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Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān's Parable of the Two Generous Men in Avicenna's *Decree and Determination* (*R. fī l-Qaḡā' wa-l-qadar*)

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Abstract

This article explores Avicenna's conception of divine providence in the light of his allegorical work *Decree and Determination* (*R. fī l-Qaḡā' wa-l-qadar*), wherein the philosopher stages interactions between the rational soul, the animal soul, and the Active Intelligence. Centering on the parable of the two generous men told in *Decree and Determination* by the legendary sage Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān, this analysis draws parallels from numerous works of Avicenna—notably his other allegorical work, *Alive, Son of Awake* (*R. Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān*)—so as to bring into focus lesser-known facets of his philosophical worldview.

Keywords

Avicenna – Ibn Sīnā – Providence – Decree – Determination – rational soul – animal soul – Active Intelligence – Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān

In the opening lines of his lesser-known allegorical work *Decree and Determination* (*R. fī l-Qaḡā' wa-l-qadar*),¹ Avicenna relates a dialogue between the nar-

1 Written in a “florid and rhetorical Arabic” (Hourani, “Ibn Sīnā's ‘Essay,’” p. 25), this linguistically sophisticated work betrays Avicenna's ambition to confute the charge of the philologist Abū Manṣūr al-Ġabbān—as reported by al-Ġūzġānī (Gohlman, *Life of Ibn Sīna*, pp. 69–71)—that though he was an accomplished philosopher and physician, he was no expert in Arabic linguistics (see Michot, *Lettre au vizir*, p. 104*). This work is listed as authentic by Anawati, no. 193 (*Mu'allafāt*, pp. 249–250), Mahdavi, no. 100 (*Fihrist*, pp. 197–198), and Gutas, no. M4

rative persona—presumably the philosopher himself—and an unnamed companion “in one of the vaulted fortresses (*bi-ba‘d al-qilā‘ al-ma‘qūda*)” (Mehren, *Traités*, I, p. 1)² of Iṣfahān, upon their return from Ṣalamba.³ This companion, the narrator explains, was one passionately enamoured of dialectics, in whom [the inclination for] argumentation had arisen naturally, who deemed that to proceed towards the truth through antagonism and the occupation called “[theological] disputation” (*kalām*) was to follow a paved road, and that to progress in dialogue through quarrel and wrangling was to follow a clear path (Mehren, *Traités*, I, p. 1).⁴

The pair accordingly engaged in an animated dialogue, the course of which eventually led them to the subject of the divine determination (*qadar*). The companion firmly believed that the divine determination does not extend to human acts, therefore he refused to consider the notion that God also determines immoral and vile acts,⁵ and so “the conversation led him to shout.

(*Avicenna*, p. 480), and was edited by Mehren (*Traités mystiques* 1) and al-Kurdī (*Ġāmi‘*). I revised the Arabic text using three Istanbul MSS, which I identified using Gutas’ “Inventory of Avicenna’s Authentic Works” (*AAT* in Gutas, *Avicenna*, p. 480): MS Ayasofya 4852, ff. 22^b–34^a; MS Hamidiye 1448, ff. 589^a–599^b; and MS Nuruosmaniye 4894, ff. 304^b–307^a. In translating and paraphrasing passages from *Decree and Determination* I consulted Michot’s rigorous French translation of the opening passage (*Lettre au vizir*, pp. 104*–111*), Mehren’s French paraphrastic translation, and Sabri’s French version (“*Traité d’Avicenne sur le destin*”). In translating passages from *Alive, Son of Awake* I also consulted Goichon’s excellent French translation (*Le Récit de Ḥayy Ibn Yaqẓān*) and Trask’s English translation of H. Corbin’s French translation (“*Living Son of the Awake*”, *An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia*, Vol. 1). I wish to thank Mohammed Rustom, Pauline Froissart, and the anonymous reviewer for their useful comments on this paper, and Nasser Dumairiyah for his gracious help in acquiring the MSS at the Süleymaniye Library during his recent stay in Istanbul. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

- 2 MS Ayasofya 4852 (Aya.), f. 22^b; MS Hamidiye 1448 (Ham.), f. 589^a; MS Nuruosmaniye 4894 (Nur.), f. 304^b.
- 3 A town in the Dunbāwand (Damāvand) district, “some hundred miles east of Rayy, and certainly a long way off from Iṣfahān” (Gutas, *Avicenna*, pp. 479–480, n. 36). In his biography of Avicenna, al-Ġūzġānī writes that his Master composed *Decree and Determination* “on the way to Iṣfahān during his escape and flight to Iṣfahān” (Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 101). Gohlman notes that “[a]lthough Ibn Sina’s escape from Hamaḍān and flight to Iṣfahān, which took place c. 414/1023, would seem to be the one referred to here, one of the MSS in Istanbul [(i.e. Ayasofya 4852)] gives the date as the end of Muḥarram 424/January 1033. This would place its composition during ‘Alā’ al-Dawla’s flight from Tāsh Farrāsh, Sultan Mas‘ūd’s army commander” (*ibid.*, pp. 139–140, n. 9).
- 4 Aya., f. 22^b; Ham., f. 589^a; Nur., f. 304^b. See Michot, *Lettre au vizir*, p. 104*.
- 5 The companion manifestly adheres to the Mu‘tazilī doctrine of the theologian ‘Abd al-Ġabbār (d. 415/1025), a contemporary of Avicenna who states in his *Sufficient Book* (*K. al-Muḡnī*), as a proof that God does not intend the occurrence of vile human acts, “that the intention of what is vile is itself vile (*anna irādatu l-qabīḥ qabīḥa*)” (p. 220). In his systematic exposition

[The narrative persona] responded courteously, hoping to curb his incivility (*baḍā'ahu*) and subdue his ardour, when suddenly a silhouette (*ṣabḥ*) appeared in the distance" (Mehren, *Traités*, I, p. 1),⁶ which resembled that of the legendary sage Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān. Having ascertained his identity, the narrative persona then approached the sage to "[seek] his beneficence (*istan'amtuhu*)⁷ as a helper and partner in overcoming [his companion's obstinacy] and in deliv-

of 'Abd al-Ġabbār's doctrine, the *Book of the Five Principles*, Mānkdim Šešdīv (d. c. 425/1034) explains: "If God, the Mighty and Majestic, is self-sufficient and needless of anything that is vile (*qabīḥ*), then it must be impossible for him to choose it, since He knows it to be vile. Consequently, every vile thing that occurs in the world must be a human act, for God, the Exalted, has no need of such acts" (Mānkdim Šešdīv, *al-Uṣūl*, p. 76). On the attribution of the *Book of the Five Principles* to Mānkdim Šešdīv, see Gimaret, "Les *Uṣūl al-ḥamsa*," p. 50.

6 Aya., f. 22^b; Ham., f. 590^b; Nur., f. 304^b. Mehren, al-Kurdī, and Aya. have *ṣayḥ*; Ham. and Nur. have *ṣabḥ*. I concur with Michot's reading (*Lettre au vizir*, p. 106*).

7 "I sought his beneficence." The tenth verbal form of the root *n-ʿ-m* is not attested in Lane's *Arabic-English Lexicon* (see Vol. 8 [Supplement], pp. 3035–3036), Kazimirski's *Dictionnaire arabe-français* (see T. II, pp. 1296–1299), Dozy's *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes* (see T. II, pp. 691–692), nor in any of the searchable classical Arabic lexicons on lisaan.net. Corrected to *ista'antuhu* ("I sought his assistance") by both Mehren (*Traités*, p. 2) and al-Kurdī (p. 45), the three MSS consulted unambiguously give *istan'amtuhu*. Given the connotation of the tenth verbal form, as conveying either the directly reflexive meaning of *disposing oneself for something*, or the indirectly reflexive meaning of *seeking or asking for something*, Avicenna appears to have coined—as wordplay—a neologism to signify the rational soul's disposition and inclination to receive the divine influence (*atar*), through its junction with the Active Intelligence. Wright observes in his *Arabic Grammar*: "The tenth form converts the factitive signification of the fourth into the *reflexive* [...]. The tenth form often indicates that a person thinks that a certain thing possesses, in reference to himself, or for his benefit, the quality expressed by the first form. [...] The tenth form likewise often expresses the *taking, seeking, asking for, or demanding*, what is meant by the first [form]" (Vol. I, pp. 44–45). As a conversion of the factitive signification of the fourth form into the reflexive, it is also conceivable that Avicenna's wordplay on the root *n-ʿ-m* is meant to suggest the occurrence of the fourth form of this verb in the oft-recited verse of the Qurʾān, "[guide us on] the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your blessings (*an'amta*)" (1:7). As such, the blessings are effectively bestowed by God, but occur to the rational soul through its disposition and inclination to receive these blessings. In his commentary on the Chapter of Mankind (Qurʾān 114), Avicenna accordingly describes the process of the realization of the rational soul's junction with the Active Intelligence as occurring through stages which correspond to three blessings (sing. *niʿam*) from God: the "Lord of mankind" (114:1), as His balancing of the human temperament, which prepares the human body to receive a rational soul capable of perceiving intelligibles; the "King of mankind" (114:2), as His appointment of the rational soul as ruler over the entirety of the faculties of the human body, whereby the rational soul achieves the proper disposition to turn to the Active Intelligence; and the "Deity of mankind" (114:3), as His bestowal on the soul—freed from the dominion of the body—of the desire to conjoin itself to its beloved, the Active Intelligence, whereby the soul assimilates itself to God in the measure of its proper capacity (Ibn Sinā, *Tafsīr sūrat al-Nās*, pp. 123–124).

ering [him from the delusions that] had seduced him” (Mehren, *Traités*, I, p. 2).⁸ The remainder of *Decree and Determination* is the account of Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān’s prescribed cure for the companion’s doubts and misconceptions regarding the nature of the divine determination.

This narrative is reminiscent of Avicenna’s better-known literary work that bears the legendary sage’s name, *Alive, Son of Awake* (*R. Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān*), where the first-person narrator—again, presumably the philosopher himself—sets out for a walk outside the walls of an unidentified city in the company of three figures: walking before him, a deceitful babblers; on his right, a violent brute; and on his left, a filthy glutton (Mehren, *Traités*, IV, pp. 4–5). As allegorical personifications, these companions unmistakably correspond to the main divisions of the animal soul’s faculties in Avicenna’s psychology: the first personifies the sensorium, as the sum of the animal soul’s faculties of perception, comprising the external and internal senses; the second and third, to irascibility and concupiscence, as the two branches of the animal soul’s faculty of volition.⁹

Here, as in *Decree and Determination*, the group joins—through the initiative and mediation of the narrative persona—the figure of the “splendid sage (*ṣayḡ bahiyy*)” (Mehren, *Traités*, IV, p. 1) Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān, who for his part corresponds in Avicenna’s philosophy to the Active Intelligence (*al-ʿaql al-faʿāl*), the Bestower of Forms (*wāhib al-ṣuwar*) to whom the human rational soul needs to turn so as to perceive intelligibles. As for the narrative persona, it is no accident that both *Decree and Determination* and *Alive, Son of Awake* are voiced in

8 Aya., f. 22^a; Ham., f. 590^b; Nur., f. 304^b.

9 Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān says in *Alive, Son of Awake*: “The companion that walks before you is a liar, a vain babblers, who concocts falsehoods and forges fictions. He brings you information which is not to be used as traveling provisions, for the truth it contains is tainted by error, and its veracity is mixed with lies. Despite all this, he is your eye and vanguard, and it is through his channel that you receive knowledge concerning that which is foreign to you and remote from where you are. It is your task to sort between truth and falsehood, to glean the truth from among his lies, and to extricate (*istiḡlās*) what is accurate from the gangue of error, for you cannot dispense with him. And it may so happen that divine assistance will take you by the hand and lift you out of the place where you stray, or that perplexity will stop you in your tracks, or again, that a false testimony will deceive you. The companion on your right is a violent brute. When his anger is aroused, no counsel can subdue him, and courtesy does not appease him. [...] The companion on your left is a filthy glutton, a lustful stallion. Nothing but earth can fill his belly; [...] he is like a pig that has been starved and then released on garbage. To these wicked companions you have been bound, O wretched one, and there is no way for you to escape them except by an exile which will take you to a region whose ground the likes of them cannot tread. But since the time of that exile has not yet come, and since you have no refuge beyond their reach, then act in such a way that you will have the upper hand, and let your authority rule them” (Mehren, *Traités*, IV, pp. 4–5).

the first person, given that for Avicenna the true ipseity or "I" of the human individual is none other than his rational soul.¹⁰ The voice of the first-person narrator is therefore itself a linguistic figuration of the rational soul, or as the Arabic term signifies, a "speaking soul" (*naḥs nāṭiqā*).

As a figuration of the rational soul, the narrative persona in both works is thus accompanied by figurations of the animal soul, inasmuch as the rational soul is attached to a human body which is capable of sense perception and voluntary motion, and guided by the Active Intelligence, inasmuch as the rational soul is an intelligible essence which in itself is disengaged from the body, and as such capable of perceiving intelligibles through its own essence.¹¹ That the narrative persona's companions do not in either work appear to be independently aware of Ḥayy ibn Yaḳẓān's presence—and only receive his influence (or counsel) through the initiative and mediation of the narrative persona—correspondingly reflects Avicenna's notion that only the rational soul in the human has the capacity to perceive intelligibles.¹²

10 Avicenna writes in *Pointers and Reminders* 11.3.5–6: "[The rational soul] is the substance which governs (*yataṣarrāf*) the parts of your body, and hence your body. This substance, which is in you, is one; rather, it is you, as we have verified" (Ibn Sīnā, *Iṣārāt*, ed. Forget, p. 121). In *The Return*, he likewise states: "It is therefore verified that the human, or that which in the human corresponds to his ipseity (*annīyya*), as being his true essence, and the thing whereby he knows that he is himself, is necessarily the soul" (Ibn Sīnā, *Aḍḥawīyya*, ed. Lucchetta, p. 145).

11 Avicenna explains in his *Notes* (§331): "The human soul intellects its own essence inasmuch as it is disengaged (*muḥarrada*) [from matter], whereas animal souls, which are not disengaged [from matter], do not intellect their own essences [...], since what is intelligible is disengaged from matter, and if it is not disengaged, then it is not intelligible, but rather imaginable (*mutaḥayyilan*). What the [rational] soul perceives through an organ is sensible and imaginable, and [the rational soul] does not perceive what is disengaged [from matter] through an organ, but rather through its own essence, since no organ can have knowledge of intelligibles" (Ibn Sīnā, *Ta'liqāt*, pp. 212–213).

12 That said, for Avicenna the rational soul certainly does employ the faculties of the animal soul so as to acquire knowledge of sensible things, and this in turn prepares the rational soul to acquire knowledge of intelligibles. Hence, the narrative persona in *Decree and Determination* says upon discerning the figure of Ḥayy ibn Yaḳẓān: "Let a friend (*ṣāhib*) of mine proceed to kindly meet him, so that we may ascertain his identity" (Mehren, *Traité*s, I, p. 2; Aya., f. 22^a; Ham., f. 590^b; Nur., f. 304^b). Presumably, the "friend" personifies the sensorium, which the rational soul—in its condition of attachment to the human body—employs so as to acquire knowledge of intelligible forms inductively, by means of sensible and imaginable forms. Avicenna accordingly explains in *On Love*: "It is evident that human actions are often based on an essential partnership between the rational and animal [faculties], such as when his rational faculty enlists his [external] senses so as to abstract (*li-yantizī'a*) universals from particulars by way of induction (*istiqrā'*). The same occurs when in its reflection (*tafakkurihi*) [the soul] enlists the faculty of imagina-

Following the implications of these allegorical correspondences, the quarrelsome companion in *Decree and Determination* manifestly represents the human as dominated by his animal soul. As such, the unnamed companion, while ostensibly a human individual, personifies the animal soul which accompanies the rational soul in its condition of attachment to the human body. In these terms, the narrative persona's appeal to Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān parallels the rational soul's appeal to the Active Intelligence in its effort to cure the animal soul of its dominant irascibility, which clouds the companion's judgment and causes him to defiantly reject the principles of reflection which could otherwise enable him to comprehend the nature of the divine determination.

Given that for Avicenna only the rational soul in the human has the capacity to perceive intelligible forms, inasmuch as intelligibles are disengaged from matter, and given that the animal soul only has the capacity to perceive sensible and imaginable forms, inasmuch as such natural forms possess a material substrate, Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān thus prescribes a cure for the narrative persona's companion which mediates intellection and sensation, by explaining the nature of the divine determination in a mode which is suitable for him; namely, using parables which convey intelligible meanings through sensible imagery, thereby enabling the companion to comprehend the nature of the divine determination in the measure of his own capacity.

As the centerpiece of *Decree and Determination*, Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān accordingly tells a parable which conveys in a nutshell the nature of Avicenna's conception of providence (*ināya*), here formulated in terms of the divine decree (*qaḍā'*) and determination (*qadar*).¹³ In this parable, Ḥayy ibn Yaḳzān proposes to contrast divine and human acts side by side—that is, each in their parallel reality—by comparing the generous deed of two wealthy men who each determined to build a caravanserai (*binya*, lit. a “physical frame” or “structure”) “in a parched and rain-deprived desert devoid of any source of running water, [...] which nonetheless crossed the shortest path to the seaside and trading

tion (*mutaḥayyila*)” (Ibn Sīnā, *T̄s̄q*, p. 256). Note here that Avicenna uses the root *n-z-ʿ* to designate the incomplete abstraction performed by the faculties of sensation, imagination, and estimation, and not intellectual abstraction proper, as the rational soul's act of “denuding” (*taḡrīd*) intelligible forms from their material coverings, for which he reserves the root *ḡ-r-d*. See Goichon, *Récit*, p. 35.

- 13 In *On the Divine Decree*, Avicenna explains that God's decree “is His first, sole judgment, which encompasses all things, and from which all things proceed in the course of time, while His determination is His arrangement of the emanation of things from this first decree, one after the other, as He has said—how mighty a speaker He is!—‘There is nothing that does not have its treasures with Us, and We do not send it down save according to a known determination’ (Qurʾān 15:21)” (Michot, *Lettre au vizir*, pp. 104[1]–105[2]).

ports (*furaḍ al-baḥr wa marāqī l-tuḡūr*)'” (Mehren, *Traités*, I, p. 7).¹⁴ As a place of rest in the midst of a harsh environment, the caravanserai would therefore serve the benefit of wayfarers

who traversed difficult roads through mountain ranges and narrow pathways through rugged lowlands and ravines, obstructed paths, narrow mountain passes, and woodland trails, hardly accessible to riding animals and beasts of burden.¹⁵

MEHREN, *Traités*, I, p. 8

In such a place, Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān continues,

they each would erect a walled circular structure (*binya mukawwara musawwara*)¹⁶ possessing watchtowers (*masāliḥ*), gardens, courtyards, prayer spaces, communal baths, spacious lodging with large secluded bedchambers, vaulted porticos and hallways. [This structure] would provide shelter from both the heat of summer and the cold of winter (*maṣā'if wa-maštāt*), [and would be equipped] with storerooms, barns, wells, and an aqueduct system which would collect and channel groundwater, then distribute it into rivulets which would irrigate the gardens, water the roots of trees and plants, and provide a continuous stream of clean drinking water.¹⁷

MEHREN, *Traités*, I, p. 8

Neither of these men, Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān remarks,

was in need of compensation, [...] nor desired to receive expressions of praise and gratitude, nor wished to be well-remembered, nor [expected his] condition to undergo any change [...] as a result of his act.¹⁸

MEHREN, *Traités*, I, p. 8

14 Aya., f. 25^a; Ham., ff. 592^b–592^a; Nur., f. 305^b.

15 Aya., f. 25^a; Ham., f. 592^a; Nur., f. 305^b.

16 It is noteworthy that this “structure”, as a hotel wherein wayfarers come to rest after a strenuous journey, parallels the “vaulted fortress” mentioned in the opening of *Decree and Determination*, as the very setting of the narrative. Given that for Avicenna the animal soul only has the capacity to apprehend particular sensible realities which are located in a place and can be pointed to, Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān's use of the companion's immediate location as the focal point of the parable serves to reinforce its evocative power.

17 Aya., ff. 25^a–26^b; Ham., f. 592^a; Nur., f. 305^b.

18 Aya., f. 26^b; Ham., f. 592^a; Nur., f. 305^b. In his *Book of Knowledge*, Avicenna explains that

While both men were determined to execute their design, Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān further adds, the first man knew full well that in this world one's intentions are often opposed by conflicting causes, and that the caravanserai, though intended for the comfort and enjoyment of wayfarers, would in time become

a lair of caravan raiders who terrorise the roads and rob whoever crosses their path, [...] a den of debauchery and intoxication, reputed for its depravity (*maṣṭaba li-l-fuḡūr, wa-masba'a li-l-ḥumūr, wa-mazīnna li-l-fa-wāhiš*), from which hardly any unsuspecting wayfarer would escape unharmed.¹⁹

MEHREN, *Traités*, I, p. 9

For his part, Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān notes, the second man was persuaded of the successful outcome of his initiative, and had no doubt that its benefits would spread out into the world.

Both men executed their design, the sage concludes, “and the structure was erected as described; thus, the knowledge (*ilm*) of the first man was confirmed, while the assumption (*ẓann*) of the second failed to be realised” (Mehren, *Traités*, I, p. 9).²⁰ Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān then proceeds to rhetorically question the deluded companion as to the verdict the teacher of his particular school²¹ would give on the act of each man:

“gratitude, praise, a good name, and the rest of the states deemed good” are also forms of compensation, even though they are not commonly recognised as such. Thus, if a man expects no tangible compensation yet still seeks gratitude or praise in return for his act, then such a man is not truly generous. “For the wise man knows,” he writes, “that anything in which desire intervenes is a profit” (Ibn Sīnā, *Dāniš-nāma*, p. 101). Avicenna further elaborates on this notion in *Origin and Return* (Ibn Sīnā, *al-Mabda'*, p. 32) *Metaphysics* VI.5 (Ibn Sīnā, *Šifā', Ilāhīyyāt*, transl. Marmura, p. 231; ed. Mūsā, p. 296), and *Pointers and Reminders* II.6.5 (Ibn Sīnā, *Išārāt*, ed. Forget, p. 159).

19 Aya., f. 26^b; Ham., f. 592^a; Nur., f. 305^b.

20 Aya., f. 26^a; Ham., f. 593^b; Nur., f. 305^b.

21 The authority figure in question, while ostensibly a Mu'tazili teacher to whose judgments the companion adheres, parallels the estimative faculty (*al-quwwa l-wahmiyya, al-wahm*) of the animal soul—namely, the internal sense which according to Avicenna is “the highest judge in the animal” (Ibn Sīnā, *Šifā', Naḡs*, IV.4, ed. Bakoš, p. 196).

Avicenna's implicit association of the estimative faculty with the Mu'tazili school of *Kalām* appears in many of his works. While the Mu'tazili doctrine that God cannot intend evil human acts is exemplified in *Decree and Determination*, in *Pointers and Reminders* 1.6 Avicenna refers to two other core doctrines of this school, namely, the existence of the void and the belief that every existent must be found in a place. He writes: “Pure estimative propositions are false propositions. But the human estimative faculty asserts them in a very strong manner. For the estimative faculty does not accept their contrary or opposite, because this faculty follows the senses, and whatever does not concur with the senses

Perhaps he will excuse the second man on the ground that his intention was noble, even though he lacked the power to overcome the obstacles which prevented him from executing his noble design? Or perhaps he will [...] blame him for having endeavoured to perform an act which was

is not accepted by the estimative faculty. [...] Examples of this are the beliefs of one who holds that it is impossible not to have void at the limit of the plenum if the plenum is limited, or that it is impossible for any being to be such that one cannot point in the direction of its presence" (Ibn Sīnā, *Iṣārāt*, trans. Inati, *Remarks*, pp. 123–124 [modified]; ed. Forget, pp. 59–60).

In *Physics* 11.9, Avicenna also uses as an example of estimative judgments the belief "of the common and average man—not inasmuch as he adopts some school of thought, but rather as he speaks and acts according to the imagining of the estimative faculty and what is commonly accepted—[...] that whatever exists is found in a place and can be pointed to. [...] The average man would renounce [this belief if only he set] aside instinct and the imaginations of the estimative faculty, and consideration and thought prevail upon him" (Ibn Sīnā, *Šifāʾ*, *Ṭabṭīyyāt*, trans. McGinnis, *Physics*, p. 213). As in the case of the Muʿtazilī doctrine that God cannot possibly determine vile human acts, for Avicenna such doctrines derive from estimative judgments which are false—despite their forceful appeal to the animal soul which gives them the semblance of intellectual judgments.

In *An Epistle from One of the Theologians (Mutakallimūn) to the Master and His Reply*, Avicenna explains in the context of his refutation of the Muʿtazilī doctrine of the existence of the void that "when the estimative takes the place of the intellect it considers [its own assertion to be a necessary matter] of the intellect, but it is not so; rather, it is the intellect which judges of its falsity and provides demonstrative evidence. As for the occurrence [of this assertion] in the estimative, it is due to the fact that it follows the sensible, and [the estimative] neither accept what is not perceived by the senses, nor anything that is not like what is sensible" (Ibn Sīnā, *R. li-Baʿd al-mutakallimīn*, pp. 158–159).

In his *Epistle to the Vizier Abū Saʿd [al-Hamaḍānī]*, Avicenna portrays his adversary, Abū l-Qāsim al-Kirmānī, as one who "mistakes the estimative for the intellect to the point that he corrupts his constitution. [...] He is impressed by his own opinion and applies himself to drawing the truth to his own way, instead of letting himself be drawn by the truth! [...] He allows himself to be strongly abused by appearances, and is very attached to imitation" (Michot, *Lettre au vizir*, p. 54).

In *On Love*, Avicenna represents the estimative faculty as a servant who presumes to take the place of his master: "In this, [the estimative faculty] acts as though it were a bad servant whose master has ordered to assist him on an important business, [...] and who believes, after its successful completion, that he has achieved the desired end on his own, without his master, [...] and that he is himself the true master" (Ibn Sīnā, *Tṣiq*, p. 255).

In *Decree and Determination*, Avicenna correspondingly remarks that those who rely on their own faculties alone—and thus mistake the estimative for the intellect—vehemently refuse ideas which result from the rational soul's conjunction with the Active Intelligence: "Arbitration in this dispute", says Ḥayy ibn YaqẒān, "falls to an intellect which is not this intellect. [...] For indeed the term 'intellect' is shared by all, but not everyone who makes use of the term 'intellect' has been nominated for this privilege" (Mehren, *Traité*, I, p. 23; Aya., f. 32^a; Ham., f. 598^b; Nur., f. 307^b).

bound to become a cause of universal turmoil [...], given that he had failed to reflect in advance on the consequences of his act?²²

MEHREN, *Traités*, I, p. 9

In the case of the first man, Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān adds, “there can be no doubt as to your judge’s verdict: the man will be exposed to a deluge of criticism, against which he will have no excuse to offer” (Mehren, *Traités*, I, p. 9).²³

Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān then addresses the narrative persona:

And you, [...] who knows that God has created all things—including our acts, moral as well as immoral, noble as well as vile—tell me, then, which of the acts of these two men should be related to the divine determination, if only it were possible to compare a creature with God? [...] The act which is to be likened to the act of God, is it not that of the first man?²⁴

MEHREN, *Traités*, I, pp. 9–10

The alternatives presented by Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān exemplify the companion’s judgment that God cannot possibly intend immoral and vile human acts. Correspondingly, the companion’s Mu‘tazilī teacher—as personifying the estimative faculty—will either excuse or blame the second man for the occurrence of such evils, but will not entertain the possibility that he had intended anything but what is moral and noble. The companion, following his teacher’s judgments, is therefore readily inclined to regard the act of the second man as more closely resembling the act of God, and given that the first man knew full well that such evils could ensue from his design, the estimative faculty cannot but condemn him.

Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān then presents the key to the parable, not to the companion, but to the narrative persona, whose intelligible nature—as personifying the rational soul—transcends the polarizing influence of the estimative faculty. By virtue of its disengagement from matter, the rational soul is therefore disposed to conceive of conjoining alternatives which the estimative faculty obstinately regards as mutually exclusive: that God at once decrees what is best for all His creatures, yet determines them in such a way that the existence of evil is also possible in them.²⁵ Avicenna succinctly formulates this notion in *The Throne*,

22 Aya., f. 26^a; Ham., f. 593^b; Nur., f. 305^b.

23 Aya., f. 26^a; Ham., f. 593^b; Nur., f. 305^b.

24 Aya., ff. 26^a–27^b; Ham., f. 593^b; Nur., f. 305^b.

25 For Avicenna, the estimative faculty’s resistance to entertaining two opposite alternatives at once—which is prerequisite to achieving a subtle position beyond both which con-

where he stresses the necessity of approaching the question of divine providence in a way which does not exclude either alternative from the outset:

Let it be known that “there is no appeal to His judgment” (Qurʾān 13:41), and no rescinding of His decree. It is indeed necessary to be temperate in relating good and evil to Him; this is only learned after adopting a middle course between extremes.

IBN SĪNĀ, *ʿAršūyya*, p. 103

The parable of the two generous men in *Decree and Determination* provides fertile ground for reflection on the nature of divine providence, understood as such a “middle course between extremes”. It is not immediately obvious how the act of the first man more closely resembles the act of God, and the alternatives presented by Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān do little more than provoke the soul to revisit—and ideally forego—estimative judgments which hinder rational reflection. Against the backdrop of Avicenna’s philosophical worldview, however, the meaning of the parable becomes clear.

joins them—is due to its adherence to the sensible realm, where a physical thing cannot simultaneously be itself and its opposite. The estimative faculty accordingly incites zealous adherence to one alternative, and vehement rejection of its opposite.

As Michot observes, “l’estimative va souvent trop vite en besogne. Elle ne s’inquiète pas de l’insuffisance éventuelle du savoir, d’origine d’ailleurs assez floue, qui fonde ses jugements sans appel. Chose plus grave encore, sa prétention la conduit à limiter fortement l’horizon des hommes. Habitée aux choses corporelles, elle juge en effet irréels les êtres purement spirituels, elle les refuse avec la même aisance qu’elle entérine et impose au psychisme l’existence des créations les plus étranges de l’imagination” (*Destinée*, p. 149).

In an implicit reference to the estimative faculty, Avicenna remarks in *Pointers and Reminders* 11.10.31: “Your strong rejection of that whose clarity is not yet made evident to you is no less a mistake than your strong belief in that whose evidence does not lie in your hands. Rather, you must hold on to the line of suspending judgment—even if you are disturbed by the denial of what your hearing recognises as true—as long as its impossibility is not evident to you. Thus, it is appropriate that you relegate such a thing to the region of possibility as long as you are not driven away from that by firm evidence” (Ibn Sīnā, *Išārāt*, trans. Inati, p. 107 [modified]; ed. Forget, pp. 221–222).

Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān’s advice to the narrative persona in *Alive, Son of Awake* on how to deal with the third wicked companion of the soul—the deceitful babbler—reflects the same advice and confirms the association of this figure with the estimative faculty in particular, as presiding over the sensorium: “As for that companion who craftily admixes truth with falsehood (*al-mumawwih al-mutaḥarris*), beware of relying on him unless he brings you a weighty testimony from God. In that event, trust him, and do not reject what he brings you, despite the fact that it is a mixture. In this way you will avoid destroying the part of it which is worthy of your consideration” (Mehren, *Traité*s, IV, p. 6).

As an image of privation, the parched desert in Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān's parable represents the nature of matter in the sublunary realm of generation and corruption. The extreme dryness which dominates this environment is characteristic of elemental matter, whose four elemental foundations—earth, water, air, and fire—exclusively tend by nature to their respective essential perfections. In *The Deliverance*, Avicenna states:

It must be known [...] that [in the realm of generation and corruption] elemental bodies are prevented from receiving life by their being in absolute opposition [to each other]. The more these bodies are able to overcome the absoluteness of [elemental] opposition and bring it nearer to the mean, which has no opposite, the nearer they approach a resemblance to the celestial bodies, and to that extent they deserve to receive an animating faculty from the immaterial ordering principle [(i.e. the Active Intelligence)].

IBN SĪNĀ, *Nağāt*, p. 392

In Avicenna's philosophical worldview, the constitution of living things in the natural world is determined as an intricate harmonization—or balancing (*i'tidāl*) of the mixture (*mizāj*)—of numerous opposing forces, increasing in complexity from vegetal, then animal, and ultimately human life. As he explains in *Origin and Return*,

The nature of all bodies appears to be disposed for life. However, a body may be opposite to another due to its form, and this opposition prevents the reception of the soul; that is why the elements (*uṣṭuqusāt*) are utterly devoid of life. But when [the elements] are combined and break away from their opposition [to each other], they begin to receive life. Hence, they first receive the [vegetative] life of nutrition, growth, and reproduction. When the opposition is further overcome in them, the [animal] life of sensation and voluntary motion comes to be. And when the opposition [between the elements] is further overcome, due to the balance of the mixture, rational life (*ḥayat al-nuṭq*) then comes to be.²⁶

IBN SĪNĀ, *Mabda'*, p. 57

26 In *Pointers and Reminders* 11.2.27, Avicenna remarks: "Consider the wisdom of the Maker: He began by creating the [elemental] foundations, and from these He then created various mixtures (*amzāj*), and prepared a mixture for each species, and He made equilibrium (*i'tidāl*) arise from [these] mixtures, so that there may arise the [various] kinds of perfection, and He disposed the mixture of the human to be as close as possible to [the state of]

Since the avoidance of extremes in all living things is necessary for the reception of the divine influence, and since human nature attains its proper perfection through a highly intricate harmonization of numerous opposing forces, it follows that, of all creatures, the conditions for human actualization are the most fragile.

The fate of the caravanserai in Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān's parable correspondingly represents the evils which ensue from the loss of this subtle harmonization. While originally designed to facilitate and protect life, the "physical frame" in the midst of a parched desert—as an image of the human body existing in the realm of elemental matter—thus devolves into a cause of further privation in an already harsh environment, dominated as it is by the evils of deceptive appearances, ruthless violence, and insatiable craving.

For Avicenna, the good of every existent consists in the realization of its proper perfections, and its evil, in the privation of perfections which are proper to its nature.²⁷ The perfection of existents is therefore contingent on their preparation to receive the divine influence,²⁸ which perpetually confers on all

equilibrium, so that it may become a nest (*tastawkarīh*) for his rational soul" (Ibn Sīnā, *Iṣārāt*, ed. Forget, p. 118). In *On the Rational Soul*, Avicenna further explains: "The closer the temperament (*mizāj*) is to balance, the greater is the disposition to receive the [divine] effusion (*ḥayd*). Since the celestial bodies are entirely devoid of opposites, they are receptive to the divine effusion. As for the human, due to [his involvement with] opposites he is never free of deficiency, no matter how balanced his temperament is. [...] But when [a human] diligently applies himself to purifying [his soul through] knowledge and acquires the *habitus* for junction with the divine effusion (that is, through the intelligible substance which in religious terms is called the 'Angel', and in philosophical terms is called the 'Active Intelligence'), has a balanced temperament devoid of those opposites which hinder his receptivity to the divine effusion, then there occurs in him a similarity to the celestial bodies, so that he comes to resemble in this purification the 'seven firmaments (*al-sabʿ al-ṣidād*)' (Qurʾān 78:12)—that is, the seven [celestial] spheres" (Ibn Sīnā, *Kalām*, pp. 197–198). In his *Homily on Divine Oneness*, Avicenna similarly writes: "When his temperament achieves balance and becomes devoid of opposites, the human becomes similar to the 'seven firmaments'" (Akhtar, "Tract," p. 233).

27 Avicenna affirms in *Metaphysics* VIII.6: "The good, in general, is what everything within its [own] bound desires, and through which its existence is completed. Evil has no essence, but is either the nonexistence of a substance, or the nonexistence of what constitutes rectitude for the state of a substance. Existence is, hence, goodness; and the perfection of existence is the goodness of existence" (Ibn Sīnā, *Ṣifāʾ, Ilāhīyyāt*, trans. Marmura, p. 284; ed. Mūsā, p. 355). In his commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*, he states: "The good in every thing is to exist according to the most perfect mode of existence which is proper for it" (Ibn Sīnā, *Ṣarḥ*, p. 46).

28 Avicenna writes in the conclusion of his *Book of Knowledge*: "It has now become clear that the good exists where the influence (*aṭar*) of the First Good appears, that evil exists where

exists the forms of their perfections. What is more, Avicenna states in *Metaphysics IX.6* that “all cause of evil is only found within the sublunary sphere” (*Šifāʾ, Ilāhiyyāt*, trans. Marmura, p. 341; ed. Mūsā, p. 417), since impediments to the reception of this perfecting influence only exist in the realm of generation and corruption. As he explains in his commentary on the verse “Then He turned to the sky ...” (Qurʾān 41:11),

When the matter of the celestial spheres is commanded to receive the form of the sphere, it obeys by itself to this command. Indeed, [in the supernal realm] there is fundamentally no impediment. For its part, when elemental matter [in the sublunary realm] is commanded to receive another form, it is not obedient. Rather, its receptiveness and preparation to yield to the divine command occur with aversion on its part. That is because the prior form hinders the occurrence of the generated form.

MICHOT, “Commentaire,” pp. 319[3]–320[4]

Ether (Arabic *aytīr*, from the Greek *aethēr*), as the matter of celestial bodies, is receptive of the form of the sphere without resistance, since this celestial matter is “characterised by the disposition to receive one form which has no opposite” (Ibn Sīnā, *Aḡrām*, p. 267), and therefore does not, as in the case of sublunary elemental matter, admit of only one form to the exclusion of its opposite.

In *Alive, Son of Awake*, Avicenna represents the sublunary realm using, as in *Decree and Determination*, the image of a sterile and arid desert. Note that in the topography of this allegorical work, the “eastern border” represents the side of the intelligible realm, and the “western border” that of the sensible realm. He writes:

We asked [Ḥayy ibn Yaḡzān] to inform us about the western border, due to its proximity to our land. He said: “[...] Its plain is a desert of salt; whenever it is inhabited by those who cultivate its fields, it expels them and others take their place. Whatever they cultivate perishes; whatever they build collapses. Quarrelling, even fighting, is the norm among its people. Wherever a group prevails, it takes over the dwellings of others, forcing them to evacuate. It seeks to establish itself on the land, but its efforts come to nothing. Such is their custom, from which they never stray. [...] Thus, this region is a desolate land, a desert of salt, fraught with affliction

this influence does not, and where there is no receptivity to this influence, and that evil has no other cause” (Ibn Sīnā, *Dāniš-nāma*, p. 165).

and turmoil, strife and tumult; and the resplendence (or joy, *bahġa*) [that is found there] is borrowed from a distant place”.

MEHREN, *Traités*, IV, pp. 9–10

Significantly, this allegorical description likens the conflict and brutality which reigns in the realm of generation and corruption—as exemplified in the dynamics of elemental matter—to the behaviour of degenerate humans, as dominated by their animal soul. The tendency to extremes is indeed exemplified both in the radical opposition of elemental forces and in human expressions of ruthlessness and intemperance, and this is all the more evident where the irascible faculty is dominant, given its natural propensity to vehemently resist and deny that which it opposes—as in the case of elemental matter.

For its part, the “physical frame” erected in the desert manifests the tempering influence of the divine effusion—as though a physical creature designed with organs which enable it to exist in the best possible way determined for it.²⁹ As a literal building, the caravanserai constitutes a temperate, and hence life-sustaining environment: it collects groundwater to counter the desert’s dryness, and provides shelter from both the intense heat of summer and the bitter cold of winter. Inasmuch as it fulfils its essential purpose of facilitating and protecting life, the caravanserai is therefore a good.

Due its physical nature, however, according to Avicenna it is not possible for such a structure to fulfil the purpose of safeguarding human, animal, and vegetal life unless it is also possible for it to be taken over by caravan raiders and devolve into a den of debauchery and intoxication. In the context of Avicenna’s conception of providence, this signifies that while the divine decree intends only the good by primary intention, it also intends evil by secondary intention, that is, as a necessary concomitant of the divine determination.³⁰

29 Avicenna writes in his *Book of Knowledge*: “The meaning of goodness (*niki*) is the existence of everything as it must be, and providence consists in that, for instance, [the Necessary Existent] has known how the organs of the human must be to be the best for him, and how the motion must be to be the best for him, and for it to be in the best order; and this, without there occurring in Him any intention (*qaṣd*), search (*ṭalab*), desire (*ārzū*), or aim (*ġaraḍ*), for none of this is worthy of Him” (Ibn Sīnā, *Dāniš-nāma*, pp. 95–96).

30 In his commentary on the Chapter of the Daybreak (Qur’ān 113), Avicenna states: “In sum, the Cleaver (*Fāliq*) of the darkness of nonexistence by the light of existence is the Necessarily Existent, and evils do not ensue from Him primarily, through His decree, but rather secondarily, through His determination. Hence, He commanded to seek refuge ‘in the Lord of the daybreak’ from the evils that ensue from what is created” (Ibn Sīnā, *Tafsīr sūrat al-falaq*, p. 117).

In his commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*, Avicenna correspondingly remarks that influences from the celestial realm can be beneficial or detrimental,

although not in the sense that detriment and evil are intended; rather, [detriment and evil] proceed from these influences by virtue of ineluctable necessity, which does not, however, entail that objectionable things proceed [from the celestial realm] by primary intention. Rather, [detriment and evil] result from effects which are necessitated by the good. For the causes of the good cannot fulfill their function as causes of the good unless [detriment and evil] are necessary concomitants of the causes of the good, which is [by] primary [intention].

IBN SĪNĀ, *Šarḥ*, p. 65

Avicenna commonly uses the example of fire or water to illustrate this notion.³¹ In proper measure, he explains, fire confers many benefits due to its essential property, which is to burn anything it touches. Likewise, water is indispensable to life, yet can also cause animals to drown.³² Were it not possible for fire to burn precious things or for water to cause death by drowning, Avicenna explains, then it would not be possible for these elements to confer the many benefits which derive from their essential properties.

Bearing in mind the affinity between the behaviour of elemental matter and that of degenerate humans, as dominated by their animal soul, these considerations may then be applied to the faculties of the animal soul in humans—personified in *Alive, Son of Awake* as a deceitful babbler, a violent brute, and a filthy glutton. While not evil in themselves, for Avicenna these faculties are naturally determined to seek their respective perfections, which constitute their

31 Notably, in *Metaphysics* IX.6 (Ibn Sīnā, *Šifāʾ, Ilāhiyyāt*, transl. Marmura, p. 342; ed. Mūsā, p. 418) and *Pointers and Reminders* II.2 (Ibn Sīnā, *Išārāt*, ed. Forget, p. 186).

32 In his commentary on the *Theology of Aristotle*, Avicenna writes: “The universal benefits of fire or water could not be realised in the realm of generation and corruption unless the collision of causes—which are all given their proper place in the universal order and a motion in view of the general good—could result in the burning of a precious thing, in the case of fire, or in the drowning of a living thing, in the case of water. For if fire was not such that it could burn, or water that it could drown, or if the motion of things was such that it could never bring fire in contact with a precious garment, nor cause a noble animal to fall into water, then it would not be possible for either the general good or for the exceptional evil to occur. And the absence of the general good would be a greater [evil] than the occurrence of an exceptional evil; indeed, this would be a general evil” (Ibn Sīnā, *Šarḥ*, p. 65).

proper goods. These goods, however, become evils when their intemperate pursuit interferes with and hinders other and higher ends which are essential to human nature.³³

Thus, the good of the irascible faculty is realised in warding off and subjugating what is perceived to be detrimental, and that of concupiscence, in acquiring and enjoying what is perceived to be beneficial (see Ibn Sīnā, *Šifāʾ Nafs* I.5, ed. Bakoš, pp. 41–42). As such, these sensible ends are necessary to human existence, yet are not its true ends. The ends of these faculties therefore need to be subordinated to the higher end of the rational soul—which is to conjoin itself to the divine effusion through the mediation of the Active Intelligence, and thereby assimilate itself to the First Good.

Hence, just as fire cannot cook a meal unless it is also possible for flames to devour an entire house, in Avicenna's analysis it is not possible for the irascible faculty to fulfil its role as part of human nature unless it is also possible for it to cause a human to become abusive and violent. This results from the individual's alienation from the divine influence—following the ruin of the intricate harmonization of opposite forces by which alone sublunary creatures, and above them all humans, are able to receive this perfecting influence.

In *Alive, Son of Awake*, Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān warns the narrative persona: “these companions who are with you and never leave your side are wicked companions; you will hardly escape them, and they will entice you—unless you are safeguarded by abundant divine protection (*ʿiṣma*)” (Mehren, *Traités*, IV, p. 4). In Avicenna's philosophical worldview, this “divine protection” corresponds to the divine influence (*aṭar*) or effusion (*fayḍ*) whereby all creatures are enabled to realise the proper good which God, in His perfect wisdom and boundless generosity, has determined for their nature.³⁴

In *Decree and Determination*, the figure of Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān likewise invokes this notion of divine protection to explain the harmonizing influence which safeguards humans from the intemperate pursuit of sensible ends. He says:

33 Avicenna explains in *On Love*: “there is goodness in every part of the divinely established order, and each one of these goods is sought after. However, the pursuit of one of these worldly goods often interferes with the attainment of a good which is of a higher rank” (Ibn Sīnā, *Išq*, p. 256).

34 In *Metaphysics* VI.5, Avicenna affirms: “It is necessary within divine providence—which is generosity—that every contingent existent should be given the good existence [which is proper to it]” (Ibn Sīnā, *Šifāʾ, Ilāhīyyāt*, trans. Marmura, p. 225 [modified]; ed. Mūsā, p. 289). In his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* Λ, he also notes: “The First is pleasing (*murtada*) and befitting (*malāʾima*) [...]. [His being] befitting consists in that the influence (*aṭar*) which is received from Him is what befits all things, whether natural, psychical, or intellectual. For all things receive from the favour of His Being what is according to their capacity (*tāqa*)” (Ibn Sīnā, *Commentaire*, p. 51).

Not everyone is safeguarded by divine protection (*ʿiṣma*), as was Joseph when, “had he not seen the evidence of his Lord”—“and she wanted him, and he would have taken her” (Qurʾān 12:24); nor again, as was Absāl when the lightning flash revealed her face to him.³⁵

MEHREN, *Traité*s, I, pp. 5–6

Here, the sage hints at the Qurʾānic story of Joseph and Zulayḥā and the allegorical story of Salāmān and Absāl to illustrate how the divine influence—when the disposition for its reception is actualised—safeguards humans from two of the rational soul’s wicked companions, namely, the “filthy glutton” in the case of Joseph, and the “deceitful babbler” in the case of Absāl.

In the former, the divine protection enables Joseph to refrain from intemperately giving way to his concupiscence. In the latter, it enables Absāl to perceive that the woman embracing him is not his newly wed bride, but rather Salāmān’s wife, who had contrived to take her sister’s place in the dark.³⁶ The divine protection thus enables Absāl to recognise, beyond appearances, her true identity. This image signifies the rational soul’s capacity to perceive, behind and beyond sensible and imaginable forms, the intelligible forms which constitute the true nature of things, a perception which is made possible only by the “lightning flash”—that is, the divine influence, received through its junction with the Active Intelligence.

Left to their own devices, the faculties of the animal soul in the human being therefore tend to extremes by their very nature, and there is no cure for this condition unless the rational soul is restored as the higher unifying principle in the human individual. What is more, without the assistance of the Active Intelligence, to whom the rational soul turns and through whom the divine influence descends, the human constitution lacks the proper harmonization required to receive this very influence.³⁷

35 Aya., f. 24^a; Ham., f. 591^a; Nur., f. 304^a.

36 In his commentary on Avicenna’s *Pointers and Reminders*, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī recounts two known versions of the allegorical story of Salāmān and Absāl which Avicenna briefly evokes in 11.9.1 (*Iṣārāt*, ed. Forget, p. 199). The passage in *Decree and Determination* corresponds to the second version, as recounted by al-Ṭūsī: “On the night of the wedding, the wife of Salāmān slept in the bed of her sister. When Absāl entered the room she could not control herself and clasped him to her chest. Absāl became suspicious and said to himself: ‘modest virgins do not behave like this.’ At that time the sky was overcast by a dark cloud. Suddenly, a lightning flash shone and he saw her face.” (al-Ṭūsī, *Ṣarḥ al-iṣārāt*, p. 54). Significantly, the lightning flash shines just as Absāl notices her intemperance; the bride Absāl intends to embrace is a modest virgin—not a base sensible form which is prone to extremes, but a pure intelligible form which is suitably balanced.

37 It is important to note that for Avicenna the human mind cannot know the proper mixture

The narrative persona in *Decree and Determination* therefore needs to seek the assistance of Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān in order to cure his companion, so that the latter's faculties may cease from interfering with his reception of the divine influence.³⁸

For the reception of the divine influence to be possible, the intentional disposition to receive this beneficial influence—as Avicenna's apparent neologism, *istin'ām*, suggests—is therefore necessary, since without the cultivation

of creatures. The harmonization of the temperament is brought about by the divine influence, so that sublunary creatures are strictly dependent on the beneficence of the Active Intelligence for its reception. Avicenna states in *Cardiac Remedies*: "We remain ignorant of the relative proportion [of elements which is] found in the mixture [of things] so long as we live in the world of generation and corruption. [...] In general, the specific quality (*ḥāṣiyya*) [of a thing] is the nature which exists in bodies composed of elements, and it is bestowed by the supernal divine emanation (*al-fayḍ al-ilāhī l-'ulwī*), so that beneficial specific mixtures may be come to be for them according to their specific dispositions" (Ibn Sīnā, *Adwīyya*, p. 248). Avicenna correspondingly explains in his commentary on the Chapter of Mankind (Qur'ān 114) that the human disposition to receive a rational soul "comes about through a subtle rearing (*tarbiya*) and a subtle balancing (*tamziḡ*) which [our human] minds fall short [of comprehending] (*taqṣuru l-'uqūl 'anhā*). Such is the intention of the saying of the Exalted: 'So when I have fashioned him (*sawwaytuhu*), and breathed into him of My Spirit' (Qur'ān 15:29, 38:72)" (Ibn Sīnā, *Tafsīr sūrat al-Nās*, p. 123).

The inability for humans to know the proper mixture of things in the realm of generation and corruption is incidentally the reason for Avicenna's denial of the possibility of the transmutation of metals in alchemy. In *On the Generation of Metals* (*Physics* v.1), he writes: "As for the claims of the alchemists, it must be known that it is not in their power to truly accomplish the transmutation (*yaqlibū*) of species. It is, however, in their power to produce excellent similitudes, dyeing the red [metal (i.e. gold)] white, so that it closely resembles silver, or dyeing [silver] yellow, so that it closely resembles gold. [...]. In these, however, the essential nature remains unchanged [...]. I do not deny that such a degree of similitude may be reached as to deceive even the most perceptive, but the possibility of removing or conferring the specific difference has never been obvious to me. Rather, I consider it impossible, given that there is no way to dissolve (*ḥalla*) the mixture [and to combine the elements] into another. Those sensible states are probably not the [specific] differences which separate the [metallic] bodies into species, but rather accidents or consequents, *the specific differences being unknown*. And if a thing is unknown, then how is it possible for anyone to endeavour to produce it or destroy it?" (Ibn Sīnā, *Šifā', Ṭabī'yyāt*, trans. Holmyard and Mandeville, pp. 41–42 [modified]; ed. Muntaṣir, pp. 22–23).

38 Avicenna's philosophy of medicine perfectly illustrates this notion. In *Metaphysics* 1x.3, he explains: "The physician does not bestow health, but rather prepares the matter and the instrument for it. In reality, what gives health is a principle loftier than the physician, being that which gives matter all its forms and whose essence is nobler than matter" (Ibn Sīnā, *Šifā', Ilāhīyyāt*, trans. Marmura, p. 320; ed. Mūsā, p. 395). Likewise, for Avicenna the role of the philosopher is to pacify and prepare the animal faculties of the soul, in particular the estimative faculty, to receive the divine influence which orders all things according to what is best for all creatures.

of this disposition, for instance through prayer,³⁹ the human can hardly escape the tendency to extremes which characterises the faculties of his animal soul. Even worse, this natural tendency comes to exacerbate, in a vicious cycle, his very incapacity to receive the divine influence.

In Avicenna's philosophical worldview, there is no place for divine intervention—in the sense that God would be moved to help His contingent creature after the fact.⁴⁰ As Avicenna writes in *The Throne*, “there is no appeal to His judgment’ (Qur’ān 13:41), and no rescinding of His decree” (*Aršīyya*, p. 103). The God of Avicenna is detached from the contingent aspect of His creatures, and

39 For Avicenna, prayers of petition (*du‘ā’*) are not effective in the sense that the petitioner causes a change in God—thus moving Him to pity His creature. In his *Notes* (§ 823), he states: “It is not true that the Creator is affected by the request [that man addresses Him]; rather, if the thing that is requested of Him is [according to] what He knows, this request receives a response, whereas if it is not, then it receives none” (Ibn Sīnā, *Ta’līqāt*, p. 447). In another passage (§ 357), he writes: “When we want to know something and the soul prepares itself to receive knowledge of it from the Active Intelligence by removing the impediment which obstructs this search, then [the soul’s] preparation becomes appropriate for [its reception]” (ibid., p. 223). Avicenna further explains in *Guidance* that “the reception of the guiding effusion [...] is due to a cause in the receiver [in such a way that] for the soul the request consists in its acquiring the preparation to receive this guidance in a perfect way. [...] Hence, [what is received] is not something which would occur if there was no request” (pp. 291–292). The following passage from Avicenna’s *Prayer* exemplifies this notion, even as he invokes divine protection: “O God, Lord of the exalted [angelic] beings (*al-aṣḥāṣ al-‘ubwīyya*), the heavenly spheres, and the celestial spirits—human nature, along with the base cravings of the world, have overcome Your servant. Make Your protection (*‘isma*) my shield against intemperance (*al-tafrīt*), and devotion to You (*taqwāka*) my fortress against admixture (*al-tahlīt*); uplift me to Your unified (*muttaḥid*), pure (*maḥḍ*), and simple (*basīt*) realm; for verily, whatever You will You are able to achieve, and You ‘encompass all things’ (Qur’ān 41:54)” (Ibn Sīnā, *Du‘ā’*, p. 298).

40 In *Metaphysics* IX.6, Avicenna cites a tradition from the *Musnad* of Ibn Ḥanbal (no. 17207) to illustrate God’s detachment from His creatures: “He gives no heed and pays no attention to the bad consequences that occur by necessity. As it has been said [by God]: ‘I created these for the Fire, and I care not; and I created these for Paradise, and I care not’” (Ibn Sīnā, *Šifā’, Ilāhiyyāt*, transl. Marmura, p. 347; ed. Mūsā, p. 422). In *On the Divine Decree*, Avicenna also writes: “The Creator, the First, while not detesting His creature, does not alter His judgment, and is not preoccupied with what happens to them; rather, having created these for the Garden, He cares not; and having created these for the Fire, He cares not” (Michot, *Lettre au vizir*, pp. 106[3]–107[4]).

For Avicenna, God eternally bestows existence and its perfection on all His creatures, but is not affected by their eventual failure to fully realise these perfections. As he states in the conclusion of *On Love*: “Just as wisdom will not allow anything which has some aspect of excellence (*fāḍil*) to be disregarded, even though it falls short of utmost excellence, in His wisdom the Absolute Good loves that His influence should be received, even though the degree to which it is received will not attain perfection” (Ibn Sīnā, *‘Iṣq*, p. 269).

like the first generous man in Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān's parable, is thereby "exposed to a deluge of criticism" (Mehren, *Traités*, p. 9), given that the estimative faculty readily interprets this notion as meaning that God is not concerned with their well-being: God is either detached or concerned, but cannot be both at once.

This tendency to interpret reality from a sharply either/or perspective—zealously clinging to an alternative and vehemently denying its opposite—is for Avicenna a fundamental impediment to true knowledge which prevents the rational soul from perceiving intelligible realities, causes the animal soul to dominate human nature, and thus confines the human individual to the sensible realm. In the end, the narrative persona's companion in Avicenna's *Decree and Determination* cannot be cured of his condition—neither through the activity of his own faculties, nor by the agency of the narrative persona—without the assistance of Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān, which is perpetually available, if only his beneficence is sought and his influence received.

In Avicenna's analysis, God confers abundant blessings on all His creatures, and insofar as they align with the universal order of divine providence which determines what is best for all things and facilitates the realization of their proper perfections, they are not subject to deficiency and evil. What is required of creatures, and above all of humans, then takes the form of a double negation: to cease from interfering with the divine order, or else suffer the consequences of straying from the good which God has wisely and generously determined for their specific natures, apart from which there is no true good.

At the end of *Decree and Determination*, Avicenna uses a flourish of images to convey the necessity for the soul of turning to the Active Intelligence—that is, of disposing itself to receive beneficence (*istin'ām!*) from the higher realm. Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān concludes:

Perhaps he [who relies on the faculties of his animal soul alone] will realise that he has wasted his time in futile discourse, unable as he is to draw sparks from his flint stone. [...] Lacking the key to Its door and the oil to Its lamp, he has never rejoiced in the shade of the Truth, nor was ever refreshed by Its dew, as he has never turned his face to Its *qibla*. [...] He is like a man who set out to collect firewood at night, or like one who undertook to milk a bird (*ka-ḥātib layl aw ḥālib ṭayr*) [...]. [Alas, he has searched in vain where there was nothing to be found.⁴¹] Know then [...] that if one's innate disposition (*fiṭra*) and assiduous effort were sufficient, every-

41 This sentence appears in Mehren's paraphrase (*Traités*, I, p. 12), as summarizing the general sense of the passage.

one would avail themselves of Ibn Muqla's books and compose amusing verses in Nābiġa's style⁴²—famed as they are, whether for their talents or their efforts! [...] Recognise therefore the limits of your capacities, so that you may be acquainted [with the Truth]. And how apt is the saying, "Everything is facilitated [to do] that for which it has been created"⁴³ (*kull muyassar li-mā ħuliqa lahu*).⁴⁴

MEHREN, *Traités*, I, pp. 24–25

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42 Abū ‘Alī Muḥammad Ibn Muqla (885–940AD) was a vizier and master calligrapher (see D. Sourdel, “Ibn Muqla,” *EI*², pp. 886–887), and Nābiġa al-Dhubyānī (c. 535–c. 604AD) a pre-Islamic poet renowned for his imaginary tableaux (see A. Arazi, “al-Nābiġha al-Dhubyānī,” *EI*², pp. 840–842). Both achieved worldly fame for their artistry.

43 From the *Musnad* of Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal (nos. 13846 and 16194), also found in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of al-Buḥārī (nos. 4949 and 7551). Avicenna also cites this tradition in *Metaphysics* IX.7 (transl. Marmura, p. 347; ed. Mūsā, p. 422), and as the closing words of *Pointers and Reminders* 11.9 (ed. Forget, p. 207). Significantly, both *Decree and Determination* and *Alive, Son of Awake* begin with the words: “When it had been facilitated for me (*ṭayassartu li*) to return from Šalamba .../to set out for a walk with my companions ...” (Mehren, *Traités* I, p. 1, and IV, p. 1), in both cases as a prelude to the narrative persona’s encounter with Ḥayy ibn Yaġzān.

44 Aya., ff. 34^b–34^a; Ham., ff. 598^a–599^b; Nur., f. 307^a.

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