IBN RUSHD ON GOD'S DECREE AND DETERMINATION
(AL-QAḌĀ' WA-L-QADAR) *

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This article is based on Ibn Rushd's chapter on God's *qaḍā' wa-qadar,* which adresses the question of predestination, as illustrative of a rationalistic approach that introduces philosophical views into an age-old religious debate. My aim is to present Ibn Rushd's argument, which has unmistakable Aristotelian overtones; therefore, the harmonization of religion and philosophy implicit in his argument is one of the points I would like to explore in this paper. In the same way, I am interested in discussing whether Ibn Rushd's proposed solution constitutes a middle way between two opposite positions and solves the perennial problem of determinism. The paper also discusses the issue whether he supports predestination, i.e., the view that events are predetermined by God before they happen.

Keywords. Ibn Rushd; Determinism; Predestination; Aristotelian Philosophy in Islam; al-Ghazzālī.

Este artículo se basa en el capítulo de Ibn Rušd sobre los atributos *qaḍā' wa-qadar* de Allāh, que se ocupa del concepto de "predestinación", como ejemplo de una aproximación racionalista que introduce conceptos filosóficos en un viejo debate religioso. Es mi propósito presentar el argumento de Ibn Rušd que contiene inequívocas alusiones aristotélicas; por tanto, la armonización de la religión y la filosofía implícita en sus argumentos es uno de los puntos que trataré de explorar en este trabajo. Igualmente, estoy interesada en la cuestión de si las soluciones propuestas por Ibn Rušd suponen un térmimo medio entre dos posiciones enfrentadas y resuelven el eterno problema del determinismo. Este trabajo discute también si Ibn Rušd defiende la predestinación, es decir, la cuestión de si los sucesos están predeterminados por Dios antes de que tengan lugar.

Palabras clave: Ibn Rušd; determinismo; predestinación; filosofía aristotélica en el Islam; al-Gazzālī.

In his *Kashf 'an-manāhij al-adilla fi 'aqā'id al-milla* (*Uncovering the ways of [finding] proofs concerning the beliefs of the [religious] community*) Ibn Rushd proposes to settle the main issues, arising from the study of the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunna,* that for centuries had divided the different schools of *kalām* (speculative theology). These issues in-

clude God's oneness, His attributes, and predestination. In what fol-
lows I take the chapter on God's *qaḍā' wa-qadar,* which tackles the
predestination question, as illustrative of a rationalistic approach that
introduces philosophical views into an age-old religious debate. My
aim is to present Ibn Rushd's argument and proposed solution while
highlighting the philosophical influences involved in his argument.
For while the framework of the question is entirely religious, and the
issue prompted by a reflection on the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunna,* the solu-
tion proposed by Ibn Rushd has unmistakable Aristotelian overtones.
Moreover, some of the issues treated by Ibn Rushd are evocative of
the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Incoherence*), in
which, in addition to settling key philosophical issues, he also rebuts
al-Ghazzālī's charge of unbelief (*kufr*) against the philosophers on
three counts – the eternity of the world, God's knowledge of particu-
lars, and bodily resurrection. As in the *Faṣl al-Maqāl* (*The Decisive
Treatise*) and in the *Tahāfut,* Ibn Rushd seeks to show in the *Kashf*
that religion and philosophy are not incompatible. While in the *Faṣl*
he explicitly argues for the agreement between philosophy and reli-
gion, in the *Kashf* he implicitly introduces philosophical theses into
the debate. [1] The harmonization of religion and philosophy implicit in
Ibn Rushd's argument is one of the points I would like to explore in
this paper.

Apart from considering Ibn Rushd's method of reconciling reli-
gion and philosophy, I am interested in discussing whether Ibn
Rushd's proposed solution strikes a happy medium between two op-
posite positions and solves the perennial problem of determinism.
One should be able to glean from Ibn Rushd's position whether he is
a determinist or not. I take determinism here to mean the theory ac-
cording to which every event or substance has a necessary cause such
that it could not have been otherwise. Also, it should be possible to
glean whether he supports predestination, i.e., the view that events are

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[1] These three works chronologically mediate between his short and middle commen-
taries on Aristotle and his long commentaries. They have been considered "original"
works because in them he engages in polemical debate against the *Mutakallimūn* rather
than commenting on Aristotle's texts. For a chronology of Ibn Rushd's works, Cruz
Hernández, M., *Abū-l-Walīd Ibn Rushd, Vida, obra, pensamiento, influencia*, Córdoba,
1986, 16 and 55-58; *EI,* London, 1971, 3, 910-911. In drawing on Ibn Rushd's long com-
mentaries – written after the *Kashf* – in support of the view that he uses philosophical ar-
guments in the *Kashf*, I am not concerned with questions of chronology.

predetermined by God before they happen. Ibn Rushd's position on the Islamic issue of *qadar* in the *Kashf* has been studied by recent scholarship, for example G. Hourani and I. Mohamed, who both hold that Ibn Rushd's position is rather deterministic, but a comparison with his commentaries on Aristotle works is also important in order to obtain a more rounded picture of his views. [2]

The problem

The debate on *qadar* focuses on two major poles, human and divine agency. On the one hand this discussion involves ethical theories of action, and the question whether one can truly act freely so as to be responsible and accountable for one's actions. On the other hand the issue of God's actions and omnipotence is the focus of the debate. As such, the problem is really centered on the question of God and His attributes. The debate on God's determination issues from the discussion of God's actions and omnipotence, which is one of His attributes, as is justice. How can God be omnipotent if humans are free agents? On the other hand, how can God be just if He is the agent of their evil acts? This is typically a theodicy controversy: God cannot justly punish or reward humans if He alone determines their actions.

Ibn Rushd's exposition of the problem in the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunna*

The discussion of the debate on God's determination, *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar,* constitutes within the *Kashf* the third question of the chapter on God's actions. [3]

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[2] Hourani, G. F., "Averroes on Good and Evil", *Studia Islamica,* 16 (1962), 13-40, 25-28, and Mohamed, I., "Concept of Predestination in Islam and Christianity: Special Reference to Averroes and Aquinas", *The Islamic Quarterly*, 44, 2 (2000), 393-413.

[3] According to *EI,* "*al-qadar*" «has the meaning of measure, evaluation, fixed limit... In its technical sense *qadar* therefore designates the divine decree in so far as it sets the fixed limits of each thing, or the measure of its being», London, 1971, 365-6 (L. Gardet). On the other hand, «On the basis of the Qur'ān the word *qaḍā'* can be understood as God's eternal decision or decree concerning all things. It is given different interpretations, especially when contrasted with another term, *qadar*... For instance, according to al-Bukhārī, *qaḍā'* is the eternal, universal and all-embracing decree of God, while *qadar* denotes the details of His eternal, universal decree», 364-66 (Gy. Káldy Nagy).

Ibn Rushd opens the section claiming that this is one of the most difficult issues within the religious law. In stating the problem as it is prompted by seeming contradictions in the tradition, i.e., the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunna,* Ibn Rushd proceeds by order of importance, quoting first from the *Qur'ān* and then from the *Sunna,* before proceeding to the *kalām* schools and finally rational arguments. He presents both sides of the argument, for and against *qadar,* quoting several *sūras* and *ḥadīth*s that either stress God's agency or human freedom of action.

> The conflict between the proofs of authority regarding this issue is to be found in the Scripture and in the Tradition (*Sunna*). In the Scripture one finds several verses which in general indicate that everything happens by [God's] determination (*bi-qadar*), and that people are constrained (*majbūr*) in their actions. On the other hand, one finds in it also many verses that indicate that people acquire their action[s] (*li-l-insān iktisāb bi-fi'lihi*), and are not constrained in their actions. [4]

Here clearly *qadar,* and the notion that everything happens according to *qadar,* stands for the theory that people are constrained in their actions. The contrary would be to assert that people acquire their acts. [5] Hence an all-embracing *qadar* and human acquisition are the two poles of the problem. In order to illustrate this problem Ibn Rushd distinguishes between verses which say that «everything is necessary» (*al-umūr kulluhā ḍarūriya*) and those which state that people acquire their actions (*iktisāb*), and that things themselves are possible, not necessary (*mumkina lā wājiba*). Hence beside the issues of God's omnipotence and human action Ibn Rushd raises the broader question whether events are all necessary or, instead, possible. [6] In stating the

[4] Ibn Rushd, *Al-Kashf 'an manāhij al-adilla fī 'aqā'id al-milla,* ed., intr. and analysis M. 'A. al-Jābirī, Beirut, 1998, 186. All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[5] The verb *kasaba* features in the Qur'ānic verses quoted by Ibn Rushd (42:34; 42:30; 10:28; 2:286), but his use of the term *iktisāb* evokes the Ash'arite doctrine of acquisition. «L' 'acquisition' (*kasb* ou *iktisāb*) est le maître mot de la doctrine ash'arite de la prédestination. Dieu est le seul créateur des actes humains volontaires, mais il les crée comme les actes d'un autre que lui, de même qu'il en crée la volonté. C'est pourquoi les humains *acquièrent* ces actes et en sont responsables», Ibn Rushd, *L'Islam et la raison,* Geoffroy, M. (trad.), Libera, A. de (presentation), Paris, 2000, 131, n. 101.

[6] The terms *ḍarūrī* and *wājib* used by Ibn Rushd do not feature in the Qur'ānic verses quoted by him, rather they have Aristotelian overtones. See, for instance, Ibn Rushd's *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics* in Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr mā ba'd al-tabī'a,* ed. M. Bouyges, Beirut, 1938, 515-523, where he comments on the various meanings of "necessity" and "necessary" as expounded by Aristotle.

issue in these terms, he is already introducing philosophical themes
into the debate. The debate whether events/substances are necessary
or possible is based on Aristotle's discussion of the different mean-
ings of 'necessity' in the *Metaphysics.* Two important meanings in
this context are, first, cause as necessity. [7] According to this sense, all
things are necessary if they have causes, contingent or possible if not.
Secondly, Aristotle identifies necessity with constraint in non-volun-
tary actions. [8]

Ibn Rushd next discusses what *ḥadīth* literature has to say about
qadar. One *ḥadīth* from al-Bukhārī's collection, the famous *ḥadīth
al-fiṭra,* states that everyone is born in the right faith and only be-
comes a Jew or a Christian through their parents. This *ḥadīth,* accord-
ing to Ibn Rushd, indicates that the sole cause of *kufr* is one's place of
origin, and that Islam is one's natural disposition. Ibn Rushd cites this
ḥadīth to illustrate the view that someone's action, unbelief in this
case, is not predetermined by God but by external circumstances. [9]
The other *ḥadīth* he quotes, in support of *qadar,* is a predestinarian
one, to be found in Ibn Ḥanbal's collection, to the effect that «I cre-
ated some for heaven (*janna*), who act like the people of heaven
(*bi-aʿmāl ahl al-janna yaʿmalūna*), and I created some for hellfire
(*li-l-nār*), and they act like the people of hellfire». [10] This *ḥadīth,*

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[7] Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* ed. W. Jaeger, Oxford, 1957, 1015b6.

[8] For the Arabic translation of Aristotle's text and Ibn Rushd's commentary, see
Long Commentary on the Metaphysics, 515-518.

[9] The notion of *fiṭra* appears early in Islam: «Parmi les plus anciennes attestations
textuelles des domaines dans lequels est intervenue la notion de *fiṭra,* figurent les traités
juridiques de Mālik (179/795) et de Abū Ḥanīfa (150/767). Ces textes, ou du moins
l'essentiel de leur contenu, peuvent remonter jusqu'à la première moitié du IIᵉ siècle de
l'Hégire», Gobillot, G., *La Conception Originelle (fiṭra). Ses interprétations et functions
chez les penseurs musulmans*, Cairo, 2000, 14. In her book, Gobillot explains the origin
and interpretations of this term. She also explains how this notion was used by Muslims
in favour or against the notion of *qadar,* namely whether belief is predetermined by God.
Most Muslim jurists and theologians interpreted *fiṭra* as meaning Islam, for instance
al-Bukhārī, 14, and Ibn Ḥanbal, 27, for whom the notion of *fiṭra* does not contradict
God's *qadar,* 18-19. However, Muʿtazilites used this *ḥadīth* to argue in favour of the
view that humans choose their religion/belief, see 34-35. Ibn Rushd uses the *ḥadīth* ac-
cording to this latter interpretation. The different usages of the term go back to the earli-
est theological debates, and this notion features in association both with a traditionist
(and determinist) like Zuhrī and the "qadarite" theologian Ḥasan al-Baṣrī; see Ess,
J. van, *Zwischen Ḥadīṯ und Theologie. Studien zum Entstehen prädestinatianischer
Überlieferung*, Berlin, 1975, 104-106, and also 101-114 for early debates on this *ḥadīth.*

[10] Ibn Rushd, *Kashf,* 187.

which epitomises the predestinarian doctrine, is also quoted by Ibn
Sīnā in a short treatise on *qadar,* in support of a philosophical theory
of determinism and God's all-embracing *qadar.* [11]

Ibn Rushd's following step is to seek an intermediate position that
complies with the religious precepts while taking on board rational
arguments. The problem, for Ibn Rushd, is obviously that there can be
no accountability (*taklīf*) for human beings if they are powerless to
act.

After having expounded the problem as it is to be found in the
Scripture and the *Sunna,* Ibn Rushd goes on to expound the three maj-
or schools of theology. He quotes arguments from theological
schools. The Muʿtazilites he mentions as having a position according
to which people acquire their own acts, and are judged accordingly. [12]
For in their view a person is the cause of disobedience/sin (*maʿṣiya*)
and good deed(s) (*ḥasana*), punishment and reward being a direct res-
ult of these. [13] The opposite position is held by the Jabariyya, who
hold that «people are compelled and constrained in their actions»
(*majbūr ʿalā afʿālihi wa-maqhūr*). [14] Finally in the Ashʿariyya Ibn

[11] Quoted by Ibn Sīnā in his *Risālat al-Qaḍāʾ,* Michot, Y., *Ibn Sīnā, Lettre au Vizir
Abū Saʿd.* (*Editio princeps* d'après le manuscrit de Bursa, traduction de l'arabe, introduc-
tion, notes et lexique par Y. Michot), Beirut, 2000, 105-108.

[12] According to Geoffroy, Ibn Rushd wrongly ascribes the theory of *iktisāb* to the
Muʿtazilites, who in fact are much more radical in their defence of the freedom of human
action. «Comme on l'a noté, Ibn Rushd a tort d'attribuer l'ʿacquisition' aux muʿtazilites.
En fait, ceux-ci vont plus loin. Selon eux, il est une catégorie d'actes dont la création
échappe véritablement à Dieu, les actes humains voluntaires. C'est à cette condition que
Dieu peut être dit juste lorsqu'il applique les châtiments et les récompenses de l'Au-delà.
On ne doit pas trop s'étonner de la confusion d'Ibn Rushd à propos de la formulation de
la thèse muʿtazilite. Lui même note ailleurs dans le texte que les ouvrages de ces derniers
'ne sont pas parvenus' jusque dans la lointaine Péninsule Ibérique. Il doit donc
reconstituer, à partir de sources secondaires qui peuvent donner lieu à des malentendus.
Mais s'il y a erreur sur la formulation, sur le fond, cela revient au même: les muʿtazilites
sont bien partisans du livre arbitre», Ibn Rushd, *L'Islam et la raison,* 132, n.108. As
Geoffroy rightly points out, this misattribution makes no difference in the context of Ibn
Rushd's argument, for he rightly places the Muʿtazilites at one pole of the debate as de-
fending human freedom of action. The Muʿtazilites defend that humans produce their
own actions, according to al-Ashʿarī's *Maqālāt;* «Pour eux [Muʿtazilites], l'homme est
agent au sens propre (*fāʿil fi l-ḥaqīqa*), c'est à dire, selon eux, 'adventeur' (*muḥdith*)
producteur *ex nihilo* (*mukhtariʿ*), inventeur (*munshiʾ*) (*Maqālāt* 539, 12-13)», Gimaret,
D., *Théories de l'acte humain en théologie musulmane,* Paris, 1980, 12. Al-Ashʿarī, for
his part, «refusait à l'homme la qualification de *fāʿil*», *ibidem,* 180.

[13] Ibn Rushd, *Kashf*, 187.

[14] *Ibidem,* 187. According to Geoffroy, Jabarites are named after the term *jabr* –
«de l'arabe *jabr* ('contrainte', 'coercition'). École se réclamant de Jahm ibn Ṣafwān

Rushd sees an attempt to steer a middle course between God's power and human capability to act, by saying that both the acquired thing and the acquirer are created by God. Nevertheless according to Ibn Rushd, this is a meaningless theory, as it amounts to affirming that people are constrained in their actions. [15]

In addition to the disagreement (*ikhtilāf*) to be found in the authority (*sam'*), Ibn Rushd states that there is a conflict according to reason.

> If we say that people produce (*mūjid*) and create their act[s], [we must admit that] there are acts which do not conform to God's, most high, volition (*mashī'a*), or His choice (*ikhtiyār*), and that there is another creator beside God. However they said that Muslims have agreed (*ajma'a*) that there is no creator (*khāliq*) other than God, may He be praised.

Moreover, if we say that people do not acquire their acts, [we must admit that] they are forced to [perform] them. For there is no intermediate position between constraint (*jabr*) and acquisition (*iktisāb*). And if people are coerced in their acts, then it is impossible to make them accountable [for their own acts]. [16]

The contradiction pointed out by Ibn Rushd consists in asserting both that people create their acts and that God is the sole creator. His starting point is the principle that God is the sole creator, because

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(m. 128h./745). Pour les jabrites, il n'y a absolument aucune distinction à faire entre les actes humains volontaires, qui impliquent la puissance de l'homme à les accomplir, et les actes involontaires. L'homme est simplement le réceptacle d'actes créés en lui par Dieu», Ibn Rushd, *L'Islam et la raison*, 132-3, n. 109.

[15] Ibn Rushd, *Kashf*, 187. The theory of *iktisāb* is developed by al-Ash'arī to refer to an action that is created by God but performed by men, for which they are therefore accountable. In the Qur'ān, the verb *kasaba* can generally mean to perform an action. «As a theological term *kasb* means 'acquisition', 'appropriation'». The term *kasaba,* usually in the 1st form and sometimes in the 8th (*iktasaba*), is frequently found in Qur'ānic vocabulary, mainly with the sense of "acquiring" those rewards or punishments which are the fruits of moral acts, and so a loose translation could render *kasaba* here as «carrying out an action... *Kasaba* alludes to the acquisition (of the fruit) of each act, good or evil; *iktasaba,* which is very close in meaning, is used in the Qur'ān only for human actions in general (IV, 36), which merit punishment (II, 286, XXIV, 11, XXXIII, 58)... The Ash'arī *kasb* is a narrow margin in which is inscribed the relationship between the act created by God and human responsibility», *EI*, Leiden, 1978, 4, 692 (L. Gardet). For some schools, *kasb* is equivalent to *fi'l*, «Tout ce que l'on peut noter ici, c'est l'équivalence établie entre *kasb* et *fi'l.* Cela... est typique de Māturīdī et des Māturīdites», Gimaret, D., *Théories de l'acte humain*, 185.

[16] Ibn Rushd, *Kashf*, 188.

Muslims had agreed on this by *ijmāʿ* (consensus). If there is only one creator, humans cannot create their acts, in which case the Jabarite stance has to be endorsed. If humans are caused to act, they are not responsible for their acts, and so they cannot be justly rewarded or punished for their actions.

Ibn Rushd's solution

Ibn Rushd seeks to steer a middle course between the two extremes, a solution to the problem which is in accordance with religious law.

> It appears that the goal of the law (*sharʿ*) is not to separate these two beliefs. Its goal is to reconcile them [by finding] a middle term (*tawassuṭ*), which is the truth of the matter. For it appears that God, may he be praised and extolled, created in us faculties/powers (*quwā*) through which we are able (*naqdiru*) to acquire things which are contraries. However, since the acquisition of those things is only perfected by us with the agreement (*muwāṭāt*) of the external causes which God makes subject (*sakhkhara*) to us, and [with] the removal of their obstacles, the actions that are ascribed to us are perfected through both things. [17]

It is important to dwell on the pursuit of the middle term, the golden mean between the two conflicting positions. Clearly, Ibn Rushd does not think that Muʿtazilites or Ashʿarites (for their position is tantamount to Jabarism) have the solution to the problem, hence his own attempt to reconcile God's omnipotence and determination with human responsibility. To that end, he preserves human efficient causality without losing sight of God's omnipotence. In his exposition of human action, Ibn Rushd brings up the issue of powers/faculties residing in humans. In human agency there are two factors, internal faculties that give us the power to act, and external causes that contribute to this process. We are given the possibility/capability to choose between two contraries. This could lead to the view that humans are free to choose between contraries, that choice being our autonomous decision. Is this the argument pursued by Ibn Rushd? There

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[17] Ibn Rushd, *Kashf*, 188. «[les muʿtazilites] entendent par "puissance" la puissance à un acte donné et à son contraire, tandis qu'al-Ashʿarī et ses successeurs considèrent que la puissance à un acte donné exclut, à ce moment donné, la puissance à l'acte contraire», Ibn Rushd, *L'Islam et la raison*, 134, n. 114.

are conditions for choosing one contrary to the exclusion of the other, namely the external causes furnished by God and the absence of obstacles. [18] Only when these two conditions are in place is one of two contraries chosen. In what way do these two factors contribute to the event? Do they necessitate it or simply contribute to its origination? The answer is given by Ibn Rushd in the course of his argument.

By bringing up the effect of external causes, Ibn Rushd goes into the issue of secondary causality, the notion that God delegates His power to other causes, as implied in another passage. «The performance of actions attributed to us is accomplished by our will with the agreement of the actions which are external to our will. This is what is meant by God's *qadar*». [19]

How does Ibn Rushd go from asserting that humans are capable of action, having for that purpose faculties which concur with external causes, to asserting God's power? What is the relationship between these causes and God's omnipotence, and what is the nature of the agreement between them?

There is a twofold cause of our actions: our will and external causes. These are not dissociated, rather they concur. At no point in this chapter does Ibn Rushd state that there is in us an autonomous principle of action which would enable us not to be conditioned by external causes. The notion of human autonomy or freedom – whereby humans are free in the sense that they are not subject to a necessary and inescapable chain of natural causes – is articulated particularly clearly by Kant, in the way he formulates the problem of determinism, which he presents as the third antinomy of pure reason. In the thesis, Kant presents the argument for human freedom: «Causality according to the laws of nature is not the only causality which produces the phenomena in the world. A causality through freedom must necessarily be presupposed to account for these phenomena». The antithesis puts forward the deterministic position: «There is no [such

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[18] This alludes to an Aristotelian principle expounded by Ibn Rushd in his *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*, namely that an efficient natural cause always produces its effect under the same circumstances and in the absence of obstacles. «[In irrational beings] if the agent approaches the patient and there is no external obstacle, the agent must necessarily act and the patient be acted upon; for example when fire approaches something combustible, and there is no obstacle preventing the [object from] burning, the combustible object necessarily burns», 1152.

[19] Ibn Rushd, *Kashf*, 189.

thing as] freedom, rather everything in the world happens solely ac-
cording to the laws of nature». [20] On this interpretation, a libertarian
defends that human or voluntary action is not subjected to the laws of
nature. In short, he or she states that there is a discontinuity between
voluntary and natural chains of causality. The determinist position
holds that there is no such discontinuity between natural and volun-
tary causality.

One can argue that on Ibn Rushd's account external causes deter-
mine our will. God's *qadar* consists in the process whereby God de-
termines the causes that in turn determine our actions. «These [exter-
nal] causes which God makes subject to us not only perfect the
actions which we want to perform or prevent, rather they are the
cause that we want one of the opposites (*mutaqābilayn*)». [21] Each ac-
tual occurrence, be it in natural or voluntary agency, depends on the
prevalence of one of two opposites, so if God determines our desire
for one of two opposites he also determines the coming to be of any
human act. An alternative interpretation might argue that according to
this passage God's causation of our actions might be intended loosely,
in which case God would cause but not determine or necessitate human
actions, thus safeguarding human freedom of action.

The strong deterministic reading of Ibn Rushd' position would
state that external causes determine our volitions, and that there is no
suggestion of an autonomous human will – and this becomes more
plausible in what follows, where a psychological theory of human ac-
tion and motivation is put forward. Ibn Rushd describes the sequence
of events that lead to a particular action.

> Will is merely desire (*shawq*) which originates in us through imagining
> (*takhayyul*) something, or assenting to something (*taṣdīq bi-shay'*). This assent is
> not due to our choice (*ikhtiyār*), rather it is something that happens *(yaʿriḍu)* to us
> through external events. For example if something desirable externally presents
> itself to us we desire it necessarily (*bi-l-ḍarūra*) without choice (*min ghayr
> ikhtiyār*), and are drawn to it. Equally if something repugnant (*mahrūb*) presents
> itself to us externally we abhor and evade it necessarily. Thus, our will is pre-
> served and bound by external matters (*maḥfūẓa bi-l-umūr allatī min khārij
> wa-marbūṭa bi-hā*). [22]

Our action follows upon a certain desire and decision. This decision is made on the basis of an assent to something we think or imagine. The decision is a necessary and immediate response to an external factor. Hence whatever we think and decide is necessarily conditioned by external causes. The causes for choosing and acting on that choice are thus external rather than internal. Ibn Rushd seems to side with the Jabarite stance, which he accuses the Ash'arites of doing. The difference – with regard to the Ash'arite account – is that according to this model God does not determine our actions directly but through secondary causes. Yet according to this passage one might still argue that we may desire something without acting on it, in which case the fact that our desires are determined does not imply that our actions are. From other passages though it appears that our actions too are determined as we shall see.

Ibn Rushd seeks to distance himself from the Jabarite and the Ash'arite stance which favours divine agency over human power of action by asserting the principle of secondary causality that, according to Ibn Rushd, al-Ghazzālī had opposed in his *Tahāfut.* Equally, as we shall see, he defends a philosophical stance against the Ash'arite criticism that it detracts from God's omnipotence. In the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* Ibn Rushd rejects al-Ghazzālī's criticism, stating that:

> To deny the existence of efficient causes which are observed in sensible things is sophistry, and he who defends this doctrine either denies with his tongue what is present in his mind or is carried away by a sophistical doubt which occurs to him concerning this question. For he who denies this can no longer acknowledge that every act must have an agent. [23]

Ibn Rushd adduces two arguments in favour of secondary causality. One is simply empirical experience. We see, for instance, that fire burns once in contact with certain objects. The other argument, that every action has an agent or cause is more abstract and is based on the view, which goes back to Aristotle and Parmenides, that from nothing nothing originates. [24] Ibn Rushd presses the philosophical argument that causes have the power to produce their effects – in

[23] Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-tahāfut. (The Incoherence of the Incoherence),* Bergh, S. van den (transl., intro. and notes), London, 1954, 318; Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfot at-Tahāfot*, Maurice Bouyges, S. J., Beyrouth, 1930, 519.
[24] Sorabji, R., *Time, Creation and the Continuum*, London, 1983, 246.

al-Ghazzālī God is the only real cause. Moreover in Ibn Rushd's *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* the theory of secondary causation is tied up with the view that each thing has its proper function and name:

> For it is self-evident that things have essences (*dhāt*) and attributes (*ṣifa*) which determine the special functions of each thing and through which the essences and names of things are differentiated... Further, it is self-evident that all events have four causes, agent, form, matter, and end, and that they are necessary for the existence of the effects. [25]

This passage furthermore links this theory of secondary causes to Aristotle's fourfold division of causes, as well as his theory of substance and accident.

This criticism levelled at al-Ghazzālī is underpinned by the view that every act must have an agent. The agency of primary substances ensues from their respective properties and functions. Without this hierarchy of causes and effects divine wisdom would be meaningless. This criticism on the part of Ibn Rushd and his defence of secondary causality underlies his whole exposition of God's *qadar.* Some scholars have argued that Ibn Rushd's reading of al-Ghazzālī's position does not do him justice in the sense that al-Ghazzālī did not truly deny the agency of secondary causes. Goodman points out that he misrepresented al-Ghazzālī's true stance, but for our purposes we shall take Ibn Rushd's criticism, misdirected or not, as indicative of his own position. [26]

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[25] Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, Bergh, S. van den, 318, 319; Maurice Bouyges, S. J., 520-521.

[26] According to Goodman, «Ghazālī moved much further in the direction of naturalism than did Ash'arī... On the whole Ghazālī's critics including Ibn Rushd have ignored this emphatic rejection by him of the extreme voluntaristic occasionalism which he describes», Goodman, L. E., «Did al-Ghazālī deny causality?», *Studia Islamica*, 47 (1978), 83-120, 104-105. Concerning the relation between a secondary cause and its effect, Goodman states, citing al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa,* that «The position Ghazālī actually does adopt is this: 'We grant that flame is created with such a nature (*khalqa*) that if two identical pieces of cotton were placed in contact with it, it would set fire to them both and if they were in fact identical in every way it would not affect either of them any differently than the other. Nonetheless we hold it possible that a prophet be in contact with flame and not burn, either on account of a change in the character of the flame or on account of a change in the character of the prophet. There might arise either from God or from the angels a property in the flame which would confine its heat within its own body, preventing it from going further. Thus it would retain its heat and still have the form and essence of fire, but this heat and its effects would not go beyond it. Or there might arise in the body of the person some property which did not restrict him from being flesh and

In addition to the dependence of our actions upon external causes, another precision is made concerning this mode of causation, namely that it follows a definite and strictly arranged order.

> Since the external causes follow a definite order (*niẓām maḥdūd*), a hierarchical arrangement (*tartīb manḍūd*) and [this order] is not reversed, owing to the determination of their creator; and [since] our will and actions are not performed and do not exist at all except through an agreement with the causes [that originate] externally, [so] our actions follow a definite order. [By this] I mean that they exist at definite times (*awqāt maḥdūda*) and according to a definite measure (*miqdār maḥdūd*). This is only necessary because our actions are caused by those causes which are external. So every caused thing comes to be from causes definite and determined (*muqaddara*), therefore it is necessarily (*ḍarūratan*) definite and determined. Therefore one does not find this connection (*irtibāṭ*) only between our actions and the external causes [to our bodies], but [also] between them and the causes which God most high created outside our bodies. [27]

Several crucial are points made in this passage, which propounds a theory of strict efficient causality. According to this model of causation, there are no gaps in the causal chain, which means that there is no effect without a cause. It portrays a hierarchy of causes originating in God and reaching us through intermediate causes. The proposed continuity between external/natural causality and internal/voluntary causality means that our actions are conditioned by external causes such as natural causes, including the motions of the spheres and ultimately God. Moreover this order is not reversed and humans are at the receiving end of the causal chain in the sense that they do not initiate a process spontaneously.

This chain of causality follows a strict pattern, and the link between cause and effect is necessary and determined, rather than contingent. Thus it appears that according to Ibn Rushd our actions come to be through a necessary cause. On the whole the passage states that nothing comes to be of itself, spontaneously, without a preceding cause, or autonomously, rather it depends upon something

blood but did protect him from the effects of flame'», *ibidem*, 107. According to Goodman, al-Ghazzālī's qualifications regarding natural causality were meant to preserve the nature of miracles, *ibidem*, 112. In another article, Abrahamov also argues that al-Ghazzālī defends the theory of secondary causality in his major works except one, see his "Al-Ghazālī's theory of causality", *Studia Islamica*, 67 (1988), 75-98, 96-97.

[27] Ibn Rushd, *Kashf,* 189. See also, concerning the necessary chain of causality, Muhammad 'Ābid al-Jābirī's introduction to the Arabic edition, 80.

external. Also, the precision is made that this causation follows a set pattern and happens at specific times and according to a well defined process. This means that all events are necessarily determined. The mention of definite times is also important. [28] It means that the time at which a certain thing happens and the exact manner in which it happens is predetermined by God as part of His *qadar*. One might argue that this "agreement" between internal and external causes could be interpreted as a loose connection between the two kinds of causes, in which case external causes would condition but not fully determine internal causes. However, Ibn Rushd's insistence on the determinacy of the effects considerably weakens this possible interpretation. Another objection to a voluntarist reading of Ibn Rushd is that he never suggests that our voluntary actions are independent of external determinants, that is, he does not suggest that it is autonomous. Judging by the Kantian framework on the question of determinism, Ibn Rushd would be among those defending determinism.

According to Ibn Rushd our actions follow from that definite order and are part of it. The result of this agreement between external causes and our actions is that our actions are necessary and fully determined by external factors. Causes and effects follow upon each other necessarily and according to a determined order, all of them subordinated to God's causation.

Having expounded his view on the mechanism of human action, Ibn Rushd expands on the relation between "internal" and "external" causes, and God's causative knowledge.

> The definite order underlying the internal and external causes, which is irreversible, is the decree and determination (*al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*) which God foreordained to his servants. And this is the preserved tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*).

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[28] This is evocative of the process of growth described by Ibn Rushd in his *Long Commentary on the Physics*: «Semen must necessarily precede the generation of the animal in time, and the animal should be generated from semen at a definite time (*in tempore terminato*):... the first stage (*ordo*) in generation is the semen, and the last is the animal. By this he [Aristotle] meant that the animal by itself (*per se*) is produced (*fit*) by nature (*natura*)... Semen is naturally prior to the animal: therefore it is its cause...; it does not suddenly (*subito*) come to be from semen, but at a definite time (*in tempore terminato*)», Ibn Rushd, *Aristotelis de Physico Auditu libri octo cum Averrois Cordubensis variis in eosdem commentariis*, vol. 4 of *Aristotelis Opera quae extant omnia*, Venetiis apud Juctas, 1562, 80E.

Moreover, God's knowledge

> ... of these causes, and of what issues from them is the cause (*'illa*) of the existence of these causes (*sabab*). Therefore only God has the knowledge of these causes. Thus He alone truly knows the hidden [events] (*al-ghayb*), for the knowledge of the hidden [events] consists in knowing the causes. Because the hidden is the knowledge of the existence of what exists and does not exist in the future. [29]

This passage combines Qur'ānic and theological themes with philosophical doctrines. The term *al-ghayb* is Qur'ānic and indicates that which eludes human knowledge, but not God's knowledge. Another point put forward in this passage is that God's knowledge is causative, one of the most important tenets in medieval Aristotelian philosophy. On this interpretation knowledge and causality go hand in hand. Hence God's reflexive knowledge embraces all events, past, present, and future. Ibn Rushd fuses together the philosophical theory of causality whereby all causes are connected in an unbroken chain and the Islamic notion of predestination, of the "preserved tablet", where everything that is to happen is written down in all eternity. [30]

[29] Ibn Rushd, *Kashf*, 189. However, in the *Middle Commentary on De interpretatione* Ibn Rushd, following Aristotle, is more cautious to express a "predestinarian" view in his discussion of the problem of future contingents, for he sees that our opinions and the provisions we make determine what we do and future events. Nevertheless, this is not incompatible with the view expressed by him in the *Kashf*. It is possible to conceive that our actions change the course of events and equally hold that they are determined by external factors. However, a detailed discussion of Ibn Rushd's interpretation of the problem of future contingents posed by Aristotle is beyond the scope of this article. See Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Middle Commentary on Aristotle's De interpretatione*, ed. M. Kassem, C. E. Butterworth and A. A. Haridi (annotation), Cairo, 1981, 77-84.

[30] The theme of the preserved tablet is well known in the Islamic tradition, and is mentioned by Ibn Rushd in several places, including his *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*. It is mentioned by him there in reference to things which come to be (*al-ashyā' al-kā'ina*) and have a constitutive being (*anniya*), by reason of which they must pass from potentiality to actuality. Ibn Rushd makes the link between Aristotle's theory that whatever is in potentiality must at some point become actual (*De caelo* 110-112, *Physics*, 203b30, *Metaphysics* 1050b9-24) with the Islamic doctrine of the preserved tablet, according to which what is eternally written in the tablet comes to pass. The context is that of the nature of future contingents, and although the commentary passage is not without ambiguity, the *Kashf* allusion to the "preserved tablet" clearly means that events are written down in all eternity before taking place, *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*, 734. In that passage Ibn Rushd reverses what is his usual procedure in the *Kashf*, for he brings into his discussion of Aristotle's ideas an Islamic topic. The mention of theological and religious issues is not unusual in his commentaries. The theme of the

Again, an objection might be levelled at this predestinarian reading of Ibn Rushd, if one considers that God's eternal knowledge of future events does not mean that they are predetermined by Him. Yet this objection must be rejected, because of an essential difference, according to Ibn Rushd, between human and divine knowledge. While our knowledge derives from the objects that present themselves to us, empirical or not, and so is a result of external causes, God's knowledge is causative and, unlike ours, not passive. [31] This means that God knowledge of events is tantamount to His causation and determination of those events – «For our knowledge is the effect of the existents, whereas God's knowledge is their cause». [32] One might object to this predestinarian reading of Averroes by saying that God knows everything as an eternal "now" so that future events would not necessarily be determined by God. Against this argument a deterministic reading would state that God's eternal "now" encompasses our past, present and future.

The former passages put forth a deterministic theory of causation. Ibn Rushd goes further by saying that the time when something comes to pass is determined because the cause determines the moment in which the effect comes into being. As the causal process is known by God in all eternity, He knows and determines the future.

> Since the arrangement of the causes and their order is that which determines the existence of the effect at a certain time or its non-existence (*'adam*) at that time, it is necessary that the knowledge of the causes of a certain thing should be the knowledge of the existence of that thing and its non-existence (*'adam*) at a certain time. Also the absolute knowledge (*'alā al-iṭlāq*) of the causes is the knowledge of what proceeds from them (*bi-mā yūjidu minhā*) and of what does not exist at any point in time. Praise be to Him who encompasses all the causes of all the existents with [His] creation (*ikhtirā'*) and knowledge (*'ilm*). [33]

The notion of God as supreme knower and cause is here put forth. Ibn Rushd does not only state that causes produce their effects in a necessary fashion, but also that the time of the event is predetermined. Ibn Rushd makes a very strong case for God's

preserved tablet is also discussed in the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, Maurice Bouyges, S. J., 494-495, 503-504.

[31] Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 460, Bergh, S. van den, 279.
[32] Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 468, Bergh, S. van den, 285.
[33] Ibn Rushd, *Kashf*, 190.

foreknowledge. If we bear in mind that God's knowledge is causative, and that He knows the future, we have in Ibn Rushd an analysis of *qadar* that is both deterministic and predestinarian.

Having expounded the way in which our actions fit into the wider causal chain originated by God, Ibn Rushd believes to have solved the problem by accepting, unlike the Ash'arites, secondary causality by humans. All the actions we perform are preceded by God's decree and determination. This solution is in his view in consonance with religion – the *Qur'ān* and the *Sunna* – and also with reason.

Defense of secondary causality against al-Ghazzālī

After presenting his solution to the issue of *qadar,* Ibn Rushd embarks on a defence of secondary causality against al-Ghazzālī. Having implicitly affirmed that God determines events through secondary causes, he shows in concluding his exposition that there is no contradiction between affirming secondary causality and the notion of God's omnipotence. In order further to stress God's omnipotence, Ibn Rushd states that although primary substances like humans have certain powers only God is truly agent. Secondary causes are only metaphorically called "agents".

The causes that God makes subject [to us] are only efficient in a metaphorical way: they only exist through God, only He made them exist as causes, only He preserves their existence as efficient, and preserves their effects after their action and creates their substances by linking the causes with those [substances]. [34]

In addition to defending the philosophical theory of causality, Ibn Rushd accuses al-Ghazzālī of understating God's omnipotence, thus returning the criticism that al-Ghazzālī had levelled at the philosophers for detracting from God's omnipotence. The example introduced by al-Ghazzālī and criticized by Ibn Rushd, is that of a writer using a pen. As the pen is only the instrument of writing, it cannot properly be said to write, as al-Ghazzālī would have it. Other than God all creatures are agents by sheer homonymy (*ishtirāk al-ism*), which means that they share a common name but do not have the same meaning. As an illustration of divine causation, this is a flawed

[34] Ibn Rushd, *Kashf*, 190.

example. The writer would have to preserve the very substance of the pen, for the duration of the pen's existence, if it were a true simile of God's acts, for God is the creator (*mukhtariʿ*) of all substances.

This analysis is in consonance with the Qurʾānic verse that only God is agent (*fāʿil*), but equally it evokes the Aristotelian theory of the prime mover. In Aristotelian philosophy God continually moves the celestial bodies. If this motion imparted by the prime mover were to cease, everything in the world would perish. Thus the Aristotelian model ensures that all causation is "borrowed" from, and ultimately depends on, divine causation: «If one were to imagine... one [of the planets] removed or existing in a different place or having different dimensions, or at a different speed than that which God has established, the existents which are on the face of the earth would perish». [35] Nothing deviates from the exact manner in which God created it. Consequently things behave in the way that God determined.

All the points made by Ibn Rushd in his argument go towards affirming divine omnipotence, including the distinction he introduces, at the end of his exposition, between substance and accident. Amongst existents that come to be (*al-mawjūdāt al-ḥāditha*), we must distinguish substances (*jawhar*) and essences (*ʿayn*), from accidents (*ʿaraḍ*) such as heat and coldness, and motions. The first are created by God alone. Ibn Rushd points out that agents other than God affect only accidental features of a substance, while only God creates and determines the substance. That is not to say that accidents are outside the scope of divine causation. In his *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics,* Ibn Rushd says that: «substances are cause of the being (*anniya*) of the accidents and the accidents only exist as a consequence of the substance». [36] According to this view, we must assume that God also creates, albeit indirectly, the accidents. Thus all existents are created by God.

To conclude he says that the noun of creator (*ism al-khāliq*) is more specific (*akhaṣṣ*) of God than the noun of agent (*ism al-fāʿil*), for none but God is a creator. Ibn Rushd closes the chapter with a Qurʾānic quotation: «For God created you and what you do» (37:96). [37]

[35] Ibn Rushd, *Kashf*, 191.

[36] Ibn Rushd, *Long Commentary on the Metaphysics*, 752.

[37] According to Gimaret *(La doctrine d'al-Ashʿari*, Paris, 1990), this is an Ashʿarite usage of the Qurʾānic verse, by al-Ashʿarī, who uses this verse to support his view of

Conclusion

In his analysis of the dispute surrounding *qadar,* Ibn Rushd seeks to strike a moderate position between the two extremes of the Muʿtazila and the Jabariyya. Although his discussion is based on Scripture, the argumentation and key themes reveal obvious philosophical underpinnings. This becomes particularly clear in the way that the thesis of God's omnipotence and the Qur'ānic claim that He is the sole creator are combined with a specific view of causality, which echoes the philosophical theories expressed in Aristotle's works. The philosophical basis of his solution would be apparent to anyone familiar with Aristotle's philosophy, albeit Ibn Rushd does not cite Aristotle in a work which deals with questions of Islamic theology. Instead he interprets the Scripture in a philosophical way, thus seeking to show in practice that Greek philosophy and Islam are not incompatible but express the same truth. [38]

As for Ibn Rushd's proposed solution, it should so be noted that while he reaffirms his rejection of the Ashʿarite atomistic position on causation, he seems to adopt the view of *iktisāb*, which states that all actions are created by God. Moreover, he never expresses the view that human beings act in any way autonomously or spontaneously,

divine omnipotence. The Muʿtazilites suggested a different interpretation by emphasizing its context. In this Qur'ānic passage, Abraham turns against his idol-worshiping people and smashes their idols. It is he who pronounces the aforementioned verses, *wa-llahu khalaqa-kum wa-mā taʿmalūna.* According to the Muʿtazilites, the *mā* refers to the idols specifically, and is not to be generalized. «Rappelant d'abord le contexte du verset en question, ils [les muʿtazilites] font observer que ces paroles concernent les idoles qu'Abraham a entrepris de briser, et qu'il reproche aux siens d'adorer. Il a dit à ceux-ci, les deux versets venant immédiatement à la suite l'un de l'autre: *a taʿbudūna mā tanḥitūna,* 'adorez vous ce que vous sculptez?' (95), *wa-llahu khalaqa-kum wa-mā taʿmalūna,* 'c'est Dieu qui vous a créés, ainsi que ce que vous faites' (96). 'Ce que vous sculptez', ce sont les idoles qu'ils ont sculptées. Par conséquent, 'ce que vous faites' (ou plutôt: 'ce que vous fabriquez') désigne pareillement les idoles fabriquées par eux», 377.

[38] «Il s'agit... de montrer que, sur des questions fondamentales, existe un accord entre le sens littéral du Texte révélé et les thèses du péripatétisme, accord qui rend *inutiles* les stratégies interprétatives des théologiens dialectiques traditionnels (principalement ashʿarites)», Ibn Rushd, *L'Islam et la raison*, intro., 31. In the *Kashf*, Ibn Rushd puts into practice the hermeneutical principle introduced in the *Faṣl*, namely those passages whose apparent meaning conflicts with philosophical principles must be interpreted metaphorically. See also intro., 65 and 68. According to al-Jābirī, the combination of the Qur'ānic doctrine that only God is a true agent on the one hand and Greek philosophical conceptions of generation in the natural world on the other were contrary to the view that humans have free will, 85.

independently of external factors. [39] The sole difference with regard to the Ash'arite position is the acceptance of secondary causes. By applying the notion of secondary causality to human causality, Ibn Rushd thinks to have evaded the problems besetting the Ash'arite and the Jabarite position. Some could argue that this view has the same flaw as the Ash'arite one in the sense that God is ultimately the only real cause of our actions and hence punishment or reward are unjustly meted out. Ibn Rushd obviously thinks that secondary causality on our part guarantees that we can be made responsible for our actions. The critic might object that the acceptance of secondary causes is irrelevant if our actions are wholly determined by external causes and ultimately by God. Between the extremes of human freedom and divine omnipotence, Ibn Rushd tips the balance in favour of the latter. His theory of *qadar* in the *Kashf* is both deterministic and predestinarian.

[39] In recent years much has been written about the relation between Ibn Rushd's philosophy and Almohad doctrine in al-Andalus, in particular the thought of the founder of the Almohad movement, Ibn Tūmart. Although the commentary by Ibn Rushd on Ibn Tūmart's *'aqīda* is lost, some similarities between their positions can be observed. Geoffroy remarks central issues such as the rational knowledge of God through the observation and study of the universe, the stress on God's transcendence (*tanzīh*), and a germane issue, the rejection of ascribing to God corporeal attributes (known as *tajsīm*) and the rejection of a blind adherence to tradition (*taqlīd*). See Geoffroy, M., "Ibn Rušd et la théologie almohadiste. Une version inconnue du *Kitāb al-Kašf 'an manāhij al-adilla* dans deux manuscrits d'Istanbul", *Medioevo*, 26 (2001), 327-351, 330. Geoffroy also mentions his rejection of Ash'arism on the basis of Almohad stances, in particular in the *Kashf*, see Geoffroy, M., "L'almohadisme théologique d'Averroès", *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 66 (1999), 9-47, 66. Another scholar, D. Urvoy, who analyses the positions taken by Ibn Rushd in solving the problems that had been debated by the different theological schools, in particular the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites, points to a similar view on God's omnipotence by Ibn Rushd and the Almohad stance on the subject: "Ibn Tūmart, obnubilé par l'idée de l'Être Absolu, donc sans changement, donc nécessaire, tranchait la question [de la prédestination] en disant que Dieu est au-dessus de tout jugement. Averroès distingue les puissances qui sont en nous et qui nous permettent de mériter ou de démériter, et les causes extérieures qui influent sur notre action. Mais en fait, la voie reste libre pour que l'analyse philosophique de ces causes réintroduise un déterminisme plus ou moins strict, avec l'idée de Providence, qui n'est qu'une interprétation de l'affirmation almohade: 'Dieu a produit (toute chose) comme preuve de sa puissance et de son libre-arbitre. Il les a soumises afin de prouver sa sagesse et sa puissance d'organisation'», Urvoy, D., "La Pensée almohade dans l'oeuvre d'Averroès", *Multiple Averroès*, Jolivet, J. (ed.), Paris, 1978, 45-53, 48. Tilman Nagel mentions predestination as one of Ibn Tūmart's principles, but also that he held that humans were responsible for their actions, notwithstanding God's omnipotence. See Nagel, T., *Im Offenkundigen das Verborgene. Die Heilszusage des sunnitischen Islams,* Göttingen, 2002, 40, 43, 115.