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# IBN ARABI AND HIS CHALLENGES ON THE ISSUE OF FREE WILL

*A Review of the Issue in Light of Two of His Theories*

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## **Abstract**

*Criticising Mutazilite and Asharite interpretations of free will, Ibn Arabi accepted free will in the human being and considered it as a kind of human independency, although he was doubtful about the meaning of free will in two specific contexts – divinity and humanity. Therefore, he provided contradictory ideas about the issue. This paper deals with the origin of the contradictions in his ideas on the issue through the review of his two major theories, namely the unity of being and the divine form of human being. Based on the concept of unity of being, there is no existence but God. Therefore, there is no effective function of free will by creatures since they are manifestations of God. However, Ibn Arabi at least provided two interpretations of the divine form of human beings: man possesses all the divine names including the name Al-Murīd (The Desiring), and also man is vicegerent of God on earth, which means man is responsible, and hence he has free will to assume his responsibility.*

**Keywords:** Free will, the unity of being, The Desiring, vicegerency, Ibn Arabi.

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## Introduction

“None has any act save God, and no act occurs in *wujūd* choice, for the choices known in the cosmos derive from compulsion itself, so all are compelled in their choices. In the true act there is no compulsion and no choice, because it is required by Essence.”<sup>4</sup>

Free will and predestination have always been contentious theological topics. They rank among the three or four most important philosophical challenges of all time. The question whether we are or God is the agent of our acts continues to be a controversial issue among scholars in the Muslim community. During Ibn Arabi’s time, two advanced solutions to the issue were associated with two important schools of Muslim theology, namely Mu‘tazilite and Ash‘arite.<sup>5</sup>

The Mutazilites believed that since the human being is ordered by God to do moral acts, and God has also promised to bring wrongdoers to hell and believers to heaven, the human being is the agent of his acts.<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, the Asharites held that all actions are attributed to God. They claimed that the human being simply acquires the acts which God decides to do.<sup>7</sup> This means that human beings receive a temporary and natural ability to do the acts which God has decided to do.<sup>8</sup>

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4 Ibn ‘Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīya*, ed., Abū ‘Alā ‘Aḥfīf, 4/1 (Cairo: Dar al-Kutub al-Arabiya al-Kubra, 1911), 70. Hereafter this work is cited as *Futuhāt*. Muhyi al-Din Muhammad b. Ali b. Muhammad al-Arabi was born in Murcia in 1165 CE in Andalusia (Spain). He is known as mystical philosopher, who classified and discussed mystical ideas in a coherent system. On his works and core ideas, see William C. Chittick, *The Self-disclosure of God Principles of Ibn al-‘Arabī’s Cosmology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 187. Hereafter cited as *The Self-Disclosure*.

5 Abu-Ḥasan al-Ashari, *Kitāb Maqālāt Al-Islāmiyyīn Wa Ikhtilāf Al-Muṣallīn*, ed. Helmut Ritter (Istanbul, 1929), 279; W. M. Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London : Luzac, 1948), 12-15.

6 cf. Abd al-Jabar Qazi, *Al-Mughnī fī abwāb al-tawḥīd wa’l-‘adl*, ed., Anawati (Cairo : al-Dar al-Misriyah lil-Talif wal-Tarjamah, 1959), 12/12, 253-305; A. M. Subhi, *Fī ‘ilm al- kalām (Mutazilite)* (Dar al-Nahdah al-Arabiyyah, 1985), 146, 149.

7 ‘Abdal Rahman Qazi Iji, *al-Talīghāt ‘alāsharh al-‘aghāīd al-‘aḍīyyah*, 2002, 423, 308; Sif al-Din Amadi, *Abkār al-Afkār fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 5/2 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 2002), 425.

<sup>8</sup> Abdal Rahman Qazi Iji, *al-Mawāqif fī Ilm al- Kalām* (Beirut: Alim al-Kutub, n.d.),

The Asharites believed that there is a distinction between creation (*khalq*) and acquisition (*kasb*) of actions. Hence, according to them, man is the acquirer (*muktasib*) of actions while God is their creator (*khāliq*). “Actions of human beings are created (*makhlūq*) by God; the creatures are not capable of creating any action”.<sup>9</sup> In their view, power had two aspects: it is either original (*qadamah*) or derived (*hadithah*). The original power is the only effective power and the derived power cannot create anything. The power of man is God-given, which is thus a derived power. “The true meaning of acquisition is the occurrence of a thing or event due to derived power and it is an acquisition for the person by whose derived power it takes place.”<sup>10</sup> As a result, man is free only in making the choice between alternatives and also in intending to do the particular action freely chosen while the free choice of man is not effective in producing the action. Therefore, man acquires either the merit of appreciation and reward from God, if he makes the right choice, or the demerit of condemnation and punishment if he makes the wrong choice.

The Mutazilites, however, believed that man has full power to produce an action, and thus complete free will in his choice, although the power was created by God in man. “The Mutazilites unanimously maintain that man decides upon and creates his acts, both good and evil; that he deserves reward or punishment in the next world for what he does. In this way the Lord is safeguarded from association with any evil or transgression. For if He created the wrong, He would be wrong, and if He created justice, He would be just.”<sup>11</sup> Hence, as argued by Ibn Hazm, the great merit of the Mutazilite theological analysis is to be seen in their doctrine of free will and divine promise and threat.<sup>12</sup>

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151.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Ashari, *Maqālāt al-Islamiyyin wa Ikhtilaf al-Musalliyin*, 2/1 (Istanbul, 1929), 291.

<sup>10</sup> Al-Ashari (1929), 2/1, 542.

<sup>11</sup> Al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-Milal wa'l-Nihal*, quoted by A. J. Wensinck in *The Muslim Creed* (Cambridge, 1932), 62.

<sup>12</sup> M. A. Mir Valiuddin, “Mu’tazalism,” in *A History of Muslim Philosophy* (Pakistan Philosophical Congress), vol. 1, Book 3; [www. Al-Islam.org](http://www.Al-Islam.org)

Ash‘arism, in Ibn ‘Arabī’s time, was the ubiquitous school in Andalusia and other parts of the Islamic world.<sup>13</sup> In his works, Ibn Arabi discussed both theories and explained their strengths and weaknesses. Ibn Arabi conceded the legitimacy of both schools of thought to come to terms with the inscrutable actions of the divine will. He knew that the two thoughts rest on rational speculation rather than direct insight (*kashf*). He explained that the mistake of people’s reflection in divine affairs, whether they are philosophers, Mutazilites, Asharites or others, is their errors in the knowledge of God by opposing the reports brought by the messengers.<sup>14</sup>

As a mystical philosopher<sup>15</sup>, Ibn Arabi criticised both groups; for him, the Mutazilites’ mistake was to emphasise too much on the transcendence of God; in fact, their error was not to recognize the powerlessness of reason in assigning real determinations upon God.<sup>16</sup> They argued that God does not and cannot violate rational principles of justice and divine unity. Their thought was limited to rational thought.<sup>17</sup> Ibn Arabī’s objection to the Asharite position is that they did not realize the fact that the entire universe is nothing but the accident of the One Substance or God. However, from Ibn Arabī’s texts it is not clear which side he recognised as having the more correct understanding of human choices – having free will or otherwise. In some places in his books, he emphasised that man is responsible for his deeds and he deserves to be blamed when doing wrongs. But in other texts, he took pleasure in making excuses before God for wrong deeds. In *Futūḥāt*, stating the Asharite arguments based on acquiring the actions by the human being, he justified that

<sup>13</sup> Claude Addas and Peter Kingsley, *Quest for the Red Sulphur: The Life of Ibn ‘Arabī* (Cambridge, Islamic Texts Society, 1993), 104.

<sup>14</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 523; William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn Al-‘Arabī’s Metaphysics of Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 203. Hereafter cited *The Sufi Path*.

<sup>15</sup> Sandoz Ellis, “What is a mystic philosopher and why does it matter? Preliminary Reflections,” Louisiana State University, Eric Voegelin Society, Washington, 27<sup>th</sup> Annual International Meeting in Seattle, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī. *Fuṣūṣal-Ḥikam*, ed., Abu Ala Afifi (Beirut, Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, 1946), 152. Hereafter cited as *Fuṣūṣ*; R, J. Dobie. *Logos and Revelation: Ibn Arabi, Meister Eckhart, and Mystical Hermeneutics* (The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 184.

<sup>17</sup> *Fuṣūṣ*.



acquiring (*kasb*) the actions by the human being means to decide to do the act.<sup>18</sup> It means God created the act, but the human being acquires it through his decision-making. In another book, he attributed the actions to both God and man.<sup>19</sup>

To explain the reason for these apparently contradictory statements, we will appeal to two theories in Ibn Arabi's thought: first, the divine form of the human being (*al-ṣurah al-ilāhiyya*) and second, the unity of being (*waḥdat al-wujūd*). These theories appear to be the main source of his perplexing ideas on the issue of free will. Two approaches, substantive and functional, may be applied to his interpretation of the divine form of the human being in relation to the issue of free will.<sup>20</sup> This will be discussed in the later sections.

### Unity of Being and Free Will

As mentioned, the Mu'tazilites believed that, although God intervenes in human actions, they are fully responsible for their actions.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, God's actions are rationally justifiable, since He is a rational entity.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the Ash'arites believed all actions are created directly by God, whereupon human beings appropriate and perform them. Therefore, insofar as they are performers of the actions, they are responsible before God. God's actions are considered arbitrary and not subject to any logic as we understand it.<sup>23</sup> This Asharite teaching has been characterized as a form of predestination.

Some Mutazilite ideas such as the "nonexistence" of the entities come close to Ibn Arabi's thought; however, he criticised their theories and believed that they did not perceive the whole

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<sup>18</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/1, 40.

<sup>19</sup> Ibn Arabi, *Inshā' al-Dawā'ir*, ed. Mohammad Mahdi Nāsir al-Dīn (Leiden: Brill, 1957), 65.

<sup>20</sup> Saeideh Sayari, *The Human Self from Ibn Arabi's Perspective: A Philosophical Investigation of the Theophanic Form (Imago Dei)*, PhD Thesis (Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī*. 12/6, 246, 252, 384, 350.

<sup>22</sup> A. Knysh., "The realms of responsibility in Ibn 'Arabi's al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiya," *Journal of the Muḥyiddīn Ibn 'Arabī Society*, 31 (2002).

<sup>23</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 70; Chittick, *The Self-disclosure*, 187.

picture.<sup>24</sup> Ibn Arabi explained about ascribing the acts to God and the human being; “know that the real thing is the existence of the divine command in the world of the breaths. That command turns toward the world and brings it into motion.”<sup>25</sup> Then, he brings an example illustrating the issue:

...wind turns towards the trees to bring them into motion through its blowing. The observer sees the motion of the branches because of the blowing of the wind. Knowledge sees that if the branches were not free to move in their places, they would not find the wind when it blows. So, they have a governing property over the wind in one respect, and no property in another respect.<sup>26</sup>

The wind does this because of the elimination of the corrupt part of trees, since they cause illness in the cosmos when animals feed upon the trees. Ibn Arabi concluded that the wind as a secondary cause is set up by God while it becomes a veil in front of God.<sup>27</sup> Some people associate others with Him and they are ignorant while they forget His unity; however, the Mutazilites did not join up with those who associate since they explained the unity of the acts of the servants in the servants themselves. Hence, they did not believe in association, but they attributed the actions to the servants in accordance with reason; the Law declares Mutazilites spoke the truth regarding the issue.<sup>28</sup> The Asharites justified the unity of the actions of all possible things in God without any classification according to reason; the Law supports their idea.<sup>29</sup> Ibn Arabi believed that the Mutazilites’ arguments are stronger, although Ash‘ari’s attitude comes close to mysticism, since finally everything returns to God.<sup>30</sup> Based on the unity of being, there is nothing but God and all the creatures are

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<sup>24</sup> *The Self-disclosure*, 204.

<sup>25</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 629.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 4/2, 629; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 206.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 4/2, 629; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 206.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 4/2, 629; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 206.

<sup>30</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 206.

God's manifestations; therefore, all the acts of manifestations of God belong to Him.

In *Futūḥāt*, he explained two terms: the divine unity (*aḥadīyya*) and unicity (*wāḥidiyya*). According to the divine unity, there is no room for any individual existence; there are no multiplicity and duality.<sup>31</sup> God is *Real* existence and other creatures are all relational.<sup>32</sup> God is in the inner part of all manifestations since the divine unity flows in all things.<sup>33</sup> Then, Ibn 'Arabī comes to speak about unicity, by which he means all creatures which exist in the divine unity are manifested. In this he was influenced by Neo-platonic cosmological notion of creation as a developing divine perfection; hence, for him, the universe is a manifestation of the divine reality.

The divine reality known as divine presence encompasses the divine Essence (*dhāt*), Attributes (*ṣifāt*), and Actions (*aḥwāl*).<sup>34</sup> Ibn 'Arabī considers divine Attributes as universal and intelligible conceptions which are the meaning of all things and as relative realities that are *places* for God's self-manifestation. The divine Attributes participate in the divine existence through their relative realities which God granted to them.<sup>35</sup>

The Names which are the attributes are envisaged between God and the cosmos.<sup>36</sup> A relationship with the creatures can be envisaged in every case where a name of God is mentioned by the Quran.<sup>37</sup> God is not manifested in the existence except in the form of the tasks<sup>38</sup> which are the variety of the divine names;<sup>39</sup> man is the only creature that is potentially able to carry all tasks or all names.

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<sup>31</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/1, 6; 4/3, 162.

<sup>32</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *Inshā al-dawā'ir (The Description of the Encompassing Circles)* (Tunis, 1201), 6-7.

<sup>33</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *The Book Al-yā' in Rasā'l*, ed. Mohammad Shahab al-Din al-Arabi (Beirut, Dar Sader, 1997), 137.

<sup>34</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/1, 101, 119; 4/2, 160; Ibn 'Arabī, *Inshā* (1201), 29.

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Arabi (1946), 76.

<sup>36</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 35.

<sup>37</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 35.

<sup>38</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 474; M. Chodkiewicz and William C. Chittick, *Les Illuminations De La Meque: The Meccan Illuminations, Texts Choisis /selectd Texts* (Paris, Islam/Sindbad, 1988), 248.

<sup>39</sup> Maria De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical*

According to Ibn Arabi's theory of the unity of existence, there is nothing but God and there is no good or evil to choose from. In fact, evil is defined as nothing but the nonexistence of perfection or nonexistence of reaching one's own individual desire. Hence, these non-existences are relationships, and the only real agent of every good manifestation in the cosmos is the Real Existence. This is because of the fact that nothing can derive from the perfection of existence but mere goodness.<sup>40</sup> As a result, good and evil are irrelevant notions. In the other hand, the responsible person who should choose between good and evil seems to be limited by their participation in the divine oneness through their role as an archetype of the Reality.<sup>41</sup>

To solve this problem, relying on Ibn Arabi's perspective, Afifi explains two aspects of the divine voluntarism: the Will (*mashī'a*) or the eternal power of God, which determines the endless possibilities in all things, and the Wish (*irāda*) through which He manifests the possibilities. Ibn 'Arabī considers the Will as the creative command (*al-amr al-takwīnī*), and the Wish as the prescriptive command (*al-amr al-taklīfī*).<sup>42</sup> The creative command is carried out because the divine essence is itself *amr al-takwīnī* and the cosmos, which is nothing but the real, is compelled to obey His *amr al-takwīnī*.<sup>43</sup>

Concerning contradiction, Ibn 'Arabī writes: "since there is nothing but God, all the events, creatures, and their actions belong to God according to the theory of the unity of Being. God is agent in every action; hence, there is no agent but God."<sup>44</sup> If one accepts that all things are manifestations of God, as insisted by this theory, and if one accepts that the immutable entities are manifestations of God, then there will be fatalism which Ibn 'Arabī cannot escape easily from its concomitants. Comparing man's will with the Will of God, he states that the Will and Power of God are understood as

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*Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, Ghāzālī and Ibn 'Arabī* (New York/London, Routledge, 2014), 200.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>42</sup> Abul Ala Afifi, *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyid Dīn-Ibn ul-'Arabī*. (Cambridge, Cambridge the University Press, 1939).

<sup>43</sup> Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 293.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 160.

complying with His Omniscience and can be defined as the knowledge of things as they are to come by themselves.<sup>45</sup>

According to Chittick, Ibn Arabi's theory involves a contradiction. Therefore, Chittick explains that the concept of choice as understood by human beings is not necessarily attributed to God. In fact, His choice is to give existence to all things, but the diversity of things is related to themselves.<sup>46</sup>

Ibn 'Arabī offers another way according to which one can consider multiple choices for God,<sup>47</sup> but in some sense the presence of multiple choices contrasts with the idea that God's will is one. The creatures themselves determine their destiny. God just shows them their realities through bestowing existence to them, but He does not make realities because realities are what they are forever (immutable entities).<sup>48</sup> Chittick, then, concludes that God is not compelled from outside of Himself, but He does what is demanded by His Own reality.<sup>49</sup>

After all, Ibn 'Arabī explains that the meaning which man understands from the freedom and predestination is different from that he can say about God. This issue about God is beyond our perception.

None has any act save God, and no act occurs in *wujūd* choice, for the choices known in the cosmos derive from compulsion itself, so all are compelled in their choices. In the true act there is no compulsion and no choice, because it is required by the Essence.<sup>50</sup>

Ibn 'Arabī himself was aware of the contradiction, hence, in another place in *Futūḥāt*, he mentioned that God is beyond the choice and compulsion in the meaning man knows, but He does what is required by the Essences.<sup>51</sup> In many places in the *Futūḥāt*, he emphasises compulsion in the human being; while also presenting paradoxical

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<sup>45</sup> Ibn Arab, *Risālāt Al-Qasam Al-Ilāhī* (Hyderabad, 1948), 25.

<sup>46</sup> Chittick, *The Self-disclosure*, 168.

<sup>47</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/1, 162.

<sup>48</sup> Chittick, *The Self-disclosure*, 186; Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, 38.

<sup>49</sup> Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, 187.

<sup>50</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 70; Chittick, *The Sufī Path*, 187.

<sup>51</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 70.

situations explaining that the human being is compelled to make some choices while he is responsible before God.<sup>52</sup> In another place, he says that the servants are happy because they can provide an excuse before God since they are constrained.<sup>53</sup> However, he argues that man is responsible for his actions,<sup>54</sup> and should save himself from God's punishment by following the divine law.<sup>55</sup>

### **The Divine Form of Human Being and Free Will**

Ibn Arabi makes clear that man is responsible for his actions, and he will be rewarded or penalised for his decisions.<sup>56</sup> He considers the issue of attribution of human actions to God or to themselves as one of the greatest in theology. In his view, no issue causes so much uncertainty as this problem does.<sup>57</sup> "Some people who believed in predestination said that the human being does not really have free will,"<sup>58</sup> "I dealt with this issue so much until on the 6<sup>th</sup> day of Rajab, 633 H, I received the answer from God and after that I was certain about it, although before this time I did not know which side is right."<sup>59</sup>

Ibn Arabi's answer may be found in his theory that man is created in the divine form. "The Prophet – peace be upon him – said God created man in His form; the pronoun 'His' referred to God, be He exalted."<sup>60</sup> At least, we find two approaches to interpret the divine form in Ibn Arabi's texts, substantive and functional.<sup>61</sup> Based

<sup>52</sup> *Futuhāt*, 4/2, 444; *Ibid.*, 4/4, 208; *Ibid.*, 4/3, 229.

<sup>53</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/3, 32.

<sup>54</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/3, 220; Chittick, *The Self-disclosure*, 2, 43; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, 63, 110, 114, 174, 208, 274.

<sup>55</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/3, 6-8; *Ibid.* 4/4, 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Fuṣūṣ*, 57, 95, 115.

<sup>57</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 607.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 4/2, 204.

<sup>60</sup> Ibn Arabi was referring to this Prophetic ḥadīth: "God created man in His form or ṣūra" (*Futūḥāt*, 4/1, 200). He mentioned this many times in other parts of *Futūḥāt*, such as vol. 2, 391, 170.

قوله صلى الله عليه والسلام ان الله خلق آدم على صورته باعاده الضمير على الله تعالى

<sup>61</sup> Saeideh Sayari, *The Human Self*. "When we inquire which force operates in this universe we find that it is the Beautiful Names who manifested themselves in this universe completely and entirely. These names realised themselves in this universe

on the substantive approach, to be in the divine form means to have all the divine names and attributes including the main names. "As I cited in (my book) *Inshā'*, the mothers of all names are The Alive (*Al-Ḥayy*), The Knower (*Al-'Alīm*), The Desiring (*Al-Murīd*), The Almighty or Omnipotent (*Al-Qādir*), The Speaker (*Al-Qā'il*), The Bounteous (*Al-Jawād*), and The Equitable (*Al-Muqsīt*), which are all necessary for the creation of the universe."<sup>62</sup> In fact, God put these names into the human being (God taught all the names to Adam).<sup>63</sup> As for the name The Desiring (*Al-Murīd*), Ibn Arabi cited its two meanings. Sometimes it refers to someone who follows a way with so much awkwardness while he is attracted to the aim (*murād*) which is his motivation. Another meaning refers to someone who affects things through his will as motivation.<sup>64</sup> The supposed meaning here is the second one. In other words, the desiring is someone who affects things through his/her knowledge and will.<sup>65</sup>

Ibn Arabi explained that for God, the will exists forever, since the object willed or the contingents are infinite. Therefore, the will always exists, although there are varieties of objects willed.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, if man is in the divine form and possesses all of His names, including The Desiring, then man has will to affect things and

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through their effects (*āthār*) and predications (*ahkām*) not through their essences (*dhawāt*) but through their copies (*amthāl*), not through their realities (*ḥaqā'iq*) but through their subtle bonds (*raqā'iq*)."<sup>67</sup> Ibn Arabi, *Inshā'* (1957), 32, English translation as cited in M. Takeshita, *Ibn 'Arabi's Theory of the Perfect Man and Its Place in the History of Islamic Thought*, PhD Thesis (University of Chicago, 1986), 70.

<sup>62</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 100.

<sup>63</sup> Al-Quran, 2: 31; Ibn Arabi says, "we exist; God also exists, if we did not have any knowledge of our existence, we would not know the meaning of the existence of God, and if He did not put them in us, we would not know them, so it is the same case with all of other attributes." See Ibn Arabi, *al-Tadbīrāt al-Ilāhīya fī Iṣlāḥ al-Mamlaka al-Insānīya* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1914), 208; English translation of Takeshita, *Ibn 'Arabi's Theory of the Perfect Man*, 68.

<sup>64</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 134.

<sup>65</sup> فإن قلت و ما المراد و ما المرید قلنا المراد عبارة عن المجنوب عن الإرادته مع تهيؤ الأمر له و أما المرید فهو المتجرد عن إرادته و قال أبو حامد هو الذى صح له الأسماء و دخل فى جملة ... المنقطعین إلى الله بالاسم و أما المرید عندنا فنطلقه على شخصین لحالین الواحد من سلك الطريق بمكابدة و مشاق و لم تصرفه تلك المشاق عن طريقه و الآخر من تنفذ إرادته فى الأشياء و هذا هو المتحقق بالإرادة لا المراد (فتوحات، 2: 134).

<sup>66</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 522.

make choices. To demonstrate the permanent exercising of The Desiring in the human being, Ibn Arabi stated that the relationship between God and man is never devoid of the divine form which is manifested in the human being, as substance cannot be in the concrete being if it does not accept form. In the same way, if the human being does not accept the divine forms, he cannot exist in the external world. Therefore, once the human being exists, he has accepted all the divine names and attributes such as Alive, Knower, Desiring, and others.<sup>67</sup> Ibn Arabi referred to the changes of modes in Adam based on the varieties of the divine names; then, he concluded that man is alive, knower, and desirer.<sup>68</sup> The responsible man, says he, is an essence who has life, knowledge, free will, power, command, hearing, and seeing.<sup>69</sup>

One of the functions of the divine names that Ibn Arabi emphasised is related to the concept of God's representative or caliph on earth. God said "I will put a caliph on the earth"<sup>70</sup> and God said "I taught all the divine names to Adam".<sup>71</sup> Ibn Arabi interpreted being in the form of God as being His vicegerent since God said "I put a vicegerent," and He immediately mentioned the teaching of the divine names. The vicegerent needs to have free will to do his responsibility as God's representative.

In the *Futūḥāt*, he explained that God gave man authority over the other creatures because of three reasons: first, He created him with His two hands;<sup>72</sup> second, He taught him all the names, and finally God officially announced that He put Adam as His vicegerent on earth.<sup>73</sup> Since God taught Adam the names of all things, man has been given knowledge of creatures. Without knowledge, power and free will, man cannot exercise his authority over the other creatures.

Ibn Arabi considered the vicegerency as a reward for Adam's repentance after his fall.<sup>74</sup> For man to say that "I am the vicegerent,"

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<sup>67</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/ 1, 37.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> *Al-Quran*, 2: 30.

<sup>71</sup> *Al-Quran*, 2: 31.

<sup>72</sup> This refers to the *Quran*, 38:75.

<sup>73</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/ 2, 67-8.

<sup>74</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/ 1, 231.



means that both God and man are partners to actualise the form (*ṣūrah*) in which the divine names exist.<sup>75</sup> He regarded the term ‘vicegerent’ (*khalīfah*) as of feminine gender (*ta’nīth*), which symbolises creation (*takwīn*) since the caliph is the locus of generation and actualisation.<sup>76</sup> The other issue here is whether vicegerency includes all human beings or just the perfect man whom Ibn Arabi described as the ultimate goal of the universe. His answer indicated that this vicegerency is comprehensive and includes all human beings, even “animal” men.<sup>77</sup> To justify and classify the vicegerency for all human beings, Ibn Arabi introduced infinite vicegerents using vicegerency as the responsibility of man before God. In *Futūḥāt*, he writes that “at least, individual souls are responsible for keeping their bodies, and they are vicegerent of God on their bodies, because they have to seek knowledge to maintain it”.<sup>78</sup> As a result, there is no man who is devoid of vicegerency and responsibility.

Be aware that the pleasure perfection to which human being has been created is only vicegerency, so Adam – peace be upon him- took it according to the divine providence and it is more specified than prophecy... when Allah put the particular souls to manage the body and put them as a caliph on body and clarified that they rule the body to know about what on which they are vicegerent, then Allah necessitated requesting

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 4/3, 267.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibn Arabi divided human beings into two groups, the animal man and the perfect man. Izutsu opined that Ibn ‘Arabī explained two levels of the perfect man. At the first level, man is a species and has the perfect existence because he is in the image of God and thus, he is the complete abstract of the universe or the spirit of the universe, and the microcosm. At the second level, man is considered as an individual. Here, human beings are not all equal, but just some of them deserve to be the perfect man while most of them are the animal man (Izutsu, 1966). In *Tadbīrāt*, Ibn Arabi discussed the difference between the perfect man and the animal man; the animal man has all the realities of the universe while the perfect man includes the realities of the universe and the divine realities. See Ibn Arabi, *Tadbīrāt*, 93; *Futūḥāt*, 4/3, 437).

<sup>78</sup> *Futūḥāt* (1911), 4/ 2, 272.

knowledge through which they can manage the body. Is it like them or is it similar to them in some ways? Or there is no similarity between them so the motivations to know the body are increased from the particular souls.<sup>79</sup>

Based on the unity of existence there is nothing but God, He includes everything; therefore, man's body also belongs to God, and it is a trust (*amānah*) in the hands of man who accepted the responsibility for it. Hence, at least, man is God's vicegerent over it. Ibn Arabi introduces many degrees of vicegerency, for example, he writes that there are many caliphs on earth; they are different from each other, since their times and modes are different.<sup>80</sup>

Finally, he stated that the perfect man is a complete vicegerent, since his effect on the contingents and the universe is complete. This means that every person has responsibility and he/she is vicegerent, and the different degrees of responsibility (vicegerency) originate from the capacity of the human beings to apply two main elements of vicegerency, namely knowledge and free will. To the extent that man develops these capacities, he is a more responsible vicegerent with the realms of his vicegerency expanding.

## Discussion

Discussing the reality of free will, Chittick interpreted Ibn Arabi as subscribing to the idea that God exercises His power in terms of wisdom, mercy, and other attributes. God's Will is based on the realities which are fixed in His knowledge. God follows His knowledge, and His knowledge follows the known; therefore, God is compelled by His Own Reality or knowledge to choose. Human being, who is compelled by other than God, has an illusory free will.<sup>81</sup> Nasr believes that vicegerency has two sides, namely power and responsibility. Modern man took power and left responsibility, then he lost his dignity as God's deputy on earth, and he reduced his locus into the possessor of the things and destroyed nature with his misuse. As mentioned, Ibn Arabi argued that man as God's

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<sup>79</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 272-3.

<sup>80</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/ 2.

<sup>81</sup> Chittick, *The Self-disclosure*.

representative is responsible to give the right of everything. It means to put everything in its right place, and he needs to know and to connect to the Reality of realities and to know the right or reality (*ḥaqq*) of everything; however, modern man lost this connection.<sup>82</sup>

Ibn 'Arabī as a Sufi believes in free will, since it is fundamental to morality, intuition of self, normal functioning of society, and finally the system of reward and punishment. The challenging issue for us readers is to understand how the two theories of moral responsibility and oneness of Being find compatibility with each other in his thought. Moral responsibility means man is the agent of his acts, and as a result he will either be blamed or receive rewards. In Muslim thought, especially in Sufism, the religious concern with free will pertains mainly to the question “to what extent is the human being considered as responsible for his own actions?” Early Sufism acknowledged both predestination and free will.<sup>83</sup> For Sufism, the importance of free will is related to its role as the motive of man's actions. “The human being should try to actualize his will (*irādah*) for the truth by which he acts in accordance with God's satisfaction.”<sup>84</sup> Mystics approach the free will-predestination problem as a context for justifying man's responsibilities for good and evil actions, and an affirmation of the divine Law. They concern themselves with the ascetic principle of conflict with the soul (*nafs*) with the view of reaching perfection of the human self. They want to be free from sensual and physical pleasures, and finally to be free from temptations of evil.<sup>85</sup>

However, Ibn 'Arabī distinguished himself from other Sufis in the understanding of free will. He says, “for the Sufis, free will is to be free from anything save God while to me it means the replacement of servitude in the human being with the divine quality; then, the recipient is free because God cannot be possessed.”<sup>86</sup> Here,

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<sup>82</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Who is man? the perennial answer of Islam,” *Studies in Comparative Religion* 2, no. 1 (1968), 6.

<sup>83</sup> A. J. Aberrry, trans., *Al-kalābādhī Kitāb Al-Ta'arruf Li-Madhab Ahl Al-Taṣawwuf (The Doctrine of the Sufis)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 28-29.

<sup>84</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 552.

<sup>85</sup> Al-Qushayrī, *Al-Risālah* (Cairo, 1957), 100.

<sup>86</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 227.

regarding God's Essence, Ibn Arabi approaches an ontological interpretation of free will according to which the human being is free when he is empty of all of the other manifestations of God in order to be the *place* of God Himself.

On the other hand, regarding God's presence and the divine image which depends on the divine names, Ibn Arabi presents a phenomenological interpretation of free will through the concept of the vicegerency of God on earth. He needs to examine the divine names to explain the theory of vicegerency, since in the Quran, mentioned together, God says "I am putting a vicegerent on earth",<sup>87</sup> and He taught Adam all the names. Ibn Arabi wrote, "it is necessary for the vicegerent to imitate the names of the One who appointed him as the vicegerent, so that these may appear in the character of his subjects and their actions."<sup>88</sup> Therefore, the concept of vicegerency is intertwined with the divine names in two aspects: general knowledge of the creatures, which is necessary for the vicegerency, and the special name The Desiring, which refers to free will to govern creatures.

The perfect man is the counterpoised point of the contrast between the transcendent Absolute and divine multiple manifestations; he is the ultimate goal (*al-ghāyah*) of all evolving existence.<sup>89</sup> In symbolic dialogue depicted between the names, Ibn Arabi 'In symbolic dialogue depicted between the names, Ibn Arabi between the transcendent Absolute and divine multiple manifestations.<sup>90</sup> The Worshipped Name (*al-ism al-ma'bud* = the Lord) asked for the creation of free and rational creatures to worship God that they might know Him by the very attributes (the anthropomorphic names) which God possesses. Therefore, the rational creatures include the divine names when God created them. In this process, the divine names are imagined as dependant on Allah to do their work.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>87</sup> *Al-Quran*, 2: 31-32.

<sup>88</sup> Ibn Arabi, *al-Tadbīrāt*, 145, English trans. M. Takeshita, *Ibn 'Arabi's Theory of the Perfect Man*, 67.

<sup>89</sup> N. D. Adib, "Ibn 'Arabi on human freedom, destiny and the problem of evil," *Al-Shajarah*, vol. 5. no.1 (2000), 29-50.

<sup>90</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *Anqā' Mughrib Fī Al-awliyā' Wa-shams Al-maghrib*, ed., Ahmad Seyyid Sharīf Behensāvī (Cairo: Al-Maktabat Al-Azharīya Leltuāth, 1998), 45-48.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 45-48.

Ibn 'Arabī began with the creation of things. He described two features of man, namely free will and rationality, which explain the situation of the human being in creation. Justifying the relationship between the will of God as The Desiring (*Murīd*) and the will of rational creature or man, Ibn 'Arabī explains that God affirms a will for Him and another for man; "...if [a] servant finds the desire for something in himself, the Real is identical with his desire, nothing else."<sup>92</sup> God's decree, control, and justification are admonitions; He applies the admonitions which will never go wrong.<sup>93</sup> Involving in dilemma and trying to justify the free will in the rational creature, Ibn 'Arabī suggests this idea that God decided to create free rational creatures (man); however, the concomitants of this idea are not compatible with the oneness of being which Ibn 'Arabī supported. Therefore, he was obliged to incline to the opinion that all our actions come from God and we just are aware of them as His will.

Ibn Arabi deals with the issue of God's desire to know Himself. The point at issue in the symbolic dialogue between the Real and the divine names, is God's desire to know Himself and to be known through the realities of His names. This desire causes distinction between the subject of knowledge and its object, and this split is the origin of differentiation and relationship. For Ibn 'Arabī, the mentioned split or *creation* is necessary for God's desire to be known.<sup>94</sup> The universe is the manifestation of the Real, and the Real wanted to be known through His manifestations.<sup>95</sup> The polarisation that happens between the Real as the knower and the universe as the known affects the Real's self-consciousness.

The first determination (*al-ta'ayyun al-awwal*) distinguished itself logically and conceptually from the divine Essence; however, in reality, it was not separated from the Essence; therefore, knowledge and its object coincide.<sup>96</sup> What actualises and manifests the knowledge and its object (all the contingents), or in other words the

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<sup>92</sup> *Futūḥāt*) as cited in Adib (2000).

<sup>93</sup> *Futūḥā*, 4/2, 215; Chodkiewicz and Chittick, *Les Illuminations De La Mecque*, 248.

<sup>94</sup> Maria De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought*, 176.

<sup>95</sup> *Fuṣūṣ*, 48-50.

<sup>96</sup> Maria De Cillis, 176.

first determination, is His will which acts through the name, The Desiring.

Ibn Arabi explains that there is only God and there is nothing else; He was attributed to be existent, but there was no name or other attribute to be related to God. When He decides to create the universe in accord with His knowledge, the creativity, which is His Essential attribute, accepts the effect of His will (the effect of The Desiring); then, a multitude of things are created.<sup>97</sup> Hence, the Desiring is the main agent that bridges God's desire to the multiple varieties of the universe.

The divine names do not have entities or essence; however, they are relations and effects. It means the image in which Adam was created is the divine presence which is described as the Essence, the Attributes, and the Actions. This image consisted of the divine names<sup>98</sup> which are necessary for creation, and two of them are really critical, namely the Knower and the Desiring.

According to the substantive approach, God put all of His attributes in the human being. Ibn Arabi, in the *Futūḥāt*, reiterates that "all the divine names are bound to him [man] without one single exception. Thus, Adam came out in the image of the name Allah, because this name comprises all the divine names".<sup>99</sup> Among the names three are important for the creation. The name Desiring is immediately after the Knower; the knowledge is before free will (*īrādah*) and the Almighty or the power is after free will to actualise the decision or to create the universe.

Ibn Arabi explains that the desirer is someone who is not under the will of anyone, and the object willed (*murād*) or goal is to be attracted by the will,<sup>100</sup> and the will belongs to the thing which requests the name The Desiring.<sup>101</sup> In *Futūḥāt*, he cites two meanings for the desiring; sometimes it refers to someone who follows a way with so much awkwardness attracting to the aim

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<sup>97</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt Al-Makkīya*, Osman Yahya, ed. (Cairo: Al-Hay'a Al-Miṣrīya al-Āmma li'l-Kitāb, 1985), 14/ 2, 226.

<sup>98</sup> *Fuṣūṣ*, 50.

<sup>99</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 124.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 4/2, 134.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 4/1, 100

(*murād*) which is his motivation. Another meaning refers to someone who affects things through his will as the motivation.<sup>102</sup> The supposed meaning of the desirer here, is the second one.

The desirer is an existential entity while the object willed is a non-existent entity.<sup>103</sup> Ibn Arabi says:

“Based on my opinion, the object willed is a non-existential entity. Knowing God makes me a servant and since always there are some kinds of knowledge of God, which the servant does not know, permanently there is the will of the servant as long as the desirer exists and is attributed to the will, and his object willed is non-existent. Then, once the desirer finds his/her object willed, the validity of command of will vanishes and the will disappears.”<sup>104</sup>

The divine will exists forever since the object willed or the contingents which are infinite continue to exist. Therefore, although there are varieties of object willed, the will always exists.<sup>105</sup>

In the *Futūḥāt*, Ibn Arabi in many places reminds us of a principle: the command of the Desiring depends on the command of the Knower. Symbolising the conversation between the divine names, Ibn Arabi explains that when contingents asked The Almighty for existence, He said “I am under the command of the Desiring; if he does not intend to realize you, then I cannot do anything.” Then, they went to the Desiring and repeated their request. The Desiring said “I am under the command of the Knower, so you should go to him.” They went to him, and the Knower said “I have the command although it is polite to ask the comprehensive name Allah.<sup>106</sup> Then, Ibn Arabi explains that God’s power is not intended to do anything unless His will intends to do it, and His will does not intend to do anything unless He knows it, since rationally it is impossible to have

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 4/2, 134.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 4/3, 548.

<sup>104</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 522.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 4/2, 522.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 4/1, 323.

an unknown purpose or to something that is not decided.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, God is always essentially attributed to His attributes, and hence, the Desiring permanently requests the Will since the creation which includes all the divine names is infinite.

He continues that the responsible man is an essence who has life, knowledge, free will, power, command, hearing, and seeing.<sup>108</sup> Therefore, Ibn Arabi accepts that man has received all of God's attributes since he is not devoid of the divine form, and hence, he received the free will from God because God has free will. Ibn Arabi does not hesitate to accept the divine form of the human being, although he doubts if these attributes are identical in both God and man. As a result, when using the divine names and attributes he says one should be careful to not use them for man and God in the same way since these names should be used based on the God's lordship and man's servitude.<sup>109</sup> However, he insists that man includes His names and attributes; therefore, in the symbolic story about the conversation between the names for God, Ibn Arabi presented Allah's Essence as saying that "all the contingents and the names request my degrees, I share all of my degrees with them save one, my unique Oneness" (*Al-Wāḥīd Al-Khāṣṣa*).<sup>110</sup> Ibn Arabi, here, clearly admits that man received his attributes from God. He presents the important results of his idea in *Fuṣūṣ* in which he dedicates one chapter (*faṣ*) to discuss the man's responsibility for his acts.<sup>111</sup> The divine names as the traits of the character of God are the foundation of man's vicegerency.

The vicegerent is someone who is made to step into another's (God's) shoes and becomes the means by which one performs certain tasks or governs some places. Being a caliph, the deputy must have the power and qualities of the one whom he is representing. If man does not have those powers and qualities, he would not be a deputy or a caliph. If God considers man as vicegerent, he will be granted

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 4/1, 36-37.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 323.

<sup>111</sup> Chapter 5 of *Fuṣūṣ* is devoted to this subject.



certain qualities of His since caliph needs to use these qualities to exercise the power of his vicegerency.

Some of those qualities are potential and some of them are the actualized features in man. The human being needs to exercise his free will and power to actualize all the potential names of God. The most important features to actualize an idea, theory, opinion, and a position, are knowledge and free will.

Ibn Arabi analysed two aspects, vicegerency and servitude in the human beings based on the Quran. How are these two aspects compatible within the context of free will? Ibn Arabi distinguished between two kinds of free will. One is related to the fundamental level of existence. The second kind of free will is related to the activity of man in this world.<sup>112</sup> At the fundamental level and based on the unity of existence, all the contingents depend on God or they are like a *shadow of a person*,<sup>113</sup> therefore, basically because of contingency, the human being does not have free will. The servitude is based on the commands of a master (God), and the only person who is able to do the commands is the servant. Hence, if the agent of actions is God, He will be the commander and the doer of the commands.<sup>114</sup> On another level, namely the level of an agent in the world, Ibn Arabi believed if someone is free of all the things save God, he/she is free; in fact, freedom is the actualized servitude before God.<sup>115</sup> Here, one is free and responsible concerning his/her actions. Existentially man is not a free being, since his existence depends on God.

The bridge between servitude and vicegerency is the Lord, who makes the compatibility between free will and servitude possible. Man is introduced as a vicegerent and therefore, he must have free will in many situations in order to practice his free choice. Here, the concept of lordship (*rubūbīyya*) is important. God's Essence is not involved in servitude or vicegerency, since it is far from any attribute and name. However, His names which manifest themselves in concrete world are attributed to the features. Lord

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 216. This idea is based on Asharite thought.

<sup>115</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/2, 226.

(*Rabb*) which is a manifestation of a certain name in an existent is a connection between that being and God's Essence; of course, the Lord is not separate from His Essence. The Lord requests the servant because without a servant (*marbūb*) there is no Lord. Lord and servant have a mutual relationship with each other; they exchange and share relationships with each other, for example, they exchange knowledge in such a way that the Lord gives knowledge to the servant through the immutable attributes which entities have, while servant informs the Lord about himself through the actualization of the inner capabilities that the servant has. The servitude and vicegerency originated from the eternal nature of the human being. Lord and servant exchange their capacities to exercise free will regarding the boundaries of responsibility, and vicegerency is determined in accordance with the capacities and exercising.

Ibn Arabi is in doubt about the boundaries of using free will to explain the vicegerency of man. According to the functional approach, man is the vicegerent of God on earth. Ibn 'Arabī warns that being in the form of God and also being His vicegerent is dangerous for man, for he may be fed with the illusion of lordship as a result of having free will. Man should never forget that his vicegerency comes from God, and he is not the real vicegerent.<sup>116</sup>

## Conclusion

We have dealt with the challenges, which Ibn Arabi faced when discussing the issue of free will. He told us that it took him considerable time to resolve the issue. On the one hand, he advocated the theory of the unity of being, and on the other the theory of the divine form of human being. According to the former theory, there is no existence but God, and all things save Him are His manifestations, which do not have any existence. Since free will is an existential attribute, nobody except God has free will. However, based on the latter theory, human beings possess all the divine attributes and names including the name The Desiring or someone who has will to do something. Therefore, man has free will. Moreover, in explaining

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<sup>116</sup> *Futūḥāt*, 4/1, 370; 4/2, 602-3; Claude Addas, "The Paradox of the Duty of Perfection in the Doctrine of Ibn Arabi," *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabī Society*, 15 (1994).

the meaning of human being as God's vicegerent on earth, Ibn Arabi argues that man has responsibility before God, and this responsibility needs knowledge and free will to exercise authority over the creatures. Thus, in addition to knowledge, human being has to possess free will.

Ibn Arabi interpreted the divine form based on the substantive and functional approaches. However, he writes some contradictory statements because of his other theory, the unity of being. Therefore, to make the two theories compatible, he decided to present two meanings for free will (one for God and one for man) explaining that we cannot use the same meaning for both of them. The vicegerent needs to have free will to do his responsibility as God's representative.

Being involved in contradictions and confessing to resolve the issue from the substantive and functional approaches, Ibn Arabi tried to provide additional explanations. For example, he doubted if attributes are identical in both God and man, and because of that, he explained that when using the divine names and attributes one should be careful not to use them for man and God with the same meaning, since these names should be used based on the God's lordship and man's servitude. In addition, Ibn Arabi thanked God since man does not have free will, and as a result he does not have any responsibility before God for his deeds. However, Ibn Arabi cannot reject the idea of man's free will on the basis of God's promises of punishment and reward. He accepted that the human being is a free being since there is no reason for punishment of wrongdoers without free will.

The contradictory statements in his texts reveal that he did not support the Asharites' attitudes towards the issue of free will. He recognized a kind of independency of human beings considering that man is a responsible being before God.

It may be concluded that, in Ibn Arabi's thought, there are actually at least three theories where humans are involved in perplexity and challenges on the issues of free will, the unity of being, man's vicegerency of God, and immutable entities.





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