

## THE IDEA OF JUSTICE IN ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

Moslem thinkers have treated the idea of justice from a religious and human point of view by examining it on two planes: God and Man. Whatever their inclinations may be, their concept of justice is linked to other connected notions such as beauty and ugliness, good and evil, free will, the volition and wisdom of God, and predestination. In the framework of this study of the idea of justice and its related concepts, we shall confine ourselves to setting out the points of view of the principal sects (the *Ash'arites*, the *Mu'tazilites* and *Maturidism*) and of certain philosophers such as Averroes and some mystics including Ibn'Arabi. We shall probably be led to a brief comparison of the ideas of Ibn'Arabi with those of Leibniz. For more ample details on this subject,

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we refer the reader to a series of articles already published in which we underlined the points of convergence between these two philosophers with regard to the infinite, monadism, optimism, good and evil, and predestination.<sup>1</sup>

The school of *Mu'tazilites* is perhaps the only one to have spoken out concerning all these concepts. It is the incarnation of free thought within Islamic civilization. Instead of being satisfied with an examination of the ideas of justice and injustice from a purely religious point of view, its merit has been the equal treatment of this problem on the individual and social levels. This is why this school has not hesitated to adopt a position entirely opposed to that of another great sect: *Asb'arism*. The variance between the two schools proceeds from the manner in which they interpret religious texts relating to the will of God, the attributes of justice, ideas of good and evil, predestination and free will.

For *Asb'arism*, the will of God is absolute since, as Creator of the universe, His acts cannot be deferred to human criteria which distinguish justice and injustice. The acts of God can conflict with the imperatives of reason: God can reward the sinner and punish a believer. His acts should not be considered wicked or unjust or evil. In regard to the *Mu'tazilites*, they desired to ground themselves in human criteria for the definition of the nature of justice and injustice and to apply these criteria to divine acts while affirming that the actions of God the Creator may not be unjust or vile. Consequently, one cannot speak of God the Unjust while He is the Equitable Judge.

### 1. THE MU'TAZILITE IDEA OF JUSTICE

The *Mu'tazilites* define themselves as "the people of justice and uniqueness (of God)," *abl al-'adl wa-l-tawhind*. As the "people of uniqueness," they deny the multiplicity of divine attributes which, in their view, are only one with the essence of God. As the "people of justice," the *Mu'tazilites* commit themselves to refuting the opinions of other sects, according to which God is unjust for condemning man to sin and yet punishing him for

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the reviews *Al-Fikr al Mu'asiv*, *Al-Magallah* (Cairo), *Mugabid* (Algiers), and *Magallat al-'Arabi* (Kuwait), 1970 and 1971.

faults and wrongs which he only committed by constraint. For the *Mu'tazilites*, this determinism disaccords as much with orthodoxy as with reason. How, then, in the case of predestination, to justify the punishment of the wrongdoer or the wicked? Taking a rational point of view, how can one conceive that man is responsible for things willed and decreed by God?

For the *Mu'tazilites*, justice is a quality which corresponds to the perfection of God, as is, moreover, the case with man. God must be just, equitable in the judgements which He pronounces; He thus cannot be unjust or arbitrary. Therefore, one must adhere to the Koranic verses which affirm that God could not be unjust and, rather on the contrary, His justice is absolute. In fact, God is provident and just. It is only a matter of the determined goal. In any case, His acts could not be incompatible with the criteria of reason which distinguishes good from evil and which sees that certain actions are in themselves good or evil, since it would be irrational to call a lie beautiful and the truth vile.

If such is the case, God could not lie, for as the lie of a man is blameworthy, what would it mean applied to God? Likewise, it follows that God must be veracious. In fact, truth is beautiful in itself. It is a quality which expresses the perfection of man. *A fortiori*, it must be good in itself in regard to the Creator. It follows that the divine orders and prohibitions must be submitted to this criterion in order that He may be just. It falls to Him not to ordain whatever is ugly and bad nor to turn away from what is beautiful and good. In other words, the revealed Law must be appropriate to the judgements of reason which ordains all that is good and just and forbids doing evil and injustice. Indeed, dogma encourages virtue, protects the human soul, forbids vices such as injustice, theft, murder, lying and sin. No revealed dogma has ever encouraged evil and injustice nor put good and justice in an unfavorable light.

The *Mu'tazilites* based themselves on numerous verses for the purpose of cleansing all ideas of injustice or wickedness from the conception of God: "God does not allow injustice toward his servants" (XL, 31);<sup>2</sup> "I wrong not my servants" (L, 29); "Surely God bids to justice and good-doing and giving to

<sup>2</sup> All quotations are from *The Koran Interpreted*, A. J. Arberry, translator (New York: 1955).

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kinsmen; and He forbids indecency, dishonour, and insolence, admonishing you, so that haply you will remember” (XVI, 90). In another verse, the Koran, by way of refuting the arguments of idolaters who justify their reprehensible acts by traditions inherited from their ancestors, states: “And whenever they commit an act of indecency they say, ‘We found our fathers practising it, and God has commanded us to do it.’ Say: ‘God does not command indecency: what, do you say concerning God such things as you know not?’” (VII, 28). Taking up again the words of those who justify their polytheism by the Will of God, the Holy Book declares: “The idolaters will say, ‘Had God willed, we would not have been idolaters, neither our fathers nor would we have forbidden aught.’ Even so the people before them cried lies until they tasted Our might. Say: ‘Have you any knowledge, for you to bring forth for us? You follow only surmise, merely conjecturing.’ Say: ‘To God belongs the argument conclusive, for had He willed, He would have guided you all’” (VI, 148-49). In fact, the *Mu'tazilites* say, God does not constrain man from doing good or evil; God allows him to choose his actions with a free hand. God had given him the power to do whatever he wishes—good or evil, justice or injustice.

Moreover, the *Mu'tazilites* resort to rational demonstration to prove the justice of God. They affirm that reason was, prior to the revealed religions, the criterion of human values; it is reason which allows man to distinguish good things from vile things in themselves. The Revelation was only a confirmation of what reason had already discovered. To that, they add the following argument: if things are neither good nor bad in themselves or if reason cannot distinguish these two types of things, the Prophets would not have exhorted men to depend on reason to distinguish good from evil. Likewise, it would have been unthinkable that the Prophets would demand that reason believe in prophecy because of its goodness. Another argument advanced by the *Mu'tazilites*: religion makes no close examination of the questions in which men find it difficult to distinguish good from evil. It is in certain such cases that one must use judgement to discern good and evil in differing kinds of human behavior. Man has not been endowed with reason in order that he might put it to his own uses; it would be

just if he were answerable for any evil use of reason. Finally, for the *Mu'tazilites*, the Revelation has been handed down for a single aim: to aid men in distinguishing good from evil, beauty from ugliness, and justice from injustice.

This idea has led the *Mu'tazilites* to an optimism analogous to that of Ibn-Arabi and Leibniz. For them, God who knows all and is just is benevolent towards man. This is why He makes the Good in their interest through creating the best of all possible worlds. If we ascertain some manifestations of evil, injustice and ugliness in the universe without the power to comprehend their purpose or reason, the conclusion ought not be drawn that God wishes evil or ugliness in themselves but rather that human reason cannot apprehend the causes and finalities. This is why the *Mu'tazilites* affirm that divine justice demands that God wish the good and the best for his servants.

The *Mu'tazilites'* detractors have reproached them with wishing to impose on God what He must accomplish and have accused them of heterodoxy. However, certain moderate opponents of the school limit themselves to the claim that it has shown disrespect to God in speaking of this justice.

At any rate, it is certain that the idea of divine justice among the *Mu'tazilites* is linked to the problem of good and evil and the Will of God. For them, divine wisdom and justice are opposed to evil and injustice. God is benevolent because it is good and because it is better for man. God is not malevolent which would be bad and harmful to man. In regard to things which cannot be considered either good or bad, it is said that God neither desires nor reproves, but he leaves the care of judging them to human reason. God cannot be malevolent toward men unless He is unjust. Does not the Koran say "God does not allow injustice toward his servants" (XL, 31)? Likewise, if God desired idolatry or sin, it would be inconceivable that He punish idolaters and sinners. Could not the polytheists then object of God that He has condemned them, them and their ancestors, to polytheism? Finally, for the *Mu'tazilites*, God is just. He is benevolent to all humanity and He creates the means to effect this will. But it is man who chooses, by his own will, good or evil, which explains the meaning of reward and punishment.

It should be noted that the *Mu'tazilite* sect is almost the only one to set out a concept of justice on both individual and social

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levels. They affirm that each man is free and that he is responsible for the evil consequences of his actions. He must also assume the responsibility for his passivity on a social level. No one can claim predestination as an excuse to justify his injustice or wrongdoing nor that of others.

For the *Mu'tazilites*, man is the creator, the author and the agent of his actions. Man is creator but the place he occupies as creator could in no way be compared with that of God. Man creates insofar as he provides for, designs, and plans his actions and can exercise an influence on exterior things. Somewhat later, Ibn'Arabi says that the actions of man make him fit to be master of the universe! Already, in the 9th century, one of the *Mu'tazilites'* authors, l'Imam Yahya Ibn al-Husayn az-Zaydi, said: "The creator of a thing is its agent, and the agent is its author." Man is the creator of all that we see in our world. In regard to divine creation, it is relative to the cosmos, which is the principal matter freely utilized by man to create what does not exist in nature. Man creates within the limits of divine creation. He utilizes his liberty in the process of creation. Moreover, he is responsible for all that he creates. Man has the power to forge his own destiny, to improve his state of health and social rank without infringing, nonetheless, on orthodox religious thought. Imam Yahya Ibn al-Husayn has explained the idea of human creation in rapport with divine creation thus: "In all that, whatever God has made has been limited to creating the means. He has created man in order that he walk and he has walked; He has designed the ear for hearing and man has heard; the nose for smell and he has smelled; the eye for seeing and he has seen... All that man can extract from this means, he has done it himself. The eye has been created by God, but it is that eye which sees. The hand is the work of God but, with it, man strikes..."

To support the idea of divine justice, the *Mu'tazilites* claim that the will of man is independent from that of the Creator. Man himself freely opts for what he wants. He can wish what God does not wish for him. In fact, the *Mu'tazilites* do not believe that human free will is incompatible with the will of God. The Creator has given man the possibility of utilizing the powers which he has at his command so that he assumes responsibility for his action; he creates what he wishes, does

what pleases him from the time that he takes on the responsibility for his actions.

That is the answer to the demands of divine and human justice. It is for this reason that the *Mu'tazilites* have taken sides against the fatalists since, for the former, to say that evil and injustice are decreed by God would be as much incompatible with reason as with religion.

The *Jabrites* (fatalists) believe that if there is social injustice, it is because God has so decided, for if God had not wished and decreed that governments be unjust, they could not have been so.

The *Mu'tazilites* take aim against this thesis which would justify social and political injustice by religious arguments. According to them, the fatalists are defeatists responsible for the injustice which can ravage their society. For Imam Yahya Ibn al-Husayn, the people are responsible for the survival of a wicked political regime as long as they tolerate injustice and do not throw off the yoke of tyranny. This passive attitude on the part of the people largely contributes to maintaining the political and social oppressor. Imam Yahya goes as far as labelling as agents of tyranny those who accept the injustice of the Emir by pretending it answers to the divine will. If we translate Imam's thought into our modern speech, we would say that to allow injustice or to tolerate it constitutes indirect aid to the iniquitous despot.

This act, according to the same author, is manifest in the payment of taxes and duties. Will not all funds furnished to a despot by the population contribute to the survival of an evil regime? Tolerating injustice not only wrongs oneself but also the members of the community. The payment of taxes will in fact be utilized to make others suffer, which would be analogous to the *zakat* (legal welfare) given to corrupt and debauched persons. Imam Yahya illuminates this social responsibility, remarking: "In giving money, in the form of *zakat*, to a debauched person, one enables him to become further involved in debauchery, libertinism, and rebellion, and one becomes a kind of accomplice in sin. This participation in evil recalls the complicity of those who aid an unjust emir and contribute, thanks to their agricultural and commercial resources, to putting his kingdom on a solid basis... For farmers work the earth while

unjust governments, given on to pleasures, enter upon the road of error and sow death among their subjects.”

## 2. THE CONCEPT OF DIVINE JUSTICE AMONG THE ASH'ARITES

*Ash'arism* shows us the other side of the coin. Their thesis, which has its counterpart in Christian thought, is the opposite of *Mu'tazilism*. It emanates from their conception of the divine Will. We may say that their point of view is sometimes incompatible and in contradiction with reason and facts. At times, they claim that God creates and wishes evil. At other times, they affirm that good and evil are questions of judgement—there cannot be good and evil in the nature of things and actions, but the criterion which determines good and evil is the Revelation. Something is ugly or beautiful if the Law so calls it. Something is beautiful if it yields its author the approbation of the Law. Something is ugly if it is reproved by the Law. While recognizing the existence of good and evil, al-Ash'ari thus denies that things may be beautiful or ugly in themselves, although the Good may be beautiful and the Bad may be ugly. Despite this apparent contradiction, the *Ash'arites* find abrupt disagreement with *Mu'tazilism*. For them, dogma determines, from the start, the nature of the beautiful and ugly and reason ought not to participate in any way for this reason. Consequently, if God ordains lying or injustice, these two vices change in nature and become good and useful. On the other hand, if God forbids truth and justice, they then become ugly and evil. Putting this idea precisely, al-Ash'ari says: “Obligations are entirely founded on tradition; reason is not concerned to determine obligations nor to impose criteria of beauty and ugliness.”

The *Ash'arites* put forth in confirmation of their thesis the argument from the relativity of moral values which are altered in terms of the differences between nations, cults and epochs. For them, these values are not immutable nor absolute for they do not cease to evolve. But one might object to the *Ash'arites* that the relativity of morals does not exclude the existence of great ethical principles on which revealed religions or those conceived by man are unanimous. Now, these principles are eternal and immutable. A murder is always considered odious



whereas truth and mutual aid are considered good and useful. Certainly the particular consequences and applications of these principles can evolve, but then it is only that they are qualified by relatives. Besides, the recent *Ash'arites* have broadened the thought of their master by distinguishing between two categories of beauty and ugliness—the first is that of beauty or ugliness in itself and as conceived by reason; the second is relative and is only perceived through the intermediary of the Revelation.

Al-Ash'ari applied his theory to the letter, affirming that if God does something that our reason considers ugly, it will not be so. He is right in condemning prophets to eternal damnation in hell, as He is right in reserving Paradise for the infidels, because His will is absolute. It would not be odious for God to want to punish infants in the future life, to create people predestined for idolatry and torture, to reward the rebellious and to punish a servant who adheres faithfully to the Law, for if it comes to such a question, He is always just.

Of course, al-Ash'ari and his followers insist on the necessity of distinguishing God from man in matters relating to justice and injustice. But one may say that al-Ash'ari has not in fact established this distinction because, unconsciously, he as much as assimilates human justice and divine justice by practically putting the despotism of governments of the period on a level with the absolute Will of God. He explains his thesis, according to which the acts of God could not be considered wicked, by the fact that He is not subject to the Law and that, in fact, He does not exceed a framework assigned to Him but rather has at His command that which He possesses. Isn't this idea quite close to that of certain thinkers who allow the despot the right of life and death over his subjects, put him above the law, subject him to no restriction or legislation since he determines and decrees?

From all this, al-Ash'ari draws the following conclusion: since God is free to do what He wants in His kingdom, no one can force him to treat His creatures well or ill. His acts are inexplicable except by a finality or a determined aim.

This idea probably reflects the social conditions which prevailed at the time of al-Ash'ari in the 9th century Moslem community. It is worth noting that al-Ash'ari supported his thesis with the same arguments that Voltaire used but in a totally different

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framework! In fact, while al-Ash'ari wishes to show the absolute will of God, Voltaire stresses the existence of evil and injustice in the world to effect doubts of God's existence.

Moreover, for al-Ash'ari, the problem of good and evil is linked to his idea of the absolute divine Will. God wishes all that has happened and does not wish what has not. If evil exists in the world, God wills it so. Thus, He wants sinners to rebel against Him and those whom the faith sustains to be directed on the road of bliss. Thus, man can choose only what God has chosen for him. Taking his thesis to its conclusion, al-Ash'ari declares that God has destined a part of mankind to Hell and another to Heaven. It would have been better to say, in explanation of these two categories of man, that God has created the means to do good and the means to do evil. Some choose the first; others, the second. They assume responsibility for their actions and their free choice which justifies reward and punishment.

The hostility of al-Ash'ari to the *Mu'tazilites* (whose illustrious representative he was at the outset) is explained by his strange conception of the Will of God, a conception which enabled him to omit citations from religious texts which weakened his thesis and to treat the *Mu'tazilites* as "miscreants" and free-thinkers. He supported his point of view with religious and rational arguments. In just this way, he relies on verses of the Koran of which one might easily give a rational interpretation which is compatible with the spirit of the Revelation: "God has set a seal on their hearts and on their hearing, and on their eyes is a covering" (II, 7); "Whomsoever God desires to guide, He expands his breast to Islam; whomsoever He desires to lead astray, He makes his breast narrow, tight..." (VI, 125).

Now, these verses signify that God creates the means for loving good or evil. Man opts for good or evil thanks to the power which God has supplied him. If the creature turns away from good, the Creator abandons him to his sad fate. In fact, the Koran says: "When they swerved, God caused their hearts to swerve" (LXI, 5).

It should be noted that al-Ash'ari relies on certain verses and neglects quite a few others. When he finds verses affirming that God could not be unjust—"God does not allow injustice

toward his servants" (XL, 31); "God desires not any injustice to living beings" (III, 108)—he interprets them in a less than probing manner: "God did not intend injustice" would mean, according to al-Ash'ari, that God allows men to commit injustices against each other. Now, al-Ashari seems to forget that the contradiction between these verses—affirming the absolute Will of God and others which insist on divine Justice—is only an apparent contradiction which can be removed by showing that man is free and responsible within the limits of the means of doing good or evil which God has put at his disposition. This is the argument that Averroes will use later.

In regard to the rational argument advanced by al-Ash'ari to prove that the acts of God cannot be called just and good nor unjust and evil, these are no longer decisive. In just this way, he claims that to believe in a human free will would mean that the Will of God is not absolute. Likewise, he affirms that if God has put man in the position of doing vile and unjust acts, *a fortiori*, He Himself must be capable of accomplishing these acts. Thus, it is for God to ordain that miscreants believe in Him without, nonetheless, giving them the power to do so. In addition to that, al-Ashari believes that the punishment (torture) of infants here on earth is just. If God would punish them in the future life, it would likewise be just.

It should be noted that all these rational demonstrations have a common trait: the non-recognition of human free will and the affirmation that man merits punishment or reward for some actions which he did not wish for nor create but which God decreed and imposed on him.

Now, the *Mu'tazilites* and, after them, Averroes, observe that the *Ash'arites* have an idea of justice incompatible with the demands of reason and the spirit of religion. If this idea were well-founded, the principle of reward and punishment would become inconceivable. The believer would no longer keep his faith and the sinner would not renounce his rebellion against God. Al-Ash'ari's point of view is thus incompatible with justice and the perfection of God. On the contrary, it goes hand-in-hand with the ideas of the defeatists who, in certain societies, give themselves up to injustice and tyranny. In fact, it assimilates the absolute Will of God to the will of despotic and tyrannical man.

3. THE IDEA OF JUSTICE AMONG THE MATURIDITES

*Maturidism* has formed an idea of justice which does not differ much from that of *Mu'tazilism*. A *Maturidi* is in agreement with a *Mu'tazilite* on numerous points but he sometimes employs a different language. He admits that beauty and ugliness exist in the very nature of things and that the Law, by determining beauty and ugliness, follows the values of reason. But when reason does not succeed in distinguishing beauty from ugliness, the Law comes to its aid and illuminates it. For a *Maturidi*, one should say that God desires neither ugliness nor evil nor injustice, for His power is not an unconditioned power, not subject to His wisdom and His justice. If it is undeniable that God absolutely possesses all, one ought not then to conclude that He would accomplish actions which reason judges to be wicked; otherwise, all moral and rational values in general and the concept of justice in particular would be reduced to nothing. This, too, would be a negation of what the Revelation says about the wisdom and the goodness of God. For this reason, the *Maturidis* declare that the *Asb'arite* thesis is "totally erroneous, wicked, and hateful in the eyes of every clear-sighted man."

On the other hand, the *Maturidis* support the *Mu'tazilite* thesis by which God is considered Just because He does all that is in the interest of his creatures. However, while defending this thesis, *Maturidism* adopts a different language. This is how, in place of saying (with the *Mu'tazilites*) that God should accomplish the good and the best, it opts for another formula which expresses the same idea: the necessity of justice and grace. Justice appoints all that is in the interest of man. Grace, in turn, produces something more: the *best*. God is provident and just. His actions cannot lack wisdom. The acts which He does are accomplished according to His own will. What He does constitutes grace; that which He does not is just. This means that God always creates the best of all possible worlds. For al-Maturidi, "If the *Mu'tazilites* use 'the best' to mean 'wisdom,' we are in complete agreement. But if they mean by this term 'the most useful,' they are in error." Nevertheless, al-Maturidi admits elsewhere the idea of utility, for he defines justice as: that which assures others' perfection, that is, their good. One

may thus say that, at bottom, *Mu'tazilism* has no real opposition.

Al-Maturidi was able to reform the *Mu'tazilite* idea of good and evil and its relation to the concept of justice. He affirms that the interest of the world necessarily demands the existence of good and evil but, contrary to what the *Mu'tazilites* think, this does not mean that God does not wish evil but that this evil is destined to effect good, or the best possible world.

While in opposition to the *Mu'tazilites* on this point, al-Maturidi does not go as far as to accept the *Ash'arite* thesis by which it is possible that a believer would be punished if such is the absolute Will of God. For God does not fail in the promise which He made to put aside a fine reward for his upright servants. Even the threats addressed to rebels do not exclude the possibility of their pardon. God can in fact pardon whomever He likes and this would then be an act of grace and pity. On the other hand, to punish believers, in the name of the absolute Will, would be inadmissible from a rational point of view. Good sense cannot admit that God utilizes His power for such vain, unjust and senseless ends.

#### 4. THE CONCEPT OF JUSTICE IN AVERROES

Averroes denies the *Ash'arite* thesis since it is incompatible with reason as well as the spirit of the revealed Law. The fact that this doctrine runs counter to reason puts it in the realm of the senses. For our reason and judgement teach us that there are some beautiful things and some ugly things, that beauty and ugliness are in the very nature of these things. Beauty and ugliness are not a single question of appreciation, as the *Ash'arites* believe, but have an existence in themselves. From a purely rational point of view, this *Ash'arite* thesis is false for if the Law were the sole criterion of the beauty and ugliness of things, we could then say that the act of giving God some "partners" would not be base in itself and that if the Revelation had advocated polytheism in place of monotheism, this polytheism would then change in nature and become good and useful.

In other respects, the *Ash'arite* thesis opposes orthodoxy since it runs counter to many Koranic verses which characterize

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injustice as bad and vile and affirm that God would not be unjust. Among these verses which stress the absolute justice of God, one may cite: "Whoso does righteousness, it is to his own gain, and whoso does evil, it is to his own loss. Thy Lord wrongs not His servants" (XLI, 46); "God hears witness that there is no good but He—and the angels, and men possessed of knowledge—upholding justice..." (III, 18); "Surely God shall not wrong so much as the weight of an ant; and if it be a good deed He will double it, and give from Himself a mighty wage" (IV, 40); "Every soul earns only to its own account; no soul laden bears the burden of another" (VI, 164).

In a general way, Averroes leans towards the *Mu'tazilite* thesis. He shares their opinion of the wisdom and justice of God which brings the good and the best for His creatures. However, he differs on the point of the creation of evil and the divine will for evil. For Averroes, God creates evil just as He creates good. He also wishes evil, not in itself but because it can engender good on which the interest of the world depends. In this way, God creates in men the means to do good and evil, while knowing that it is salutary for His servants: a bit of evil beside so much good is better than the entire absence of a great good mixed with a little evil. When the angels opposed the creation of Adam, whose primogeniture had to cause murderers and agents of disorder, God answered that He knew what they did not, since it is utterly useless that man be the "lieutenant" of the All-Powerful on earth.

Averroes allows free will and the responsibility of man since that gives justice its *raison d'être*. He reproaches the *Ash'arites* with badly interpreting some Koranic verses to give the impression that God is unjust. Thus, the *Ash'arites* misunderstand the following verse: "...God leads astray whomsoever He will, and He guides whomsoever He will..." (XIV, 4); and their mistake obscures in their minds the significance of many verses which accentuate divine justice, such as: "Surely God wrongs not men anything, but themselves men wrong" (X, 45); "... that, for what your hands have forwarded, and for that God is never unjust unto His servants" (III, 182).

For Averroes, the first of these verses—"...God leads astray whomsoever He will, and He guides whomsoever He will..." (XIV, 4)—is completely compatible with the idea of justice:

God creates in man the power to choose good or evil, which leads either to the Right Path or to wandering; this must be so, says Averroes, so that reward and punishment may have a significance. Free will is one of the bases of justice because, if acts are determined in advance, reward and punishment would be contrary to justice. Besides, reason and judgement teach every objective man that he is free and responsible for his actions.

Determinism as understood by certain followers of al-Ash'ari has been one of the factors which has led many Moslems to a kind of resigned fatalism. Now, from the earliest centuries of Islamic civilization, the *Mu'tazilites* have struggled against this fatalism by stressing that whoever accepts injustice as something willed and decreed by God contributes in some sense to that injustice. Resignation, in this particular case, favors and reinforces the injustice of tyrants and despots.

## 5. THE IDEA OF JUSTICE IN IBN 'ARABI

Ibn 'Arabi studied the idea of justice and the related concepts (beauty and ugliness, good and evil, free will, predestination) on a higher level.

At the outset, Ibn 'Arabi denies "ugliness in itself" since all, here below, bear the mark of the divine Beauty. God is beautiful, and He loves beauty. It follows that all parts of the world—which God is the architect—must be derived from divine Truth. Not to take account of His creatures or to disdain them would be disrespectful to the Creator. Everything in the universe constitutes a wisdom which God made due to the fact that it is the work of a sage. Everything which is present in the world is necessary and assumes the best form it can since: everything in the world is beautiful and beneficent.

The various kinds of imperfection and ugliness which seem to exist in the world only represent an ugliness in itself. They are only accidents indispensable to the effecting of harmony among the beings in this universe. In other words, if the world did not comprise ugliness and some apparent imperfections, it would not be perfect. The very perfection of the world requires the existence of those who fix their gaze on the manifestations of ugliness in place of delighting in beauty which reigns over nature. Imper-

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fection is not fundamental, only one of the characteristics of the perfection of the universe.

For Ibn 'Arabi, the world is beautiful and worthy to be loved. Fundamentally, it contains no ugliness. All the elements of good and beauty have been collected together. There is no way to wish for anything better, more beautiful, more marvellous. If the universe contained the least quality of actual evil, it would lose the rank in creation which God assigned it. Ibn 'Arabi goes as far as to say that the universe is a mirror in which God sees His Reflection. This is why the Gnostics collapse in ecstasy at the contemplation of this universe in which they see the image of truth. This is why their mystical voyage starts to leave the universe considered as the symbol of God, "a voyage which comprises the repetition of an invocation (*dhikr*), contemplation, reasoning, and faith as well as knowledge, reflection, and the life of the heart. Tongues repeat His name and hearts are ecstatic with love for Him." Thus, well before the romantics, Ibn 'Arabi compares the world to a mirror in which divine ideas are reflected.

Of course, some things are considered good and others base. This is explained by the fact that human reason, which is limited in what it can know, makes this distinction in accord with what pleases or displeases it. When reason was considered capable of distinguishing beauty from ugliness, it had been confirmed in this role by the Revelation. None less remained but that whatever God created is good in itself and of a perfect beauty.

It is self-evident that this concept harmonizes with the ideas of Ibn 'Arabi on the nature of good and evil. He sees the world as entirely good and containing nothing "evil in itself." The manifestations of evil which we observe are only accidents which we can attribute to God. To the contrary, we should hold responsible the very nature of beings in power who are the object of the divine intelligence. These beings in power are located in the "reservoirs" of the divine benevolence of the archetypes. This expression takes on, in Ibn 'Arabi's thought, a meaning which recalls the Leibnizian formula of the "region of eternal verities."

Usually, we call "base" or "vile" all that which hinders our passions or our interests, thus making our own ego the



criterion of the nature of good or evil in things. Now, it is undeniable that our judgements vary as a function of our passions and interests. For circumstances and matters vary according to our manner of receiving them. What harms one person can be useful to another. Reason and the naming of evil, in the last analysis, come from human beings. One cannot attribute evil to God, Who is good, provident and just, from Whom only good emanates which is pure goodness. It must thus be admitted that happiness and unhappiness depend on the nature of the person who accepts or rejects the divine gift. Heat and cold are necessary to the benefit of the world. They are indispensable to the vegetation which man needs. However, some people complain about heat or cold. Now, if one reflects a moment, one realizes that what annoys is indispensable to one's good and that of others. Thus, man sees, through the distorting prism of his self-interest, good and evil while the acts of God are all good.

If such is the case, why has the nature of things been so varied in this world that it has led to the appearance of evil? Wouldn't it have been better if the world had not known evil, even under the forms of accident, so that divine justice might be realized? To this, Ibn 'Arabi answer as follows: This mixture of good and evil is a mystery of predestination which ends in the best possible world, where things form a harmonious whole, in action and power. Going further in his optimism Ibn 'Arabi affirms that the calamities and catastrophes which strike individuals and nations purify them in some way. The most difficult proofs are sometimes necessary so that man expiate his faults and sins here on earth. Nonetheless, it must not be concluded that man should reconcile himself to unhappiness; on the contrary, he should spare no effort to bring about a better reality.

One might wonder how evil appeared. The answer is quite simple: evil is inherent in the very composition of human beings. They are made of various elements and their differing mixtures lead to the appearance of evil. An antecedent divine will is benevolent but consequent wills allow the existence of momentary and minimal evil beside a greater and permanent good. In that way, the best of all possible worlds is realized in accord with the justice of God, His wisdom, and His benevolence. Let

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us add that each being has his own individual inclinations which God knows for all eternity. When the being *in posse* accedes to existence, good or evil appears “within” him, just as appear, according to Leibniz, the inclinations “in the interior” of the monad. One may wonder why the inclinations change from one to another. To that, Ibn ‘Arabi answers that the providence of God did not want beings to have the same ability to receive grace, so that the best possible world might come to be. The various manifestations of good and evil in the world are thus only means proper to one end: the achievement of good and justice.

For Ibn ‘Arabi, the problem of predestination is linked to that of good and evil with regard to the wisdom and justice of God, on the one hand, and free will, on the other. Ibn ‘Arabi struggled to remove the contradiction between the divine free will and free will which spontaneously directs man towards good or evil. From the outset, Ibn ‘Arabi affirms that determinism reduces the notion of reward and punishment to nothing and runs counter to moral norms which distinguish good from evil. To remove the contradiction between the divine free will and free choice, it must be recognized that the divine prescience of men’s acts does not influence the latter nor does it free it from moral responsibility. The omniscience of God is in complete accord with His wisdom and His justice. God has chosen the best world possible, in accord with His wisdom, which is inspired by His omniscience. Now, the freedom of man is a *sine qua non* condition of the existence of the best of possible worlds. In this connection, Ibn ‘Arabi cites religious texts according to which man is responsible for his acts since he has a mind endowed with the faculty of reflection, disposed to accept all the tasks with which God has charged him—all of which give him some power but also impose obligations. One might thus recognize that we are the authors of our acts from the moment that God confers them on us. Likewise, men should be free to accept or refuse the teachings of the Revelation, so that reward and punishment may have a meaning, because God only judges men according to their actions. Thus, one could say that the fate of a man depends only on him. On this point, the Koran declares that those who follow the Devil start on this road in all freedom because they have the

chance to resist or to give in to the appeal of the Evil One. Likewise, Iblis was free when he refused to prostrate himself before Adam and when he expressed the intention of leading many human beings astray. This liberty of action, whose beneficiary is the Devil, constitutes a kind of test for man because, thanks to it, God knows who among His servants are those who resist the influence of the demon.

One may wonder why this test which could lead to a punishment is addressed solely to man. The reason is quite simple: man is a being endowed with reason who distinguishes good from evil; he believes himself to be free to choose his actions, to pursue goals and to apply himself to attaining them. In this respect, Ibn 'Arabi puts in service his idea about the "divine reservoirs of archetypes" which resembles the one of Leibniz about the "region of eternal verities" to show us how the destiny of man would have him free and responsible for his actions. These reservoirs contain, under the form of archetypes, all beings *in posse* on whom the divine prescience rests for all eternity. Man is one of these beings *in posse* who, in complete freedom and on his own initiative, supplicates the Creator to let him pass through the world by the power of the "light of existence." Man is thus entirely free but as soon as he asks God to allow him happiness of existence and as soon as he understands the Logos, he exists *en acte* and no longer enjoys all the liberty from which he would benefit. In fact, he becomes "subjected" to his inclinations. But this "subjection" does not take the form of an absolute determinism. Rather, it is a question of a spontaneity proper to each being, which inspires his actions. By acting according to his internal inclinations and without undergoing any external influence whatsoever, man remains free, since he must either avoid or give in to this influence.

One can thus say that free will does not exclude religious values, from the moment that the prescience of God does not influence the behaviour of man in this world. Man is free from the moment when he finds himself in the "reservoirs of archetypes." God knows from all eternity that this being *in posse* will come, in freedom, to the world of existence and that he himself will choose, in accord with his own nature and inclinations, the road of good or of evil. But this prescience

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does not condition man's choice. One can thus interpret predestination in a way different from that in which most thinkers take the word: predestination, according to Ibn 'Arabi, signifies that God, alone, thanks to His providence and His justice, rules over the existence of things, determines the relationships which link them, establishes an equilibrium and harmony between them. In other words, He predetermines the rank, the period of existence and the historical moment of each thing.

It is permissible for beings *in posse* to reclaim their right to exist. But God is completely free to determine the historical moment when they exist *en acte* in this world. God has examined all the forms which might make up the best of all possible worlds, before choosing the best of them in which divine justice and wisdom are realized. For wisdom and justice demand that the universe comprise free beings, endowed with reason, choosing their destiny freely and, consequently, responsible for their actions which bring them either reward or punishment. It is in this spirit that the profound significance of the Koranic verse must be understood: "He shall not be questioned as to what He does, but they shall be questioned" (XXI, 23). This single verse bears proof that the divine prescience of man's choices in no way determines them. "Knowledge is consistent with that which is known, it goes on thus because the object of knowledge is its concrete form. Now, the knowledge which the researcher arrives at has no influence whatsoever on what makes its object because it is subsequent to the object..." The state of the known object determines the nature of divine knowledge as much as human because "knowledge faithfully follows the steps of the known object and is bound up with it such as it is in itself, in its essence." Certainly, it often happens that man is unaware of the consequences of his voluntary acts whereas God knows them, but this divine knowledge does not condition the free will. The Koran says on this subject: "...He approves not unthankfulness in His servants" (XXXIX, 7) which shows that man himself chooses what he wants but that the choice is only what God has known for eternity.

The wisdom and justice of God thus wanted the destiny of things to depend on their nature and their intrinsic limits. There are those who arrange their fate and God only judges

them in regard to their nature; "Otherwise, this would be an evil judgement, and God would be a rigid judge instead of being just." It is usual that each man be responsible for his acts, within the limits of his nature and capacity. Within these limits of his nature, he may commit good or evil. His nature predisposes him to uplifting or downfall, and to the degree that he transcends his limits or falls below them, he will be rewarded or punished: "Such is the Presence of destiny and whoever becomes its witness understands the secret of predestination." For the fate of things depends only on themselves. They feel no other external influence. An adage says: "Answer to your actions." Thus, it is just that man knows that he assumes the responsibility of free choice whose source is only his own nature. In just this sense we should interpret the Koranic verse: "... We wronged them not, but they wronged themselves" (XVI, 118). Commenting on this verse, Ibn 'Arabi wrote: "The question there is extremely important and exact which no one, to my knowledge, has yet brought forward, unless he has done so unnoticed. At any rate, whoever understands this conception can in no way deny that it is well-grounded."

No one has the right to question this nature which determines our choice because the acts of God are all just and beneficent. His wisdom intended that the best of all possible worlds contain a very vast range of different natures, that man be responsible within the limits of his nature, that he be capable of protecting or debasing himself. Thus, it is usual that man be rewarded or punished in accord with *the perfection or the degradation which he achieves, always within the limit of his nature*. Such is the divine justice which accords to each thing its rights and its destiny. Knowledge will always be consequent to the known object because the Word must remain unchanged. The Creator has chosen the best of possible worlds in accord with the demands of wisdom and knowledge. For God, there were only two possible positions: either to create the best of possible worlds or not. His justice chose the creation of this world.

Ibn 'Arabi, after showing that free will depends on human nature, express his idea more subtly by pointing out that exterior factors can determine our choice by orienting it in a determined way. But in the last analysis, this influence only takes on a true meaning if there is a free ego which rejects or accepts it.

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### 6. THE IDEA OF JUSTICE IN LEIBNIZ

Through his concept of justice and its related ideas (beauty and ugliness, good and evil, free will and predestination), Leibniz is the Western philosopher closest to Moslem thought. Without fear of the accusation of having given an arbitrary and forced interpretation of his work, one may indicate many echoes of these from the *Mu'tazilites*, *Maturidites*, Averroes and Ibn 'Arabi. One may easily compare his adversaries to the *Ash'arites*.

One should recognize that Leibniz raised his concepts to a level as high as Ibn 'Arabi did his own. On the other hand, this level is by far superior to that attained by other Arab philosophers: he shows more profundity and greater maturity of mind. Leibniz stresses from the outset that these ideas harmonize perfectly with the religious values that hold God to be just and provident. In his opinion, it is ridiculous that man judge the beauty or ugliness of things by grounding himself solely on his personal point of view or by means of principles which he confirms without considering reality. Wouldn't it be better to contemplate the universe so as to understand how beings form a completely harmonious whole? Merely observing the sides of the issue does not suffice to give us an exact idea of the ensemble. For how can a partial view apprehend the order and beauty of this ensemble? Woe to him who believes the contrary! He is in the greatest error if he does not know how to profit from the models which are presented to his eyes so as to grasp the wisdom, justice and goodness of God. These models are not only worthy of admiration but also affection. All that God has fashioned is perfection itself, and we are obliged to appreciate its beauty and perfect execution. It is usual that this harmony and plenitude escape us when our glance, instead of embracing nature entire, only perceives some partial and minute aspects. Certainly, a plant, an animal, a human being reflect to a certain degree a little of that perfection and reveal the hand of the Perfect Architect. Even when one object, considered in itself, appears to us small and ugly, we ought to recall that it is derived from divine truth. Thereby, Leibniz rejoins Ibn 'Arabi.

Certainly, some gloomy spirits delight in stressing to excess the ugliness of the world in which, they say, rage wickedness and catastrophes. In this regard, Leibniz cites ar-Razi, the famous

Arab doctor. But Leibniz denies this conception and expresses a point of view identical with that of the *Mu'tazilites*, Averroes and Ibn 'Arabi in particular. For him, the fact that reason recognizes the perfection and beauty of nature does in no way run counter to the concept of the absolute liberty of God which certain groups (e.g., the *Ash'arites*) make use of to deny the existence of perfection and beauty in the very nature of things. These groups claim that if God wills it, a lie will become a virtue and truth a vice. Now, they ignore a truth which is before their noses: the perfection and beauty of nature are derived from the wisdom of the Creator. Creation must carry the mark of its author. Without fear of betraying the thought of Leibniz, we may say that this creation is a mirror in which the divine beauty is reflected.

Leibniz stresses that the opinion of these authors is extremely dangerous. It is not far from the opinion of certain modern philosophers who claim that the beauty of nature is only an illusion with which all those who imagine God in their image delude themselves. To claim that things are not beautiful in their essence but because God has so arranged them would be to reduce the Love and Glory of God to nothing.

Since God has chosen the best of possible worlds and has created it in accord with the simplest plans by the pattern of His divine wisdom, how can we not call the things of the world beautiful? God has created a world capable of receiving the maximum harmony, beauty and perfection.

It should be pointed out that Ibn 'Arabi had already expressed an analogous idea in his explanation that the absolute perfection of our world would be unbearable. At any rate, Leibniz, like Ibn 'Arabi, considers that our world is, in fact, the one in which the maximum beauty, harmony and correctness of proportions is realized. These perfections enchant us. God always watches over the correctness of the proportions which give birth to beauty and harmony. This creates universal harmony: all beauty is an effusion of its rays. This idea reminds us of Ibn 'Arabi's: the world is a mirror in which the divine beauty is reflected which is called Light. According to Ibn 'Arabi and Leibniz, this truth escapes only those who pose as judges of beauty and ugliness.

For Leibniz, beauty and ugliness are linked to the problem of good and evil. He sees the world as entirely good; evil is

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only accidental. God does not wish evil in itself but he allows it to exist for sublime ends. Like Ibn 'Arabi, Leibniz believes that evil exists in the nature of the world. On the other hand, evil is rare and transient. One might even claim that evil is fundamentally a kind of good because it serves good ends. The universe is good in itself because all that God, "the best of monarchs," does tends toward good and all that derives from Him is good. Certainly, some can imagine possible universes with a minimum of evil destined to accomplish or increase good. But Leibniz affirms that these worlds would be less perfect than ours, which is the best of all possible worlds, from the fact that God created it in accord with a perfect plan inspired by His knowledge, wisdom and goodness. One could thus say that good is the rule, and evil the exception. Besides, evil, which is accidental, is minimal compared to the maximum good which overflows the world.

But what is the source of transient evil which exists in our world from the moment that we attribute it to God? It is interesting to note that Leibniz finds an answer to this question identical to that of Ibn 'Arabi who, let us recall, had explained transient evil by the nature of the beings which the divine reservoirs of archetypes contain and the *composition* of these beings at the moment when they pass from a state of *posse* to existence *de facto*. Leibniz takes up this idea again when he notes that these beings which are located initially in the form of limited and imperfect possibles in the region of eternal truths, that is, in the object of the divine intelligence, contain all their qualities which come to light little by little when they exist *en acte*. At this moment, the beings are joined together, and then the *original* evil which creatures contain for all eternity makes its apparition. Transient evil thus proceeds from the internal laws of beings and their *gathering*. And as the best of possible worlds can only be realized if the "possibles" leave the region of eternal verities, it follows necessarily that the conception of the best of possible worlds includes evil. For this reason, God allows evil. Now, this transient evil would not impede the existence of the best of worlds because God is the best of monarchs, and all that he decrees is supreme justice.

The fact that the very nature of human beings is the source of evil is very salutary. All was arranged in "the ideal cause"



of each being before the supreme wisdom and providence of God pronounced: *Fiat*. If God had not chosen the best of possible worlds in which a minimum of evil is mixed, His goodness would have been imperfect. Now, Ibn 'Arabi had already set out the same idea: God chooses the best since he does nothing without acting in accord with His knowledge and wisdom: "All that God creates, He knows in advance. He creates the best; otherwise, nothing would have been created." In other words, there were only two possible attitudes: to create or not to create the best of all possible worlds. God intended that this world exist so that His *Fiat*, His wisdom and knowledge would be effected, even if evil is inherent in the "existentiation" of possibles.

One could object that the world might have existed without this minimum of evil. Would it have been difficult for God, who is All-Powerful, to assure the health and happiness of all men without permitting evil to exist? Leibniz answers that this objection, formulated by Moslem and Christian philosophers, is only a sophism because man follows the "penchant for present pleasures" when he himself acts as judge of good and evil, and when he links every judgement in this area to his own interests. Thus, we designate as "good" everything that pleases us and "bad" all that opposed to our interests and desires, even if much benefit to others is the result. To take up such a position which denies divine wisdom and providence (many secrets of which are unknown to us) is again to measure God's wisdom and goodness by our narrow intelligences. Could one push temerity and absurdity further?

Some may raise the following objection: Why should it be necessary that evil be inherent in the nature and composition of human beings, which means that they differ in their "receptivity" to the gifts of the divine goodness? Wouldn't it have been better that these natures be identical so that good would be complete, and with no admixture of evil, wouldn't evil be transient? To this, Leibniz answers that predestination means that the gift of God is universal, but it does not necessarily follow that this gift saves all men because it is linked to the conditions of time and place in which men find themselves (i.e., destiny). In other words, if it is true that God accords his gift to all creatures, it nonetheless remains that the efficacy of this gift depends on numerous factors, including the very

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nature of things. Consequently, it is essential that this nature differs from one person to another so that the best of possible worlds might come to be, this world which God has chosen after examining and ordering everything. Thus, nothing emanates from God except what conforms to His goodness, justice and holiness.

Just as Ibn 'Arabi and his predecessors had associated good and evil with problems of predestination and free will, Leibniz does the same in his discussion of divine justice. He clearly defines the givens of the problem by stating precisely that determinism runs counter to the principle of pain and reward and the moral values which distinguish good from evil. The fatalists claim that the prescience of God predetermines man's actions and obliges him to accomplish them. But, if it is true that divine prescience conditions man's actions, Leibniz notes, how then can he assume responsibility for them? For this reason, he takes sides against determinism which is incompatible with divine and human justice altogether.

Leibniz strives to solve the problem of predestination in a manner compatible with both reason and faith and which leaves man free and responsible for his actions. From the outset, Leibniz denies that divine prescience influences human actions. The very nature of man determines, in itself, his moral attitudes. Man is responsible to the degree he utilizes his innate tendencies well or badly. For, before being admitted into existence, beings find themselves such as they are, with their eternal verities, in the region of the possibles.

In regard to man, Leibniz believes that God knows from all eternity that man is free by his essence, that he can deny his Creator, that he will incline either towards good or evil. If, then, "the free will is the proximate cause" of man's obedience or sin, "the original imperfection of creatures which is also found in the eternal ideas is the first and most distant of all" (*Theodicy*, 228). Man has been one of the possible beings which the world of eternal verities contains. His essence comprises *liberty and apperception*. When the prescience of God indicated to Him that, among possible creatures, man would be the one to employ his liberty badly and would be the maker of his own unhappiness, the Creator could not deprive him of existence because the best possible plan of the universe demands the

existence of human beings. Man was thus one of the possibles which were laying claim to existence. When the Lord decided to admit man to existence, he carried in himself all the inclinations of his nature or, as Leibniz puts it, of his "ideal cause." This is why his actions emanate only from him, as is the case for every spiritual substance or monad. The actions of man are thus determined only by his essence. This essence includes liberty. This is why one could not say that the divine prescience conditions man by obliging him to incline to good or evil.

Divine prescience did not exclude free will, for the two following points must be distinguished: 1) the free nature of man which opts for a determined thing after having hesitated in the choice and 2) the divine prescience which neither influences nor determines this choice but which bears on the future decisions of man, which entirely disregards the fact that God knows that one choice rather than another will be made. One could say that the essence of man, like that of every possible creature found in the region of eternal verities, predetermines his future. Certainly, divine prescience foresees the future of every creature, but it does not contradict human free will.

In our opinion, Leibniz ought to have said, as Ibn 'Arabi did, that God is consequent to whatever is made an object, which would have made his thesis clearer. But it must be recognized that he expresses an idea close to that of Ibn 'Arabi when he states that God sees beings just as they are in the region of eternal verities. When these "possibles" are admitted to existence, their eternal qualities are spontaneously manifested in a progressive manner. The thesis according to which the divine prescience, being prior to the formation of the nature of possibles, does not influence them in any way, would supply an explanation of the liberty of man and, consequently, moral values which distinguish good from evil. It would justify the principle of the responsibility of each man whose acts are worthy of reward or punishment.

In effect, when a human being finds himself in the region of eternal verities, his nature, like that of other possibles, contains some predetermined and specific qualities. The sources of determinism are not external but exclusively internal. One could thus say, without risking a betrayal of Leibniz's thought,

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that man is condemned to choose because his nature itself demands this freedom of choice.

The supreme wisdom of God did not fail to create the best world possible after a comparison of the different possible worlds with respect to the possibilities for liberty which they offer man. The Creator chose the best of the best of them: the one in which man is a being endowed with reason, free and responsible for his actions. In creating this world, God left all the beings which compose it just as they were insofar as was possible. In other words, God made no changes in their nature. Man, who was free in the region of eternal verities, remained so when he was admitted to existence in accord with divine prescience.

Thus, God does not change the nature of human beings after their existentiatio. Man must remain free and responsible for his actions. Exterior things exert no influence on man's liberty which has an internal source. External things will not be decisive or compulsive, but they will incline the balance toward the inclinations of the free man who will follow the penchant which exerts a power over his mind when he finds himself in a specific situation. These are the predominate inclinations which are constantly manifested. God knows in advance that man will follow only these inclinations.

Let us recall at this point that Ibn 'Arabi claims that God changes nothing in the plan of this world. But he shows more respect for God: instead of saying that God *cannot* change anything, he claims that the word of God will be the object of no changes. Furthermore, he has well demonstrated and with clarity that man is responsible only within the limits of his nature and power and that the difference between men's natures is a *sine qua non* condition of the realization of the best of possible worlds, this world which God has chosen according to the most perfect and most just plan.