possible form; on the other hand, proximate matter can only welcome and acquire one new form assigned and made suitable for it by the *Dator Formarum*. Furthermore, Avicenna states that matter's reception and its preparation to obey the divine command occurs with aversion, because 'the preceding form acts as an obstacle for the arrival of the successive form'. The presence of one form precludes the possibility of coexistence of two forms in the same matter, so that, with the assignment of a new form, the preceding one has to be annihilated to leave space for what follows it. It is, therefore, the antecedent form that acts as an obstacle for the arrival of the successive one, an outlook shared by the *kalāmic* occasionalistic view. Avicenna, however, shifts his discourse on the topic of matter from a *kalāmic* standpoint to a metaphysical angle when he speaks of matter as a potential substance which shows aversion, probably because it is 'afraid' (preoccupied – *mashghūl*) of experiencing the transition from one form to the other; namely, the transition from the security of one present form to the unpredictability of a successive one. It is not accidental that, at the very beginning of his exegesis, Avicenna had claimed that part of the verse in question 'refers to

what is constant (*taqarrar*)'; certainly he had in mind the difference which exists between celestial matter on the one side, and earthly matter on the other side. More specifically, Avicenna must have been aware that the relation occurring between heavenly matter and the unique celestial form of the spheres is characterized by certainty of obedience and perfection due to a lack of alternatives, since the form of the sphere is one and one only. He must have also been conscious that the relation existing between form and earthly matter is of an irregular nature due to the plurality of forms which prime matter can potentially acquire. The initial aversion of proximate matter is said, however, to be superseded at the moment of the formation of the new form; that is to say, at the very moment matter becomes ready and aware that it has been made suitable to acquire another specific form. Matter, then, is no longer preoccupied with being left without its own proximate guarantor of existence, that is, a new, specific and suitable form.

When Avicenna deals with the other part of the Qur'ānic verse ('they said: "we do come (together) in willing obedience"'),[180] he is compelled to deal with the problem of reconciling (i) the idea that matter is not disposed to obey the divine commandment with (ii) the Qur'ānic view for which God is omnipotent and obeyed by the heavens and the earth. A kind of harmonization between these apparent contrasting positions is achieved because, ultimately, matter obeys the dictates of the Agent Intellect which establishes form's conjunction with matter exactly as ultimately ordered by God's command in the emanative schema. The contrast between the disobedience of matter and the divine order is eventually won by the latter. This shows that the discrepancy existing between 'prime matter', which is naturally disposed to escape non-existence, and the divine commandment, which requires obedience, is in the end resolved because the two coincide within the act of existentiation; existence, to be remembered being ultimately granted only by the Necessary Existent.

Avicenna fashions his Necessary Existent in the cloak of a benevolent Provider and Sustainer of existence which is able to 'tame', with His omnipotence, defiance and disobedience. Matter's obstructionism is ruled out by the divine commandment and its final obedience is obtained with the security of its perpetuation in existence offered by its acquisition of a specific form, in a precise instant, as spurred by the *wāhib al-ṣuwar*. It is to be highlighted that the divine victory over the disposition of matter is not occasioned by a direct divine intervention of God, as it would be expected in the *kalāmic* idea of *qadar*, but it is entrusted to the Agent Intellect and its surveillance over the form-matter's reciprocal matching. Eventually, even the initial disobedience of prime matter must be thought as being necessarily enclosed in the divine plan, with matter ultimately complying with the dispositions coming from God, the ultimate Cause of all existents.

At this point it is sensible to argue that Avicenna's ability to accommodate his metaphysical views within the Qur'ānic frame allows him to remain firmly situated on Aristotelian and Neoplatonic metaphysical grounds. The necessary causal liaison occurring between matter and form on the one side, and matter's initial disobedience and its final compliance to the divine command on the other side, are ultimately linked to the divine emanationistic plan, since emanation is said to

work through delegated causalities, being carried out from intelligence to intelligence down to the Agent Intellect.

The innovative element of the discourse is given by the fact that Avicenna explains the phenomenon of *ʿiṣyān al-mādda* by recurring to his metaphysical stances on matter and matter's place in the emanative scheme; here metaphysics becoming an instrument for Qurʾānic exegesis. The 'foreign' metaphysical idea about the disobedience of matter, inherited by the Greek thought, is recognized as being implicitly accommodated within the divine revelation and ready to be attained by means of a philosophical interpretation. This is also evident when Avicenna refers to the verse: 'He assigned to each heaven its duty and command' (Q. 41:12). With it the philosopher reiterates the idea that divine *qaḍāʾ* decrees the role of the heavens and of the celestial spheres whose movements influence matter's receptivity and disposition on earth, as claimed by the Peripatetic philosophers.

Notes

1 See W.E. Gohlamn, *Avicenna's Biography, The Life of Ibn Sina: A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1974; Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*; A.M. Goichon, 'Ibn Sīnā', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, pp. 941–7, in particular pp. 945–6 where the author lists numerous bibliographical and biographical sources; D.C. Reisman, 'Stealing Avicenna's Books: A Study of the Historical Sources for the Life and Times of Avicenna', in D.C. Reisman and A.H. Al-Rahim (eds), *Before and After Avicenna*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003, pp. 91–126.
2 Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, pp. 23–9. Goichon, looking at Avicenna's autobiography has stated that, although acquainted with Ismāʿīlī tenets, Avicenna refused to adopt them. Goichon, 'Ibn Sīnā', pp. 941–2.
3 Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, pp. 154–8.
4 Ibid., p. 145; M. Elkaisy-Friemuth, *God and Humans in Islamic Thought*, London and New York: Routledge, 2006, p. 26.
5 Ibid.
6 H. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960, p. 125.
7 Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, p. 145.
8 A.L. Ivry, 'Destiny Revisited: Avicenna's Concept of Determinism', in M.E. Marmura (ed.), *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984, p. 162.
9 Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, p. 237; J. Janssens, 'Ibn Sīnā's ideas of ultimate realities', *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 10, 1987, p. 253; P. Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the 'Theology of Aristotle'*, London: Duckworth, 2002.
10 Goodman, *Avicenna*, pp. 15–6; Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, pp. 238–51.
11 A.M. Goichon, 'The Philosopher of Being', in *Avicenna Commemoration Volume*, Calcutta: Iran Society, 1956, p. 108. Robert Wisnovsky has argued that, by Avicenna's time, Neoplatonism had become part of the general Aristotelian tradition. See R. Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*, 2003, p. 15. The majority of scholars agree that the theory of the 10 separate intellects in the emanative schema was elaborated by al-Farābī. On this argument see H.A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna & Averroes on Intellect*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 45–7; D.C. Reisman, 'Al-Farābī and the philosophical curriculum', in P. Adamson and R.C.

Taylor (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, pp. 52–71.

12 Goichon, 'The Philosopher of Being', pp. 121–41; Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 135. Avicenna adopts this point very clearly in his *al-Shifā: al-Ilāhiyyāt*: *The Metaphysics of the Healing. A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, trans. M.E. Marmura, Provo (Utah): Brigham Young University Press, 2005, pp. 127–8. Henceforth, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*. All quotations from *al-Ilāhiyyāt* employ Marmura's translations which have been partially modified, unless otherwise specified.

13 A.H. Armstrong, 'Emanation in Plotinus', *Mind* 46, 1937, pp. 61–2.

14 R.E. Witt, 'Plotinus and Posidonius', *The Classical Quarterly* 24, 1930, pp. 198–207.

15 See H. Dörrie, 'Emanation. Ein unphilosophisches wort im spätantiken denken', in H. Dörrie, *Platonica Minora*, Fink: Munich, 1976, pp. 70–88, quoted in De Smet, *La Quiétude de l'Intellect*, Leuven: Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 1995, p. 104, note 11.

16 Goichon, 'The Philosopher of Being', p. 108.

17 F. Raḥmān, 'Ibn Sina', in M.M. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy with Short Accounts of Other Disciplines and the Modern Renaissance in Muslim Lands*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963–66, pp. 481–2.

18 Avicenna's elaboration of this theory is significant also if one takes into account the Ismā'īlī intellectual *milieu* which was flourishing around him. In contrast to his father and brother, Avicenna resisted conversion to the Ismā'īlī tenets. Ismā'īlīsm saw philosophers like Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī (d. 996/1021) rejecting the validity of both the classical ontological and cosmological proofs which aimed at establishing the existence of God. By denouncing the incapacity of the human soul to grasp the divine nature, a capacity which is necessary in the initial stages of the ontological proof, and by stressing the radical discontinuity between the Creator and His creatures, which impedes the ascendance to God from the created universe used in the cosmological proof, al-Kirmān emphasized the Ismā'īlī belief in the divine nature's ineffability, also stressing the futility to prove God's existence. Paradoxically, al-Kirmānī advanced a simplified version of Avicenna's principle of causality for which it is impossible to refer to an infinite number of causes and is therefore necessary to establish the existence of an ultimate cause. However, it has to be emphasized that al-Kirmānī did not employ the Avicennian way of reasoning with the intent to establish the existence of God but, rather, in order to stress the absurdity of attributing God with non-existence (*laysīya*) and non-ipseity (*lā-huwīya*). On these topics see Ḥamīd al-Dīn, al-Kirmānī, *Kitāb Rāḥat al-'Aql*, ed. M. Ghālib, Beyrouth, 1983, p. 130; De Smet, *La Quiétude de l'Intellect*, pp. 38–44.

19 R.M. Frank, '*Kalām* and Philosophy, a Perspective from One Problem', in Paraviz Morewedge (ed.), *Islamic Philosophical Theology*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1979, pp. 73–4.

20 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 27–34.

21 Ibid., pp. 29–34.

22 Frank, '*Kalām* and Philosophy, pp. 73–4.

23 Netton has argued that Avicenna moves away from the Aristotelian idea of God as an 'eternal substance', agreeing instead with Plotinus who believes God to be a *hyperousía*, namely, a being beyond the Aristotelian substance. Netton, *Allāh Transcendent*, p. 159.

24 Aristotle, *Metaphysics Lambda 8*, 1074a15.

25 Al-Farābī, *ārā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, p. 365.

26 Ptolemy's *De Hypothesibus Planetarum*, in *Opera Astronomica Minora*, ed. J.L. Heiberg, Leipzig: n. p., 1907, p. 119.

27 Al-Farābī, *ārā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, pp. 100–4; Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect*, pp. 44–8; Netton, *Allāh Transcendent*, pp. 114–23.

28 De Smet argues that al-Fārābī's system was elaborated with the aim of updating the Aristotelian metaphysical tradition by introducing the newer Neoplatonic emanative trends within it, with the additional benefit of complementing the antique astronomy's principle of movements with an explanation for the existence of supra and sub-lunar realms. See De Smet, *La Quiétude de l'Intellect*, pp. 275–84.
29 M. Fakhry, 'The Subject-Matter of Metaphysics: Aristotle and Ibn Sina', in M.E. Marmura (ed.), *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984, p. 140.
30 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 195.
31 M.E. Marmura, 'The Metaphysics of Efficient Causality in Avicenna (Ibn Sina)', in M.E. Marmura (ed.), *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984, pp. 173–5. On this topic see Yaʿqūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī, *Rasāʿil al- Kindī al-Falsafīya*, ed. Abū Rīda, 2 vols, Cairo: n.p., 1950–53, p. 16.
32 Ibid., p. 16; De Smet, *La Quiétude de l'Intellect*, pp. 129–30.
33 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 195–200.
34 B. Kogan, *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985, p. 28.
35 For these technical terms see Edward W. Lane, *An Arabic English Lexicon*, London: Stanley Lane Poole, 1968–93, vol. 8, no. 4; T. Mayer, 'Ibn Sīnā's "Burhān al-Siddīqīn"', *Journal of Islamic Studies*, Oxford: Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies 12, 2001, p. 19.
36 A.M. Goichon, *Lexique de la Langue Philosophique d'Ibn Sīnā*, p. 134, no. 265.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 On the notion of 'thingness', see J. Jolivet, 'Aux origines de l'ontologie d'Ibn Sīnā', in J. Jolivet et al. (eds), *Études sur Avicenne*, Paris, 1984, pp. 11–28.
40 Avicenna, *al-Najāt*, 1967, p. 325 quoted in Goichon, *Lexique de la Langue Philosophique d'Ibn Sīnā*, p. 134, no. 265.
41 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 22–9.
42 Goichon, *Lexique de la Langue Philosophique d'Ibn Sīnā*, p. 135, no. 265.
43 G. Goichon, *La Distinction de l'Essence et de l'Existence d'apres Ibn Sīnā* (*Avicenne*), Paris: Descler de Brouwer, 1973, p. 33.
44 Ibid. p. 51.
45 Avicenna, *Dānish nāma-i ʿalāʾī: Ilāhiyyāt*, ed. E. Muʿīn, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Anjuman-i āsār-i Millī, 1952, trans. P. Morewedge as *Dānish Nāma-i, The Metaphysica of Avicenna*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, p. 15, henceforth, *The Metaphysica*. The definitional primitiveness of 'being' is also applied by Avicenna to the word 'thing' (*shay'*) which F. Shehadi defines as 'being's extensional synonym'. See F. Shehadi, 'Ibn Sina' in *Metaphysics in Islamic Philosophy*, New York: Caravan Books, 1982, p. 73.
46 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 45; idem, *Dānish nāma-i*, p. 10; Morewedge, *The Metaphysica*, p. 15;
47 Goichon, *La Distinction*, p. 20.
48 Goichon, *Lexique de la Langue Philosophique d'Ibn Sīnā*, p. 90, no. 179. For the majority of the *falāsifa*, matter is generally identified with the term *hayūla* (derived from the Greek idea of *materia prima*) and with the Arabic equivalent *mādda* (usually indicating the *materia secunda*). See L. Gardet, '*Hayūla*', *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn, pp. 338–40; Goichon, *Lexique de la Langue Philosophique*, pp. 413–4.
49 Avicenna, *Dānish Nāma-i*, pp. 8–10; Morewedge, *The Metaphysica*, pp. 15–6; O. Chaine, *Ontologie et théologie chez Avicenne*, Paris: Librairie d'Amerique et d'Orient, 1962, p. 62; Goichon, *La Philosophie d'Avicenne et son Influence en Europe Médievale*, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1944, p. 46.
50 Elements of the emanation scheme are traceable in all the major works of Avicenna. See *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 330–4; *al-Najāt* (1938), p. 277.

51 Avicenna, *al-Najāt* (1938), p. 277; idem, *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*, p. 174. In contrast, al-Fārābī speaks of a twofold contemplation: by thinking of the Principle, the intellect emanates another intellect, and by thinking of itself it emanates a celestial sphere. See al-Fārābī, *ārā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, pp. 100–4.
52 The same concept is expressed by al-Fārābī, ibid.
53 Avicenna conceives of the intellects as pure forms, which are deprived of potentiality or materiality and perpetually *in actu* due to their nature. These concepts are an inheritance from al-Fārābī. Ibid.
54 Elkaisy-Friemuth, *God and Humans*, p. 86.
55 See below, p. 34.
56 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt* p. 126; Marmura, 'The Metaphysics of Efficient Causality', pp. 176–7 and pp. 180–1; idem, 'Ghazali and the Demonstrative Sciences', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 3, 1965, pp. 184–6; idem, 'Avicenna on Causal Priority', in P. Morewedge (ed.), *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, Delmar New York: Caravan Books, 1981, pp. 67–8.
57 S.H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964, pp. 212–3; J. Jannsens, 'Creation and emanation in Ibn Sīnā', *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale* 8, 1997, pp. 455–77.
58 De Smet, *La Quiétude de l'Intellect*, pp. 112–3.
59 On these topics see *Theologia Aristotelis*, V, pp. 66–7/§14, p. 433/§ 40, p. 437; X, p. 147/§ 88, p. 453.
60 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, 4 vols, Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1957, III, p. 473.
61 Ibid., 3 vols, p. 184.
62 Ibid., p. 348.
63 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 203. Avicenna argues for his causal principle also in ibid., pp. 124–30 and pp. 194–235.
64 Avicenna insists on the absolute but timeless creation of the world thus attracting strong criticism from eminent figures like al-Ghazālī. The latter criticizes Avicenna's incoherence in asserting that the world is dependent on God for its existence. If the world is assumed to be eternal, he states, its existence is necessary and does not need God's act. See al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, M. Bouyges (ed.), Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1927, discussions 1–4. For a comparative translation we have referred also to *The Incoherence of the Philosophers. Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, trans. M.E. Marmura, Provo, Utah: Brigham Yung University Press, 1997. References to the *Tahāfut* will follow the pagination of Marmura's edition.
65 Ibid., p. 199.
66 Jannsens, 'Creation and Emanation', pp. 474–6; F. Raḥmān, 'Essence and Existence in Ibn Sīnā: The Myth and Reality', *Hamdard Islamicus* 4, 1981, pp. 4–6.
67 Avicenna, *Sharḥ Kitāb Uṭūlūjiyyā' al-mansūb ilā Arisṭū*, in A. Badawī (ed.), *Arisṭū 'inda al-'Arab*, Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahdah al-Misriyah, 1947, pp. 59–60.
68 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 198–205; A. Straface, *L'Origine del Mondo nel Pensiero Islamico dei Secc X-XI*, Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1996, p. 65.
69 Avicenna considers the celestial bodies and their circular motions to be responsible for the preparation of matter in receiving a specific form in the way this is arranged by the Agent Intellect.
70 In contrast to Avicenna and the majority of Neoplatonic *falāsifa*, Isma'īlī philosophers like al-Sijistānī (d. 361/971) and al-Kirmānī insisted on the uniqueness of the divine act of *ibdā'* as being irreconcilable with emanation. Particularly, according to al-Sijistānī, the divine act of origination, which is identified with the command (*amr*), is perfect and therefore there is no necessity to alter it in any way by adding something to it. On *ibdā'* see al-Sijistānī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, trans. H. Landolt, 'Unveiling of the Hidden', in S.H. Nasr and M. Aminrazavi (eds), *An Anthropology of Philosophy in Persia*, vol. 2, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 83–4. The creation of all beings is

encompassed within the original *ibdāʿ* and God does not need to issue a second command of origination or to trigger a series of emanation since His creation is perfectly complete. Al-Sijistānī, however, like Avicenna, sets creation outside any temporal framework, suggesting that even the *amr* is uncreated. See P.E. Walker, *Early Philosophical Shiism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp. 82–3.

71 Jannsens, 'Creation and Emanation', p. 475.

72 In similar terms al-Ghazālī claims that all actions which involve the knowledge of the 'act of doing' entail a will. See his *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, ed. S. Donya, Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1960, p. 81 and p. 235.

73 Avicenna, *al-Najāt fī al-Ḥikma al-Manṭiqīya wa al-Ṭabīʿiya wa al-Ilāhīya*, Tehran: Muḥyiʾl-Dīn al-Kurdī, 1967, pp. 246–7; idem, *Kitāb al-Hidāya li-ibn Sīnā*, ed. M. 'Abduh, Cairo: Maktabat al-Qāirat al-ḥadīṭa, 1974, p. 269; Marmura, 'Some Aspects of Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars,' *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82, 1962, p. 301.

74 G. Legenhausen, 'Notes Towards an Ashʿarite Theodicy', *Religious Studies* 24, 1988, p. 259.

75 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 56 and p. 108; K. Gyekye, 'Al-Ghazālī on action', in *Ghazālī: La Raison et le Miracle*, Paris: Maisonneuve & Larose, 1987, p. 86.

76 Avicenna, *Risālat fī Sirr al-Qadar*. The translation, partially modified, is by G.F. Hourani, 'Ibn Sīnā's "Essay on the Secret of Destiny"', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29, 1966, p. 31. Italics are ours.

77 Ibid., p. 37.

78 Morewedge, *The Metaphysica*, pp. 66–8.

79 Avicenna, *al-Najāt* (1938), p. 274. With this statement Avicenna is clearly attempting to maintain a vague position on whether the first intellect is the result of an act of voluntary creation or a necessary emanation.

80 Avicenna, *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya fīʾl-maʿād*, trans. F. Lucchetta, *Avicenna, Epistola sulla Vita Futura: Testo Arabo, Traduzione, Introduzione e Note*, Padova: Antenore, 1969, pp. 70–2; Goichon, *La Distinction*, pp. 216–8.

81 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 295–6.

82 Avicenna states: 'There is no hindrance to, nor aversion from the emanation of all from [God].' Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, p. 271; idem, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 402–3.

83 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 132. This statement implies that, besides God, all the intellects in the celestial schema are powerful things and that they are able to act, as it has been mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

84 Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, pp. 271–2 with comments by O. Lizzini, 'La Metafisica del Libro della Guida', Presentazione e Traduzione della terza parte (*bāb*) del *Kitāb al-Hidāya* di Avicenna', *Le Muséon, Revue d'Études Orientales* 108, 1995, p. 380. Henceforth, 'La Metafisica'. See also Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 327 and p. 339.

85 Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, pp. 271–2. On the relation between power and willingness see also Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 133–4.

86 According to Avicenna, the possible in itself does not have, within itself, any element which makes it able to 'prefer' its existence over its non-existence. A possible being is 'allowed' to enter the realm of actual existence only if a factor (*murajjiḥ*), which is distinct from itself, 'selects out' its existence. Whenever this factor (or cause) is present, then the existence of the possible being is made necessary. These concepts are not completely alien to Muʿtazilite *kalām*. Differently from the majority of the Ashʿarites, who denied that beings have the potentiality to be different from what they are, Baṣrian Muʿtazilites acknowledge the possibility for things (all being corporeal) to have a perfection or a state (*ḥāl*) different from their actual one. They stipulated that there must be a determinant or a cause (*mukhaṣṣ* or '*illa*) able to specify their being in a particular state. See 'Abd Allāh al-Jabbār, *al-Majmūʿ al-muḥīṭ biʾl-taklīf*, ed. U.S. Azmi, Cairo: n.p., 1969, p. 41; Frank, '*Kalām* and Philosophy', p. 76.

87 Goichon, *La Distinction*, p. 164.

88 Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, pp. 114–5.
89 Avicenna, *Risālat fī'l-qaḍā'*, in *Lettre au Vizier Abū Sa'ad*, ed. and trans. Y. Michot, Beirut: al-Bouraq, 2000, pp. 103–5.
90 Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, p. 122*.
91 Hourani speaks about his understanding of Avicennian concepts like divine control, knowledge and will and explains that the philosopher's view of destiny should not be called predestination. Hourani, 'Essay on the Secret of Destiny', p. 31, note 56.
92 Khayyāṭ, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār*, p. 44.
93 Avicenna, *Risālat fī'l- qaḍā'*, p. 106.
94 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 201–15.
95 Goodman, *Avicenna*, pp. 152–4.
96 Avicenna seems to criticize the Ash'arite stance for which the created power is only with the act and that it never precedes it. Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 133–6; Marmura, 'The Metaphysics of Efficient Causality in Avicenna (Ibn Sina)', pp. 182–3.
97 Avicenna, *Risālat fī'l-qaḍā'*, pp. 106.
98 Ibid.
99 This motif, also presented by Avicenna in *al-Ilāhiyyāt* (p. 339) where it is joined to the philosopher's explanation of the concept of divine providence, is treated in al-Juwaynī's *al-Shāmil*, pp. 61–2. It is also a well-known Sufi theme present in Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's *Qūt al-Qulūb*, pp. 35–6.
100 Avicenna, *Risālat fi'l-qaḍā'*, pp. 105. It will be successively shown that al-Ghazālī speaks of the natures of things as being disposed by God's custom 'side by side'. Here Avicenna's statement seems to anticipate al-Ghazālī's idea that the necessary relation between cause and effect is exclusively due to God's disposition of things and that the reciprocal relation between causes and effects is determined only by a force external to the natures of beings. This, however, is inconsistent with what Avicenna states in his treatise on the *qadar*. Therein, it is specified that 'every principle of choice is by virtue of an initiating principle (*mubtada' mustā'naf*) and any initiating principle implies a cause (*sabab*) and everything that is a cause to it is caused and what is not joined in this legacy is necessary [in itself] (*ijāb*) and eludes the chain of causality (*miskt al-sababīyya*)'. In this passage, the dependence of all beings on the intrinsic necessary relation between causes and effects is implicit, given that the Necessary Existent by Himself is the only entity not bound to the chain of causality. See Avicenna, *Risālat al-Qadar*, in A.F.M. Mehren (ed.), *Traités Mystiques d'Abou 'Alī al-Ḥoèsain b. Abdallah b. Sīnā*, Leyde: Brill, IV fascicule, 1889–99, p. 13.
101 Avicenna, *Risālat fi'l-qaḍā'*, p. 107. The Tradition is from Ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Musnad*, 6 vols, p. 441. On this *ḥadīth* see L. Gardet, *Dieu et le Destinée de l'Homme*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1967, p. 129; W.C. Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure of God*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988, p. 174.
102 Avicenna, *Risālat fī sirr al-qadar*, the translation is from Hourani's 'Essay on the Secret of Destiny', p. 31. The secrecy of the topic of destiny is also mentioned in Avicenna's *Risālat fi'l-qaḍā'*, p. 105.
103 Avicenna, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, ed. Bīdārfar, Qum: Intisharāt-e Bīdār, 1992, p. 92 and p. 94; translation (slightly modified) is from Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, p. 57.
104 Goichon, *La Distinction*, p. 22.
105 For a classification of causes in Avicenna see J. Jolivet, 'La repartition des causes chez Aristote et Avicenne: le sens d'un déplacement', in J. Jolivet, Z. Kaluza and A. De Libera (eds), *Lectionum Varietates: Hommage à Paul Vignaux* (1904–1987), Paris: Vrin, 1991, pp. 49–65.
106 The relation between form and actuality on the one hand, matter and potentiality on the other hand is clearly expressed by Avicenna in *Risālat fī'l-'ishq*, in A.F.M. Mehren (ed.), *Traitès Mystiques d'Abou 'Alī al-Ḥoèsain b. Abdallah b. Sīnā*, Leyde: Brill, III fascicule, 1889–99, p. 6; trans. E.L. Fackenheim, 'A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sīnā,' *Medieval Studies* 7, 1945, pp. 214–5.

107 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 46–7.
108 A similar view is advanced in Avicenna's *Kitāb al-Ḥudūd*, trans. A.M. Goichon, *Le Livre des Definitions*, Cairo: Publications de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale du Caire, 1963, p. 17 note 6.
109 Avicenna argues that 'the true receptacle is also a substance' (*al-Ilāhiyyāt* p. 47). Ibn Rushd believes that form alone is 'necessary of existence through its own substance'. Despite this, however, in terms similar to Avicenna's, he is ready to speak of sensible existents as made of two 'substances': the actuality of form and the potency of matter. Implicitly, therefore, Ibn Rushd admits the possibility that matter may be a substance and that it might have a potential independent existence from the form, even though, in reality, neither exists without the other. See Kogan, *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation*, p. 189.
110 Avicenna, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, p. 216 quoted in Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, p. 57; J.R. Michot, *La Destinée de l'Homme selon Avicenne: le Retour à Dieu et l'Imagination*, Louvain: Peeters, 1986.
111 Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, p. 57.
112 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 140. Possibility becomes simply receptivity of its own potentiality.
113 Jules Janssens has noted that the potential character of a being is only revealed at the very moment it exists. See his 'Creation and Emanation in Ibn Sīnā', p. 473.
114 Avicenna declares that 'since it is possible for it [the act of realization] to be actualized while it does not yet exist, its possibility of existence i.e., existing as a possible x when the x itself does not yet exist is called a potentiality'. See Morewedge, *The Metaphysica*, pp. 45–6.
115 On the relation between potentiality and possibility see A. Hyman, 'Aristotle, Algazali and Avicenna on Necessity, Potentiality and Possibility', in K.L. Selig and R. Somerville (eds), *Florilegium Columbianum*: *Essays in Honour of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, New York: Italica Press, 1987, pp. 73–88.
116 Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, p. 63.
117 Avicenna, *al-Shifā': al-Samāʿal-Ṭabīʿī*, ed. Jaʿfar al-Yāsīn, Beirut: n.p., 1996, p. 131.
118 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 139.
119 Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, p. 59.
120 Avicenna, *al-Shifā': Al-Samāʿal-Ṭabīʿī*, p. 103 quoted in Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, p. 59.
121 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 329.
122 Ibid., p. 26 and p. 54. Matter is a substance by way of being a receptacle. Even if matter is not as 'substantial' as the form, which does not need to inhere in a subject, as an informed matter, it has nonetheless a metaphysical value. Marmura speaks of matter in terms of a 'universal meaning', that is, a universal matter which is predictable for all matters but not existent outside the mind. It is significant that forms too, despite their 'positive' substancehood, never appear in actuality without being joined to their matters.
123 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 70.
124 Ibid., pp. 64–7 and p. 390 note 1.
125 Ibid., pp. 66–7.
126 Ibid.
127 In fact, actuality is the essence of form, and form exists only in *hyle* but not in the sense that *hyle* is the cause of its existence. The cause for the existence of each form would be an external cause, responsible also for endowing a form with its particular property making a form existing as it does. Ibid., pp. 65–70.
128 Kogan, *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation*, pp. 36–7, pp. 88–9.
129 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 67.
130 Ibid., pp. 205–15.

131 Avicenna, following the Aristotelian distinction between material and formal cause, identifies matter and form with the causes which are responsible for the subsistence of a thing. He refers to the wood and the form of the bed as parts which are accountable for the existence of the bed; the wood is nothing but the potential to constitute the bed (potential-material causality) whilst the form of the bed is that by which the bed is what it is (formal causality).
132 It is significant that forms are causes only by contact (*mulāqāt*) since they do not have any causal power over what is distinct from them.
133 Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna & Averroes on Intellect*, pp. 86–7. The causal action of the Agent Intellect is given by the fact that, for Avicenna, as for the Arabic Plotinus (*Risālat fī'l-'ilm al-Ilāhī* in *Plotinus apud Arabes*, ed A.R. Badawī, Cairo: Dirāsa Islamiyya, 1955, p. 168), anything which in the sub-lunar world passes from potentiality into actuality does so only through a cause which is actual. This cause is identified with the Agent Intellect. See Avicenna, *al-Najāt* (1938), pp. 192–3, trans. F. Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology: An English Translation of Kitāb al-Najāt, Book II, Chapter VI*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952, pp. 68–9.
134 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 62.
135 Avicenna, *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya*, p. 128 note 6.
136 It is important to bear in mind that matter's receptivity is due to the fact that the Necessary Existent sets matter itself amongst the possible things which depend on God for their existence. God bestows existence in matter through the form. See Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 196; Lizzini, 'La Metafisica' p. 370. All beings, ultimately, depend on the Necessary Existent for their existence, and the emphasis which Avicenna puts on the activity of the Agent Intellect makes the *Dator Formarum*, as Netton explains, 'a marker of the way in which that dependence is "diluted."' Netton, *Allāh Transcendent*, p. 169.
137 Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna & Averroes on Intellect*, pp. 76–7.
138 Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. H.A. Armstrong, London: Harvard University Press, 1966, pp. 141–6.
139 The members of the Brethren of Purity speak of evil as the byproduct of creation and as something which comes to be according to a secondary intention. Evil becomes an unwanted effect which is linked to the imperfection of matter. See *Rasā'il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'*, vol. 3, pp. 476–8.
140 G.S. Kane, 'Evil and privation', International Journal for Philosophy of Religion 11, 1980, pp. 43–58.
141 H.R. Wolfson, 'The *kalam* Problem of Nonexistence and Saadia's Second Theory of Creation', *The Jewish Quarterly Review* New Series 36, 1946, pp. 372–4.
142 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 340.
143 Ibid., p. 339.
144 Ibid. Translation is Marmura's.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 Avicenna, *Risālat fī'l-'ishq*, p. 6; English translation, p. 215.
148 Avicenna, *al-Shifā': al-Samā'al-Ṭabī'ī*, p. 91.
149 Ibid., p. 92.
150 Avicenna states: 'If one asserts that the power of the agent is the possibility of its being, one is mistaken [and] until a thing does not have the possibility of being due to its own nature, there cannot be a power in it'. See Morewedge, *The Metaphysica*, p. 46. Avicenna has already explained that the substratum's power of receptivity is due to itself in its being a substratum-*qua*-substratum and he is here implicitly accepting that matter is a power, even if a passive one. Matter, in fact, although never explicitly described as an agent is nonetheless, by way of its inner receptivity, plunged in the realm of powerful things. Even Belo, who initially states that matter does not

contribute towards existence (Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, p. 59), is forced to admit that matter contributes to the compound through a passive power (ibid., p. 62).

151 Morewedge, *The Metaphysica*, pp. 101–2.

152 Avicenna will conclude that the cause of a body cannot be either a body nor a material form, but an immaterial cause (*lā jism sababī*) and a separate intelligence (*mufāriq-i ʿaqli*). The former might refer to the spirit (*rūḥ*), a subtle body in the body which changes the body without mediation, whilst the latter might refer to the Agent Intellect. See Morewedge, *The Metaphysica*, p. 103.

153 Ivry, 'Destiny Revisited', p. 164. From this point of view, matter can be seen as partially 'tamed' by its being bound to specific forms within substances.

154 Ibid., p. 165.

155 Goichon, *La Distinction*, p. 477.

156 Hourani, 'Essay on the Secret of Destiny', pp. 37–9.

157 Jules Janssens defines evil as a 'by-product of the greater good'. See his 'The Problem of Human Freedom in Ibn Sīnā's', in *Actes del Simposio Internacional de Filosofia de l'Edat Mitjana: el Pensament Antropològic Medieval en els àmbits Islàmic, Hebreu i Cristià*, Vic-Girona: P. Llorente & Others, 1993, p. 112.

158 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 341–6.

159 Avicenna states: 'It would not be good that the benefits that [occur] for the most part . . . should be relinquished because of evil objects [form] a minority [of cases]'. See Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 345. The translation is Marmura's.

160 Ibid., p. 343.

161 Ibid., p. 346.

162 Ibid., p. 347.

163 Part of this sub-chapter has been published in our article, 'Avicenna on Matter, Matter's Disobedience and Evil: Reconciling Metaphysical Stances and Qur'ānic Perspectives', *Transcendent Philosophy* 12, 2011, pp. 147–68.

164 Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, p. 47.

165 C. Belo, 'Ibn Sīnā on Chance in the Physics of Aš-Šifā'', in J. McGinnis and D.C. Reisman (eds), *Interpreting Avicenna: Science and Philosophy in Medieval Islam*, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004, pp. 25–41; idem, *Chance and Determinism*, p. 47.

166 Ibid., p. 88

167 See above, pp. 000.

168 References to Qur'ānic verses are from Yusuf 'Alī, 'The Meaning of the Holy Qur'ān', 10th edn, Maryland, USA, 1999. References to Avicenna's interpretation of chapter 41 verses 11 and 12 are from Jean Michot, 'Le Commentaire Avicennien du verset: "Puis Il se Tourna vers le Ciel"', *Mideo* 14, 1980, pp. 317–28, Arabic text pp. 319–21.

169 Ibid.

170 The noblest category of matter is that of spiritual matter which constitutes the celestial spheres. Spiritual matter, which emanates directly from the intellects, is pure and incorruptible and defies any change by being perpetually joined to the same form. See al-Fārābī, *Ārāʾ ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, p. 134; Walzer's translation, pp. 373–5. The other category of matter is 'the absolute prime matter' (*al-hayūla al-ūlā al-muṭlaqa*) which is classified as pure receptivity. This is deprived of any determination and is the substratum for the world of generation and corruption. See al-Fārābī, ibid., p. 112. It is important to remember that for the philosophers, the only entities deprived of matter are the separate intellects and that, according to Avicenna, all intellects are immaterial and incorporeal substances. See al-Fārābī, ibid., pp. 100–4.

171 References are to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr)*, ed. Bulaq, Cairo: n.p., 1890, part VII, p. 343.

172 See for instance Qur'ān, 16: 48–50.

173 Avicenna writes: '*Li-yakūn al-ṭawʿu ʿāiʾd ilā madda al-falak waʾl-karāha ʿāiʾd ilā madda al-arḍ*'. Michot, 'Le Commentaire Avicennien', p. 320.

174 Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, p. 343.

175 Michot, 'Le Commentaire Avicennien', Arabic text, p. 317.
176 Avicenna explains the case of water: when water is heated, it generates heat with aversion. This is the time in which water is commanded (*mā'mūra*) to receive, for example, the form of air. Michot, 'Le Commentaire Avicennien', Arabic text, p. 319.
177 Ibid., p. 320.
178 Ibid.
179 Ibid.
180 Ibid.

2 Avicenna

Part two

Divine and celestial knowledge in relation to determinism

Critics have often accused Avicenna of undermining God's omnipotence with his claims that God knows particulars only in a universal way (*ʿalā naḥwin kulliyyin*),[1] pointing out the implicit theological consequences of this position.[2] This chapter aims to explain the relation which the role of matter, so far explored, entertains both with the idea of God's restricted knowledge of particulars and with the concept of divine determinism. It will be shown that these two notions are both influenced by matter's unpredictable receptivity.

God's knowledge, which is essentially self-knowledge, allows Him to be aware that He is the cause of all entities.[3] More specifically, because God's knowledge is a causative one, when God knows, the existents come into being.[4] The Necessary Existent, however, is also said to know eternally by a conceptual knowledge, so that the object of His knowledge is primarily the universal.[5] Avicenna puts a strong emphasis on the difference occurring between what the intellect, both divine and human, is capable of, namely, grasping intelligible things which are universals, and what faculties such as sensation or imagination, whose functionality is triggered through sense perception, can do, namely, grasping particulars.

The *Shaykh al-raʾīs* believes that universal knowledge is potential and that it only becomes actual when it is instantiated in a particular member of a species which, in turn, becomes 'perceivable' only through sensory observation. Avicenna provides the example of an eclipse: because an eclipse shares the same nature of all other eclipses, one can assume to know a given eclipse in a universal way through the common features, which are all predictable, and that this specific eclipse shares with all other eclipses. These all belong to the species *eclipse*. However, Avicenna specifies, one would not be able to judge at this moment the existence or non-existence of a specific eclipse without sense perception. Only through the latter one would know that a specific eclipse is occurring.[6]

Peter Adamson has highlighted that, for Avicenna, sense perception of particular individuals or of objects within a given species represents a form of awareness (*maʿrifa*) rather than true knowledge (*ʿilm*).[7] Since sensation is not a principle for demonstration, nothing which derives from it can be classified as universal knowledge (*ʿilm bi-kullī*). Therefore, Adamson concludes, God's knowledge, which can be exclusively a universal knowledge given His intellectual nature, does not make

Him *aware* of particulars as particulars, since He lacks both sensation and imagination which are designed to grasp particulars. The Necessary Existent knows each thing in a universal way by knowing all the essential features pertaining to all particulars; namely, the predictable elements that characterize the species and that are shared by all the members of each species. As Adamson explains, 'God is superior to humans in that He has only the best cognitive grasp of particulars, namely knowledge: a grasp that is universal, necessary, unchanging and certain, and hence only incidentally applicable to particulars.'[8]

Clearly, by stressing that God is intellect,[9] Avicenna's intention is to show that God does know particulars only as universals. However, the philosopher also emphasizes that 'not even the weight of an atom in the Heavens and the earth escapes Him'.[10] In order to get a clearer idea of how Avicenna reconciles these two positions one can analyse his own words:

> When [the Necessary Existent] intelligizes (*ʿaqala*) His essence and intelligizes that He is the principle of all existents (*mabdaʿ kulli mawjūd*), He intelligizes the principles of the existents which are from Him, and what is generated from them. There is no thing amongst things which is not, in some way, necessitated by this Cause . . . The collisions of . . . causes leads to the existence of particular things (*al-umūr al-jazi'yya*). The First knows the causes and their corresponding [effects] so He necessarily knows what they give rise to . . . for it is impossible that He knows those [the causes] but not these [the effects]. He would thus intellectually apprehend the particular things insomuch as they are universals (*min ḥaythu hiya kulliyya*), and I mean, insomuch as they have attributes (*ṣifāt*).
>
> (Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 288)

What Avicenna is trying to say is that God intelligizes what proceeds from Him by knowing the causes of all existents and their corresponding effects. More precisely, because knowledge (*ʿilm*) is equivalent to grasping the essential nature of a thing by way of knowing its immediate causes, as the ultimate Cause, God apprehends particular things via the common nature they share through the attributes which pertain to any given species, formed through the collisions of causes. Marmura specifies that this would not prevent God from knowing intellectually the particulars as particulars, for the latter have qualities that are universal and are, hence, known by God. This can be certainly said to be true in the celestial realm where this kind of intellectual apprehension is valid thanks to the correspondence between universal and particular things. In fact, all the universal qualities belong to a specific species and have only one member, as in the case of the universal and individual sun which is the only one sun.[11] It should be pointed out, however, as Adamson does, that even if God were able to know the unique sun as the only case of instantiation of this species, the deity would still not know the individual sun as such.[12] This is because, as Ivry explains, God's universal knowledge, understood as 'complete', 'future' and 'eternal' knowledge is limited only to the realm of permanent beings, an environment in which the actualization

of beings is practically complete and where the only conceivable changes are the planetary motions which being eternally incorruptible and constant, are fully predictable and knowledgeable.[13]

A few observations are in order: with reference to the celestial world for instance, it must be assumed that God is aware that the planetary motions occur both essentially and accidentally in the heavens. In the first case, God would know that a particular motion is the essential nature of the celestial sphere which it belongs to, as a member of the species *sphere*; but, God would not know that specific sphere as such. In order to know a sphere as a particular sphere, God would need to be aware that motion occurs to that sphere as an *accident* which particularizes that sphere as it is, and that differentiates it from all other spheres. It could be argued that even the accidental feature of motion would be known only generically through an intellectual, demonstrative knowledge which would allow God to identify what motion is in general, that is, as an act which generates a movement from one place to another or that it is a circular motion etc. Nonetheless, it can also be argued that the celestial motion of a sphere would still retain its accidental character, even though its accidentality would differ from our idea of a generic accidentality. Since all spheres are characterized by the same kind of motion, this motion would represent an accidentality corresponding to a kind of essentiality, given that the same motion occurs for all the celestial spheres and is, therefore, fully predictable. Put shortly, God would know particulars as particulars in the celestial realm because, in the end, His universal knowledge, that is knowledge of what is necessary, constant and therefore certain, would provide Him with the same information attainable through sensory knowledge which, informing on accidents, is generally speaking non-certain and non-demonstrable.[14]

The scenario is obviously different in the world of generation and corruption in which the different combinations (the above-mentioned collisions of causes) of universal qualities assure that a particular becomes specified and potentially identifiable for the celestial intelligences and for God. However, in actual fact, as also Marmura argues, in the terrestrial dominion, the universal qualities alone cannot ever identify a corruptible individual, whose identification must instead rest on a direct sensory perception of their material substrata. God is a pure mind and as such He has no knowledge of the terrestrial particular as a particular but He knows only its universal qualities.[15] Basically, in the world of generation and corruption, which is characterized by corporeal matter, the Necessary Existent is actually incapable of fully knowing individual changing beings, since His knowledge is eternal and not sensory. This means that the Necessary Existent cannot be aware of the accidental or 'attributive' features belonging to individual particular objects within this realm and this in some way also implies that God cannot attain awareness of particular future states of their being.

These observations lead one to emphasize that once again, for Avicenna, it makes sense to speak of determinism rather than predestination: even if God may possess an intentional predetermination in inferring existence to a particular possible being in the terrestrial realm, such an inference must be done only starting from the present existence of an actual being which subsists with its own given nature.

This implies that in God's foreknowledge, as Ivry states, 'the future is analogous and continuous with the present and that the particular possible objects resemble present actual ones', this being exactly 'what cannot be known in advance'.[16]

The above findings also explain why the celestial factors are able to effect the determination of particular events in the sub-lunar world only 'wherever possible.'[17] This occurs because the determination of an object is never totally due to external factors, including the permanent emanating influence of heavenly bodies, but it is also dependent on the receptivity of the object due to its material substrate which is never fully knowable in advance due to matter's remote causality.

Surprisingly, the whole notion of determinism comes to be joined to that of freedom as the role played by the unpredictable receptivity of matter[18] becomes, once again, a protagonist and it is in matter that the *locus* of freedom might be identified. Whilst Ivry sees freedom exclusively as the precondition for all the activities involving matter 'evaporating as soon as the activity is undertaken and the matter formed',[19] freedom might instead also be conceived as the intrinsic condition of the proven changeability of matter, which does not vanish with the formation of matter once the 'divine choice' of existentiation is performed. In fact, the nature of prime matter which makes it receptive to all forms still entails the possibility for an informed matter to change by way of being joined to a different form. Since matter's capacity for changeability is never compromised, freedom might be thought as continuing to subsist in a latent way in the substratum-matter which is responsible, as seen above, for the disobedience of matter.

Once again the passive 'activism' of matter, previously observed, becomes suggestive of possible freedom in the Avicennian providential, natural determinism. Determinism occurs not simply in the supra-lunar world but also in the terrestrial realm, that is in actuality, once the victory of the Necessary Existent has rendered a thing necessarily existent. However, such a thing, which is still a possible being in itself, preserves, through its inner potentiality and within its material nature, the potentiality to change. Corollary to this is that God's knowledge of universals is limited to knowledge of predictable modifications and is framed as 'universal knowledge' because it is not able to predict matter's receptivity and matter's reaction towards the in-forming activity of the godhead, who not to forget, acts through secondary causes such as the *Dator Formarum* and the *medium* of forms. The Ash'arite occasionalistic view which sees God directly predisposing the destinies of all beings, is replaced by the view of God 'entrusting' matter with a potentiality that, despite its unpredictable disobedience, fulfils God's 'overall' decree.

It may be maintained that Avicenna turns the notion of predestination into that of divine determinism because God is prevented from knowing particulars as particulars. Since God cannot exercise a 'direct' control over material compounds, He must entrust other beings with an efficient causality which ultimately shapes the destinies of future beings. Emanation which, in contrast to creation, entails continuity between God and His creatures, allows celestial bodies to 'supplement' God's knowledge through their knowledge of particulars as particulars. Obviously, knowledge of particulars cannot be attributed to the intellects that, as intellects, have only intellectual, universal knowledge; but it can certainly be credited to the

celestial spheres whose souls are not detached from their bodies. In its conjunction with matter, the soul, which acts as the form of the body of the sphere, becomes the proximate cause of celestial motion. This kind of soul is defined by Avicenna as corporeal, mutable (*mustaḥīla*) and changeable (*mutaghayyira*); and, because it is not detached from matter, it is different from the intellect of the sphere whose activity is simply contemplative of the universals.

Just as the Necessary Existent is conscious of being the cause of everything, so the intellects are aware that He is the cause of their existence and that, consequently, they are contingent in themselves. This awareness becomes the 'voice' through which celestial intellects express their need for an instrument which can allow them to reach perfection and actualization. The celestial soul, which operates as the form of the celestial body, becomes this instrument whose function, however, is endorsed by the materiality of the celestial body. The form represented by the soul must, in fact, have a legacy with matter in order to act in any sort of way. In the heavenly realm, the celestial sphere moves by the soul which is its proximate principle of motion. This soul, Avicenna states:

> Is engaged [in the act of] estimation – that is, it has apprehension of the changing things such as particulars (*juzi'yyāt*), and a will [orientated towards] specific particular things (*al-umūr al-juzi'yya bi-aʿyāniha*). It is the perfection of the body of the celestial sphere and its form. If it were not like this but were self-subsistent in every respect, it would then have been a pure intellect that neither changes, undergoes transition, nor it is mixed with what has potency (*quwwa*).
>
> (Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 311)

It is clear that the heavenly soul, thanks to its conjunction with the body of the sphere, entertains a certain relationship with materiality and changeability. In addition Avicenna explains:

> The motive soul (*al-nafs al-muḥarrika*) . . . it is not denuded of matter (*laysat mujarrada ʿan al-madda*); rather, its relation with the sphere is the same as the relation of the animal soul (*al-nafs al-ḥayawāniyya*) that is in us, except that in some way, it intelligizes in a manner adulterated (*mashūb*) by matter (*bi'l-madda*).
>
> (Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 312)

The above passage suggests that, in contrast to God, the existence and functions of the heavenly beings occur by virtue of desire, will and choice.[20] The soul of each sphere longs to imitate its own intellect with all celestial souls ultimately aspiring to the perfection of the First Cause. If one considers that the sphere's soul is something that perceives changing things, like particulars, and wills particular things in themselves, it is clear that the soul of the sphere is able to know particulars as universals and also as particulars. The Necessary Existent then, 'limited' in His knowledge by His own perfection, finds in the constituents of the

emanative scheme complementary tools operating to strengthen His omnipotence and flawlessness with regard to His 'circumscribed' knowledge of particulars. It might be argued that all the functions and awareness of the celestial souls reinforce the theory that natural determinism is doubtless at work within the celestial realm and that it allows all celestial constituents to operate through their natures, simultaneously facilitating God's *qaḍā'* to be authoritative by way of 'supplementing' His knowledge.[21] The celestial soul, as the form of the celestial sphere and as its perfection, in contact with materiality, inaugurates a process which prompts spheres, souls and intellects to liken themselves first to their own proximate cause, and ultimately to their common First Cause.

The naturalization of rewards and punishments

Avicenna takes an unconventional stance on the Qur'ānic notions of rewards and punishments. It is evident that these concepts are closely linked with the notion of freedom because humans can either 'choose' to comply or not comply with the divine dictates and be rewarded or punished accordingly. Recompense and castigation in the afterlife are 'neutralized' by Avicenna as he perceives them to be consequences of human actions. He argues that the complex question of rewards and punishments, commandments and prohibitions announced by the revealed Law has been misinterpreted by the *mutakallimūn*, whilst these concepts should be regarded as respectively, 'stimuli' (*targhīb*) or deterrents (*tarhīb*).[22] In order to demonstrate the nature of destiny awaiting man in the afterlife, Avicenna sets aside the scriptural interpretations and proposes a rather philosophical approach to the issue. This is done because Avicenna, by stressing the significance of his own concept of determinism, is always attempting to present a philosophically acceptable version of theodicy. The first move in this direction is to refuse *kalām*'s corporeal resurrection and explain it in terms of a spiritual resurrection.[23] In order to substantiate his reinterpretation, Avicenna analyses the function of the religious Law, which becomes vital in order to assess humans' earthly and future conditions. If reason alone is not sufficient to guide completely mankind to distinguish between good and evil, then it is evident that human beings are in need of a law with a simple regulating function and a non-determining nature which might help them in discerning what is commendable from what is not.

The punishments and rewards described in the Qur'ān are not simply deterrents and stimulants to avoid evil and to promote good in this life; but, Avicenna states, they are also useful instructions for the hereafter, because the situation awaiting the soul in the afterlife is simply the natural prolongation of the soul's life on earth.[24] The 'images', described in the Qur'ān, of the corporeal punishments and rewards awaiting humans in the afterlife have, indeed, a causal function because they become the causes pressing humankind to obey Law's *dicta*. Avicenna considers that revelation has, in actual fact, a very pragmatic nature as its specific character is first and foremost divulgative. This means that the revealed Law is made to be understood by all kinds of people and that, consequently, it has to be presented in an anthropomorphic and metaphorical way. This is the reason that

explains the presence in the Qur'ān of the physical images describing rewards and punishments in the afterlife.[25]

The role played by the Law is also significant because it facilitates each soul's success to fulfil its potential: since the soul is expected to accomplish its intellectual potentialities by acquiring knowledge of the ultimate Cause and by detaching itself from materiality, punishment is regarded as something which has 'not [been] meted out by an external principle for it, from a vengeful God'.[26] This means that the punishment of the soul in the hereafter is ultimately dependent upon the soul's own inadequacy to actualize its potentials.[27] Once it is deprived of its body in the hereafter, the soul will enjoy a state of bliss or a state of torment proportionately to its capacity to be independent from the body's dictates. If during its earthly permanence, in its corporeal abode, the soul has already been trained to defer from material appetites, following the instructions of the divine Law, then in the purely spiritual realm, the soul will not 'feel' any deprivation. Torment in the hereafter will affect that soul which is not used to renouncing corporeal desires, because of its lacking 'self-discipline'. Avicenna describes the nature of evil morals in similar terms. Bad morals are believed to depend on the actions which deprive the soul of that perfection which is ought to belong to it. Avicenna sees acts as perfections in relation to the causes which enact them and it is therefore impossible to label acts as evil acts. An act may be an evil act only in relation either to the cause which is receptive of it, or in relation to an agent that has his act prevented from occurring. This would be possible despite the fact the agent has a better claim on the act than the cause which prevents the act from occurring. The example of injustice is provided:

> Injustice (*ẓalima*) comes forth . . . from a power that is a seeker of subjugation (*ghaliba*) – for example, the irascible (*ghaḍibiyya*) [power] – and subjugation is its perfection (*kamālaha*). It is this the reason why it has been created as long as it is irascible, this meaning that it has been created orientated towards subjugation, seeking it (*taṭalibaha*) and rejoicing in it (*tafaraḥa biha*). So this act relative to it is good for it (*khayr li-ha*); and if it [the power] becomes weak [in performing this act], [it] becomes, in relation to it, an evil for it.[28]

Arberry has framed these concepts by claiming that the *Shaykh al-ra'īs* perceives reward as 'the supervening of a certain pleasure in the soul according to the degree to which it achieves perfection', distancing itself from the body, while describing punishment as 'the supervening of a certain pain in the soul according to the degree in which it remains imperfect'.[29] In harmony with these observations, Marmura has argued that Avicenna is naturalizing rewards and punishments as these are nothing else but consequences of the intrinsic character of human actions. Entailed in this concept of 'naturalization' is the idea that humans are free to choose and train their souls against the impositions of materiality.

However, freedom is soon scaled down once one realizes that, in the *Risālat al-qadar*, Avicenna explicitly declares that God is able to either guide people on the right path or to lead them astray.[30] He clearly states that the Necessary Existent

is capable of making someone obedient or disobedient, determining happiness or perdition, knowing which people will be strong, that is respective of His commandments, or rebellious. How can this statement be reconciled with Avicenna's 'naturalized' view of rewards and punishments? A possible explanation can be provided by looking back at the nature of divine knowledge. It should be taken into account that since God cannot know particulars of individuals what He can know in advance is limited to a universal knowledge. The Necessary Existent does not know individuals with their accidental particularities, but He does know different *kinds* of people with their predictable characters so that He is able to discern what kinds of people will respond or not respond to His religious prescriptions. God foreknows who will be punished and who will be rewarded simply because the people in question respond to divine commandments in a predictable way. People belong to a certain kind or a certain group of humans exactly because each 'type' or 'group' have always been and will always respond to divine commandments in an unchangeable way.[31] The Muʿtazilite notion of '*taklīf mā lā yuṭāq*' appears closely linked to this issue. Avicenna's view on this should be derived from his understanding that 'destiny' equals 'determinism'. This implies that the divine imposition of duties must be in harmony with the actual capacity an individual possesses, given that God knows each being because it belongs to a specific group of existents which are endowed with specific and predictable capacities.

Here the concept of freedom can be seen as merely potential, despite the fact that rewards and punishments, as well as commandments and prohibitions, seem to imply the possibility for individuals to respond freely to religious perceptions in different ways. If this were the case, however, it would make sense to think of certain kinds of individuals that respond to the religious prescriptions in a way which would render God's foreknowledge of individuals impossible, in which case God's knowledge would turn into ignorance.[32] This means that the freedom a human being has in determining his/her future state of bliss or damnation is framed by the unchangeable divine knowledge of individuals as universals.

It is clear that when Avicenna addresses the questions of rewards and punishments, which are naturalized in order to solve the problem of theodicy, the concept of human freedom emerges as being merely potential. This potentiality is due to the fact that human freedom is tied to the restricted divine knowledge of universals and to the fact that the Necessary Existent can know individuals and their future conditions only when these are perfectly actualized in the present. In other terms, divine foreknowledge of human states in the afterlife depends on the predictable character of each individual's behaviour which, determined to follow the same predictable pattern, remains unchangeable and so fully knowable by the deity.

Human soul and freedom

Avicenna's view of body and soul is strongly influenced by Plato who, in *Phaedo*, identifies the soul with the thinking mind which exercises its best thinking activity when dissociated from the body.[33] Like Plato, Avicenna establishes a necessary relation between the body and the soul but he rejects the idea that the body is, in

respect to the soul, in a classic relation of cause to effect. The body cannot be perceived as the final 'perfectioning' cause of the soul and it can only be seen as the accidental cause of soul's existence.[34] The individual character of the soul, however, cannot be itself accidental because the individual soul begins its existence only when bodily matter, operating as a receptacle, is ready to receive it. Once the body manifests its disposition in welcoming one specific soul, thus becoming soul's kingdom and instrument,[35] the individualization of the soul is completed through its union with the body.[36] Each soul, as a form, carries within itself an inclination (i.e. a power which is always complying with God's will), to penetrate a determined body, acting as the material substratum, excluding any other possible options. The deterministic character of the union of soul and body is given once it is established that the existence of the soul and the production (*ḥudūth*) of the body's constitution are simultaneous.[37]

According to Avicenna, the constitution of the body cannot merely provide an occasion for that of the soul. Interestingly, Verbeke has suggested that bodies are not individuated by their 'appointed' souls, but by virtue of their own inner characteristics. However, it is not clear why in Avicenna's system, the soul, which has the characteristics of a substance, is in need of the body to be individuated.[38] The possible explanation for this may rest in the Avicennian understanding of 'nature': by espousing the Aristotelian view of nature as the power which acts by necessity, Avicenna affirms that nature is 'rooted' in matter, but not in the soul. More specifically, the philosopher claims that the existence and substance of any 'nature' consists in 'putting [things] into action', so that nature-matter acts by a substantial necessity whereas, in the case of the soul, the action does not occur in the soul's essence but follows its essence in a non-necessary manner.[39] These considerations, confirm that matter is intrinsically receptive of movement and changeability and that the soul is in need of a material substrata for its action to occur.

Clearly, Avicenna combines philosophical and theological tenets: the soul's individuation through matter is not accidental since it happens only when the matter in the body is ready for it. Nonetheless, the connection of the soul with a specific body is guaranteed by both the divine will and God's decree which establish a necessary relation between a specific soul and a specific body. The soul reaches its perfection through the help and collaboration of the body only initially, but its subsequent development does not depend on the body.[40] Like the representatives of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' stressed before him,[41] Avicenna believes that the sensitive contact with the material world plays a positive role in the early steps on the path of the intellective and active process. Without it, man would be incapable of developing his personal patrimony of knowledge. The human being, in fact, uses his body as an instrument for action so that man commences his pragmatic conduct through the body.[42] However, once the soul acquires, with the assistance of the Agent Intellect, the principles of recognition and conception, it no longer needs the body for its intellectual operations. Avicenna speaks of the complex nature of the human soul which is mainly dependent on its knowledge of the nature of things and the intellectual activity experienced in the body. Significantly, Avicenna insists on the idea that human souls are, by themselves,

capable only of attaining the first three levels of thought: sensation, imagination and estimation. Apprehension of the intelligible is given to them from outside. Intelligibles are perceived only through intuition (*ḥads*) of the medium term of a syllogism. Intuition occurs when the soul is in conjunction with the Agent Intellect.[43] It is exactly through intuition that humans have access to gnosis: only once the human soul has liberated itself from the imprisoning legacy of the body, can it engage in a communicative liaison with the intelligences that are ready to share their knowledge of universals with the soul.[44]

The possibility of achieving such a gnosis is discussed in mystical terms because it is made to depend on the individual capacity to 'keep in touch' with the intellectual realm. Particularly, Avicenna formulates the idea that divine guidance, constantly flowing down from the divine intelligences, waits to be captured by vigilant and intuitive human souls.[45] Divine Revelation offers this guidance, the contents of which can be grasped by humans thanks to their capacity to strive and hone their intellectual abilities. The quantity and quality of the latter are determined by the Agent Intellect according to a specific measure 'chosen' by God, ultimately identified in Ashʿarite terms as the uttermost Disposer of measures and things. The mystical element in the discourse is granted by the fact that humans, even as rational beings, are never exempted from the assistance of divine agents. The Agent Intellect regulates human intellectual abilities, and consequently 'manages' man's destiny in harmony with the individual human being's disposition to yearn towards perfection.

It is in the mystical domain that human free will can be analysed in terms of actual freedom, particularly when freedom is associated with the faculties of the human soul, mostly the rational faculty, as well as with the human innate desire to strive towards completeness. Avicenna speaks of the human soul, or the human form, in Platonist terms, as the initial and final point of human knowledge and actions.[46] He claims that 'the soul's transitive action [action exercised on external things] relates to the body and within it its active conduct (*tadbīr*) is established'.[47] He also stresses that human acts emanate from man 'only because of the existence of his form [or soul] in a matter [or body].'[48] In contrast to the Ashʿarites, these statements explicitly affirm that the human soul has the capacity to apply its actions on bodies different from its own, i.e. on external matter. The human soul becomes the vital element of the body and the dynamic principle of its actions. However, actions can be put into existence always through the corporeality of matter.

Avicenna recognizes in the human soul, i.e. in man as man *is* his soul, a double nature: it enjoys an intermediary position between the intellectual and the bodily and has two aspects, one turned towards the contemplation of superior principles, the other orientated towards the control and direction of the body.[49] The two activities of contemplation on the one hand, and control of the lower bodily faculties, from which bad morals arise, on the other hand, operate on two different planes, by two diverse faculties and upon two different objects. The objects of the former belong to theoretical faculty and are necessary, universal, immovable and unchangeable. The objects of the second activity that belong to the practical

faculty, are contingent, particular and liable to mutation and change so that they can be deliberated and voluntary changed.[50] By virtue of its theoretical faculty the human soul, whilst it is still in touch with the body, becomes aware of its potential perfection. In the Avicennian eschatological construct, the latter corresponds to the intellectual perfection which represents the only real pleasure for the human soul. Intellectual pleasure is, for the human soul, potentially identical both in its terrestrial and celestial life. Avicenna in fact establishes, as Lizzini states, a 'corrispondenza biunivoca' between the pleasures of human soul's sensible faculties and the intellectual pleasure of the soul's rational faculty.[51] Because the ultimate pleasure for the human soul is of an intellectual nature, it must pertain to the rational faculty through which man participate in the divine realm.[52] Although Avicenna is aware that the realization of intellectual perfection results extremely difficult on earth, he still considers it possible.[53] Notwithstanding the value of the rational faculty, it is especially the practical faculty which is responsible for the fulfilment of the soul's perfection. The practical faculty's sphere of activity is related to the changeable realm of possible entities, and this means that the soul operates as an 'administrator' over those lower faculties from which passive dispositions or bad morals can originate.[54] Janssens explains that it is in accordance with the practical faculty's capacity to predominate over the seductive activity of the bodily faculties that excellent morals might eventually prevail.[55] It becomes clear that it is through the soul's faculties, that some form of freedom can be traced. In its attempt to defer the dictates of materiality, the rational faculty can 'choose' moral qualities over bad morals. Consequently, moral qualities are not regarded as the result of a natural gift because man has to strive for them actively.[56] It is through his personal striving towards perfection, his personal willingness to develop his intellectual activities, his efforts in renouncing his material substrate that a human being can determine his future destiny. It is man, as Janssens argues, that, de facto, rewards and punishes himself.[57]

Rejection of fatalism

Avicenna rejects the fatalism implied in the concept of an inscrutable divine predestination, and does so by way of assigning a primary importance to mankind's potentiality to achieve intellectual perfection and ultimate bliss. God's providential supervision is, however, never denied because, in the end, it is always the deity who appoints for each individual a more or less effective rational faculty. In other terms, it is God who establishes the 'disposition' of any rational faculty, through which individuals become inclined to pursue perfection. If on the one hand, it is God who makes each man 'disposed' towards a destiny of happiness according to pre-established measures, on the other hand, happiness is attainable in this life time once humans decide to apprehend the dictates contained in the divine revelation. It is by grasping the real meaning of revelation, through the 'honing' of the intellectual faculties, that an individual 'takes some precautions to defend himself [against pure determinism].'[58] The divine guidance contained in the revelation is identified as a secondary form of providence, the first form being the good order of

the world, through which mankind can attempt to escape uttermost determinism. Such a guidance, as it has been observed above, is also understood to be constantly flooding down from above so that it is ultimately the human soul's responsibility to be able to embrace it by 'training' its intellectual state and encouraging his intellect to achieve a proper understanding of the essences of things.[59] The ability humans have to perfect their intellectual tools allows them potentially to grasp the meaning of divine providence as the 'positive part of destiny'.[60] Divine guidance, *alias* revelation, is understood as a 'gift' which God, as supreme goodness, necessarily bestows upon mankind. From this perspective it might appear that human beings have the freedom to choose and develop their moral and intellectual capacities at their disposal; it has to be borne in mind, however, that this sort of freedom excludes any kind of arbitrariness on human behalf, because any human 'choice' necessarily fulfils the universal order of intelligible beings as ultimately decreed by God.

A new compromising relationship between God and humans might be formulated in terms of their respective areas of responsibilities: in the same way as God's awareness 'accepts' the incidental emanation of evil for the sake of goodness, likewise human beings accept reshaping the nature of their freedom by way of 'approving' the measure (*qadar*) of determinism which God puts into the only possible world-order.[61] Despite the determinism that regulates the universe into which man is plunged, humans seem to possess the capacity to act, even though their activity is limited within the confines of a 'choice' that is nothing more than an 'acceptance' of the divinely given world-order.[62] Therefore, it is not surprising that Avicenna adopts and promotes a pragmatic attitude, which will also feature in al-Ghazālī's works, by way of encouraging mankind to do their best in order to shape their destiny. Determinism is not to be confused with fatalism because man is never persuaded to accept passively his own destiny, but is rather encouraged to orientate himself on the right path through reason and revelation,[63] employing, for such an orientation, soul and intellect. In his attempt to overtake the limits imposed by materiality, each human being, never entirely able to shed the bodily substrate, except after death, has to tame his corporeal functions in order to initiate his moral and intellectual purification. 'Alienated' from sensible pleasures, the individual can aspire to perceive 'the light' of his 'guardians' (the intellective faculties) by opening himself to the enlightenment of the Agent Intellect. One's perfection can be achieved exclusively through an independent striving which is nothing but the individual attempt of the soul to protect itself against the perils coming from its union with the body.[64]

Consequently, a circumscribed degree of freedom can be identified in the rational soul's aim to become more and more what it actually is: a *substantia solitaria* capable of performing its own action, aspiring to the contemplation of the first principles of everything that is. The role of corporeality, previously emphasized to be the fundamental instrument for the soul's formative activity, is nullified by the soul's climbing up to a purely psychic stage. Through its detachment from the body and its intellectual aspiration to resemble the First, the soul inaugurates the moment of return to the only Real Existent. Such a return, which

is an integral part of the creative process, will be analysed in the next section in mystical terms as the deity makes emanation a principle through which He predisposes a necessary return of all essences to the only Real Existent, even before their own formation.[65]

Love and determinism

It is well-known that Avicenna integrates strictly Islamic religious principles with Sufi perceptions with the intention of interpreting them according to his philosophical system.[66] God is perceived as the Necessary Existent but also as the source of knowledge, beauty, goodness and love; this leaves open the possibility to interpret his system through a mystical key, which many scholars considered particularly evident in Avicenna's later works.[67]

In the history of Islamic thought, and particularly in Sufi circles, the theme of love looks at God's desire to love and to be loved by His creatures. Love is generally linked to the notion of beauty: God, being Beauty and loving beauty, reveals Himself to kindle love in the world, and creation is made necessary because beauty would be meaningless without the world's love being able to contemplate it.[68] Neither the theme of love, nor its link with beauty originated within Islam, but rather within the Greek thought. In his *Symposium*, Plato introduces his theory of love (*eros*) and, in the dialogue thereby assigned to Aristophanes, describes love as the sensation of longing which all human beings feel towards the lost primeval oneness of their essences. Love is for Plato nothing but the search for their lost 'other half'.[69] In the *Symposium*, as well as in *Phaedrus*, Plato implicitly denounces that the real goal of *eros* should be identified in seeking knowledge of real beauty, i.e. the Form of Beauty, thus assigning a spiritual dimension to true love.[70] From a different perspective, Aristotle mainly discussed the theme of love in association to the nature of the divine. Love is investigated in relation to the notion of perfection (εντέλεια) with the latter being, in turn, intimately linked to the notion of joy or happiness (ευτυχία). The Stagirite understood God as an immaterial Intellect, whose self-intellectual activity represents a form of happiness not comparable to any other kind of temporal or imperfect joy.[71] By contemplating His essence, God, who is the most perfect being, enjoys the most perfect form of happiness. As mentioned earlier, the Aristotelian principle which identifies God with the first Unmoved Mover that is simultaneously an Intellect who intelligizes and is also the subject of its own cogitation was inherited by al-Farābī.[72] The latter adapts the Aristotelian view to a Neoplatonic perspective by claiming that the supreme happiness felt by the One is partially shared by the first emanated being in the chain of existents, the Intellect.[73] In the Farābīan emanative scheme, as previously observed, the result of divine self-intellection – the emanated first intellect – contemplates God and its own essence;[74] when contemplating the Principle (or Source) from which it descends, the act of contemplation being repeated for all the 10 intellects that are encompassed in the hierarchy of emanation, the joy (*iltidhādh*), the pride (*iʿjāb*) and the love (*ʿishq*), which the first intellect 'feels', are far greater than what it might 'feel' by intelligizing its own essence.[75]

Following on the footsteps of Aristotle and al-Farābī, Avicenna engages in investigating the theme of love starting from God. The Avicennian *wājib al-wujūd* is not simply the Aristotelian *ʿaql*, *ʿāqil*, and *maʿqūl*, but He is also loving (*ʿāshiq*) Himself, whilst being loved (*maʿshūq*) by Himself and other beings.[76] More specifically, God has intellection of His own essence, He loves it and is loved by it in the same way as He is loved by anything which is reached by His causal relation and according to the degree by which it is reached.[77] This means that all beings aspire to fulfil their love and do so by way of discerning in God their Cause proportionately to their respective thinking capacities.[78]

The *Risālat fī'l-ʿishq* is a treatise in which the 'intellectual' journey of the human soul from the material world to the divine Cause is discussed in terms of love.[79] In this work Avicenna speaks of three kinds of love poured down by God upon all beings: (i) a love naturally planted in beings aiming to perfection; (ii) a voluntary love; (iii) a love of beauty and goodness. At the beginning of the *Risālat* Avicenna claims that:

> Every being which is determined (*mudabbar*) by a design strives by nature towards its perfection . . . which is a state of goodness issued forth (*munbaʿita*) from the Pure Good; it turns away (*nāfara*) from its specific deficiency (*al-naqṣ al-khaṣṣ*) which is the evil in it – materiality (*hayūlāniyya*) and non-existence (*ʿadamiyya*).
>
> (Avicenna, *Risālat fī'l-ʿishq*, p. 2)

The philosopher soon adds that 'all beings determined by a design possess a natural desire and an innate love (*ʿishq gharīzī*).'[80] It is certainly significant that the author increasingly needs to clarify that these beings are determined to strive by their nature. In addition, such a striving is also suggested as being part of a specific divine design predetermined for each being. It is quite obvious that Avicenna offers a combination of Aristotelian determinism and Islamic theological predestination simultaneously. In another passage of the *Risālat*, its author investigates the metaphysical significance of love and links it with his understanding of natural determinism:

> It is a necessary outcome in [God's] wisdom (*ḥikmatihi*) and the goodness of His governance (*ḥasan tadbīrihi*) to plant into His order the general principle of love . . . so to attain through it a preservation (*mustaḥafaṭ*) of all the perfections (*al-kamalāt al-kulliyya*) which He donated (*nāla*) via emanation (*min fayḍ*) . . . the goal being that the administration [of the universe] might run according to a wise harmony (*al-niẓām al-ḥikmiyya*). The never-ceasing existence of love in all beings determined by a design is, therefore, a necessity.
>
> (Avicenna, *Risālat fī'l-ʿishq*, p. 3)

From a logical point of view, the existence of the above-mentioned inborn love and its natural character necessarily fulfil what has been established by the divine

decree. Love allows beings to strive towards their perfection and acts in a double way: first as a gift bestowed by a 'wise' God, it ensures the maintenance of the divine good order; second, in a purely Aristotelian fashion, love acts as a power able to set in motion[81] and motivate existents' preservation and continuity, allowing the endurance of their existence against their non-existence.[82] On the one hand, such understanding of love alludes to the theological vision of God as a providential bestower of gifts who benefits mankind with love. On the other hand, the latter, inherent in the nature of things, allows existents to be what they are within God's *al-nizām al-khayr*. In other words, because this love is naturally imbued in the essences of things, the latter are spontaneously loving, that is they are spontaneously yearning towards their perfected existence thus allowing the unfolding of all existents' destinies. Each destiny is perfectly in line with the eternal plan God has decided for all things.[83]

Avicenna goes on to define the second type of love as spontaneous and voluntary (*ikhtiyārī*)[84] and refers to the fact that any lover, or possessor of love, can turn away under its own initiative from any object of love. Such a turning away finds its applicability in the foreseeing of some harm (*istiḍrār*) about to befall that love, so that the lover, Avicenna argues, 'will weigh up the extent of this harm against that of the benefit of which the object of love would be'.[85] The *Shaykh al-raʾīs* clarifies that only beings endowed with the vegetative and animal faculties have the capacity to defer from pursuing this love. This capacity, which pertains to their appetitive faculty (*bi'l-shahwānī*), is portrayed as a sort of 'self-preserving' free-willed action (*taḥarrika ikhtiyāriyya*), which operates through a peculiar form of divine providence (*min al-ʿināya al-ilāhiyya*).[86] This basically means that the freedom (or capacity) to defer from love becomes an instrument of defence which is provided by God's providence, by which token, the subject escapes any possible harm. This tool, however, is 'not intended per se' (*fa-lan yakun al-ghāya fīhi maqṣūda bi'l-dhātiha*), but guarantees the protection and preservation (*istibqāʾ*) of all existents, implicitly serving God's 'willingness' to keep the status quo of things in His world's good order.[87] Interestingly in fact, the Avicennian construct speaks of God as a deity who does not create anew at every moment, but who is committed to preserve the 'mechanisms' of generation and destruction also keeping the division of genera and species fixed, so that no passage from one to another may ever be possible.[88] This clearly differs from Ashʿarite occasionalism, which denies duration in the existence and which credits divine providence with the responsibility to impart perpetual re-creation of beings. Conversely, in Avicenna's providential world-order the individuals are pushed to represent their kinds, genera and species pursuing the propagation of their likes (*mulāzima tawlīd al-mithal*).[89]

It is quite significant that the ability to defer from love is not applicable to the rational faculty, which is responsible for the penetration of specific aims, but it pertains exclusively to the vegetative and animal faculties whose non-rational natures allow the fulfilment of generic aims, such as the mentioned preservation of species and genera.[90] These faculties seem to entail a primitive sense of will and a consequential freedom to choose, but this is not actually the case: free will, as such, does not become a constitutive element of these faculties since no being lower than man

and no faculty lower than the rational one is truly self-conscious of its ultimate end and cannot have a specific will through which pursue its goal. It may be argued that, at the level of the vegetative and animal faculties, 'free will' perfectly obeys the dictates of God's decree and necessarily coincides with God's providence.

The situation is slightly different in relation to the human rational faculty: endowed with reason, humans are able to turn away from love because of the faculty of desire (*al-quwwa al-shawqiyya*). This faculty, although recognized as 'one of the causes of corruption' (*'illa al-fasād*) is also acknowledged by Avicenna as being:

> Necessary (*ḍurūrī*) in the general desired order which is good, and it is not part of the divine wisdom to abandon (*taraka*) a great good (*khayr kathīr*) because of an evil (*sharr*) which is small (*tasīr*) in relation to it.
>
> (Avicenna, *Risālat fī'l-'ishq*, p. 12).

It has been observed that Avicenna advances a similar consideration when he deals with the existence of evil and by making the divine acceptance of evil a necessity in order not to jeopardize the majority of goodness in creation. However, in the *Risālat* evil is connected to materiality (*hayūlāniyya*) and non-existence per se,[91] whilst it elsewhere is presented as the result of a divine secondary intentionality (*bi'l-qaṣd al-thān'iyya*), which is explained as being an 'ancillary' product of God's emanative goodness. Avicenna declares that 'the first emanation of existents is from Him and this is His decree (*qaḍā'hu*) and there is no absolute evil (*lā sharr aṣl*) in it with the exception of what emanates hidden under the radiance of the first light . . . Evils (*shurūr*) do not occur according to a primary intention but according to a secondary one (*bi'l-qaṣd al-thān'yya*).[92] In the context of the *Risālat*, the negativity which is commonly associated with the faculty of desire is couched in positive terms being it the desire to strive towards perfection.[93] The natural disposition of such a desire is sublimated and ingrained in the struggle that human and divine souls undertake in their attempts to abandon materiality and pursue happiness and perfection.

The third type of love is said to belong to those beings classified as 'celestial souls', who have reached a state of semi-perfection such that they are able to yearn towards love and goodness for love and goodness' sake thus not expecting anything in return. Principally, Avicenna speaks of human and angelic souls as the only souls that aim to reach Pure Love or Pure Good as objects of their yearning.[94] In particular, the actual state of perfection of the angelic souls and the state of preparation to perfection of the human souls is discussed in relation to two things: (i) the intellection of those intelligible beings the souls may be in relation with, each according to its capacity, and (ii) the action emanating from these intelligible beings which are in accordance with their nature.[95] A number of considerations are in order: Avicenna's system allows each human and intellective soul to increase in excellence by imitating the being immediately higher in the hierarchy of existents thus becoming closer to it and establishing a special relation to it. This possibility is, however, contemplated only:

> After they [such souls] have gained knowledge of those objects of the intellect which are caused (*al-maʿqulāt al-muʿlūla*), and the only way to conceive these is to let their conception be preceded by knowledge of the true causes (*maʿrifa al-ʿillal*), especially that of the First Cause (*al-ʿilla al-āwwal*)
>
> (Avicenna, *Risālat fī'l-ʿishq*, p. 18)[96]

Avicenna's quote indicates that, through their strivings, all beings aim to attain approximation to the Absolute Good. Nonetheless, it is has been already emphasized that this approximation is divinely well-measured. Indeed, the freedom of striving is calculated and measured according to the given capacity to pursue such a striving.

The discussion is shifted onto a mystical plane when it is clarified that the highest degree of approximation to the Absolute Good is the reception of God's manifestation (*tajallī*) in His full reality. This is something, Avicenna stresses, one can find in the Sufi concept of unification (*ittiḥād*).[97] This approximation to God in fact, 'can happen only by reason of a help given by It [the Absolute Good]'.[98] As such it must be regarded as a real gift from the godhead. Closeness to God represents the only chance the celestial souls have to become objects of love (*maʿshūqāt*) for the Absolute Good.[99] This means that the celestial souls can aspire to be assimilated into God by acquiring God's own specific qualities, the highest of which is a perfect essential identification between existence and love. It is known that in Avicenna's view, God primarily loves Himself, but He also sets the possibility to be loved by others.[100] Furthermore, in order to be loved, God needs to be known and made manifest. In the *Risālat*, God's manifestation is said to occur only in respect to those beings in which existence and love are almost the same thing.[101] In the light of what has been observed above, it can be argued that humans' attempts to attain identification between essence and love can be perceived as being the fruit of human desire, but it might also be seen as a form of divine manoeuvre aiming at facilitating a return of the souls to God, keeping in mind that for Avicenna the human will is effectively determined by divine power.[102] Now, the return of the soul to God can be seen also as a return of God to Himself. This statement obviously needs further discussion: since, in the Avicennian schema, God's Existence, His Love and Knowledge coincide in the simplicity of His Essence, it is logical that the only way in which divine souls can become simultaneously objects of love and knowledge of the Absolute Good is to reach the highest degree of assimilation to Him, that is, making existence and love one and the same thing within their essences.[103] Given that God can have as objects of His knowledge and love only those souls in which the identification between essence and love has been achieved, it follows that such identification allows God's knowledge to be perfected, because souls' essence and love become included within God's objects of knowledge. This is so because God's knowledge is primarily self-knowledge. By adopting a Sufi approach, Avicenna seems to imply that the divine nature necessitates that perfected knowledge must prevail over non-perfected knowledge, thus rendering the movement of return of all souls towards their Origin part and parcel of God's plan to reveal Himself to Himself.

From what has been analysed so far, it can be stressed that every entity receives God's manifestation as a proper divine gift and that every entity is admitted to the contemplation of God's *tajallī* proportionally to its desire to become assimilated to divine Absolute Perfection. Animal and vegetative entities imitate Absolute Perfection by carrying out actions which satisfy the preservation of species, whilst the human souls, endowed with rational faculty, perform their activities being spurred by a love that is natural – and as such responsive to God's determinism – but is also responsible for the individual striving to divine approximation. The possibility of getting closer to God, a beneficial bestowal for the human souls, can also be seen as God's way to be better aware of Himself through His own creation. This position finds further corroboration: within the corpus of the *Risālat*, Avicenna declares that without divine 'manifestation' there would be no existence, but he also states that each existent's capacity to receive such a divine manifestation differs in degree, thus implicitly admitting that the divine manifestation is actually posterior to the existence of the beings loving God.[104] Divine manifestation can here be read in Gnostic terms as the result of the souls' acquisition of true knowledge of the divine. Manifestation is nothing but an epiphany which allows existent beings to become aware of the Absolute Good's nature and essence.[105] The divine *tajallī* then becomes a necessary instrument through which already-existing beings attain awareness of their status as entities endowed with an inborn love for goodness and perfection.[106] Manifestation becomes the tool awakening consciousness in the soul making it aware of the fact that it belongs to the divine realm by way of sharing with God His love for Himself as ultimate goodness. Consequently, for each soul, the yearning towards divine unification becomes logically accepted and worthy to strive for. Souls become 'prompted' to aim towards the divine, first for their own sake, with their chance to fulfil their perfection, and also because they simultaneously satisfy God's 'necessity' for such an action. In Avicenna's opinion, God 'requires' that beings may be aware of their nature as well as His nature, and such awareness is needed in order to stimulate their striving and attain further perfection. This aims to shorten the intellectual gap existing between Creator and creatures, and implies the mystical notion of unification with God, which is nothing but an intellectual *ittiḥād*. More specifically, the Sufi principle of unification is presented here as an intellectual conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) like Avicenna explains also in his *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya*.[107] The philosopher, in fact, denies any ontological identification between the human and the divine soul.[108] In order to attain to the Principle, it is necessary to enter in conjunction with the 'incorporeal principle' (the Agent Intellect) which allows the human intellect to achieve its maximum intellectual potentiality, ensuring the passage from the three stages of the *intellectus possibilis* – material intellect, intellect in *habitu* and actual intellect – to that of *intellectus acquisitus*.[109]

Even if the striving of all beings towards their Principle would seem to shatter the laws relevant to the apparent immutability of God's good order, it actually functions as a instrument which preserves both intelligences and humans' 'existence' in their never-ceasing 'hope' to share a certain likeness to God's essence. Avicenna contemplates that the possibility of gaining some divine knowledge

does not pertain exclusively to the celestial souls, but it is also accessible to humans because of their capacity to flee from attachment to corporeal and material desires.[110] It is pretty obvious that humans have the possibility of becoming God-like exclusively by sharing with God the ability of intellection/contemplation. Avicenna explains that, in order to be grasped by humans, the Absolute Good never manifests Itself except in 'Its pure essence . . . and for this reason the philosophers have called It "the Form of the Intellect"' (*ṣūrat al-ʿaql*).[111] It is through the intellective aspect (*ʿaql*) of their souls that mankind may participate in the mystical union.[112] It is therefore the intellectual aspect that makes it possible for humans to fulfil the final stage of their development and share some of God's essence. Once stripped of its materiality, the intelligence, through an intellectual vision (*mushāhada ʿaqliyya*),[113] experiences its 'return' to the Necessary Existent.[114] Clearly, such a return is conceivable as a return of the intellects to their origin but it can also be perceived as God's return to Himself and to the purity of His intellective essence after the 'particularization' of knowledge witnessed, via emanation, through the individual existents. In the emanative scheme, in fact, God knows Himself as the Cause of all existents, and implicitly He knows the effects of His self-knowledge through the mediation of the intellects' *intelligere* on themselves and their relation towards their Cause. Consequently, the knowledge that existents have of God as their Cause becomes the means which allows God's Self-knowledge.[115] It is evident that the souls' return (*rujūʿ*) towards their Principle, namely their *reditus* motion, becomes, together with the *exitus* movement, a necessitated product of emanation encompassed within God's decree. It satisfies the First Cause's need for a self-perfected knowledge (His return to His intellectual essence) and the First Lover's 'willingness' to be loved, hence known, by the objects of His love.

Angelology, mystical individuation and inner freedom

Towards the end of his life Avicenna embraces what has been labelled as the 'Oriental Philosophy', an esoteric type of philosophy that makes wide use of angelology to explain what is addressed in major works like the *Shifāʾ* and the *Najāt* in purely metaphysical terms.

The Qur'ān speaks of angels mostly to stress their obedience to their Creator; their absolute submission to the divine commandment is presented as being inscribed within their natures of luminous beings, incapable of disobedience or non-compliance to the decree of God.[116] It is certainly not accidental that Avicenna decides to talk of the components of his emanative schema in terms of angelology probably willing to emphasize the natural determinism implied in the process of emanation in which the angelic intellects (as knowing entities), despite their awareness, are still submissive before the absolute knowledge of the First who knows what they do not know.[117]

From the third/ninth and fourth/tenth century, for Hellenizing Islamic intellectuals such as Avicenna, the mention of the angels in the Qur'ān and the Traditions provided the opportunity to demonstrate their existence via reason, implicitly

confirming the validity of philosophical speculations.[118] It is to be borne in mind that Islamic philosophers' fascination with the Greek cosmological geo-centrism, placing Earth at the centre of the cosmos, with the latter being divided between the terrestrial realm of materiality and the supra-lunar world of the celestial spheres, challenged them to find an accordance between such worldview and divine Revelation. This spurred the need to find in the Qur'ān religious equivalents to the beings described, for instance, in the Neoplatonic hierarchical emanative system. So, the One came to be easily identified with God, the celestial spheres became analogous to the Qur'anic multiple Heavens (Q. 67:3), and the angels were recognized as belonging to the category of the secondary beings, with the Angel Gabriel often identified with the Holy Spirit (*Rūḥ al-Quds*).[119]

In Avicenna's system, the angelic hierarchy reflects the emanative scheme of the intellects. From God proceeds the first intelligence or first archangel/cherub capable of a threefold contemplation: first, of its Principle, second, of itself as necessary and, third, of itself as possible. By way of these contemplations the first archangel/cherub produces simultaneously (i) the second intelligence or second archangel/cherub; (ii) the first *anima coelestis* or first angel/soul as the moving soul of its celestial orb; (iii) the highest celestial orb or matter of the first heaven (the starless sphere). This emanative process culminates with the ninth Archangel corresponding to the Agent Intellect, the 'demiurge of the sub-lunary world'.[120]

It has been previously observed that Avicenna interprets the return of the soul to its Principle in a clear Neoplatonic perspective; however, whilst the latter prescribes the annihilation of the human soul's individuation once it encounters the divine, in the Avicennian idea of *rujūʿ*, the soul preserves its individuality.[121] In *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (containing the texts and comments on Avicenna's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān, Risālat al-Ṭayr* and *Salāmān wa Absāl*), Corbin has pointed out that it is particularly the character of ultimate individuality which distinguishes every mystical experience. In the following section, it will be observed that Avicenna, by referring to human freedom and responsibility through a numinous vocabulary, uses individuality to shift his discourse on emanation from a philosophical to a mystical dimension. Even though Avicenna colours his emanative schema with theological angelology, he still remains faithful to his personal understanding of natural determinism as he acknowledges nature and will (both divine and human) as co-operators in the determination of things.

It has been examined that the human way of return to God is thinkable as an ultimate expression of intellectual awareness. What Gutas seems to have missed in his denial of mysticism in Avicenna's system, is the fact that knowledge becomes real gnosis only when it encompasses the soul's self-consciousness of its status and awareness of its place in relation to God. The knowledge that a purified soul acquires, through God's manifestation, is a form of gnosis strengthened by the soul's understanding of the place it occupies in the world, which makes it aware of its continuity with the Principle and His manifestations.[122] Corbin has highlighted that Gnosticism enters the realm of mysticism once it is realized that the soul's awakening to itself, occurring through its intellective power which makes the soul capable of receiving the illumination descending from the Agent Intellect,

is achievable when the soul encounters and recognizes its own 'personal' guide, its personal Active Intellect or its particular Angel. Significantly, Corbin states that Avicenna's angelology identifies the soul's personal guide in the Angel-Soul, a celestial counterpart of the terrestrial soul, which exercises on the latter both an epiphanic and hermeneutic function.[123] The Angel-Soul, in fact, becomes visible, that is epiphanizes itself in an image, to the individual soul once the latter awakens and realizes its extraneity to the earthly world and the need that it has of a guide which is committed to lead the soul's exodus from the terrestrial cosmos, thus allowing its return to the original celestial realm. For Corbin, it is the Angel-Soul which becomes a guide and which performs this pedagogic service, by informing its corresponding soul of the fact that it shares the same nature of the Angel-Soul. With this 'information', the soul comes to understand that it is one with the Angel from which it originates. In order to be recognized by its terrestrial side, the Soul is required to manifest itself in an absolutely 'individual' expression which the soul can identify. Likewise, the Soul, which is aware of the fact that it emanates from the Agent Intellect's thought, necessitates a 'personalization' of the latter so that its terrestrial counterpart, the soul, might individuate the Agent Intellect's image proportionally to its own preparation to receive the forms irradiated by it. The human soul, awakened to its celestial nature, is thus 'returned' to its intellectual-contemplative nature (*ʿaqliyya*): it becomes conscious of itself as a thinking-intelligent soul, as an *intellectus possibilis* which is placed *in actu* through its Soul's preparation to receive the in-forming activity of its individualized Agent Intellect.

If one examines these concepts from the perspective of angelology, it becomes clear that Avicenna speaks of a 'virtual angelicity' of the human soul, a concept inherited from the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'.[124] The virtual angelic nature of the human soul, which can be attained once it realizes its original celestial nature, becomes the source of the soul's individuation. Despite the human soul's natural vocation to encounter its Angel and follow its guidance, it is due to the victory of its contemplative power, that is, the ability of the theoretical intellect to overcome the temptations of the practical intellect, that the soul's *reditus* effort to reach its real self and its Principle becomes successful. Once again, Avicenna shuns away the fatalistic attitude pertaining to the classical understanding of natural predestination, as he emphasizes the efficacy of individual striving. The soul's yearning towards its original celestial nature, which is triggered by natural necessitation, through its inborn love, and by the individual will which is determined to defeat bridling passions, represents the soul's way to attaining perfect individuation. This individuation is no longer the individuation of the material compound occurring through the reciprocal causal combination of form and matter. It is, Corbin explains, not the identification of individuals as single members of a species, but a 'superindividuality' brought about by the pedagogical lesson imparted by the Agent Intellect upon the human soul, and the latter's attitude of 'turning with greater spontaneity, perfection and constancy toward the illuminating [Agent Intellect]'.[125]

It is clear that also, from a mystical/angelological perspective, Avicenna sees the human soul as being able to contribute in determining his terrestrial destiny

and his posthumous future. This happens in proportion to the soul's ability to tame the dictates of his practical faculty and through the action that man's contemplative intellect, trained by its angelic nature, performs by turning toward the Agent Intellect in order to be conjoined with it. The capacity the soul has to expose itself to the irradiating in-forming action of the Agent Intellect, making itself fit, through spiritual exercises, to receive such effusion of forms, explains why the soul's individuation entails the soul's freedom. A sufficient measure of inner freedom, in fact, must be inferred so that the manifestation of the personal image of the Soul to the soul can occur through the imaginative activity. In other terms, the soul's freedom becomes indispensable for the operativity of the imaginative activity which facilitates the visualization of a personal Soul to the soul. Obviously, the shaping of the image of the Soul onto the soul is the consequence of the human experiential crossing through successive stages of consciousness: first the stage of self-consciousness and, second the stage in which the human soul becomes aware that it is the product of both the angelic thoughts and the in-forming function of the Agent Intellect. It can be argued that the soul's consciousness, in its various degrees, is the result of the same soul's natural willingness to 'progress' and to perfect itself returning to itself.

It has been discussed above that the individuation of a compounded substance is due to the receptivity of matter, which is ready to embrace the form specifically suitable for it. The human soul, like matter, is not a mere passive principle; from an angelological perspective, the human soul as a *material intellectus* or even as *intellectus possibilis* does not have merely a dispositive nature towards intelligible knowledge. It is undeniable that the human soul-intelligence becomes the partner of his Angel-Soul because it needs the latter as its guide; but one needs also to bear in mind that it is the human soul which allows the Angel to accomplish his divine service, by way of realizing his epiphanic value. Basically, it is the human soul which allows the Angel to irradiate intelligible forms, destined to inform matter, towards this world, and to raise the soul towards its Principle. The personal relation, established within the mystical dimension, between the human soul and the Agent Intellect makes the soul the protagonist of any possible choice. In other terms, the human soul, as the dwelling place of intellectual sublimations and practical desires, of demonic and angelic virtualities, can mould itself and builds up its future of happiness and salvation by way of allowing the blooming of its potential angelicity. The intellectual realization of his angelicity becomes, consequently, the soul's goal.

The deterministic tone with which the 'philosopher' Avicenna embeds his emanative order is 'integrated' once the 'mystic' Avicenna interprets the Angels-Souls and their heavens-spheres, i.e. celestial matters of their orbs, as hypostases of the Archangels-Intelligences' thoughts. The emanative power, which is transferred by the Necessary Existent to the angelic secondary causes, is an act of thought, that is gnosis understood as creative knowledge. It is the product of the Angels-Intelligences' intellection of their Principle and of themselves as generators of beings, of substances and ultimately, of human souls. The Soul's desire to become similar to the intelligence which precedes it naturally triggers the motion of the sphere

of its heaven. Each Soul, in fact, 'moves its sphere with a motion that is natural, perpetual and circular, but the motive force of which is the Soul's will and loving desire to assimilate itself with the perfectly happy Intelligence from which it emanates'.[126]

It can be deduced that the divine deterministic schema, which prescribes a natural tendency for Souls and spheres to aim towards their principles, is mitigated through the 'mystical' and very personal soul-Soul's struggle. Such a struggle does not occur necessarily but it is triggered by the souls' will to approach their not-yet-possessed individual perfections through intellectual-spiritual exercises. It is worth remembering that the human *ʿaqliyya* is not indigenous to the soul, but is acquired through the soul's own spiritual efforts. Therefore one can claim that from both a philosophical perspective and from a mystical angle, the whole Avicennian construct, through the double movement *exitus-reditus*, presupposes a predetermined structure in which all existents obey, first unconsciously and then with acquired intellective awareness, to the *ab aeterno* divine design which is certainly beneficial to mankind but it is also, as we have tried to show, 'beneficial' for the deity. Despite the deterministic framework of an eternal and universal return, necessarily inscribed as an inevitable moment in the very nature of the divine emanation, the responsibility for a successful return of all essences to God is considered dependent on the essences' capacity to strive towards such goal. The necessary character of the essences' disposition to engage in such a return is, however, to be emphasized: it is almost as if, even before being set into existence, these essences aim to return to the source of their existence.[127] Beyond his mystical perspective, Avicenna is still anchored to a very deterministic context with the latter being, nonetheless, attenuated by his very personal perspective on ontology-angelology.

Notes

1 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 283–90.
2 If God does not know particulars how can He be aware of each individual and punish or reward him/her accordingly? On similar questions see P. Adamson, 'On knowledge of particulars', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 105, 2005, pp. 273–94; M.E. Marmura, 'Some Aspects of Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82, 1962, pp. 299–312; H. Zghal, 'La Connaissance des Singuliers chez Avicenne', in R. Morelon and A. Hasnawi (eds), *De Zénon d'Élée à Poicaré: Recueil d'études en homage à Roshdi Rashed*, Louvain: Peeters, pp. 685–718.
3 Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, p. 266. Translation is by Lizzini: 'Poichè conosce se stesso, conosce che da sè proviene ogni esistenza; e conosce dunque da sè ogni esistenza universale e [ogni esistenza] particolare *sub specie universali*'. 'La Metafisica', p. 406. See also Marmura, 'Some aspects', p. 302; Netton, *Allāh Transcendent*, p. 161.
4 ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Kitāb al-Muṣāraʿa*, trans. and ed. W. Madelung and T. Mayer, *Struggling with the Philosopher: A Refutation of Avicenna's Metaphysics*, New York and London: Curzon Press, 2001, p. 61.
5 Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, pp. 266–7. Avicenna offers a clear definition of what universal means in *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 148–57.

6 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 288–9.
7 Adamson, 'On Knowledge of Particulars', p. 283.
8 Ibid., pp. 281–5.
9 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 285–8.
10 Ibid., p. 288.
11 Marmura, 'Some Aspects', pp. 305–11. Significantly, Avicenna explains that there is no universality as such except in the soul and that the nature (*ṭabīʿa*) of a thing which is not characterized by materiality cannot be multiple in existence. This is because the nature deprived of matter cannot become multiple through accidents. The latter are either necessary concomitants of the nature (*lāzim li'l-ṭabīʿa*), so that the multiplicity in them does not vary in terms of species, or are not necessary concomitants of the nature, in which case, their occurrence would be linked to a cause relating to matter. Hence, Avicenna explains, it is conceivable that the nature of an existing species (like that of the sun) is one in number and this can occur without depriving the nature of this thing of its accidents. See Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 158.
12 Adamson, 'On Knowledge of Particulars', p. 286. Adamson refers to Avicenna's *al-Shifā': al-Burhān (The Healing: Demonstration)*, ed. A. Afīfī and I. Madkour, Cairo: Organisation Generale Egyptienne, 1956, p. 144, p. 146, p. 172.
13 Ivry, 'Destiny Revisited', p. 166.
14 Marmura, 'Some Aspects', p. 311.
15 M.E. Marmura, 'Divine Omniscience and Future Contingents in Alfarabi and Avicenna', in T. Rudavsky (ed.), *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy: Islamic, Jewish and Christian Perspectives*, Dordrecht: Reidel, 1985, pp. 88–91. See also Marmura, 'Some Aspects,' pp. 301–2; R. Acar, 'Reconsidering Avicenna's Position on God's Knowledge of Particulars', in J. McGinnis and D.C. Reisman (eds), *Interpreting Avicenna: Science and Philosophy in Medieval Islam*, Leiden Boston: Brill, 2004, pp. 142–56.
16 Ivry, 'Destiny revisited', p. 167.
17 Avicenna, *al-Shifā': al-Burhān*, p. 181, p. 298 and p. 321.
18 In contrast to Ivry ('Destiny Revisited', pp. 166–7), Belo has suggested that, for Avicenna, matter is not unpredictable in relation to form. Belo quotes an example from the *Physics* of *al-Shifā'* and argues that the comparison between the prediction of an eclipse and that of a fever enables Avicenna to bring down 'the barrier between the celestial and the terrestrial world in terms of predictability and stability'. The quotation reads: 'When someone sees the moon conjoined with the (pseudo-) planet which is in the degree of the (Moon's) node, and the sun [is] at the other end of the diameter, the intellect judges [that there will be] an eclipse. Equally if [someone] knows that matter is becoming putrescent, he knows that a fever is in the offing' (Belo, *Chance and Determinism*, p. 88). Matter, in this perspective, seems not to be more unpredictable than the motion of the celestial spheres which are involved in the occurring of the eclipse. However, the predictability of matter doesn't seem to be the real issue here. The example provided instead concerns the question of the necessary legacy between causes and effects. The matter referred to in the quotation, in its already evident actual condition of putrescence, recalls more the idea of an existent corporeal body which, already informed, is currently invested with that specific aspect, rather than the Avicennian idea of absolute matter whose unpredictability Ivry refers to.
19 Ivry, 'Destiny Revisited', p. 167.
20 On the nature of psychological desire and on its relation to action see Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 220–35.
21 The desire for perfection is not only a voluntary motion but also an act imbedded in nature. See Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 312.
22 Avicenna, *Risālat fī sirr al-Qadar*, p. 30; Hourani, 'Essay on the Secret of Destiny', p. 33.
23 In his *Tahāfut*, al-Ghazālī rejects 20 philosophical doctrines which are based on the

works of Aristotle and Plato and of Muslim philosophers like al-Farābī and Avicenna. Seventeen of these doctrines were condemned as heretical innovations and three as irreligious (*kufr*), being totally opposed to the Islamic creed. The denial of bodily resurrection is one of the three positions of unbelief – together with the belief in the eternity of the world and God's limited knowledge of particulars. These positions will be analysed in details in the course of this book.

24 Hourani, 'Essay on the Secret of Destiny', p. 40; Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 362.
25 Avicenna, *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya*, pp. 42–6, p. 60, p. 74.
26 Marmura, 'Divine Omniscience and Future Contingents', p. 92.
27 Ibid.
28 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 344.
29 A.J. Arberry, *Avicenna on Theology*, London: Murray, 1951, p. 39.
30 Avicenna, *Risālat al-Qadar*, p. 13.
31 Marmura, 'Divine Omniscience and Future Contingents', p. 90.
32 This stance is significantly paralleled in al-Ghazālī' use of divine knowledge which he employs in order to resolve the difficulties posed by the *kalāmic* doctrine of bodily resurrection.
33 Plato, *Phaedo*, pp. 64–6; Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, pp. 16–7.
34 'Impossibile est etiam corpus esse causam formalem animae aut perfectivam', 'nec est corpus causa nisi accidentalis'. Avicenna quoted in G. Verbeke 'Le *De Anima* d'Avicenne': una Conception Spiritualiste de l'Homme', in *Avicenna Latinus, Liber de Anima seu Sextus de Naturalibus*, IV-V, Louvain/Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968–1972, p. 34* and p. 40.*
35 Raḥmān, *Avicenna's Psychology*, p. 57.
36 Janssens, 'Ibn Sīnā's Ideas of Ultimate Realities', p. 256.
37 Avicenna, *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya*, p. 132.
38 Raḥmān, *Avicenna's Psychology*, p. 12; Avicenna, *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya*, p. 128; see also note 3.
39 Avicenna, *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya*, pp. 168–70.
40 Raḥmān, *Avicenna's Psychology*, p. 58.
41 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 424; Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, pp. 17–8; idem, *Al-Fārābī and His School*, pp. 32–5.
42 Avicenna, *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya*, pp. 128–32.
43 Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, pp. 293–4.
44 Ibid. pp. 295–6. On the definitions of *ma'rifa* see Netton, *al-Fārābī and His School*, p. 33.
45 The common human being is closer to the celestial intellects (angels) during sleep when the imaginative faculty is not bridled by sense perception. The celestial beings' essences are forms which are capable of understanding all occurrences, including future events. Humans receive these forms and, if the imaginative faculty leaves them undisturbed, they can potentially subsist as such. However, the imaginative faculty tends to imitate or associate these forms with something it retrieves from the past (such as old images etc.). Consequently, the forms preserved are simply imitations of their original versions. It is necessary to go back (*ta'wīl*) with the imagination and draw parallels between the original forms and their imitations. Angels can manifest to prophets, who are men with an extensive imaginative faculty, under different forms with greater intensity also during the state of wake. The imagination of these kinds of humans imitates what flows from the celestial intelligences and stabilizes in the common sense. Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, pp. 295–7.
46 'Intelligo quod ipsa anima est principium motuum et apprehensionum.' Avicenna quoted in Verbeke, 'Le *De Anima* d'Avicenne', p. 38*; Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, pp. 288–9.
47 Avicenna, *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya*, p. 130
48 Ibid., pp. 62–4. This position resembles Aristotle's view for which the soul is the

active element within created beings and the internal motor of bodies. According to the Stagirite, within the natural living bodies, the soul is often used as a synonymous of life (Aristotle, *De Anima*, II, 1, 412a6–15), and it is intended as the form of a natural body which has life in potentiality. Ibid., II, 1, 412a19–21, 412b10–17.

49 Verbeke, 'Le *De Anima* d'Avicenne', pp. 43*-5*; Avicenna, *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya*, p. 130 n. 1.
50 Raḥmān, *Avicenna's Psychology*, pp. 32–5.
51 Lizzini, 'La Metafisica', pp. 388–9
52 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 350.
53 Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, pp. 300–1.
54 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 347–57. Avicenna links evil with the specific human faculty of desire and classifies it as a lower faculty. Wishing to free God from any blame for the very existence of evil, Avicenna claims that lower faculties do not inevitably lead to moral evil and claims that 'nothing among the actions is to be called an evil, without also being a good with respect to his efficient cause.' See Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 344. In many cases, in fact, lower faculties show their positive sides in their ensuring basic corporeal necessities such as survival and reproductions. Their relation to vital functions makes the fulfilment of these desires agreeable with the dictates of reason. It is the latter, in fact, that takes over the great responsibility to decide whether or not a lower faculty, in a given situation, has to do with something really vital. See Janssens, 'The problem of human freedom in Ibn Sīnā', pp. 112–3.
55 Ibid., pp. 114–8.
56 On this topic B. Abrahamov, 'Ibn Sīnā's Influence on al-Ghazzālī's Non-Philosophical Works', *Abr Nahrain* 29, 1991, p. 5.
57 Janssens, 'The Problem of Human Freedom in Ibn Sīnā', p. 117.
58 Avicenna, *Risālat al-Qadar*, p. 10.
59 Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, pp. 293–4.
60 T. Sabri, 'Traité d'Avicenne sul le Destin (*al-Qadar*): Traduction et Commentaire', *Revue des Études Islamiques* 55–7, 1987–89, p. 203.
61 A similar outcome is expressed in Janssens, 'The Problem of Human Freedom in Ibn Sīnā', pp. 118.
62 Avicenna, *Risālat al-Qadar*, pp. 1–2
63 Avicenna emphasizes the need for divine revelation and prophecy in *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, pp. 298–9.
64 Avicenna, *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya*, pp. 200–4. For the definition of knowledge as light see F. Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, Leiden: Brill, *1970*, pp. 155–93; in Greek as well as in Islamic philosophical texts, knowledge is often compared to the light and to the sun. See al-Farābī, *Ārā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, p. 403; Netton, *Allāh Transcendent*, p. 176; B. Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, London and New York: Routledge Curzon 2003, p. 159, note 86.
65 Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Hidāya*, p. 274.
66 Generally, Gutas denies any form of mysticism in Avicenna. See D. Gutas, 'Intellect without Limit: The Absence of Mysticism in Avicenna', pp. 351–72. Gutas analyses the Avicennian theory of philosophical knowledge and concludes that there is no difference between the latter and any alleged theory of mystical knowledge. According to Gutas, in Avicenna's system there are no elements that cannot be explained within his 'rationalist and empiricist analysis of the faculties and abilities of the human soul'. If on the one hand, it is important to stress as Gutas does, that in the Avicennian construct the supremacy of the intellectual way of acquiring knowledge emerges clearly, on the other hand, it is undeniable that all the rational and logical elements in Avicenna's system are imbued with 'mystical' layers. These are evident if approached from the perspective of 'love' or that of the soul's 'personal' striving towards perfection. Gutas claims that Avicenna had a very low opinion of Sufism and quotes Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in support of his position (Gutas, 'Avicenna's Eastern "Oriental" Philosophy; Nature,

Contents, Transmission', pp. 161–2). Particularly, Gutas refers to the last three chapters of the *Ishārāt* which are known to contain the *'ulūm al-sūfīyya*. Gutas understands that these terms do not mean 'the sciences of the Sufis' (as translated by Marmura in his 'Plotting the Course of Avicenna's Thought', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 111, 1991, p. 342), but the 'knowledge of the Sufis', that is, the variety or grades of knowledge of the Sufis. According to Gutas, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī did not believe that the chapters in question were all about Sufism or all about the 'sciences' of the Sufis. Despite this, Gutas admits that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī credited a Sufi subject for chapter/*namat* 9 of part 2 of the *Ishārāt*. Gutas also stresses that Avicenna's criticism towards Islamic mysticism can be easily traced in his works and to highlight this, he quotes a passage from the very beginning of the Physics of the *Shifā'* (*al-Samā'al-Tabī'ī*, p. 21) where Avicenna discusses the difficult nature of certain technical terminology (like the anthropomorphic readings of matter=female and form=male), comparing the Sufi language to that of the philosophers: 'From these things it becomes difficult to understand this talk (*kalām*) which resembles more the talk of the Sufis than it does the talk of the philosophers (*huwa ashbahu bi-kalāmi al-sūfīyyati minhu bi-kalāmi al-falāsifa*).' Gutas sees in this passage Avicenna's condemnation of the Sufi positions whilst, one might argue, the quotation seems merely to emphasize the evident difficult character of Sufi language which is more similar to *kalāmic* discourse than the linear/logical way of reasoning of the philosophers.

67 On the legacy between Avicenna and mysticism see Shams Inati, *Ibn Sīnā and Mysticism: Remarks and Admonition: Part Four*, London: Kegan Paul International, 1996. See also Nasr's position in *Three Muslim* Sages: *Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Ibn 'Arabī*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964, reprinted Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1976. Amongst the alleged mystical works of Avicenna: *Risālat fī'l-'ishq'* and the three visionary recitals *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān, Risālat al-Ṭayr and Salāmān wa Absāl*. For a classification of the different kinds of Avicennian mystical philosophy see Morewedge, 'The Logic of Emanationism and Ṣūfism', pp. 1–18; Elkaisy-Friemuth, *God and Humans*, pp. 77–9.

68 Schimmel, *Mystical Dimension of Islam*, p. 291.

69 On this myth, which will become a conventional motif in relation to love, see Plato, *Symposium* 187 *C* –189 *D*, 189E–191E. On the appropriation of the story in Arabic sources see D. Gutas, *Greek Philosophers in the Arabic Tradition*, Aldershot: Variorum Collected Studies Series, 2000, pp. 36–60.

70 Plato, *Phaedrus*, in E. Hamilton and H. Cairns (eds), *Plato: Collected Dialogues*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963, pp. 475–525. In this work as well as the *Symposium*, love is perceived as the pursuit for the attainment of something missing; it implies a deficiency and a natural inclination to obviate it. In the Islamic *milieu*, the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' stressed the 'ethical' aspect of love whose ultimate aim should be that of elevating the human soul from sensual beauty to spiritual beauty. See Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, Epistle 37, 3.271, ll. 9–12.

71 Aristotle, *Metaphysics Lambda 7*, 1072b15–26. The absoluteness of divine happiness is due to the fact that the intensity of the joy is proportionate to the perfection of the object which is intelligized. This concept is found also in al-Farābī's *Ārā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, pp. 116–8.

72 Ibid., pp. 70–2. Amongst Avicenna's works, this concept emerges in *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 283–90 and p. 297. It is also mentioned in *Kitāb al-Najāt*, (1938), pp. 243–5.

73 In Plotinus (*Enneads*, VI, 8), the One is the object of its own love; for Proclus (*In Platonis Timaeum Commentaria*, ed. G. Kroll, Leipzig: n.p., 1899–1901, III, pp. 6–7), the Intellect, which is the demiurge of the terrestrial world, is described as being astonished by the perfection of its own essence. On these topics see De Smet, *La Quiétude de l'Intellect*, p. 205.

74 Al-Farābī, *Ārā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, p. 100

75 Al-Farābī states: 'Its [the Intellect's] pride (*i'jāb*) in its own essence (*bi'l-dhātihi*) and

its love (*ʿishqahu*) for it while it thinks (*ʿaqala*) the First is greater to the pride in its own essence and its love for it whilst it thinks its own essence in accordance to the degree for which the magnificence (*bahāʾ*) and beauty (*jamāl*) of the First are superior to the magnificence and beauty of its own essence'. Ibid., pp. 118–9.

76 Avicenna, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 297.

77 Lizzini, 'La Metafisica', p. 377.

78 The term 'cause' is to be intended both as the Aristotelian efficient cause, God is recognized by creatures to be their Creator given that they are the effect of the divine act, and as the Neoplatonic final cause which exercises causality by being the object of creatures' love/striving/desire.

79 References to the English translations of the treatise are by Fackenheim, 'A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sīnā'. We have modified the translation unless otherwise indicated.

80 Ibid., p. 2.

81 In Avicenna's work, love is used often as a synonymous of the Aristotelian concept of nature; Aristotle identifies nature as 'the principle of movement and rest which is found in one thing in essence.' More specifically, Aristotle perceives 'nature' as (i) the principle for which any given thing is what it is, and (ii) that principle through which this thing manifests a predisposition to realize the potentialities (*dynamis*) inherent in it and through which it has come to exist. See Aristotle, *Physics*, II, 1, 192b13–16, 20–3, III,1, 200b12–13, VIII,3, 253b5–6; idem, *De Anima*, II, 1, 412b16–17; idem, *Metaphysics* L*ambda*,4, 1014b16–1015a19. A similar definition also features in al-Farābī, *Kitāb al-Siyāsa al-Madanīya*, ed. F.M. Najjar, Beirut; n. p., 1964, pp. 36–7; idem, *al-Daʿāwa al-Qalbīya*, Hyderabad: n.p., 1930, p. 6.

82 Early in his treatise on love, Avicenna has already stressed (see quote p. 79) that the deficiency or imperfection of any thing, which is the evil in it, can be identified with the thing's non-existence (*al-ʿadamiyya*). In the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifāʾ* he stresses this point even more clearly and declares that 'what in reality is truly desired is existence' (*al-mutshūq bi'l-ḥaqīqa al-wujūd*). See *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 283–4.

83 To be borne in mind is the fact that this plan finds its fulfilment only when *in actu*, namely, only at the very moment beings come into existence through their own natural dispositions given by their being merely potential beings.

84 Avicenna, *Risālat fī'l-ʿishq*, p. 9.

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid., p. 10.

87 This is particularly true with reference to the celestial souls which eternally possess the perfection in which their existence rests. Because they are the closest entities to the absolute divine perfection, they pursue God's intention to preserve the world's general status quo, including the natural laws of generation and corruption. Ibid., p. 21.

88 Avicenna states that God's providential wisdom (*ḥikma*) establishes of necessity a form of providence which maintains destruction and generation within species (*al-ānwāʿ*) and genera (*al-ājnās*). Ibid., p. 10.

89 Ibid.

90 On other occasions Avicenna speaks of the estimative faculty (*wahmiyya*); this is an intuitive capacity by which the sheep recognizes the wolf as a danger to be avoided. See Avicenna, *al-Najāt*, p. 163; Raḥmān, *Avicenna's Psychology*, pp. 30–1. A similar example is provided in *Risālat fī'l-ʿishq*: it is thanks to the estimative faculty that a donkey, looking at a wolf approaching, stops feeding itself and runs away, knowing that the impending harm outweighs the benefit of pasture. Avicenna, *Risālat fī'l-ʿishq*, p. 9.

91 Previously in his *Risālat fī'l-ʿishq* (p. 6), Avicenna had defined *hayūlā* as the abode of non-being (*maqarru al-ʿadam*).

92 See the observations on Avicenna's interpretation of Qur'an 41:11–12 in J. Michot 'Le Commentaire Avicennien du Verset', pp. 317–28, Arabic text pp. 319–21.

93 Referring to the ethical enterprise that the human soul has to undertake in order to

free itself from the legacies of bodily dictates, Abū Ḥayyān al-Tawḥīḍī speaks of love (*maḥabba*) as something which emanates from the virtuous soul, whilst desire (*shahwa*) is related to nature and bears, intrinsically, a negative aspect. See al-Tawḥīḍī, *al-Imtāʿwa al-Muʾānasa*, 3 vols, ed. Aḥmad Amīn and Aḥmad al-Zayn, Beirut, 1953, p. 3.105, l. 13–106, l. 6, quoted in N. al-Shaʿar, 'Between Love and Social Aspiration: The Influence of Sufi and Greek Concepts of Love on the Socio-Political Thought of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ, ed. Miskawayh, and al-Tawḥīdī,' in Nuha al-Shaʿar and Verena Klemm et al., *Sources and Approaches across Near Eastern Disciplines: The Proceedings of the 24th Congress of the Union Européenne des Arabisants et Islamisants (UEAI)*, Peeters: Leuven, 2012.

94 Avicenna, *Risālat fīʾl-ʿishq*, p. 22.
95 Ibid., p. 21.
96 Ibid., the translation is by Fackenheim, p. 222.
97 Ibid., p. 23;
98 Ibid., p. 21.
99 Ibid., p. 26.
100 Ibid., p. 5.
101 Avicenna declares that 'in all beings . . . love is either the cause of their being, or being and love are identical in them'. Ibid., p. 5.
102 Avicenna's *Risālat al-Qadar* quoted in Belo, 'Ibn Sīnā on Chance in the Physics of Aš-Šifā'', p. 30, note 11.
103 In the *Risālat fīʾl-ʿishq*, we read: 'It [Absolute Good], by Its very nature, loves the existents that are caused by It and It loves to manifest Itself. Given that the love of the Most Perfect for Its own perfection (*li-faḍlihi*) is the greatest love, the true goal of Its desire is what is given (*yunāl*) with Its manifestation (*tajallī*), and this is the receiving of its manifestation by the divine souls which have reached maximum approximation to It. In this way it is possible for them to become the object of Its love.' Avicenna, *Risālat fīʾl-ʿishq*, p. 26.
104 Ibid., p. 22.
105 This is clear if one analyses Avicenna's statement: 'If It were in Its essence veiled from all things and not manifested to them, It could not be known and nothing could be obtained from It.' Ibid., p. 23; translation is Fackenheim's, p. 225.
106 Ibid., p. 23.
107 Avicenna, *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya*, p. 56.
108 L. Gardet, *La Pensée religieuse d'Avicenna (Ibn Sina)*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1951, pp. 145–69 and G. Anawati and L. Gardet, *Mystique Musulmane*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1961, p. 116 note 38.
109 Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna & Averroes on Intellect*, pp. 87–91.
110 This occurs because, for Avicenna, knowledge begins from 'the truly adept's separation, detachment, abandonment and rejection [of materiality] concentrating on a togetherness that is togetherness of the attributes of the Truth [and divine perfection]'. See Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt waʾl-Tanbīhāt*, trans. S. Inati as *Ibn Sīnā and Mysticism*, p. 88. Avicenna also claims that 'when a being yearns for an object, this being must have already attained something of this object but is missing something else'. Ibid., p. 28.
111 Avicenna, *Risālat fīʾl-ʿishq*, p. 23. It is significant that unification is nothing but a mystical contemplation of an intellectualistic nature which refers to the possibility for human soul to become a mirror for God's supreme light. See L. Gardet, 'La Connaissance Suprème de Dieu, *maʿrifa* A*llāh*, selon Avicenne', *Revue de l'Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes à Tunis* 14, 1951, pp. 387–94. The intellectualistic tone used by Avicenna when he speaks of God's manifestation as the 'Form of the Intellect' cannot obfuscate its theological/mystical connotation. This is given by the fact that the approximation to ultimate goodness is guaranteed by a divine concession which is placed outside any rationalist or empiricist phenomena.
112 P. Morewedge, 'The Logic of Emanationism and Ṣūfism', pp. 12–3.

113 Avicenna states that men will see the true One through an intellectual vision (*mushāhada ʿaqliyya*) rather than through bodily seeing (*mushāhada jismāniyya*). Avicenna, *Risālat fī māhiyyat al-Ṣalāt*, in A.F.M. Mehren (ed.), *Traitès Mystiques d'Abou ʿAlī al-Ḥoèsain b. Abdallah b. Sīnā*, Leyde: Brill, III fascicule, 1889–99, p. 38.
114 Morewedge, 'The Logic of Emanationism and Ṣūfism', pp. 9–17.
115 M.E. Marmura, 'Ghazālian Causes and Intermediaries', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, 1995, p. 100.
116 On the nature of angelic knowledge see Qur'ān 2:30–4; 4:172; 7:11; 15–29–30; 16: 49–50; 17:6; 21:19–20. On angels in Islam see S.R. Burge, *Angels in Islam*: *Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī's al-Ḥabāʾik fī akhbār al-malāʾik*, London: Routledge, 2011, particularly, pp. 88–108.
117 Avicenna refers to angels in connection to emanation in *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, pp. 358–9 and pp. 365–9.
118 This position is evident in al-Fārābī, *Masāʾil mutafarriqa*, in *Rasāʾil al-Fārābī*, Haidarabad: n. p., 1926, p. 3.
119 Netton's *Muslim Neoplatonists*, p. 55, p. 68, p. 74, p. 84.
120 Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, pp. 25–6.
121 Avicenna, *Risālat al-aḍḥawīya*, pp. 140–50; Lucchetta, *Epistola sulla Vita Futura*, p. xviii.
122 For instance, Avicenna speaks of a contact between human souls and the souls of the celestial bodies which occurs by virtue of a congeneric similarity (congenerousness – *mujānasa*). The latter allows the sharing of intellectual 'concerns' between the heavenly and the human souls. In order to deny any mystical dimension in Avicenna's system, Gutas argues that 'the knowledge from the supernal world by means of the faculty of imagination is that of particular events on earth as contained in the souls of the heavenly spheres, while knowledge by means of the intellect is of universals as contained in the Active Intellect' (Gutas, 'Intellect without Limits', pp. 360–1). Even if one can accept this view, it is impossible to dismiss altogether the sense of continuity existing between the sub and supra-lunar worlds.
123 Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, p. 20.
124 Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasāʾil*, vol. 3, p. 181, IV, p. 122; Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, p. 24.
125 Netton, *Muslim Neoplatonists*, p. 82. It is worth noticing that such a conception of the soul's individuality would explain its survival after corporeal death.
126 Avicenna's *al-Najāt*, quoted in L. Gardet, 'En l'Honneur du Millénaire d'Avicenne', *Revue Thomiste*, Paris 2, 1951, p. 340.
127 Lizzini, 'La Metafisica', p. 381.

3 Al-Ghazālī

Part one

A biography

Known as the 'Proof of Islam' (*al-Ḥujjat al-Islām*), Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī is considered one of the greatest intellectual authorities in Islamic thought. Born in Ṭūs (*c.*450/1054) where he gained his acquaintance with the science of jurisprudence, al-Ghazālī soon began to study Ashʿarite theology, philosophy, logic and the natural sciences at the Niẓāmiyya *madrasa* in Nīshāpūr, under the direction of the Shāfiʿī and Ashʿarite scholar Abū'l-Maʿālī al-Juwāynī (d. 478/1085–86). Al-Juwāynī's teaching at the Niẓāmiyya marked an important moment in the history of Ashʿarism: the Seljuk Tughril-Beg (reigned 432–55/1040–36) had nominated as his Wazir the Ḥanafite al-Kundurī who had initiated the persecution of the Ashʿarites in 439–54/1048–63. Al-Juwāynī, as well as other Ashʿarites such as al-Qushayrī, were banned from teaching at the mosques at Nīshāpūr.[1] With the ascension of Niẓām al-Mulk, who was nominated caliph of the Seljuk sultanate in 455/1063, the Ashʿarite teachings received new support: Niẓām al-Mulk established a series of seminaries (*madrasa Niẓāmiyya*) for the dissemination of the Islamic sciences and appointed al-Juwāynī to the Nīshāpūr branch.[2] Al-Juwāynī was probably the first amongst the Ashʿarites to inject into the study of theology an unprecedented attention to the philosophical sciences that, by the fifth/eleventh century, had begun to be deeply influenced by the works of Avicenna. It is possible to think that al-Ghazālī's acquaintance with *falsafa* might have started during his attendance of al-Juwāynī's seminaries.[3] For some scholars like Elkaisy-Friemuth and Treiger, al-Ghazālī's curriculum, at this time, probably included also Sufism, which he studied under the guidance of the mystic al-Farmādhī (d. 447/1055).[4] In Nīshāpūr, al-Ghazālī started his teaching career, focusing on jurisprudence and Ashʿarite law in his literary works (amongst these, *al-Mankhūl min taʿlīqāt al-uṣūl*, *Shifā' al-Ghalīl fī al-Qiyās*, *al-Basīṭ*, *al-Wasīṭ*).[5] After al-Juwāynī's death, al-Ghazālī became amongst the favourites of Niẓām al-Mulk who appointed him director of the Niẓāmiyya College in Baghdād in 484/1091. Between 484–88/1091–95, he produced some of his major works such as *Maqāṣid al-falāsifa*, the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, *Miʿyār al-ʿilm fī fann al-Manṭiq*, *al-Iqtiṣād fī'l-Iʿtiqād* and the *Mīzān al-ʿamal*. The years spent teaching in Baghdād were difficult for both the city and the Seljuk Empire: after Niẓām al-Mulk's murder in 485/1092, probably at the hand of an Ismāʿīlī leader, a series of struggles over the sultanate began to unravel, culminating in the death of the new nominated caliph and the whole

elite of the Seljuk state. In 488/1095, at the height of his academic career, and probably motivated by political reasons, al-Ghazālī left Baghdād, spending some time in Damascus before heading to Mecca.[6] A few months before his departure, as highlighted in his autobiography *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (*The Deliverance from Error*), al-Ghazālī intensified his study of philosophy and committed himself to the study of Sufi texts of authors such as al-Junayd (d. 298/910), al-Shiblī (d. 334/945), Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī (d. 261/874 or 264/877–8), and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 386/996). The new approaches to Sufism which featured in their works had a profound impact on the Ghazālīan understanding of religious tenets and suggested that the only way to reach ultimate salvation was through a life of devoutness and self-restraint from worldly desires. Al-Ghazālī began to question the significance of his career, and this led him to an existential crisis. In his late teens, he had already undergone a first crisis, often depicted as a phase of scepticism. His early dissatisfaction with the explanations and the rational arguments provided by both philosophy and *kalām* meant that al-Ghazālī began to seek answers to his questions in Sufism.[7] With his second crisis, initially dominated by mere indecision and successively turned into a real physical disorder, al-Ghazālī, now in his late thirties, internalized the approach to religion and embraced Sufism as the tool to heal his psychological and physical malady.[8] It has been argued that, due to the latest crisis, his thinking changed radically; this drastic transformation has often been used to justify some inconsistencies in his teachings. Even if, as Frank Griffel observes, 'none of his theological or philosophical positions transform[ed] from what they were before', it is evident that, from the years following 488/1095, the focus of al-Ghazālī's attention shifted onto a more mystical plane which made the 'connections between an individual's "knowledge" . . . of his or her actions, and the afterlife's reward of these actions' the point of convergence of all al-Ghazālī's theoretical speculations.[9]

After the abandonment of his professorship in Baghdād, al-Ghazālī spent many years in Syria. From Damascus he travelled to Jerusalem, Hebron and Medina, also reaching Mecca to take part in the Pilgrimage of 489/1096. He successively went back to Damascus, a brief stay in the course of his journey home. During his retirement at Damascus and Ṭūs, he lived as a poor Sufi, spending his time in meditation and other spiritual exercises. Sufism's influence had evident effects in many Ghazālīan works produced at this time such as the *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn*, the *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* and the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*. In 499/1106, pressed by the authority of the new vizier Fakhr al-Mulk, son of Niẓām al-Mulk, and motivated by the belief that he was the reviver of religion (*mujaddid*) who, according to a well-known Tradition is meant to appear at the beginning of the new century, al-Ghazālī returned to his teaching job in Nīshāpūr, with the majority of his works dating this period being mainly written for the public (with the exception of his autobiography and *The Alchemy of Happiness*).[10] In the last years of his life, he returned to his birthplace where, after establishing a *khānqāh* and few days after the completion of the *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-Islām wa'l-zandaqa* (*The Criterion for distinguishing between Islam and Unbelief*) and the *Iljām al-ʿAwāmm ʿan ʿilm al-kalām* (*Return to the Purity of the Science of Kalām*), he died in 505/1111.

Al-Ghazālī is one of the most celebrated thinkers in Islam. Puzzling both defenders and critics of his theoretical system, his name is remembered, on the one hand, for his trenchant critique of philosophy and, on the other hand, for his assimilation of the philosopher's logical argumentative techniques, which he considered necessary to supersede their arguments. Al-Ghazālī's name also resonates in the history of Islam for his espousal of Ashʿarite stances and his championing sober mystical positions.

The moral laxity prevailing in al-Ghazālī's time among the *ʿumma* and the class of the *ʿulamāʾ* motivated his desire to revive the original spiritual message of Islam. This was thought to be achieved through an interiorization of the religion with reference to the *via mystica*. Al-Ghazālī was convinced that the religious and intellectual rivalry between the Muʿtazilites and the Ashʿarites within *kalām* had revealed the shortcomings of this science and its inability to provide the believers with a path to certitude (*yaqīn*). In his *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-Islām wa'l-zandaqa*, he denounced the 'extremism' of certain *kalām* theologians, and accused them of holding on to a restrictive view of correct belief and of inclining to issue accusations of heresy (*kufr*) too frequently. Al-Ghazālī's criticism focused also against the philosophers; after the *Tahāfut*, also in the *Fayṣal*, he attacks them, probably referring to the *falāsifa* as the *zandaqah*, namely, the hypocritical believers featuring in the title of the work, because, despite professing to be Muslims, they failed to maintain fundamental Islamic theological tenets and proposed unacceptable stances such as the eternity of the world, the idea of a divine limited knowledge and the denial of bodily resurrection.[11] Al-Ghazālī's disapproval of these forms of intellectual deviances was certainly not sterile: underpinning it was a sophisticated theory of scriptural exegesis which sought to delineate the confines within which rival speculative positions could coexist 'in mutual recognition'.[12]

Al-Ghazālī's outlook vis-à-vis *kalām*, *falsafa* and *taṣawwūf* is certainly symptomatic of the tense relationship existing, in Medieval Islam, among the so-called 'indigenous' disciplines, such as Theology and Law, the 'foreign sciences', as Metaphysics and Logic, and mystical epistemology.[13] Particularly, even though Islamic mysticism appealed to many luminaries, it was not yet universally acknowledged as being consistent with the Sunni creed. This probably explains al-Ghazālī's initial approach of the mystical path, which was purely intellectual, and his aim to learn Sufism's methods exclusively by way of studying and teaching, turning away, in the beginning, from any experiential practice.

Under the Seljuk patronage, Sufism found itself strongly bound to the resurgent Ashʿarite *kalām*. The endeavour of harmonizing mysticism and Ashʿarism, which started in the works of many Ashʿarite Sufi such as al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857) and al-Qushayrī, was to be completed by al-Ghazālī. At the time of his late 'conversion', he became convinced of the need to address the contentious conceptualizations made by Sufis on issues such as theosophical union and mystical ecstasy. It became necessary to achieve a synthesis of religious doctrine which reconciled Sufism with Sunnite 'orthodoxy', showing that the Muslim life of devotion to God could be achieved following the 'Sufi way'. The elitism that had characterized the first forms of sober Sufism was superseded by al-Ghazālī's proposition to

make *taṣawwūf* part and parcel of the Muslim faith. With this intent, Abū Ḥāmid celebrated the necessity to complement the esoteric experience of mysticism with the exoteric approach to the revealed Law and its impositions. This attitude certainly reflects the historical context in which al-Ghazālī lived: by the fourth/tenth century, Sufi manuals had begun to circulate in which the harmonization between Sufism and mainstream Islam was a prominent theme. Such texts had reached a wide audience and were aimed at criticizing the radical asceticism, which, influenced by Christian monasticism, had been a characteristic of early expressions of Islamic piety, with its focus on the motif of fear and abstinence. Extreme forms of *askesis*, the so-called *zuhdī* tendency, particularly wide-spread in the region of Khurāsān, began to be questioned in the classical manuals which attempted to offer a harmonic picture of the different schools and tendencies which had characterized *taṣawwūf* since its origin.[14] In al-Ghazālī's time, Sufi literature praised asceticism as a means to live in harmony with the material world, and not as a tool by which obtain a drastic separation from it. Even more specifically, the material world was perceived as the arena in which the wayfarer could practice moderation and self-control. This explains why, following the 'instructions' included in the manuals, Sufi masters like al-Ghazālī informed their mystical teachings with both theoretical and practical suggestions on how to enter and travel on the mystical path during the earthly existence. Besides providing pragmatic advices for the wayfarer, the Sufi creeds, promoted in this literature, were also meant to mitigate the provoking expressions of mystical experience embodied in the ecstatic utterances of early Sufi like al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) whose remark '*Anā al-Ḥaqq*' (I am the Truth) provoked claims of blasphemy due to its suggestion of the possibility of *ḥulūl* (substantial union with God), and antinomianism.

The following two chapters analyse al-Ghazālī's positions on free will and predestination and highlight the extent of his capacity to harmonize theological, philosophical and mystical elements. The analysis also seeks to explore the degrees of similarity and diversity between al-Ghazālī and Avicenna's speculations, revealing the extent of the Ghazālīan rebuff of philosophical tools. It is the aim of this discussion to explain the reason why al-Ghazālī's perspective on the subject of free will and predestination is 'permeated' by the notion of divine unicity (*tawḥīd*), which is approached both from a theological and a mystical perspective.

A passage derived from al-Ghazālī's *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* seems particularly fitting to mark the beginning of this investigation since it summarizes many points which are fundamental to interpret al-Ghazālī's perception of divine unicity and its relation with the issue of free will and predestination. In this passage, it is stated that the understanding of things:

> Consists in 'not cursing fate', not attributing things to the influence of celestial bodies, and not taking objection to Him [God], as it is customary to do; but rather in knowing that all of this takes place by causes subservient to Him, themselves ordered and directed to their effects in the best order and direction, according to the highest standpoint of justice and benevolence.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, p. 109)[15]

In the above passage, al-Ghazālī criticizes and distances himself from the philosophers' view for which the celestial entities are capable of influencing the course of events by way of a divinely delegated capacity.[16] In addition, the Proof of Islam points out that human beings need to become aware of the real essence of things, and they need to attain knowledge of the divine mechanism governing them; only this would prompt mankind to comprehend the ultimate significance of divine *tawḥīd*. The appeal to observe the arrangement of the world's order is a motif which has already been observed in Avicenna.[17] This theme has a great prominence in Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's *Qūt al-Qulūb*. Al-Ghazālī draws openly from this work, especially in the thirty-fifth book of the *Iḥyā'*, in order to explain, like Makkī, that the current creation of the world is the best of all possible ones. Interestingly, Griffel observes, al-Ghazālī also links this issue with the notion of God's unity with the intent of elucidating that all events are God's creation, including human acts.[18] In addition, in the quotation reported, al-Ghazālī claims that everything takes place through causes depending on God and on His action of connecting them to their effects. He implicitly rejects the necessary character of the cause-effect relationship which informed the philosophers' perspectives on causality. Al-Ghazālī, as it will be further illustrated in the course of this book, embraces Ashʿarite positions and aims to show the falsity of the alleged necessary cause-effect relation, speaking of its evident non-necessary nature. Causes have to be perceived as being directed towards specific effects exclusively because they are arranged in this way within the well-ordered and benevolent divine decree. Bearing in mind the difference occurring between the concepts of predestination and determinism which has been discussed in the previous chapters, it is possible to distinguish al-Ghazālī's preference for the Ashʿarite notion of predestination and its creationistic implications. Whilst, for Avicenna, secondary causes are said to be responsible for their own destinies, working in harmony with the divine eternal arrangement of things, through the merging of destiny and determinism, al-Ghazālī infers that God uses causes to fulfil His decree, because causes are subservient to God. The efficiency of secondary causes is decreed to respond to a well-structured and predetermined divine plan that, however, as it will be demonstrated in this study, does not empower other beings with the capacity of determining their own destinies.

Despite the directness of the above position, al-Ghazālī's views on free will and predestination are not always as clear. Striving within himself in the attempt to reconcile his beliefs within the boundaries of Ashʿarite *kalām*, al-Ghazālī perceived, through his mystical experimental gnosis, a strong closeness between Neoplatonic philosophy and the mystical path. Particularly, in his autobiography titled *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, al-Ghazālī, dealing with the moral sciences, expresses his concern on the dangerous similarities which are found between some of the philosophical positions and certain Sufi stances, especially in connection with their respective views on the qualities and habits of the soul. Danger, he believes, lays in the philosophers' attitude to appropriate themselves with mystical concepts, and their inclination of mixing these with some of their own doctrines. For al-Ghazālī, problems might arise when the philosophical doctrines in questions correspond to

the ones condemned by Qur'ānic theological positions, such as the denial of God's knowledge of particulars, the eternity of the world and the negation of bodily resurrection. If injected with these blasphemous beliefs, mystical elements risk to be totally rejected, proportionately to the opinion people have of the soundness or unreliability of the philosophical issues absorbed. To be borne in mind is the fact that al-Ghazālī does not condemn the totality of the philosophers' positions, but only those who are irreconcilable within the Islamic paradigm. Consequently, he rejects both a complete dismissal and a complete acceptance of the philosophers' ethical teachings, protesting against the tendency to identify the whole truth with only one party and the whole error with the other party. By subscribing to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib's principle, 'do not know the truth by men, but rather, know the truth and you will know its adherents',[19] al-Ghazālī invites to avoid prejudices and doctrines' condemnations. A honest attitude which al-Ghazālī himself adopts throughout his captivating apologetic method.[20] It was probably this awareness that contributed to making his individualized Sufism the realm of reconciliation between metaphysical and theological perspectives.[21]

Mishkāt al-Anwār: General considerations

The analysis of the Ghazālīan view on free will and predestination can start by analysing the *The Niche of Lights* in which the thinker proposes a modified version of the Avicennian emanative scheme.[22] It has been shown in the previous sections that emanation becomes for Avicenna symptomatic of determinism, because it allows all beings to act simultaneously as causes and effects in the chain of existents, all of which have embedded, within their nature, their future destinies. It is therefore possible to understand whether al-Ghazālī accepts determinism or moves towards a more predestinarian outlook, which credits authentic causative efficacy exclusively to God in His capacity to shape the future of all His creatures, by evaluating to what extent al-Ghazālī is ready to adopt the emanative schema.

In the *Mishkāt*, a product of al-Ghazālī's profound psychological and spiritual journey,[23] the author offers a perspective on reality which is explicitly mystical when it is compared to the outlooks singled out in previous works, such as the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, the *Iqtiṣād fī'l-iʿtiqād*,[24] both of which have mainly been recognized as *kalāmic* compositions, or even the *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn*.[25] Even if one wishes to distinguish between al-Ghazālī's esoteric and exoteric views,[26] the *Mishkāt* remains an unquestionable Sufi work,[27] which highlights the mystical elements of al-Ghazālī's teachings. In this *oeuvre*, al-Ghazālī engages in the explanation of the Light Verse (Q. 24:35) and the Veils *ḥadīth*.[28] Their interpretation shows that, like Avicenna, al-Ghazālī is attempting to reconcile the theory of emanation with that of creation, and he ends up fostering a different version of the emanative scheme. In the following sections of this study it will be shown that al-Ghazālī initially addresses the topic of existence through a Sufi terminology, and by doing so, he chooses to speak of creation when he wills to hold onto the Ashʿarite occasionalistic view of God. Successively, al-Ghazālī is ready to accommodate the plausibility of emanation, speaking of a kind of emanation

which is different from Avicenna's. Furthermore, it will be observed that, in the Veils section, al-Ghazālī shifts the discourse from emanation to causality when he refers to the secondary agency of the angels. The result of al-Ghazālī's speculations led him to imbue his discourse on causality with both predestinarian and deterministic bearings by adopting, as Frank Griffel puts it, 'a very philosophical perspective', and by looking 'at the world with eyes trained in philosophical cosmology'.[29]

Section 1: Evidences for al-Ghazālī's gnoseological emanation

Al-Ghazālī begins his discourse by introducing a variation of a sound *ḥadīth* for which 'God creates Adam, as an expression of mankind, by pouring light onto him,[30] successively reducing him to the 'lowest of the low'.[31] Due to his lowliness, according to a very traditional Sufi stance, the human being is given the opportunity to initiate his ascent towards the higher realities in order to discover that this world is a parallel of the other.[32] Significantly, the existence of Adam in a proper ontological way is already given, as God creates him, and only successively the enlightening emanation is mentioned as being operative on something already given as existent. In addition, al-Ghazālī draws attention to a series of mystical expressions such as 'God created Adam upon the form of the All-Merciful' and 'one knows one's Lord only by knowing oneself' in order to link God's direct creation of Adam with the divine mercy (*raḥma*);[33] he aims to convey the idea that it is thanks to the latter that human beings become capable of knowing themselves and their Lord. This is made possible because divine mercy gifts man with an abridged form, which brings together both the divine and the human nature.[34] Al-Ghazālī is conscious of the fact that humans need to hone the understanding of what they are, and what they are meant to do in the hierarchy of existents before attaining knowledge of God. Adam's initial state of darkness, which represents primarily his unawareness about his nature and his role on this earth, is depicted as being in need of a light (knowledge) which may initiate Adam's understanding of God. The latter is considered to be attainable only after Adam has reached his self-understanding. In this part of *The Niche of Lights*, God is presented as a merciful Being, which responds to man's need of knowledge by pouring (*ifāḍa*) on Adam some (*min*) of His divine light.[35] It must be remembered that Avicenna regarded darkness as ignorance or, more precisely, as unconsciousness of ignorance; likewise, for al-Ghazālī, man's consciousness of his initial obscurity-ignorance inaugurates the human journey towards God, and the 'investiture' of awareness makes man's knowledge primarily a self-knowledge, and only successively the instrument through which humans reach knowledge of their Lord.[36] It can be argued that the divine 'pouring' of light is acting here exclusively in an intellectual way by kindling awareness for someone previously lacking it, this light being, as al-Ghazālī specifies, 'the key to most knowledge (*al-nūr huwa miftāḥ akthar al-maʿrifa*)'[37] The stress Avicenna had put on the intellects' perpetual action of cogitation, which made them fully aware of themselves and God, was considered sufficient to ensure the ontological emanation of each intellect's

proximate effect, i.e. the successive intellect in the celestial hierarchy. However, the character of ontological emanation highlighted by Avicenna is shelved by al-Ghazālī, who focuses his attention exclusively on the gnoseological aspect of the emanative process, which is regarded as a divine activity outpouring knowledge upon an unaware Adam.

The Proof of Islam reminds his readers that human knowledge is attained via the rational faculty that is God's balance (*mīzān Allāh*) on earth.[38] His understanding of the rational faculty reminds of the Avicennian Agent Intellect and its function. For Avicenna, the Agent Intellect is responsible for the fulfilment of humans' ultimate process of cognition which is achievable also through man's actualization of his *intellectus acquisitus*. In the previous chapters it has been demonstrated that Avicenna, cloaking in a mystical garb what Dimitri Gutas reads in more openly intellectual terms, speaks of the human soul as being able to acquire its *ʿaqliyya* through the assistance of the Active Intellect, and indirectly the assistance of God. This is because real *gnosis* is attainable not only through personal striving, but also through the help of what descends from 'above'. Since, for Avicenna, the human soul cannot store intellectual knowledge,[39] it can receive what corresponds to the Ghazālīan 'key to most knowledge' only when in conjunction with the Active Intellect. Al-Ghazālī, in turn, believes that it is particularly through the holy prophetic spirit (*al-rūḥ al-qudsī al-nubuwī*) that many types of knowledge are poured upon creatures.[40] He argues that, amongst humans, only a few individuals are allowed to attain the degree of such spirit, thus reaching the stage of prophecy (*nubuwwa*). Al-Ghazālī describes the holy prophetic spirit as 'another eye, a kind of vision superior to the normal process of intellection' by which 'man sees the hidden and what will take place in the future, and other things from which the intellect is far removed'.[41] This interpretation can be linked to his view of the rational soul: like the eye of prophecy, the rational soul has the capacity to 'penetrate non-manifest dimensions and mysteries of things'.[42] Moreover, the rational soul is said to have perception of itself, knowledge of its knowledge and so on *ad infinitum*, this being the characteristic of those existents which do not perceive through bodily instruments.[43] With these observations, al-Ghazālī alludes to the fact that the soul's knowledge, as either prophetic or rational soul, is dependent on something neither intellectual nor material. For al-Ghazālī, like for Avicenna, the human soul's consciousness becomes reliant on some form of mystical illumination which is emanated through 'the light of knowledge', descending from the Agent Intellect. In addition, like Avicenna, al-Ghazālī believes that the angelic intelligence of the outermost sphere is capable of knowing through its own being and through its essence (*bi-jawharihi wa-dhātihi*).[44] It is through the rational faculty that human beings perceive their status in the world of lowliness. It is through 'the low, human light that the proper order of the world of lowness becomes manifest',[45] al-Ghazālī states, also emphasizing that it is through the light-awareness of the true reality of things that God's plan for humanity can be realized: it is the divine light that 'will surely make you [men] vice-regents on earth' (Qur'ān 24:55).[46] This means that the knowledge which humans have of their nature and of the nature of the created beings by which they are surrounded (i.e. what makes

the world of lowliness), constitutes as a moral obligation whose fulfilment alone allows mankind to become divine vice-regents.

Clearly, the above issues are linked with the topic of predestination: by echoing Platonic stances, for al-Ghazālī, emanated gnosis enables man to re-discover, through a personal understanding of his 'self', the position occupied in the divine plan. Once grasped the role established in the world, each human being is morally compelled to make use of such given gnosis to fulfil God's decree. It is the latter, in fact, which predetermines human beings to act as God's vice-regents. Through a divine-given awareness of all individual's role, the human being is called upon action, upon obedience to the dictates of the divine commandment whose knowability is guaranteed by God's merciful outpouring of gnoseological gifts.

It is worth noticing that al-Ghazālī is employing here a basic Sufi concept. From the fifth/eleventh century onwards, Sufis began to emphasize that no mystical experience could be attained without the wayfarer's (*sālik*) adherence to the injunctions of the *Sharīʿa*. Likewise, Abū Ḥāmid is convinced that it is only through obedience to the divine Law that the wayfarer enters the mystical path to reach the goal of his quest: perfect *tawḥīd*, or, 'the existential confession that God is One'.[47] Nonetheless, this objective is not achievable merely through man's self-striving across the different spiritual stations (*maqām*) which mark the Sufi path; it also needs the gift of benevolence (or state – *ḥāl*) which descends from God upon His creatures. Al-Ghazālī insists on the idea that men can become vice-regents on earth by means of the 'illuminating' action of God (the Light) in order to point out that humans are compelled to respond to the divine *qaḍā'* proportionately to the amount of knowledge emanated upon them, and that their responsiveness to the impositions of the divine Law depends on this knowledge.[48] The emanation of knowledge is therefore responsible for predetermining humans' conditions in this world and the hereafter. Hidden here is the Ashʿarite belief for which there is no moral obligation prior to and independent from the acquisition of knowledge which is provided by the revealed Law. The measure of knowledge, concerning the veracity of Muḥammad's prophethood and the contents of the divine revelation, which any human being attains, makes obedience to the Law a moral necessity. This is because the Prophet clearly announces punishments for whoever does not believe that the message of Islam comes from God and that it requires obedience. In the *Iqtiṣād*,[49] al-Ghazālī defines moral necessity as 'the necessity of a given alternative', that is the alternative of either obey or disobey, and he claims that the one who makes morality 'necessary' is God Himself with His bestowal of knowledge.[50]

Gairdner has suggested that the theory of emanation contrasts with the 'orthodox' doctrine which sees God as the Creator and it is condemned as being incompatible with it. This begs the question: why is al-Ghazālī using a proper 'emanationistic' terminology if emanation is intended exclusively as a divine bestowal of knowledge?[51] This occurs, as it will be examined, because, throughout the *Mishkāt*, the initial denial of ontological emanation is gradually nuanced by al-Ghazālī, who transforms it through mystical and Ashʿarite elements. Emanative nuances can be detected by looking at the terminology employed in the *Mishkāt*:

Gairdner has pointed out that, in al-Ghazālī's work, the verb *fāḍa* is predominantly accompanied by the particle *ʿalā* and this would indicate that the action of this verb is performed upon a dark body, probably a reminder of the Avicennian idea that unformed matter is dark and in need of the illumination provided to it by its given form, which becomes clothed, as Gairdner words it, 'not with the essence of the Light-Giver, but with the reflection of His Glory'.[52] Gairdner has also highlighted that in *The Niche of Lights* in al-Ghazālī's statement, 'the lower lights emanate one from the other as the light emanates from the lamp', the last part of the sentence ('as the light emanates from the lamp') explains that it is not the flame itself, namely the Essence of God which is emanated, but the light which is the effect of the flame-essence. However, if one examines the *Mishkāt* in its entirety, it can be noted that the above-mentioned combination of verb and particle seems to occur only in the first part of the work.[53] It can be argued that the emanation hinted at by the term *fāḍa* is not the Neoplatonic ontological emanation, which entails the sharing of the divine essence with all God's emanated beings, but a gnoseological overflowing, which enlightens already-created beings through the reflection of the divine Glory. In the same section of *The Niche of Lights*, al-Ghazālī's claims that:

> The visible world comes forth from the world of dominion just as the shadow comes forth from the thing that throws it (*al-ẓill bi'l iḍāfa ilā al-shakhṣ*), the fruit comes forth from the tree, and the effect comes forth from the secondary causes.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, p. 12)

This passage creates some difficulties: whilst the example of the lamp might substantiate the idea for which al-Ghazālī's emanation process is something different from the Avicennian ontological version, this statement seems to refer precisely to Avicenna's ontological emanative necessity. All the references to the emanation of lights and knowledge from a hierarchy of celestial beings, however, do not suffice to accuse al-Ghazālī of hypocrisy, that is the idea that he condemns the philosophers' doctrine of emanation in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* whilst adopting it in this part of the *Mishkāt*.[54] This is clear from his use of alternative expressions which are synonymous with the idea of 'pouring down' that do not imply the ontological idea of emanation.[55]

To remove any doubt about his lack of consistency, *The Niche of Lights* offers a profounder elucidation of the author's personal understanding of divine emanation which is depicted as the correct way to comprehend the hierarchy of lights:

> The way to perceive a similitude of this hierarchy (*tartīb*) in the visible world is to suppose that moonlight enters through a window of a house, falls upon a mirror attached to a wall, is reflected from the mirror to an opposite wall, and turns from that wall to the earth so as to illuminate it. You know that the light on the earth comes from that on the wall, the light on the wall from that

> on the mirror, the light on the mirror from that in the moon, and the light in the moon from that in the sun, since light shines from the sun onto the moon. These four lights are ranked in levels such that some are higher and more perfect than others. Each one has a 'known station' and a specific degree which it does not overstep.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt* , p.14)[56]

It is explained that within the hierarchy of lights only the Highest Light (God) really deserves this name, because other lights are simply borrowed or, more precisely, their luminosity is borrowed and supported by others.[57] By adopting a very Ashʿarite view, on this occasion, al-Ghazālī depicts God as the 'bestower' and the 'preserver' of the borrowed lights: the Real Light can only be Him 'in whose hands is the creation and the command (Q. 7:54)' as he puts it.[58] Once again, against the notion of ontological emanation, it is stressed that God operates as the Creator and as the One to whom creatures are obedient. The final and finest point in the Ghazālīan apologia is offered in the following statement:

> Light returns to manifestation; to making [itself] manifest . . . know that there is no stronger darkness than the concealment (*katam*) of non-existence (*ʿadam*). This is because something dark is such because sight cannot get to it, so it is not an existent thing for the observer, even though it is an existent in itself.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt* , p.16)

In order to explain this passage, al-Ghazālī borrows the distinction that the *Shaykh al-raʾīs* had made between the existence that a thing possesses in itself, and the existence which it possesses through another being. Al-Ghazālī's goal is mainly to defend God's *taḥwīd* and he specifies that when something is viewed in itself and with respect to itself, it is pure non-existence (*ʿadam maḥḍ*),[59] thus resembling Avicenna's view of the possible entity which lacks in itself the inner cause of its existence. The style used here is somewhat ambiguous: is al-Ghazālī carefully moving on a purely intellectual path when he claims that a being is non-existent because of its unawareness (i.e. its lacking knowledge of the Real) which leads it to a false existential concept? Or is he shifting onto the more controversial ontological path intended by Avicenna? It is possible to opt for the first alternative: the expression 'there is no stronger darkness than the concealment of non-existence' articulates the necessity to prompt mankind to become aware of their status. The act attaining awareness, it has been previously highlighted, represents, for al-Ghazālī, a moral requirement.[60] The extract refers to the 'concealment' of non-existence, rather than to non-existence itself, as the darkest thing possible and this means that the masking of ignorance, namely, the concealment of the real meaning of existence, is what is condemned here. The above statement refers to the concealment of what is known to be 'not real existence', and it is the disguise of real knowledge which becomes deplorable and morally unacceptable.

Gnosticism and Ash'arite occasionalism

Within the first section of *The Niche of Lights* it is possible to sense gradual changes in the character and intensity of the discourse on emanation. This is particularly evident when al-Ghazālī, who initially ambiguously addressed *fayḍ* in gnoseological terms, also opts to follow occasionalistic views, regarding God as a being which is able to intervene in creation at each given moment.

Al-Ghazālī indicates that the Gnostics, who are the specific category of the Attainers described in the Veil section, are aware that humans are not living a 'real' existence.[61] Consequentially, the Gnostics are able to understand that what is not real existence is destined to perish: they witness that 'everything perishes but God's Face'.[62] The awareness that everything perishes but the face of God becomes for them a taste and a state.[63] It is a taste because they are capable of actually experience it; but this awareness represents also a state, which informs them of their gnoseological 'arrival'. Basically, the Gnostics become conscious that there is no higher stage to be reached in the gnosis of God. Particularly, al-Ghazālī speaks of the Gnostics' experiential realization for which there is nothing in existence but God, and he states that the maximum level of proximity to God is the understanding of His incomprehensibility. Paradoxically, therefore, it is through awareness of the impossibility to grasp the real Essence of God that any mystic comes to 'know' God's inaccessibility and complete un-relationability. Divine *tawḥīd*, as al-Ghazālī maintains, is reached through singularity (*fardānīyah*). Such a realization becomes simply the comprehension, which is attainable through individual experience, of the un-bridgeable gap occurring between the Creator and His creatures. Al-Ghazālī, as a mature mystic, recognizes the superiority of experimentalism or 'taste' (*dhawq*) over knowledge (*'ilm*) and faith (*īmān*).[64] He is fiercely critical of the idea, wrongly credited to Avicenna, that human contact (*ittiṣāl*) with the Active Intellect and the individual's ultimate salvation can be obtained exclusively through the development of personal intellectual potentialities in this life. The idea of a purely 'intellectual *eudæmonia*',[65] which justifies the Neoplatonic allegorization of corporeal punishments and rewards in the afterlife, is dismissed by al-Ghazālī. He stresses that action, substantiated by the mystical dimension of experimental gnosis, should be undertaken in order to obtain salvation: 'knowledge without action is madness and action without knowledge is void':[66]

> When the essence of anything other than He is considered, this is perceived as sheer non-existence. But in respect to the 'face' (*wajh*) to which existence flows forth (*yasira ilā*) from the First, the Real, then it is seen as an existent not in itself but through the face adjacent (*yalī*) to its Giver of Existence. Therefore, the only existent is the face of God.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt* , p. 16)

Once again, in the above passage, al-Ghazālī borrows the Avicennian idea for which the essence of a thing is something in itself non-existent; he implicitly admits that any essence is endowed with two faces, one turned towards itself and

the other towards its Lord. In the first case, the essence is nothing but sheer non-existence, but when its 'face' is turned towards its Lord, this essence becomes an existent. The face is, in this perspective, nothing but the expression of receptivity, what Avicenna calls disposition in the nature of things, which makes the essence susceptible to receive its existence. It is worth noting that when al-Ghazālī states that an essence becomes existent 'through the face adjacent to its Giver of Existence', he is specifically referring to the face which is adjacent (*yalī*) to God. The use of this specific adjective can be understood if read in mystical terms, as well as according to the occasionalistic perspective which sees divine action directly operating upon the essences. Al-Ghazālī speaks of the essence's face which is adjacent to God because the bestowal of existence is performed directly by God, without any external intermediary.[67] This implies that God is not simply the Giver of Existence of the philosophers – one might remember that for Avicenna the bestowal of existence is considered sufficient to speak of creation – but above all, the Creator of the speculative theologians, a God who acts directly on the objects of His creation. The notion of adjacency/vicinity is also applied to the lights which effuse from the angels upon human spirits in order to confirm that there is neither emanation nor sharing of divine Essence.[68] Because of these lights, al-Ghazālī claims, angels, who have diverse levels in their luminosity, may be called 'lords' (*arbāb*).[69] If one takes into account al-Ghazālī's Ashʿarite occasionalist side, it can be assumed that the angels, from the higher to the lower, are simply part of those universal causes (i.e. the most general level of causation) perpetually and directly generated from God, moment after moment.[70] Al-Ghazālī, however, implicitly positions these angels in a hierarchy by calling them 'lords' and by mentioning their different levels of luminosity. He does so in order to stress that the angels' arrangement is not given by their diverse intense existential degree. Their ranking, that is their diverse levels in luminosity, is due exclusively to the different measure of understanding they have of themselves and their Principle. The emanation of gnosis, initially referred to Adam, is extended upon the angels whose hierarchy is established exactly through their individualized level of knowledge which is directly bestowed upon them by God.

It has been observed that the first portion of the *Mishkāt* presents God primarily as the only Creator of everything. However, as the Opener of Eyes and Effuser of Lights God is also a God able to 'emanate', not the Avicennian ontological existence, but a meta-ontological type of existence, the only one *real* existence which the Gnostic identifies in divine *tawḥīd*. Although sharing similarities with the Avicennian angelological reading of the emanative schema, in the first section of *The Niche of Lights*, emanation becomes exclusively intellectual enlightenment, conveying knowledge of the real essence of things. The condemnation of the Avicennian ontological kind of emanation and its interpretation in gnoseological terms serves the purpose of urging humans to be aware of their role in this world and the next. A proper understanding of reality has, in truth, the fundamental function to lead humans towards the appreciation of the real meaning of divine unity and unicity. In turn, the grasping of the true meaning of *tawḥīd* allows man to realize his

position on earth and to embrace his role as God's vice-regent through which he can disclose God's decree for humanity. Awareness of divine *tawḥīd* becomes central also because it denounces the impossibility to conceive any other existent except the only One Real Existent. Given that no other beings really exist, it is meaningless to speak of ontological emanation and, given that there is no ontological emanation, there cannot be determinism. To sum up, comprehension of divine *tawḥīd*, perceived from a Sufi perspective, makes redundant the idea that non-truly existent-beings might, through their 'non-existing' nature, determine their destinies. Destinies are what God predetermines by way of granting beings with a well-measured awareness of themselves and their roles.

Section 2: The Veils ḥadīth

The second part of the *Mishkāt* is dedicated to the Veils *ḥadīth*. It refers to the tradition of the veils used by God to veil Himself from the vision of man. In this section, al-Ghazālī reads emanation in Aristotelian and Neoplatonic causative terms even though he mainly speaks of the angels as being able to merely cause the movement of the celestial spheres. This sub-chapter analyses both the Ghazālīan cosmological doctrine of the spheres and the issue of free will and predestination by focusing mainly upon the causal nexus of the debate. The discussion also explores the relation between primary and secondary causality implied in the cosmological doctrine of the spheres.

Al-Ghazālī analyses various sects and classifies these groups according to the kind of veil which determines their understanding of God. The main division speaks of three groups as those who are veiled by pure darkness, those who are veiled by light along with darkness and, finally, those veiled by pure light. A fourth group is also added, the group of the Attainers (*wāṣilūn*) who are regarded as those to whom God concedes to have the last veil taken away and to whom the vision of the *Ḥaqq* is finally granted. This section of *The Niche of Lights* focuses on the doctrine of the spheres and examines the role played by God in connection to them. More specifically, al-Ghazālī uses the different groups' understanding of the relationship occurring between God and the celestial spheres as a discriminating tool, aiming to establish which amongst doctors and saints are the most proximate to God.

The first group of those veiled by pure darkness include the Atheists, divided into two main types: (i) the Naturalists, or those who look at nature as the cause of the universe; and (ii) those that do not even search for a cause being preoccupied only with themselves. This last kind is further divided into other groups including the following: the Hedonists, that is those who aim at fulfilling sensual pleasure and are veiled by *shahwa*, or the appetitive soul; the Polemicists, veiled by ferocity and control; the Greedy namely, those who see their ultimate happiness in the accumulation of property (they are the worshippers of the *dirham*); and the Ambitious.[71]

The group of people veiled by light and darkness are further divided into three subgroups with regard to the nature of their 'veils of darkness': (i) the veil of sense-perception (*ḥiss*), (ii) the veil of imagination (*khayāl*), and (iii) the veil of false

analogical reasoning (*muqāyasāt ʿaqliyya fāsida*).[72] The first two can be identified with, respectively, the Polytheists and the Monotheist Corporeatists (the *Mujassima* and the *Karrāmiyya*). Some problems arise when one attempts to identify the third subgroup of those veiled by light and darkness. According to Griffel, the members of this subgroup are people who understand how God is beyond any kind of anthropomorphic attribute. When the terms 'will', 'power' and 'knowledge' are used to describe God, they know these meanings transcend the customarily sense of these words. This, Griffel explains, clearly refers to the polemics between the *mutakallimūn* and, particularly, between the Ashʿarites and the Muʿtazilites, with their respective interpretation of cryptical Qurʾānic passages which describe God with anthropomorphic references. The Muʿtazilites occupy, according to Griffel, the position of the third group of people veiled by light and darkness, whilst the Ashʿarites are identified with the first subgroup of those veiled by light as they have obtained a better understanding of God's attributes as being utterly transcendent.[73] Noticeably, both Gairdner[74] and Watt[75] have agreed on the impossibility to include in the group of those veiled by pure light any of the *mutakallimūn* theologians, not even the exponents of the *bi-lā kayf* tendency, given that none of them avoided defining God by any of the above attributes. However, it has to be borne in mind that al-Ghazālī, de facto, simply mentions that the members of the first subgroup of those veiled by pure light know the meaning of the attributes in an appropriate manner (properly – *taḥqīq* [an]), never openly stating that the members of this subgroup denied altogether the use of these attributes. The Ashʿarites never stripped God of His attributes but simply employed them in a way which was considered appropriate. Conversely, in the philosophers' systems, and particularly in the case of Avicenna, the avoidance of describing God by His *ṣifāt* was an attempt to conceptually substantiate the identification of divine will, knowledge and power. In other terms, Avicenna and the rest of the theistic philosophers did not use to describe God by His attributes not because they were primarily concerned with avoiding conceptual plurality in God's essence, like in the case of the *mutakallimūn* theologians, but rather in order to prove the eternal status of the world and the absolute inescapable perfection of God's nature, the latter being necessitated by His very Essence which is identical with His will, knowledge and power. Probably, for the *falāsifa*, divine attributes did not represent a suitable 'argument' to prove the issue of the divine unity and this would explain why the philosophers avoided using them. Watt also considers that the language used by al-Ghazālī, with reference to the group of people veiled by pure light, may apply only to the theistic philosophers, namely, the school of al-Fārābī and Avicenna. Consequently, Watt claims, the orthodox theologians (no distinction is mentioned between Ashʿarites and Muʿtazilites), must be found among the previous group of those veiled by mixed light and darkness.

Landolt[76] proposes another view: he believes that those veiled by the darkness of false analogical reasoning can be identified with the Muslim 'Attributists' namely, the *mutakallimūn* and specifically in order, the Ḥanbalites, the Ashʿarites and, finally, the Muʿtazilites who are ranked in a better position than the Ashʿarites

because did not commit open *tashbīh*.[77] Landolt believes that the above-mentioned anti-anthropomorphic tendency does not find its highest spokesmen in the Ashʿarites, but rather, in philosophers like al-Kindī and Avicenna. Therefore, the group of those veiled by pure light should be placed 'somewhere between Muʿtazilism and Philosophy'.[78] This can be proven to be correct if one takes into account, Landolt explains, the extant part of al-Kindī's *First Philosophy* which ends with an allusion to God as the mover (*muḥarrik*) and the unique agent (*fāʿil*) of creation, as the One who transcends all the attributes which are addressed to God by the godless ones (*ṣifāt al-mulḥidīn*).[79] Amongst the subgroup of those veiled by pure light, those guided by pure reason and 'not by the darkness of false analogical reasoning', al-Ghazālī includes exactly those who believe that their Lord is the mover of the highest visible Heaven. Those are the ones who have avoided defining God by His *ṣifāt* in a way not appropriate to Him, predicating His knowability by referring to His creatorhood and providence. In order to stress these points, al-Ghazālī mentions the answer provided by Moses to Pharaoh's questioning the nature (*maʿānī*) of the Lord of the World, paraphrasing it from the Qurʾān (26:24):[80] 'The Lord, whose holiness transcends the connotations of these attributes, is the Mover (*Muḥarriq*) and Orderer (*Mudabbir*) of the Heavens.'[81] Ghazālī's intention is to highlight how the answer provided by Moses clearly avoids any reference to the Divine quiddity and offers, instead, a description of God with exclusive reference to His creative acts.

Overall the debate remains open. Later in the discussion, al-Ghazālī refers to the members of the second subgroup of those purely veiled by light and considers them superior to the previous group because they have been able to acknowledge the existence of a plurality of heavens each of which is moved by an angel. They know that each heaven is enveloped by another sphere (the outermost Heaven) whose motion assures the movements of the other heavens. The definition of God as *muḥarrik al-samāwāt* (the mover of the heavens), offered by the first group of those veiled by pure light, is here believed to threaten divine unity by implying that God acts directly upon more than one thing. This position is, therefore, rejected by the second group. Its representatives limit divine action to the moving of one sphere, thus sparing God from the accusation of multiplicity. In addition, they identify the Lord with the mover of the celestial body which is further away and envelopes all celestial spheres. This second group has basically attained a better understanding of astronomy and the whole spheres' system.[82]

The latter's views are accepted by the third subgroup amongst those veiled by pure light. They, however, consider that the Being, which the 'second sort' consider to be their Lord, is still directly connected to the physical motion, and consequentially, it can only be identified with an angel, rather than with God Himself. This would be an angel who acts in obedience to the real God and from whom the movement of the spheres comes 'directly'. These thinkers, al-Ghazālī specifies, claim that the Lord is obeyed by a mover-angel and that the He is the 'Mover . . . by way of command' (*bi-ṭarīq al-amr*).[83] It is fundamental to remember that the

superiority of the third group of those veiled by pure light is established by way of their substituting God with a supreme angel who performs the movement of the outermost sphere by obeying the 'divine command.' Al-Ghazālī points out that the direct motion of the celestial spheres necessitates an act of worship (*ʿibāda*) and obedience (*ṭāʿa*) to the Lord of the World by the angel, mover of the heaven. The mover of the highest sphere obeys the Lord and worships Him by moving the sphere;[84] this subtly implies that the sphere which is set in movement by the angel, in turn, obeys the angel in its movements, thus paying indirectly its 'service' to the Lord. This idea is indicative of the much-criticized philosophical understanding of the spheres as being animate and compliant, by way of their very nature, to God's ordering their movements. It would suggest that the members of this group are likely to be identified with philosophers like al-Fārābī and Avicenna, who regarded God as the Giver of Existence rather than, merely, as the First Mover of their Aristotelian peers.

In contrast, when it comes to the question of identifying the members of the third subgroup, Landolt has advanced another hypothesis. He has stressed that, as a missing link between the group of the philosophers and the following group of the Attainers, unmistakably recognized as the Sufis, the *al-baṭiniyya* (*taʿlīm al-baṭiniyya* or *madhhab al-taʿlīm*, namely the Ismāʿīlīs) represent the people of the third group.[85] By pointing out to a series of correspondences between the *baṭinī* views, especially those expressed in al-Nasafī (d. 330/942–3), and the beliefs of the third group in *The Niche of Lights*, Landolt concludes that al-Ghazālī must have been deeply impressed by the synthesis Ismāʿīlīsm provided between Neoplatonic philosophy and Islam, much more than what emerges from his critical works.[86] However, even if Landolt identifies the third group with the *al-bāṭiniyya*, he himself suggests that the philosopher al-Kindī used to speak of celestial motion as an act of rational/angelic obedience to the divine *amr*[87] and that, in similar terms, Avicenna spoke of 'some kind of angelic or spherical motion' (*ʿibādatun mā malakiyya aw falakiyya*) as the cause of celestial motion.[88]

Surprisingly, in the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, al-Ghazālī's negation of the animation of the sphere, which is at the heart of the issue concerning the identification of the third group of those veiled by pure light, is not radical. The lack of a drastic condemnation of the spheres' animation theory would explain why the philosophers might be located in such a high rank amongst these groups. Al-Ghazālī maintains that it is possible to accept the philosophers' idea for which the celestial spheres are animate (*ḥayawānāt*), and that what is irreconcilable with his system is merely the philosophers' understanding of God as a Being who is 'compelled' to act by the absolute perfection of His nature. This makes Him half-dead and, consequently, not a true agent. The God of the philosophers, al-Ghazālī stresses, does not truly act according to an intentional will and, therefore, He is not a real *fāʿil*. When considered in itself, however, the question of the 'animateness' of the spheres, hypothetically formulated, can be accepted if confined to the realm of revelation (*kashf*) rather than to the dominion of demonstration (*dalīl*).[89] The philosophers mistakenly used the topic of the animation of the sphere in their

cosmological proof for the existence of the ultimate Cause and this is the reason which makes it necessary to depart from their view of nature as having an *inner* principle of motion and rest. In contrast, al-Ghazālī promotes the idea for which nature is directly constrained to work (*musakhkhara*) by its Creator:

> [Nature] is totally subject to God Most High: it does not act of itself but is used as an instrument by its Creator. The sun, moon, stars and the elements are subjects to God's command (*musakhkharatun bi-amrihi*), none of them produces any act by and of itself.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, Arabic, p. 117)[90]

These findings are harmonized within the *Mishkāt*: al-Ghazālī must have been aware that, for the philosophers, the assignment of an angel as the mover of the spheres and the graduation of these angels under one supreme angel, acting as their Commander, meant to assess in theological terms their belief in the animation and the rationality of the spheres. It has been observed in the first chapter that the discussion of the emanatory scheme in angelological terms is used by Avicenna as a device to insist on the dependence of the angelic creatures necessitated in their actions by their nature; in the *Mishkāt* however, no mention is made of the fact that the movement of the spheres by the angels occurs because of their very nature. Al-Ghazālī could have used the *Mishkāt* to pin down his criticism against the philosophers by referring explicitly to the inconsistency of their belief for which nature is the determining factor for all actions. Yet, he simply focuses on the modality through which the movement is triggered, namely, obedience to the divine command. Moreover, al-Ghazālī mentions that there is obscurity (*ghamūḍ*) about the nature of the above command.[91]

Al-Ghazālī does show a *forma mentis* profoundly affected by Aristotelian, Neoplatonic and Ashʿarite creeds: he describes the position of the philosophers (if one keeps considering that the members of the third subgroup of those veiled by pure light are actually the Avicennian philosophers) simply referring to their belief that the angel acts through obedience and his emphasis on obedience allows him, probably unconsciously, to rescue the philosophers' doctrine of the animation of the sphere from a total condemnation. Obedience, in fact, is a concept which infers both the notions of non-voluntarism as well as that of voluntarism, depending on whether obedience is seen as imposed or liberally 'chosen'. Basically, the notion of obedience explains the philosophers' belief that angels and spheres certainly act through their natures, but such a term also implies that angels and spheres act because they are aware of their actions (this proving the presence in them of a certain kind of willingness). It is also possible to speculate that al-Ghazālī intended to read the *falāsifa*s' theory with reference to the notion of *kasb* in which the act of obedience can be regarded as an 'acquired' act. The act of obedience would be, according to this perspective, created by God in the angels and spheres which would be therefore determined by it.

The theory of *kasb* regarded God as the *fāʿil* of the act but it also looked at other

beings as the agents and the makers of the act. Al-Ghazālī was well aware of the different meaning he and the philosophers attributed to the word *fāʿil*: for Aristotle it meant 'efficient mover'; for Avicenna it simply meant 'efficient cause' (either animate or inanimate), whilst for al-Ghazālī an agent could only refer to a 'voluntary agent', namely, a person who has a will, acts freely, has knowledge of what is willed and awareness of its consequences.[92] In the *Tahāfut*, God is described as being able to act 'through the mediation of his angels or without mediation'[93] and if one accepts that al-Ghazālī's ideas are coherent and consistent throughout his works, then it is clear that in *The Niche of Lights* al-Ghazālī excludes the action of obedience from being seen as the efficient cause through which the celestial beings operate (via their nature). Rather, the act of obedience can be regarded as a cause inserted in a causal chain which is made such by the only real ultimate efficient Cause. Ultimately, the 'obscure' command which 'causes' angelic obedience can be considered as nothing but the act itself as the Lord is believed by the philosophers' to be the Mover of the world only by way of being 'obeyed'. In other terms, the angels and the spheres cannot but perform the act because they cannot but necessarily acquire the act of obedience created for them by God.

If these findings are approached with regard to the topic of predestination they disclose the typically Ashʿarite stance for which the distinction between obedience and disobedience is sublimated in the coincidence between the divine decree, here interpreted as the command, and the object on which the latter acts upon, that is the world in which good and evil are considered accidental and depending on God's commandment and prohibition. The Avicennian philosophers' notion of God as 'the Mover by way of command' is saved from total condemnation because al-Ghazālī leaves open the possibility of substituting the philosophical idea of *nature* with the theological notion of *kasb* and by replacing determinism with predestination: angels act by way of acquiring the act – specifically, the act of obedience – created in their nature by God. In addition, it can be argued that the description of the philosophers as those who identify God as the 'Mover by way of command' allows our author to attack the philosophers' ontological emanation but it also permits a compromise. Al-Ghazālī is ready to concede that the philosophers' view has some validity when such a view identifies the angels as agents because they are characterized by an inherent combination of purposeless voluntarism and natural necessity. What is surprising here is that al-Ghazālī seems to admit implicitly the superiority of the philosophers' views over those of the Ashʿarites by placing the former in the third subgroup of those veiled by light whilst the Ashʿarites, might have been hypothetically relegated within the first subgroup. This odd choice can be explained considering that, for al-Ghazālī, an angel can be said to be the Avicennian proximate cause of existence, corresponding in turn to the peripatetic proximate cause of motion, simply by way of its being, first and foremost, the Ashʿarite *locus* (*maḥall*) in which God creates the power for the act to occur. Although it is only to the divine power that the act can be related in terms of efficient causality, namely, in terms of 'the connection of the effect to the cause and the created thing to its creator',[94] the angels can still be seen as 'instrumental causes' or tools used by God to 'perform' the act. This position

would explain the Ghazālīan accommodating attitude towards the philosophers' notion of secondary causality which is described as an 'acceptable' argument not to be condemned outright.

The idea that God's agency does not completely exclude a secondary agency, such as human actions, is initially advanced in the *Tahāfut*. By declaring that the agent is somebody 'from whom the act proceeds, together with the will to act by way of choice and the knowledge of what is willed', al-Ghazālī does not explicitly deny that humans and animals can truly act. Moreover, when he analyses the difference between the tremor and the voluntary action, al-Ghazālī candidly indicates that the tremor happens without the human control (power) over it, whereas voluntary actions require such a control despite the fact that God is the Creator of the human power. It is clear that whilst the tremor is directly produced by God, the voluntary movement requires the mediation of an intermediary 'agent'. The human power thus becomes the *instrumental* justification of the otherwise inexplicable difference existing between the voluntary and the un-voluntary movement.[95] In the *Iqtiṣād*,[96] al-Ghazālī's view is somewhat different and, by affirming the possibility for the same object of power to be enacted by two possessors of power – given that the relation of the powers is different towards the same object – al-Ghazālī declares that only the divine power is causally connected to the object of power. This being the case, the term power cannot be used univocally for God and other created things including humans, angels, jinn and devils: only the real Powerful (God) is capable of true creation and invention (namely, the causing of existence) of both the power and its object. In the *Iqtiṣād*,[97] in fact, the human power is presented as being created in concomitance with the movement as both are the simultaneous creation of God. Whilst in the *Tahāfut* an agent is potentially identifiable with any person who is aware of what willed, in the *Iqtiṣād* such a partial knowledge is not considered sufficient for an agent to be an agent. Who can be defined as a real agent is exclusively whoever has knowledge of all existing beings. This stance necessarily excludes all creatures from the domain of real agency.[98]

The group of the Attainers

The celestial schema of the previous classes is rejected by the group of the Attainers who refuse to see God as the 'Obeyed One' (*al-muṭā'*):

> They have had it revealed to them that the obeyed one has been described by an attribute that is incompatible with pure oneness and ultimate perfection by reason of a mystery the disclosure of which this book does not admit of.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, p. 51)[99]

The Attainers are superior to the other groups because they distinguish between the obeyed one and the Real One/Real Existent (*al-wujūd al-ḥaqq*).[100] In other words, they believe that the obeyed one is inferior to God and cannot be confused with God Himself. The *wāṣilūn*, in fact, not only deny that God can be perceived

as the immediate efficient cause of the movement of the outermost sphere but they also deny that the sphere is moved in obedience to His command. It is clear that both denials are needed in order to reach absolute divine *tawḥīd* as both assumptions would imply the identification of a relation between God and His creatures. In the first case, a relation between cause (God) and effect (the moving of the sphere) and, in the second instance, a relation of a service paid to God by the spheres' obedience to His ordering. For the Attainers, the obeyed one is not suitable to be the Absolute Real and its nature, presumably that of an intellect or an angel, remains obscure. The challenge here consists in explaining how this mysterious being can be harmonized with the awareness of *tawḥīd* attained by the *wāṣilūn*. Such a being is simultaneously an entity and a non-entity, a figure who links the intellectual agnosticism, that is the impossibility for humans to attain a complete understanding of divine *tawḥīd*, with the Attainers' experiential gnosticism which makes them aware of the fact that this obeyed being serves its role as a divine vice-regent and as the instrument through which God has His decree realized. This vice-regent is perceived as being too sublime to move the Heavens directly and, for this reason, orders their moving, under him being the one (an Archangel) who actually moves them.[101] Beyond all this ambiguity it is clear that for the group of the Attainers the obeyed one is simply the mediator between the real Lord and His creation.[102] The *wāṣilūn* are the only ones amongst all the groups of the Veils section to differentiate between the cause of universal motion and the cause of existence:[103] the Lord who, for philosophers like al-Fārābī and Avicenna, bestows existence and is obeyed by the movers of the spheres becomes for the Attainers the first being created by the only Cause of existence.

From this perspective, Landolt rightly suggests, the Attainers can be considered Sufis in the same way as Avicenna is a Sufi, namely, because they are 'in line with the Neoplatonic tradition which is the one followed by Avicenna in his "nobler" proof of the existence of God "from existence" itself'.[104] This explains why the Attainers are those who:

> Turn their faces away from the one who moves the heavens . . . from the one who commands them to be moved, [and arrive] to Him who brings forth (*alladhī faṭara*) the Heavens . . . brings forth the furthest celestial body, brings forth the one who commands moving the Heavens. They have arrived to an Existent One (*mawjūd*) who is unblemished (*munazzah*) from all that is apprehended by the perception or by the conception of all speculators (*nāẓirūn*), for they find Him absolutely transcended of every attribution previously made by us.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt* , p. 51)

The Attainers turn their faces away from all the celestial movers to approach the One who initially originated the Heavens. They arrive at the experiential knowledge of the One Existent who transcends any human perceptiveness. These findings show that, for the Attainers, the speculative constructions of both the Ashʿarite theologians and the Avicennian philosophers – who perceived God as the predeterminer Agent and the determinist Commander respectively – are

destined to collapse: true insight on divine *tawḥīd* reveals that nothing can be defined as nothing exists but God.

For the Ghazālīan Attainers, the Avicennian 'definitional primitiveness', which identifies the notion of 'being' as the most intuitively determinable concept, becomes the Sufi limitation beyond which any intellectual speculation loses sense. God can only be perceived as being in existence, but the divine nature remains indefinable because God transcends any attribute. It would be expected that also the notions of *qaḍā'* and *qadar* would lose their meaning before such an intuition, but something unexpected occurs: al-Ghazālī introduces the Qurʾānic passage in which Abraham, after showing reverence towards a hierarchy of heavenly bodies, finally recognizes the superiority of the Real Lord and exclaims: 'Oh my people I am innocent of your polytheism: I have turned my face to He Who created the Heavens and the Earth.'[105] Abraham's description of God from a purely Sufi perspective would have identified God as the 'One Who' (*mafhūm alladhī*), namely, an indefinable Being, beyond any possible description. However, such a classification of God falls, despite its mystical flavour, within the confines of Neoplatonic 'Islamicized' metaphysics as well as Ashʿarite creationism because God, even as a Neoplatonic inexpressible Being, is not only the First Cause in which all other existents find their ultimately Originator, but He is also the Qurʾānic Creator of the heavens and the earth. The mystic al-Ghazālī wears, once again, the cloak of the Ashʿarite theologian who, however, consciously or unconsciously, is shown to have been influenced by Avicennian persuasions. Despite it all, by way of acknowledging God as the Creator, and by carefully avoiding to employ an emanationistic language, one might still be under the impression that al-Ghazālī is implicitly validating the Ashʿarite 'creationistic' predestinarian decree.

Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn: General considerations

Notwithstanding its stylistic sophistication and fecundity together with its focus on a plethora of speculative, philosophical and mystical themes, the *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn* stands out as a uniform, solid and consistent text. In it al-Ghazālī produces a narrative which is so tightly knitted to reveal each topic as logically descending from the preceding one. An 'unusual book for its time', it was made public through a series of lectures held by al-Ghazālī during his second sojourn in Baghdād.[106] The *Revival* bears a pragmatic agenda, seeking to provide 'a guidebook on how its readers may gain the afterlife through the actions they perform in this world'.[107] Despite the presumption that humans may act freely – only such a stance would justify the need for a guidebook able to show them the best ways to attain good recompense in the afterlife – the *Iḥyā'* reveals a strong predestinarian 'texture' which is nonetheless smoothen with libertarian views which are scattered within the erratic mixture of philosophical elements and Ashʿarite dogmas harmonized underneath Sufi positions. In effect, throughout the book, al-Ghazālī is still determined to enlighten God's mystical notion of *tawḥīd* but, differently from the *Mishkāt*, this result is obtained with no treatment of cosmology.[108] The focus is to show mankind the practical consequences that the Sufi comprehension

of divine unity and unicity entails. All discussions concentrate on the practical ways to achieve redemption in the afterlife. The attention is centred on 'human actions' even though al-Ghazālī tirelessly reminds his readership that, in truth, every event in the world including human activity, is ultimately God's creation.

The predestinarian character of the *Iḥyā'* is set forth at the very beginning through a series of statements that emphasize the role of God as the unique Creator. God is described as the Initiator of things (*Mubdī'*) and as the only Being able to return them to Himself (*Mu'īd*), as the One who carries out His will (*fa'āl limā yurīd*), leading the best of men on the right path.[109] Particularly, in the *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id*, the second book of the *Iḥyā'*, al-Ghazālī stresses as a fundamental article of faith the belief for which God is the Living, the Powerful, the Omnipotent, never touched by incapacity nor impotence, Possessor of the visible realm (*Mulk*) and the invisible one (*Malakūt*), of the power (*'izza*) and of the realm of Almightiness (*Jabarūt*).[110] By emphasizing the nature of God as being omnipotent and powerful, al-Ghazālī is psychologically preparing the reader for more 'lapidarian' predestinarian statements:

> God's are the authority and the coercion (*qahr*), the creation (*khalq*) and the order (*amr*); the heavens are folded in His right hand and the creatures compelled in His grip. He is single in creation and invention; He is the only One to bring into existence. He has created the creatures and their actions (*khalaqa al-khalq wa a'mālahum*) and has predetermined (*qaddara*) the providence in their favour and the end of their lives. No objects of power (*maqdūr*) escape His clutch . . . the objects of His Power are uncountable. He is the infinitely Aware.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, I, p. 83.)

Critical of the Mu'tazilite view which regards any individual as the author (*muḥdith*) of his or her acts, this passage intends to highlight that God is the only Creator of all existing things, including human actions. The focus is directed towards God's beneficent *qadar* which predetermines His providence in favour of His creatures, without any reference to eventual punishments. In the same extract, al-Ghazālī also suggests that the number of things known by God is infinite and this, in line with the thought expressed in the *Iqtiṣād*, is considered a sufficient proof to establish the nature of God as the only real Agent.

Again in the *Qawā'id*, after a discussion on the divine qualities of life and power, al-Ghazālī moves on to recall the nature and role of the divine will as a tool able to select out (in time) amongst possible beings those which are destined to be put into existence. Existentiation, however, occurs, to be borne in mind, only with the intervention of divine power:

> The existence of things is specified in the moments predetermined by Him; therefore they had existed in their moments according to what He wanted in His eternity with no anticipation or delay; indeed they happened according to His knowledge and will, with neither change nor variation.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, I, p. 84)[111]

God wills existents, He is the provider of the future ones, and nothing happens either in the visible realm or the invisible domain if not through His sentencing and decree, His wisdom and will: 'What He wants is, and what he does not want is not . . . nothing opposes His command and nobody is against His decree.'[112] The Ashʿarite view of God as the only Creator and unique Agent and Determiner of any existent is here unleashed without compromise with no elements seeming to undermine the Ashʿarite facade of al-Ghazālī who addresses the theory on free will and predestination in a very logical way. Moreover, in contrast to the previous passage, centred on the positive aspects of divine predetermination, here it is also recognized that every existing thing, be it good or bad, useful or damaging, occurs through God's decree. With a very Ashʿarite attitude, the stress is implicitly laid on the futility of the tendency to categorize things in positive or negative terms, which is typical of the Muʿtazilites, as this is meaningless in relation to God's perception of the reality.[113]

In the course of this discussion on the *Revival* it will be shown that the Ashʿarite tone of al-Ghazālī is mitigated. Theological issues like the concepts of God as the only Creator, who is not compelled to create by His nature, the stress on the absoluteness of the divine justice and the pervasive character of the divine will, which al-Ghazālī uses in order to tackle the problem of divine and human responsibility, are progressively 'coloured' by philosophical resolutions and mystical outcomes.

The Ashʿarite al-Ghazālī on divine justice

In the sub-chapter of the *Revival* concerned with the explanation of the nature of God's actions, it is emphasized that there is no other being comparable to God. It has been observed that the *exordium* of al-Ghazālī's magnum opus is as Ashʿarite as it could possibly be: it emphasizes that nothing exists except what originates from God's action, and that all proceeds from His justice in the best, most perfect, complete and righteous way because God is wise in His action and righteous in His decree.[114] In the following parts of the *Revival*, al-Ghazālī embarks on the task of outlining the realms of responsibility existing between man and God by addressing delicate issues like that of divine justice (*ʿadl*), unity, and the question of the divine attributes. In conjunction with the first topic, with great candour, he claims that it is impossible to accuse God of being unjust simply because God, who does not compete with others in relation to property as everything belongs to Him alone, eliminates the occurrence of any injustice in His disposition of things.[115] Despite this dogmatic rigour, al-Ghazālī feels compelled to offer an explanation of the nature of divine justice which is destined to reveal the shortcomings of any ethical rationale applied to God and His *ʿadl*. First, he states, that the divine bestowal of existence, in contrast to the philosophers' view, is not a divine obligation. In fact, the origination of the world from non-existence does not have a necessary character, impending upon the absoluteness of God's nature. Second, he emphasizes that the divine creation of existents is a manifestation (*izhār*) of His power and an actualization (*taḥqīq*) of His eternal will, reinforcing the idea that all existents are not due to fulfil any divine need or necessity.[116] God is the only 'owner' of favour

(*faḍl*), benefit (*iḥsān*), grace (*niʿma*) and blessing (*imtinān*) because He has the power to impose on His servant any sort of torments and sufferings freely since these impositions are, from God's perspective, always just. Ultimately, according to al-Ghazālī, any endeavour to submit divine ethics to human enquiry demonstrates the limited compass of human reason in relation to theodicy. In line with this, al-Ghazālī's Ashʿarite facet is 'honed' when he comes to explain his own understanding of divine justice: in truth, there is no duty except the one imposed by the Law (*lā wājib illā bi'l-Sharīʿa*),[117] a precept which follows the Ashʿarites' belief for which nothing is due to mankind as nobody has rights over God. On the contrary, it is God's right to be obeyed because His requests are incumbent on His creatures. Such requests are imposed through the dictions of God's prophets whose true prophetic nature has been proven by evident miracles.[118] As a corollary to this, it becomes necessary for all humans to believe in Muhammad's prophethood because the latter conveys God's commands and prohibitions, His promise and His threat. In connection to the concept of divine justice, the Proof of Islam also emphasizes the notion of human *fiṭra* as the natural state in which any being enjoys a predisposition towards attainment of knowledge and comprehension of the divine unity. He stresses that human beings should be in no need of further proofs with regard to the existence and justice of their Creator. However, al-Ghazālī highlights that the nature of divine justice, which is inscrutable for humans, is such an endless source of generosity that, besides providing humans with their *fiṭra*, it also grants men with the power of reason which is destined to help them in attaining an even more profound understanding of their Creator. Humans add the capacity to engage in rational debates to their intuitive knowledge, which allows them to understand that it is necessary to have a 'cause' for anything which is divinely occasionalistically created anew. Purposely, al-Ghazālī quotes a series of Qur'ānic verses which focus on God's Almightiness and His role as Creator,[119] and speaks of the ingrained presence in humans of the intellectual capacity which enables humankind to deduce from the wonders of creation the necessary existence of a Maker (*Ṣānīʿ*), who regulates these wonders, and the existence of an Agent, who administrates them: 'He guided you [to the awareness] that the Maker knows how to ordain and arrange'.[120] Clearly, al-Ghazālī perceives God not simply as the Ashʿarite dogmatic righteous divinity, but as a generous God who facilitates His creatures in their comprehension of His justice. Justice can be called 'justice' exactly because God knows how to ordain and dispose things with His decree which is always right and perfect in accordance to the Ashʿarite dogma.

Al-Ghazālī's revised Ashʿarism: Divine created acts and human acquisition

It is well known that, in the history of Islam, the Ashʿarites debated more than other Islamic theologians the concept of acquisition (*kasb*) in order to credit humans with the responsibility for their actions, which made them susceptible to punishment or reward in the afterlife, whilst preserving for God the role as the Creator of the humans' acts. Al-Ghazālī endorses Ashʿarite ideas when he states

that 'all the acts of servants are created by Him and connected with Him through His power (*bi-qudrathi*) as proved by God's words – "Allāh created everything" – and His words – "Allāh created you and what you do"'.[121] He even more clearly declares that:

> God is the only One to invent human acts. He does not exclude them to be objects of the human capacity in terms of acquisition: indeed God has created the capacity (*qudra*) and its object (*maqdūr*) together (*jamīʿan*) and He created volition (*ikhtīyār*) and its object together.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, I, p. 101)

At a first glance, al-Ghazālī's position would appear to equal the Ashʿarites'. However, at a closer look, the above quotation reveals subtle differences. The Proof of Islam does not fail to specify that the capacity, which is created by God and is given to man, does not stand as a human acquisition. The case is different with reference to the human act which always created by the divine power and is assigned to the servants because it is acknowledged to belong to the realm of their acquisitions. These ideas are explained in one brief sentence: instead of stating that the capacity-to-act is being created to enable man to act, al-Ghazālī inverts the order of wording and claims that the human action is explicitly created as the object of the capacity given to man. Although subtle, this reading of the nature of the act bears profound repercussions. Since the capacity-to-act is not an *iktisāb* as the act itself, as the capacity-to-act is said to fall beyond the realm of human acquisition, the human being is indirectly compelled to 'acquire' the act according to the limits imposed by a very specific given capacity.[122] On the one hand, it is conceivable that God, foreknowing the acquisitions man would perform in the future – here al-Ghazālī's quotation of Qur'ān 37:9, 'God has created you and what you do' is emblematic – is willing to endow man exactly with that particular capacity which makes an action a 'human' action. On the other hand, it is self-evident that, when God provides humans with an arranged specific capacity, He does indeed frame their actions as strictly predetermined. In both cases, however, what God does is always a divine favour which is granted to humanity, this bearing witness to the fact that the Ashʿarite al-Ghazālī does not admit there might be any form of injustice on God's behalf.

In the *Iḥyā'* actions are described both as objects of God's power in terms of creation, and as objects of man's capacity in terms of acquisition. Significantly, in this work it is highlighted that it is possible to think of the correlation between the capacity-to-act and its object in terms which are different from the creative relation. This alternative is postulated by referring to the power of God: this is related, *ab aeterno*, to the things of this world, and is able to put them into existence through an un-named relation which is known as the selective action of the will.[123] The attributes of power and will are, for the Ashʿarite al-Ghazālī, not identical with the divine essence, but additional to it. Therefore, whatever is eternally decreed and chosen by the divine will, brought about by the divine power, is not necessitated by the divine essence, this exemplifying the distinction between

qaḍā' and *qadar*. This view is in opposition to the philosophers' idea for which everything proceeds by necessity from the divine essence in the already-analysed identification of *qadar* and destiny.[124]

The selective function of the will can operate in relation to humans too. In man, the given capacity to acquire an act is always connected with its object. However, the act comes into existence only through the human volition for its acquisition. This means that at the moment of creation, the divine capacity to create the act is connected to the world because it is 'led' by man's acquisition of that specific act, whose realization, in turn, becomes possible only by virtue of the determined divine-given capacity. A man becomes the vessel for God's act of selection and the locus of disclosure of the divine eternal plan. In line with this, the human being turns out to be God's vice-regent on earth due to his/her capacity to actualize, in specific temporal moments, God's eternal will.

Even at this early stage in the analysis of the *Iḥyā'*, it is possible to detect some indications of al-Ghazālī's vision on free will and predestination, which is mainly addressed through his revised theory of acquisition. Initially, the Ghazālīan resolution of the theory is substantially Ashʿarite. The argumentations adopted, however, betray a more philosophical, almost Aristotelian trend, which sweeps away a pure dogmatic approach in favour of a more 'argumentative' attitude through which al-Ghazālī 'explains' his ideas. This stance is especially evident when he decides to introduce the issue of the acts which is preceded by his treatments of divine justice, God's unity and the topic of human *fiṭra*. With the arguments related to God's creative capacity, in the *Revival*, al-Ghazālī finds it necessary to insist on divine *tawḥīd*. To this end, he sets human choice on a subordinated plane, with humans becoming the substratum for the actualization of God's action and the instruments confirming God's unique efficient agency.

Modes of actions: Man as the 'compelled chooser'

In the *Iḥyā'*, it is highlighted that the understanding of true theomonism that is the essential and existential unicity of the godhead, necessitates the intellectual realization for which there is no agent or efficient cause other than God. This awareness urges to discover practical ways to deal with God's unicity. Al-Ghazālī, then, finds himself even more compelled to identify God as the Creator of actions and the real Agent. Therefore, in the *Revival*, he speaks about the theory of acquisition only because it would be impossible to deny the difference between voluntary and un-voluntary movements which he had already examined in the *Tahāfut*.

Al-Ghazālī begins his discourse on the nature of voluntary actions prefacing it with reference to three elements which are commonly associated with the notion of 'choice': intention (*niyyah*), will (*irāda*) and purpose (*qaṣd*). The scope (*gharaḍ*) becomes the motivating element which pushes towards action and which, in turn, operates as a stimulus (*bāʿith*). This is nothing else but the 'destination wanted to be given to the aim (*maqṣad*)'.[125] The impulse to accomplish the act is identified with the purpose of the action, whilst the activation of the power, which serves the will in moving the external limbs, is finally identified with the act.[126] Al-Ghazālī

continues his discussion and speaks of three different modes of human actions by providing three examples: (i) the action which occurs when a body is immersed in water; (ii) the action of breathing, and (iii) the action of writing. The first mode is declared to be natural (*ṭabīʿī*), the second wilful (*irādī*) and the third is a mode that can commonly be referred to by way of choice (*ikhtīyarī*). In the first case, the power of man is completely eliminated as, whenever a human body stands in water, water moves away of itself from the body immersed in it inevitably. In the instance of one's breathing, the will of taking one's breath occurs automatically because it is impossible for humans to stop breathing, even after considerably frantic efforts. When al-Ghazālī explains the act of writing, it seems that all his endeavours are employed to dismiss the general tendency which sees humans' powers as being connected to their volitions.[127] All these speculations are offered because al-Ghazālī wants to present his own interpretation of the Ashʿarite position for which humans are agents because they are 'acquirers' of the actions God creates for them. To achieve this, Griffel maintains, al-Ghazālī sets aside the stark distinction between voluntary and involuntary actions and refers to the case of opening and closing one's eyelids.[128] It is easy to acknowledge that this kind of action, usually seen as a voluntary one, is no longer voluntary once it is realized that a sharp needle approaching the human eye actually *compels* humans to close their eyelids.[129] The voluntary closing of the eyelid is, in fact, necessitated by volition which is, in turn, compelled by the perception (i.e. the knowledge) of the needle approaching the eye. Volition determines the action by the power-to-act (*qudra*) which causes the action. What is important to note is that knowledge, volition, power and act are set in a condition-conditioned chain, which is so disposed by God's custom. Al-Ghazālī explains that the natural inclination of man's choice, that is the closing of the eyelid, is 'inscribed' in the dictations of God's *Sunna*. In doing so, he sets the 'voluntary' occurrence of the closing of the eyelid in the domain of the divine decree.[130] More clearly put, it is explained that in man volition follows one's knowledge of whether a thing might be beneficial or not. This means that volition operates only after the intervention of knowledge. The latter, through thinking and reflection, identifies on behalf of the intellect whether a certain action is beneficial or not, and this allows a real will (*irāda al-ikhtiyār*) to arise.[131] This form of *irāda* does not occur except by virtue of the judgement which operates through sense perception, imagination or through a kind of 'assessment' which comes from the intellect. Significantly, all these mechanisms are established to work exclusively according the divine disposition and not according to their nature. Predictably, the closing down of the eyelid, protecting the eye from the attack of a needle, is denied the nature of a wilful act. It becomes rather classifiable as an inevitable or necessitated (*ḍarūrī*) action. The closing of the eyelid, when a needle is approaching the eye, is the result of compulsion (*iḍṭirār*), because, in reality, there is no involvement of any human choice. Basically, there is no possibility to choose (*ikhtiyār*) between the alternatives of closing the eyelid or leaving it open.[132] Al-Ghazālī maintains that even if one contemplates actions in which *ikhtiyār* is entailed, these actions are fundamentally not different from those actions performed without any human choice. This is because choice essentially

reflects the human ability to select out what is most agreeable or beneficial to humans. The capacity to discern what is more or less good for humans is due to the human intellect which deliberates, in terms of judging and deciding what action can be mostly beneficial, until what is identified as a 'choice' is made. Once the deliberation of the intellect is clear, a doubtless knowledge arises regarding what, in a given circumstance, represents the best beneficial alternative. Such knowledge, in succession, triggers the chain terminating with the action. All the connections occurring in the chain are considered necessary because all of them proceed, in the human being, by a necessity within him of which he is not aware:

> All is predetermined (*muqaddar*) by necessity (*bi'l-ḍarūr*) in him [man] in a place he does not know. He is the locus (*maḥall*) and the channel (*majran*) for these orders. Nothing comes from him. The meaning of his being compelled (*majbūr*) is that [compulsion] occurs in him not from him, but from other than himself. The meaning of his having free will (*mukhtār*) is that man is the locus for the will which arises in him necessarily after the judgement of the intellect that [establishes if] a certain act is pure good and useful. Also the judgement takes place necessarily. Thus man is compelled in his choice (*majbūr 'ala al-ikhtiyār*) . . . God acts by pure free choice and man acts in an intermediate way, being compelled to choose freely.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, p. 236)

Man is simply the place and the channel for all proceedings coming from God.[133] It is because humans are the substrate for the occurrence of choices that they are said to be free agents. In truth, they are rather compelled to make certain specific choices because, ultimately, the actions they seemingly 'select out' are the only possible ones. Other alternatives are made impossible both by the divine will and the divine foreknowledge. It is important to detect that al-Ghazālī's stance on the predetermining nature of the divine foreknowledge is presented in the *Revival* without further explanation because, in the *Iqtiṣād*, he had already specified that something not contained in God's foreknowledge can be created only potentially.[134] In the *Iqtiṣād*, it is stated that any future event in itself is possible. However, in accordance to God's foreknowledge, what the eternal will determines is only what is necessary, so that different alternatives simply do not occur. Consequently, a future contingent event which is not contained within God's foreknowledge will never take place. This event is considered to be 'possible with regard to itself' (*mumkin bi-'itibār dhātihi*), and 'impossible with regard to something else' (*muḥāl bi-'itibār ghayrihi*), that is with regard to both God's *irāda* and *'ilm*.[135]

Clearly, the 'compelled free-choosing' activity of humans is just another way to refer to the notion of acquisition and to explain why humans find themselves in an intermediate position, which is contrary neither to compulsion nor to free will. The state of humans as 'compelled choosers' provides them with a power-to-act which is determined to be efficient exclusively according to God's *Sunna*. God's customary Law is arranged in a way which makes humans the locus of disclosure of the exclusive unbound, free acting of God. Besides proving that God is the only real Agent,

as He is the only Being truly free, al-Ghazālī uses the notion of the compelled choice also with the aim of reconciling the idea of *tawḥīd* with the purposive pragmatism of the divine Law. Divine unity has the function to inform men that there is no agent but God and, similarly, the Law has the role to fix the duties of God's servants after they have realized that there is only one real *fāʿil*. These duties are fulfilled once individuals acknowledge themselves as the *loci* in which the power-to-act comes about, after the occurrence of the action of the will which, in turn, is created only after the emergence of knowledge and so on. In addition, al-Ghazālī stresses that the human being should realize that power is connected to the will, like the movements are connected to the power; man should be aware of the fact that the nature of such connections reflects the relation of the condition to the conditioned (*irtibāṭ al-sharṭ bi'l-mashurūṭ*), of the effect to the cause (*al-maʿlūl bi'l-ʿillah*) and of the invention to the inventor (*al-mukhtaraʿbi'l-mukhtariʿi*). To be noticed is that, in a vortex of 'experimentalism', al-Ghazālī openly lists amongst the series of condition-conditioned things the relation of the effect to the cause thus suggesting, in clear contrast to the Avicennian view, that their relationship is not a necessary one. Causes and effects become elements non-necessarily conjoined whose accidental relation is made unchangeable exclusively through the divine *Sunna*: the philosophical Avicennian discourse on causality is clothed here in a purely theological disguise.

The nature of evil

It has been observed that the notion of divine justice and the role of divine volition are used to emphasize the divine freedom in decreeing, but they are also employed to inaugurate an open discussion against some Muʿtazilites positions. Particularly, al-Ghazālī aims at criticizing their view for which God assigns to humans only those duties that they are actually capable of carrying out (the notion of '*taklīf mā lā yuṭāq*'). Whilst the Muʿtazilites had stressed the impossibility for God to impose obligations falling outside their capacity, al-Ghazālī supports the opposite idea and stresses that God is not limited in His 'choice' of imposing obligations which humans do not have necessarily the capacity to fulfil.[136] His vision is clearly that of an Ashʿarite: in a parlance similar to the one used previously with regards to divine property,[137] al-Ghazālī claims that, because God is One in His dominion, it follows that the arrangements and dispositions in His kingdom are absolutely free from limitations. He quotes God's words: 'if God wanted He would have led all men to good' (Q. 13:31) and 'if We wanted it, We would have given everyone the right direction' (Q. 32:13), and unequivocally declares that God bestows His creation and *taklīf* on mankind without any form of compulsion because all things are manifestations of His favour and generosity. This position obviously implies that the godhead is not compelled by His nature to do what is best for men. What is advanced in this context is a pale justification for the existence of evil. Whilst al-Ghazālī embraces the Ashʿarite dogma for which there is no such thing as intrinsic good or evil,[138] he still attempts to provide an explanation intending to absolve God from the authorship of evils in the world. All this is being done despite the proclaimed belief that God is the only true Agent.

A detailed explanation on the nature of evil is presented in *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*.[139] Throughout this work, in a very Avicennian style, al-Ghazālī states that there is no evil in existence which does not contain some good; were that evil to be eliminated, the good within it would be nullified, leading as a final result, to a bigger form of evil. Furthermore, al-Ghazālī highlights the notion for which God wants goodness for goodness sake and that 'what is intended for its own sake (*al-murād li-dhātihi*) takes precedence over which is intended for the sake of the other (*al-murād li-ghayrihi*)'.[140] What is emphasized with this statement is that evil occurs only because it encompasses some good within it and that, whilst good is accomplished essentially, evil is realized accidentally. Nevertheless, both good and evil 'occur' according to the divine decree. The production of evil perceived in this light, does not contradict the principle of mercy (*laysa fī dhalika mā yunāfī al-raḥma aṣlan*) and does not contravene the divine definition of God as the Most Merciful (*al-Raḥmān, al-Raḥīm*) because God can still be identified with the infinitely Good, considering that He wants evil exclusively for the sake of goodness.[141] Keeping in mind the Ashʿarite concept for which good and evil are non-existent per se, all readers of the *Revival* are encouraged by its author to consider that created things are divine works and that all of them are *wanted* by God. In order to stress the latter point, al-Ghazālī provides the example of a paradoxical case limit by speaking of the imposition of a command which God does not want men to obey. The divine command it is presented as being different from God's will (*al-amr ghayr al-irāda*), and this distinction leads to attributing evil mainly to humans, rather than the deity.[142] When human beings disobey God's command, in cases when this disobedience is actually wanted by Him, they produce something which can be classified as evil or rebelliousness exclusively from the human point of view. In truth, God would perceive this as an act of obedience and, specifically, obedience to His willingness not to be obeyed. The act classified by humans as an act of disobedience is acquired, or chosen, by them, but in truth, is subject to the discerning power of the divine will which selects out and grants humans with a specific capacity to perform such a choice. Therefore, it is only the free choice of God's will which decides on humans' 'disobedience', since it opts to bestow upon them a capacity which, in turn, leads men to 'choose' the act of 'disobedience'. In brief, the propensity of labelling something as good or evil makes sense only according to human parameters, as al-Ghazālī points out, due to the human incapacity to identify the real nature of goodness and mercy which are hidden beneath the manifest evil of this world.[143]

Evil is often thought of as something repulsive or ugly (*qabīḥ*), but is also conceivable as 'something which is not concordant with a specific aim (*mā lā yūwāfīq al-gharḍ*)'.[144] The latter interpretation implies that, when it is considered in itself, evil is certainly not imputable to God whose will, despite being deprived of any selfish aim to satisfy, never lacks volition or purpose (al-Ghazālī's position is, in this instance, clearly in opposition to Avicenna's).[145] Nonetheless, evil, in its accidental nature, can also be considered as something 'possible with regard to something else', that is with regard to God's foreknowledge and His will to choose a minor evil for the sake of a major good. Once evil is approached from this angle,

it is self-evident that al-Ghazālī understands it in terms similar to Avicenna's: for both thinkers God wills the existence of evil in order not to compromise the possible goodness of creation, this occurring despite the fact that He does not desire evil in the 'traditional' sense. Like Avicenna, al-Ghazālī believes that evil is created accidentally, even if it is encompassed within the divine decree. However, a key difference between the two intellectuals is evident. According to Avicenna, the concept of evil, as an accidental consequence of the divine providence, reinforces the relation of evil with matter through the potential character they share. The same insurgence of evil becomes justifiable in terms of the disobedience, or non-compliance, of matter to the dictates of the individual purposive nature of anything which is existent. Clearly, these positions are irreconcilable with al-Ghazālī's belief for which all existing nature is subservient to God's impositions and His *Sunna*.

Nature and fear

Knowledge of God and obedience to Him are obligatory not simply because they are imposed by reason and intuition, as claimed by the Muʿtazilites and the Maturidites, but also because the holy Law (*Sharīʿa*) requires them. Impositions are necessary even if obedience and disobedience stand equal before God, who has no inclination towards one at the expense of the other. Indeed, it has been mentioned that in the *Iqtiṣād*, al-Ghazālī believes that God operates only on possible things: acts of obedience and acts of rebellion are, therefore, considered identical exactly because they are both possible things.[146] Obviously, the divine revelation has made clear that obedience to its *dicta* is expected from those people who are willing to be rewarded in the afterlife. Consequentially, a distinction between the two categories of acts of obedience and disobedience is somewhat inferred. On the other hand, it is to be noted that it is exclusively through the divine Law that this distinction is made evident to mankind. This is because no moral obligation of any kind occurs before and independently from the revealed Law. Al-Ghazālī condemns both the Muʿtazilites and the Avicennian philosophers' belief for which human intuitiveness is sufficient to distinguish between good and evil and is capable of indicating what is ethically necessary. Despite this attitude, al-Ghazālī in effect absorbs their thesis and, in an unexpected turn, substitutes the notion of 'intuitiveness' with the capacity of rational discernment which is engrained in human nature.[147] It is the latter, he emphasizes, that spurs the human being to be aware of future harm which might result from disobedience to what is ordained and prescribed in the Law. Particularly, it is the nature of fear (*khawf*) which helps mankind to make sense of:

> The law and reason, and their efficacy in evaluating what is obligatory (*wājib*): if it were not for fear of the punishment for the omission of what has been ordered, the obligation would have no sense since the term *wājib* indicates that whose omission causes harm in the next world.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʾ*, I, p. 103)

Significantly, al-Ghazālī adopts the word *khawf* which, used also by the Muʿtazilites, is generally employed in the Qurʾān to describe the instinctive reaction of fear towards an impending harm. The essence of *khawf* provides human beings with a support through which they can achieve a full understanding of the divine unity, proportionally to the awareness of their own condition. Al-Ghazālī explains that fear might depend on the nature of the feared things like water, by its nature, is feared because it is compelled to inundate, and fire is feared because it is compelled to burn, and in doing so, he implicitly hints at the Avicennian cause-effect relation for which fire (cause) inevitably produces burning (effect), this being due to the natural necessary relation occurring between a cause and its effect. However, when he speaks of the fear for God (*taqwā*), one realizes that al-Ghazālī has something different in mind: the intensity of fear, which is experienced by mankind, is proportionate both to the knowledge that an individual has of his/her soul's defects and, above all, proportionate to the knowledge of God's absolute majesty, His utter independence, His being dispensed from needing to qualify His actions. This equals to saying that fear of God is linked to the degree of knowledge an individual has of God, of His attributes, and of the fact that His justice transcends any human parameter of comprehension: 'Whoever mostly fears (*taqwā*) his Lord he is who mostly know himself and his Lord', al-Ghazālī declares.[148] The notion of *taqwā* (*Timor Dei*) presented in this quotation is employed in the Qurʾān to indicate the psychic state of a person who is open to divine guidance; it ultimately constitutes a form of feeling which is perceived as a divine reward for any pious person (Q. 47:17). The Qurʾānic notion of *taqwā* shows that the subjective fear expressed by the term *khawf* can be superseded when humans realize that, once they have acknowledged the validity of the divine revelation, they are morally compelled to act by following the divine guidance offered in it. Clearly the possibility to apprehend the contents of revelation is offered by the intervention of human reason, but alongside it, the role played by nature cannot be underestimated. In fact, the measure by which revelation is received depends on the individual degree of human receptivity, which characterizes any individual's nature. According to al-Ghazālī, revelation discloses itself in many ways, and it is according to the measure of particularized reason and nature that each human being can taste a very 'personal', individualized revelation.

Frank has stressed that al-Ghazālī understands nature as 'an operative element' in a series of secondary causes which are effective generally and 'in most cases (*ʿalā'l-akthar*)'.[149] Is it perhaps through nature that some form of escapism from utter predestination can be actually traced? Does nature become the factor triggering the innate human predisposition to act or not to act? In order to answer these questions it is imperative to remember that, according to al-Ghazālī, the secondary causes' necessary efficacy is never dependent on the secondary causes' very nature. When he speaks of human nature and its influence in determining the human understanding of revelation, and when he describes it as an element operating in secondary causes which is effective in most cases, al-Ghazālī seems to accept that nature might play a role in the causative chain inscribed in the perpetual creation of God. In truth, in contrast to Avicenna for whom regularities

experienced in the world derive from the real nature of things which connect them causally and necessarily, for al-Ghazālī, nature's general uniformity entails its own irregularity. This is nothing but the product of a given divine habitual order of occurrences (*istimrār al-ʿāda*). All things breaking the expected sequence of habitual cause and habitual effect, such as miracles, are eternally predisposed by God's *ab aeterno* will. The basic argument is that nothing in this world follows its given nature, because everything can be transformed and changed if so wished by God.[150] The Avicennian philosophical argumentation which acknowledges that the reaction of things to given circumstances is determined by their natural predispositions (which never change), is replaced by an occasionalistic outlook for which an omnipotent God is endowed with total freedom of action. The Ghazālīan God, despite being fully able to act independently from secondary causes and being able to predetermine things according to what He wants, endows existents with a divinely chosen nature which does not react to circumstances through its own predisposition, but exclusively according to what God establishes for it through His customary habit. This position explains why, for instance, should God's foreknowledge include the enactment of a miracle, God would suspend His habit so that the usual or expected 'effect' would not occur.[151]

In line with what has been previously observed, if, on the one hand, the idea for which God wants evil a secondary manner places al-Ghazālī closer to Avicenna, on the other hand, the denial, typical of Ashʿarite thought, that nature might be responsible for the development of beings sets him at odds with the Avicennian notion of natural determinism, considered to be inherent in the essences of things. Clearly, for al-Ghazālī, the reason why events occur in a specific way is due to the divine eternal deliberation and choice, that is, to the pure divine voluntarism which is not affected by secondary causes' natural efficacy.

'Naturality' of human actions

In the book dedicated to the exploration of the *wonders of the heart* (*ʿajāʾib al-qalb*), al-Ghazālī speaks of two different ways to acquire knowledge: the first way is that of the Sufis which is based both on inspiration (*ʾilhām*) and on the belief that knowledge can be attained through the angel 'that bestows knowledge on the mind'. The second is the way of the scholars (*ʿulamāʾ*) based on speculative reasoning (*nuẓẓār*). In addition, al-Ghazālī alludes to the possibility that the human heart might be ready (*mustaʿadd*) to be informed of the real nature of things when it is prepared for such information. Amongst the probable impediments to reach such knowledge, he mentions five causes: (i) inadequacy of mind, (ii) impurity of the heart, (iii) failure to seek knowledge, (iv) attachment to false opinion and (v) ignorance on the way through which to seek knowledge. All of these act as veils which separate the mirror of the human heart from the Preserved Tablet (*lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) 'where it is written everything God has decreed till the Day of Resurrection'.[152] Revelation of true knowledge from the mirror of the Preserved Tablet to the mirror of the heart is allowed by the secret favour of God (*biʾl-luṭf khafī min Allāh taʿāla*)[153] and, al-Ghazālī stresses, humans can facilitate the bestowal of the

divine favour by being in constant and vigilant 'alert mode', preparing themselves for the portion of mercy which God will concede them. However, ultimately, it is always God's choice to inspire man. This means that it is God who takes care of the heart of His servant by flooding it with His mercy and by enlarging his breast, thus allowing man to gaze at the realm of the unseen.

In relation to the discussion on the way humans are enabled to attain knowledge, the *Revival* refers to the Sufi inclination to privilege the inspired sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-ilhāmiyya*) over the instructive ones (*al-ʿulūm al-taʿlīmiyya*). Following the emerging mystical literature of the fourth/tenth century which was directed towards the promotion of personal piety, al-Ghazālī criticizes the early Sufis' tendency to shun the performance of supererogatory acts and their propensity to emphasize exclusively the constant invocation of God. Both God's remembrance (*dhikr*) and the activity of spiritual retreat, aiming to attain 'the perfect adherence of the heart to the inner meaning of the word God', allow humans only to be 'in control' of their willingness to perpetuate their permanence in the stage of closeness to God. However, these practices do not suffice a correct spiritual practice. Notwithstanding their shortcomings, asceticism and contemplation can be of some use because, by practising these activities, any individual can improve the possibility to be in a constant vigilant 'state of grace'. Through this state is possible to facilitate the reception of the divine gusts of mercy (*nafaḥāt raḥma Allāh*).[154] Al-Ghazālī is well aware that good human actions are, by themselves, not adequate to ensure salvation, but he is also convinced that good deeds like prayer, remembrance of God, abstention from earthly desires, asceticism, are all helpful in predisposing humans to receive the divine effusions of grace.[155] The religious obligations which are prescribed by the practical science of theology too are fundamental in spurring actions and human receptivity of divine benevolence: 'the revealed sciences and the practical sciences are connected like the branch and the root . . . the practical sciences, if not efficient in stimulating actions, should be non-existent'.[156] Fundamentally, good deeds predispose the human soul to be open to the effusion of divine benevolence but, ultimately, in al-Ghazālī's estimation, the worshipper attains Paradise by the bounty and the grace of God. This suggests that nobody is saved by virtue of individual good deeds and proves that, as Toby Mayer emphasizes, al-Ghazālī is still clearly bound 'to the Ashʿarite doctrine of "*sola gratia*"; virtuous acts are able to direct the outcome [of divine grace] without dictating it'.[157]

Acts such as the worship of God and the submission to religious impositions are conceived as the ultimate expression of faith (*imān*) which enacts in the soul the predisposition to receiving the gift of the divine grace. The latter is, however, the primary source and the real origin of the human soul's faith and good deeds. Good actions become proofs of human faith and they enable man to accept gratefully his condition as someone who has been 'chosen' by the divine grace, the latter being, in any case, ultimately responsible for human faith and good actions. The capacity to perform good actions becomes, for any individual, comforting evidence that the person lives in the 'status of grace' which is granted by God's benevolence. The *status gratiae* becomes, from the human perspective, a reassurance for salvation which discloses God's predetermined benevolent disposition towards His 'good agents'.

Obviously, human deeds are not simply of a positive nature. Al-Ghazālī refers to the Qur'ānic description of Adam who, as the epitome of mankind, contains in his nature both elements of goodness and mischief, evil and goodness being moulded in his clay in a perfect blend.[158] Al-Ghazālī argues that it is impossible for any human being to accomplish exclusively good deeds because this characteristic belongs only to the angels. Different also from demons, which are able to perform only evil acts, men who have fallen are indeed able to redeem themselves from sin and return to goodness.[159] Al-Ghazālī believes that, in the children of Adam, passions (defined as the devil's army) precede the intellect (the angels' army), this meaning that it is intrinsic to human nature to fall first, and atone for committed evil later.[160] Al-Ghazālī seems to believe that only once the individual has become aware of the obligations imposed by the revealed Law the withdrawal from an evil action becomes a moral obligation. Such an interpretation is, however, later dismissed by al-Ghazālī's claim for which, 'withdrawal . . . is obligatory for every man, Prophets or those ignorant'.[161] The mention of ignorant people invalidates the Ashʿarite stance which suggests that humans have the capacity to distinguish between bad and good acts, depending on the knowledge of the divine Law. The mandatory nature of humans' return to good from evil has nothing to do with human endeavour as such, but is uniquely owed to God. It is, to use al-Ghazālī's words, 'an eternal norm inscribed in the human race to which it is not possible to oppose, unless of a change in the divine custom (*al-sunna al-ilahīyya*) which is not desirable'.[162] It is worth remembering that, whilst the Muʿtazilites believed that humans have the power to distinguish between good and evil independently from divine revelation, al-Ghazālī unremittingly does not assign this capacity to the nature of mankind, but rather to God's custom, which is immutable. Simultaneously, he moderates his earlier rigid Ashʿarism: whilst he initially adopts the idea that divine revelation is necessary to distinguish between good and evil, the above passage shows that, in this context, he tends to shun this concept. Al-Ghazālī, however, never abandons Ashʿarism completely since he reinforces, by means of mitigated logic naturalism, the notion of the divine *ijrā' al-ʿāda*. This is evident when he declares that the human *ṭabīʿa*, with the assistance of reason, is considered partially responsible for the understanding that each human being can attain of the necessary character of the Law's pronouncements.[163] Notwithstanding the fact that nature is considered as given by God, responding to His eternal plan, on many occasions, al-Ghazālī also describes it as a miserable nature (*shaqa'*), as a 'leading power', arguing that it is humans' responsibility if this miserable nature prevails.[164] Avicenna, it has been observed, considered humans responsible to grasp the content of divine revelation because they have been granted with the capacity to strive in order to hone their intellectual abilities, this implicitly shaping their destinies. The fatalism imposed by natural determinism is made, for Avicenna, more bearable because humans accept the predetermined measure of the capacity which is bestowed upon them by God and, despite this, humans keep striving to attain perfection. According to al-Ghazālī, nature is ultimately the result of God's custom which makes an individual human nature what it is. However, if on the one hand, human nature has the power to commit evil acts, on

the other hand, it is also responsible for men's successive withdrawal from evil. God, in His mercy, embeds human nature with the gift of reason, and it is with reason's support that humans are prompted to grasping the content of the revealed Law and its religious dictates so that all individuals' nature – which predetermines them to fall and atone – might fulfil God's decree. Atonement is attainable by complying with the revealed obligations, which, in turn, engender good actions. The latter facilitate humans to attaining divine mercy, shaping their destinies and their chance to be amongst those 'chosen' by God.

Repentance and hope

Al-Ghazālī links the concept of humans' atonement with the notion of repentance (*tawba*). This concept, derived from the Qur'ān,[165] was used by Sufis to highlight the unmediated nature of their encounter with God. They interpreted *tawba* as a kind of 'dynamic principle' with which God directly re-orientated His followers from false paths to the truth of the mystical journey.[166] The long discussion dedicated to *tawba* shows that the *Iḥyā'* was conceived as a Sufi handbook. In general, in fact, all Sufi instructive manuals contain chapters on repentance.[167] Al-Ghazālī permeates this concept with rational implications and explains that the stages through which repentance can be reached are ordained in the necessary sequence of the conditioned to the condition:

> Know that repentance is the meaning of that which becomes rightly ordered and cohesive through three [conditionally] arranged things: knowledge, state and act. Knowledge is the first [thing], state is the second [thing] and act is the third [thing]. The first necessitates the second and the second necessitates the third by a necessity required by the uninterrupted sequence of God's custom in the worlds of the seen and the unseen.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, p. 4)[168]

In the above passage, knowledge refers to the alienation of one individual from God. The state following it is that of remorse or regret which is seen as a necessary condition for the act of renouncing the sin. Even if the three elements are conditionally arranged, their necessitation is clearly tied to God's *Sunna*. In order to understand these concepts, it is necessary to follow al-Ghazālī's articulate construction for his argument. The first step is to realize that, since repentance is not simply the abandonment of passions but also the effort of healing oneself from the errors of the past, the return to good after the abyss of evil is realizable through the three mentioned stages, which culminate in the action of compliance to God's orders. The second step is to appreciate that, almost paradoxically, human actions mark the beginning and the end of a chain of conditions, necessarily and logically connected, whilst the third step consists in understanding that all human actions have their foundation in the divine gift of faith which is rooted in the certitude of God's *tawḥīd*, the reality of Prophethood and the rightness of the revealed Law. Linked to this is a fundamental point for al-Ghazālī: he emphasizes that the belief

in the truthfulness of prophethood and of the divine Law is indispensable for prompting actions. In order to stress this idea, he draws a comparison between the condition of an ill person and that of a believer. Just as it is fundamental for an ill person to believe that malady and sanity have causes and that it is also necessary to have faith in the power of medicine, likewise it is fundamental for man to believe in the validity of the divine Law, namely, to believe that happiness and misery in the next life have, as respective causes, obedience and disobedience to God's commands. Moreover, as it is necessary for the ill person to trust the capability of the doctor, in the same way, it is necessary for the believer to have faith in the absolute reality and faultlessness of Muḥammad's Prophethood.[169]

When al-Ghazālī deals with the essence of hope (*rajā'*), he basically sums up and reaffirms his arguments.[170] Once man has sowed the seed of faith, watered it with the seeds of the acts of obedience, purified the heart from the thorns of a perverted behaviour, he can expect to be enlightened by the gusts of God's grace. Hope spurs the servant to persevere in order to fulfil the requirements of the 'causes of faith' (*asbāb al-imān* or good actions) which are necessary to complete the 'causes of forgiveness' (*asbāb al-maghrafra*). The tone of the discourse changes when al-Ghazālī deals with the essence of divine mercy (*raḥma*). In harmony with a very Sufi perspective, he considers God's mercy and love to be above restrictions, because both are able to supersede the logical barrier imposed by the very nature of the state of hope. To speak about hope, with the meaning intended above, it is necessary to have a series of conditions which are able to turn the expectancy of divine benevolence into real hope, rather than a mere or hollow expectation. Differently, love, states al-Ghazālī, wins over hope (*al-ḥubb yaghrliba al-rajā'*), whilst mercy is in no need of any condition-conditioned sequence since it, in its irreducibility, proscribes the principle of despair: 'Do not despair of God's mercy', al-Ghazālī announces.[171] The hope which a human being nourishes towards the boundless mercy of God becomes the *cause* of his salvation because, it is argued, the obstacle for the reception of divine revelation is set within human nature itself, and does not depend on God's mercy. In their attempts to follow the dictates of divine revelation, humans become predisposed to hope in the divine mercy and, by doing so, they actually become meritorious of this mercy. Clearly, in the above context, the already discussed human 'state of grace', which is identified as a status of preparedness, comes to be linked with the notion of divine mercy.

With the analysis of the notion of hope the reader is set, once again, before a very intricate condition-conditioned chain and a reinforcement of a very 'Calvinistic' idea of predestination for which humans, with their own good deeds, can attain to the ranks of the elects, the gusts of God's grace confirming man's state and behaviour as a chosen one. Perseverance in performing commanded acts does not simply lead to divine forgiveness, but also to regarding hope as something logically achievable. This means that any individual who dedicates his/her life to the acts of obedience against those of disobedience has the *right* to expect of receiving grace from God.[172] In connection with this idea, al-Ghazālī quotes Qur'ān 2:218: 'Those who believed and those who suffered exile and fought (and strove and

struggled) in the path of God, they have the hope of the mercy of God.'[173] The intention is to clarify that God has established for every person the possibility to hope in His favour when His favour has been rightly 'earned'. God, in fact, has declared openly that the right to hope belongs only to those people who have fulfilled the causes which nourish such hope. This means that actions are, yet again, located within a condition-conditioned chain since they depend on the knowledge of what is required or forbidden by God. Knowledge produces the state of hope and the latter, in turn, prompts the performance of good deeds. To sum up, good actions are evident signs of God's choice, and whoever hopes to be part of the elects without the presence of these signs is declared to be a fool.[174]

It's worth noting that al-Ghazālī approaches each theme in a lucid and logical way. However, all these topics also betray Avicennian reminiscences and Sufi traces. Concerning the latter, it has been observed that al-Ghazālī urges the wayfarer to expose himself to the gusts of divine grace through a constant vigilance which must be augmented by good deeds. These predispose the human being to value his status as an individual who has been selected out by divine grace, which is, in turn, identified as the ultimate origin of human faith. The discourse on the complex human nature is discussed in order to emphasize the Ashʿarite habitual order of occurrences that is ultimately determined by God's eternal design. Human moral redemption, initially posed in an Avicennian style as being ingrained in the human nature, is eventually portrayed as an eternal norm due to God's custom. The return to good, linked to the notions of repentance and hope, does not lose its mandatory nature despite being predetermined by God's eternal decision. On the one hand, as stressed by Ibrahim Moosa, al-Ghazālī does 'admit that nature has a predilection for dispositions', but he regards that these as not being 'ultimate, reserving ultimate causation to a theistic will'.[175] On the other hand, human nature seems to be able to dispose and motivate humans to act according to its own dictates. Even without any mention of the notion of acquisition (*kasb*), it is easy to sense that for al-Ghazālī humans and God have a share with regard to the realm of activity. However, the respective degree of human and divine responsibility is left blurred, even vague, allowing a theistic aura to prevail.

Trust in God: Responsibility and the role of the divine law

Like the Ashʿarites, al-Ghazālī argues in his construct that it is not advisable to discuss the question of divine predestination. In addition, he links the topic of predestination with the necessity to rely on God's providential plan. By stressing the Ghazālīan concept of the 'perfect rightness of the actual', Eric Ormsby draws attention to the fact that in the *Iḥyāʾ* passages which are related to the rightness and most perfect nature of God's ordering, and in treatments of trust in God (*tawakkul*) in general, a great emphasis is stressed even more than usual on the sole agency of God.[176] Whoever trusts God (*mutawakkil*) has to recognize no other agent than Him, thus putting his complete trust in the divine decree. The concept of 'the perfect rightness of the actual' concerns the issue for which God necessarily creates what He creates without room for any alternative world. This notion is

exemplified in al-Ghazālī's belief that i) what is in existence is such in the most perfect way possible and that, ii) 'existence is per se better than non-existence' (*al-wujūd khayr min al-ʿadam fī dhātihi*).[177] A similar view is also presented in *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, where al-Ghazālī declares that living things are nobler and more perfect than the non-living ones because God is Himself existent, and approximation to God (and His existence) makes things way more perfect than those farther from Him (and His existence).[178]

Trust in God allows humans to quench their enquiring thirst to unravel the mysteries of divine predestination.[179] Remission and trust in the divine decree, as well as the belief in *tawḥīd* and in the sole divine agency, become the keys to the human peace of mind, sources of certitude for any inquisitive soul. Once a man perceives his powerlessness and understands that, borrowing al-Ghazālī's words at the time of his 'crisis, 'the capacity to make a choice has completely collapsed',[180] the recourse to God and trust in Him are the tools through which the human being can obtain a 'vantage point' and finally perceive what reality is: nothing except God and His acts. This yearned certitude can be obtained once the individual manages to perceive the domain of the seen (*ʿālam al-mulk*), as Ormsby argues, 'not as the product of blind chance or of any series of causes and effects, nor as the arena of his own endeavours, but as the direct expression of the divine will and wisdom, down to the least particular'.[181] In essence, the Sufi virtue, and mystical station, of trust in God consists in becoming increasingly aware of the real significance of *tawḥīd* which mirrors the mystical understanding of God's oneness, already encountered in our analysis of *The* N*iche of Lights*.[182] When al-Ghazālī deals with the topic of *tawakkul*, he presents God as the only Creator, Inventor and Agent repeatedly. God is alone in His actions and all existents besides Him are subject to His discipline by being subservient and thankful (*shākir*) towards Him.[183] Despite the occurrence of clear signs in the world through which theomonism is made manifest, al-Ghazālī takes into account the possibility for humans to deny God's *tawḥīd* and His sole agency. Such a denial, which is triggered by the work of Satan, leads humans to believe that they have free will and to the conviction that natural conditions can have efficient causes other than God. Consequently, for al-Ghazālī, the sin of *shirk* (unbelief or polytheism) does not simply consist in misconstruing the concept of God as the only Agent or the only Cause of causes, but also in the ignorance about the true nature of things (*ḥaqāʾiq al-ʿumūr*), which leads men to believe that the cause–effect relation has a necessary character.

Although presented in a veiled manner, the theme of trust in God is an element already identified in some of Avicenna's works. It was observed that in the Avicennian schema, whilst, on the one hand, God is ready to 'allow' the incidental emanation of evil in order to safeguard the existence of a greater good, on the other hand, human beings agree to limit their freedom by 'accepting' the measure of determinism that God places in the world's order. By doing this, humans implicitly trust God because they believe that what established by His decree is of a beneficial nature. When al-Ghazālī speaks of the possibility for the servant not to acknowledge real *tawḥīd*, also pointing out that this is the minor work of Satan, he seems to suggest that evil operates to derail God's plan from its design.[184] In

the *Iḥyā'*, however, it is never clearly explained neither to what extent the action of Satan is actually efficient, nor according to what modalities evil actually operates in the world. Conversely, in the *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, Satan's authoritative 'efficacy' is completely nullified by al-Ghazālī who openly stresses that Iblis' actions are part and parcel of the divine decree:

> Do not suppose that poison kills or harms by itself, or that food satisfies or benefits by itself; or that kings or men or Satan, or any creature – be they heavenly bodies or stars or anything else – are capable of good or evil, benefit or harm, by themselves. For all these are subservient causes from which nothing proceeds except that for which they were utilized.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, p. 157)[185]

Once it is grasped that God is all-powerful and all-knowing, that He bestows His kindness independently from any human measure of comparison and that there is no power except through Him, the human being can attain the state of *tawakkul*. All the elements indicated above are regarded as conditions which necessary lead to the mystical station of 'Trust in God'. Absolute trust, however, does not have to become a base for moral laxity because the transparency of the divine message passed on by the revelation and communicated by al-Ghazālī with urgent force, condemns resignation and renunciation.[186] Even the basic rejection of the provisions which God bestows out of His generosity upon mankind is classifiable as unlawful because it is nothing but a sterile refusal of what is established as absolutely necessary by divinely decreed natural laws.[187] In connection to this topic, al-Ghazālī goes back to one of his favourite topic, God's custom, and explains that it makes use of His servants as instruments. This is done in order to ensure goodness for all human beings. Therefore, extreme forms of ascetic life and world renunciation are often to be condemned, because they might impede God's habit to provide mankind with His gifts *via* His human tools. This possibility is reported in one Tradition which is promptly quoted by al-Ghazālī: 'You wanted to change my law by way of your world renunciation. You do not know that what I provide My servants with, I prefer to provide through my servants rather than My power?'[188]

Trust in God means to have a firm faith in God's *tawḥīd*, a reassured belief in God's mercy and a positive recognition of the well-ordained laws of God. To this al-Ghazālī also adds that real understanding of *tawakkul* is subordinated to the understanding of the revealed Law. He infers that real trust in God can be achieved only once the servant has doubtless grasped the real meaning and scope of the divine revelation and its impositions. One must remember that knowledge is acquired by humans through discursive reason, which is nourished by, and depending on, the divine creational *habitus*. The latter has, therefore, a clear epistemic value: it is exclusively through God's custom and His habitual recreation of things, from moment to moment and according to a predictable pattern, that human reason gets to know, understand and place confidence in the divine revelation and in the natural sequences of the universe, all of which are ultimately 'governed' by God's custom.

A higher degree of trust in God is the one which eludes reliance on the rational conclusions which are drawn from God's habits, and yet acknowledges them as being inscribed in the divine foreknowledge. God's occasionalistic intervention is framed outside temporality because His choices concerning what to create from one moment to the other are not extemporary decisions (what Griffel defines as '*ad hoc* decisions'), but are rather decisions that have been made since eternity and long before God 'started' acting.[189] Divine choices are written in the Preserved Tablet (Q. 85:22). If one considers that God's customs and His pre-eternal decisions are all inscribed in His foreknowledge, it becomes clear that *tawakkul* must be considered as something which has been prescribed for mankind since eternity; an element which is engrained in God's beneficial plan and which human beings are due to fulfil. Lack of trust in God is, consequently, not only negative and not profitable for humans, but even illegal because it might impede the disclosing of God's providential design. Given that *tawakkul* is ultimately embedded in the divine decree, the human choice to rely on the divine favours becomes a sort of imposition which is established by the divine arrangement. Al-Ghazālī's 'philosophy of action' encourages human activity, despite trapping it within divine predestination:

> Renunciation of the means of sustenance is aversion against wisdom and ignorance of the Law of God. Action according to the necessary Law of God, together with trust in God, provides the means of sustenance [and] is not an infraction of *tawakkul*.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* , IV, p. 246)

Human action is not an infraction of *tawakkul* as long as it does not violate God's habitual establishment of the natural laws and as long as it does not aim to complement or adjust God's bestowal of provisions. Should a believer embrace the Ashʿarite occasionalistic view for which God intervenes every moment in time, knowledge both of the revelation and of the real status of things should reassure the same *mu'min* of the fact that God's occasionalistic operations are always in accordance with His custom and never erratic, this awareness facilitating trust in Him. Nevertheless, the *mutawakkil* is meant to be aware that the remission to God's wisdom and custom does not absolve anybody from any moral responsibility of action. As Griffel emphasizes, *tawakkul* 'requires acting in accord with God's habitual order of events . . . arranging one's life patterns to match what we know is God's habit'.[190]

In brief, for al-Ghazālī, the whole issue of trust in God is transferred onto the plane of divine custom: it is God who establishes man's individual nature within His decree and it is always God that employs the condition-conditioned relation in order to 'regulate' the measure of freedom destined to mankind. Even the phenomenon of *tawakkul* is meticulously divinely weighted up and imparted upon humans whose actions are always 'supervised' and regulated by the prescriptions of the immutable divine habit, determining things just the way they are.

Mulk, Malakūt and Jabarūt

With the treatment of the three realms of *Malakūt*, *Jabarūt* and *Mulk*, the mystical tone in al-Ghazālī's *Revival* becomes increasingly intense. The mystical components seem almost to besiege the Ashʿarite dogmatic view on causality and, thanks to a deeper scrutiny, it is possible to notice how mysticism comes to be used in order to shield al-Ghazālī's Ashʿarism from any accusation of philosophical decadence.

Al-Ghazālī embarks on a complex journey through the kingdoms of *Malakūt* (the domain of the Unseen), *Mulk* (the domain of the Seen), both of which constitute the divine lordly presence (*ḥaḍra al-rubūbiyya*), and the world of *Jabarūt* (the domain of the Almightiness). The crossing of these three realms is depicted as being a physical, psychological and gnoseological experience which awaits the wayfarer on the Sufi path. The journey begins with the need to dissipate any doubts with regard to the issue of divine and human responsibility for actions and, in order to achieve this goal, al-Ghazālī indulges in explaining the parable of the 'illuminated' man (identified with a Sufi wayfarer) willing to identify the causes of the blackening of a paper.[191] This man, the story teaches, initiates his quest with the intention of finding out how a piece of paper is blacken by the ink which is contained in the pen which, moved by the hand, is in turn activated by power, the latter being described as depending for its action on the will, knowledge and intellect.[192] Particularly, after a series of passages which clarify how that all these elements are connected to each other according to a condition-conditioned relation, a personified Power declares not to have acted wrongly against the hand because it has simply subjugated it and compelled it to write, thus blackening the paper. Power too, it is explained in the parable, is innocent because it was already mastering the hand before activating its movement.[193] This provides insights into the Ghazālīan perspective on the essences of things which are *ab aeterno* disposed to be interrelated and active in accordance with the perpetual divine will.[194] Moreover, a personified Will declares to have been activated by the imperious Decree and decisive Command.[195] The latter is said to be the messenger of Knowledge which, in turn, is said to operate through the language of the Intellect. The Will asserts itself to be a quite (s*ākin*) instrument under the direction of Knowledge and Intellect, whilst the Command, which operates upon a 'decree-awaiting Will', is described to be effective only when the indecisiveness of the Intellect has been won over. It is Knowledge which supports the Intellect and which enables to break away from the paralysing state in which the Intellect, at first, finds itself. Towards the end of the parable, the traveller is informed by Knowledge about the three different realms of *Mulk*, *Malakūt* and *Jabarūt* as it declares:

> When you have crossed over them, you will have passed through three stations, the first of which is the station of power, then will, and finally knowledge. This world [*Jabarūt*] is midway between the world of material Dominion and Sensual-Perception and the world of *al-Malakūt* . . . the world of Almightiness resembles a ship moving between water and land: it is not as turbulent as being in the water and yet not as secure as being on land.

> Everyone who walks on the earth walks in the world of Dominion and Sense-Perception (*al-mulk wa'l-shahāda*), but if one's strength endures to the point of being able to board the ship, then he is as the one who is walking in the world of Almightiness. And if one comes to the point of walking on water without a ship then he walks in the intelligible world without any hesitation.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, p. 232)[196]

Timothy Gianotti explains that the above passage refers to the pilgrim's journey through the divine attributes of power, will and knowledge which these worlds respectively represent. The first stage of the wayfarer's psycho-spiritual journey entails his total acceptance of God as the only agent, whilst the second stage implies the pilgrim's total acceptance of the inscrutability of the divine will. Finally, with the ultimate step in the world of *Malakūt*, corresponding to the traveller's voyage through the divine attribute of knowledge, the servant reaches the stage where his 'pious recognition of his eternal inability to "know" the divine is the crown of his knowledge'.[197] The reference to the world of *Jabarūt* as a ship suggests that this realm is an instrument bestowed by God's generosity through which the servant understands the reality of things.[198] Such a ship, in fact, allows the wayfarer to proceed towards an increasing self-awareness with regards to, first his position in the plenitude of creation and, second his condition in relation to God's inscrutable essence. This instrument serves the purpose to clarify that the world of the seen is a reflection of the world of the unseen, a concept which has already been stressed in the *Mishkāt*, and that humans are never in the position to fully know the divine essence. The possibility of either embarking or not on the ship mirrors the fact that the seeker can 'choose' to flee from the deficiency of his un-purified soul by acknowledging his status of ignorance.[199] To be borne in mind is that the cosmological category of the world of the Almightiness is an intermediary realm between the kingdoms of *Malakūt* and *Mulk* and that its intermediate position is due to the fact that this realm involves 'change, transformation and, above all, subjective feelings'.[200] If the wayfarer becomes aware that his soul needs cleansing and recognizes that feelings such as knowledge, judgement, will and power are *his* own feelings, this means that he has reached the shores of *Jabarūt*. By boarding the ship of *Jabarūt*, the wayfarer intellectually apprehends true *tawḥīd*, and, basically, comes to know that all feelings and actions are in reality not his but God's. The wayfarer becomes simultaneously aware of the fact that all he can acknowledge is merely that nothing exists but God and His acts: the apogee of individual knowledge becomes awareness of the individual's ignorance about the 'Divine'.

The echo of Avicenna's mystical works resonates here quite clearly: the journey across the *Jabarūt* realm corresponds to the Avicennian journey of the soul within itself, through which the human soul re-discovers that it belongs to the divine dominium. The soul's awareness, corresponding to the Ghazālīan soul's initial deficiency, is for Avicenna, awakened and rescued by its contact with the Agent Intellect, the latter corresponding to what al-Ghazālī calls intervention of knowledge. It should be remembered that al-Ghazālī employs the mystical journey in order to convey the real meaning of God's unity; in effect, the soul's journey

within itself, as well as within these three realms, allows the soul to understand that its existence depends on the only Agent and the only Disposer of the so-called causes. Once the traveller has reached the shores of *Jabarūt*, through his personal effort, his voyage is not yet complete: in order to disembark the ship and 'walk on water' namely, in order to attain the purest form of *tawḥīd* and to acknowledge that God and His acts are the only true existents, the wayfarer needs to receive the possibility, as Nakamura states, 'not only to know that he is a mere puppet of God but also to become a mere puppet by annihilating himself.'[201] It is through an act of individual essential nihilism that the traveller on the mystical path realizes that, ontologically speaking, the only true existent is God and His acts.

Al-Ghazālī states that in every individual there are parts of these three worlds and he sets a series of correspondences between, first the bodily limbs and the realm of *Mulk*, second the breast and the world of *Jabarūt* and, third the spiritual heart and the kingdom of *Malakūt*. Furthermore, al-Ghazālī declares that the lights of pure gnosis originate from the world of *Malakūt*, while the effects of these lights (by way of feelings such as dread, fear, happiness, awe) descend from the world of *Jabarūt* and find their resting place in the human breast (*al-ṣadr*).[202] Al-Ghazālī seems to suggest that the wayfarer's chance to reach uncontaminated gnosis is given from something outside his individual sphere of awareness, that is, from a light (knowledge) pouring from above. Accessibility to Truth is, however, made possible only through the receptivity of the emotional 'theatre of the states', which is equivalent to the human breast, and which is placed between the spiritual heart and the bodily limbs.[203] The ultimate move to overcome the sensitivity of the breast, stepping out the *Jabarūt*'s boundaries, is the duty of the spiritual heart. Many Sufis had used the *qalb* to indicate the divine Presence in the human being, also making the heart the perfect theophanic support (*majlā*) for the divine disclosure, being it the only 'place' able to encompass the divine vastness.[204] However, the possibility for the heart to apprehend that the divine Presence encompasses the worlds of *Mulk* and *Malakūt* and that there is nothing in existence except God and His acts still depends on the heart's own level of purification and its detachment from earthly desires. Since, as al-Ghazālī declares, 'the faithful's heart is between the two fingers of the Merciful',[205] the disclosure (*kashf*) of the nature of the realms of the *Mulk* and *Malakūt*, granted by God, is facilitated by the servant's striving to cleansing his heart. It is evident that the Avicennian view of illuminating knowledge, which is dispensed by the Agent Intellect and is made achievable through a soul which is ready to purify itself, is presented in the Ghazālīan idea of the *Jabarūt* realm. Within its confines the human self realizes the spectrum of its individuality through a divine-given awareness. Such a perspective, already analysed in his *Mishkāt*, bears witness to al-Ghazālī's permeability to Sufi tenets.

Astonishingly, despite these mystical musings, Ashʿarite predestinarian tenets are allowed to surface when al-Ghazālī tackles, once more, the issue of human agency. The totalizing mystic experientialism of the wayfarer's journey through the three realms is watered down by simple reflections on causality and responsibility. In particular, al-Ghazālī discusses again about the fact that the real understanding of *tawḥīd* should allow agents, now significantly described as mediums

(*wasā'iṭ*), to understand that they are nothing but instrumental causes (*al-asbāb musakharāt*). The belief for which the human being is able to either perform or not perform an action, if so wished, is considered as the occurrence of a mistake (*mawqiʿ al-ghalaṭ*). What an individual does or does not want has nothing to do with the individual's willingness because the latter is, ultimately, divinely established in a necessary way in the heart (*ḍarūr fī'l-qalb*). Essentially, there is no room for refusing what is put into existence by the divine will, and there is no room for the alteration (*inṣirāf*) of God's power which operates upon the objects of power according to His will.[206]

Notes

1 On the persecution of the Ashʿarites of Nīshāpūr by the Ḥanafite-Muʿtazilites in the eleventh century see H. Halm, 'Der Wesir al-Kundurī und die Fitna von Nishapur', in *Die Welt des Orients* 6, 1971, pp. 205–33.

2 It has been suggested that the establishment of the *Niẓāmiyya* schools was engendered by the need to compete with the Fatimids who were creating colleges for the promulgation of Ismāʿīlī teachings. On al-Ghazālī's polemical engagement with the Ismāʿīlīs see F. Mitha, *al-Ghazālī and the Ismailis: A Debate of Reason and Authority in Medieval Islam*, London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001.

3 ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn ʿAlī al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Shāfiʿiyya al-Kubra*, ed. M.M. al-Ṭanāḥī and A.F.A. al-Ḥilw, Cairo: ʿĪsa al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1964–76, vol. 6, p. 196; Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, pp. 30–1; J. Janssens, 'Al-Ghazzālī and His Use of Avicennian Texts', in M. Maroth (ed.), *Problems in Arabic Philosophy*, Piliscaba: Avicenna Institute of Middle East Studies, 2003, p. 48.

4 Elkaisy-Friemuth, *God and Humans*, p. 29; A. Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought*, Abington: Routledge, 2012, p. 1; M. Smith, *al-Ghazālī: The Mystic*, London: Luzac, 1944, pp. 15–7. For a survey on the history of Ashʿarism see R.W. Bulliet, *The Patricians of Nishabur: A Study in Medieval Islamic Social History*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972.

5 G.F. Hourani, 'A Revised Chronology of Ghazālī's Writings', *Journal of American Oriental Society* 104, 1984, pp. 289–302.

6 It is argued that al-Ghazālī was compelled to leave Baghdad fearing for his life after Niẓām al-Mulk's assassination. At that time, al-Ghazālī had composed the *Faḍā'iḥ al-bāṭiniyya wa-faḍā'il al-Mustaẓhiriyya* expressing criticism against the *bāṭiniyya* (the people of esoteric meaning), identified with the Ismāʿīlīs movement which rose against the Seljuk power. See al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'iḥ al-bāṭiniyya wa-faḍā'il al-Mustaẓhiriyya*, ed. Badawī, Cairo: Dār al-Qawmiyya, 1964.

7 For a general overview on these topics see al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*. References to this work are from the Arabic version, H. Maḥmūr (ed.), Dār al-Kitāb al-Ḥadīthat, n.d., and from the English translation R.J. McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment*: *An Annotated Translation of Ghazālī's al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl and other Relevant Works of al-Ghazālī*, Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980; for a comprehensive biography of Ghazālī see Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, pp. 19–59.

8 Al-Ghazālī *al-Munqidh*, Arabic, p. 88; English, pp. 89–96.

9 Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 43.

10 The famous *mujaddid* tradition mentions that, at the turn of every century, God will send to the community an individual (or individuals) who will restore and revive the religion. The tradition is included in Abū Dāwūd's *Sunan*, vol. 2, p. 518. On this tradition see Y. Friedmann, *Prophecy Continuous*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 94–101; E. Landau-Tasseron, '"The Cyclical Reform": A Study of the *Mujaddid* Tradition', *Studia Islamica* 70, 1989, pp. 79–117.

11 Al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqa bayn al-Islam wa'l-Zandaqa*, trans. S.A. Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam* , Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2002.
12 Ibid., p. 5. On the Ghazālīan view of *kalām* see R.M. Frank, *al-Ghazzālī and the Ashʿarite School*, London: Duke University Press, 1994, pp. 7–27.
13 On this topic see I. Goldziher, 'The Attitude of Orthodox Islam toward the "Ancient Sciences"', in M. Swarts (ed.), *Studies on Islam*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, 185–215.
14 In the third/ninth century, the word *ṣūfiyya* was used to refer exclusively to the Baghdādī School of Islamic mysticism. It is only from the second half of the fourth/tenth century that this term, together with the word *taṣawwūf*, began to be used to include all the different paths and schools of Islamic mysticism at large. Some scholars believe that the tendency to depict Sufism as an all-inclusive mystical tradition was initiated by individuals like ʿAbd al-Raḥman al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021), particularly in his *Ṭabaqāt al-Ṣufiyya*. On this argument see S. Sviri, 'Hakim Tirmidhi and the *Malāmāti* Movement in Early Sufism', in Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.), *Sufism*, London and New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 152; On the anti-*zuhdī* movements in third/ninth century Islam see idem, 'An Analysis of Traditions Concerning the Origins and Evaluation of Christian Monasticism', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 13, 1990, pp. 195–208.
15 References to al-Ghazālī's *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* are from F.A. Shedadi (ed.), Beyrouth: Librairie Orientale, reprinted in Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1971. The translations into English, unless otherwise specified, are from *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, with Notes by D. Burrel and N. Daher, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1999. See p. 96. It is significant to bear in mind that the Ashʿarite thinker, Ibn ʿAsākir, composed a polemical treatise against 'the belief that there is a connection between the events and the stars, and that good fortune is dependent of these latter'. See A.F.M. Mehren, *Exposé de la Réforme de l'Islamisme commencée au III ème siècle*, Leyden: n. p., 1878, p. 101.
16 Islamic philosophers, following Neoplatonic trends, identified *qadar* with what is necessarily established by the constellations of the stars, and explained *qaḍā'* as the corresponding eternal fore-knowledge of God. See for instance the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il* , vol. 4, p. 146, quoted in Sviri, 'The Attitude of Orthodox Islam', p. 195.
17 See above, p. 40
18 See Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, pp. 225–31. On the topic of God's creation of the best possible world see E.L. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over Ghazali's Best of all Possible Worlds*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984.
19 This saying is quoted in al-Ghazālī's *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, Arabic, p. 125; English, p. 78.
20 On this topic see al-Ghazālī, *Ayyuhā'l-Walad*, trans. T. Mayer, *Letter to a Disciple*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2005, p. xvii.
21 Alexander Knysh has observed that al-Ghazālī, aware of the individual differences of human characters and personalities, proposes a form of 'individualized' Sufism which allows the wayfarer to follow his/her spiritual path according to his/her own capacity and inclinations. A. Knysh, *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History*, Leiden, Boston, Cologne: Brill, 2000, p. 146.
22 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, in *Majmūʿat Rasāʿil al-Imām al-Ghazālī*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya 1994, trans. David Buchman as *Mishkāt al-Anwār (The Niche of Lights)*: *A Parallel English–Arabic Text*, Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1998. Translated extracts from this work have been slightly modified unless otherwise specified.
23 Considered one of al-Ghazālī's most mystical works, the *Niche of Lights* is believed to be one of his latest compositions completed after he had experienced his existential

and spiritual crises. See M. Bouyges, *Essai de Chronologie des œuvres de al-Ghazali (Alghazel)*, ed. Michael Allard, Beirut: Imprimerie Catolique, 1959; T.W. Gairdner, 'Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār* and the Ghazālī Problem', *Der Islam* 6, 1914, p. 121; Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 246.

24 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād fī'l-i'tiqād*, ed. Çunuçu and Atay, Ankara: Nūr Matbāsi, 1962. Further references are from trans. 'Abdu al-Rahman Abu Zayd, *al-Iqtiṣād fī'l-i'tiqād: al-Ghazali on Divine Predicates and Their Properties*, Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1970.

25 References are from *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, Beirut: Dār al-Qalām, *c.*1980. In the *Iḥyā'*, al-Ghazālī speaks in mystical terms of the human need to achieve God's nearness, but does it in a subtle way by employing long theological and juridical passages which were certainly more easily acceptable for the representatives of theological and juridical schools. See *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, translator's introduction, p. xxvii. In its rather 'caged' mystical flavour, the *Iḥyā'* still preserves a precautionary tone.

26 Modern scholarship has been divided on whether al-Ghazālī had different levels of teachings, often considered as mutually exclusive. A specific passage from the *Mizān al-'Amal* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-'Arabiyya 1923, pp. 162 ff.) is often quoted to substantiate this belief. One would have to agree with Hava Lazarus-Yafeh who has summarized the various contrasting positions concluding that, whilst al-Ghazālī wrote differently for different audiences, he never contradicted himself. See H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī*, Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1975, pp. 349–411. On these topics see A. Dallal, 'Ghazālī and the perils of interpretation', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 122, 2002, pp. 773–87; Frank, *al-Ghazzālī and the Ash'arite School*, pp. 86–7.

27 Many scholars consider the *Mishkāt al-Anwār* as being primarily a Sufi text. See Gairdner, 'Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*', pp. 121–53; Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* , p. 246; H. Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', *Asiatische Studien* 45, 1991, p. 24; A.J. Wensink, *Semietische Studien: Uit de Nalatenschap*, Leiden: A.W. Sijthoff's Uitgeversmaatschappij N.V., 1941.

28 A *ḥadīth* found in Muslim, *Imān*, 293, and in Ibn Mājah, *Muqaddima*, 13 which reads: 'God has seventy (thousand) veils of light and darkness; were He to lift them, the august glories of His face would burn up everyone whose eyesight perceived Him.' For further references to this *ḥadīth* see W.C. Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 401, note 19.

29 Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* , p. 248.

30 The canonical version of the Tradition reads: 'God created his creatures in darkness, then cast to them something of His light'. See al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, p. 12, note 9.

31 Ibid. This is an allusion to Qur'ān 95:4–5.

32 Basically, the visible world is a similitude to the world of dominion. Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, p. 12. In Islam, the mystical tradition often speaks of this world as a mirror of the celestial world.

33 Here al-Ghazālī embraces the *homo imago Dei* motif which is already found in the Old Testament, early Christianity and in the Sufism of al-Ḥallāj and Baqlī Shīrāzī (d. 605/1209). This *topos* is used by al-Ghazālī to stress the idea that Adam, as the synthesis of the whole universe typifying the species Man, is destined to be the divine vice-regent through his sharing of the divine knowledge.

34 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, pp. 31–2. This is clearly an allusion to the well-known Prophetic saying which is particularly loved by Sufi followers: 'He who knows himself knows his Lord.'

35 Al-Ghazālī understands Adam's darkness as the lack of awareness; this reading is emphasized throughout the work. It is in order to highlight human ignorance about their status that he quotes: 'God has angels who are better informed of people . . . than people are of themselves.' See al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, p. 12.

36 In his autobiography, al-Ghazālī speaks of his 'malady', that is, his state of personal scepticism during the first of his two 'crises, as being due, amongst other causes, to the

lack of self-awareness and the absence of knowledge about the real essence of things. He then refers to the cure for his conditions as the effect of 'a light which God casts into the heart (*nūr qadhafhu Allāh fī'l-ṣadr*)'. See al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, Arabic, p. 93; English, p. 66.

37 Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, Arabic, p. 93; English, p. 66.
38 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, p. 18.
39 See F. Raḥmān, *Avicenna's De Anima, Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifā'*, ed. F. Raḥmān, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959.
40 Al-Ghazālī *Mishkāt*, p. 13
41 Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, Arabic, p. 142; English, p. 97
42 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, p. 7.
43 Ibid., p. 6
44 Al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-ʿamal*, Cairo: n. p., 1963, p. 24. Al-Ghazālī also describes the soul in Ashʿarite terms as a single *jawhar* rather than as a conglomerate of two or more atoms. However, in contrast to the Ashʿarites, this soul is conceived as an independent entity which does not reside in a subject and is not an accident occasionalistically recreated by God. Nevertheless, Frank has observed, al-Ghazālī's use of the term *jawhar* is equivocal: when he describes the body as 'a composite of two *jawhars* which occupy space', by '*jawharayn mutaḥayyizayn*' al-Ghazālī means two independent contingent entities which occupy space and which are not different from the Avicennian substances. On these arguments see Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, pp. 55–66 and p. 67 note 70.
45 Al-Ghazālī *Mishkāt*, p. 19.
46 Al-Ghazālī also quotes Qur'ān 2:30; 24:55; 27:62 in *Mishkāt*, p. 20. All these verses refer to the existence of human vice-regents.
47 Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 99.
48 The states descending upon men vary according to the station in which an individual is currently living. This explains why self-striving is fundamental to favour the divine bestowal of states.
49 Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād*, p. 195.
50 On these arguments see Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School* , p. 34.
51 Al-Ghazālī refers to emanation in the *Mishkāt* using terms like *fāḍa* (pp. 12–4). In this text *fāḍa* is the only verb used to convey the idea of 'flowing over' or 'issuing forth'.
52 Gairdner, 'Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*', pp. 138–9.
53 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, p. 13.
54 This accusation is made by Ibn Rushd in his work entitled *al-Kashf ʿan Manāij al-adilla*, Cairo: n.d., p. 59. For full references to the relevant passage see Gairdner, 'Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*', p. 133.
55 See al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt* , particularly pp. 13–5 where the verb 'to descend' (*yanzila*) is used as a substitute for the verb 'to emanate' (*ifāḍa*).
56 The translation is by David Buchman.
57 On this argument see also R.M. Frank, 'The Non-Existent and the Possible in Classical Ashʿarite Teaching', pp. 1–13.
58 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt* , p. 15.
59 Ibid. The position of al-Ghazālī is typically that of an Ashʿarite theologian because he implicitly states the possibility for God's causal activity to operate on pure non-existence. This reminds of the *mutakallimūns*' idea for which God's *creatio ex nihilo* occurs in time; a position which was condemned by Avicenna.
60 Man has the moral obligation to know himself which, in turn, implies the ethical duty to know God. The nature of the 'compulsion' that humans have to know God (*fiṭra*), which is linked to the human desire for salvation (a desire that for Avicenna is connected to the movement *exitus-reditus* inherent in every being), is surprisingly perceived by al-Ghazālī in an uncertain way. For him, the compulsion is only partially due to the revealed Law. In fact, he admits that also the human nature plays a particular

role in it. There is here a mild recognition of the philosophical idea for which nature is something not completely inadequate to 'initiate' some acts.

61 By quoting the prophetic tradition 'Men are asleep: then after they die they awake,' al-Ghazālī refers to the present life as a state of sleep (*Munqidh*, Arabic p. 93; English p. 66). The consciousness of such a condition belongs to the Sufi Gnostics and this explains the initial part of the paragraph which is destined to elucidate that, once acquired knowledge of authentic *tawḥīd*, the Gnostics see nothing in existence save the One, the Real. See al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, pp. 16–7.

62 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, p. 52.

63 Ibid., p. 17.

64 Ibid., p. 38.

65 Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna & Averroes, on Intellect*, p. 109.

66 Al-Ghazālī, *Letter to a Disciple* , p. 16.

67 See also A. Treiger, 'Monism and Monotheism in al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 9, 2007, p. 9.

68 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt* , p. 20.

69 Ibid., p. 27.

70 T. Mayer's review of R. Frank's 'al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School', *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 1, 1999, p. 179.

71 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, pp. 45–6. To these two main subgroups a further category is added, namely, that of those who proclaim to be Muslims out of fear rather than faith.

72 For full details see Gairdner, 'Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*', pp. 122–9. Landolt has highlighted that the subgroups of those veiled by pure light follow the story of Abraham's discovery and ascent towards monotheism as recounted in Qur'ān (6:75–9). Growing up in a cave surrounded by darkness, Abraham starts the search for his Lord. Leaving the cave at night, his eyes see a star rising from the East and Abraham believes that that star might be his Lord. However, this belief is abandoned once the star descents towards the West. The same happens when Abraham sees the moon rising and then descending. Abraham is also convinced that the rising morning sun could be identified with his Lord rejecting this belief when the sun sets at night. Finally, Abraham realises that none of these celestial bodies are to be confused with his Lord. The real Lord is their Maker, the Creator of the Heavens and the Earth. See Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', pp. 31-ff.

73 Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 247.

74 Gairdner, 'Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār'*, p. 126

75 W.M. Watt, 'A Forgery in Ghazālī's *Mishkāt*?', *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 1949, pp. 6–7.

76 Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', pp. 36–8.

77 This is in contrast to the Ashʿarites who claimed the divine Speech to be like 'our mental speech' (*ka-ḥadīth nafsinā*) as reported by ʿAbd al-Karīm Shahrastānī. See ʿAbd al-Karīm Shahrastānī, *Livre des Religions et des Sects*, trans. Daniel Gimaret and Guy Monnot, Paris: Peeters: UNESCO, 1986, p. 267, note 14.

78 Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 39. Landolt has suggested that the 'non-orthodox' nature of the Veils-section – if with the expression 'non-orthodox' one intends the esoteric aspect of al-Ghazālī's production *versus* his more widely accepted Ashʿarite nature – is perfectly compatible with major points found in the *Iḥyā'* and are evidently inspired by basic ideas present in the 42nd epistle of the Encyclopaedia of the Brethren of Purity. This section of the *Niche of Light*sis believed to include not only Neoplatonic features but also '*baṭini*' doctrines. ('Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 23). The members of the Brethren of Purity used to accuse of 'false analogical reasoning' the Dialecticians (*ahl al-jadal*) i.e. the *mutakallimūn*s, whilst praising whoever believed in a Creator who creates the world in the best possible way, who employs angels to preserve the world's order and who uses humans intermediaries. See Ibid., pp. 29–30; Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, vol. 3, p. 457 ff.

79 *Kitāb al-Kindī ilā'l-Muʿtaṣim Billāh fi'l-Falsafa al-Ūlā*, ed. A.F. al-Aḥwānī, Cairo: n.p., 1948, 142f, quoted in Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 39.
80 Gairdner, 'Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*' pp. 126–7.
81 Al-Ghazālī *Mishkāt*, p. 51, p. 66 notes 15 and 16. The word *maʿānī* is intended here as the real meaning of God's nature that cannot be explained away by simply referring to the divine attributes.
82 The members of this second subgroup are, according to Landolt, meant to refer to the Peripatetic cosmology of the Islamic philosophers in a simplified manner. For details see Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', pp. 40–1. Griffel instead, points out that the Lord presented by this sub-second group corresponds to the *Primum Mobile* first theorized by Ptolemy and later adopted as a distinctive feature in the Aristotelian cosmology. Aristotle speaks of an Unmoved Mover who is Himself the Mover of the highest sphere. Consequentially, the members of the second subgroup of those veiled by pure light are likely to be identified with Aristotle and his followers. See Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, pp. 250–1.
83 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, p. 51.
84 Ibid.
85 Landolt finds support for this position by comparing the *Mishkāt* with the structure of al-Ghazālī's *Munqidh* and with the contents of Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Nasafī's interpretation of Q. 6:7, where Abraham's 'sun' and 'moon' are explained in Neoplatonic terms as the Intellect ('*aql*) and the Soul (*nafs*). Generally speaking, the Intellect – or the 'Predecessor'/Abrahamic 'sun' as it is described in the *Faḍā'iḥ al-baṭiniyya* and in al-Nasafī's interpretation – corresponds to the Obeyed One (of the *Mishkāt*), whilst the Soul (or the 'Follower/'lunar angel') becomes the instrument through which the actual movement of the sphere occurs. Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 44
86 Ibid., pp. 42–7.
87 Walzer, *Greek into Arabic*, pp. 196–99.
88 Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 41.
89 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 144. Janssens has explained that the movement of the spheres in itself can relate to matters which may be qualified as 'religiously neutral' because linked to natural phenomena falling within the limits of physics rather than metaphysics. To approach this subject from this perspective is, according to al-Ghazālī, legitimate. J. Janssens, 'al-Ghazzālī's *Tahāfut*: Is it Really a Rejection of Ibn Sīnā's Philosophy?', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12, 2001, p. 6.
90 Gairdner, 'Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*', p. 135.
91 Al-Ghazālī', *Mishkāt*, p. 51.
92 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, pp. 127–9 and pp. 167–9.
93 Ibid., p. 167. This position explains why al-Ghazālī follows Ashʿarite occasionalism. Toby Mayer (Review, p. 176) has significantly pointed out that, in *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, Frank has wrongly translated the word *ikhtirāʿ* as 'initial creation', rather than using it as a synonymous of 'perpetual creation' as actually done by the Ashʿarites (cf. Ibn Fūrak's *Mujarrad Maqālāt*, p. 76). Frank has argued that Ghazālī understands divine *qaḍā'* as the initial creation of the universal causes, as well as the creation of the transient and proximate causes of the coming into being of every existent (in accordance to what written on the Preserved Tablet). Moreover, Frank has highlighted that al-Ghazālī employs the verbs '*khalaqa*' (to create) as synonymous of '*qaddara*' (to determine), and '*ikhtara* '' as synonymous of '' *awjada*' (to cause to exist). These findings reveal that Frank's opinion which regards God as 'the originating cause' of existents is actually incomplete: God does not simply operate through secondary causes, like the Avicennian *musabbib al-asbāb* (the One who makes causes to function as causes), but He is also the Creator who puts things into existence through His direct intervention in the world.
94 A similar idea is presented in the *Iqtiṣād*, Arabic p. 92; English, pp. 13–4.

95 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut* , pp. 176–7.
96 Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād* , Arabic, pp. 90–2.
97 Ibid., p. 91 ff.
98 On these topics see T.A. Druart, 'Al-Ghazālī's Conception of the Agent in the *Tahāfut* and the *Iqtiṣād*: Are People Really Agents?', in James E. Montgomery (ed.), *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One. Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*. Leuven: Peeters, 2006, p. 437. Frank has argued that, even in the *Iqtiṣād*, al-Ghazālī's statements are never openly inconsistent with the idea that God determines the necessity of the occurrence of every event in the universe *through* sequences of secondary efficient causes. Frank has claimed that even if al-Ghazālī accepts that humans might be agents through their power to act, he continues to be vague when it comes to define the causal function of the human faculties and that of their acts, all of which, he claims, are 'the results of a complex web of present conditions and antecedent causes, interior and exterior, terrestrial and celestial, all of which follow determinately from God's original act of creation'. Frank, *al-Ghazzālī and the Ash'arite School*, p. 44.
99 The mystery in question can be assumed to be the *qaḍā' wa'l-qadar* issue. Al-Ghazālī speaks of it as a sea of arcane matters, in which many have drowned, and as 'the secret of predestination' (*sirr al-qadar*), in which the majority of people wonder in a perplex state. See al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyā'* quoted in Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, pp. 40–1. Griffel (*al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 347 note 63) has observed that all the elements which are presented in al-Ghazālī's definitions of *qadar* seem to derive from the initial paragraph of Avicenna's *Risālat fī Sirr al-Qadar* (pp. 27–31).
100 Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 50.
101 Gairdner, 'Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*', p. 143.
102 Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 253.
103 Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 51.
104 Ibid.
105 Qurʾān 6:79; Gairdner, 'Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*', p. 142.
106 Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 48.
107 Ibid.
108 Similarly, in the introduction to his *Iqtiṣād*, al-Ghazālī makes clear that he would not occupy himself with cosmology (what Frank describes as 'the determination of sublunary events through the efficient causality of the celestial beings' in his *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, pp. 42–4) and that his intent is to confirm the validity of the traditional Ashʿarite language related to the issues of human power.
109 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, I, p. 83.
110 Ibid.
111 A similar concept is expressed also in *Iḥyā'*, I, pp. 99–100.
112 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, I, p. 84.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid., p. 96.
118 Ibid. The topic of prophetic miracles, which is used to demonstrate the truthfulness of prophethood, is dear to all Ashʿarites. The nature of miracles shows and supplements the Ashʿarite occasionalistic view of a God who can act miraculously in the world with no limits being imposed on His actions.
119 Qurʾān 78: 6–16; 2:164; 71:15–18; 56:58–73.
120 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, I, p. 99.
121 Ibid., p. 101.
122 Note that the created powers in humans have no causal efficacy. For a general over-

view on this issue see Marmura, 'Ghazālī's Chapter on Divine Power in the *Iqtiṣād*', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 4, 1994, pp. 297–315.

123 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, I, p. 101.

124 M.E. Marmura, 'Ghazali and Ashʿarism Revisited', *Arabic Science and Philosophy* 12, 2002, p. 105.

125 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, pp. 334–5. The translation of the above terms follows the suggestions advanced in *Scritti Scelti di al – Ghazālī*, ed. L.V. Vagliera e R. Rubinacci, Torino: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1970, pp. 550–1, note 1.

126 Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, p. 336.

127 Marmura, 'Ghazali and Ashʿarism Revisited', p. 107.

128 Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 217.

129 This theme is treated at length in *Iḥyā'*, IV, pp. 225–69.

130 Ibid., p. 235.

131 Al-Ghazālī offers the example of a suicidal action occurring by way of cutting one's own throat: the non-actualization of such an act depends neither on the lack of power in the man's hand nor in the absence of the knife but, rather, in the lack of volition in engendering the power after the intellect has considered that this action is clearly non-beneficial. Ibid.

132 In this instance the voluntary action is a form of necessary self-preservation from harm; basically what Avicenna has discussed in connection with the topic of love.

133 Ibid.; Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, pp. 216–8.

134 Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād*, p. 85

135 Ibid. See also Marmura, 'Ghazālī's Chapter on Divine Power in the *Iqtiṣād*', p. 301; Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, pp. 218–9.

136 Al-Ashʿārī, *The Theology of al-Ashʿarī*, pp. 59–60; Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad Maqālāt al-Ashʿarī*, p. 131.

137 See supra, p. 119.

138 The Ashʿarites believed that what can be classified as ethically good or bad is determined by God's commands and prohibitions. There is no such thing as an intrinsic good or an intrinsic evil because these concepts cannot be rationalized.

139 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, pp. 68–70; *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names*, pp. 55–7.

140 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, p. 68; *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names*, p. 56.

141 The idea that God's nature can be expressed by referring to the divine name 'the Merciful' seems to be in contradiction with the divine creation of different forms of evil such as poverty, distress, diseases, etc. Al-Ghazālī responds to this with the parable of the mother, father and the sick child: the father forces the child to undergo the painful process of cupping in order to heal his illness. The father is more beneficial towards his child than his mother who, moved by love, wants to spare her child any distress. See Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, p. 68; *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names*, p. 56.

142 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, I, p. 102. Al-Ghazālī uses here a theological sophism in order to avoid the consequences of the doctrine of predestination: even though God commands evil, He has no desire for it. What God desires is always for the sake of goodness, even if He might command what is evil.

143 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* , pp. 68–9; *The Ninety-Nine*, p. 56.

144 This is in line with the Ghazālīan idea for which what is ethically necessary is that which must be done rather than omitted in order to avoid some harm. In the *Iqtiṣād* (p. 162 and p. 92), what is necessary is defined as 'that [thing] in whose absence there is an evident harm'. This concept is traced back to al-Juwaynī's *Kāfīyah fī'l-jadal* (ed. F. Maḥmūd, Cairo, 1978, p. 38) in which the author speaks of harm as the threat of divine punishment.

145 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* , I, p. 103.

146 On the principles to which God's power is subject to, see the *Tahāfut*, particularly the Seventeenth Discussion; Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, pp. 158–60;

see also M. Marmura, 'Al-Ghazālī's Second Causal Theory in the Seventeenth Discussion of the *Tahāfut*', in P. Morewedge (ed.), *Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism*, Delmar New York: Caravan Books, 1981, pp. 103–6.

147 This is particularly evident in the *Iqtiṣād*, p. 195. Frank has observed that al-Ghazālī, following the Muʿtazilites, believes that what makes an act, that is, either its performance or its omission, good or evil has its foundation in the good nature of the agent. This implies that, in opposition to the Ashʿarites' creed, ethical causes can be rationalized in terms of (i) the agent's nature, and (ii) the causal relationship which occurs between actions and their results. Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School* , p. 116 note 6.

148 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* , IV, p. 145.

149 Frank, *al-Ghazzālī and the Ashʿarite School*, p. 34.

150 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, pp. 169–70.

151 God's does not alter the customary order of cause and effects by caprice; the only reason for which God would suspend the habitual sequence of condition-conditioned things is to prove the truthful nature of His prophets.

152 See Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism*, pp. 64–5; Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, p. 25; Vagliera-Rubinacci, *Scritti Scelti di al-Ghazālī*, p. 336.

153 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, III, p. 19. Frank has observed that the Preserved Tablet is often identified with the Throne, i.e., the first created intellect which is associated with the outermost sphere (Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, p. 26 note 41; idem, *Creation and the Cosmic System: al-Ghazālī and Avicenna*, p. 45 note 81). On the human heart as a soul and as a mirror see H. Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. L. Sherrad, London: Kegan Paul, 1993, p. 260; idem, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, p. 152, p. 239. Avicenna speaks of the rational soul as a polished mirror in *Risālat fī'l-kalām ʿalā al-nafs al-nāṭiqa*, ed. al-Ahwānī, Cairo: Majallat al-Kitāb, 1952, p. 421.

154 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, III, p. 20; idem, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* , pp. 103–5; *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful* Names, p. 90. In the *Iqtiṣād* (p. 43), al-Ghazālī states that, the soul 'is created with a nature such that it is affected (*muta'aththir*) by the repeated actions of the bodily parts, just as the bodily parts are affected by the beliefs of the soul'. This position suggests that the soul may affect something outside itself. This is an idea Avicenna had already expressed, discussing about the transitive action of the soul. This position implies that for al-Ghazālī, in contrast to the Ashʿarites' view, a contingent event has an effect on another contingent event and that these occurrences do not necessitate God's occasionalistic intervention. See Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, pp. 39–40.

155 Al-Ghazālī quotes the Prophetic Tradition: 'Work and be content but know that nobody is saved through his deeds' in *Iḥyā'*, IV, p. 141.

156 Ibid., pp. 8–9.

157 Al-Ghazālī, *Letter to a Disciple* , pp. xxx–xxxi.

158 Qurʾān 2:30; 15:26; 15:28–9; 15:33; 31:71–2.

159 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, p. 3.

160 A famous prophetic Tradition states that 'Truly Satan flows in man's bloodstream'. See Al-Bukhārī (4–150); Muslim, (7: 8–9).

161 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, p. 10.

162 Ibid.

163 On al-Ghazālī's conflict with the Ashʿarite view on essential natures and secondary causes see Frank, *al-Ghazzālī and the Ashʿarite School*, pp. 15–22; pp. 76–80.

164 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, p. 175.

165 See for instance, Qurʾān 6:54; 42:25.

166 See Böwering, 'Early Sufism between Persecution and Heresy', p. 45. For a discussion of the use of *tawba* in the Qurʾān see ibid., pp. 65–7; M.S. Stern, 'Notes on the Theology of al-Ghazālī's Concept of Repentance', *Islamic Quarterly* 23, 1979, pp. 82–98.

167 See amongst others, Abū Naṣr al-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ fī'l-taṣawwuf*, ed. R.A. Nicholson, Leiden: Brill, 1914, pp. 43–4; Muḥammad Ibn Isḥāq al-Kalābādhī, *Kitāb al-taʿrruf li-madhhab ahl al-taṣawwuf*, ed. A.J. Arberry, Cairo: 1933, pp. 64–5; al-Makkī, *Qūt al-Qulūb*, pp. 364–94.
168 On this passage and its significance see Marmura, 'Ghazali and Ashʿarism Revisited', pp. 104–5.
169 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, p. 48.
170 Ibid., pp. 134–5.
171 Ibid.
172 Ibid., pp. 134–35.
173 Translation is by *The Holy Qur'ān*. Text, Translation and Commentary by A. Yusuf Ali, New York: Tahrike Tarsile Qur'ān, 2002.
174 Ibid., p. 135.
175 I. Moosa *Ghazālī and the Poetics of Imagination*, Karachi, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 188.
176 Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, pp. 32 ff.
177 Al-Ghazālī, *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa*, ed. S. Donya, Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1960, p. 237.
178 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, pp. 44–5; *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names*, pp. 32–3.
179 Ghazālī attempts to comply with early Traditions stating that the subject of predestination is best not discussed at all. In the *Iḥyā'* he often states that to disclose the secrets of the material and spiritual world is abominable. See for instance *Iḥyā'*, IV, p. 230.
180 Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, Arabic p. 163; English p. 92.
181 Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, pp. 51–2.
182 Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, pp. 227–8.
183 Ibid., p. 229.
184 Ibid.
185 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*. The translation is from *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names of God*, p. 144.
186 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, pp. 242–6.
187 Al-Ghazālī reports that the Prophet suggested people to make use of treatments and medications because they all 'lie within the decree of God'. See D. Burrell, *Faith in Divine Unity and Trust in Divine Providence. Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa al-tawakkul: Book XXXV of The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, Louisville: Fons Vitae/Islamic Texts Society, 2006, pp. 118.
188 Ibid., p. 246.
189 Griffel, *al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, p. 193.
190 Ibid., p. 186.
191 The same topic is presented, with slight differences, also in *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, p. 157; *The Ninety-Nine Beautiful Names*, pp. 144–5.
192 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, pp. 230–3.
193 Ibid., 231.
194 On Ghazālī's arrangement of the levels of beings see K. Nakamura, 'Imam Ghazālī's cosmology reconsidered with special reference to the concept of *Giabarūt*', *Studia Islamica* 80, 1994, p. 36.
195 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, p. 231.
196 Translation is by T.J. Gianotti, *al-Ghazālī's Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul: Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology and Eschatology of the Iḥyā'*, Leiden, Boston, Cologne: Brill, 2001, pp. 152–3.
197 Ibid., pp. 153–4.
198 The ship could be a reference to Noah's ark quoted in Qur'ān 11:41–2.
199 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, pp. 232–3.
200 Janotti, *al-Ghazālī's Unspeakable Doctrine*, p. 157. The fact that *Jabarūt* is part and

parcel of the other two dimensions explains why al-Ghazālī failed to insert *Jabarūt* within the *ḥaḍra al-rubūbiyya*.

201 Nakamura, 'Imam Ghazālī's Cosmology Reconsidered', p. 43.

202 Al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-arba'īn fī usūl al-dīn*, quoted in Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī*, p. 515.

203 Janotti, *al-Ghazālī's Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul*, p. 157.

204 On the concept of *qalb* see A. Ventura, 'La Presenza Divina nel Cuore', in *Quaderni di Studi Arabi* 3, 1985, pp. 63–72. In Qur'ān 50:16, God says: 'We are closer to him [man] than his jugular vein' and this closeness, Sahl al-Tuṣarī explains, is given by the presence of a vein (*'irq*) in a deep cavity of the heart which represents the locus of the divine presence in mankind. See G. Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam*, Berlin-New York, 1980, p. 202.

205 A prophetic tradition quoted in al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, III, p. 20.

206 Ibid., IV, p. 235.

4 Al-Ghazālī

Part two

Al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ ma'ānī asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā

The position, observed in the *Revival*, that there is no true agent other than God – a stand which preserves universal predestination by way of excluding nature as a possible cause capable of determining future conditions – is, evidently, a common Ash'arite position, but al-Ghazālī is willing to introduce new compromising assertions concerning how God's agency is actually exercised and manifested in phenomena.

In his attempt to identify the extent of al-Ghazālī's borrowings from Avicenna's philosophy, Frank assigns particular importance to *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*. This work is of specific interest for this book because, in the second section dedicated to the explanation of the meanings of God's ninety-nine beautiful names, al-Ghazālī introduces again the Neoplatonic notion of emanation, speaking of God as the source of the ordered chain of beings. The issue of decree and predestination is directly tackled when the significance of the divine name the Arbitrator (*al-Ḥakam*) is explained:

> He will be an absolute Arbitrator, because He is the one who causes all the causes, in general and in detail. Branching out from the Arbitrator are the divine decree and predestination (*qaḍā' wa-qadar*) . . . His appointing the universal causes – original, fixed and stable, like the earth, the seven heavens, the stars and the celestial bodies, with their harmonious and constant movements which neither change nor corrupt – which remain without change until what is written be fulfilled (Q. 2:235): this is His decree . . . His applying these causes with their harmonious, defined, planned, and tangible movements to the effects resulting from them, from moment to moment, is His predestination . . . The decree is the positing of universal and constant causes. Predestination applies universal causes with their ordained and measured movements to their effects, numbered and defined, according to a determined measure which neither increases nor decreases. And for that reason nothing escapes His decree and predestination.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, pp. 98–9)[1]

Al-Ghazālī's system is presented as an intricate complex of immediate causes presided over by superior universal and permanent ones. By declaring that God

is the one who makes the causes to function as causes, al-Ghazālī integrates his universal construct not simply with the idea of causality but, more specifically, with the idea of a secondary causality, which is exercised by means of intermediaries, whose efficiency is clearly guaranteed solely by the *musabbib al-asbāb*. Particularly, in the above passage, al-Ghazālī speaks of the divine decree as a kind of twofold activity through which God (i) establishes the universal causes (the seven heavens, the earth, the stars and the celestial bodies), and (ii) makes such causes original (*aṣliyya*), fixed (*thābita*) and stable (*mustaqarra*) with their constant movements. The above causes are made existent and permanent (i.e. without change: *lā tazūl wa lā taḥūl*) until what has been written since eternity is eventually fulfilled. The fulfilment of the divine decree, it is explained, occurs because God connects these causes to their effects which derive from their causes 'moment after moment (*laḥẓ ba'd laḥẓ*)'. It is possible to perceive how, in al-Ghazālī's view, God's activity, which is initially thought to create the world by 'controlling' it through secondary causes, comes to be substituted by a modified occasionalistic perspective of perpetual creation (*ikhtirā'*); this operates also on those universal causes (*al-asbāb al-kulliyya*) upon which the secondary causes devolve on at every moment. More specifically, because of their very perishable nature, the universal causes, generated instant after instant by God's decree, allow reaching an astonishing compromise between Avicennian naturalism, due to the fact that these causes are efficient causes as long as they acts as instruments for God, and the Ash'arite doctrine of theistic occasionalism for which these causes preserve their 'accidental' nature by being recreated anew at each given time, with their effects merely representing their concomitants.

Frank has observed that, in *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, al-Ghazālī clings onto his Ash'arite background by diminishing the importance of the natures of things and by making them empty receptacles of God's action. Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that, in the passage above, al-Ghazālī renders those receptacles not only, as Frank puts it, 'the limiting conditions of what can be received', but also of 'what God can do', in accordance to God's custom. By doing so, he actually adulterates the Ash'arite dogma of God's absolute omnipotence through the Neoplatonic belief for which both God's agency and the entities' receptivity of divine actions are somewhat limited. The example of the water-clock is explicative: the universe's operational function is compared by al-Ghazālī to a water-clock whose final effect, the announcement of the time of prayers, is determined by a series of mechanisms which, corresponding to secondary causes, operate according to a pre-established arrangement. The first mechanism is triggered by the flowing of water through the clock which, in turn, spurs one after the other, a series of functions all of which follow a well-thought plan. Al-Ghazālī stresses that the whole devise depends on three things: (i) planning, that is the decision concerning what is needed regarding devices and movements triggering other movements, etc.; (ii) the creating of the devices which are constituents of the clock; (iii) the setting up of a cause which necessitates all the other movements and makes them determined and well-measured.[2]

In *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, before defining decree and predestination as the products of God as the Arbitrator, al-Ghazālī had already explained the meanings of other

divine Names, presenting God's nature and His relation to His acts especially in connection with three principal terms which, commonly thought as synonymous, cannot in fact be reduced to the notions of creation and invention: (i) God as Creator (*al-Khāliq*); (ii) God as the Producer (*al-Bāri'*), through His causing the existence of things; (iii) God as the Fashioner (*al-Muṣawwir*) through His ordering the forms of created beings.[3] The different connotations of these terms are explicated because everything which comes forth from existence needs first of all to be planned; second to be originated according to the plan; and third to be formed after being originated:

> God – may He be praised and exalted – is Creator inasmuch as He is the planner (*muqaddir*), Producer inasmuch as He initiates existence and Fashioner inasmuch as He arranges the forms of the things invented in the finest way.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, p. 80)[4]

In the first case, God is the Creator by being a *Muqaddir*, that is to say a being who operates through His *qaḍā'* and His power. With reference to the divine decree, in the *Kitāb al-arba'īn fī usūl al-dīn*, al-Ghazālī had put forth other definitions of both the *qaḍā'* and the *qadar*, complementing the designation provided in the previous passage of *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*. The first term is defined as 'the eternal will and divine providence fulfilling the order of existents according to a specific arrangement', whilst *qadar* is identified with the power which 'connects that will with things at particular moments'.[5] It is evident that in al-Ghazālī's mind, the role of God as the Creator is not only linked with the notion of power to act, but also with divine knowledge and, particularly, with God's will which, as a substantial attribute additional to the divine essence, has the primary role of choosing between similar things in the absence of any determinant (or factor of preponderance) which is able to influence this choice.[6] Al-Ghazālī defines the divine will as 'nothing but an expression of an attribute whose function is to differentiate one thing from what is similar to it'.[7] Basically, the will specifies one entity from another similar to it, thus facilitating the divine power which has the task of bringing it into existence. In addition, the will is also related to the issue of placing the creation of the world in time. Considering that temporal moments are all similar, it is the function of the will to choose one specific instant for creation, allowing the eternal power to cause the existence of its object of power at the very time specified by the eternal will. Issues presented in this way explain why it is possible to speak of a divine eternal power which acts on an object that is not coeternal with it. It is evident that the Ghazālian view on this topic is set afar from the Avicennian affirmation of the world's eternity and his concept of ontological emanation: for al-Ghazālī, God is primarily the Creator who operates in time through His will and is not compelled to create by His nature.[8]

The predestinarian tone which is ingrained in the concept of God as the Creator is nuanced once God is described as the Producer and the Fashioner. To explain these names, in *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, al-Ghazālī introduces the example of the fashioning of man whose constitution would not be sound unless made by a specific

measure of water and clay.[9] The dryness of the clay is compared to divine compulsion, whilst the element of water is associated with freedom. Al-Ghazālī clarifies that through an unbalanced quantity of the two elements and abundance of dryness, human actions would not really be humans', implicitly asserting that it is necessary to acknowledge some room of manoeuvre for humans against pure *jabr*. The combination of clay (i.e. compulsion) and water (i.e. freedom), occurring according to a proportion only known to God (i.e. His *qaḍā'*), requires some heat (i.e. God's measure – *qadar*) in order for this combination to be cooked (i.e. instantiated): 'For man is not fashioned from pure clay but from fired clay, like the potter's [work]'.[10]

The predestinarian character fades more and more as al-Ghazālī progresses into his work and speaks of water and fire, describing their mutually inimical nature. Surprisingly, he initially explains that water necessarily extinguishes fire and that fire can itself prevail over water, transforming it into vapour, because of their very natures, a position which might be more easily associable with the Avicennian thought. Successively, however, he clarifies that every natural process is not determined by the necessary natures of things, but by what is predetermined and guarded by celestial intermediaries. If on the one hand, this position confirms the Ghazālīan belief for which God can act through intermediaries if He so wishes, on the other hand, it also betrays a subtle shift in his thought which places him close to the Peripatetic views of nature. Al-Ghazālī, in fact, states, in yet another passage, that every single drop of water is preserved by an angel entrusted with it and who operates through an intention inhering in the essence of water. Within such a statement, an effective cooperation occurring between the inner natures of beings and the subservient instrumental function of celestial intermediaries, which obey God's eternal planning, is undoubtedly inferred. The efficient causality which Avicenna advocates for the nature of things is here 'bridled' by the operationality of secondary agents which obey the divine regulation by way of their 'disposing'.[11] It is evident that, despite his polemical attitude towards the Avicennian causal premises, al-Ghazālī uses them, at least from an instrumental point of view.

Divine predestination for happiness and misery

In *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* al-Ghazālī encourages mankind to understand in a proper manner the existence of things in terms of their disposition and organization. Humans are urged to know the arrangement of spiritual things:

> Of the angels and their ranks, and how much is entrusted to each one of them in disposing the heavens and the stars, then in disposing human hearts by guidance and counselling, and finally in disposing animals by inspirations guiding them to satisfy their presumed needs.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, pp. 83)[12]

The human comprehension of the arrangement of things is said to be determined by the angels and their actions which aim to disposing the human heart

to receive guidance, counselling and knowledge. If on the one hand, angels have the responsibility of awakening humans' consciousness about their role as God's vice-regents on earth, on the other hand, human vice-regency cannot be overrated because, in reality, what men believe to be able to perform, in terms of decreeing and planning, is truly insignificant. Given that everything has been already decreed, the whole point is for human beings to realize that their role may consist exclusively, as al-Ghazālī claims, in 'planning religious exercises, battles and determining policies that might lead to the well-being of religion and the world'.[13] It is exclusively for this reason, al-Ghazālī insists, 'that God appointed His servants vicars on earth and settled them on it'.[14]

By virtue of God's intervention, angels are entrusted to appoint humans with a well-measured capacity to dispose their hearts for the reception of divine mercy, facilitating 'the servant's striving towards the gusts of the mercy of God the most high upon him.'[15] Significantly, al-Ghazālī sets the human capacity of striving in a mystical dimension and frames it as an individual struggle. Willing to clarify that all individual endeavours are the result of God's predestination, which might manifest itself through His celestial mediators, he quotes a series of Qur'ānic verses to make these points: 'Man has only what he strives for . . . his effort will be seen' (Q. 53:39–40);[16] '[God] changes not what is in people, until they change what is in themselves' (Qur'ān, 13:11);[17] 'Work, for the path is made easy for everyone towards what he was created for.'[18] *Al-Maqṣad al-asnā* practically echoes what it has been observed in the *Iḥyā'* with reference to the issue of *tawakkul* and, despite stressing the effectiveness of predestination, this work calls mankind upon an active and pragmatic behaviour:

> The causes are already applied to their effects, and their being impelled towards their effects in their proper and appointed times is a necessary inevitability. Whatever enters into existence enters into it by necessity. For it is necessary that it exist: if it is not necessary in itself, it will be necessary by the eternal decree which is irresistible. So man learns that what is decreed exists, and that anxiety is superfluous. As a result he will act well in seeking his livelihood, with a tranquil spirit, a calm soul, and a heart free form disruption . . . For whomever happiness is ordained, it is determined by a cause, and its causes become easy: to wit, obedience. And for whomsoever misery is determined – God forbid! – it is determined by a cause, and that is one's indolence with regard to pursuing its causes.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, pp. 103–4)[19]

It is worth highlighting that al-Ghazālī speaks of causes openly: consequently, reason, revelation and guidance, which help humans to choose between righteousness (*barr*) and iniquity (*fujūr*), should all be acknowledged as causes (*asbāb*), leading their followers (*ṣāḥabahumā*) to happiness or misery. Particularly, in the above quotation, obedience is referred to as the *cause* of happiness and this explains that for whomever happiness is determined, the chain of causes which lead to obedience is made easy and no major obstacles interrupt the unfolding

of such causes. To elucidate this argument al-Ghazālī provides his readers the example of someone who wants reach the rank of *imām*; he explains that if God has decreed for such an individual to become an *imām*, then He must have decreed it in his causes. The latter are 'destined' to reach the aspiring *imām* because God disposes of him by means of the mentioned causes. In this context, causes are clearly 'means' through which divine predestination can be unfurled. It is God who intervenes by way of removing from the aspiring *imām* any tendency towards idleness or resignation. Moreover, it is specified that whoever makes no effort will not achieve the rank of *imām* whilst the individual who strives and finds its causes within his reach, not only nourishes his hope, but he also fulfils this hope through his constant efforts.[20]

Returning to the quoted passage, since happiness is contrasted to misery, which is also predetermined, one would expect to identify the cause of misery in human disobedience. However, it is the human indolence (*baṭāla*) in pursuing the causes leading to obedience which takes the blame. In the end, it is man's weak nature to be credited with the responsibility of human unhappiness. Quite candidly, the question of theodicy is simplistically explained away, and the divine decree's accountability for some form of evil or punishment is shunned to leave space to humans own responsibility. Implicitly, it is acknowledged that the unhappiness of this or the next life, commonly associated to the notion of punishment, is linked to man's behaviour and to the individual's effort to understand the real significance of the divine arrangements.

In fairness it should be said that, in the same work, al-Ghazālī includes also human responsibility in his discourse on knowledge and work which are considered amongst the causes of human happiness. These become instruments which are able to predispose God's benevolence, but above all, they are intended as proofs of His favour. The capacity to strive in order to achieve one's goal certainly shows that success is within reach, but humans have also to be aware of the fact that no one attains happiness except those 'who come to God with a sound heart, soundness of heart [being] a quality acquired by effort'.[21] It has been observed that, in the *Iḥyā'*, moral decadence in the name of predestination is strenuously condemned by al-Ghazālī who advocated activism as well as trust in God. The same occurs in *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* where, in addition, any form of anxiety is declared superfluous. The theme of trust in God is silently intimated in this work when it is reported that every human being is required to be active in order to seek his livelihood with a tranquil soul and a heart free from disruption. Whoever is active and obedient can confide in the divine provisions, 'For the Pen (*qalam*) is already dry, [having written] what exists'.[22]

Inescapably, the concept of predestination pervades the whole debate: even if al-Ghazālī mentions causes and effects and also avoids references to condition-conditioned things, he claims that causes are applied to their effect according to a measured (i.e. predetermined by *qadar*) time, which has nothing to do with the Avicennian simultaneous necessary relation which is embedded in the nature of causes and effects. Human destiny for happiness or misery is shaped by *qaḍā'* and controlled by *qadar* in its temporal occurrence; this means that the human

destiny is ultimately depending directly on the divine predetermination and on God's intervention in the temporal dimension.

It has been previously detected that, in the Avicennian deterministic construct, the identification between divine decree and destiny leads paradoxically to a form of optimism which grants humans the opportunity to 'invest' in their own striving towards perfection in order to reach salvation. In al-Ghazālī's case, even the human striving is instrumentalized and used to express divine predestination. This occurs because all human activities are, ultimately, embedded within the divine custom which makes a chain of causes, leading to happiness or misery, more or less easily understandable for all those who manage to awaken their perception of the universal devices. Despite adopting Avicenna's urge for activism and purification of the soul, al-Ghazālī uses it with different outcomes. He confirms what the Ashʿarites claimed about the limit of human rationalization in theodicy; as a corollary, the 'naturalization' of rewards and punishments, presented in Avicenna, is here abandoned and substituted by an unchangeable decree which accepts responsibility for reward, but not for punishment. The latter is ascribable to human idleness and the individual's weakness in understanding the reality of things and their mechanisms, an understanding which is, in any case, unavoidably predetermined.

al-Iqtiṣād fī'l-iʿtiqād and the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*

Logical Necessity inscribed in God's Custom

Al-Ghazālī composed the *Iqtiṣād* as a theological handbook in harmony with the Ashʿarite tradition.[23] In it the author deliberates upon the Ashʿarite posture for which God is the only Creator and Originator, and speaks about the nature of human voluntary actions, an issue which had always been the point of contention between the Ashʿarite and the Muʿtazilite schools. Al-Ghazālī's language, as Frank has observed, is carefully chosen because any alteration of the traditional idea that God is the only Being able to bring about all temporal existents by invention *ex nihilo* would have revealed his abandonment of Ashʿarite orthodoxy.[24]

In his defence of Ashʿarite teachings, al-Ghazālī decides to dedicate a whole chapter of his *Iqtiṣād* to the definition of power. He begins by observing that any well-designed act proceeds from a powerful agent and, successively, identifies the world as a well-designed and ordered act which, as such, must have proceeded from a powerful agent. The reality of these assertions, al-Ghazālī explains, is a rational truth which is known immediately because it is witnessed by senses and observation. It is, therefore, impossible to deny since it corresponds to what traditional *kalām* epistemology would have defined as a necessary knowledge.[25] Al-Ghazālī, who intends to avoid any Neoplatonic implication, clarifies that it is impossible for the agent's act to proceed from his essence (consequence: agent's act being coeternal with his essence), and declares that the idea for which the act proceeds from something additional to the essence represents the only possible alternative. In order to prove his point, he recurs to the definition of the term 'power' which

is presented according to the conventions of the Arabic language. It is said to correspond to 'that through which the object comes to actuality given the act of the will and the receptivity of the subject'.[26] This definition serves al-Ghazālī's purpose to clarify (i) that through the attribute of power, which is additional to God's Essence, the creation happens *in time*, thus dismissing confusion on the co-eternality between the Creator (as the Agent) and creature (as the act); and (ii) that the creation is an act which is not necessitated by the nature of the divine essence. To be noted is that both stances are expressive of predestination. Al-Ghazālī also claims that the divine power is *one* and *omnipresent*:[27] 'the one whose power is all-encompassing (*al-wāsiʿu al-qurda*) is the one who has the power to create the [act of the human agent's] power-to-act and its object simultaneously'.[28] With such a fundamental premise it is impossible to contradict al-Ghazālī's position for which omnipresence becomes synonymous with omnipotence. As proofs show, since God is the only true possessor of power in the real sense of the word, no alternative is left but stressing that God is the only real powerful Creator. In fact, in opposition to the Muʿtazilites, al-Ghazālī argues that:

> Since the word creator (*mukhtariʿ*) pertains to [that being who] causes something to exist through his own power and both [the human agent's] power and its object are through God's power and the object is not by the human agent's power . . . [then the latter] is not called a creator.
>
> (Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād*, p. 92)[29]

Marmura has claimed that even the detailed defence of the Ashʿarite doctrine of acquisition cannot be considered isolated from the issue of divine power's pervasiveness which becomes 'the basic premise of al-Ghazālī's causal doctrine'.[30] By way of using the Aristotelian syllogism, al-Ghazālī shows that, because the relation of power to its objects is one, and because all the objects of powers (*maqdūrāt*) are possible things (*mumkināt*), all those things which share the common element of possibility (*imkān*) are objects of God's power.[31] Al-Ghazālī emphasizes that the theory which sees divine power as directly connected with every possible thing becomes acceptable because the same power can be exercised on more than one object and because the relation of the divine power to all actions is of the same kind. This is because the power over a thing is also a power over its similar.[32]

After mentioning possibility, al-Ghazālī must have felt compelled to undertake the analysis of the metaphysical concepts of 'possible', 'impossible' and 'necessary'.[33] He borrows and adapts from Avicenna's ideas and argues that what is internally consistent (i.e. devoid of self-contradiction) is in itself possible, the opposite being valid for something impossible. He also advances the idea for which something only possible in itself can also be seen as (i) necessary or (ii) impossible through something external to it. Consequently, once the divine will opts for the existence of a possible event, the latter, although only possible in itself, becomes necessary, through the divine decision. In the same way, something which is possible, and whose existence is not chosen by the divine will, is kept in the realm of non-existentiality and becomes an impossible thing. This is

due to the external absence of its cause, that is, the fact that the divine will does not choose to existantiate it.[34]

By embracing Aristotelian and Farābīan logic, al-Ghazālī is ready to concede that divine power does not extend to impossible things. He needs to respond to the Aristotelian philosophers' belief for which creation is a necessary process which flows from God's unchanging knowledge. According to them, both the divine knowledge and the divine will are sufficient causes which makes the world what it is. God's knowledge is the determining factor for the status quo of the world and such knowledge is 'limited' by its nature as eternal and unchanging. This means that the world's history is determined and unchangeable as result of God's eternal knowledge. This necessity does not allow the creation of anything other than what already exists. For the Peripatetic philosophers like Avicenna, anything which is not present in this world cannot be created because God cannot change the continuous realization of causal chains of causes and effects. Al-Ghazālī inaugurates his response to these positions by stating that there are three principles to which God's creation is bound to: (i) God cannot violate the rule of excluded contradiction, namely, He cannot create and then not create a specific thing at a specific time; (ii) God must accept relations of implication (this is very close to the previous principle: God cannot affirm the special and, at the same time, deny the general); (iii) God cannot affirm two things at the same time and deny one. These three rules define what for al-Ghazālī is impossible. Everything that is not limited by these three norms can be created by God. This concession is granted with the intention to defeat the philosophers' stance on their own ground of reasoning. Basically, al-Ghazālī is inclined to accept the necessary character of the relationship between the conditioned and its condition, echoing the philosopher's cause-effect relation, but for him this necessary character is acceptable exclusively from a logical perspective. He, in fact, is not interested in denying the legitimacy of the notion of necessity in the sphere of mere logical relations. However, once this concept is transferred to the realm of contingency and natural relationships, namely, extended to the 'kingdom' of causal necessity, its acceptability is nullified. Al-Ghazālī is convinced that the philosophers made a mistake in attributing a necessary nature to what is simply the conventional habit of identifying causal relationships and their mistake is evident in the insufficient proofs they obtain through empirical experience. These proofs are, in fact, merely able to show that the alleged effect 'occurs with the cause and not through it (*'indahu lā bihi*)', the experience of the senses simply showing the necessary character of mere concomitants.[35] Consequently, the limitation of God's power to the only sphere of possibility is justified through the principle of necessary conditional correlation: the divine power does not embrace what involves contradiction or what is logically impossible.[36] Opponents might question whether it is possible for God to change a future event as it is decreed in His foreknowledge. An example which is often cited is whether God foreknows that the death of Zayd should occur at a certain time and whether He can replace death with life through His capacity to create life in Zayd. To this question al-Ghazālī replies that such a change is to be perceived as possible in itself because God's power, per se, encompasses the

creation of life. However, this change is impossible in relation to God's knowledge of Zayd's death because this would turn divine knowledge into ignorance.[37] Divine foreknowledge, therefore, becomes the element that establishes predestination.

After such clarifications, al-Ghazālī turns to the exposition and defence of the Ashʿarite doctrine of *kasb* and rejects both the view of the *Mujbira*, the supporters of compulsion, and that of the Muʿtazilites, supporters of free will. The members of the first group, he explains, were forced to reject human power because they were unable to explain the difference between voluntary movement and tremor. Two charges are levelled against the second group: (i) the fact that they deny the position of the pious ancestors regarding God as the only Creator, and (ii) the fact that they attribute invention to the human being who is unaware of what he creates.[38] Al-Ghazālī opts for a middle position, for which the object of power relates to two possessors of power. Since divine power is pervasive and relates to all possible things, God creates the power in the animate being and, because the object of this created power is also a possible event, it follows that divine power creates the object with it. It should be borne in mind that the whole question about power stems from the philosophical postulate which considers that the only possible relation (*taʿalluq*) between the created power and the object of power can be the relation of a causal connection.[39] Al-Ghazālī refuses this position and affirms that not all connections are necessarily causal. This is evident in the case of the relation existing between the divine attributes of will and knowledge, which are considered simply concomitants. Moreover, al-Ghazālī observes, the Muʿtazilite position, for which human power precedes the act and lasts after it, must admit that there is a time when the power and 'its' object are not related in causal terms. His argument states that, if the human power-to-act is prior to the act, then their relation cannot be that of a cause to the effect because the power exists also after its object has disappeared, that is, it exists in the absence of the occurrence of its object.[40] Therefore, the Muʿtazilites must acknowledge that the human agent's power to act exists (*mawjūd*) and it is related to its object (the act – *mutaʿalliq*) with its power (*bi'l-maqdūr*), but the latter does not occur through it (*wa'l-maqdūr ghayr wāqiʿin bihā*), rather it must occur through the power of God, which is exactly what al-Ghazālī has been arguing from the beginning of his speculation.[41]

The idea that the relation between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what is habitually believed to be an effect is not a necessary connection is advanced for the first time in the *Tahāfut*.[42] In this work, al-Ghazālī specifies that, in the case of two non-identical things, 'it is not necessary for the one to exist [and] that the other should exist, and it is not necessary for the one not to exist [and] that the other should not exist'.[43] The connection he speaks of is an observable relation between concomitants, like in the relations which occurs between the quenching of thirst and drinking, the burning and the contact with fire, death and decapitation, etc. These, to a certain extent, can be regarded as necessary relations, as in the case of the necessity which connects life, knowledge and will, but they are not causal relations. A significant shift at the level of necessity becomes evident in the above argumentations: as noticed by Marmura, al-Ghazālī is not willing to dismiss

necessary relations between existents but, in this specific context, he draws attention to the fact that it is impossible for necessity to be actual when one regards things as habitual causes and habitual effects.[44] Al-Ghazālī's choice to open the Seventeenth discussion of his *Tahāfut* referring directly to concomitants in terms of cause and effect is important if one keeps in mind this background. Because the relation between 'causes' and 'effects' is not a necessary one, it is possible to think of their existence independently from one another because they are not incapable of separation. The concomitants, whose connection is simply due to the prior decree of God creating them*'alā al-tasāwuq*, are therefore possible things which lay, as such, within God's power. The latter is indeed able to 'create death without decapitation, to continue life after decapitation and so onto all connected things'.[45]

In the *Iqtiṣād* and the *Tahāfut*, al-Ghazālī is clearly determined to defend the view for which God is the only Creator and Agent, but he is not totally against the principle of causality. He simply deplores the philosophers' use of causality which they employ to delegate creationistic capacity to beings other than God. However, despite his criticism of philosophical methods, it is undeniable that al-Ghazālī adopts their logic *rationale*. This is evident, as it has been observed, in his use of their syllogistic way of reasoning, and in his compromise for which a 'necessary character' can be addressed to the condition-conditioned relation. Such necessity, acceptable in the logical realm, is nonetheless 'artificial', once it is set in the sphere of existential phenomena. In the dominium of created beings, in fact, the nature of this necessity is inscribed within the compass of God's custom which arranges condition-conditioned things*'alā al-tasāwuq*. The necessary relation between cause and effect is wiped off by the divine decree which establishes condition-conditioned links; their accidental nature is overwhelmed by God's custom and by His setting affairs according to what can be called the human 'habitual' perspective.

Natural agency in God's accommodating Sunna

Al-Ghazālī speaks of three possible types of relationships occurring between things: (i) the relation of reciprocity as in the case of spatial relationships in which the negation of the one implies the negation of the other (right and left, above and below); (ii) the relation of antecedence and consequence, as in the relation of the conditioned to the condition or in the case of life which is a necessary condition for knowledge and will; (iii) the causal relationship in which, when the cause is removed, the effect is removed.[46] Al-Ghazālī is particularly concerned with the challenge of having to explain the third type of causal relation and to this end he impressively scrutinizes the principle of causality. If someone wants to speak of causality, he claims, first it has to be proved that such a principle has a universal validity, that is, that it can be applied to any real sequence under examination. This needs be done not simply from a logical point of view, but on an ontological basis too. This hypothesis is dismissed because al-Ghazālī has already shown that the tool the philosophers used to explain the necessity occurring between the cause

and its effect through experience is not sufficient, and is only able to prove that the assumed effect occurs in concomitance *with* the assumed cause but not *through* it.[47] In addition, in order to demonstrate that the relation of cause and effect is necessary, one must state that the negation of the cause entails the negation of the effect; however, this is valid if it is assumed that the effect has only one cause. Conversely, if it is supposed that the effect has more than one cause, it follows that the negation of all causes would lead to the negation of the effect. Nonetheless, the possibility of eliminating all causes implies that an individual must have complete knowledge of all the possible causes which operate in any given natural process. This instance is condemned as impossible in the *Tahāfut* where al-Ghazālī admits there is a possibility for 'unknown causes' to escape human understanding.[48] Third, even if one acknowledges in the 'principle of things' the presence of certain obscure grounds and causes, corresponding to the Avicennian nature, from which events emanate when a contact between them takes place, the fact that they are constant and never ceasing eludes the possibility for humans to discern them. This is due to the fact that humans are capable of understanding their reality only in respect to the difference occurring between their existence and their non-existence.

By not mentioning issues relative to matter and form in his dispute, al-Ghazālī is not only oblivious to the Aristotelian view of the world, but he also condemns the authorities among the philosophers (*muḥaqqiqūn*) who speak of the *Dator Formarum* as the demiurge responsible for the reciprocal compatibility of matter and form. Al-Ghazālī denies the validity of the determinism implicit in the philosophers' emanative scheme whose *modus operandi*, it has been previously observed, is dependent on the intellectual nature of its constituents and on the specific dispositions of their substrata which are immutable.[49] As a consequence, within the philosophers' emanative schemas, a natural agent acts in a determinate manner, and things, which proceed from the agent are necessitated without pertaining to the realm of deliberation and choice. It is at this point that al-Ghazālī corroborates his denial of the Neoplatonic emanationism affirming that he is not ready to concede 'that the principles do not act by choice and that God does not act voluntarily'.[50] The negation of ontological emanation, which was shown in the *Niche of Lights*, implicitly confirms the Ghazālīan notion of divine predestination. For him, the agent is not called an agent and a maker by simply being a cause, but by being a cause in a special sort of way, that is, by way of will and choice (*ʿalā wajh al-irāda wa'l-ikhtiyār*).[51] Divine action is consequently not compulsory: had it been compulsory, the world would have been in existence eternally.[52] Moreover, al-Ghazālī cannot concede that an action can be an eternal action. This is because the action's non-existence prior to its occurrence represents a necessary condition (*sharṭ*) for this action to be classified as an act of an agent.[53] Therefore, it is logical to think that a proper action, which is created, is related to a will, and therefore, to an agent. In explaining the reason why a voluntary action is a real action, it is stressed that due attention has to be paid to the *nature* of the subject of a sentence and that observers need to keep in mind that real action proceeds only from rational willing beings.[54] Significantly, in this context there is recourse to the notion of nature:

what al-Ghazālī emphasizes is that agents are agents because of their *nature* as rational, willing beings. In order to illustrate this point, he speaks about the possibility that a prophet might not to be burnt when thrown into a fire. For argument's sake, al-Ghazālī stresses that this possibility can be credited either to the prophet's nature or to the fire's nature, both of which can be 'disrupted' by God's modification of His custom.[55] Teasing his readers, al-Ghazālī is ready to grant that fire, by its own very nature, produces heat and burning, and that the human body, such as that of a prophet, by its nature, is subject to the action of being burnt. It is worth stressing that he intentionally proposes the example of the fire because he wants to emphasize that fire, not being a voluntary agent, is never able to act and that action can only be addressed to a willing being. This example is put forward with the intent of stressing that the nature of fire, by itself, does not burn the prophet. The goal is to make clear that it is God at His will, by a voluntary and not a necessitated act, who modifies the non-necessary relation existing between the believed-to-be *habitual cause* (the burning of the fire) and the believed-to-be *habitual effect* (the being burnt of the prophet). On the one hand, with this example, al-Ghazālī condemns the logical and ontological necessary relation which Avicenna believed to link causes and effects; on the other hand, he employs the Aristotelian notion for which nature disposes things according to certain predispositions – a nature which makes the fire to burn and the prophet to be burnt – in order to stress that the relationship occurring between the fire and the prophet it is not a necessary one. Even more significantly, al-Ghazālī manages, once again, to blend Avicennian elements with Ashʿarite basic tenets. There is no doubt that the Ashʿarite premise for which the divine act is a voluntary one is respected, as it is the notion of the occasionalistic nature of the divine intervention. The latter is proven by the fact that God is able to intervene and modify the alleged Aristotelian *causal* powers existing in natural things. However, even if al-Ghazālī identifies a real agent only with a willing subject, and even if he alludes to the notion of natural causation as a paradoxical case because activity occurs only *via* will and choice, it is undeniable that he somehow acknowledges the importance played by the nature of things. In the example of fire, the importance of natural activity is admitted even though accommodated within the notion of God's custom. All these manoeuvres however, do not allow a radical substitution of predestination in favour of natural determinism: what occurs in the world happens because it is so disposed by the divine decree and not because it is so determined by the nature of things.

Notes

1 Translation is from *The Ninety-Nine*, p. 86.
2 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, pp. 98–100; *The Ninety-Nine*, pp. 86–8.
3 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, pp. 79–80; *The Ninety-Nine*, pp. 68–9.
4 Translation is from *The Ninety-Nine*, p. 68
5 Al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn fī usūl al-dīn*, p. 11.
6 Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, p. 114 note 43.
7 Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād*, p. 106. The translation is from Marmura's 'Ghazālī's chapter on divine power in the *Iqtiṣād*', pp. 298 note 45.

8 This is discussed at length in Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, see particularly chapter 4.
9 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, pp. 80–1; *The Ninety-Nine*, pp. 68–9.
10 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, pp. 80–1; *The Ninety-Nine*, pp. 68–9.
11 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣa al-asnā*, pp. 83; *The Ninety-Nine*, p. 71
12 Translation is from *The Ninety-Nine*, p. 71.
13 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣa al-asnā*, p. 102; *The Ninety-Nine*, p. 90.
14 Ibid.
15 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, p. 83; *The Ninety-Nine*, p. 71.
16 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, p. 98; *The Ninety-Nine*, p. 86.
17 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, p. 83; *The Ninety-Nine*, p. 71.
18 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, pp. 103–4; *The Ninety-Nine*, p. 91.
19 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, pp. 103–4; *The Ninety-Nine*, pp. 90–1.
20 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, p. 104; *The Ninety-Nine*, p. 92.
21 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, p. 104; *The Ninety-Nine*, p. 92.
22 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*p. 103; *The Ninety-Nine*, p. 90. Al-Ghazālī refers here to the Pen which appears together with the Preserved Tablet in (Q. 85:22) and (Q. 68:1). There exists a Tradition recounting that the Prophet stated that, before creation, God ordered the Pen to write upon the Tablet all that was come to pass till the end of time. See Muḥmmad Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Annales*, Leiden: Brill, 1879–1901, vol. I, pp. 29–30, and p. 48; Muḥammad ibn ʿĪsā al-Tirmidhī, *Jamiʾ al-ṣaḥīḥ: wa-huwa sunan al-Tirmidhī*, Cairo: Muṣṭafa al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1937–1956, vol. 2, p. 232. According to Frank, al-Ghazālī also hints at the Pen in *Ihyāʾ* (III, p. 18). In that context, the Pen is given as a synonymous of the Agent Intellect: 'One God's creation which He has made the cause of the actual engraving of true cognitions on human hearts'. See Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, p. 114 note 41.
23 Ibid., p. 71.
24 Ibid., p. 43.
25 Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād*, p. 80; Marmura, 'Ghazālī's Chapter on Divine Power in the *Iqtiṣād*,' p. 296 note 40.
26 Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād*, p. 81 and p. 91. Translation is from Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, p. 43.
27 The notion of divine pervasiveness in all actions might have been inspired by Qurʾān 8:17: 'It was not your throw [that defeated them when you threw] but God's'.
28 Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād*, p. 92.
29 Translation, partially modified, is by Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, p. 44.
30 Marmura, 'Ghazālī's Chapter on Divine Power in the *Iqtiṣād*', pp. 280–1.
31 Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād*, p. 82.
32 Ibid., pp. 82–3.
33 On 'possibility' and '*qudra*', see Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*, pp. 32 ff.
34 It is important to remember al-Ghazālī's acceptance of the general principle of causality. In the above case, the impossibility of existence for the possible in itself is given by the absence of an external cause which could guarantee its existence.
35 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 167.
36 Majid Fakhry has pointed out that in this perspective 'the revised notion of possibility becomes . . . coterminous with that of logical consistency'. M. Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroes and Aquinas*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1958, p. 67.
37 Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād*, pp. 86–95. Significantly, al-Ghazālī uses the standpoint of divine knowledge to resolve the difficulties presented by the *kalāmic* doctrine of bodily resurrection. In answering opponents' arguments for which the bodily resurrection would entail the return of a similar thing but not the original one, considering that the non-existent has no longer a concrete identity which can be resurrected, al-Ghazālī

introduces the difference, known to God, between the annihilated thing, which is preceded by existence, and the one which is not preceded by it. Al-Ghazālī defines resurrection of the original as the act of exchanging 'existence for a non-existence that had been preceded by existence', whereas the meaning of the similar is 'to initiate existence for a non-existence not preceded by existence'. Consequently, the things belonging to the first class, once annihilated, are able to keep their identity in God's knowledge (Creator and Preserver!) and they can resurrect exactly as those things. The second class of existents, lacking existence prior to their annihilation, loose their identity; what is resurrected is simply their replica. See Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād*, p. 214. The translation used in the passage is by M.E. Marmura, 'al-Ghazālī on Bodily Resurrection and Causality in *Tahafut* and the *Iqtiṣād*', *Aligarh Journal of Islamic Thought* 2, 1989, p. 58.

38 These arguments go back to al-Ashʿarī. See his *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, p. 39 ff.
39 Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtiṣād*, p. 92.
40 Ibid., pp. 92–3.
41 Ibid., p. 94 and p. 99. Frank has made the point that al-Ghazālī has never analysed the Muʿtazilites thesis fully and correctly. He arrives at his conclusions after lengthy and 'oblique arguments', manipulating and restricting both Ashʿarites and Muʿtazilites' 'terms and elements . . . under his present construction of them'. See Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, pp. 45–6.
42 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, p. 166.
43 Ibid.
44 Marmura, 'al-Ghazālī on Bodily Resurrection', p. 60.
45 This expression, according to Marmura (Ibid., and p. 240 note 3), refers to a non-temporal successive order and to God's habit to create things 'side by side'. The aim is to talk about concomitance where the priority is not temporal. This principle, it has been observed, is against Avicenna's idea for which causes and effects are simultaneous. Even when Avicenna intends to foster a more theological view in connection to the question of predestination, he speaks of things as being created 'one after the other'.
46 Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism*, pp. 62–3.
47 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, pp. 167–8.
48 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, pp. 173–4.
49 Ibid., p. 168.
50 Ibid., p. 169.
51 Ibid., p. 56.
52 Al-Ghazālī rejects the idea that any action is such by nature. This would be a self-contradictory expression (*mutanāqiḍah*) as in the statement: 'he acted and he has not acted'. Ibid., p. 57.
53 Ibid., p. 63.
54 Ibid., pp. 58–9.
55 Ibid., pp. 171–2; Marmura, 'al-Ghazālī on Bodily Resurrection', p. 64.

5 Ibn ʿArabī

Part one

A biography

Muḥyi'l-Dīn Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Ibn ʿAlī Ibn ʿArabī, also known as the *Shaykh al-akbar* (the Greatest Master), was born in Murcia in 560/1165. At the age of 8 he began his formal education in Seville which had replaced the old capital Cordova as the main centre of Muslim culture and learning. Around the sixth/twelfth century, the rigid theocratic system of the Almohad State had to come to terms with the tumultuous society of Seville, a cultural and religious melting pot, bursting with people from all walks of life such as musicians, poets, *ʿulamā'* and philosophers. Amongst the *falāsifa*, Ibn Rushd, at that time the *Qāḍī* of Seville, impressed by the precocious illumination displayed by Ibn ʿArabī, called for a meeting with him and questioned the young mystic on the nature of his spiritual achievements.[1] Ibn ʿArabī spent a good number of years travelling in various towns of Spain and North Africa, encountering many *Shaykhs* such as Abū Jaʿfar al-ʿUraynī and the two mystic women, Fāṭima bint al-Muthannā and Shams Umm al-Fuḳarā' who became his spiritual teachers.[2] At the age of 30, Ibn ʿArabī travelled to Tunis and to Fez where he began the composition of his *Kitāb al-Isrā'*. In 595/1199, he was again in Cordova, where he attended the funeral of Ibn Rushd. In 598/1202 the *Shaykh al-akbar* returned to Tunis, successively reaching Mecca, travelling via Cairo and Jerusalem. He spent two years in Mecca, reading, meditating and enjoying many mystic visions and dreams. It was here that he wrote his *Tāj al-rasā'il*, his *Rūḥ al-Quds*, and thereafter began working in 598/1202 on his magnum opus, the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*. In Mecca, Ibn ʿArabī met ʿAyn al-Shams Niẓām, the daughter of an Iṣfahānī resident of the city, to whom he dedicated the poems collected in the *dīwān* entitled *Tarjumān al-ashwāq*. In 600/1204 Ibn ʿArabī accompanied a number of Anatolian pilgrims from Konya to Malatya, reaching their destination in 601/1205. Ibn ʿArabī travelled again to Jerusalem, Cairo and Mecca returning, in 606/1209–10, to Konya where he composed his *Risālat al-anwār*. After these series of travels, he moved to Malatya, where his profound knowledge of esoteric and exoteric sciences earned him the support of many Muslim sovereigns (and Seljuk sultans) who granted him with generous allowances. By 627/1230 Ibn ʿArabī had settled in Damascus where he found protection with members of the Ayyūbid ruling family. During this period many important representatives of Damascene society were enumerated amongst

his disciples; eager to preserve their positions as religious and civil administrators, *ʿulamā'* and *qāḍīs* began to share the Ayyūbids' fascination with the charismatic teachings of Sufism in general, and with the teachings of Ibn ʿArabī in particular. Protected by political and religious authorities, the *Shaykh al-akbar* was free to promulgate his doctrines. In Damascus Ibn ʿArabī led a quiet life of reading and teaching, composing, as the result of a dream in 627/1229, one of his most influential works, the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. From 630/1233 onwards, he completed and revised his *Futūḥāt*. Ibn ʿArabī died in 638/1240, finding his resting place on the slopes of Mount Ḳāsiyūn, outside Damascus.

The following chapters show that Ibn ʿArabī's strategy of harmonization between the different approaches to knowledge is less radical if it is compared to that of Avicenna and al-Ghazālī. His compromise is transformed into a harmonious blend which, as Chodkiewicz states, encapsulates 'dans une vertigineuse synthése tous les domains des sciences traditionnelles, de la jurisprudence à la métaphysique'.[3] It will be shown that, in Ibn ʿArabī's thought, the conciliation between theological, philosophical and mystical parameters is simply serving the scope to better communicate his profoundly subjective view of the reality, rather than aiming to please the authorities. The nature of Ibn ʿArabī's writings serves as a testimony to this supposition: his teachings, which were generated by the experiential source of spiritual taste (*dhawq*), are characterized by complexity, obscure terminologies and perplexing theoretical digressions. They are made deliberately confused as they were meant to be understood exclusively by minds already trained in and acquainted with Sufi prepositions.[4] The Akbarian writings are to be grasped exclusively by those individuals who voluntarily activate themselves on the path of spiritual illumination (*fatḥ*), and by those 'who begin to interact with his works with the appropriate intentions and preparations'.[5] One need to remember that, in the sixth/twelfth century, Sufism was no longer concerned with defining and justifying its teachings because Sufi manuals had successfully demonstrated the compatibility between Sufism and Sunni Islam. This state of affairs explains why the *Shaykh al-akbar* was never seemingly preoccupied with clarifying his bold outlooks and the difficult character of his writings. In contrast, it has been observed, Avicenna and al-Ghazālī's compromising stances on theology, philosophy and mysticism were needed to render their works more palatable to their contemporary coreligionists.

During his life, the Ibn ʿArabī's speculative system became the object of different levels of disparagement.[6] The *Shaykh* seemed to be, at any case, mainly oblivious to this criticism which had failed to understand that his hyperbolic language, his bewildering paradoxes, his juxtaposition of 'orthodox' and 'unorthodox' dictates were meant to abolish the parameters of conventional speculations, had they been theological philosophical or mystical.[7] Despite showing fondness for the Qur'ānic and *ḥadīth* vocabulary, Ibn ʿArabī's non-conceptual language makes use of philosophical, theological as well as mystical idioms as *linguae francae*, that is, vernacular parlances, serving the scope of conveying to the readers, in the best possible way, his mystical insights and evanescent experiences.[8]

The political protections enjoyed by Ibn ʿArabī, the fact that there was, as Van

Ess states, 'a market for his ideas', together with the *Shaykh*'s tendency to circumscribe his teachings only to the elite of his disciples, thus avoiding the foundation of a specific Akbarian *tarīqa*, spared him from severe persecution and censorship.[9] With no doubt these circumstances unburdened Ibn ʿArabī from the need to reach drastic compromising stances between his daring ideas and more 'conventional' Islamic positions. Ibn ʿArabī's freedom of teaching is much more surprising when his unconventional relationship with philosophy is considered: Franz Rosenthal has observed that, on a few occasions, Ibn ʿArabī refers to 'intelligent individuals and logical thinkers' (*al-ʿuqalāʾ wa-ahl al-qiyās*) as his colleagues (*aṣḥāb*), and, although he never named himself a *faylasūf*, his stances on philosophy were sufficient for him to be called *Ibn Aflāṭūn* (the son of Plato).[10] Many attempts have been made to demonstrate that Ibn ʿArabī's Sufism is, to say the least unusual, and that in his theoretical achievements resonate strong Platonic and Neoplatonic underpinnings.[11] However, scholars' categorizing tendency has failed to place the *Shaykh*'s thought within the confines of a coherent philosophical scheme; this attitude has led intellectuals to labelling his writings as extravagant, inconsistent, eclectic, paradoxical and serpentine works.[12] The accusations of pantheism, monism and heresy levelled against Ibn ʿArabī betray the pitfall of placing the metaphysical doctrines of Ibn ʿArabī within philosophical confines. This tendency, Sayyed H. Nasr has claimed, does not 'take into consideration the fact that the way of gnosis is not separate from grace and sanctity'.[13] This keystone intuition, it has been observed, is also solidly grounded in both the Avicennian and Ghazālīan speculations on free will and predestination: informed by theological, philosophical and mystical parameters, their systems has shown that the divine decree does not allow humans to attain ultimate knowledge exclusively through self-striving and independently from the divine bestowal of gracious gifts. Similarly, it is important to understand that it was thanks the illuminated mystical insight granted by the divine disclosure that Ibn ʿArabī was able to compose his works in the way he did.

The spirit of intellectual tolerance which had characterized al-Ghazālī's criticism against the condemnation of contentious mystical doctrines is espoused by the *Shaykh al-akbar*. He warns his disciples against any form of simplistic criticism of the theories of the *falāsifa* and *mutakallimūn*, particularly within the realm of ethics and metaphysics.[14] The speculative 'flexibility' of the philosophers, which had attempted to link the general wisdom inherited by the Greeks with the Islamic message, finds a subtle echo in Ibn ʿArabī's defence of the philosophers' *ḥikma*, which he considered to be a synonymous of the 'knowledge of prophethood'.[15] This defence of *falsafa* occurred despite the *Shaykh*'s objection to the philosophers' belief for which wisdom could be attained exclusively through rationalizing speculations rather than divinely granted insights. In terms similar to al-Ghazālī, the *Shaykh al-akbar* offers his spiritual guidance on both the theoretical aspects of mysticism and on the *adab*, i.e. the pragmatic rules to be followed by the wayfarer on the mystical path. All his works bear witness to his lifelong observance of the Islamic rites and practices which are prescribed in the Qur'ān and the prophetic teachings.[16] Notwithstanding the fact that Ibn ʿArabī made experiential esotericism the hallmark of his teaching, he remained faithful to the *Sharīʿa*-based

structures of Islamic praxis throughout his life, believing that obedience and compliance with the exoteric interpretation of the divine Law was needed to corroborate the comprehension of the truth which was to be attained through esoteric insights. In the *Shaykh*'s estimation, in fact, true spiritual life was meant to embrace both the normative sciences, that is, the dogmatic truths and the precepts of the theological morals, and the experimental aspects of faith, namely, the soul's experiential perception of its relation with the divine, in a perfect harmonization between the *via ascetica* and the *via mystica*.[17] Such a harmonization was the result of the long process of evolution Sufism had undergone since its origin. In Ibn ʿArabī's lifetime, the *ʿulamā*'s' concern with the potential harmful effects the esoteric teachings could have on the faith of the common people had already been tackled and moderated by many scholars such as Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, al-Junayd, al-Ghazālī and ʿUmar Suhrawardī (d. 632/1234).[18] They had already demonstrated that there existed a perfect compatibility between 'orthodox' theology and Sufism. *Taṣawwūf* had also managed to curb the preoccupations of the religious scholars with regard to the Sufis' use of both philosophical terminology and certain *kalāmic* speculations which were considered to be too much reliant on the 'Hellenic methodology of rational enquiry'.[19] Moreover, a new intellectual liveliness and a more liberal attitude towards Islamic mysticism had begun to characterize the Almohad movement from the reign of Abū Yaʿqūb Yūsuf (reigned 558–79/1163–84). During the rule of the Almohades, enthusiastic supporters of sciences such as medicine, astrology and philosophy, the teachings of the Ẓāḥirites had achieved official recognition. Ibn ʿArabī is often mentioned among their followers, and his alleged adherence to their theologico-juridical school has been seen as the key to his merging the heights of mysticism with the dictates of the *Sharīʿa*.

Ẓāhirism was promoted in Spain by Ibn Ḥasm of Cordoba (d. 456/1063) and is acknowledged among the *madhhab* s in general as the one 'at the furthest limit of orthodoxy'.[20] Ibn ʿArabī's possible espousal of the Ẓāhirī creed is often credited to his focus on stripping God of any trace of anthropomorphism (*tashbīh*) whilst stressing the validity of the divine Names. Like in Ẓāhirism, the *Shaykh al-akbar* places emphasis on the unity of God by way of His Essence and the uniqueness of God's creative action. It has been argued that Ibn ʿArabī's controversial Qurʾānic exegesis found its justification in the Ẓāhirī legal perspective which sought to contrast the use of opinion (*raʾy*) and analogical reasoning (*qiyās*) by claiming that deductions and conclusions could be drawn from what already contained in the fundamental texts of Islam.[21] Whether or not the *Shaykh al-akbar* actually espoused Ẓāhirī views, it is certain that his veneration for the Qurʾān as well as the Prophet's *Sunna* shielded him from any accusation of antinomianism.

All these circumstances allowed the *Shaykh al-akbar* to make confident use of Sufi stances, *kalāmic* and philosophical motifs. Ibn ʿArabī, however, considered the speculations of *kalām* and *falsafa* insufficient to convey his understanding of the reality; he was aware that Sufism shared with the intellectual knowledge of philosophers and speculative theologians the aim to attain ultimate gnosis of God, but he also acknowledged that his mysticism was set to achieve this goal primarily through 'experiential taste'. This was meant to be accompanied by the

injunctions of the divine revelation, the knowledge and practice of the Prophet's *Sunna*[22] and, only secondarily, by the tools of reason.[23] Although occasionally Ibn ʿArabī employed the syllogistic mode of reasoning used by the philosophers, he was conscious that this method was unable to fathom the real status of things which, in his opinion, could be expressed only by means of poetical, mythological and paradoxical stylistic devices.

Nature of the Akbarian writings

The *Shaykh al-akbar* declares that the majority of his works are the products of visionary experiences. This was the case of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, which he said to have received by the hand of the Prophet in a dream, and the volumes of the *Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, which were originated from an immediate illumination, attained through an epiphany. In occasion of one Pilgrimage to Mecca, and particularly during his *ṭawāf* around the Kaʿba, Ibn ʿArabī is admitted to the vision of an enigmatic youth (*fatā*). By staring at the form of this young individual, the *Shaykh* apprehends the contents of his magnum opus with no utterance of word being needed.[24] In the second chapter of the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn ʿArabī explains the nature of his work:

> I speak through permission (*idhn*) [from the divine] and this composition (*ta'līf*) does not follow [the general principles of] other works or other authors. Every author is under the authority of his own choice – even if he is compelled in his own choice – or he is under the authority of that particular science which he transmits in a specific way . . . We are only hearts clinging onto the door of the divine Presence, waiting for it to be open. We are poor and deprived of any knowledge.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 48)

According to Ibn ʿArabī, authors are compelled in their choice – a condition which is shared by all human beings, as it will be explained later in the discussion – as they are restricted in their knowledge by the limitation of the particular science of which they are devoted representatives. Differently, Ibn ʿArabī's loyalty revolves only towards the divine inspiration which makes him, as he himself declares in the above passage, a mere scribe and a translator of spiritual 'openings'. His works are mediated through the filter of both the personal experience and the human language. His writings, defined by James Morris as 'multifaceted',[25] are nothing but 'la tradition éctite d'une connaissance visionnarie et d'une experience personelle de la sainteté'.[26] To them corresponds a 'multidimensional understanding'[27] which conveys a multiplicity of perspectives. This means that the same idea is indicated with different names which, however, are never exactly synonyms; in the Akbarian literary production, in fact, different expressive registers operate simultaneously so that the multifaceted aspects of the One Reality find their ontological justification in the multiplicity of various names. Each name designates a particular reality from a specific point of view which excludes all others.[28]

The subjective nature of Ibn ʿArabī's writings should not mislead one to believe in any tendency towards antinomianism. In all his works, the spiritual presence of the

Qur'ān and its vivifying spirit, represent, as Chiara Casseler explains, 'il sostegno ontologico e la fonte di ogni parola dello *Shaykh al-akbar*'.[29] Particularly, in the *Futūḥāt*, any theoretical speculation is approached by Ibn ʿArabī with the reassuring certainty that the profound understanding of the divine Word and the spiritual nourishment (*imdād*) descending from it have been bestowed in order to keep him and his writings in the proximity of the Qur'ān.[30] Consequently, all the Akbarian stances, as paradoxical as they might appear, are, in effect, carefully subordinated to the revealed Word. Even the presumed inherent chaotic architecture of the *Futūḥāt* is only an apparent disorder which finds its logic in the divine array (*al-naẓm al-ilāhī*): the layout of the work, the *Shaykh* confesses, has been so arranged (*rattaba*) by God, 'without the introduction of my opinion and my reasoning faculties'.[31]

It has been argued that the *Futūḥāt* is, in its entirety, a majestic Qur'ānic commentary which is characterized by an exegetical methodology that, as Chodkiewicz puts it, 'ne cherche pas l-au-delà de la letter ailleurs que dans la letter ellememe'.[32] The reverential respect for the letter of the Qur'ān is palpable thanks to the presence of numerous direct scriptural quotations as well as implicit references to the Qur'ānic verses featuring in the Akbarian writings.[33] The Qur'ān represents the starting point and the final aim in the individual journey on the mystical path as it becomes the station of 'omni-comprehensiveness', and the synthesis of all essential realities.[34] From an esoteric perspective, the Qur'ānic exegesis becomes the ultimate tangible instrument which is able to transcend the linguistic confines of the human language. In other terms, the Qur'ānic hermeneutics, according to the *Shaykh al-akbar*, allows assigning each verse or chapter of the Holy Book its corresponding essential reality. As a result, as many scholars have highlighted, Ibn ʿArabī never privileges the esoteric aspect of the divine revelation over the exoteric facet. The form of God's word is as important as the meaning it bears, being it is the symbol which expresses its corresponding reality (*ḥaqīqa*). As Chodkiewicz has argued, such a form, as a divine form, it is not simply the most adequate expression of the truth, but it is itself the Truth.[35]

Attributes, divine Names and immutable entities

It has been highlighted in the previous chapters that al-Ghazālī's Sufism, coached in Ashʿarite tenets, professed that, once an individual has attained to a real understanding of divine *tawḥīd*, everything must inevitably be perceived as being predetermined by God's decree. It can be argued that the Ashʿarite predestinarian outlook characterizes Sufism in general; however, differently from theologians and philosophers, mystics are usually not concerned with elaborating logically coherent speculative systems. Their preoccupations are, rather, connected with expressing the tension which is experienced, along the *via mystica*, between on the one hand, God's pervasive power and, on the other hand, the individual's ability to act according to what is considered 'right' on the mystical path.[36] This explains why a clear definition of Ibn ʿArabī's position on the question of free will and predestination is a very challenging task. The reason for such a poignant difficulty is to be found in the *sālik*'s renunciation to any active power, and the

individual's focus on the possibility to reach the goal of his seeking, that is, to use Chittick's words, 'to live in a constantly overflowing fountain of divine self-expression, experiencing a renewed Self-disclosure of God and perceiving a new understanding of what it means being God's image'.[37] Once reached this desired status, the distinction occurring between the human individual will on the one side, and God's will on the other side, is thinkable as no more existent in the seeker's cognitive dimension. This becomes more evident once the individual realizes that nothing exists except God, a stance which is embedded in Ibn ʿArabī's theory of the divine Oneness of Being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*).[38]

Ibn ʿArabī speaks of divine unity (*aḥadiyya*) and unicity (*wāḥidiyya*) and is very explicit in defining the different metaphysical significances of the two terms. Whilst the term *aḥadiyya* identifies the divine unity which is deprived of any multiplicity or duality, *wāḥidiyya* designates the first act of qualification of the divine Essence to Itself, that is, an act by which the divine Essence's self-awareness confirms its being one.[39] Such a differentiation does not mark an abrupt departure from previous Sufi preoccupations, but reveals its logical connection with them. This continuity becomes clear when the issue of divine unity and unicity is analysed in the perspective of the divine predetermining activity and the all-encompassing divine power. For instance, the theme of the primordial covenant (Q. 7:172), in which God had proclaimed His lordship (*rububīyya*), and the human souls had acknowledged it, is an episode which is used by Sufis not only to explain the relation of intimacy occurring between God and men to which all Muslim mystics aspire to return, but also the pervasiveness of the divine Presence within the universe.[40] The notion of *waḥdat al-wujūd* draws from this source, as well as from the concept of divine pervasiveness, and aims to explain that there is no other reality except the divine one (a position al-Ghazālī had already espoused in the *Mishkāt*). According to the *Shaykh al-akbar*, God as the Supreme Principle or Absolute Existent (*al-wujūd al-mutlaq*), encompassing and transcending every being and every difference, extinguishes any claim of existence and activity in everything other than Him. In effect, Ibn ʿArabī fosters a kind of *theologia negativa* on the Reality, typical of early *Kalāmic* speculations, which also resembles the *apophatic theology* of the Ismaili teachings for which nothing can be said of the unspeakable Real. This attitude leads to an aversion to any classification or description of the Existent depending on the Aristotelian categories.[41] For the *Shaykh al-akbar*, God is above all qualities and what remains to be perceived in the world is only:

> The manifest activity (*fī'l ẓāhir*) in an unknowable agent (*fāʿil majhūl*) whose effect (*athar*) is seen but whose predicate (*khabar*) is not recognized, whose essence (*ʿayn*) is not known and whose being (*kawn*) remains unknown.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, vol. II, p. 211)[42]

In line with previous Sufi stances, the theory of *waḥdat al-wujūd* does not imply any substantial continuity between God and the product of His activity (the cosmos). This means that the accusations of pantheism and panentheism which have been, and still are, levelled against the Akbarian thought are truly unfounded. This

theory simply stresses that there is no being but the Being of God who is one and unique in His Essence but multiple in His manifestations.

The difficult nature of the *waḥdat al-wujūd*'s theory surfaces when the multiplicity of existents comes under scrutiny. Ibn ʿArabī often clarifies that '[God] is Himself, and things are things',[43] with the intention of making clear that what is 'other than God' remains possible in its essence, whether it is put into existence or not. Nothing *is*, that is, nothing *exists* – and consequently acts – except God. This is true even if it is problematic to speak of God as the *cause* of creation due to His essential independence from, and incomparability to, what is created. In contrast with the *Shaykh al-akbar*, it has been observed that, in al-Ghazālī's construct, the unicity of the deity is read primarily in Ashʿarite causal terms. Accordingly, all activity are said to relate to God who is the only Agent.

In order to attain a better understanding of Ibn ʿArabī's view on free will and predestination it is imperative to explain in more details the constituents of his theoretical speculation. Like many other earlier thinkers, Ibn ʿArabī is fascinated by the Neoplatonic cosmological notion which looks at the cosmos as the unravelling of divine perfection, and he speaks of everything as manifestation of the divine Reality. The latter, also known as divine Presence (*ḥaḍra ilāhīyya*) is all-encompassing and it is made of divine Essence (*dhāt*), Attributes (*ṣifāt*) and Actions (*afʿāl*).[44] Particularly, Ibn ʿArabī regards the Attributes of God as universal, intelligible concepts also intended as meanings or entifications (*mawjūdāt*) of all things. Divine Attributes are nothing but relative realities thought of as *loci theophanici*, namely, 'places' allowing God's Self-manifestation. Attributes are things participating of the divine existence due to a relative existence (*al-wujūd al-iḍāfī*) granted to them by God.

In the Akbarian doctrine, divine Self-manifestation is also linked to the so-called divine Names. The only One Reality, as stated by Paolo Urizzi, 'per la dinamica implicita nella sua universale onnicomprensività'[45] generates a series of *asmā'*. These Names are expressions which detail the undifferentiated divine Essence and are, in themselves, simply conceptual relations (*nisab*) to the Essence.[46] Basically, they are not the Essence, and yet they are nothing more than the Being who is designated by them: they are attributions or ascriptions 'envisaged between God and the cosmos'.[47] When in association with the Essence, these Names are still not differentiated, enjoying a kind of hypostatic existence in God whose Essence they 'share' despite the fact that they are neither existent nor non-existent. In their essential latency, the Names find their ontological status in the realm of the possible (*mumkin*), that is in an intermediate level, between existence and non-existence. The Avicennian distinction between the possible and necessary beings clearly resonates in Ibn ʿArabī's words:

> It is established that the originated is dependent on which that brings it about, for its possibility. Its existence is derived from something other than itself, the connection in this case being one of dependence. It is therefore necessary that that which is the support [of originated existence] should be essentially and necessarily by itself, self-sufficient and independent of any other.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 53)[48]

The *Shaykh al-akbar* shares Avicenna's idea for which the possible nature of a thing never abandons it, despite its being put into existence. In a sense, the notion of the *wujūb bi'l-ghayr* is implied in Ibn ʿArabī's statement: 'Know that the cosmos is everything "other than God" and it is nothing but the "possible things", either they exist or they do not exist . . . The status of *mumkin* is inherent in them either they exist or not'.[49] It is simple to understand why the possible being comes to be invested with the concept of 'immutability' (*thubūt*) due to this very unchangeable essential condition.[50] In easier terms it can be said that what pertains to the possible thing is an immutable essence (*ʿayn thābita*), and the qualification of being 'something' in its own status of non-existence.[51]

Once set in relation with the Attributes-meanings they bear, the Names abandon their undifferentiating nature and become distinguished from each other.[52] All divine Names have their correspondent Attribute-realities through which they are differentiated from each other and by which the Names find their *loci* of disclosure. The divine Names, in turn, enshrine and particularize the divine Essence (as Absolute Ipseity) since they are different aspects of the same and only divine Reality. Despite the unicity of Being, in fact, it is possible to distinguish within the absolute Essence of God various degrees of entifications or determinations (*taʿayyunāt*). Particularly, it is possible to find at the level of God's *wāḥidiyya*, that is the stage in which the divine Essence, in itself, is considered in connection with the multiplicity of its internal relations, all the possible things and their essences which are identified with the immutable entities (*aʿyān thābita*). These represent the eternal archetypes of everything which is manifested in the cosmos. These archetypes designate ideas which express God's foreknowledge of how His Essence will become disclosed in particular situations. They are 'moments of eternity', determinations perpetually existing *ab intra* in God's absolute Essence at the level of His unity.[53] Ibn ʿArabī speaks of the immutable prototypes as the 'determinations of a location' and describe them as:

> Nothing other than the immutable essence in respect of which the Reality is diversified within the theatre [of His Self-revelation]. These locational determinants seem to diversify Him, but it is He Who absorbs every determinant, He Himself being determined only by His Own Self-manifestation. There is naught but He.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 79)[54]

The immutable entities are simply the Attributes in their functions as *loci manifestationis*. They are not yet diversified as such and lay hidden within the divine Essential undifferentiation.

From the one to the many: Hints of Avicennian determinism

The Oneness of the divine Reality (*Ḥaqiqa*), desiring to know Itself and to be known through the realities of Its Names, splits itself into the subject of knowledge and its object. This separation which constitutes the first source of differentiation

and relationship, finds its explanation in the well-known *ḥadīth qudsī* dear to all Sufis: 'I was a hidden treasure and I longed to be known, so I created the world that I might be known.'[55] This *ḥadīth* has its origins in the mystical understanding of divine love and beauty, which has already been discussed in this book in connection to the Avicennian construct. Ibn ʿArabī draws from the mystical tradition which looks at creation as a necessity for God's desire to be loved, and applies it to his idea for which creation is a mirror for divine manifestation, namely, God's possibility to be known through His manifestations (*tajalliyyāt*). Particularly, Ibn ʿArabī, following the footsteps of al-Ghazālī, shifts the discourse from the domain of love to that of knowledge and links the *homo imago Dei* motif to the analogy occurring between the microcosm (man) and the macrocosm (the world). The theme which acknowledges that man has been created in the image of God, thus encompassing in himself the whole of creation, was already explored by Plato, the Stoics, the Neoplatonists the Gnostics and particularly developed among the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. This suggests that the polarization occurring between God, in His quality as 'the knower', on the one hand, and man/world/creation, as 'the known' and as the result of God's Self-disclosure, on the other hand, unleashes 'the primordial Self-consciousness of God'.[56] Basically, through the creation of the cosmos, which is reflected in the complex nature of the human being, the first divine determination (*al-taʿayyun al-awwal*) occurs. The latter, however, distinguishes itself from the divine Essence only in a logical and conceptual way, but not in reality, since the Essence that knows Itself continues to be the same and only divine Essence (*huwa ʿayn al-dhāt*) and nothing else. Consequently, knowledge and knowledge's object coincide. This equals to saying that, according to Ibn ʿArabī, Being is identical with God's knowledge and that 'creation' becomes synonymous with knowledge. All things subsisting in a latent status in God's Essence become 'creation', that is they enter actuality, only at the very moment God 'becomes' conscious of them through His Self-manifestation. As Richard Nicholson states, the creation of things only means that God is knowing these things.[57] Reciprocally, it can be stated that the world-creation attains existence at 'every moment from the "Hidden Treasure" that wishes to reveal its riches'.[58]

Some similarities can be drawn between Ibn ʿArabī and Avicenna's notion of knowledge, conceived as a creative knowledge. The notion of creative knowledge is particularly explicit in Avicenna's emanative scheme whose 'functionality', it has been shown, depends on the awareness that God and the intellects have both of their respective roles and of their reciprocal relations. Such awareness acts as the 'efficient cause' of their 'actions'. According to the *Shaykh al-akbar*, God's Self-knowledge depends on the created realities which are used by God as *loci manifestationis*. These realities (or Attributes) allow the inner divine identity (the undifferentiated Names) to be disclosed and subtracted from that self-ignorance which is entailed in their previous stage of non-createdness. Hence, similarly to Avicenna, for the *Shaykh al-akbar* too God's knowledge is a creative knowledge, and His activity is ultimately 'regulated' by the nature of divinely derived tools of manifestation which correspond, in the Avicennian system, to the intellects of the emanative scheme. Ibn ʿArabī's position

also reflects the Avicennian notion for which potentiality occurs exclusively at the very moment the possible being is set into existence by the Necessary Existent. In the Akbarian construct, God knows Himself through His Names only at the very moment of their entification *via* their respective Attributes. Moreover, God's Self-knowledge, that is, the knowledge of the Names' need for realities, opens the door for the inner divine potentiality to be disclosed, making gnosis the cause of ontological realization.

Supreme Unity is incomparable and cannot be known simultaneously with the world. This equals to saying that the divine *aḥadiyya* is the object of divine knowledge only. Conversely, divine Unicity (*wāḥidiyya*) is in connection with the cosmos because, in it, the cosmos appears revealed in a 'divine way'. It should be kept in mind that in each of His innumerable aspects, God reveals Himself in a unique manner and that all of His aspects are always within the divine nature.[59] With the first determination, known as 'first theophany' (*al-tajallī al-awwal*), the divine knowledge manifests the Essence to Itself through its exclusive *aḥadiyya*. This means that the first determination 'awakes' the Essence and becomes the receptacle for the manifestation of the Essence to Itself. At a specific stage in the process of divine Self-knowledge/Self-manifestation, the multiplicity of relations, identified with the Names, starts to emerge: these are the immediate result of the distinction which is produced with the first determination and by which the divine Essence establishes itself as a Unique Entity (*al-ʿayn al-wāḥida*). God's knowledge of Himself, in Himself and through Himself, allows the differentiation of all the other qualifications pertaining to Him, and divine knowledge becomes the principium (the Avicennian efficient cause) of all things. The latter are, in turn, determinations of what is embraced within God's knowledge.[60] Only at this second level divine knowledge manifests the Essence to Itself through its actions-tasks (*shuʾūn*). These are nothing different from the divine Attributes which correspond to the essential realities of things (*ḥaqāʾiq al-ashyāʾ*). At this stage, the divine Attributes are differentiated and unfolded within the 'presence of the [divine] knowledge' (*al-ḥadra al-ʿilmiyya*) through an act of divine effusion which is called by Ibn ʿArabī 'the most holy effusion' (*al-fayḍ al-aqdas*).[61] A successive effusion, called 'holy effusion' (*al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*), witnesses the call which the Names, in the Divine Presence, put forth in order to receive epiphanic receptacles (*maẓāhir*). These are needed by the Names to be differentiated within their respective Attributes. Fundamentally, the holy effusion allows the passage of the Attributes from the status of immutable entities to the status of existentiated things (*mawjūdāt*). It is evident that in this process of successive emanations the bestowal of existence cannot be read in terms of a temporal creation; it is rather, Nasr explains, 'an effusion of being upon the heavenly archetypes'.[62] Similarly to the Avicennian emanation, the possibilities of manifestation are arranged following a logical succession, but, far from being the emotionless Avicennian *fayḍ*, this process expresses the Reality's passionate yearning to be known.[63] These effusing occurrences take place through a process which is reminiscent of the Avicennian enactment of the possible things that, permanent in their ontological status as possible beings, step into the realm of existence becoming necessary by something else.

In the Akbarian universe, existents constitute the cosmos as everything 'other than God' (*kullu mā siwā Allāh*) and fulfil their scope to become the *loci* for the theophanic manifestation. It is clear that God's plan to be known finds its means of actualization within the divine nature and its emanated constituents:

> The Reality gave existence to the whole Cosmos [at first] as an undifferentiated thing without anything of the spirit in it . . . It is in the nature of divine determination that He does not set out a location except to receive a divine spirit . . . There is only that which is receptive and the receptive has been only from the most Holy Superabundance [of the Reality], for all power to act [all initiative] is from Him, in the beginning and at the end. All command derives from Him, even as it begins with Him.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 49)[64]

The above passage reminds of the Avicennian concept of matter's receptiveness and its deterministic underpinnings. It has been shown that God's absolute perfection 'compels' the Avicennian deity to emanate the world, such a natural necessity being enacted by God's purposeless will and His Self-knowledge as the Cause of causes. In very similar terms, for the *Shaykh al-akbar*, it is from the divine Superabundance, 'the bursting fullness [of the essential realities in the undifferentiated essence]' that the need for the cosmos arises. It is from the divine perfect plenitude 'that [God] breathed forth [the primordial creative Word *kun*]',[65] and it is through the receptiveness of beings, as *loci manifestationis*, that 'creation' finds its way to be disclosed and its reason to be actualized. It must be emphasized that, if on the one hand, it is God's Self-determination that necessitates the *loci* of manifestation, since nothing comes into being other than locations, that is, the Avicennian substrata, which are able to receive the divine existentiating command, on the other hand, the nature of all created beings is determined by their necessary receptivity of the inexhaustible overflowing of God's Self-revelation. This clearly suggests that it is the nature of things which enacts determinism as well as the release of existence.

Divine 'creation'

Ibn ʿArabī's idea of creation finds its core in the undifferentiated and potential nature of the Names together with their need to locate, within created beings (i.e. their respective Attributes), their receptacles of individualization. It is only through 'creation' that the Names are particularized, through the realities, and become 'existent'. It is evident that these Names are to be seen as agents, prompting divine 'creation', because it is due to the Names' desire to be differentiated and manifest that God bestows existence. In effect, God's absolute Essence, dissociated from His Names is always 'Independent of the World' (Q. 3:97).[66] What Ibn ʿArabī's calls 'creation' is simply a bestowal of existence or, rather, the linguistic expression which indicates the manifestation of a process of emanation. It is the stricture which is imposed by the human language that forces men to use expressions like 'creation' or 'emanation' but, in reality, these have to be taken

cautiously because Ibn ʿArabī rebukes the thought that possible things might truly acquire existence. In effect, things remain eternally non-existent as all realities are, ultimately only God (*Ḥaqq*) and 'realities do not change (*al-ḥaqāʾiq lā tatabaddal*)'.[67] What is truly 'acquirable' by the entities is not existence as such, but the property of becoming *loci* of manifestation for the only Real Existent. These *loci* are intended as the particular forms within which the divine Self-disclosure comes to be displayed in the world through God's Name 'the Manifest' according to specific situations, that is, according to the variety of receptors fragmenting the Manifest in the plurality of God's Names.[68]

Creatures are never really created; the creation *ex nihilo* of the theologians cannot ever be real since creation is merely manifestation of the eternal Essence which lays in a latent potentiality within the eternal knowledge of God. Creatures never acquire existence of their own, for existence belongs always to God. They continue to be merely possibilities even though divided between potential possibilities, which are still latent in the divine undifferentiated Essence, and actual ones, which are manifested through the divine Names in the divine Attributes.[69] Paradoxically, Titus Burckhardt has emphasized that in Ibn ʿArabī's thought it is still possible to perceive some 'creationistic' parameters. In fact, even if the notion of creation *ex nihilo* implies the negation of the pre-existence of all the possible things in the divine Essence and their permanence in it, it can still be brought near to the concept of manifestation. This occurs if it is considered that the metaphysical significance of nothingness (*ʿadam*), from which the Creator draws things *ex nihilo*, is no different from the concept of non-existence, the latter being a synonymous of non-manifestation.[70] Such a stance immediately reminds of Avicenna's endeavours to blend the idea of creation with that of emanation; it has been observed that Avicenna accomplished this by using the concept of privation and, specifically, the privation of something with readiness and preparation (*tahayyuʾ wa-istiʿdād*) for the reception of existence. Divine creation had become for the *Shaykh al-raʾīs* the imparting of existence upon what previously lacked it, a concept which sufficed to grant God with the capacity to exercise His predetermining power exclusively by way of bestowing existence on possible beings.

In order to understand Ibn ʿArabī's view on creation and on the divine responsibility in determining the readiness and preparation of entities to receive 'existence', it is worth quoting two extracts from the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam* in which Ibn ʿArabī offers his definitions on *qaḍāʾ* and *qadar*. He explains that the divine decree is 'God's determination of things which is according to what He knows of them, in them, since His knowledge of things is dependent on what that which may be known gives to Him from what they are [eternally] in themselves'.[71] Destiny, on the other end, is defined by the *Shaykh* as:

> The precise timing of [the manifestation and annihilation of] things as they are essentially. For the Determiner, in actualizing His determination, complies with the essence of the object of His determination in accordance with the requirements of its essential nature.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 131)[72]

According to these passages, the divine determination of things occurs according to God's knowledge which selects, in specific times, which one, amongst the possible things (*mumkināt*), may be worth of manifestation. This idea, despite suggesting a Ghazālian predestinarian perspective by way of stressing the pervasiveness of the divine activity in determining things, is in reality much more akin to the Avicennian motif of natural determinism. According to Ibn ʿArabī, in God's eternal knowledge, all the possible things are what they are since eternity because they are immutable. Their immutability depends on the fact that, for the Real Existent, knowledge follows the object of knowledge and it is limited to what is known. Knowledge and foreknowledge coincide because, ultimately, all possible things are the immutable entities. With creation, which is intended as the bestowal of *wujūd*, God does not make the realities what they are since they remain immutable and unchanged from what they were in the undifferentiated divine Unity. This means that God does neither determine nor shape the present or future conditions of 'existents' because their realities remain the same from always and forever.[73] This implies that the selection which is made by the divine knowledge, choosing which possibilities may become manifested or annihilated, is always in accordance with the natures, that is, the immutable entities-prototypes of the same possible things.[74] It is ultimately the properties of the immutable entities to qualify and quantify their destiny, namely, to qualify and quantify the *qadar*, or the 'measure', of knowledge that God can attain of them. Considering that what God knows is what God 'creates', it is clear that it is the immutable prototypes' nature that receives 'existence' in harmony with their level of readiness and preparedness to receive it. It is the *aʿyān thābita* which determine the knowledge that God has of them, with divine knowledge being indirectly responsible for the determination of their manifestation. In short, it is the immutable nature of the possible manifestations which determines their destiny.

The already-mentioned theory for which every essential determination is logically preceded by a status of non-determination substantiates this idea: after all, the possible things are distinct due to their own limitations, in their being self-determinations or 'subjectivities' (*ta'ayyunāt*) of the divine Essence. When Ibn ʿArabī speaks of essences or predispositions, he is really talking about the 'limits' or the 'lack of being' by which one thing is characterized with respect to any other 'existent'. These determinations select for themselves, and are limited within themselves, with regards to the degree of manifestation and existence of which they are worthy of. This 'worthiness' is according to their predispositions which prompts God's acts and His choice to put them into existence, in harmony with what their essences demand. The issue of free will and predestination seems to have no validity in this context given that God's choice in nothing different from the existents' choice; however, it is important to develop this concept further. The distinction between the Essence and the immutable entities allows one to think of divine manifestation according to two complementary relations: first, that of the *ta'ayyunāt* of the Essence; second, that of the divine *tajalliyyāt* which occurs within the former subjectivities.[75] In the first instance, the Real 'implodes' and the Essence is conceived, as Titus Burckhardt claims, 'per integration', because it is

unique in any manifested possibility.[76] With the second case, the Real 'explodes', His Essence touching upon the confines of its uniqueness without causing any substantial emanation, because ultimately there is nothing outside it. The Real's manifestations in fact, continue to be encompassed within the confines of its Oneness. Consequently, the deity cannot be credited with the paradoxical task of seizing His unlimitedness and to determine His own indeterminateness with regards to His Essence. This means that what God knows, and chooses, is what He is given to know by the knowledge of His own determinations. Divine knowledge can only be 'metaphorically' accountable for selecting which *ta'ayyunāt* will become *mawjūdāt* since their formation is already embedded in the nature of the determinations as immutable entities. In truth, God's compulsion to choose what its own reality selects for Him (through His determinations) demonstrates that God is beyond freedom or compulsion in the way we, as humans, understand these terms:

> None has any act save God, and no act occurs in *wujūd* by choice, for the choices known in the cosmos derive from compulsion itself, so all are compelled in their choices. In the true act there is no compulsion and no choice, because it is required by the Essence.
>
> (Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 70)[77]

Ibn ʿArabī's idea that the nature of divine knowledge is shaped by 'what is known' shows that his view on *qaḍā'* and *qadar* resonates with what had been previous attempts of compromises between *kalāmic* stances and Aristotelian outlooks. The Avicennian and Ghazālīan endeavours to harmonize the notion of emanation with that of creation is superseded by the *Shaykh al-akbar*'s ideas on the Reality. In a sense, Ibn ʿArabī speaks inconsistently of creation or emanation because he believes that there can never be actual emanation or real creation since God can neither refrain nor contain His endless possibilities within the confines of specific existential manifestations, or specific linguistic expressions. This would delimit God's unbounded essential magnitude because, as Annemarie Schimmel observes, the Absolute Reality is certainly all that exists but, at the same time, 'something more dynamic than mere existence'.[78] Whilst existence, in itself, conveys the idea of something which is realized and, hence, limited by its own essence, the Akbarian absolute *Wujūd* is plenitude of possibilities; it is an infinite and transforming energy; it is an implosive and explosive force which is open to the illimitability of ultimate, inextinguishable and unadulterated Oneness.

Divine knowledge

'Creation' allows God to know things under the guise of His Essence's specifications at the very moment of God's Self-disclosure. God's Self-knowledge, as detailed knowledge of His Names, 'occurs' simultaneously with the formation of His attributes. Hence, God knows things *as* Him because knowledge of things is *through* knowledge of Himself or rather, knowledge of things *is* knowledge of Himself.

Ibn ʿArabī shares the same Avicennian idea for which divine knowledge is creative, but in contrast to Avicenna, this knowledge cannot be seen as the *cause* of things as it is subordinated to them. It is not only the cosmos which is subordinated to the divine science, as the cosmos is now what it is eternally in the divine knowledge but, in turn, divine knowledge itself is subordinated to what is known. God knows the creatures according to their 'ideal' nature, retained in their status as immutable entities as he himself clarifies: '[God's] knowledge of them is according to what they are themselves [in their essential essences]',[79] together with the whole range of their possible developments in reality which is imprinted in their original nature. Furthermore, the *Shaykh* explains:

> [God's Knowledge] is dependent on the object of His knowledge, which constitutes you and your essential status. Knowledge has no effect on the object of knowledge, while what is known has an effect on knowledge, bestowing on it of itself what it is.
>
> (Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 83)[80]

Consequently, divine knowledge, which is immutable and, as such, foreknowledge since eternity, does not affect the nature of things as it does not bear the responsibility of determining their future. The essence of things, in their multiple forms, is an immutable hidden meaning (*al-maʿnā al-mabtūn*) that is possessed by the properties which are in God Himself. Moreover, borrowing from the *mutakallimūn*s' parlance, Ibn ʿArabī claims that, 'though the forms [in God] display variation, they have no effect upon the Self manifested within them, just as substance (*jawhar*) does not cease being substance because of the states and accidents that become manifest through it'.[81] The variation in the forms within God's Essence is a mark of the properties of the immutable entities of the possible beings (*aʿyān al-mumkināt al-thābita*). It has been explained above that the properties of the immutable entities qualify and quantify the 'measure' (*qadar* = destiny) of God which they are able to contain within themselves, according to their level of readiness and preparedness. The properties' action of qualifying and quantifying the divine receptivity can, however, ultimately be seen as the activity of both God and the prototypes, as well as an element of God's scheme for Self-disclosure:

> Divine emanation is infinitely vast by virtue of His infinite Providence (*imdād*). There is no deficiency therein. But one obtains of it only that which his essence can accept; and one's essence limits the acceptance of this vastness and so confines one's own capacity. The result is one's own share of His Providence.[82]

Divine *imdād* establishes that each thing must be receptive of God's providence; this is the same providence which makes emanation unlimited. Divine *qaḍā'*, which is engrained in the emanative scheme and it is necessitated by divine need to be known, includes also the possibility that things may be receptive of the divine providence. This is classifiable as providence exactly because it is 'measured' or

'controlled' by one's capacity, rather than being capriciously imposed by God. Ibn ʿArabī draws here from the Muʿtazilite notion of '*taklīf mā lā yuṭāq*', also following Avicenna's footsteps in his idea that determinism equates destiny. Ibn ʿArabī also states that every form is shaped (*taswiyya*) and balanced (*taʿdīl*) by God in a manner which is appropriate to it and to its station and its state. This occurrence takes place before composition (*tarkīb*), that is, before the form's combination (*ijtimāʿ*) with what it carries.[83] This statement would lead one to think that the degree of receptivity of the immutable entities is established prior to God's Self-manifestation in their respective forms. Here, Ibn ʿArabī refers to the idea for which the immutable entities' inner capacity to affect the destiny of existing things does it always in accordance with the divine providential decree (i.e. the 'share of His Providence' quoted in the above passage) which imposes measurement and limitation upon existents.

Causality in relation to good and evil

The divine Names become the support for the existentiation of the *loci* within which their effects are manifested. These *loci* are ultimately the attributes (or tasks) as accomplished realizations (*kā'ināt, mukawwanāt*) of the divine Names' effects.[84] On the one hand, all Names can be seen as 'interpreters' of the divine Essence, whilst the latter the *Shaykh* explains, 'stays winded through the veil of inaccessibility, supreme guard in Its unity and its ipseity'.[85] On the other hand, the Names also become the tools for understanding the connection between God and the cosmos. Every Name is in fact a *barzakh*, that is, an isthmus between God and the universe.[86] Ibn Arabī describes the divine Names not simply as relations, but also as primordial keys (*al-mafātih al-awwal*), unlocking the creation of the world, because 'to any reality corresponds a divine Name which is proper to it and constitutes its Lord'.[87] This means that each entified thing is related to a specific Name in terms similar to the relationship occurring between a servant and his lord.

When Ibn Arabī speaks of the Names as the properties of the effects of the preparedness of the entities he is carefully avoiding trapping the role of these Names under the label of causes (of creation). In fact, in the whole Akbarian production the use of the notion 'cause', even if not entirely absent, is rare and problematic. This is a logical consequence of Ibn Arabī's 'oneness of Being' for which any effective distinction between causes and effects is ultimately made impossible.[88] God Himself is never addressed directly as the Cause of all things, but He is rather 'the Creator of the effects and the [secondary] causes',[89] a definition placed halfway between the Ashʿarite vision of God as the Creator and the philosophical 'accommodating' outlook of God as the *musabbib al-asbāb*.Ibn ʿArabī acknowledges the difficulties one has to face in crediting causality to God, but this does not impede him to discuss causality as such. He does so by referring to the philosophers' interpretation of this concept. He begins his analysis by taking into account the expression 'The Real through which creation occurs' (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi*). The *Shaykh* declares to have borrowed the expression from the writings of ʿAbd al-Salām Ibn Barājan of Seville (d. 536/1141)[90] and offers a comment which is self-explicative and for this reason worth to be reported here in full:

> They [the philosophers] have interpreted [the expression] the Real through which creation occurs in two meanings. Some of them make this Real . . . identical with the cause of creation. But the Real's creation cannot be assigned a cause; this is what is correct in itself, so much so that in Him nothing can be rationally conceived of that would require the causation of this creation of His that becomes manifest. On the contrary, His creation of the creatures is a gratuitous favour toward the creatures and a beginning of bounty, and He is independent of the worlds. Others make this Real through which creation occurs an existent entity through which God created what is apart from Him. These are those who say that 'Nothing proceeds from the One save one' and that the procession of this one is the procession of an effect from a cause, a cause that demands that procession. As for this – in it is what is in it. As for me, I say, When God's command comes (40:78), the Commander is the Command, and this is the *tawḥīd* of Him who possesses the command. So associate not, for association is a proven wrongdoing, a wrongdoing that all have condemned.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 355)[91]

In this passage, criticism is addressed to the Peripatetic as well as the Neoplatonic philosophers who have mistakenly associated God, respectively, with the direct cause of creation, and the cause of the first effected being brought into existence (i.e. the first intellect in the emanative chain). Ibn ʿArabī responds to their positions by stressing the concepts of divine unity and unicity which contravene any form of associationism. In another passage of the *Futūhāt*, the *Shaykh* a*l-akbar* criticizes the philosophers' belief in the eternity of the cosmos, also denouncing their disapproval of the theory of occasionalism which explains the Ashʿarite view on God's never-ceasing creation:

> How should the cosmos have eternity? It has no entrance into the self-necessity of *wujūd* . . . Were eternity affirmed for the cosmos, nonexistence would be impossible for it, but nonexistence is possible, or rather, it actually happens for all the cosmos. However, most of the servants are uncertain of a new creation (50:15) . . . Al-Ashʿarī affirmed it [the renewal of the entities] in the accidents but the philosophers imagine that he was the companion of a disease (*ʿilla*), so they considered him ignorant of the black of the Africans and the yellow of gold and thought that his position had led him astray.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, IV, p. 378)[92]

Ibn ʿArabī is using the philosophers' distinction between self-necessity and possibility but he is, in actual fact, condemning their way of employing this distinction on the basis that non-existence does not share the self-necessity of *wujūd*. *Wujūd* only occurs in the world at a stage which is prior to the creation of the cosmos. Chittick has explained that Ibn ʿArabī takes into consideration the terms *ʿilla* and *maʿlūl* as meaning, respectively, both 'cause' and 'effect', and 'infirmity' or 'infirm'.[93] It is to the second significance of *ʿilla* that the *Shaykh* refers to in

the above passage when he speaks about al-Ashʿarī and the fact that he was seen by the philosophers as the 'companion of a disease'.[94] This is an emphatic way to address al-Ashʿarī's view of God as the only real Cause and his theory which considered God as constantly renewing creation, through the occasionalistic perpetual formation of atoms and accidents. The philosophers were critical of al-Ashʿarī because of his incapacity to recognize that the nature of things could be seen as the real cause of action and, for this reason, they denounced al-Ashʿarī, the *Shaykh* poetically emphasizes, as being 'ignorant of the black of the African and the yellow of gold'.

It has been observed that, for Avicenna, the very logical existence of causes implies the necessary and simultaneous existence of their correspondent effects. This led him and his followers to stress that God is coeternal with the world. Surprisingly, despite his theory of the immutable prototypes, seen as responsible for the future creation which is present in God's knowledge from eternity, Ibn ʿArabī rejects the concept of the eternality of the world. In his opinion, the divine Names which are presented in the Qurʾān defining God as the 'Prior' and 'Posterior' serve as testimony to the impossibility for the world to be eternal.[95] In Ibn ʿArabī's view, the identification of God with the 'Cause' of existents would suggest that God is in a necessary relation with His own creation, thus contradicting His Essence as 'the Independent of the Worlds'. However, Ibn ʿArabī like al-Ghazālī, does not deny causality as such, and admits the existence of causes and effects even acknowledging that, in order to speak of cause and effect, one must admit that the coexistence of causes and effects is necessary. Initially, Ibn ʿArabī claims that this necessary connection can be such only when the causes and effects are considered within the confines of the cosmos, without allusion to God and His Essence, because this dispenses God from being referred to as a Cause:

> It is not correct for the Real to be our cause, since He was when I was not . . . No cause is separate from its effect just as no signifier is separate from the signified. Were this to become separate from that, it would be not a signifier, nor would the other be a causer.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, IV, p. 373)

However, a closer examination reveals that, since the cosmos is nothing else but the engendered manifestation of God's tasks, for Ibn ʿArabī, even the divine acts cannot be identified as causes:

> It is not appropriate that the Real's acts be assigned causes, for there is no cause that makes necessary the engendering of a thing save the very *wujūd* of the Essence and the fact that the entity of the possible thing is a receptacle for the manifestation of *wujūd*.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 64)[96]

Nonetheless, the *Shaykh* is still willing to speak of causes and identifies 'causal' elements in the possible things' entities, particularly, in their receptivity of the

manifestation of *wujūd*. It is imperative to note that Ibn ʿArabī does not state that the possible thing is the receptacle for existence. More accurately, it is its entity, that is, the engendered thing which still preserves its possible nature – corresponding to the Avicennian effect (*maʿlūl*) – which is responsible, in its quality as a *locus*, not for existence directly, but for the manifestation of *wujūd* within it. The existentiated thing does not 'contain' God (God equalling Existence), but is exclusively the surface which reflects the divine manifestation (God's image). The idea that a thing may function as a place of manifestation for the only One Reality explains why Ibn ʿArabī faces the causalistic concept of agency by referring to the notion of permeation of the Reality. Basically, what he intends to say is that whilst all beings are essentially nothing but God's contents of the knowledge that He has of Himself, God is, in turn, the all-permeating substance in respect to which existents are simple *loci* of manifestation. Engendered things remain always possible, and their possibility of manifestation becomes a synonymous of their capacity to be receptive of the divine *tajalliyyāt*. This receptivity turns out to be the Avicennean 'distant cause' which allows the coming into being of all possible existents.

The Akbarian notion of God's boundless existential and essential pervasiveness echoes the Ghazālīan perspective of divine omnipotence which defines God as the only Real Agent. Due to His pervasiveness, God becomes the subject and object of any activity, and this bears witness to the fact that divine omnipotence is not limited by anything, since there is nothing outside it. It is clear that, through the notion of permeation, Ibn ʿArabī is actually compromising between the Avicennian notion of substantial receptivity and the Ghazālīan idea of divine omnipotence, which have been analysed earlier in this study. The notion of permeation also implies that it is necessary to assume a sort of separation between what permeates and what is permeated, namely, between what causes the permeation and what is effected by it.[97] In relation to the only One Existent, division and separation occur with respect to the divine Names which have already been presented as isthmuses connecting the cosmos with the only One Reality. Although they are not classified as 'causes' per se, it is only through the Names, as the distinctive properties of the Real, that the relation between God and the world, in terms of causality, might have some sense. This is because the Names allow a distinction between themselves and the divine Essence which they name. Notwithstanding the validity of these stances, the *Shaykh* warns his readers on the dangers to identifying God as the Cause *par excellence* by saying that 'the properties of the Real in His servants' (the servants corresponding to the Ghazālīan instruments, i.e. the 'through' by 'which creation occurs'), 'are not given causes, but He is the [one] intended through aspirations and hopes'.[98] In order to fully understand this statement it is important to highlight that Ibn ʿArabī's causal view on reality oscillates between the Avicennian and the Ghazālīan stances on the argument. It has already been mentioned that Ibn ʿArabī, intermittently, acknowledges that, should one wish to talk about causes and effects, it is necessary to refer to a relation occurring between them. On some other occasions, however, Ibn ʿArabī seems to be inclined to prove the Ghazālīan denial of the necessary connection between causes (Names) and effects (Attributes), stating that their relation is meant to be understood as that of

the condition to the conditioned. He declares: 'No one professes the cause except those ignorant of what proofs bestow. The firm and fastened affair lies in the knowledge of the condition and the conditioned.'[99] Ibn ʿArabī makes his point on the issue particularly when speaks of the human soul:

> Its ruler is one . . . and nothing moves in the body save by its knowledge and will . . . All this is an indication that the world must have a Ruler . . . Who is aware of what is happening in His kingdom, capable of causing it to happen.
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Shajarat al-Kawn*, p. 122)[100]

Clearly, the *Shaykh al-akbar* shares al-Ghazālī's idea for which any action happens, following the activity of both knowledge and will, just as the conditioned follows the condition. The condition-conditioned relation makes it necessary to believe in a Ruler who is also an Arranger because He has full knowledge of His actions and full awareness of the results of His acts (including particulars!). Moreover, similarly to the view al-Ghazālī offers in the *Mishkāt*, Ibn ʿArabī claims that the divine Names, although accountable for triggering divine creation, cannot be held responsible for it in proper philosophical causal terms because their essence is not different from that of their 'effects' or Attributes. Names and Attributes, inextricably correlated, are, in fact, nothing but the divine Reality which is glanced at through the Reality's Essences (Names) that are differentiated through the Reality's Actions (Attributes).

Astonishingly, despite these Ghazālīan-like observations, Ibn ʿArabī's notion of causality seems to be very much influenced also by the Aristotelian notion for which nothing occurs in vain. When he declares that 'God did not establish the secondary causes aimlessly',[101] Ibn ʿArabī suggests that the Names are meant to be perceived as 'secondary causes' through which humans are given the chance to comprehend God, fulfilling His plan to be known. The divine desire to be known is realizable only through God's fulfilling the Names' yearning (the mentioned 'aspirations and hopes') towards the entification of their *loci* for manifestation. Subtle Avicennian influences on the notion of causality can also be detected: in Avicenna's opinion, the necessary relation between cause and effect is something humans can experience through sense perception. Conversely, al-Ghazālī considered the latter as being insufficient to prove that effects are brought about *through* their causes, simply showing they take place *with* them. According to Ibn ʿArabī, men are given the possibility to *experience* that the Names can be identified as secondary causes and that their function is that of concealing the nature of God as the real Cause. The Names are causes simultaneously hiding and revealing God's Essence; this explains their nature as veils (*ḥujub*). As Chittick puts it, for the *Shaykh al-akbar*, secondary causes are veils 'inasmuch as they prevent us from seeing God, though they alert us to the fact that God is hidden behind them'.[102] The veils are, therefore, indispensable reminders that to God belongs the only Real Existence.

To conclude it might be argued that secondary causes cannot be denied; similarly to al-Ghazālī, for the *Shaykh* a*l-akbar* it is pre-eminently the instrumental

usage of causes, that is, their function as *barzakhs* or veils between the Real and the cosmos, which makes their concept to be acceptable and useful. Nonetheless, surprisingly, the Avicennian notion of causes which necessitate specific effects, i.e. the receptivity of the Names allowing the manifestation of the divine tasks, becomes indispensable in Ibn ʿArabī's perception of Reality in which the logical speculations of both the theologians and the philosophers succumb to experiential Gnosticism: it is indispensable to talk about causes because it is through them that humans can discern what Real Existence is. Causes are necessary also because it is through them that humans differentiate between good and evil. Like for earlier Sufis, Ibn ʿArabī's view of good and evil too is informed by both theological and philosophical outlooks. So the Ashʿarite theological views for which everything is the result of God's activity and for which the divine revelation renders good and evil relative terms, truly befits the notion of the *waḥdat al-wujūd* and its premise asserting that what humans perceive it is just a circumscribed aspect of the Reality. Ibn ʿArabī understands evil also, in more explicit Neoplatonic terms, as a synonymous of non-existence and as the manifestation of what has no entity in reality. Like the Neoplatonic philosophers, Ibn ʿArabī links evil, in its ontological quality (*amr wujūdī*), to the world of generation and corruption which is characterized by the imperfection of lacking existence.[103] In contrast to the Real Existent, in fact, creatures, as 'immutable entities dwelling in non-existence', are closely related to evil. It is by entering existence that the entities are dragged out of evil. Like in Avicenna's case, the possible nature of all things is sufficient to blemish them, 'staining' them with accidental evil, as Ibn ʿArabī poetically explains:

> There is no evil in the Root. By whom are then evils supported? For the cosmos is in the grasp of Sheer Good, which is complete Being. But nonexistence gazes upon the possible thing, so in that measure is attributed to it the evil that it is attributed to it. In its essence the possible thing does not possess the property of the Being which is Necessary through Its own Essence, and this is why evil presents itself to the possible thing.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 315)[104]

Even if there is no evil in the Root of the cosmos, the latter possesses the property of possibility and, because the cosmos fails to share God's necessary Essence, it allows evil to occur. The only solution against the threat of accidental evil is to find 'shelter' in existence. When looked in themselves, the entities of the existent things are neither good nor evil; what God has actualized in existence is susceptible of being classified according to the relativity of human parameters which identify 'evil' or 'good' in harmony with their personal understanding of these concepts. In addition, the human judgement is contingent on whether the reality of 'good' or 'evil' things is, in accordance to what is sought. The *Shaykh* explains that a thing is classified as 'good' or as 'evil' if it is agreeable or disagreeable in respect of someone's expectations and desires, and whether the thing is evaluated as perfect or imperfect. In fact, evil is defined as nothing but 'nonexistence of perfection, nonexistence of agreeableness and nonexistence of reaching one's own individual

desire'.[105] All these 'non-existences' are relationships and, hence, Names to be looked at as secondary causes, whilst the only real agent of every good which becomes manifest in the cosmos is exclusively the Real Existent. This is because from the Perfection of existence nothing can derive but sheer goodness.

Those aware that good and evil are merely relative relationships are the Gnostics. This explains why in the *Shaykh*'s paradigm, similarly to what observed in al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt*, the moral preoccupation of the wayfarer rests no longer with the theological imperative to distinguish between good or evil, but with the need to ascend from ignorance to knowledge. Hence, the ultimate mystical moral experience consists in the challenge of becoming a Gnostic, a knower (*ʿārif*).[106] The attainment of this status has ethical repercussions: it is through the experiential knowledge of ultimate *tawḥīd* that the seeker realizes not only, like the Ashʿarite believed, that there is no good or evil to choose from, since everything has been predetermined by the divine omnipotent activity; not only, like the philosophers thought, that what comes into actualization must be ultimately good because it is determined by God's nature and His emanation, but, above all, that there is nothing else other than the One Reality and that, for this reason, good and evil are irrelevant notions. Consequently, given that there is nothing but the Real, humans appear incapable of making moral choices. Humans' responsibility in 'choosing' between 'good' and 'evil' appears to be limited to their ultimate participation in the divine Oneness, that is, in their role as latent archetypes of the Reality.

Divine will

Afīfī has shown that Ibn ʿArabī discusses divine voluntarism under two aspects, already encountered in the Ghazālīan system, which are derived from the theories of the Muʿtazilites and the Ashʿarites: (i) the Will (*mashī'a*) namely, the eternal power of God which determines in all things the endless possibility of becoming, corresponding to the volitional aspect of the Ghazālīan view of God), and (ii) the Wish (*irāda*) namely, that through which God brings into manifestation the possible things, corresponding to the 'temporal' choosing aspect of the Ghazālīan divine purposive will.[107] Ibn ʿArabī identifies the former with the creative command (*al-amr al-takwīnī*), and the latter with the prescriptive or obligating command (*al-amr al-taklīfī*).

As it has been previously mentioned, the majority of humans, compelled by their own relativity and driven by self-interests, are called to discern what is good or evil in the secondary causes. At the same time, they are expected to be aware of the fact that their point of view is different from God's perspective. They are facilitated in this task by observing the dictates of the divine Law which provides hints of what is divinely imposed. In the Akbarian dimension, the divine Law becomes synonymous of God's prescriptive command, being it identified with the call (*nidā'*) by which God intimates to mankind which action to take. It is by answering or not answering this call that humans bring upon themselves punishment or reward, and it is through the prescriptive command that possibility of disobedience comes forth. However, disobedience, which is seen by Ibn ʿArabī as a consequence of human

activity, exists exclusively according to the limitedness of this world, since it is in the terrestrial realm that the divine Law finds its validity. The authority of the Law ceases with the lifting of its prescription in the hereafter and, consequently, the real condition of a 'disobedient' person in this world will correspond to that of an 'obedient' individual in the next world, because, once the Law has fallen into proscription, there will be no legal transgression to be punishable for.

The prescriptive command and the occurrence of disobedience can be explained because the *taklīfī* command is different from the *takwīnī* command, the latter corresponding to the '*Kun*-Be' by which the cosmos enters existence (essentially, God's Will for creation). The possibility that the two commands may be in conflict is something that can be witnessed in the world, once it is observed that, despite the divine impositions, humans still disobey the divine Law. The experience of this conflict has provided Sufis of all times with the chance to investigate the reasons why humans can still be considered responsible for their actions and accountable for them, notwithstanding the belief that their actions are determined by their predispositions, and that they are compliant with the divine Wish. The *Shaykh* resolves this conflict claiming that, should the two commands contravene each other, it is ultimately the engendering command which is carried out since it can never be truly disobeyed.[108] The impossibility of disobeying the engendering command is due to the fact that the divine Essence, as Real *Wujūd*, is itself the *amr al-takwīnī*. In other terms, the Essence is the efficient and final 'cause' which, by its own nature, makes existentiation of things unavoidable. This is so exclusively because, ultimately, there is nothing else but God and the necessity of His Essence, and for this reason the cosmos, which is nothing but the Real, is compelled to obey His *amr al-takwīnī*.[109] The irrefutable status of obedience which is imposed upon all creatures is, in Ibn Arabī's opinion, established in the Qurʾān: 'Your Lord has decreed (*qaḍā'*) that you should worship no other than Him' (17:23). The decree is therefore not prescriptive and this implies that all creatures, including idolaters, willing it or not, in reality worship God because nothing eludes His unsurpassable will.[110] These stances confirm what has already been observed: from the perspective of the Real, there cannot be actual disobedience because disobedience is a relative idea which depends on the validity of the divine Law in this world. Corollary to this is that, in the hereafter, humans are never culpable and never punishable according to the Law's dictates. In similar terms, there cannot be real punishment for evil actions because, in the end, nothing is but divine Goodness. Ibn Arabī seems here to draw close to Avicenna's naturalization of 'reward' and 'punishment' which have been portrayed as stimulants and deterrents. However, in contrast to Avicenna, for whom the validity of revelation extends in the hereafter – the situation awaiting the soul in the after-life being the natural prolongation of soul's life on earth – for the *Shaykh al-akbar*, the dictates of the Law are only valid on earth and apply exclusively to the rational soul. The part of the soul which has connection with bodily matter, that is, the animal soul, is the only element which is considered responsible for disobedience. More specifically, disobedience is said to occur when the animal soul is not docile and fails to assist the rational soul. However, Ibn ʿArabī stresses, the animal soul is not

addressed by the prescriptions of the Law so that 'if it happens to be recalcitrant, this is required by the nature of its specific constitution'.[111]

Ibn ʿArabī echoes the Gnostic elements present in the Ghazālīan speculations: in spite of the importance of revelation, it is clear that the impositions of the divine Law can be of use once the individual has realized that an authentic moral choice is that of becoming a 'knower' in order to understanding the real meaning of divine *tawḥīd*. Avicennian facets also resonate very clearly: the aspect of the human soul, which is considered responsible for 'bad morals', is the one which is more closely related to matter and its natural recalcitrant tendency to disobey the divine prescriptions. In the end, the *Shaykh al-akbar*, supersedes both al-Ghazālī and Avicenna by stating that, in effect, there cannot be real punishment in the hereafter. Whilst in the worldly domain, the Law can affect human behaviours by way of instructing the commonality of men on the nature of 'good' and 'evil' actions, in truth, the function of the Law is to initiate the Gnostics and make them aware that the essence of the ultimate Reality encompasses and supersedes any ethical classification or distinction.

Notes

1 When Ibn Rushd enquired whether the young mystic had attained through divine inspiration and unveiling the same answers which are found by the philosophers through reason, Ibn ʿArabī replied: 'yes and no; between the "yes" and the "no" the spirits fly from their matter and necks depart from their bodies'. On the meaning of this reply see C. Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*: *The Life of Ibn ʿArabī*, The Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, 1993, p. 37; idem, *The Voyage of No Return*, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2010, p. 16; H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Ṣūfism of Ibn ʿArabī*, trans. Ralph Manheim, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969, pp. 41–3; R.J.W. Austin, *Sufi of Andalusia: The Rūḥ al-Quds and al-Durrat al-fākhirah of Ibn `Arabī*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1971, p. 23. The episode is recounted in *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Cairo: n.p., 1329/1911 reprinted Dār Al-Sāḍir (ed.), Beirut; n.p., 1968 (henceforth *Futūḥāt*), p. 372. In this volume references to the *Futūḥāt* are also taken from the partial critical edition by O. Yahya, Cairo: al-Hay'at al-Miṣriyyat al-'Āmma li'l-Kitāb, 1392/1972, 10 volumes (henceforth *Fut Y*), corresponding to most of volume I of above. The majority of the translations (unless otherwise stated) are from *Les Illuminations de la Meque: The Meccan Illuminations. Texts Choisis/ Selected Texts*, ed. M. Chodkiewicz, with the collaboration of W.C. Chittick et al., Paris: Islam/Sindbad, 1988. Henceforth, *Les Illuminations*.

2 Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, pp. 87–8.

3 M. Chodkiewicz, *Un Ocean sans Rivage. Ibn ʿArabī, Le Livre et la Loi*, Paris: Seuille, 1922, p. 18.

4 It is forbidden (*ḥarām*) to communicate spiritual insights in a way that may be comprehensible for both the common believers and the esoteric élite. See Ibn ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-mīm wa'l-wāw wa'l-nūn* trans. C.A. Gilis, *Le Livre du Mīm, du Wāw et du Nūn*, Paris: Albouraq 2002, p. 59. On Ibn ʿArabī's narrative methods see M.A. Sells, 'Ibn ʿArabi's "Garden amongst the Flames": A Reevaluation', *History of Religions* 23, 1984, pp. 287–315; J.W. Morris, 'Ibn ʿArabi's "Esotericism": The Problem of Spiritual Authority', *Studia Islamica* 71, 1990, pp. 37–64.

5 J.W. Morris, 'How to Study the *Futūḥāt*: Ibn 'Arabī's Own Advice', in S. Hirtenstein and M. Tiernan (eds), Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi: A Commemorative Volume, Brisbane: Element, 1993, p. 74.

6 Occasional protests were advanced against Ibn ʿArabī by contemporary *ʿulamāʾ* such as the Shāfiʿī jurist Ibn ʿAbd al-Salām (d. 660/1262). Committed to Sufism himself, and an admirer of al-Ghazālī and the inspired knowledge of the 'friends' of God, ʿAbd al-Salām accuses the *Shaykh al-akbar* to be a defender of the doctrine of the eternity of the world and a denigrator of the *Sharīʿa* principles. The *Shaykh*'s most severe critics appeared years after his death. Amongst them, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328) denounced Ibn ʿArabī's presumed monistic teachings on many occasions. See Aḥmad ibn ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmūʿat al-rasāʾil wa'l-masāʾil*, 5 vols, reprint of the 1923–1930 Cairo edition, Cairo: Lajnat al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1976, vol. 1, pp. 75–132; pp. 169–90; vol. 4, pp. 3–112. On these topics see also, A.D. Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999, particularly chapter 4, pp. 87–111; M. Chodkiewicz, 'Le Procès posthume d'Ibn ʿArabī', in F. de Jong and B. Radtke (eds), *Islamic Mysticism Contested*: *Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics*, Leiden: Brill, 1999, pp. 93–123.

7 It seems that, in some cases, Ibn ʿArabī made use of the particular technique of the 'dispersion of knowledge' (*tabdīd al-ʿilm*)', through which fragments related to 'sensitive' topics were dismembered and scattered in different places of a text, aiming to conceal the contents of his works from potentially hostile readers. On this topic and its connection to the 'science of the letters' (*ʿilm al-ḥurūf*) in the alchemical writings attributed to Jābir b. Ḥayyān, see the chapter by D. Gril in *Les Illuminations*, pp. 414–15. For the notion of *tabdīd al-ʿilm*, see M.A. Amir-Moezzi, *Le guide divin dans le Shîʿisme Originel*, Lagrasse 1992, index, *taqiyya* and *tabdîd al-ʿilm*, especially p. 307.

8 Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi and the Later Islamic Tradition*, p. 9; Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, 81.

9 Van Ess, 'Sufism and its Opponents', p. 35. Ibn ʿArabī was not particularly fond of any form of institutionalized Sufism as he was convinced that, as Addas words it, 'its development and its spread was the harbinger of spiritual impoverishment'. Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, p. 73.

10 Rosenthal quotes *Kitāb al-Jalalah*, Hyderabad: n. p., 1948, p. 7.

11 See, for instance, A.A. Afīfī, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyid Dīn-Ibnul ʿArabī*, Lahore: S.M. Ashraf, 1979; M.C. Hernandez, *Historia del Pensamiento en el Mundo Islàmico*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1981, p. 221ff.

12 Sells, 'Ibn ʿArabi's "Garden amongst the Flames"', pp. 289–90.

13 Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 104.

14 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fut. Y*, I, p. 145; *Futūḥāt*, IV, p. 22; F. Rosenthal, 'Ibn ʿArabī between "Philosophy" and "Mysticism"', *Oriens* 31, 1988, pp. 12–3.

15 Ibid.

16 Clear examples of this attitude emerge in specific treatises which were composed by the *Shaykh* and dedicated to new disciples: *The Essence of What is Indispensable for the Novice*, trans. A. Jeffrey, 'Instruction to a Postulant', in *A Reader of Islam*, London: n.p. 1962; *Kitāb al-Tadbīrāt al-Ilāhīya*, in *Kleinere Schriften des Ibn al-ʿArabi*, ed. H.S. Nyberg, Leiden: Brill, 1919; *Risālat al-Anwār*, trans. R.T. Harris, *Journey to the Lord of Power*, New York: Inner Traditions International, 1981.

17 C. Melchert, 'The Transition from Asceticism to Mysticism at the Middle of the Ninth Century', in Lloyd Ridgeon (ed.), *Sufism*, vol. 1, London and New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 44–63; Asín Palacios, *El Islam Christianizado*, Madrid: Editorial Plutarco, 1931, p. 129.

18 See E.S. Ohlander, *Sufism in an Age of Transition: Umar al-Suhrawardi and the Rise of the Islamic Mystical Brotherhoods*, ed. W. Kadi, Leiden: Brill, 2008; idem, 'Between Historiography, Hagiography, and Polemic: The "Relationship" between Abu Hafs 'Umar al-Suhrawardi and Ibn 'Arabi', *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society* 34, 2003, pp. 59–82. It is significant that many Ayyubids belonged to the *futuwwa*, a circle organized by the caliph Naṣīr with the help of Suhrawardī which aimed

to gather together the Muslim princes under the banner of the Caliphate. See Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, pp. 72–3.

19 Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi in the Later Islamic Tradition*, p. 53.

20 R. Brunschvig, 'Polémiques Médiévales autour du rite de Mālik', in *Études d'Islamologie* 2, 1976, p. 83.

21 Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭib min ghuṣn al-Andalus al-raṭīb, Analectes sur l'Historie et la Litérature des Arabes d' Espagne*, ed. R.P.A. Dozy et al., 2 vols, Leiden: Brill, 1855–61, pp. 567–9. Goldziher has highlighted the Ẓāhirī position of Ibn ʿArabī with regards to his interpretation of the figure of the *Mahdī*. See I. Goldziher, *The Ẓāhiris*: *Their Doctrine and Their History: A Contribution to the History of Islamic Theology*, trans. W. Benn, Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1971, particularly pp. 169–71. On Ẓāhirism see Abdel-Magid Turki, 'al-Ẓāhiriyya', in *EI*^{2}

22 It will be observed that Muḥammad represents the archetype of sainthood and that it is in his person that the primordial Muḥammadan reality finds its fullest embodied perfection. As a consequence to this, it is by knowing the Prophet's *sunna* and by practising his customs that the human being might aspire to restore his original nature as *imago dei*. Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, pp. 21–5.

23 In Ibn ʿArabī's opinion, the instrument of thought (*mufakkira*) does not suffice to grasping the essence of God. See *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 319.

24 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 48.

25 Morris, "Ibn ʿArabi's 'Esotericism'", p. 39.

26 Ibn ʿArabī cited by M. Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des Saints: Prophétie et Sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn ʿArabī*, Paris: Gallimard, 1986, p. 30.

27 Morris, 'Ibn ʿArabi and His Interpreters', part II, p. 744.

28 On the significance of the phenomenon of *tasmiyya* see Chodkiewicz, *Un Ocean sans Rivage*, pp. 39–50 and pp. 55–6.

29 C. Casseler, ''Sulla Dottrina del Polo' e dei due Imām: Per un' Analisi delle Funzioni Spirituali Supreme nel Diwān al-awliyā' secondo alcuni Scritti di Ibn 'Arabī', unpublished PhD thesis, Universita' degli Studi di Roma 'La Sapienza', Dipartimento di Studi Orientali, Ciclo XIV, 2004, p. 36.

30 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 334.

31 Ibid., II, p. 163. On these arguments see Casseler, "Sulla Dottrina del Polo", pp. 10–50.

32 Chodkiewicz, *Un Ocean sans Rivage*, p. 45.

33 For an overview of the Sufi Qur'ānic commentaries in the classical and medieval periods see C. Gilliot, 'Exegesis of the Qur'ān: Classical and Medieval', in the *Encyclopaedia Quranica*, pp. 118–20. See also P. Nwyia, *Exégèse Coranique et Language Mystique*, Beirut 1970, G. Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: the Qur'ānic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl at-Tustarī (d. 283/896)*, Berlin – New York, 1980; P. Lory, *Les Commentaires ésotériques du Coran d'après 'Abd al-Razzâq al-Qâshânî*, Paris 1980; A. Keller, *Sufi Hermeneutics: the Qur'an Commentary of Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī*, Oxford, 2006, M. Nguyen, *Sufi Master and Qur'an Scholar: Abu'l-Qasim al-Qushayri and the Lata'if al-Isharat*, Oxford 2012.

34 The word Qur'ān is said by the *Shaykh* to derive from the root QR' meaning, amongst other things, 'to reunite'.

35 Chodkiewicz, *Un Ocean sans Rivage*, p. 45.

36 P.J. Awn, 'The Ethical Concerns of Classical Sufism', *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 11, 1983, pp. 257–8.

37 W. Chittick, 'The Muhammadian Inheritance', *Iqbal Review* 38, 1997, p. 147.

38 The expression '*waḥdat al-wujūd*' was never used by Ibn ʿArabī. The first to utilize it with regard to Ibn ʿArabī's thought was his disciple and successor Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673/1274). On this argument see P. Urizzi, 'La Gnosi' Muhammadiana', in *Islamismo – Ottavo Quaderno: Il Sufismo- Via Mistica dell'Islam. Sette e Religioni* 10, 2000, p. 118.

39 C. Casseler, 'Sulla Dottrina del Polo', p. 95, note 407. This subject will be observed in more details in the course of this discussion.
40 Awn, 'The Ethical Concerns of Classical Sufism', p. 257.
41 This condemnation is reflected in the works of Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Kirmānī. He claims that, since God is ultimately ineffable, it is impossible for Him to be attributed with 'existence'. Yet the denial of divine existence is said to be a case of atheism rather than of *theologia negativa*. In fact, according to al-Kirmānī, God is a pure certitude and does not require any confirmation: He does not participate to the same kind of existence as all other creatures do and, nonetheless, He 'exists' according to modalities which are fundamentally different and elusive to our senses. See D. De Smet, *La Quiétude de l'Intellect*, p. 38.
42 The quotation is by Rosenthal, 'Ibn ʿArabī between "philosophy" and "mysticism"', p. 23.
43 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 484.
44 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. A. Afīfī, Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-ʿArabīyya, 1365/1946, p. 199. Henceforth *Fuṣūṣ*. References to this work are also from trans. and intro., R.W.J. Austin, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1980, henceforth, *The* B*ezels*.
45 Urizzi, 'La Gnosi Muhammadiana', p. 119.
46 Ibn ʿArabī *Fuṣūṣ*, pp. 79–80.
47 Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 35.
48 Translation is from Austin, *The Bezels*, p. 54.
49 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 443.
50 Urizzi, 'La Gnosi Muhammadiana', p. 120.
51 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, pp. 46–7. In this respect, it has been previously pointed out that Avicenna regards a possible entity as being 'something', even if it is yet non-existent; this intuition was proved to be fundamental to sustain the potential substantial nature of prime matter.
52 According to the *Shaykh al-akbar*, a divine Name is but a 'limited' form of the Divine Essence prior to its manifestation, whilst an Attribute of God is but a Divine Name manifested in the world. Every Name indicates the Essence and the particular concept which it conveys and which it requires. See Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, pp. 79–80; M. Takeshita, *Ibn 'Arabi's Theory of the Perfect Man and its Place in the History of Islamic Thought*, Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1987, p. 69.
53 Strictly linked with this is the notion of the eternal impenetrability of the divine Essence (*samādaniyya*) which is identical with pure transcendence (*tanzīh*) and with supreme purity (*tabri'a*). See *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 580. The term *tabri'a* derives from the root BR' bearing the meaning of 'being free or immune' from any compromising relation. On the argument see Ibn ʿArabī, *Kitāb al-Yā'wa Kitāb al-Huwa*, trans. C. Casseler as *Il Libro del Sé Divino*, Torino: Il Leone Verde, 2004, p. 55.
54 Translation is from Austin, *The Bezels*, p. 87.
55 A non-canonical *ḥadīth* which is considered sound by Ibn ʿArabī 'on the basis of unveiling (*kashf*) but not established by way of transmission (*naql*)'. See Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 391, note 14.
56 Austin, *The Bezels*, p. 27.
57 R.A. Nicholson, *A Literary History of the Arabs*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969, p. 402.
58 Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, p. 93.
59 T. Burckhardt, *Introduction aux doctrines Esoteriques de l'Islam*, Alger: Messerschmitts, 1955, trans. B. Turco, *Introduzione alle Dottrine Esoteriche dell'Islam*, Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1979, p. 51. Henceforth, *Introduzione*.
60 G. De Luca, 'Non Sono Io il Vostro Signore?', *I Quaderni di Avallon*, 31, 1993, p. 63. It will be observed that, for Ibn ʿArabī, divine knowledge becomes foreknowledge of

all the potential forms of divine self-manifestation which are embedded in the divine Essence.

61 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 49; Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, pp. 93–4; De Luca, 'Non Sono Io il Vostro Signore?', p. 64.
62 Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, p. 107.
63 On the concept of emanation as *tajallī* see T. Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, Berkeley: University of California Press,1984, cap. XI.
64 Translation is from Austin, *The Bezels*, p. 50
65 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, p. 135. The imperative *Kun* as the creative word is derived from Qurʿan 2:17; 3:47 and 59; 6:73; 16:40; 19:35; 36:82; 40:68.
66 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 580.
67 Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 187; idem, *The Sufi Path*, p. 38.
68 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 99; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 560, note 74.
69 According to the *Shaykh*, 'the [eternal] essences are immutable un-manifest . . . and they remain in that state, despite all the multiplicity of manifested forms'. See Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 79. Translation from Austin, *The Bezels*, p. 85.
70 Burckhardt, *Introduzione*, p. 54.
71 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 131. Translation from Austin, *The Bezels*, p. 165.
72 Ibid. In his definition of *qaḍā'* and *qadar*, ʿAlī Ibn Muḥammad al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413) will follow the example of his master Ibn ʿArabī: 'the *qadar* is the exiting of the *mumkināt* from the [status] of non-existence and their entering into *wujūd* in accordance to the *qaḍā*'. The difference between the two is that *qaḍā'* encompasses the universality of things [written] on the Preserved Tablet, whilst the *qadar* is the things' distinctive formation within the reality of the created beings once the correspondent conditions [for their existence] are fulfilled.' See *Al-Taʿrifāt*, ed. G. Flügel, Leipzig, n.p., 1845, p. 181.
73 Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 187.
74 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 83. Addas has highlighted that the notion of immutability, which designates the status of any possible within the divine knowledge, is closely linked to the concept of predisposition (*istiʿdād*). Since God knows the immutable entities, He knows their predisposition and what they are meant to be by their very nature. Therefore, God puts them into existence according to what they should be. Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, pp. 86–7.
75 Burckhardt, *Introduzione*, p. 57.
76 Ibid.
77 The translation is by Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 187.
78 Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, p. 267.
79 Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 82. Translation from Austin, *The Bezels*, p. 93; M. Kassim, 'La Problème de la Prédestination et du Libre Arbitre chez Leibniz et Ibn 'Arabi', *Annuals of Faculty of Dar al-ʿUlūm*, 1973, p. 7; Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 186.
80 Translation is from Austin, *The Bezels*, p. 94.
81 Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 473; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 106.
82 Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt* quoted in A.N. Diyāb, 'Ibn ʿArabī on Human Freedom, Destiny and the Problem of Evil', *al-Shajarah* 5, 2000, p. 30.
83 Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, p. 426; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 102.
84 Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 39 and p. 44.
85 Ibid., pp. 137–8.
86 Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 203. On the nature of *barzakh* see S.H. Bashier, 'Proofs for the Existence and Unity of God in Greek and Islamic Thought with an Emphasis on Ibn ʿArabī's *barzakh* and its Role in Proving God's Existence and Unity', *Transcendent Philosophy* 2, 2001, pp. 29–51.
87 Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 99. The *Shaykh al-akbar* explains that 'each created being is related to God only as being its particular Lord, since its relationship to [God] as the

All is impossible'. Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 90. Translation is from Austin, *The Bezels*, p. 106.

88 On the problematic nature of causes see Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 214; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminationes*, p. 244.
89 Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 90.
90 Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 60, p. 104; III, p. 77. On this argument see Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 18; idem, *The Sufī Path*, p. 133 and p. 398 notes 15 and 16.
91 The translation is by Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 18.
92 Ibid., p. 19.
93 Ibid., p. 18.
94 Ibid., p. 19.
95 Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, IV, p. 366.
96 The translation is by Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 17.
97 Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 81.
98 Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, IV, p. 373. Translation is by Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 18.
99 The *Shaykh* declares: 'No one professes the cause except those ignorant of what proofs bestow. The firm and fastened affair lies in the knowledge of the condition and the conditioned.' Ibn 'Arabī, *Futūḥāt*, IV, p. 373.
100 Ibn ʿArabī, *Shajarat al-Kawn*, translated by A. Jeffrey, 'Ibn al-'Arabī's *Shajarat al-Kawn*', *Studia Islamica* 11, 1959, p. 122.
101 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 208; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 44.
102 Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 45.
103 On the nature of evil in Sufism see Lloyd Ridgeon, 'A Sufi Perspective of Evil', in *Sufīsm*, vol. 2, pp. 120–39.
104 Translation is by Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 291.
105 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 576; the translation by Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 292. Ghazālī has spoken of evil as 'something not concordant with a specific aim'. See supra, p. 185.
106 Awn, 'The ethical concerns', p. 258.
107 Afīfī, *The Mystical Philosophy*, p. 160; Ibn ʿArabī, *The Bezels*, p. 31 and p. 190. On the origin of the distinction of the will in the Muʿtazilites and the Ashʿarites see Gimaret, *Théories de l'Acte Humain*, pp. 3–20.
108 Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 293.
109 Significantly, for the *Shaykh al-akbar* it is the very existence of the Essence that makes things engendered and not the bestowal of existence on behalf of the deity as it would be expected in the Avicennian system.
110 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 405, IV, p. 106; idem, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 108.
111 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 262; Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 287.

6 Ibn ʿArabi

Part two

The *aʿyān thābita* and the realm of responsibility in the divine *qaḍā'*

In general, the Sufis understand the cosmos' multitude of forms as mirrors in which the divine Essence can contemplate Itself in the variety of its aspects, whilst the mirrors are commonly employed to symbolize the possibility for the Essence's self-determination. The latter is seen, in turn, as being necessary due to the Essence's infinite and uncontainable plenitude. Moreover, the mirrors are able to reflect the different manifestations of the One Being. To be borne in mind is that the multiplicity of the cosmos' forms cannot be regarded as a real multiplicity since forms are nothing more that determinations of the Essence: the Akbarian *aʿyān thābita*. These, inherent in the divine indistinctiveness, are known as possibilities of individualization, and correspond to Platonic ideas or the Avicennian *mumkināt* which, although never manifested as such, remain in their status of 'intellectual dispositions'. They are 'possibilità che le "astrazioni" presuppongono e senza le quali non avrebbero alcuna verità intrinseca'.[1]

Michel Chodkiewicz has claimed that Ibn Arabī's theory of the immutable entities, which is responsible for the future 'creation' of things as eternally existing in God's knowledge, enshrines the *Shaykh*'s view on the secret of predestination.[2] The latter relates to the awareness that everything coming into existence is a manifestation of what is included in the *aʿyān thābita* and their predispositions. With the theory of the immutable entities, which was thought to originate from the 'heretical' doctrine of the eternity of the world sustained by the peripatetic philosophers, Ibn ʿArabī compromised on the notion of divine predestination by way of making creation dependent on what established by the immutable prototypes.[3] In truth, what characterizes the relation between the *aʿyān thābita* and the notion of predestination is the focus on the constant changes by which the immutable entities manifest themselves to and through the Real. These changes allow the occurrence of interplay between, on the one hand, the pervasiveness of divine power, which can be held responsible for predestination and, on the other hand, the dispositions of the essences that are accountable for determinism. Particularly, Ibn ʿArabī provides an explanation for the immutable entities' forms of manifestation by referring to the Ashʿarite notion which sees God as perpetually renewing His creation. One must remember that the doctrine of *takwīn*, that is, the act of putting into existence all things within the instant of the divine utterance of *Kun*, sets the

created beings within their a-temporal domain;[4] however, the same a-temporality is also given by the divine constant new creation (*al-khalq al-jadīd*) (Q. 50:15) which signs both the being's instantial access into existence and its departure from it.[5] In the Akbarian thought, every form which is manifest in the cosmos becomes an Ashʿarite accident which undergoes transformation at each moment;[6] God has described Himself by saying that 'each day He is upon some task' (Q. 55:29), and these tasks, Ibn ʿArabī explains, are the changes which God brings about in the engendered things.[7] The Aristotelian distinction occurring between matter and form is read here in cosmogonic terms and the notion of matter becomes absorbed in the notion of receptivity, whilst the notion of form becomes synonymous with manifestation. This explains why the realities of the possible things are receptive of the changes in accordance to their own essences: the fact that God desires to 'clothe' them with one form or another simply means that God manifests Himself to the possible things according to their distinctive preparedness.[8] The primordial nature of each entity, once posed in existence, appears spontaneously, with all its attributes and peculiarities embedded in its pre-existential matrix (the immutable entity-prototype), which encompasses from eternity the characters of its future manifestations.[9] God, in this instance, is the Ashʿarite Originator, the Preserver of the entities' natures and of everything that can be classified as 'predispositions'. Since they have immutable essences, the entities are still dependent on God with regard to their preservation in existence, but they certainly do not depend on His perpetual intervention in directing their 'destinies', that is, with regard to their outward progressive disclosure once they are set into existence. From this perspective, despite his belief in the constant divine renewal of creation, Ibn ʿArabī seems to distance himself from the Ghazālīan occasionalistic view which sees God intervening directly in the 'history', or destiny, of every existent. In a sense, the *Shaykh* places his speculations closer to the Avicennian understanding of divine natural determinism, the latter being identical with all entities' destinies. The immutable entities-prototypes are, in fact, in time and space according to the divine will, but the divine will has no much effect on their future developments which is depending, instead, on their latent potentialities.[10] The potentialities seem to behave like the Avicennian 'substrata' that are capable of releasing their potential nature, determining their peculiarities and characteristics only once in 'becoming'.

When Ibn ʿArabī speaks of the 'mystery of the measuring out' (*sirr al-qadar*), alluding to the idea that God's knowledge follows the objects of knowledge, he infers that engendered things determine their own destiny. He points out that, 'the possible thing is receptive to guidance and misguidance in respect of its reality . . . God has nothing in it except one command, and this command is known to God from the direction of the possible thing's state'.[11] It is reasonable to argue that, like for the Avicennian Necessary Existent and His intellects-angels, the *Shaykh* perceives God as being ready to entrust realities with a kind of delegated autonomy to develop, even though this development cannot be but in tune with God's will and the 'Providence of His Names'.[12] However, Ibn ʿArabī's outlook on this particular point is also reminiscent of the Ghazālīan selective action of the will which is carried out by the humans' acquisition of the divinely predisposed capacity to act. God's entrusting things with the will and power to develop by themselves is, in fact, ultimately due to

the correspondence between God's and His servants' will.[13] As Ibn ʿArabī explains, God 'affirms a will for Him and for us, and He makes our will dependent upon His will . . . If the servant finds the desire for something in himself, the Real is identical with his desire, nothing else'. Significantly, it is not only the prototypes' nature to incline toward the deity's dictates; God's Providence too seems 'to be in accordance with the latent need of each single prototype' and 'subject' to it.[14] In this perspective, the definition offered by the *Shaykh al-akbar* on the nature of God's control, judgements and destiny as admonitions becomes comprehensible:

> So what is God's decree? . . . And what are control, judgments, and destiny? All are admonitions – if you possess reason. He who applies the admonitions will never go wrong.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 215)[15]

God's control and judgement over the choices of His servants are understandable exclusively within the realm of the engendered things where the divine Law still preserves its power and its functionality. God's instructions, His prescriptive command, can simply suggest to the possible things the right direction to take. In truth, the divine influence is limited by the innate immutable entities' predispositions to either obey or not the divine prescriptive command. Therefore, the legal impositions God prescribes are, in relation to His prescriptive command, exclusively alerts and warnings.[16] To confirm the 'admonitive' nature of the divine judgement, Ibn ʿArabī emphasizes that any entity can be held responsible for either following or not following the warnings of the prescriptive command. Once established that there is no existent but God, the entities of the possible things are able of receiving the Essence of God through their realities (their natural inclinations in reality). Ibn ʿArabī explains that divine sheer Being comes to be ascribed with everything which is bestowed by the realities of the entities. This happens because the *loci* of manifestation, despite the fact that they are non-existent, still 'bestow properties upon the forms of the Manifest and the manyness of these forms within the Reality of the One (*ʿayn al-wāhid*)'.[17] More specifically, although it may be said that existents are the *maḥall* for the accomplishment of God's acts, 'in reality the situation is the reverse; in fact He is described by the property of the effects of the preparedness of the possible entities within Him':[18]

> Limitations are occasioned, measurements become manifest, and judgment and decree are exercised . . . classes, genera, kinds, individuals, states, and properties of the existents all become manifest in the One Reality, since shapes (*ashkāl*) become distinguished within It. The names of God become manifest, possessing effects (*athar*) within that which becomes manifest in existence.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 216)[19]

Since 'in His own Self [God] decrees and differentiates affairs',[20] it is the properties of the effects of the receptivity of the immutable entities which actually

determine, judge and decree. Their diversity is occasioned by God's receptivity to the manyness of His own possibilities, the latter being nothing other than Him.

It is clear that besides their powers and inclinations, all existents are what they are through God's Self-manifestations and, as a result, they are not ruled out from a kind of determinism rooted in their Origin. Despite their capacity of unfolding their own individual destinies and their capacity to 'colour' the divine manifestation within them, the realities are still bound to the divine Essence. This is the case simply because the realities are the divine Essence in Its aspect of differentiation and similarity.

The perfect man

It is important to keep in mind that, according to Ibn ʿArabī, the Names are not entities but relations.[21] They are expression of the assignments or tasks which are undertaken by God at each moment of His creation, corresponding to the never-ending/never-repeating theophany as quoted in Q. 55:29. They are meant to fulfil God's will to know Himself and to be known. Indeed, God does not become manifest in existence except in the form of the tasks.[22] The *Shaykh al-akbar* refers to the tasks as the variety of God's Names and their respective forms which are actualized in the world of existents;[23] he makes the world, in its outward diversity, the receptacle for God's activity by stating that every single being is not simply the mark of itself, but also the mark of its correspondent divine 'task'. The divine Essence's desire to know Itself, through His uncountable tasks, finds its mirror in the totalizing entity (*kawn jāmīʿ*) of the Perfect Man (*insān al-kāmil*) who is identified in Adam.

The concept of the Perfect Man, although never systematically explained prior to Ibn ʿArabī, has always been rooted in the Islamic tradition. Already the Arabic text of the so-called *Theologia Aristotelis* had used the term *insān awwal* (primal man), whilst Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī had spoken of *al-insān al-tāmm* (the complete one).[24] Moreover, many verses in the Qurʾān and the prophetic sayings focus on the importance of the human creature and his high status in the natural world, often highlighting the eminence of men above angels.[25] The importance of humaneness has been used in Islam since its very beginning in order to define a 'Muslim spiritual anthropology', directed to devalue certain Christian and Zoroastrian tendencies which mortified the body and the materiality of this world.[26] The *Shaykh al-akbar* inherits this Islamic tradition and exalts the role played by humans in the history of creation by way of stressing their functions as divine vice-regents and by theoretically framing the notion of the *insān al-kāmil*. It is only the Perfect Man among the Folk of *Allāh* that, due to his capacity to adapt himself to the fluctuation in receiving the whole range of God's tasks, becomes the ideal locus of divine manifestation.[27] The *insān al-kāmil*, in his perfection, undergoes variation because of the variation of all the divine tasks and becomes qualified to receive the divine reliance, acting as a receptacle for God's tasks, through which the world becomes manifest.[28] Man's perfect nature resides in his liability to become the proper vessel for divine actions, and the Perfect Man qualifies himself as God's regent

(*khalīfa*) on earth thanks to the plenitude of his essence. This plenitude is due to his being the synthesis of all the universal realities and the totality of the divine Names. According to a well-known *ḥadīth*, Adam was created in the image of God (*ʿala suratihi*)[29] but with no doubt Adam, as the last being to be produced in the cosmogonic system, represents also the totality of the cosmos. It is because the Qurʾān describes Adam as the last existantiated being that he can act as the compendium of all the stages of existence preceding him. As a compendium of the cosmos, Adam is also the cosmos' form, becoming at once, the synthesis of the cosmos and the synthesis of his Principium (*mukhtaṣar al-ʿalām wa'l-ḥaqq*).[30] The *Shaykh al-akbar* identifies Adam as 'the epitome who became manifest through the realities of temporally originated existence and eternal Being',[31] and, by creating Adam upon His own image, God ascribes to him all His Names. And it is 'through the strength of the form [that] he [Adam] was able to carry the offered Trust'.[32] This Trust corresponds to the task of manifesting the all-encompassing name *Allāh*, but it also refers to man's capacity to potentially realize the plenitude of his degree and the dignity of his *khilāfa*.[33]

The Perfect Man is described as the form of the Real and as the one who has established a *barzakh* between the Real and the cosmos. He is manifested through the divine Names as a Primary reality (*ḥaqq*), and he appears through the reality of possibility (*ḥaqīqa al-imkān*) as a created reality (*khalq*).[34] The Perfect Man's nature, therefore, integrates the two extremes of *ḥaqq* and *khalq*. On the one hand, from the perspective of the divine Names *in divinis*, the Perfect Man can be seen as the most all-embracing creature, serving as the principle of reflection and perfection required by God for His Self-knowledge. On the other hand, although called *insān*, the Perfect Man has to be understood as something distinct from that being who belongs to the human species and who is designated by the term *bashar*. The *Shaykh* refers to the last typology of man as the 'animal man' (*insān ḥayuwān*) who is only virtually a Perfect Man because it is only virtually that the divine form is manifested in him.[35] The necessary perfection of the celestial kingdom, embedded in the Perfect Man, belongs to the ordinary man only potentially, in the same way as man, only potentially, owns the preceding level of beings of which the Perfect Man is the synthesis. This ultimately means that the human being has to strive in order to attain the nature of Perfect Man. In truth, the *insān al-kāmil* designates a station (*martaba*) of spiritual realization and the highest degree of spiritual accomplishment achievable for mankind.[36] Consequently, according to Ibn ʿArabī, it is the striving to reach the status of Perfect Man which allows humans to be humans. Significantly, humaneness preserves its elevated status, with respect to the entire range of created beings, because it entails those flaws and imperfections which become the very core of human potentiality.[37] By echoing the Avicennian 'optimistic' view on privation in relation to existence, for which privation is considered responsible for changes and improvements, Ibn ʿArabī depicts the blemished components which are present in the human nature, like emotions of loss and desire in corporeal existence, as what initiates the pursuit of freedom and makes the quest for the Absolute possible. Ibn ʿArabī conceives the engendered things to be perfect because they are created in the form of God who possesses absolute

perfection.[38] However, imperfection continues to be seen as an intrinsic attribute of all things, and it can still able to affect these accidentally. It is through their accidental imperfection that all 'existent' things fulfil their roles within creation by yearning towards God. Particularly, human beings are totalizing entities exactly because the divine decree brought in their nature a mixture of 'light' and 'darkness'.[39] In contrast to all other entities, including angels, men are endowed with a degree of gnosis which is not fixed, but liable to changes and improvements. This is due to the human capacity to reflect the plurality of God's tasks. It should be noted that the *insān al-kāmil*'s perfection is limited to the comprehensiveness of his nature and to his ability of bringing together all things. This implies that perfection is indeed different from 'excellence', and it does not compel the Perfect Man to be a flawless being or the most excellent (*afḍal*) of creatures.[40] More clearly put, Adam's perfection corresponds exclusively to his regency, to his acceptance of the divine trust which is supported through his capacity to mirror the divine knowledge of all the Names. For the *Shaykh al-akbar*, in fact, no one can be called a *khalīfa* except the individual who has attained to the knowledge of the divine Names through his merit (*bi-ṭarīq al-istiḥqāq*).[41] The notion of merit is linked to the Adamic capability to fulfil God's plan in his function as vice-regent. This condition is obtainable, on the one hand, through Adam's essential predisposition by virtue of which he can fully actualize his primordial nature (*fiṭra*) and fulfil God's 'expectations' for his role as *khalīfa*.[42] On the other hand, Adam's vice-regency is also depending on his 'moral' choice (that is, the mentioned *ṭarīq al-istiḥqāq*), to both comply with the divine prescriptive command and to strive towards perfection. In line with Avicenna and al-Ghazālī's thoughts, the *Doctor Maximus* rejects any form of fatalism: those humans who have not yet attained *maʿrifa* are not aware of their real condition and this allows them to aspire to be different and attain a diverse view from the current perceptions they have of themselves. Only God knows their destiny from and for all eternity, whilst all the potential perfect men are still entitled to yearn and merit the divine trust through their personal striving.

Ibn ʿArabī highlights the importance of the Perfect Man and his receptive functionality also by way of defining him as the mirror of the Real (*mir'āt al-ḥaqq*) and as the receptacle in which the Real sees Himself. Even more specifically, as a *barzakh* between the Real and the cosmos, the Perfect Man becomes a reflective surface, mirroring both God's and the cosmos' forms. The divine command requires by its very nature the reflective characteristic of the mirror of the Cosmos, and Adam becomes the very principle of reflection for that mirror.[43] In his *opus magnum*, Ibn ʿArabī declares: 'the immutable essence of the Servant is a mirror of the existence of the Real (*mir'at wujūd al-ḥaqq*)'.[44] The form of the mirror, conditioned by the nature of its immutable essence, shapes the vision of the object which comes to be reflected in it.[45] This confirms what has already been stated, namely the idea that God's Self-knowledge is determined by the immutable entities capacity to reflect His Form according to their degree of receptivity of the divine disclosure. In other terms, all human beings, who are only potentially perfect, affect the mirroring of the existence of the Real and His manifestations. Obviously, the reflection of the Image of the Real is relatively perfect depending

on the cleanliness of the mirror's surface which is used as a metaphor to indicate the level of purity within the human being. As propounded by al-Ghazālī, the cleansing of the mirror occurs in the human heart (*qalb*), the spiritual organ in which real knowledge takes place. It is because of its nature as an isthmus and as a mirror that the heart is called *qalb*: it is the reflective support in which uninterrupted theophanic transformation and change (*taqallub*) occur.[46] It is in the heart that the polishing of the human mirror takes place, and it is in the *qalb* that men can initiate their spiritual ascent and, by apprehending the heart's infinite object of knowledge, they can aspire to reflect the divine Image in Its totality, without the reflecting 'distortions' rooted in the individual essential natures.[47]

It is through aspiration and the quest for real gnosis that humans can supersede the confines of their known conditions. By making themselves receptive to all the divine Names/tasks – perfectly adhering to their role as potential perfect *insān*s – men implicitly satisfy the divine *qaḍā'*, also fulfilling God's plan to know Himself and be known. This is the pedagogic intent which the Akbarian writings pursue: far from being a 'theorist' or a 'grammarian' of esotericism, Chodkiewicz explains, 'tout son enseignement . . . est ordonné à une seule fin: rétabilir l'homme dans sa dignité d' *imago Dei* et sa function de lieutenance'.[48]

The concepts of servanthood (*ʿubūdiyya*) and servitude (*ʿubūda*)

The awareness which human beings have of the limitless potentiality of their heart can encourage them to become Perfect Men and perfect servants. To attain this privileged status, each man has to recognize his ontological indigence which makes him the servant (*ʿabd*) of God.[49] Even if the human being is cloaked with the honour of the *rubūbiyya*, the latter being granted by God's calling man into existence, he still retains in himself the nature of an *ʿabd*.[50] The Perfect Man is the only being who operates as the locus of manifestation of the totalizing divine Name *Allāh* and, in contrast to all other beings who are servants for their corresponding specific Names, the *insān al-kāmil* is a servant with respect to all the Names exactly by being a servant towards the Name *Allāh* which synthesizes them all. Hence, he embodies the total perfect servant (*al-ʿabd al- jamīʿ al-kāmil*) and the universal servant (*al-ʿabd al-kullī*).[51]

Chapters 130 and 131 in the *Futūhāt* explain the significance of the concepts of servanthood (*ʿubūdiyya*) and servitude (*ʿubūda*), followed by the chapters 140 and 141 dedicated to the station of freedom.[52] Through these notions, the elemental condition of the human being is depicted as that of a servant. Ibn ʿArabī uses expressions similar to those employed by al-Ghazālī and clarifies that the meaning of being a servant is that of being 'lowly' (*dhalīl*), that is, of occupying a subordinate position specifically towards God.[53] The servant's awareness of his lowliness can be achieved once he has grasped God's superiority as the Possessor of Mightiness (*ʿizza*).[54] The relationship of the servant with God in the state of servanthood is compared by Ibn ʿArabī to that of a shadow with the person who throws it before a lamp: the closer the person moves toward the lamp, the greater is the shadow. In addition, Ibn ʿArabī claims:

> There is no proximity to God except through that which is more specifically (*akhaṣṣ*) your attribute, not His . . . Nothing moves you away from God except your leaving aside those attributes of which you are worthy and your coveting His Attributes.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 214)[55]

The concept of servanthood is generally considered to be in contrast with the notion of freedom. The *Shaykh*, however, manages to subvert this idea and makes servanthood the sign of freedom. Freedom is attained once an individual gets in proximity to God which is realized through the servant's displaying his specific attributes, that is, through the servant becoming the entification of those specific divine Names with which he has been invested and by which he can be called a divine vice-regent. Since God created Adam in His own image, man has all the divine Names engraved in the very clay of his being, but the awareness of his initial theomorphism, and the awareness of his regency, expose him to the illusion of sovereignty. This makes human beings forgetful of their 'ontological servitude' which is testified by the fact that they have been originated by clay, the most humble material on earth.[56] The servant cannot expect to reach proximity to God by proudly yearning toward those Attributes which pertain to God exclusively. This means that man cannot aim to assume the realities of those Names which belong solely to God and which preserve the incomparability of His Essence. This indicates that the human being must 'choose' to be what he has been destined to be: a servant to God (*ʿabd Allāh*). It is to this end that, once on the mystical path, the human being is called to become a *murīd*, namely, an 'aspirant' willing to fulfil God's decree.

Ibn ʿArabī explains that when the servant makes the divine Names manifest through himself, such manifestation occurs according to two modes: first, in conformity with the divine command (*al-amr al-ilāhī*), which places the servant in proximity (*qurb*) of God's deputyship (*niyāba*) and, second without divine command, this kind of manifestation being able to place the servant in the distance (*buʿd*) from the deity.[57] But what does Ibn ʿArabī implies when he speaks of the manifestation of the Names which occurs without divine command? Is it sensible to think that human beings have the capacity to elude the dictates of such a command? It has already been shown that the divine command is distinguished by Ibn ʿArabī between the existentiating imperative, uttered by God as an answer to His Names' yearning towards existence, and the prescriptive command, which potentially entails disobedience to God's prescriptions. When he declares that manifestation can occur without commandment, it is logical to think that the *Shaykh* refers to the second typology of command. However, another interpretation is also possible; it can be argued that to evade God's commandment does not necessarily mean not to bring into existence the Names *in toto*. Rather, the formation of the Names can be said to depend on man's ability to manifest some divine Names, exclusively in accordance to his own individual dispositions and independently from the aim the divine providence.[58] The manifestation of certain Names, within the human receptacle, would be dependent on the human attributes and their capacity to escape the limitative identity which is imposed upon them by

the existentiating command. Generally, in effect, the latter requires that the human attributes might disclose only selected divine Names. It is by 'choosing' to remain within the confines of their limitedness that humans reach *walāya*: proximity to God. Conversely, man would be distancing himself from God by way of eluding His 'selective' assignation of Names and His providence, which He assigns to humans through their ontological indigence. This means that the human aspiration to fulfil God's decree, and man's desire to become the perfect servant, should prompt the human 'choice' to follow the divine commandments and to avoid the divine interdictions. It is only when man acquires awareness of himself as a being capable of 'choosing' between obedience and disobedience to the divine Law that he becomes responsible for his actions and accountable for them. Nonetheless, the human choice would still represent a form of imperfection, because it still is an indication of the servant's individuality. More specifically, choice represents the trace both of the servant's self-awareness and of his belief for which it is his will that allows him to perform acts of supererogation. This explains why Ibn ʿArabī claims that the *Sharīʿa* is 'the rigorous attachment to servitude in the attribution of the act to yourself'.[59] In the pure servant, the awareness of any particle of autonomy, as small as it might be, must disappear for 'God wills through his [servant's] will, without him knowing that what he wants is exactly what God wants; if he becomes conscious of it, he has not fully realised this station'.[60]

It should be observed that, in the case of ultimate servitude, God's will and the servant's 'choice' – determined by his intrinsic dispositions to manifest the Names – de facto do not contradict each other because both incline towards the same goal. Indeed, on the one hand, God wants only what He knows should be, and on the other hand, the immutable predispositions of the servant make the *ʿabd* wish only what he can wish for, according to what is established by the limitations of his dominant Name-lord. Put it in other terms, man's capacity to manifest the divine Names through his own dispositions is restricted by the nature of these dispositions which are unconsciously obedient to God's providential dictates. This interpretation confirms that, in Ibn ʿArabī's thought, divine predestination works hand in hand with the natural disposition of the entities and that the latter, like the Avicennian natures, determine their own destinies and capacity of manifestation.

When the *Shaykh al-akbar* speaks of the stations of servanthood and servitude he expresses basically the same notions in different ways. Although man is not allowed sharing God's most specific Attributes, as a servant, he can reach God through his most specific attributes, which he is destined to manifest for Him. It is through an epiphany that the *ʿabd* is able to recognize his Lord who, however, is not *Allāh* in His Essence, but God perceived through one particular aspect of His Essence, namely, through the particular 'face' which is familiar and recognizable for the servant. The Lord becomes the 'personal God', the lord of the servant's individual belief. Basically, God is 'individualized' through what the servant understands of Him. The relationship the servant has with his 'individual lord', occurring in the stage of servanthood, allows the *ʿabd* to enter a personal relation with God which is, however, merely a relation of himself with himself. The 'image' of God which the servant attains is filtrated through his measure of

perceptiveness which is, in turn, determined by his immutable entities.[61] Servanthood preserves a certain degree of individuality because keeps the servant in a relation only to his personal lord. Specifically, servanthood is described as the servant's ascription to the divine locus of manifestation, that is, the ascription of the servant to his corresponding divine Name and to himself, in his function as the Name's epiphanized entity. This is equal to saying that the servant's ascription to himself and to his individual lord fulfils God's providential plan which prescribes His manifestation to be 'respectful' of the *ʿabd*'s limited gnoseological ability to understand Him and himself.[62]

Disobedience to the divine prescriptive command depends on the servant and his acting as an actualized *locus* of divine manifestation through his immutable entities. Disobedience, it has been shown, makes sense only in the world of manifested things, and this implies that the divine command, in the state of servanthood, is 'controlled' by the properties of the servant as a *mazhar* (manifestation) of his Name-lord. The nature of the *ʿabd* as *locus manifestationis* affects the disclosure of God, under His Name the Manifest, because it does not allow the disclosure of the divine Essence in the totality of its aspects. This impediment is due to the fact that the divine Essence is influenced by the 'nature' of such locus. In contrast, servitude is the original state of the servant where he belongs totally to God. In the state of pure servitude, there is total absence of ascription; servitude, *ʿubūda*, is even deprived of the suffix *iyy* which, as an adjectival relationship, pertains to the station of servanthood (*ʿubūdiyya*). The servant does ascribe himself neither to the world nor to God because His Essence is completely absorbed and totally immersed in the divine one: 'The Manifest does not trace his origin to servanthood', Ibn ʿArabī explains, but 'traces His origin to that thing to which it is ascribed, since the effect given to the Manifest by the entity of the locus of manifestation is nothing than the Manifest; "there is no goal beyond God"'.[63]

The relationship existing between the servant and his lord, which is essential to the state of servanthood, is ruled out progressing onto the stage of servitude. At the station of *ʿubūda*, the human being acquires awareness that the Manifest has knowledge of Himself under the denominations of His *aʿyān thābita*. This implies that the limitations imposed by the gnoseological confines of the immutable entity's *qadar* are superseded because the determinism/destiny imprinted in all things are simply the divine *qaḍā'*. The *qaḍā'* 'has only effect on things through themselves'[64] because, as explained earlier, it is nothing but the divine engendering command and, ultimately, the only essential-existential *Wujūd* to which nothing is in opposition:

> Through servitude [the servant] follows the command without any opposition. When He [God] says to him, 'Be!', he comes into existence without hesitation, for there is nothing there but the immutable entity receptive by its very essence to being engendered. Then, when the locus of manifestations is actualized, God says to it, 'Do this!' and 'Do not do that!'; if he disobeys, it is because he is a locus of manifestation, but if he obeys and does not delay, that is in respect of his [immutable] entity.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 88)[65]

This passage reminds the reader that, in line with the Avicennian idea for which matter's receptivity is responsible for the formation of any substantial compound, Ibn ʿArabī believes that it is the very nature of the immutable entity, as a receptive entity, which makes it 'existent'. The passage infers that servitude is inherent in the immutable entities through their very essences because they are 'compelled' to obey the divine 'engendering command'. However, it is only through the servanthood of the immutable entities as *loci manifestationis*, which are 'affected' by the modalities of manifestation, independently from their inclination to either obey or not the prescriptive command, that the responsibility for proximity to God takes place. Implicitly, the *Shaykh al-akbar* claims that the immutable entity's capacity to obey the command is affected once the entity enters the domain of manifestation. Although humans are instructed to believe by the divine Law that obedience to the command is attainable through strive and self-motivation, that is, through their 'choice' to obey the Law, in truth, obedience is embedded in all beings' dispositions. These are compliant to the divine decree which establishes for all human beings their potentiality to manifest specific Names.

It has been observed that servitude belongs to the servant, as an immutable entity, in the absence of any relation and that it is at this stage that perfect identicalness between divine decree and entities' self-determinations occurs. On the contrary, the servant reaches the station of servanthood when he acts as the plane of disclosure of the relationship between himself and the Name (the lord of his personal belief) which is destined to him. A potential opposition might seem to occur between divine *qaḍā'* (God's Will) and the entity's *qadar* (God's Wish).[66] These considerations explain Ibn ʿArabī's stance with respect to the figure of the saint: the *wālī*, as the one who is proximate to God:

> [the saint] returns to his specific attribute, which is a servitude that does not compete with Lordship. He becomes adorned (*taḥallī*) by it and sits in the house of his immutability, not in his existence, gazing upon the manner in which God turns him this way and that.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, pp. 153)[67]

This refers to the utmost stage of servitude which is occupied by the saints known as *afrād* or *Malāmatiyya*: the 'people of the blame'. By acknowledging that God is the only Real Existence and that His Essence encompasses His Attributes and Acts, the *Malāmatiyya* profess their devotion by respecting and obeying the status quo of every form of existents. Amongst the characteristics of these saints, is their renunciation to all personal movements (*al-tabarrī min al-ḥaraka*) which explains the status of immutability mentioned in the above extract.[68] As Chodkiewicz elucidates, 'the *afrād* have preferred repose (*sukūn*) to movement because the state of repose alone is in conformity with the original status, the ontological definition, of the true *ʿabd* (*al-iqāma ʿalā'l-aṣl*)'.[69]

With a few exceptions, for the majority of humans, the accomplishment of servitude stops at the state of possibility; at the level of their *aʿyān thābita*. The relegation of pure servitude to the degree of possibility recalls the Avicennian theory

of the potentiality of human freedom which is overtaken only by the *istantiation* of existence through divine determinism. Similarly, according to Ibn ʿArabī, the abandonment of servanthood and the actualization of servitude are attainable once one understands that 'the entities of the possible things remain in their original state of non-existence and that they are the *loci* of manifestation for God, who is Manifest within them'.[70] The immutable entity which pertains to one servant, in the phase of divine incomparability, once set in the world is inevitably affected by the properties of its *locus* of manifestation which are capable of nullifying the unblemished primordial servitude of the *ʿabd*. This automatically turns the relation of the servant to his Lord into the liaison of servanthood. Hence, full awareness of God's oneness is necessary in order to recover the original stage of servitude. No one has existence but God, and no thing has effects (*athar*) but the entities which, despite being 'intelligible (*maʿqūl*), have no existence'.[71]

The *magister magnus* is ready to discuss his theory on servitude and servanthood also from a more logical perspective. The attribution of acts to the servant, he explains, makes the latter a 'servant' because the *ʿabd* is whoever is put in the condition to perform or not perform acts in accordance to a given command. The servant's possibility to obey or defer from obedience defines his self-control (*taṣarruf*) on the act. Self-control means to attribute acts to the servant and to establish for him the condition of servanthood which is realizable only through a relation, that is, a relation between the command and the servant's response to it. However, since acts are ultimately God's creation, the servant's chance to exercise his self-control is actually nullified.[72] Therefore, it is impossible to speak of obedience or disobedience of the servant in respect to a given command in the state of servanthood; what is admissible is saying that the servant 'remains either in conformity (*muwāfaqa*) with the command or in opposition (*mukhālafa*) to it', in line with his inherent dispositions. The servant is said to be 'an existent without a property' just because he is not endowed with any power to choose over his own dispositions.[73]

Ibn ʿArabī analyses *tawḥīd* also in causative terms when he examines the nature of the divine activity. Once humans become aware of the real meaning of divine *tawḥīd*, i.e. once they acquire knowledge that the real form of activity is merely divine, they abandon the station of servanthood and realize that 'there is no servanthood of self-control'.[74] Echoing al-Ghazālī in his eulogy of divine unity and agency, Ibn ʿArabī shifts his discourse from a mystical plane to a more *strictu senso* logical level. By implanting the theme of the servant's alleged activity within the nucleus of his idea of servanthood, however, Ibn ʿArabī places the discussion in its mystical domain.

Freedom (*ḥurriyya*)

The station of freedom is defined as a station of the essence (*maqām dhātī*) rather than as a station of the Divinity (*ilāhī*). This is because human ontological indigence is inextirpable, so much so that freedom 'cannot be delivered over to the servant absolutely, since he is God's servant through a servanthood that does not accept emancipation'.[75]

It is known that for Avicenna God is 'limited' by His own absoluteness; Ibn ʿArabī too, in his own way, declares that the Lord cannot be said to be free because He is 'conditioned' by His relations. In effect, as a divinity, namely, as the Lord, God is in a 'relationship (*irtibāt*) to the divinity's vassal. This is a relationship which corresponds to that of the lord to his servant, the owner to his property, and the king to his kingdom. Basically, in Avicennian parlance, the greatest of masters explains that it is necessary to have two terms of relation if one wants to speak of correlation (*idāfa*); it is for this reason that 'there can be no freedom with correlation, whilst Lordship and Divinity are correlations'.[76] One fundamental difference though occurs between Avicenna and Ibn ʿArabī: whilst the former believes that the Necessary Existent emanates the world by natural necessity, the latter denies any correspondence (*munāsaba*) between God and His creatures as He is and remains 'Independent of the Worlds'.

God is the only Real Existent: divine 'existential monopoly', safeguarded by the divine Jealousy, makes creatures needy towards their Lord.[77] In the stage of servanthood, the *ʿabd* is aware that his primordial condition is that of existential poverty and, consequently, he yearns to assume the traits (*takhalluq*) of servitude, also implicitly desiring the realization (*taḥaqquq*) of the station of freedom.[78] The station of *ḥurriyya* is reached through a paradoxical 'journey': the servant can actualize his freedom only by losing the poverty (*iftiqār*) which characterizes him through his nature as a possible existent. Yet, the servant knows that (i) the superseding of his intrinsic attribute (*waṣf nafsī*) of possibility and (ii) the ascription of existence to him, are impossible to achieve. The servant ascertains what he already knows about his inescapable primordial ontological 'poverty'. Almost paradoxically, in the very instant the servant grasps his real nature, he frees himself. The abandoning of any aspiration to exist and the renunciation to the claims (*daʿwā*) of existence allows the *ʿabd* to extinguish his poverty:[79] 'since God cannot be possessed, then the recipient [man] is free'.[80] The servant 'remains free in the state of possessing non-existence' in the same way as the Essence, in God's Being, experiences freedom.[81] For the human servant, freedom becomes acknowledgement of his essential non-existence and of his lowliness. The *ʿabd* is reminded that it is impossible for him to assume the traits of those specific divine Names which belong to God alone. Freedom confirms that God cannot be either compared or grasped in His Essence; it becomes, in a sense, emancipation of God's independence and declaration of His superiority to the world. Freedom announces God's unlimited power upon things and, as a result, the perspective which identifies freedom with free will is fudged. Creatures are essentially compelled to make choices and they choose exactly what they must choose. Similarly to al-Ghazālī, for the *Shaykh al-akbar*, any being is compelled (*majbūr*) in its choosing.[82]

Divine unity and the disposition of things

According to Ibn ʿArabī, there are no entities in existence but merely relations which are defined as 'things pertaining to non-existence (*umūr ʿadamiyya*).[83] Men have

to become conscious of the fact (i) that the universe is nothing but 'a collection of relationships or *barzakhs* among things'[84] and (ii) that such relations are arranged by, within and through God. Like al-Ghazālī urged mankind to perceive the real essences of things as the means to get to ultimate divine *tawḥīd*, the *Shaykh al-akbar* too acknowledges that humans must observe phenomena and distinguish in them effects and 'causes'. Causes, it has been previously shown, have to be perceived as veils which are purposively set up by God and that, for this reason, are inviolable. It must be noticed that Ibn ʿArabī does not claim that secondary causes cannot be 'changed' or 'manipulated', but he simply states that humans have to acknowledge that God establishes for the secondary causes a purpose which makes them 'untouchable'. In contrast to the Ashʿarites and al-Ghazālī, who championed the idea for which miracles occur in order to prove the truth of prophethood, for Ibn ʿArabī, the belief in the occurrence of miracles implies ignorance both of the rules of natural phenomena and of the way they are established by God. Ibn ʿArabī classifies the group of the *Malāmatiyya* as the highest of saints exactly because they follow the rules imposed by the nature of phenomena. The *Malāmatiyya* offered a decisive yet subtle reaction against extreme asceticism. 'The People of the blame' (their notion of blame being inspired by Q. 5:54) adopted an outward behaviour which exposed them to the blame of the common people, whilst inwardly struggling in the attempt to attain spiritual experiences of ultimate purity and sincerity. To behold one's self as blameworthy was considered a tool meant to be used to defeat the lower self (*nafs*) which was regarded as the centre of the human ego and the dwelling place for evil morals. According to their creed, blame should be drawn upon one's self not only from the external reality, by disregarding what socially, ethically and religiously considered right, but also from the *Malāmī* himself, by way of regarding 'all his own actions as hypocrisy (*riyā'*) and all his spiritual state as presumptuous pretence (*daʿāwā*)'.[85] Even the practices of asceticism, penitence and abstention were considered dangerous because the experience of spiritual realization following them might have led to the boosting of one's ego. Their adherence to the divine arrangement of things is dictated by their wish to flee any form of attention and praise.[86] The 'people of the blame' are those mostly aware that there cannot be any 'breaking of conventions' (i.e. miracles) because what common people perceive as miracles or charismatic acts (*karamāt*) are, for the *Malāmatiyya*, and the majority of Sufis, simply acts which bring into existence engendered things. There cannot be breaking of habits because there are no habits in God's perpetual creation. Significantly, Chodkiewicz has observed that, for Ibn ʿArabī, natural laws are 'statistical regularities which man interprets in terms of the chain of cause and effect, but which cannot bind the Almighty. A miracle contravenes, not the nature of things, but our idea of them.'[87]

These observations confirm that even if Ibn ʿArabī does not believe in such things like the divine custom,[88] he is nevertheless akin to al-Ghazālī's belief for which even what is perceived by humans in terms of a cause-effect connection between phenomena should be considered and understood correctly. In his discussion on *tawakkul*, al-Ghazālī had emphasized that attending to causes and trusting them amounts to idolatry but, at the same time, paying no attention to them

would constitute both an offence against the divine *Sunna* and a defamation of revelation.[89] Likewise, for Ibn ʿArabī, even if humans may have different ways to understand the relations which occur between essences, the true nature of these relations should be investigated and acknowledged to have been decreed by God. To this end, he emphasizes the important role carried out by the 'people of the blame': They 'affirm the secondary causes where necessary and deny them where they should be denied'.[90] This category of saints know that secondary causes are nothing but the untouchable veils, designed by God, whose action is a gratuitous favour which is granted by Him to all things which are responsive to His command. Above all, the *Malāmatiyya* are aware that, at all times, it is God who acts at the secondary causes rather than through them (*ʿinda al-asbāb lā bi'l-asbāb*). In this way things come to exist at God's command.[91] Clearly, Ibn ʿArabī does not adopt any explicit 'pantheistic' expressions because he highlights that it is God who creates things, *at* causes, not *through* them. Generally speaking, he acknowledges the validity of the Ashʿarites' position which considers God as the undisturbed Disposer of habitual-perceived causes and effects. However, it is quite obvious that the *Shaykh al-akbar*'s outlook differs from al-Ghazālī's instrumental use of secondary causes which he regards as the locus where God's actions occur. Ibn ʿArabī is also quite distant from the Avicennian idea for which God has delegated His activity to secondary causes. Evidence for this lies in Ibn ʿArabī's tribute to the *Malāmatiyya*'s conformity to ordinary life and behaviour, and his tribute to their lifestyle which is proof of their uttermost servitude they perform through voluntary compliance to the divine disposition of things. By submitting themselves to the divinely given laws of causality, the *Malāmatiyya* observe the divine order and fulfil their highest servitude by practising the legal obligations in the way they are epitomized in the revealed Law. The 'people of the blame' realize that the only possible achievement in terms of freedom is given by the servant's renunciation to his personal notion of *ḥurriyya*. Awakened to this new consciousness, the *Malāmī* gnostic identifies freedom in the servant's moral acceptance of his *ʿubūdiyya*. The stage of freedom is attained with the realization that nothing is but God, with the awareness that God's arrangement of things in the natural phenomena makes them unchangeable, and with the servant's renunciation to any 'lordly' activity which would be able to impose changes on things.

'Naturalistic' predestination

Qaḍā' is God's decree in relation to things and in accordance to what He knows of them and in them.[92] This means that divine predestination is *in divinis*, corresponding to the divine foreknowledge of all those things which will be manifested in the world. It becomes an expression of God's Self-knowledge occurring before His undivided Essence is defined into the multiplicity of the created things. Whilst, on the one hand, the Akbarian version of predestination can be related to the conventional concepts of divine decree, on the other hand, it is evident that the *Shaykh al-akbar* merges the Islamic vision of divine predestination with his very singular theory of the Names and predispositions. In fact, as it has already

been mentioned, the *qadar* is considered as the actualization, occurring at a given moment, of those things which are predestined to be according to their essences.[93] Destinies are unleashed following the unchangeable nature of their beings, that which in naturalistic terms is named 'disposition'. The immutable dispositions disclose, in the course of time, their essences and their attributes which are always preserved by, and within, the One Essence.

In Avicenna's system, the dimension of divine determinism has been described as being primarily natural. The Neoplatonic emanative scheme, inherited by Greek philosophy, insufficient to fulfil the Islamic paradigms, is therewith 'emancipated' through a series of intelligences which are capable of intellective 'emanative' natures. Intelligences are considered to be able to 'rescue', with their divinely willed delegated capacities, the notion of a God who is compelled to act by His absolute nature. In al-Ghazālī's case, nature is believed to be directly constrained to work (*musakhkhara*) by its Creator. Once humans become aware of this status of affairs, they can realize that divine *tawḥīd* makes God the only real Agent. In Ibn ʿArabī's speculations, the role played by nature emerges again: it is through and by nature that the individual destinies of all creatures are contracted *ab aeterno* in God's incomparability. In addition, it is through nature that entities are unbound to satisfy God's plan to know and be known. Each thing is destined to be what it has always been, in harmony with its immutable nature. Yet, it is the same thing that is able to determine the role of God as the only real Agent. Clearly, God is certainly the Ashʿarite Agent but He is also the recipient of His own immutable entities.

The 'entification' of the possible things and the individualization of their nature influence the absolute freedom which any entity may enjoy in the sphere of possibility. Absolute freedom is locked once the entity enters the world of existence, submitting itself to dictates of its own natural predispositions. This submission is accomplished instinctively, through a 'spontanéité intrinsèque'.[94] With it the possible being is answering the call of the existentiating *kun* and it is fulfilling the mission of realizing its potentials, in conformity with the divine will. The divine existentiating command, however, does not have to be seen as a tyrannical imposition: this is so because the divine will complies with what exists, for He wills only that which is. Ibn ʿArabī is unambiguous when he states that 'the Determiner, in actualizing His determinations, complies with the essence of the object of His determination in accordance with the requirements of its essential nature'.[95] The infinite range of possibilities, pertaining to the yet-not-existent entity, is restricted once this entity is actualized. By entering 'existence', any entity is bound to manifest only certain specific Names, and its actualization can be seen as its chance to repair and rectify the past. This means that, for Ibn ʿArabī, the Sufi responsiveness to the *amr al-takwīnī* corresponds to the theological concept of *tawba*: with its existence the possible thing renounces his defective nature, as a possible being, and its desire to attribute itself with the divine traits. Simultaneously, such a being accomplishes its divinely imposed duty to fulfil God's *qaḍā'*, manifesting only those Names that pertain to his nature. The possible being which leaps into the realm of actualization threatens its absolute freedom so that its obedience

to God's engendering command, although intrinsically spontaneous, becomes an expression of its ultimate servitude towards the godhead. Renunciation to its own freedom makes the possible thing the ultimate *ʿabd*; 'Know – God give you success – that the abandonment of freedom is pure and utter servitude', states the *Shaykh*.[96]

From a Sufi perspective, absolute servitude towards God should invalidate any other form of servitude because the possible being should be considered free from everything but God. However, for the *Shaykh al-akbar*, the scenario is different. Whoever possesses the station of 'abandoning freedom' (*tark al-ḥurriyya*) is, in fact, still enslaved by phenomena (*asbāb*) 'for he has attained to the realization of the knowledge of the [divine] wisdom (*ḥikma*) in their establishment (*wadʿ*)'.[97] Every engendered thing exercises a right upon the individual who has reached the station of 'abandoning freedom', which renders this individual a slave towards existent things. Ibn ʿArabī speaks of this kind of person as a being who is enslaved even by his own self: 'for God says to him – thy self (*nafs*) has a right upon thee, thy eye (*ʿayn*) has a right upon thee, and thy guest (*zawr*) has a right upon thee'.[98] The fulfilment of the rights of the self becomes a pure obligation once it is established that the individual has the ability to carry out this fulfilment. Refraining from its fulfilment would be seen both as an act of wrongdoing and of ignorance towards the divine wisdom (*al-ḥukm al-ilāhī*).[99]

In his discourse on the 'abandoning of freedom', the greatest of masters links the notion of divine decree to the state of *tawakkul* like al-Ghazālī did. The essence of *tawakkul* lies in the individual's acceptance of his condition as the ultimate servant and in his acknowledging that this is a condition wanted by God. *Tawakkul* also encompasses the servant's remission to the divine establishment of worldly phenomena.[100] In addition, the awareness that the divine presence is in every act, and that both the divine wisdom and justice are intrinsic to the actual status quo of the world makes the acceptance of every existent's rights necessary for the person who has reached such a level of gnosis. Whoever understands the real nature of things, and accepts the measures and limits imposed in the world by God, is called to embrace his condition as a servant and to trust the divine disposition of things. Trust in phenomena's dictates represents the accomplishment of God's right to exercise His dominion; but it is also the means through which the human being recognizes God as 'a Protector who protects . . . in the abandonment of freedom and in enslavement to that which Wisdom demands'.[101] Defiance of *tawakkul* and refusal to fulfil God's right to be obeyed are expressions of disrespect and lack of knowledge. Despite this status of affairs, the servant is given the opportunity to regain his freedom by becoming a perfect servant. The *ʿabd* becomes qualified by perfection by obeying God's prescriptive command and by renouncing divine prohibitions. By doing so, the servant is set in the position to reach the stage in which he can abandon his own attributes and be invested with the divine ones. It is at this point that the knower takes on himself one of the divine qualities: 'the *ʿārif* then knows that the abandonment of freedom is a divine attribute'.[102] The servant is rewarded for having embraced uttermost servitude with a new form of freedom which has completed its *iter* and has come to a full circle; through it, the servant

re-acquires his temporary 'lost' freedom by way of renouncing his individual liberty and by becoming the object on which the effects of divine attributes are exercised.[103]

Attribution of acts

Ibn ʿArabī analyses both Muʿtazilite and Ashʿarite positions related to the issue of the attributions of acts. He is aware that Muʿtazilites and Ashʿarites have failed to address this question in its complexity.[104] Whilst the Muʿtazilites are considered as people unaware of the reality of things, the Ashʿarites are perceived as those who have acknowledged that all acts belong to God alone. Nonetheless, they are unable to truly 'witness' this truth because they have bound their doctrines to the 'veil of performance', that is, their notion of *kasb*.[105] For the *Shaykh al-akbar*, the fact that the human being was created in the image of the All-Merciful is a principle which cannot be ignored since this concept implies that the efficacy of the human capacity to act cannot be nullified as the Ashʿarites did. They wrongly looked at the act as something which merely belonged to God 'from behind the veil of the engendered things, which are the locus wherein the acts become manifest'.[106] As long as the servant summarizes in himself the totality of God's Names and Attributes, and as long as he is in the form of God, then actions can be said to belong to man. However, the *Shaykh* claims, 'true knowledge of God demands that the servant possess a sound relationship (*nisba*) with works – hence He prescribed works for him – and that God possesses a relationship with works that is affirmed by God for Himself'.[107] This statement, which is used to define the expression 'gathering' (*jamʿ*) as the 'contemplation of true knowledge', projects the topic of the attribution of acts from an intuitive, mystical level, onto a theological plane, filling it with a profound religious sense.[108] Ibn ʿArabī, in fact, informs his readers that, through the imposition of religious obligations, God has made clear that the relationship men have with actions has to be articulated within the limits of the prescribed divine Law. However, God too possesses another relationship with the acts. This kind of relationship is qualified by Him in relation only to Himself, that is, outside the limitations which are dictated by any form of commandment or prohibition. It is known that the imposition of prescriptions implies the capacity, on behalf of their recipients, to either accept or refuse these obligations;[109] this capacity is guaranteed by the fact that the servant is a locus of disclosure for the Manifest, the latter being, in turn, coloured by the disposition and preparedness of the servant's entity.[110] Through the entity's preparedness, the Name Manifest comes to be conceived as the medium between the entity's preparedness and the property of its corresponding Name. The Manifest becomes the instrument – the *Shaykh* calls it the *speech* – which amplifies the entity's requirement of its specific property, needed for the realization of an act, which it addresses to its correspondent divine Name. Ibn ʿArabī explains: 'so the speech of the Manifest is the tongue of the entity of the possible thing; or rather, it is the speech of the possible thing in the tongue of the Manifest'.[111] Should the level of preparedness of the entity be weak, the Manifest would not be able to appeal to a suitable Name in order

to receive help from it for the realization of the act. Whilst al-Ghazālī considers humans and angels, in their quality as secondary causes, as being instrumental for the disclosure of the divine agency, in Ibn ʿArabī, this kind of 'instrumentality' involves both the servant's preparedness and the Name Manifest within him. God, as the Incomparable Essence, enters the playground just to share the prize which is earned for Him by the servant and the Manifest through their different relationship towards the act:

> So the servant possesses a relationship to the work . . . as the effect of the preparedness of the entity of the possible thing within the Manifest; and God possesses a relationship to the work . . . as the reception by the Manifest of the effectivity (*taʾthīr*) of the entity within it.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, p. 517)[112]

This means that the Name the Manifest plays an intermediate role, operating as a mirror between, on the one hand, the servant's entity and, on the other hand, God's Essence, which receives its 'colour' (i.e. its predisposition) from the former and reflects it on the latter, thus actualizing the Real.

Despite all particularizations, it is evident that every act is ultimately God's act. Whether or not it is the servant's entity which acts, it is always God who provides the conditions for the act to occur because any act is not accomplished until the conditions of its actualization are fulfilled. What Ibn ʿArabī presents is nothing but a modified version of the Ashʿarite notion of *kasb*, which is reconstituted according to the doctrine of the oneness of Being. It has been observed that, for the Ashʿarites, God is regarded as the only real Agent who creates in man the power to acquire the divine act simultaneously with the occurrence of the same act. Consequently, despite the illusion of human responsibility, it is the divine compulsion which, complying with divine predestination, is at work at all times, necessitating all activities. Similarly, in the *Shaykh*'s opinion, although the act can be credited to the servant's entity, the latter is, in reality, nothing but the actualized aspect of God's Essence. It is therefore to God that all acts have ultimately to be assigned. Ibn ʿArabī continues to criticize the Ashʿarite notion of *kasb* and their belief for which 'the temporally originated power has no effect upon anything, since it does not go beyond its own locus'. A similar notion of 'compulsion', however, is inferred when the *Shaykh* suggests how Gnostics understand the affair. They recognize that the real state of things is 'that one divine name prescribes the Law for another divine name, addressing it with the locus of an engendered servant. The servant is then called "the one for whom the Law is prescribed (*mukallaf*)"'.[113] This implies that the possibility for the servants to disobey the revealed Law is simply the result of a providential wisdom which, operating in harmony with God's Names, determines the relationship which each servant entertains with the deity, at specific times, also determining whom amongst His servants is 'destined' to be a Perfect Man in harmony to his individual essence. Even the temporally originated power in the servant, whose 'independent' efficacy to act is denied by the Ashʿarites, has to be seen as having a relationship

of connection with the specific act which is prescribed for it by the Law. This is because the command which imposes on the servant the capacity to perform acts has been already established.[114]

Any form of injustice implied by the Ashʿarite notion of divine predestination, punishing humans for necessitated acts, is obviated by Ibn ʿArabī since evil acts are, ultimately, good acts. Goodness has been hidden from humans by the rulings of the divine Law so that, once the 'veils' of the Law are removed in the hereafter, men will be able to see that goodness has always been part of all 'their' actions. This is because all acts are God's, and His acts are always perfect in goodness: 'The evil and ugliness which had been attributed to the acts were because of the opposition to God's rulings, not because of the entities of the acts'.[115] Similarly, the classical theological distinction occurring between believers and unbelievers is blurred in Ibn ʿArabī's system to the extent that even disobedience is considered as an accidental non-belief. The notion of unbelief can be valid only temporarily, within the realm of the engendered things, because it is non-compliant with the Law which becomes redundant in the next world. Moreover, unbelief is actually from God, because it is generated from the lord of each entity's individual belief. Following this thoughts, Ibn ʿArabī warns his readers not to restrict themselves to a particular aspect concerning the Reality; the intellectual tolerance characteristic of both al-Ghazālī and Avicenna becomes evident once the *Shaykh* encourages his followers to be:

> Completely and utterly receptive to all doctrinal forms, for God, Most High, is too All-embracing and Great to be confined within one creed rather than the other, for He has said 'Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God (Q 2:115),' without mentioning any particular direction.
>
> (Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 113)[116]

This perspective links in with the idea that the primordial relationship occurring between the creatures and the Creator, implicit in the idea of servanthood, implies that all beings have imprinted in their essence, as servants, the belief in their Creator. At the time of the primordial covenant, all created beings replied to God's question: 'Am I not your Lord?' with the word 'truly!' (*balā*), thus recognizing God's *rubūbiyya*. Hence, for the *Doctor Maximus*, faith towards the Lord is necessarily engrained in the essences of all creatures according to Qur'ān 17:23: 'And your Lord decreed that you should worship Him alone.' All beings, by being servants, recognize in their very nature God as their Lord.[117] Therefore, belief in God is *essential* to every servant and ultimately belongs to every created object which is embraced in God's all-encompassing outpouring Mercy (*raḥma*).[118]

Muḥammad and the *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*: Compendium of divine decree and destiny

The Perfect Man's awareness of his primordial theomorphism is something that lies hidden and forgotten. After the primordial covenant, this awareness has fallen into oblivion, and it is for this reason that the *Shaykh*, recurring to the Platonic

principle of *anamnesis*, considers imperative for humans to return to their primeval gnosis. On the one hand, from the perspective of the *mawjūdāt*, this return can be understood as a sort of *palingenesis*, namely, a new birth, and a re-awakening of all creatures to the reality of the Reality. In order to actualize this resurgence, it is imperative for humans to step onto the *via mystica* and look back towards their Origin. On the other hand, from the perspective of the Reality, this return marks the moment in which the transitory nature of manifestation must be shifted onto the permanence of the non-manifest. In other words, through the acquired awareness that existents have of themselves as permanent things (*thubūt*), they regain the immutability which has always constitute their primordial reality and of which they had lost consciousness.

Avicenna, one might recollect, does speak of the return of the human self to the original Self as a way through which the human being escapes from the extraneousness of his engendered ontological status. Conversely, al-Ghazālī linked the notion of the human return to goodness with the concept of repentance (*tawba*). The *Shaykh al-akbar* too connects the notion of repentance with the idea of a return and, specifically, a turning back (a re-turn) of the human being to the centre of His Essence, his heart and, above all, a return to the only one Reality. Those who repent (*tawwābūn*) are 'those who return from Him (*minhu*) to Him (*ilāhi*)', Ibn ʿArabī claims.[119] More specifically, the return is the process through which the human being is re-absorbed within his Origin or Source (*aṣl*). It represents an inverse process along the path of universal manifestation because, after its 'eruption', the Essence calls back its particularizations and, in this 'homecoming' journey, it is Muḥammad who comes to be perceived as the symbol of all the creatures who 'un-become', by abandoning false 'existence', and return to the only real Existence.[120]

Ibn ʿArabī speaks of the Perfect Man as the compendium of all the cosmos; similarly, within the human species, the last of the messengers of God, Muḥammad, in his function as *rusūl* combines within himself all the characteristics of the Prophets who preceded him. Muḥammad is the last to appear in the temporal order amongst the Prophets, yet his immutable entity was the first thing to be in the order of principles as the Prophet himself declared, according to a renowned *ḥadīth*: 'I was a prophet when Adam was between clay and water.' The Prophet is 'the First' in the essential order (*al-fātih*, i.e. the one who opens existence) – often referred to as 'the first in thought' – and the 'Last in actuality' (*al-khātim*, i.e. the one who closes the prophecy).[121] The Primary reality of the Prophet is identified with the *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya* whose conceptual origin is to be found in Qur'ān 5:15: 'A light has now come to you and a Scripture making things clear' (where the light is identified with Muḥammad).[122] The *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*, or Muḥammadan Reality is at the same time Light (*nūr Muḥammadī*) and Spirit (*rūḥ Muḥammadī*), as Casseler explains: 'un' entità permanente metastorica' which inaugurates the cosmological process and brings it to an end.[123]

Influenced by the Christian doctrine of the *Logos*, first discussed in the Eastern Churches, the notion of the *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya* is absorbed within Islam, and appears in the early days of Sufism, being initially articulated only in allusive

ways. The concept of *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya* as the living existentiating principle *par excellence* is made explicit for the first time in the writings of the *Shaykh al-akbar*. It becomes this essential reality which, as the first divine non-manifest thought,[124] triggers the system of divine Self-manifestation.[125] Creation, as a perpetual divine Self-disclosure, is commenced for the *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya* and for its historical incarnation, perfectly embodied in the last prophet. The Muḥammadan Reality, conveyed from the first to the last legislative prophet, is the first created thing which is brought into existence from the *materia prima*; as such, it is a pre-existent entity which finds its first historical incarnation in Adam, but which achieves its full manifestation only in the person of Muḥammad.[126] Muḥammad is believed to complement the Adamic stage of mankind because he epitomizes the entity which brings all things back in himself and returns them to God.[127] This is possible because Muḥammad exemplifies the extreme limit of human knowledge, being the bearer of the highest form of cognizance: the last Prophecy which is here intended as the final Revelation, that is, the compendium of all the preceding ones. It is exactly because the Prophet is the Seal of the 'legislative' prophethood that the return of mankind to their origin becomes a gnoseological re-discovery of both the meaning and the scope of the whole creation. It is Muḥammad that, through his engendered humanity and through his sharing of the divine Message with all mankind, allows the epistemological re-actualization of the *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*. Muḥammad, with his perfect *fiṭra*, becomes the living explanation of the Law which establishes the boundaries of human intellectual potentialities. This means that the *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya* marks the extreme confines of all human gnoseological possibilities as it allows the perception of the divine Essence in Its ultimate degree of experienceability. This is possible through the Muḥammadan 'measure' which establishes the ultimate limits within which humans can comprehend the essential reality. It is the Primary reality of Muḥammad which prompts, as an efficient and final cause, the stepping out of the Essence from its status of non-delimitation (*iṭlāq*). Put it more simply, it is the Primary reality of Muḥammad which, as the cause of creation, spurs the Essence's first self-determination, which is achieved through the knowledge the Essence has of Itself, within Itself, and through Itself. The *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya* becomes the Gnostic Demiurge, the efficient agent in all the work of creation.[128] It is the instrument through which the cosmic existentiation (*takwīn*) takes place, and it is the reality for which everything is created (*al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bihi*). It is the omnipresent meta-historical reality which finds its correspondent initiatory degree in the Perfect Man, the latter, in turn, becoming historically incarnated in Muḥammad.

The Perfect Man, it has been observed, represents the ultimate degree of spiritual realization for mankind and, likewise, the *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya* delimits the human spiritual realizability and establishes the boundaries which humans can attain of the divine Essence. Whilst the latter remains hidden in its uttermost incomparability, it also comes to be reflected upon the polished mirror of the Muḥammadian Reality.[129] It can be argued that the *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya* represents another expression for the Perfect Man in his function as a supreme *barzakh* because it acts as an extreme isthmus connecting the realms of the *ḥaqq* and *khalq*.

It is the trace which marks the distinction occurring between the divine *aḥadiyya*, as absolute necessity, and the divine *wāḥidiyya*, which is exposed via God's Self-determination to the potentiality of multiplicity. In actual fact, the *insān al-kamīl* complements the notion of the *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*: the Perfect Man, in fact, fulfils his destiny as *khālifa Allāh* exclusively when *in actu*, that is, exclusively when it is entified in the form of a human being. This occurs because it is solely in actuality that the potential perfection (*kamāl*) of humans enters the realm of manifestation. It is by living in conformity with the Law, the teaching of the Prophet and his *Sunna*, that the original theomorphism of man is realized, giving way to a perfect man. It is by assuming the traits of the servant of God that each human being can awaken his dormant divine nature and can become a divine *khālifa* providing his service as protector and as a regent of the cosmos. Muḥammad, the ultimate embodiment of the Perfect Man, is also the Perfect Servant and through his Primary reality, he is the only man who has realized absolute perfection and absolute servanthood in actuality at its highest level. Therefore, he is the freest of creatures.[130] This means that, although the initiatory degree of the Perfect Man can be and has indeed been reached by many human beings, it is exclusively in Muḥammad that it is possible to find synthesized both the divine decree (*qaḍā'*) and the divine destiny (*qadar*).[131] It is in Muḥammad that the essential reality of the *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*, shared by all prophets, coincides with the support of its prophetic manifestation since he is the only point of arrival (or final point – *nuqṭa al-akhīra*) of the prophetic Muḥammadian form.[132] Muḥammad is, therefore, the perfect form in and by which the eternal divine decree and the temporal essential destiny converge, attaining to manifestation through uttermost knowledge. Knowledge plays a fundamental role if it is considered that the divine 'bringing into existence' of humanity is pursued for two fundamental reasons: (i) to make mankind aware that God is the One who created them, and (ii) to make humans aware that the heart of Muḥammad becomes that which 'was specially picked out for perfect understanding'.[133] As the Seal of the final revelation, as the form of the extreme limit (*ghāya*) of all human gnoseological possibilities, and as the most perfect amongst the Perfect Men, Muḥammad is the totalizing being (*kawn jāmiʿ*) through which the divine Essence reveals to Itself its own secret (*sirr* – the secret of predestination).[134] A syllogistic way of reasoning must be used to understand the dynamics the *Shaykh* employs to explain the nature of Muḥammad: Muḥammad is regarded as the first key (*miftāḥ al-awwal*) amongst the keys of Mystery (*mafātīḥ al-ghayb*) because he allows God to know His secret. God knows His secret because Muḥammad knows, embodies and unlocks the *sirr* of all human destinies through his essential perfect receptivity and responsiveness to the divine decree, which is ultimately enclosed in both the engendering and the prescriptive commands. Muḥammad's existence, basically his receptiveness to the engendering command, is from ever and forever since he is both the first and last form of the a-temporal *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*; this implies that his adherence to the prescriptive command (the Law) is total because he is not only the ultimate Perfect Servant, but because he is also the Law which is revealed through the Qur'ān.[135]

Divine knowledge, it has been explained, occurs through the knowledge that man has of himself. In turn, the capacity that humans have in understanding God is proportionate to their ability to draw closer to Muḥammad's exemplar nature which is described in the Qur'ān and the Traditions. Like Avicenna and al-Ghazālī, Ibn ʿArabī stresses that both the human predisposition and personal inclination allow individuals to influence their destiny, shaping their relationship with regard to the Law. Personal striving makes men able to be 'on the watch' for the goodness descending from above because humans have a constitution which makes them to 'incline affectionately towards it'.[136] However, it is clear that the relationship that human beings have with Muḥammad is ultimately divinely decreed, depending on the individual capacity to assume the divine traits. Muḥammad is sent as a mercy to all mankind[137] because it is in Muḥammad that God's plan to be known is actualized by way of fusing destiny (the human natural predisposition to imitate the Prophet's perfect *fiṭra*), with the divine decree, which forbids 'one who has been brought into being (*mukawwan*) to pass beyond what the One Who brings into being (*mukawwin*) has purposed'.[138]

Notes

1 Burckhardt, *Introduzione*, p. 56. The entities of the possible things, like numbers, are intelligible (*maʿqūl*) but have no existence. Consequently, the multitude of these possible things is given by their being immutable objects of God's knowledge. Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, pp. 250–1.
2 Ibid., p. 39.
3 Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi and the Later Islamic Tradition*, p. 14.
4 G. Leconte, 'Introduction', in Qāshānī, *Traité sur la Prédestination et le Libre Arbitre*, p. 18.
5 Ibn ʿArabī clarifies that expressions like '*thumma*', used to indicate the succession of 'passages' within God's new creation, do not imply any temporal succession because the instant of manifestation coincides with the instant of annihilation. See T. Burckhardt, *La Sagesse des Prophètes*, Paris: Collection Spiritualites Vivantes, 1955, p. 140.
6 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 682; Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 58.
7 *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 384 and p. 431; *The Sufi Path*, pp. 98–9. Divine tasks are also interpreted as the perpetual self-renewal of *wujūd* through the breaths of the All-Merciful (*nafas al-Raḥmān*). See *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 399.
8 It is for this reason that God manifests Himself to His servants in diverse forms; it is only in relation to the essences' capacity to discern God in a 'familiar' form that God can know Himself and be known. *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 178; IV, p. 200; Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, pp. 52–7. In similar terms, Avicenna had spoken of the need for each soul to be 'in touch' with his 'personal' or 'familiar' Agent Intellect.
9 Diyāb, 'Ibn ʿArabī on Human Freedom, Destiny and the Problem of Evil', 25–43.
10 Chittick summarizes this point clearly: 'God is all-knowing, and He is all-knowing always and forever. The choices He makes are based on the realities of the entities which are fixed in His knowledge. His choices follow what He knows about the entities, because knowledge follows the known.' See *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 186.
11 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 162; translation by Chittick, *The Self-Disclosure*, p. 187.
12 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 303.
13 Trusteeship is a recurrent topic in the Akbarian production. Creatures are commanded to take God as their Trustee (*wakīl*) and to have trust (*tawakkul*) in Him. This topic is intrinsically linked to the idea for which humans are vice-regents of God on earth. God

makes humans His trustees by appointing them as His vice-regents and, in turn, men take God as their Trustee by way of obeying His commands.

14 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* quoted in 'Ibn ʿArabī on Human Freedom', p. 30.
15 Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 248.
16 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 215.
17 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 215; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, pp. 251.
18 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 517; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 284.
19 Translation is by Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 252.
20 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, IV, p. 196; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 109.
21 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 110; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, pp. 95–6.
22 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 474; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 107.
23 Ibn ʿArabī refers to the possibility that each creature has to appeal towards God only referring to Him as the Lord. It is through each creature's individual god, namely, the lord of their individual beliefs that the appeal has validity and chance of success. Ibn ʿArabī recalls that 'Noha said "Oh my Lord!" (Qur'an 71:26) He did not say, "Oh my God" because God as the Lord is fixed, whereas the divinity is manifold according to [the variety] of His Names . . . God as the Lord denotes a constancy of mode without which the appeal would not be appropriate'. See Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 73. The translation is from Austin, *The Bezels*, p. 80.
24 Ibn ʿArabī, *Shajarat al-Kawn*, p. 51. On Ibn ʿArabī's theory of the Perfect Man see his *al-Insān al-kāmil*, Damascus: Maṭbaúat Zayd Ibn Thābit, 1981; 'Abd al-Karīm al-Jīlī, *al-insān al-kāmil fī maʿrifat al-awākhir waʾl-awāʾil*, several editions, in R.A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, Cambridge, 1921, trans. T. Burckhardt, *De l'homme universel*, Lyon, 1953. Cf. also 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Jurjānī, 'al-insān al-kāmil', in *Kitāb al-Taʿrīfāt*, French translation by M. Gloton, Tehran, 1994; M. Takeshita, *Ibn 'Arabi's Theory of the Perfect Man and its Place in the History of Islamic Thought*. On the general idea of the Perfect Man see H.H. Schäder, 'Die islamische Lehre vom Vollkommenen Menschen, ihre Herkunft und ihre dichterische Gestaltung', *ZDMG* 79, 1925, pp. 192–268; L. Massignon, 'L'homme parfait en Islam et son originalité eschatologique', *Eranos Jahrbuch* 1947, pp. 287–314; Úazīz ibn Muḥammad al-Nasafī, *Le Livre de l'Homme Parfait – Kitāb al-Insān al-Kāmil: Recueil de Traités de Soufīsme*, trans. Isabelle de Gastines, Paris: Fayard, 1984; Muḥammad Úalawī Mālikī, *Muḥammad al-insān al-kāmil*, Jiddah: Dār al-Shurūq, 1984; R. Arnaldez, 'al-Insān al-Kāmil', *EI2*.
25 Qurʾān (2:34); (7:11); (15:30); (17:61); (18:50); (20:116); (38–72–3).
26 G. Webb, 'Hierarchy, Angels, and the Human Condition in the Sufism of Ibn ʿArabī ', *Muslim World* 81, 1991, p. 249.
27 According to Ibn ʿArabī, Adam was created by God's two hands and he was 'made to carry the knowledge of the Divine Names'. *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 427; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 104.
28 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 474; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 107.
29 This tradition features in the Two *Saḥiḥ* Books of *Ḥadith* (i.e. al-Bukhari and Muslim). In a narration by Ahmad b. Ḥanbal and some scholars of *ḥadith*, the same tradition reads: 'in the image of *al-Raḥman* (the Most Merciful)'.
30 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 315.
31 Ibid., II, p. 391; Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 276.
32 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 170; Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 276.
33 Giovanni De Luca has suggested that the honorific cloak of the divine form, the *khilāfa*, is for the human being a tool by which he is called to prove his capacities. This investiture makes man the depositary of the divine Trust (*amāna*) which consists of all the divine Attributes by which the servant comes to be characterized. The reference to the trust comes from the Qurʾān 33:72: 'We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains, but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof. But Man undertook it, he who is unjust and foolish.' The *amāna* is directly linked to

the *khilāfa* because the deposit of divine trust is given by God only to mankind, and the *amāna* is not different from the divine Form that designates the human regency. See De Luca, 'Non Sono Io il Vostro Signore?', p. 68, p. 87 note 59.

34 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 391.

35 The *Shaykh* explains: 'The regent of the Perfect Man, that is, the external form through which he synthesizes the essential realities of the cosmos, whilst the Perfect Man is who adds to this synthesis the Primary essential realities (*ḥaqā'iq al-ḥaqq*) through which it is his Regency.' Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 437.

36 Ibid., III, p. 156 and p. 398. This position implies that not all human beings actualize within themselves this spiritual condition. For this reason it is logical to hypothesize that this status might be accomplished at the same time by many human beings. However, in its archetypal identity, the Perfect Man is unique and identical to itself, and one may speak of the Perfect Man as a single reality. (See Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 366. On these topics see also, p. 64, p. 88 and p. 105; Casseler, 'Sulla Dottrina del Polo', pp. 63–8). Its uniqueness is explicit when one considers that the Perfect Man is the manifestation of the divine Form which is one and yet identical with the totality of things. It is because he is the divine form (*ṣūra al-ilāhiyya*) or the form of the Truth (*ṣūra al-Ḥaqq*) that the Perfect Man is entitled to be called a vice-regent. See Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 156.

37 What the angels know about Adam's composite nature is limited by their own essential selves. In contrast to humans, angels are merely part of the world but not its synthesis. This explains why angels cannot comprehend God's choice to establish Adam as His regent on earth. On this argument see Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, pp. 50–1.

38 Ibn ʿArabī claims: 'God said, "He gave everything its creation" (Q. 20:50) and this is identical with the perfection of that thing, so it lacks nothing'. Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 679; Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 294.

39 Ibn ʿArabī, *Shajarat al-Kawn*, part II, pp. 133–6. Ibn ʿArabī uses the same theological sophism which was employed by Ghazālī, and distinguishes between the divine command and the divine desire. He explains that the divine decree has commanded, but not desired, that the clay from which Adam is formed be created from the dust on which Iblīs had walked over. This is what has determined the imperfect nature of man.

40 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 163.

41 Ibid., II, p. 441.

42 This predisposition spurs Adam to obey God and to accept the deposit of trust that he might have refused like the Heavens and the Earth did before him. Adam's chooses his role as vice-regent being 'compelled' by his essential nature.

43 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, pp. 50–1.

44 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 392.

45 On the Akbarian use of the mirror theme see M. Sells, 'Ibn ʿArabī's polished mirror: perspective, shift and meaning event', *Studia Islamica* 67, 1988, pp. 121–49.

46 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 651; Casseler, 'Sulla Dottrina del Polo', pp. 82–3.

47 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 651; Casseler, 'Sulla Dottrina del Polo', pp. 82–3.

48 Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 69.

49 As Chiara Casseler explains: '[la mancanza di limiti] può realizzarsi solamente in un supporto capace di aprirsi ad un superamento trascendente dei limiti formali e creaturali. É allora il balenare dell'Assoluto fino al limite dell'essere creato, nel suo punto più intimo ossia il cuore come *sirr*, segreto e *barzakh*'. Casseler, 'Sulla Dottrina del Polo', pp. 82–3.

50 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 136.

51 Ibid., II, p. 571; III, p. 409. See Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 30 and p. 371. The servant is perfect and universal especially because, in his perfect state, he does not have any delimitation in his knowledge of God. Everything else in the cosmos knows God in a restricted way which is defined by the specific attributes this thing displays.

Conversely, due to his capacity to encompass all the divine Names and Attributes, the perfect servant is not circumscribed by any specific mode of being. See Chittick, *Ibn ʿArabi: Heir to the Prophets*, Oxford: Oneworld, 2005, pp. 64–5.

52 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, pp. 226–7.
53 Ibid. II, 214; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 245.
54 Ibid.
55 Translation from Chittick in *Les Illuminations*, p. 246.
56 Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, pp. 23–5.
57 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 561; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 554, note 13.
58 It is through its intrinsic characteristics, ruled by the immutable entities, that the servant may either conform or not to the prescriptive command. When complying with the prescription of the Law, the *ʿabd* is increasingly inclined to assume on himself the traits which assimilate him to God. This condition, although desirable, hides inner danger as it may induce the servant to address to himself attributes which pertain to his Lord (such as the attribute of 'lordship'), falling into the illusion of sovereignty. In this case, Chittick explains, 'the servant's only protection is to cling to his own nothingness, the fact that, in the last analysis, he remains forever nonexistent. Nothing belongs to him except those attributes that manifest nonexistence, evil and ignorance. Everything that manifests Being belongs to God. The servant must flee from any ontological attribute, since these are the properties of God's Lordship. He must dwell in his own non-ontological attributes, proper to servanthood'. See Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 309.
59 Ibn ʿArabī cited in Qāshānī, *Traité sur la Prédestination*, p. 28.
60 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, IV, p. 559.
61 Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, pp. 241–7.
62 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 88. Like the Muʿtazilites, the *Doctor Maximus* stresses that divine wisdom imposes on the human individual only those duties he/she is able to carry out.
63 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 214; Translation from Chittick in *Les Illuminations*, p. 247.
64 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 131; Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, p. 282.
65 Translation is by Chittick in *Les Illuminations*, p. 555, note 16.
66 The perfect servitude of the Perfect Man belongs to him simply because the *insān al-kāmil* exists only virtually, as an ideal archetype or an ideal *martaba*. See R. Guénon, *Il Simbolismo della Croce*, Torino: Luni – Grandi Pensatori d'Oriente e d'Occidente, p. 20. Likewise, perfect servitude (*al-ʿubūda al-maḥda*), free from any relationship, it is not realized automatically in this world by all human beings.
67 Translation is by Chittick in *Les Illuminations*, p. 555, note 16.
68 Further analysis of these saints will follow in the discussion.
69 Chodkiewicz, *Le Sceau des Saints: Prophétie et Sainteté dans la doctrine d'Ibn ʿArabī*, Paris: Gallimard, 1986, trans. L. Sherrad as *Seal of the Saints, Prophethood and Saint-hood in the Doctrine of Ibn ʿArabī*, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993, p. 111.
70 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 215; translation is by Chittick in *Les Illuminations*, p. 248.
71 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 215; Translation is by Chittick in *Les Illuminations*, p. 248.
72 To speak of man's own will is inappropriate; as Knysh explains, the servant's will 'simply does not exist, since all actions spring from the internal interplay of God's names and commands within a contingent locus called human being'. See Knysh, 'The realms of responsibility in Ibn ʿArabi's *Futūḥāt al-Makkiya*', *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn ʿArabi Society* 31, 2002, p. 93.
73 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* II, p. 216; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 253.
74 Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 556, note 32.
75 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 226; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, pp. 256–7.
76 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 226; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 257.

77 God describes Himself as Jealous in Qur'ān 7:33. On Ibn ʿArabī's notion of Jealousy, see Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 557, note 41.
78 The traits, Chittick explains, are usually identified with the Divine Names, whilst for 'realization' one has to intend a station which is higher than the station of 'assuming traits' (Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 557, note 39). The possibility to attain to the station of freedom is due to the servant's awareness that he is poor towards the divine Essence. With this awareness poverty disappears because the servant actually renounces to any form of existence.
79 God as the only real existent is the only One to enjoy rights (*ḥuqūq Allāh*) vis-à-vis His creatures. See Knysh, 'The Realms of Responsibility', p. 88.
80 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 661 quoted in Diyāb, 'Ibn ʿArabī on Human Freedom', p. 28. Once abandoned the illusion of being endowed with existence, man is 'finally freed from the contraposition of the "I" and the "We" and he stays associated only with the status of extinction (*fanā*) and of non-being (*nistī*)'. Sirhindī quoted in De Luca, 'Non Sono Io il Vostro Signore', p. 76 and p. 95 note 133.
81 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, 226; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, pp. 257–8.
82 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 444; III, p. 25; IV, p. 208.
83 Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 561, note 88. Ibn ʿArabī speaks of the notion of prohibition in a similar way, describing it as 'the order pertaining to non-existence' which is distinguished from God's command called 'the order pertaining to existence (*umūr wujūdiyya*)'. The *umūr wujūdiyya* demands that an action is accomplished in accordance with the command, whilst the *umūr ʿadamiyya*, which clearly frames 'prohibition' as a 'relation', demands an action not to be performed. These definitions evoke the position al-Ghazālī holds when he refers to the imposition of a command to which God does not want to be obeyed, in cases when God's order differs from His will. It has to be remembered that al-Ghazālī used such a distinction aiming to defend the Ashʿarite concept of good and evil as being per se non-existent. Similarly, for the *Shaykh al-akbar*, the nature of good and evil, which is disclosed to him through *kasf*, is of an accidental nature: ultimately, all acts and phenomena come from God.
84 Ibid.
85 On the *Malāmatiyya* see Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Risālat al-Malāmatiyya*, ed. A.A. Afīfī, in *al-Malāmatiyya wa'l-taṣawwuf wa'l-ahl al-futuwwa*, Cairo: n.p., 1945, pp. 71–120 trans. R. Deladrière, *Sulamī: La Lucidité Implacable*, Paris: Arlea, 1991; idem, *Ṭabaqāt al-Sufiyya*, N. Sharība (ed.), Cairo: n.p., 1953, pp. 114–5; al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, V.A. Zhukovskii (ed.), Tehran: n.p., 1979, pp. 68–78 trans. R.A. Nicholson, *The 'Kashf al-Maḥjūb', the Oldest Persian Treatise on Sufīsm by al-Hujwīrī*, Lahore: Islamic Book Foundation, 1976; ʿUmar Ibn Muḥammad al-Suhrawardī, *ʿAwārif al-maʿārif*, Cairo: n.p. 1971, see especially chapter 8 (*fī dhikr al-Malāmatiyya wa-sharḥ ḥālihā*); S. Sviri, 'Hakim Tirmidhi and the *Malāmāti* Movement in Early Sufism', pp. 195–208; for short discussions by contemporary Muslim authors based mainly upon these texts see Abu'l-ʿAlā' al-ʿAfīfī, *al-Taṣawwuf, al-thawra al-rūḥiyya fi'l-Islām*, Beirut, n.d., pp. 268–70; Ibrāhīm Hilāl, *al-Taṣawwuf al-Islāmī bayn al-dīn wa'l-falsafa*, Cairo: n.p., 1979, pp. 11–4; H. Ritter, 'Philologika XV. Farīduddīn ʿAṭṭār III', *Oriens* 12, 1959, pp. 14 ff., M.S. Seale, 'The Ethics of Malāmātīya Sufism and the Sermon on the Mount', *The Muslim World* 43, 1968, pp. 12–23; P. Nwyia, *Ibn'Aṭā' Allāh et la Naissance de la Confrérie Šāḍilite*, Beirut: n.p., 1972, pp. 243–4; M.G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1974, p. 457; A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, pp. 86–8.
86 On dispute between the Sufis and the *Malāmatiyya* see ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, *Nafaḥāt al-Uns*, Mahdī Tawḥīdīpūr (ed.), Tehran: n.p., 1957, pp. 9–10.
87 Chodkiewicz, *The Seal of the Saints*, p. 73 note 49.
88 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 288.
89 Al-Ghazālī, *Faith in Divine Unity and Trust in Divine Providence*, p. 4.
90 Ibid., II, p. 16. On the *Malāmatiyya* see also chapter 23, I. pp. 180–2.

91 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 204; Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, pp. 110–12.
92 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 131.
93 Addas, *Quest for the Red Sulphur*, p. 282.
94 M. Kassim, 'La Problème de la prédestination', p. 15.
95 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 131; Austin, *The Bezels*, p. 165.
96 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 227; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 261.
97 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 227; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 261.
98 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 227; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 261.
99 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, p. 228; Translation by Chittick in *Les Illuminations*, pp. 262–3.
100 According to the classification of the spiritual stations, the *maqām* of *tawakkul*, that is, the 'abandonment to God' and 'trust in God', is followed by the *maqāmāt* of *taslīm* (submission), *tafwīd* (acceptance) and *ridā* (contentment).
101 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, p. 228; translation by Chittick in *Les Illuminations*, p. 264.
102 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, p. 228; translation by Chittick in *Les Illuminations*, p. 263.
103 Chodkiewicz, *Seal of the Saints*, p. 29.
104 Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 205.
105 Ibid., pp. 205–07.
106 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 513; Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 207.
107 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 517; Chodkiewicz, *Les Illuminations*, p. 284.
108 The concept of gathering, the *Shaykh* explains, is the attribution of the only real existence to God. It indicates that the servant is placed within the entities of the possible things and the multitude of all the properties that become manifest. These properties consist in the possible things' own preparedness: 'Once you have come to know this . . . you have attached things to their roots, distinguished among the realities, and given everything its own property, just as God "gave everything its own creation"' (Q. 20:52). Ibn ʿArabī *Futūḥāt*, p. 517; Chittick in *Les Illuminations*, p. 283.
109 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 604.
110 Ibn ʿArabī claims that 'through the attribute the work comes into existence, while the Manifest is the Worker. So the work belongs only and specifically to God'. *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 512; *Les Illuminations*, p. 285.
111 Chittick in *Les Illuminations*, p. 285. A similar concept is expressed also in *Fuṣūṣ*: 'All things are the "tongues" of the Reality, giving expression to the praise of the Reality. God says, "Praise belongs to God, Lord of the worlds' (Q 1:1) for all praise returns to Him Who is both the Praiser and the Praised". Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 69. Austin, *The Bezels*, pp. 74–5.
112 Translation by Chittick in *Les Illuminations*, pp. 285–6.
113 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 403; translation by Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 208.
114 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 681
115 Ibid., III, p. 403; translation by Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, p. 208.
116 Transation is from Austin, *The Bezels*, p. 137.
117 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 405.
118 Ibn ʿArabī states: 'Know that God's Mercy encompasses everything existentially and in principle, and that the Wrath [of God] exists only by virtue of God's Mercy on it. His Mercy has precedence over His Wrath, which is to say that Mercy is attributed to Him before Wrath. Since every [latent] essence has an existence that it seeks from God, His Mercy must embrace every essence, for the Mercy by which He is Merciful accepts the desire of the essence for existence and so creates it. We therefore say that His Mercy encompasses everything existentially and in principle. The divine Names are "things" and stem from one essence.' Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 177; translation is by Austin, *The Bezels*, p. 223. With this statement the *Shaykh al-akbar* implies that divine Mercy is essential to God. In addition, by reminding that Names are things sourcing from one essence, he adopts the *kalāmic* perspective for which God's Essence is predicated by different names-attributes. Another point which emerges is that divine Mercy is before His Wrath; in effect, Ibn ʿArabī operates a shift in meaning by stating that the

very existence of Wrath is a Mercy from God. Put in different terms, it is the putting into existence of Wrath that is a Mercy from God. Wrath is nothing but another Name, craving existence, whose yearning is fulfilled by God's bestowal of creation.

119 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, II, p. 31.
120 Chodkiewicz, *Un Ocean sans Rivage*, p. 87.
121 Ibn ʿArabī, *Shajarat al-Kawn*, part II, p. 138; Urizzi, 'La Gnosi Muhammadiana', p. 149.
122 Ibn ʿArabī speaks often of the Muḥammadan Reality in the *Futūḥāt*, particularly in chapters 366 and 367.
123 Casseler, 'Sulla Dottrina del Polo', p. 93.
124 Ibn ʿArabī refers to this *ḥaqīqa* as *al-ʿ aql al-awwal* which is the First Intellect of the Neoplatonic philosophers. See his '*Shajarat al-Kawn*', part I, p. 52.
125 On the *Logos* motif see Ibid., pp. 46–50.
126 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 152; idem, *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 267. See also Addas, *The Voyage of No Return*, pp. 22–3.
127 The *Shaykh* argues that Adam and the human form are constructed in the image of Muḥammad's name. For this reason all men share, to some extent, the blessedness of Muḥammad; this is due to the fact that his body was formed with the clay from the site of the Kaʿba. See *Shajarat al-Kawn*, part II, pp. 113–20. On this argument see D.E. Singh 'An Onto-Epistemological Model: Adam-Muhammad as the Traditional Symbols of Humanity's All Comprehending Epistemic Potential', *Muslim World* 94, 2004, pp. 275–301.
128 Ibn ʿArabī', *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 99; *Fuṣūṣ*, p. 20.
129 P. Urizzi, 'La Visione Teofanica secondo Ibn 'Arabī', *Perennia Verba* 2, 1998, pp. 29–32.
130 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, I, p. 679, p. 696; III, p. 331, p. 186; IV, p. 60.
131 Ibn ʿArabī believes that the ontological degree of the Perfect Man can be realized by many men simultaneously. It is in the light of this belief that he interprets the famous tradition: 'Many amongst men are perfect (*kumila min al-rijāl kathīrūn*)'. Tradition reported in Bukhārī, *Anbiyāʿ*, 32,46; Muslim, *Faḍāʿil al-ṣaḥābā*, 70; Tirmidhī, *Aṭʿima*, 31. See Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, III, p. 307, Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 296, p. 409; Casseler, 'Sulla Dottrina del Polo', p. 63.
132 Urizzi, 'La Gnosi Muhammadiana', p. 126;
133 Ibn ʿArabī, *Shajarat al-Kawn*, part I, p. 75.
134 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ*, pp. 48–9; De Luca, 'Non sono io il vostro signore?', p. 66.
135 Ibn ʿArabī recalls the famous words which were uttered by 'A'isha: '[Muḥammad's] nature was the Qur'ān'. See Muslim, *musāfirūn*, 139; Abū Dāwūd, *tatawwu'*, 26. The *Shaykh* also highlights: 'It is as the Qur'ān had taken on a corporeal form (*ṣūra jasadiyya*) called Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib'. See *Futūḥāt*, IV, p. 61.
136 Ibn ʿArabī, *Shajarat al-Kawn*, part I, pp. 74–7.
137 Qur'ān 9:61; 21:07; 28:46.
138 Ibn ʿArabī, *Shajarat al-Kawn*, part I, p. 65.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that, almost paradoxically, the aporia of the secret of *qaḍā' wa'l-qadar*, despite being destined to be known by God alone, is also clearly manifest in the Qur'ān: the truth, disclosed for all believers, is encompassed in the totality of the verses which support both ideas of God's predestination and of humans' responsibility for their actions. The coexistence of divine *qaḍā'* and human *ikhtiyār* is the quintessential evidence of divine magnanimity, and the proof that in religion there cannot be any 'compulsion' (Q. 2:256). Both propositions, far from being irremediably mutually exclusive are, in fact, complementary; they are embedded in the Islamic *credo* and are expressive of the necessary multiplicity which divides divine and human parameters, the metaphysical, the religious and the mystical outlooks.

The unconditional faith in the divine Word has led Muslim theologians, philosophers and mystics of all times in their attempts to sublimate the presupposed contradiction occurring between the notions of free will and predestination. In the course of this book it has been observed that Avicenna's and al-Ghazālī's endeavours to reconcile the universal 'creationistic' causal power of God with His 'effusing' nature, and their attempts to establish the theoretical truths rooted in the concepts of divine omnipotence and of human autonomy to act, the latter being supported by the psychological evidences that humans have about their capacity-to-act and their freedom of 'choosing', are certainly dictated by their genuine beliefs. However, they are also clearly conditioned by the necessity to bring their speculative systems into a positive relationship with the teachings of orthodoxy. Their attempts of compromise are evident not only at a theoretical level, but also at the level of language. In Ibn ʿArabī's thought the 'strategy of compromise' is played on a different plane: the theoretical efforts advanced by theologians and philosophers are smoothened and turned into an 'inevitable' harmonization. The omni-comprehensiveness and the exuberant nature of the *waḥdat al-wujūd* theory makes it necessary to encapsulate all the teachings available in order to present a global speculative system which is most fitting to express the illimitability of the only one Reality. In the absence of any pressurizing concern imposed by the religious authorities, the *Shaykh al-akbar* experiences, absorbs, interprets and consciously manipulates the truths offered by the philosophical and theological wisdoms, and complement them with the contents of his esoteric experience. Ibn

ʿArabī employs the philosophers' and the theologians' linguistic tools since all possibilities of expressions are necessary to communicate the otherwise apophatic nature of the mystical contemplative event. Yet, the theoretical substantiality of their speculations has to be sublimated: Ibn ʿArabī's insights into the real status of affairs are granted by Qur'ānic illuminations. Qur'ānic verses are interpreted through the language of paradox and poetry and employed to state and confirm his very personal understanding of the Truth. The compromise aimed at in the Akbarian works is simply the compromise which the limitedness of what is other than God has to come to terms with.

Avicenna's system is able to provide a synthesis between the religious component, which is represented by the creationistic metaphysic of *kalām*, and the philosophical mainly Neoplatonic rational vision of the essences of things. The topic of free will and determinism, which is initially addressed with regard to causality in relation to emanation and creation, shows that Avicenna, diminishing the deterministic tones of the Plotinian emanative scheme, proposes a revisited view of the Ashʿarite concept of the *formatio mundi*, where an innovative interpretation of the divine creative act (*ibdāʿ*) is contemplated. When Avicenna speaks of natural causation, through the notion of the *wujūb bi'l-ghayr*, he is still speaking about the necessity for beings to have of a cause, suggesting that God, as the Cause of causes, is ultimately the Ashʿarite Disposer and Determiner, even if He operates through the nature of beings. Avicenna is willing to compromise between the rigid necessitarianism of traditional theology, mostly informed by Ashʿarite predestinarian axioms, without never wholly abandoning the naturalism of the philosophers and the metaphysical determinism implicit in the Aristotelian tradition.

To establish the mechanism governing the nature of things in relation to the issue of *qaḍā' wa'l-qadar*, this study has addressed the question of the role matter plays in the Avicennian system. The degree of passivity, classically attributed to matter has been questioned and reconsidered in order to evaluate to what extent the material substratum can be held responsible for facilitating the formation of substantial compositions. This has allowed assessing whether it is the nature of material entities which determines their status in existence. If, on the one hand, the re-evaluation of the independent character of the formal causative action seems to connect Avicenna's thought with the Ashʿarites' denial of any other real cause except God, on the other hand, the Avicennian view of matter, as the Aristotelian remote cause for the formation of the compound, clearly sets a new distance between the two stances.

It has been observed that, like early theologians and philosophers, Avicenna links evil with the notion of privation, but he also associates this notion with the concepts of possibility and the autonomy of matter. Despite the acknowledgement that matter has a capacity to disobey nature's particularized aims, Avicenna fosters the Ashʿarite view for which God is the ultimate Determiner by framing matter's disobedience as an element which is embedded in the divine decree. Matter proves to be fundamental in the identification of freedom and in the possibility of change because it is a cooperative force in the process of substances' formation. The theme of free will versus determinism emerges also from Avicenna's

interpretation of the relationship occurring between the soul and body. He rejects the idea that this relation might be conceived as a cause-effect connection but establishes a necessary relation between them. This is said to be ultimately depending, in Ashʿarite terms, on the will of the Necessary Existent and His decree. The human form-soul liaison is explained as being the dynamic principle of human activity which operates on material corporeality. The latter is considered responsible for a remote/causal activity which allows the passage from the abstraction of the possible to the actualization of any existent action. The capacity of the soul to know particulars and its ability to influence the realm of change, due to its legacy with corporeal matter, demonstrates that it is in the relationship occurring between the soul and the material-corporeal substrate that a certain degree of autonomy and 'responsible' freedom can be identified. The receptive role of matter, which is used to stress the latent possibility for souls-forms to volitional acting, explains why, in the Avicenna's emanative system, it is more appropriate to speak of divine determinism rather than predestination.

It has been proven that, from a purely metaphysical point of view, the human being is free to act, but not in an arbitrary way; this means that the human choice is seen as an unavoidable link in the chain of an *ab aeterno* universal order. Man can operate 'deterministically', namely, according to what is his nature or inclination which, in turn, reflects his divinely prescribed role in the world's good order. This explains why in Avicenna's metaphysical construct, nature is never truly in competition with God's determinations, nor does God intend to deprive nature of its efficacy. Nature becomes the 'channel' of God's authority.

A series of common points between Avicenna's idea of freedom and its Islamic mystical counterpart emerge, especially when one analyses the topic of love as the 'very cause of existence' and as the motor triggering human desire to return to God. The idea that man yearns to leaving the world of generation and corruption, in the attempt to resemble God in the necessity and eternal actuality of His Being, leads Avicenna to conclude that, far from *kalāmic* positions, the return of all entities to God does not imply a dismantling of their individualities. In addition, Avicenna, by appealing to the personal relationship between the soul and its celestial counterpart, emphasizes the value of individualization, transfiguring and eternalizing it from a mystical perspective. The intellective philosophical horizon is never eclipsed in Avicennian mysticism which reveals itself to be mainly a mystical philosophy rather than a philosophical mysticism.

To conclude, the Avicennian analysis of free will and predestination explored in philosophical, theological and mystical terms, with its combination of logic and naturalistic elements shows to include deterministic and 'liberalistic' views. All the topics discussed demonstrate that Avicenna accommodates the concept of free will within a naturally designed deterministic order. Whilst the inner nature of things, heavily depending on form, matter and human voluntarism, seems to leave open the possibility for human freedom to be exercised within the boundaries of individual destinies, the outer, all-encompassing 'layer' of the divine decree frames everything and every activity within a well-structured design. Like a set of Russian dolls, the Avicennian determinism reveals its core through a series

of successive involucres. Even the 'implanting' of the principle of love in every being, which 'compels' everything 'to choose' and strive towards its perfection, makes the never-ceasing existence of this love a necessity for the maintenance of God's good order of the world: a necessary outcome of God's perfect nature.

The Ghazālīan perspective on free will and predestination has revealed to encompass Ashʿarism, Avicennian metaphysics and Sufi influences. The analysis has started with the *Mishkāt al-anwār*: in this work, through his revised Neoplatonic emanative scheme, al-Ghazālī consolidates the very sound, and for the most part, Ashʿarite concept of *tawḥīd*. It has been observed that in the first part of the *Mishkāt*, al-Ghazālī denies the ontological nature of the Avicennian emanative scheme, and emanation becomes readable as a divine outpouring of God's light; the denial of ontological emanation implies denial of natural determinism. This position is used by al-Ghazālī to reinforce the Ashʿarite notion of God as the only Creator and Innovator: no efficient power is conceded to any creature through emanation. These views have also revealed that al-Ghazālī espouses a clear form of Gnosticism which looks at the divine light as the manifestation of knowledge which is granted to creatures for the specific purpose to awaken their consciences about the real essence of things, indirectly conveying awareness of pure *tawḥīd*. In the second section of *The Niche of Lights*, emanation has been presented in causative terms, following not only Neoplatonic, but also Ashʿarite and Sufi perspectives. By exploring the beliefs of those 'knowers' the veils tradition refers to, al-Ghazālī highlights that their limited perceptions of the divine are dictated by their personal drives and individualised creeds. The group of believers which are outside the perimeter of mysticism are presented as being trapped in their speculative theological and philosophical strictures. These limitations, that is, the veils which are mentioned in the *ḥadīth*, are shuttered only by the experience of God made available for the Attainers: for them experiential Sufism never decays into pantheism because the knowledge of God's essence remains accessible exclusively to God alone. Al-Ghazālī's Sufism is so heavily loaded with Ashʿarite principles to be conditioned by them: even from a mystical view, God becomes an unspeakable Being of whom nothing can be said except that He is the Ashʿarite Creator of everything that exists. The determinism implied within the ontological version of emanation comes to be substituted by divine predestination which is occasionalistically arranged by God at each moment in time, through a responsibility that is shared between primary and secondary causes. The topics of predestination and causality have been shown to be evidently intertwined within the concept of *tawḥīd*: the question of the movements of the heavens, for instance, triggers the problem of the definition of God as *muḥarrik al-samāwāt*, a definition which ultimately engenders the divine unity. Even the proposition of the deity as 'Mover by way of command' is set aside because considered threatening for God's *tawḥīd*.

In his *Niche of Lights*, any form of secondary efficient causality is simply instrumental: al-Ghazālī condemns the philosphers' view for which the act of obedience of the angel is a natural act, and he forwards the idea that looks at obedience as an inducted or acquired act which is created (and as such

predetermined) in the angels by the command of God, whose nature remains obscure. Finally, by leaving the nature of the obeyed one vague, the mystic al-Ghazālī is ready to avoid any threat of pantheism and deism, embracing the safety of a revisited Ashʿarite *kalām*.

The discourse on free will and predestination is presented in a rather long-winded way in the *Iḥyāʾ*; it is evident that in the final analysis, the Ashʿarite predestinarian construct continues to shape inexorably al-Ghazālī's approach and treatment of the whole topic. Nonetheless, the Ashʿarite predestinarian character is mitigated through a fascinating concatenation of metaphysical and Sufi stances alongside deterministic bearings. Al-Ghazālī's control over such deterministic tones, however, is well mastered due to his outstanding capacity to knit everything within notion of divine *tawḥīd* and the dogmatic Ashʿarite notion for which God is the only the Real Agent. The necessity to stress divine unity and unicity urges al-Ghazālī to shroud the Ashʿarite notion of *kasb*: the capacity-to-act is not a human acquisition and, consequently, humans are compelled to acquire the act according to their divinely given capacity. No one acts except God as there is nothing but Him and His acts. Even the distinction occurring between the modes of actions, in the end, proves that there is no such thing as a purely voluntary action: the human being can be labelled as a 'compelled chooser' simply because he is the locus of disclosure of the divine decree. Notwithstanding his modified Ashʿarite background, al-Ghazālī's discourse remains positioned within a philosophical framework, mainly with regard to cosmogonic concepts and in relation to the role played by human nature. Particularly, the Avicennian claim which looks at the nature of things as the sufficient cause which determines their present and future conditions, is partially accepted by al-Ghazālī. In his view, existents are certainly predisposed towards actions by nature even though existents' natures are entrenched within the unchangeable divine custom. The latter encompasses all natures' variants and their capacity to deviate from their usual pattern and is, for this reason, accountable for the incidence of miracles. Even the notion of *tawakkul* which should theoretically entail the possibility for any individual to either trust or not trust God's benevolence, is engrained as an element of divine *qaḍāʾ*. Hence, it has been observed, the lack of trust in the divine provisions, stressed by the revealed Law, becomes not simply an offensive manifestation of human ignorance, but also an unlawful disruption of the divine prescriptions.

The mystical aspect that is highlighted in the Avicennian system and which regards the purification of the human soul as the result of both the individual's strife and the illuminating guidance of the angels-intellects is found also in al-Ghazālī's *Iḥyāʾ*. Once again however, the deterministic element present in Avicenna, which acknowledges the self-strife as the consequence of the soul's inherent nature is superseded by the Ghazālīan predestinarian tone, stressing that any personal endeavour is simply an element inscribed in the divine decree. There is a sense that al-Ghazālī is consciously making use of philosophy not attempting to avoid it altogether. The often quoted sentence 'our Shaykh Abū Ḥāmid penetrated into the body of philosophy; then he wanted to come out of it but could not',[1] is acceptable only to a certain degree: al-Ghazālī's real effort is to escape only

from any inconsistency between philosophical issues, in particular Avicennian and Neoplatonic ones, and mainstream Islamic theology.[2] This attitude, shared in al-Ghazālī's juridical thought and his ethical and sapiential musings, is carefully guarded in relation to the predestination issue. The synthesis of philosophical and theological ideas emphasize the Ghazālīan use of safe Neoplatonic tools: al-Ghazālī is manoeuvring Avicennian ideas, like the notion of human nature and the philosophically limited ethical resolution of the theodicy, and he is blending them with Ashʿarite topics like the supreme defence of God as the only Creator who acts according to customs engraved in His *ab aeterno* design.

In *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, despite its mystical flavour, the Ashʿarite view of divine predestination shines bright; Avicennian positions are to be found again but adjusted to suit the idea of a Creator who determines everything beyond human comprehension. Finally, in the *Iqtiṣād* and the *Tahāfut*, al-Ghazālī borrows from Aristotelian logic in order dismiss philosophical positions such as the Avicennian principle of causality. However, al-Ghazālī's technique betrays fundamental philosophical influences which are smoothened by oblique Ashʿarite typecasts. The reader becomes aware that al-Ghazālī's adherence to the Ashʿarite tradition, as Frank argues, is mainly 'on the level of language, not of substance'.[3] This is particularly evident in al-Ghazālī's insistence on the reality of agency as being governed by the nature of the subject. Agents are such because of their intrinsic nature as rational and willing beings.

Any reader should remember that al-Ghazālī intended to gain acceptance among the religious authorities and he aimed to offer a developed theological apparatus which, in his opinion, had to encompass all the sciences and disciplines formally recognized by Islam. Noticeably, his successful attempt to compromise never unbalances his theoretical synthesis. His use of Avicennian, Sufi, Ashʿarite and, in a few instances, Muʿtazilite stances either clearly delineates his own ideas, making them more familiar to an audience already accustomed to such parlances, or fudges his real opinion on issues – such as the nature of emanation and the extent of the efficacy of secondary causality – which could be contentious from the orthodox perspective. Nonetheless, throughout his writings, al-Ghazālī impressively manages to render his positions harmonious and consistent.

The analysis of the concepts of free will and predestination has shown that Ibn ʿArabī is not particularly concerned with bridging the 'orthodox' perspective and the more 'esoteric' positions on *qaḍā' wa'l-qadar*. After all, he was convinced that God will judge, to quote his words, 'on the basis of religion unobscured by *ra'y* and shall be in disagreement with the teachings of the scholars in most of His judgements'.[4] This position is gauged through his unveiled references to both Neoplatonic and Ashʿarite cosmological stances. The *Shaykh al-akbar* speaks of creation, using terms such as *khalq*, and yet, in an Avicennian style, he admits that it is by the divine superabundance that the world is necessarily emanated. Creation becomes synonymous with God's knowledge, and it is explained as the result of God's Self-awareness which He attains through His Self-manifestation. The cosmos comes into existence due to fulfil the divine decree and God's desire to be known.

It has been analysed that notions like 'immutable entities' and 'eternal predispositions' play an imperative role in the configuration of Ibn ʿArabī's argument on predestination because existents fulfil the scope for creation by way of being *loci* for the divine manifestation. Creatures become the Avicennian receptacles because existence is conceived as the capacity to become a 'place' for God's disclosure. Even after formation, things continue to be the Avicennian *mumkināt*, remaining what they are because their possible nature is immutable. Their developments in existence occur following their inherent nature, and this reveals that natural determinism is unquestionably at work.

In the Akbarian system great importance is assigned to the interplay occurring between divine knowledge and the perceived objects of knowledge. It has been observed that Avicenna considered God's knowledge to be limited by divine perfection, the latter preventing divine knowledge to change. Similarly, for Ibn ʿArabī, God's knowledge is limited because it is subordinated to what is known. The reason for this is not due to divine perfection, but to the divine oneness. God knows and creates the cosmos according to what He knows of it as a non-existing cosmos, namely, according to the measure of knowledge the deity attains through His immutable components. According to the *Shaykh*, the cosmos is subjected to what the Ashʿarites defined as a perpetual creation. The reader becomes aware that this notion is used by Ibn ʿArabī to serve his theory of divine oneness and to explain the variety of manifestations in existing beings. The concepts of predestination and determinism are constantly intertwined: existents are the *loci* for the accomplishment of God's acts but, simultaneously, God's acts are determined by the properties of the receptivity of His *aʿyān thābita*. Despite the fact that the immutable entities are able to direct their destinies in harmony with their predisposition to receive existence and knowledge, it is clear that their nature is still shaped by the fact that they are not different from their original Essence that decrees what they are since eternity.

Hesitantly, one can sense that an 'accidental' attempt of compromise is advanced when the *Shaykh* merges the Avicennian and the Ghazālīan perspectives on causality: the arrangement of existents bears evidence that the world has a Maker who is aware of His creation and who establishes condition-conditioned relations between things. God is that Being who does not act in vain, but, rather, sets in His works causes which are determined to be signs through which man understands the divine nature. Causes are not denied as long as they function as veils aimed at illuminating mankind on the real nature of good and evil. In contrast to goodness, evil has a non-ontological quality and is connected to the blemishes of the world which is in itself non-existent.

In the context of the essential nature of man as a servant to God, human freedom comes to be viewed through the prism of paradox: freedom becomes an expression of the unswerving servitude towards God. By distinguishing between servanthood and servitude, the *Shaykh* highlights that the nature of man as a *ʿabd* is to be seen both as an intrinsic human condition, which is embedded in the human *fīṭra*, and as a privileged status to which the Gnostic aims to arrive. It is only the person informed of the real status of things who understands how real freedom is nothing

else but acknowledgement of one's poverty in relation to the Creator. Freedom becomes enjoyable through compliance with the status quo of phenomena, which is established by the divine decree, and it is attained through the station of 'abandoning freedom'. Human *ḥurriyya* is gained through the investiture of the divine attributes which are divinely bestowed upon the perfect of the servants and the perfect of men. By expanding previous Sufi findings, the *Shaykh al-akbar* links the notion of the perfect man to his theory of divine oneness by rendering the *insān al-kāmil* the locus of divine manifestation *par excellence*. Potentially all men are perfect; potentially all humans are given the capacity to carry the Trust of God as they are only potentially able to fulfil their role as divine vice-regents on earth. It is for this reason that, like in Avicenna's and al-Ghazālī's systems, within Ibn ʿArabī's thought too the esoteric experience becomes characterized by the individual striving towards perfection. Humans are humans only once they attempt to achieve the level of the *insān al-kāmil*. Despite the fact that the divine decree predetermines who will become a perfect servant, humans are still credited with the moral choice of striving to draw close to this status. Their endeavours are spurred by the example of the Prophet: as the personification of the Primary reality called *Ḥaqīqa Muḥammadiyya*, and as the epitome of the perfect servant, Muḥammad becomes the synthesis of divine decree, natural determinism and, ultimately, the embodiment of freedom.

Notes

1 ʿAlī Ibn Sultān's commentary on Qādī ʿIyād, *al-Shifā'*, Istanbul, 1881, II: p. 509 quoted in Reynolds, 'A Philosophical Odyssey', p. 37; Dallal, 'Ghazālī and the Perils of Interpretation', p. 773.
2 On this argument see B. Abrahamov, 'Ibn Sīnā's Influence on al-Ghazzālī's Non-Philosophical Works', *Abr Nahrain* 29, 1991, p. 4; Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzālī*, p. 295; Janssens, 'al-Ghazzālī's *Tahāfut*: Is it Really a Rejection of Ibn Sīnā's Philosophy?', pp. 1–17.
3 Frank, *al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, pp. 90–1.
4 Ibn ʿArabī cited in Ḥasan al-ʿIdwī, *al-Nafahāt al-Shādhilīyah fī sharḥ al-Burdah al-Būsīrīyah*, Cairo: n.p., 1928, vol. I, p. 184.

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