

# Abul-Barakāt al-Baghdādī on Divine Foreknowledge and Human Free Will\*

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**Abstract:** The present paper aims to explore the medieval philosopher Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's (d. pre-560 AH/1164-5) position concerning the problem of divine foreknowledge and human free will and argues Abū al-Barakāt to have considered the argument for compatibility between divine foreknowledge and human free will to be invalid. One can defend either divine foreknowledge or human free will; no other solution is available. By examining his accounts on this issue through the logic and metaphysics of his book *al-Mu'tabar fī-l-ḥikma*, Abū al-Barakāt defense of human free will shall become evident.

**Keywords:** Foreknowledge, free will, volition, future contingency, determination, predestination.

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If God has prior knowledge of all human acts, does not the fact that humans are not genuinely free follow? Must they not act as God eternally knows they will act? If God does not comprehensively know all future events, human voluntarily acts in particular, does this not entail God to be imperfect? This dilemma has a long history in Islamic philosophy and theology. Medieval Muslim theologians (*mutakallimūn*) and philosophers (*falāsifa*) were almost unanimous, albeit with a few exceptions, in claiming both that God is omniscient and that humans have free will, but they disagreed in their accounts on how the two claims are compatible. Raising certain logical and theological concerns, the sixth/twelfth century philosopher Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī doubted the validity of the argument for the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human free will stating that one can defend one or the other argument, but not both. By doing so, Abū al-Barakāt was willing to abandon the traditional view of an omniscient God for the sake of the genuine freedom of human beings.

Before engaging upon Abū al-Barakāt's discussion, a few things need to be mentioned about its structure and about the earlier scholarship on the subject. Abū al-Barakāt treated the problem of divine foreknowledge and human will (*irāda*) twice in his magnum opus *al-Mu'tabar fi-l-ḥikma*.<sup>1</sup> He introduced the problem first in the logic and then in the metaphysics of *al-Mu'tabar*. In the logic, the discussion revolves essentially around the question of future contingency: whether statements about singular future contingents have a definite truth value. In the course of the discussion, Abū al-Barakāt considers the implication of foreknowledge (i.e., whether such statements are definitely true or false) if one or the other of two mutually exclusive alternatives becoming realized is foreknown. He concludes the discussion by referring briefly to the problem of human volition (*irāda*) and determination, expressing his intention to elaborate further on this subject elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> He most probably meant the metaphysics of *al-Mu'tabar*, for there he is seen to offer a lengthy discussion on this subject in the course of his treatment of the problem of divine decree and determination (*al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*).

- 1 *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar fi-l-ḥikma* [literally translated as The Book of Carefully Considered Teachings in Philosophy] was first published around the middle of the sixth century AH (twelfth century AD), more than a decade before Abū al-Barakāt's death. It belongs to the genre of philosophical literature and loosely follows in its structure the pattern set by Avicenna. Like Avicenna's encyclopaedic works *al-Shifā* and *al-Najāt*, *al-Mu'tabar* is divided into three books: logic (*al-manṭiq*), natural sciences (*al-ṭabī'iyyāt*), and metaphysics (*al-ilāhiyyāt*).
- 2 Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar fi-l-ḥikma*. Edited by 'Abdallāh al-'Alawī al-Ḥaḍramī et al. 3 vols. (Hyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, 1357 AH), I.2, 94.

This discussion is to be found in Chapters 8 and 9 in the second book of the metaphysics of *al-Mu'tabar*. Chapter 8, titled “On Divine Decree and Determination,” begins with a general definition of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar* and focuses primarily on the divine attribute of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Abū al-Barakāt then provides an account of several opinions concerning the problem of human free will and *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qada* along with his critical remarks regarding these. Here, I have translated *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qada* together as predestination. This is because Abū al-Barakāt had taken from the earlier philosophers and theologians, who upheld the doctrine of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qada* to mean that all events occurring in the world of generation and corruption are causally predetermined. These events are brought about at a certain time, place, and measure in accordance with divine foreknowledge and determination (*qadar*).<sup>4</sup>

The historical account occupies Chapter 8 and the last section of Chapter 9.<sup>5</sup> Moving to the first half of Chapter 9, titled “The Most Reliable Opinion on Divine Decree and Determination,” Abū al-Barakāt proceeds to develop his personal position but also expands the scope of his enquiry, for the question is no longer limited to divine foreknowledge and human free will. Rather, it extends to include all events that occur both naturally and voluntarily in the physical world. His main intention is to determine whether these events are foreknown, and hence predetermined by God.<sup>6</sup> For Abū al-Barakāt, the problem of human free appears unable to be fully resolved without also considering the circumstances in which human beings live.

Two earlier studies have touched upon this topic. In a brief remark concerning the problems of the eternity of the world, God's decision, and predetermination, Shlomo Pines shed light on Abū al-Barakāt's revolutionary position on divine knowledge: Contrary to the traditional belief, according to which God is an omniscient being in the sense that God knows all that is knowable, be it in the past, present, or future, Abū al-Barakāt excludes from God's knowledge certain events, namely the natural and voluntary-contingent events that occur in the physical world.<sup>7</sup> For him, as Pines correctly commented, these events “cannot

3 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 180–182.

4 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 180–182, 189–190 and 194.

5 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 181–187, 193–195.

6 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 192.

7 Shlomo Pines, “The Problem of the Eternity of the World, God's Decision and Determination,” in *Studies in Abu'l-Barakāt al-Baghdadi: Physics and Metaphysics* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2000), 319–334.

be completely known by any one knower (not even by God).”<sup>8</sup> However, Pines unexpectedly concludes by arguing that human acts, especially those pertaining to religious commandments and prohibitions, are by no means excluded from God’s foreknowledge.<sup>9</sup> Yet as far as I can tell, nowhere in *al-Mu‘tabar* does Abū al-Barakāt suggest, either explicitly or implicitly, such an exception. As shall be shown later, his main intention is to attribute to human beings an absolute moral responsibility for their acts, even if this will lead eventually to certain restrictions on divine knowledge. I shall come back to this point concerning Pines’ interpretation at the end of the paper.

In the article “Mushkilat Ḥurriyat al-Insān ‘inda Abi l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī,” Yāsīn ‘Amārī points out to Abū al-Barakāt’s alternative conception of *al-qaḍā’ wa-l-qadar*.<sup>10</sup> He correctly observes that, according to Abū al-Barakāt, certain events occur that fall within the realm of *al-qaḍā’ wa-l-qadar* and others that fall within the realm of *al-qadar* only, whereas a third type is by no means predetermined. I shall come back to this point later. As far as the problem of human free will is concerned, ‘Amārī centered his study chiefly on examining the relation the divine attributes of power (*qudra*) and volition (*irāda*) have with human free will. He correctly observes that human beings, in accordance with Abū al-Barakāt, perform their acts autonomously: They are the real agents of their voluntary acts.<sup>11</sup> When coming to the divine attribute of knowledge and its relation to human voluntary acts, ‘Amārī refrained from including it in his enquiry because it poses certain theological problems that cannot be fully addressed.<sup>12</sup> Yet he quickly notes that Abū al-Barakāt *appeared* to think that human voluntary acts are *not* foreknown by God.<sup>13</sup>

A common feature of these two studies is that they focus on Chapter 9 of the metaphysical section of *al-Mu‘tabar*, where Abū al-Barakāt states both his position on *al-qaḍā’ wa-l-qadar* and his alternative conception of divine knowledge. They do

8 Pines, “The Problem of the Eternity”, 322.

9 Pines, “The Problem of the Eternity”, 331–332.

10 Yāsīn ‘Amārī, ‘Mushkilat ḥurriyat al-insān ‘inda Abi al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī’, *Mominoun without Borders*, July 28, 2017, available online at the URL: <https://www.mominoun.com/articles/%D9%85%D8%B4%D9%83%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%AD%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%A9-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%B9%D9%86%D8%AF-%D8%A3%D8%A8%D9%8A-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%83%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%BA%D8%AF%D8%A7%D8%AF%D9%8A-5258> (retrieved June 22, 2020), 35.

11 ‘Amārī, “Mushkilat ḥurriyat al-insān”, 17.

12 ‘Amārī, “Mushkilat ḥurriyat al-insān”, 3.

13 ‘Amārī, “Mushkilat ḥurriyat al-insān”, 25.

not refer to the section on logic, nor do they closely examine the historical report that Abū al-Barakāt provided in Chapter 8, probably viewing it as a mere historical report. Consequently, they either mistakenly interpret (as in the case of Pines) or are uncertain about (as in the case of ‘Amārī) Abū al-Barakāt’s real position. While I am largely in agreement with ‘Amārī’s analysis on Chapter 9 of the metaphysics section, my intention here is to shed light on these two neglected texts in an attempt to show how Abū al-Barakāt had actually handled the problem. That the logical account and the historical report together underline the main dilemma for which Abū al-Barakāt’s predecessors had failed to provide a convincing solution shall become clear below. The dilemma lies in divine foreknowledge of future contingents and its impact on human freedom.

One last point needs to be clarified regarding Abū al-Barakāt’s critical approach. In his collected studies on Abū al-Barakāt, Pines comments the philosopher to have had an original approach that basically relied on his personal opinion and speculations. This approach, Pines adds, distinguished him from his predecessors, particularly Avicenna.<sup>14</sup> Frank Griffel argues in his article “Between al-Ghazālī and Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī,” that Abū al-Barakāt was continuing the approach al-Ghazālī had developed in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. For the two, metaphysical teachings are not based on the demonstrative approach, instead being dialectical in nature.<sup>15</sup> I suggest that this alternative approach had allowed Abū al-Barakāt to deal with the philosophical argumentations and concepts advanced by his predecessors in a less restricted manner. More precisely, he does not rely solely on the technical definitions his predecessors had advanced. On many occasions, he instead appeals to the general definitions and common uses of the very same terms. Moreover, in constructing his theory, he set aside any details that appeared unimportant or superfluous to him but that had central importance to other philosophers in the formulation of their theories. By contrast, he chose the argumentations and positions that appeared most reasonable to him.

As shall shortly be shown, Abū al-Barakāt followed this approach when treating the concept of will or volition (*irāda*). He frequently spoke of the willing agent. In some contexts, he related the concept of will to knowledge (*‘ilm*), compulsion (*qaṣr*), and purpose (*gharad*). The willing agent knows what they do without the

14 Pines, *Studies in Abu’l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī: Physics and Metaphysics*, 335.

15 Frank Griffel, ‘Between al-Ghazālī and Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī,’ In *In the Age of Averroes: Arabic Philosophy in the Sixth/Twelfth Century*, ed. by Peter Adamson (London: Warburg Institute, 2011), 45–75.

compulsion of achieving a specific goal. This treatment is close to the technical concept of the willing agent as understood by philosophers, particularly Avicenna. Abū al-Barakāt utilized this definition in the course of his demonstration of the divine attribute of will: “God wills” means that He knows and intends what He does and He does it without compulsion or even a goal (*ghāya*).<sup>16</sup> However, Abū al-Barakāt is seen to have included in this definition the notion of choosing between alternatives. According to him, the willing agent is a person who can freely choose either to do or not do something, regardless of other accompanying causes (i.e., the external circumstances within which they live).<sup>17</sup>

With this elaboration in mind, I shall proceed to examine Abū al-Barakāt’s position on the topic at hand. I shall first deal with the logical account. I shall then discuss Abū al-Barakāt’s historical report as presented in his section on metaphysics. Lastly, I shall briefly revisit the solution that he had proposed in the first section of Chapter 9.

## 1. The Logical Discussion: Future Contingency and Foreknowledge

The problem regarding the value of truth a proposition has concerning future contingency was first introduced in Chapter 9 of Aristotle’s *On Interpretation* in the course of his treatment regarding the question of logical fatalism. Using the example of a sea battle, Aristotle asked, “If it is true *today* that there will be a sea battle *tomorrow*, is it necessary that a sea battle occurs tomorrow?”<sup>18</sup> Since then, a number of competing interpretations of Aristotle’s sea battle dilemma have been developed. Ancient commentators were unanimous in thinking that Aristotle rebuts the fatalistic argument, taking him to mean that any statement about a future contingent is either true or false, but not yet one or the other.<sup>19</sup> This interpretation was endorsed by medieval Muslim philosophers and logicians, among them al-Fārābī, Avicenna, Abū al-Barakāt and Averroes. They agreed that Aristotle’s point had been to show that one cannot assign truth values to future

16 Abū al-Barakāt, *al-Mu‘tabar*, III.1, 66–69.

17 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu‘tabar*, I.2, 94.

18 For more details on future contingency in Aristotle, see Richard Taylor, ‘Aristotle’s Doctrine of Future Contingencies,’ *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter* 9 (1954).

19 See William Craig, *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents from Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden: Brill, 1988); Simo Knuuttila, ‘Medieval Commentators on Future Contingents in *De Interpretatione* 9,’ *Vivarium* 48:1-2 (2010), 75–95; Tamar Rudavsky (ed.), *Divine Omniscience and Omnipotence in Medieval Philosophy: Islamic, Jewish and Christian Perspectives* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1985).

contingent propositions (i.e., these statements are not yet either true or false). Yet among those *falāsifa*, al-Fārābī followed by Abū al-Barakāt were the ones who realized the significance of this problem for the theological question concerning divine foreknowledge and human free will: Would human beings remain genuinely free if that they will act the way they in fact do is foreknown?<sup>20</sup> For the sake of my argument, I shall start with a brief presentation of al-Fārābī's treatment of the question regarding foreknowledge and future contingents. I shall then proceed by exploring Abū al-Barakāt's position on the same subject. By the end of this section, I shall show that, although Abū al-Barakāt does not explicitly address the issue of compatibility in his logic, he does provide significant indications for the solution that he provides in his metaphysics.

In brief, al-Fārābī defended theological compatibilism, the idea that divine foreknowledge of future contingents is compatible with human free will. Although God knows the value of truth regarding future contingent events, which entails that they will necessarily happen the way they do happen, al-Fārābī contended that God's foreknowledge does not undermine their contingency. For instance, God's foreknowledge does not eliminate the human possibility or capability of acting differently. To make this point, al-Fārābī distinguished between two types of necessary (*ḍarūrī*) existents: what is necessary in itself and what is necessary as a consequence of another thing while remaining in itself contingent. He then took the necessity that may be predicated of future contingents to be of the second type. These events are not intrinsically necessary. Rather, they are intrinsically contingent, but become necessary as a result of God's having true knowledge about them. To elaborate his point, al-Fārābī gave the example of Zayd making a journey tomorrow. He argued that God's foreknowledge that Zayd will travel tomorrow does not contradict the possibility that Zayd is able *now* to act differently. This is because Zayd's travelling tomorrow is *presently* possible in itself and will remain as a possibility until the event when Zayd actually sets out on the journey. For instance, Zayd *now* still has the possibility of staying home tomorrow from a logical standpoint. Considering the necessary truth of God's foreknowledge that Zayd will necessarily travel tomorrow does not entail, in al-Fārābī's view, the necessary truth

20 Unlike al-Fārābī and Abū al-Barakāt, Avicenna and Averroes avoided introducing the question of divine foreknowledge in its relation to human action in their commentaries on *De Interpretatione*. Rather, they confined themselves to an analysis of Aristotle's presentation of future contingency. Cf. Avicenna, *al-Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-'Ibāra*, ed. by M. Khudayri (Cairo: National Press, 1970), 70–75; Averroes, *Sharḥ al-'Ibāra*, ed. by Maḥmūd Qāsim (Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organization, 1981), 67–81.

of the conclusion that Zayd's travelling tomorrow is necessary *now*. Zayd is *now* still capable (*qādir*) of acting differently, and only when he actually travels does the mode of existence of the event change from contingency to necessity. Thus, by recourse to the state of non-actualization and the distinction between these two types of necessity, al-Fārābī wished to safeguard contingency and hence human free will.<sup>21</sup>

Whether al-Fārābī considered the divine attribute of knowledge to be intrinsically causative in the sense that it necessitates the occurrence of such events is unclear. Nowhere in his commentary does he explicitly state his position in regard to the function of divine knowledge.<sup>22</sup> He additionally refrained, either deliberately or inadvertently, from integrating the issue of divine causation into his treatment of the question of human free will. This is problematic because the freedom attributed to Zayd remains threatened insofar as he will necessarily act in accordance with God's foreknowledge and not otherwise. In other words, the problem is not, as it seems to be, about God's capability of foreseeing the things which are to happen. Rather, the problem is essentially about whether God's foreknowledge necessitates occurrence. This is to mean that God, on the basis of His foreknowledge, has determined all things from past eternity and controls all things to ensure that they will occur accordingly. If this were the case, one could hardly argue for free human agency because any activity taken as one freely chosen and decided would already have been determined to take place in that way.

This in essence is the problem at which Abū al-Barakāt hints in his logic. Therefore, the fact that he approaches this problem differently is not surprising. In roughly one page, he brings together the concepts of future contingency, foreknowledge, human volition, and divine causation. He hastily moves from one notion to another, setting aside many of the details mentioned in both Aristotle's *On Interpretation* 9 as well as those clarified by al-Fārābī in his commentary.<sup>23</sup> As

21 See Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Sharḥ al-Fārābī li-kitāb Aristūṭālīs fi-l-'ibāra* (Bayrūt: al-Maṭba'at al-Kāthūlikiyah, 1960), 81–100; Peter Adamson, 'The Arabic Sea Battle: al-Fārābī on the Problem of Future Contingents,' *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 88:2, 163–188; and Fehrullah Terkan, 'Does Zayd Have the Power Not to Travel Tomorrow? A Preliminary Analysis of al-Fārābī's Discussion on God's Knowledge of Future Human Acts,' *The Muslim World* 94:1, 45–64.

22 It is not clear whether at this stage of his intellectual development, al-Fārābī had advanced a systematic theory of divine knowledge in the way that his successor Avicenna had. It is not obvious whether, according to him, God's knowledge is causative in the sense that it necessitates its object to occur accordingly or whether God cognizes things through universal knowledge. Avicenna was much more explicit in this regard.

23 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, I.2, 93–94.



shall be seen shortly, unlike al-Fārābī, he shows no explicit attempt to reconcile between future contingency and foreknowledge. Instead, he offers an alternative way of understanding causal necessity and divine knowledge. As shall be demonstrated in the second section of this study, Abū al-Barakāt distinguishes two types of necessary events: events that are causally predetermined (those that are foreknown by God) and events that are causally determined (those that are not foreknown by God but are determined by their immediate causes). Human voluntary acts are understood to be of the second type (i.e., causally determined).

Abū al-Barakāt starts from a question concerning the classification of propositions: which are those propositions that lie within the domain of the law of contradiction?<sup>24</sup> Following faithfully the Peripatetic tradition, he asserts that no two contradictory statements can both be true (technically known as the law of non-contradiction): If one is definitely true, the other is definitely false (technically known as the law of excluded middle).<sup>25</sup> This rule, he states, applies to statements about the past and the present. In statements such as “Zayd travelled yesterday” and “Zayd did not travel yesterday,” once the requirements of contradiction are fulfilled (namely, that the two statements share the same subject, object, respect, and time) and one of the contradictory pair of events has actually happened, which statement is true and which is false can be promptly identified.<sup>26</sup> This also includes statements about non-contingent future events – those that are either necessary (*darūri*), such as the motions of celestial spheres and the like, or impossible (*muṣṭani*), such as the logical impossibility of the statement “the part is bigger than the whole.”<sup>27</sup> Evidently, the statements affirming or denying these particular events have a determinate truth value: their truth or falsity, Abū al-Barakāt asserts, can be easily assigned because the events themselves are either necessary or impossible.<sup>28</sup>

24 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, 94.

25 Here we see him combine the law of contradiction with the law of excluded middle, without clarifying the difference between them. One suggestion is that he does not see any significant difference between the two laws. Another suggestion is that he indeed realizes the difference between them but considers such a difference to be a sub-issue that bears no relation to the main topic of discussion. Henceforth, I shall use only Abū al-Barakāt's formulation, i.e., ‘the law of contradiction’.

26 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, I.2., 93–94.

27 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, 94. The above-mentioned examples are quoted from chapters 3 and 4 of the second part of the logic of *al-Mu'tabar*. Abū al-Barakāt provides them in the course of his treatment of the questions concerning the modes (*jihāt*) and matter (*mādda*) of a proposition.

28 Here Abū al-Barakāt adapts the statistical model of modalities advanced by Aristotle, which identifies modes with temporal frequencies: the necessary is that which always exists, the impossible is that which never exists, and the possible is that which sometimes exists and sometimes does not exist.

The situation is noticeably different with statements about future contingents. This includes all events whose realization is neither necessary nor impossible.<sup>29</sup> In other words, this refers to events that can either happen or not happen.<sup>30</sup> Again, Abū al-Barakāt is seen to adhere to the traditional interpretation advanced by late ancient commentators. He maintains that these statements are subject to the law of contradiction and that they must have truth values: they are either true or false. Nonetheless, he adds that “neither one of the contradictories is yet to be definitely true or false.”<sup>31</sup> To elaborate his point, he provides an example: “Zayd will write tomorrow” and “Zayd will not write tomorrow,”<sup>32</sup> which he likely quotes from the section in Avicenna’s *Shifā* corresponding to Aristotle’s *On Interpretation*.<sup>33</sup> He explains that when the law of contradiction is heeded, one member of this contradictory pair is definitely true while the other is definitely false. Nonetheless, when considering their mode of existence, which in this case is a *mere* possibility or contingency, and their assigned time, which is the future, their truth values remain indefinite. This is because the events to which these statements correspond are neither actual nor causally necessary.<sup>34</sup>

If he is being read correctly, Abū al-Barakāt adapts a standard interpretation of the principle of bivalence (PB) – the principle that every meaningful assertoric statement is either true or false. In effect, PB enforces determinism because every statement is either definitely true or definitely false. There is no obstacle in applying PB without restriction to contradictories about past and non-contingent future events as their truth values have already been assigned. The problem lays solely on future contingency. If PB is applied without restriction to statements about future contingents, the future will be determined or “inevitable,” and the contingency will be threatened. Abū al-Barakāt appears to have been aware of the serious consequences of determinism, especially for free human agency. Therefore, he is seen to shift the

29 Abū al-Barakāt rejects the notion of the one-sided common possible (‘not impossible’) while strictly adopting the two-sided contingent possible (‘not necessary and not impossible’).

30 Abū al-Barakāt was quite aware that some events may be contingent in themselves but cannot but exist. He refers to them as the perpetual necessary existents that can neither change, in terms of affirmation and negation, nor be hindered in their act. An example is provided by the celestial spheres: They are possible in themselves but exist necessarily by virtue of their cause, and can by no means cease to exist or act differently.

31 al-Baghdādi, *al-Mu‘tabar*, I.2, 94.

32 al-Baghdādi, *al-Mu‘tabar*, 94.

33 I am grateful to Professor Robert Wisnovsky for this reference.

34 al-Baghdādi, *al-Mu‘tabar*, 94.

discussion immediately to the question of human freedom by correlating it with the indeterministic character of future contingency. The point he appears to want his readers to grasp is that one can only exercise one's freedom if future contingency is considered to be intrinsically indefinite. Put differently, that future contingents are definite implies that human beings have no freedom. Such an assumption creates a problem for the belief in the voluntariness of human acts. In order to avoid lapsing into determinism, or to be more accurate, into fatalism, Abū al-Barakāt accepts the standard interpretation advanced by late ancient commentators. While maintaining that contradictory statements about future contingents are indeed either true or false (and thus endorsing PB), he emphasizes that their truth values are not yet definite: neither statement has yet to become true or false.

So far, what Abū al-Barakāt has introduced is a mere commentary on the problem of logical determinism that occurs in Aristotle's *On Interpretation* 9. The reading he suggests is similar to the traditional interpretation advanced by earlier commentators. Yet as the discussion goes on, Abū al-Barakāt starts to consider the problem of theological determinism. He does so by first introducing the issue of definiteness (*ta 'ayyun*), by means of which he discusses the problem of foreknowledge. He writes:

It [one of the equally possible alternatives] becomes definite once it has actually happened. Likewise, if it [the future contingent] becomes definite (*ta 'ayyana*) for someone, be it an angel, a prophet, or an astronomer, it will not be contingent (*mumkin*) for the one who knows. Rather, for him [the one who knows], it will have become necessary (*darūri*), according to the definitions of both the contingent and the necessary. As for [existence in the] mind (*al-dhihni*), [the future contingent becomes definite] because the one who knows was not speculating; rather, he was certain. This is because if he were speculating, it [the future contingent] would not have been definite, even if it were likely [to happen]. As for existence in re, one of the two possible alternatives of the contingent will definitely not exist compared to the other, unless there is a cause. Considering its necessitating cause, [the future contingent] becomes necessary and not contingent. It is contingent in itself but not by virtue of its necessitating cause; rather, it becomes necessary by virtue of its necessitating cause. Likewise, in the case of [existing in the] mind, it becomes definite for a reason (*sabab*).<sup>35</sup>

The concept of *ta 'ayyun*, which Abū al-Barakāt might have quoted from Avicenna,<sup>36</sup> corresponds to al-Fārābī's concept of *'alā al-taḥṣīl*; both refer to the

35 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, 94; the translation is mine.

36 In the course of his discussion of future contingents, Avicenna employs the concept *ta 'ayyun* instead of al-Fārābī's concept of *'alā al-taḥṣīl*. See Avicenna, *Shifā, 'Ibāra*, 65–75.

states of definiteness of truth value. In this context, Abū al-Barakāt allows for two ways in which the truth value of a future contingent statement becomes definite (*ta'ayyana*); this is either by virtue of the corresponding events actually happening or by virtue of their being foreknown. But in order to fully understand the concept of *ta'ayyun*, one point needs to be mentioned concerning Abū al-Barakāt's conception of modalities. On his part, as the passage above shows, he references his earlier discussion on the concepts of necessity and possibility. This discussion is found in Chapters 3 and 4 of the second part on logic in *al-Mu'tabar*, where he addresses the question of the modes (*jihāt*) and substance (*mādda*) of propositions.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, no thorough studies to date are found concerning how he understands modalities and how they function in his philosophy, particularly in his metaphysics. This task is beyond the scope of the present study, and I shall thus only commit to the remarks that are relevant to the topic.

In the course of his discussion on modalities, Abū al-Barakāt tends to merge the Aristotelian and Avicennian models. At the onset, he accepts Aristotle's statistical model, which identifies the modalities with a temporal frequency: the necessary is that which exists always, the impossible is that which never exists and the possible is that which sometimes exists and sometimes does not exist. As he goes on to elucidate the various ramifications of each mode of existence, he shifts to Avicenna's model, which identifies the modes of existents with their ontological states: (1) those that are necessary exist by virtue of themselves, whereas (2) those that are possible or impossible do not exist by virtue of themselves, and (3) those that are possible, unlike those that are impossible, exist by the virtue of another. In effect, he depends heavily on Avicenna's ontological modality, particularly in the metaphysics of *al-Mu'tabar*.<sup>38</sup> This supports Wisnovsky's argument that Avicenna's account of modality significantly shaped both theological and philosophical discourses for centuries after him.

Returning back to the passage, Abū al-Barakāt has been mentioned to have allowed two ways of definiteness (*ta'ayyun*). In the state of actualization, a contingent event becomes definite or necessary because one of equally possible alternatives is actually happening. In this case, the mode of existence changes from mere contingency to necessity. In the above-mentioned example, the act of writing

37 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, I.2, chs 3-4.

38 An example of his reliance on Avicenna's ontological modality is his employment of the latter's argument from contingency. See al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.1, 20-27.

became necessary at the moment that Zayd began to write. Drawing on Avicenna's theory of modality, Abū al-Barakāt argues that the actualization of an event does not change its essence: it remains possible in itself even though it has already been actualized. Nonetheless, he adds that it has become necessary by virtue of its necessitating causes that preponderate its existence over its non-existence while remaining possible in itself.

Likewise, the definiteness of the future contingent can be fulfilled in the case of foreknowledge. In other words, a future contingent event has become definite (i.e., necessary) when the fact that it will definitely happen is foreknown. Abū al-Barakāt postulates that if someone, whether an angel, prophet, or astronomer, for some reason (*sabab*) has true knowledge that Zayd will definitely write tomorrow, then the truth value of this event is definite (*ta'ayyana*) for this individual only. Although this event has not yet been actualized, which entails that it may be otherwise, it becomes necessary as a result of someone's having true knowledge of whether or not it will happen. In such a case, the state of definiteness corresponds to those individuals' judgments that something will either happen or not. If their knowledge is a mere assumption (*ẓinn*), the truth value of the future contingent will remain indefinite.<sup>39</sup> By contrast, having true knowledge about any future contingent event will definitely, as Abū al-Barakāt states, "transfer the possibility (*imkān*) to either necessity (*darūra*) [= existence] or impossibility (*imtinā*) [= non-existence]," even though this event is in itself a possibility.<sup>40</sup>

Abū al-Barakāt's aim is to apparently persuade the reader that a relation exists between the modal status of the object of thought and what is presently known about it. It will remain a possibility as long as either nothing is known about it or incomplete knowledge has been obtained about it. By contrast, it becomes necessary not in itself, but by virtue of having true knowledge about which of the equally possible alternatives will be fulfilled. On the surface, al-Fārābī's and Abū al-Barakāt's approaches to this problem appear similar: Both philosophers attempt to approach the problem by integrating the ontological model of modality into their discussions. Nonetheless, Abū al-Barakāt makes an interesting deviation from al-Fārābī's solution. As has been seen, al-Fārābī attempts to resolve the problem by asserting the compatibility of foreknowledge and human free will. From a logical standpoint, Zayd is still able *now* not to travel tomorrow, even though

39 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, I.2, 94.

40 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, I.2, 80.

God foreknows that he will definitely travel tomorrow. Although Abū al-Barakāt accepts that such an event is possible in itself, it seems that he does not think that Zayd is still able *now* to act differently. The event becomes *now* necessary, at least epistemologically. Put briefly, if it is foreknown *now* that Zayd will definitely write tomorrow, it is necessary *now* that Zayd will write tomorrow, even though the act of writing has not been actualized yet.

The foreknowledge attributed to angels, prophets, or astronomers being by no means causative is worth mentioning. It does not cause this event to occur as it does. What Abū al-Barakāt suggests here is that because those individuals have *absolute* knowledge that an event will occur, this event becomes epistemologically necessary. In other words, the possibility of knowing any future contingent event entails the necessity of that event. But can the same reasoning be applied to divine knowledge? Can everything that is foreknown to God being necessary only be argued epistemologically? Abū al-Barakāt does not provide a clear answer here. Yet as will become clear in the metaphysical discussion, he considers divine knowledge to be intrinsically causative, and hence one cannot think of divine foreknowledge but as precluding free will.

In the rest of the section on logic, he speaks about human volition (*irāda*) and refers, albeit briefly, to the concept of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*. The following two passages deal with the two issues respectively:

This is the meaning of Aristotle's statement: If it is not contingent the deliberation (*ru'ya*) and preparedness (*isti'dād*) would be be invalid. [...] He [Aristotle] meant that the [actual] existence of contingents (*mumkināt*) depends on causes (*ashbāb*): if these causes exist, the contingents will be fulfilled, and if they [the causes] do not exist, they [the contingents] will not exist either. Deliberation and intention (*qaṣd*) are among the causes. Take for example the person who is being educated: he can [choose] either to learn or not to learn. If he, along with other causes, wills (*arāda*) and intends (*qaṣada*) to learn, he will learn. [Conversely,] if he neither wills nor intends to learn, he will not learn, even if the other causes existed.<sup>41</sup>

This passage comes immediately after Abū al-Barakāt's emphasis that foreknowledge of a future contingent entails its necessity. He correlates contingency with human will, pointing to the need to maintain the first in order to preserve one's conviction of humans as free agents: if everything must happen the way it

41 al-Baghdādi, *al-Mu'tabar*, I.2, 94; the translation is mine.

does, deliberation (*ru`ya*) and preparedness (*isti`dād*) become absurd. In such cases, one cannot argue that humans act freely. Abū al-Barakāt continues by arguing that human will (*irāda*) is not only a condition of one's acting voluntarily, but more primarily, it is the *determining factor* or a *necessary* condition of these acts. It is the state through which a rational being is capable of choosing either to do or not to do something. For example, humans freely choose either to learn or not. The act of learning, as the passage explains, depends on a cluster of causes, among these being the student's will (*irāda*) to learn. If these causes are present altogether, the act of learning will occur, whereas if the student neither wills nor decides to learn, no learning will take place even if the other causes are present. Hence, Abū al-Barakāt's intention in this passage is to persuade the reader that one's voluntary acts are self-determined: they depend on the ability to make choices and manage one's own life. By deliberating on the motives and the antecedent conditions, humans are able to exercise will and act accordingly. As an attempt to validate his opinion, Abū al-Barakāt ascribes this to Aristotle, claiming that it is the accurate way to interpret the latter's position on future contingency and human will.

Abū al-Barakāt moves on to explain how the act of volition is generated and how it is related to *al-qaḍā` wa-l-qadar*, stating:

[A] That which is determined by means of God's immutable Decree and Determination (*al-qaḍā` wa-l-qadar*) is as such a result of its causes. Volition and intention are among these caused causes. [B] This is because the volition of the willing person has a necessitating cause [that causes its existence]. This necessitating cause cannot proceed from volition; otherwise, this second volition would have to be caused. This [necessitating cause] is either known or unknown. It can be known, as in the example of our decision to eat as a result of feeling hungry. It is worth noting that the state of hunger is not due to our volition. If a person holds the belief that one's volition is not caused by causes that are either known or unknown to us, such a person does not understand *al-qaḍā` wa-l-qadar* appropriately.<sup>42</sup>

For the sake of clarity, I have divided the passage into two sections and will elaborate section [B] first before moving back to section [A]. In section [B], Abū al-Barakāt talks about the act of volition (*irada*) itself: How is it generated? His main intention is to show that human volition is causally determined. It needs a cause to stimulate it, for otherwise it would not be generated: Without the cause, the agent would be incapable of making a decision as neither of the alternatives would

42 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu`tabar*, I.2, 94; my translation.

be preferable to the other. These causes, as the passage states, are either known or unknown. Hunger, for instance, is a natural cause or motive. It stimulates the human desire and intention to eat. In the process of eating, one decides to act in accordance with the motive. As for the unknown cause or motive, Abū al-Barakāt does not provide further details here, but he does so in his section on metaphysics. There he reiterates the same argument, giving the example of angels whispering to the human soul so that they motivate the person to act in a specific way.<sup>43</sup>

But does Abū al-Barakāt contradict himself when he claims humans to have free choice and that human volitions are causally determined? Given that human volition is necessitated by its determining causes, one might think that one has been forced to do the actions one performs. The problem becomes more critical if the determining causes, or the circumstances antecedent to one's choices, are thought to be causally predetermined in the sense that they are predestined by a knowing and a willing being, namely God.<sup>44</sup> How does Abū al-Barakāt then tackle the problem? To answer this question, I shall move to section [A] of the above excerpt. To recall, Abū al-Barakāt states, "That which is determined by means of God's immutable Decree and Determination [*al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*] is as such a result of its causes. Volition and intention are among these caused causes."<sup>45</sup>

This sentence shows voluntary acts to be included in *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*. Nonetheless, it does not clarify whether human acts are causally predetermined or causally determined. What I mean is that whether God's immutable Decree and Determination includes in detail all the causal events that are to happen in the physical world is not clear. Does God from past eternity foreknow and will all events that occur, and does He control them to ensure that they will occur accordingly? The sentence says only that God has predestined that everything must have a cause and that human volition, although it is a cause in itself, is among these caused things. This ambiguity results from the fact that Abū al-Barakāt does not provide a definition of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*. Having said that, two views can be drawn from the passage as a whole. The first is a predeterministic view: Everything must occur according to *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*, which refers to God's absolute knowledge, will

43 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 191.

44 Roughly speaking, causal and theological determinism seem to be similar insofar as they both refer to the idea that every event is necessitated by antecedent events and conditions. Nonetheless, theological determinism can be seen as a distinct form of causal determinism, in which the antecedent causes and conditions are predetermined by God.

45 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, I.1, 94.



and power. In this case, human will is merely hypothetically but not genuinely free inasmuch as human voluntary acts are eternally determined by God. The second is the deterministic view: Everything is *causally determined* by its necessitating cause. In this case, *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar* may be taken to refer only to the universal principles that God has eternally designed to govern universal processes. Divine foreknowledge does not encompass the individual events in the world in detail. Instead, God foreknew the principles according to which events in the cosmos are arranged. If this is the case, no incompatibility occurs between *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar* and Abū al-Barakāt's argument that human actions are self-determined: God predestined that human beings enjoy free will, through which they bring about their voluntary acts. One can argue that God indeed foreknows that I will freely choose either to learn or not to learn. God also foreknows all the possible outcomes that I can reach by means of my free will. Yet He does not foreknow which decision I will eventually make. In this case, my free will is the genuine and the immediate determining cause of my voluntary act. In the following section, that Abū al-Barakāt adheres to the second view will become clear.

## 2. The Metaphysical Discussion: The Historical Debate Concerning Human Freedom

Up to the time of Abū al-Barakāt, three main tendencies were found concerning the problem of human free will: religious libertarianism, religious predestination, and metaphysical determinism. The Mu'tazilites were the principal representatives of religious libertarianism. Their famous adversaries were the Ash'arites, who were the key representatives of religious predestination. Roughly speaking, the dispute over human free will between these two schools was chiefly about whether or not human beings perform their acts autonomously. More precisely, they focused their debate on the relation between the divine attribute of power (*qudra*) and human agency. On their part, the Mu'tazilites contended that humans perform their acts independently from God: they are the real agents of their voluntary acts. By doing so, they sought to preserve their concept of divine justice (*'adl*), which constitutes one of the key fundamentals of their school, and to affirm humans' moral responsibility for their actions. Whereas the Mu'tazilites put great emphasis on divine justice, the Ash'arites sought to safeguard divine omnipotence. For them, the act of creation is attributed solely to God: He is the only Creator and hence the real agent or efficient cause of any caused effect. Accordingly, they denied that a human being could act independently. Attributing efficiency to humans imposes restrictions on

God's absolute power (*qudra*), which inevitably undermines His sovereignty. The Ash'arites, however, sought to find a way to reconcile divine omnipotence with human freedom for the purpose of affirming human moral responsibility and obligation. In this endeavor, they invented the doctrine of acquisition (*kasb*) which means that humans acquire (*yaktasib*) or perform their acts by a "temporary power-to-act" (*qudra muḥdatha*) created in them by God. Although this "temporary power-to-act" allows humans to perform their voluntary acts and warrants the attribution of a kind of agency to them, (i.e., to be regarded as an agent [*fā'il*]), God remains the real agent and Creator of both the acts and their results.<sup>46</sup>

The situation was different in regard to the question of divine foreknowledge and its relation to human free will. Though not one of the major topics of debate between the Mu'tazilites and the Ash'arites, neither was it entirely absent from their discussions. In *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, al-Ash'arī states that some of the early Mu'tazilites such as Hishām ibn 'Amr (d. 218 AH/833 AD) had rejected God's foreknowledge of future events based on their rejection of the notion of the thingness of the non-existent (*shay'īyyat al-ma'dūm*).<sup>47</sup> In a relatively mature phase of the Mu'tazilites' history, attempts were made at tackling the question of God's foreknowledge and human free will, albeit indirectly. In his *Uyūn al-Masā'il wa-l-Jawābāt*, al-Ka'bī (d. 319/931) narrates a debate between him and an anonymous atheist. Throughout the debate the atheist frequently asks: How could God have created those whom He foreknew to disobey Him? Do not divine wisdom, mercy, and justice entail that He should not create them? On his part, the atheist seems not to question the issue of the incompatibility of God's foreknowledge and human free will. Rather, he attempts to show the inconsistency of both the Mu'tazilite theory of divine justice and their insistence that God does not do evil. The atheist seems to believe that the creation of those foreknown to become unbelievers is an act of evil. Interestingly, Abū al-Barakāt mentions an argument that is relatively similar to that of the atheist. In his response, al-Ka'bī does not state explicitly whether God foreknows human voluntary actions. Instead, he aims at defending divine justice, asserting that God's creation of those whom He foreknows to become

46 For more details on the debates concerning the createdness of human acts, see William Montgomery Watt, *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam* (London: Luzac, 1948); *id.*, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1973), 189–194; and Binyamin Abrahamov, 'A Re-examination of Ash'arī's Theory of *kasb* according to *Kitāb al-Luma'*', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1989), 210–221.

47 Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa-ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥī al-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, (Cairo: Maktabat al-nahḍa al-miṣriyya, 1950), Part I, 219.

unbelievers does not conflict with His justice, nor does it lead to the conclusion the atheist seeks to establish (i.e., that God does something evil). For al-Ka‘bī, God’s actions such as creation, obligation, and punishment relate to His goodness and mercy. On the contrary, unbelief is a purely human act based on human choice.<sup>48</sup> In his book *al-Intiṣār*, al-Khayyāt follows the same line of argument as al-Ka‘bī, yet he is much more explicit in asserting God’s foreknowledge of human acts.<sup>49</sup> In the later and more disciplined stage of their thought, the Mu‘tazilites argued for the compatibility of God’s foreknowledge with human voluntary acts. In his *Taṣaffuḥ al-Adilla*, Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044), one of the last Mu‘tazilite scholars, takes it upon himself to defend the school’s position. He argues that divine knowledge is informational in the sense that God only foresees and informs, but does not necessitate (*yūjīb*), what man will do out of his free will.<sup>50</sup> On the other side, the Ash‘arites were in agreement that God both foreknows and wills future events, including human voluntary acts.

In the *falsafa* tradition, Avicenna stands as the leading representative of metaphysical determinism, a concept which lies at the heart of his emanation theory. He enforces a systematic view of universal causality in which everything that exists is necessitated by its complete cause. The events occurring in both the heavenly and the earthly world form a chain of successive and interconnected causes, all of which go all the way back to the cause of causes (i.e., God). Human voluntary acts present no exception. They are likewise understood to be causally determined. They are determined by a set of causes, including motives, lack of impediments, and human will, according to which they must occur and without which they cannot occur.<sup>51</sup>

48 ‘Abd Allāh ibn Aḥmad al-Ka‘bī, *Kitāb al-Maḡālāt wa-ma‘hu ‘Uyūn al-masā’il wa-l-jawābāt*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd Rājīḥ Kurdī and Huseyin Hanṣu (‘Ammān: Dar al-Fath, 2018), 645–676. The debate appears in *‘Uyūn al-masā’il wa-l-jawābāt*, discussion 55 (‘On Doing Just and Evil’ [fi l-ta‘dīl wa-l-tajwīr]).

49 ‘Abd al-Raḥīm ibn al-Khayyāt, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār wa-l-radd ‘alā ibn al-Rawandī al-mullḥid mā qaṣada bihi min al-kadhīb ‘alā l-muslimīn wa-l-ṭa‘n ‘alayhim*, ed. H. S. Nyberg (Cairo: Maṭba‘at al-kutub al-miṣrīyah, 1925), 118–124.

50 Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, *Taṣaffuḥ al-adilla*, ed. by Wilferd Madelung and Sabine Schmidtke (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2006), 116–118.

51 For more details on Avicenna’s position concerning human freedom, see George F. Hourani, ‘Ibn Sina’s “Essay on the Secret of Destiny,”’ *BSOAS* 2.1 (1966), 25–48; Jules Janssens, ‘The Problem of Human Freedom in Ibn Sinā,’ in *id.*, *Ibn Sinā and His Influence on Arabic and Latin World* (Hampshire and Burlington: Ashgate, 1988), 112–118; Catarina Belo, *Chance and Determinism in Avicenna and Averroes* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007) and Yāsin ‘Ammārī, *Ibn Sinā wa-mushkilat al-ḥurriyat al-insāniya* (Tunis: Majma‘ al-aṭraṣh li-l-kitāb al-mukhtaṣṣ, 2014).

Undoubtedly, Abū al-Barakāt was aware of these ongoing debates. Therefore, seeing him critically engage with the above-mentioned views in the course of formulating his personal opinion is not surprising. But although he was aware of them, he did not give much attention to providing a detailed and accurate account of the doctrines of his predecessors. Rather, he selected the opinions and arguments that were both easily refutable and more likely to help him construct his own opinion, which he claimed no one else had ever put forth before. He even avoided, either deliberately or inadvertently, attributing the positions he criticized to their authors. Despite the fact that he does not reference them, the views he reports seem to correspond with recognizable historical precedents to a great extent.

The first thing that attracts our attention is Abū al-Barakāt's attempt to make the discussion revolve around one single question: Whether God's foreknowledge is compatible with possessing free will. Apparently for him, if one wants to determine whether humans are free and morally responsible for their actions, one must discuss this question in terms of its relation with divine omniscience rather than divine omnipotence. This is noticed in the definition of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*, which he singles out and about which he claims all scholars are in agreement.<sup>52</sup> With respect to *al-qaḍā'*, it has been defined as the universal decree (*amr kullī*), which exists either in God's foreknowledge, as philosophical metaphysicians and religious scholars uphold, or in the motion of the spheres, as determinist natural philosophers have been wont to say.<sup>53</sup> As for *al-qadar*, it denotes the details of the universal decree: It indicates that everything is brought about in time and place and with the measure and manner (*kayfiyya*) that have been *predetermined* by either God's foreknowledge or the motion of the spheres.<sup>54</sup> Abū al-Barakāt then gives an example of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*, which *only* reflects the view held by the philosophical metaphysicians and the theologians (these being the two groups to which Abū al-Barakāt directs most of his critique). God has eternally decreed the death of every human being and ordained in his foreknowledge the causes of their death, such as the death of Zayd due to natural causes like old age or due to accidental causes like a disease.<sup>55</sup> Abū al-Barakāt comments that in both cases, *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar* by definition refers essentially to God's foreknowledge that has preordained all future events and actions.<sup>56</sup>

52 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 182–183.

53 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 180.

54 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 180.

55 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 180–181.

56 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 182.

That this definition is relatively close to Avicenna's is worth mentioning. In his *Risāla fī-l-qaḍā'*, Avicenna introduced a definition of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar* through which he epitomizes his deterministic theory. He defines divine decree (*qaḍā'*) as God's first single decision (*ḥukm*) that comprises everything, while referring determination (*qadar*) to mean God's arrangement of the things, one after another, that arise through that first decree.<sup>57</sup> I suggest that on his part, Abū al-Barakāt approves of Avicenna's definition, yet he extends it to include other schools of thought regardless of their philosophical and theological differences. For the metaphysical philosophers and theologians, as he takes them to say, *al-qaḍā'* is nothing but God's universal decree, whereas *al-qadar* is the realization of His decree in all particulars. By grouping these various views together, Abū al-Barakāt reduces the entire debate to the one single point in which these two groups agreed, namely divine foreknowledge, while setting aside any details that might not serve the point he is seeking to establish.

Abū al-Barakāt deliberately avoids discussing arguments regarding the relation between human action and divine omnipotence – this being, as we have mentioned, the main controversial point between the Mu'tazilite and the Ash'arite scholars. Instead, he reformulates their opinions focusing on their position on God's foreknowledge. Abū al-Barakāt seems to hope to demonstrate that, as far as divine omniscience is concerned, their opinions are conflicting. He adapts the same dialectical strategy with respect to Avicenna. He speaks briefly about an anonymous philosopher that attempts to reconcile the doctrine of the early philosophers, who believed that God knows only Himself, with the opinion espoused by the religious scholars who believe that God knows particulars in a particular way.<sup>58</sup> This anonymous philosopher, Abū al-Barakāt states, believed that God does not know particulars,<sup>59</sup> yet His knowledge encompasses everything including the motions of the spheres and their effects.<sup>60</sup> Obviously, this is the view of Avicenna as Abū al-Barakāt understood it.

Abū al-Barakāt takes the position held by the anonymous philosopher to mean nothing but *predetermination*: God has eternally decreed that the world, both as a

57 Avicenna, *Risāla fī-l-qaḍā'*, *Lettre au vizir Abu Sa'd: Editio princeps d'après le manuscrit de Bursa, traduction de l'arabe, introduction, notes et lexique*, ed. by Yahya Michot (Beirut: Les éditions al-Bouraq, 2000), 103.

58 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 182 and 192.

59 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 191.

60 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 182.

whole and in its particulars, exists the way it exists. This divine decree, which is nothing but God's foreknowledge as he repeatedly says, encompasses everything proceeding necessarily from God. This includes the motion of the spheres and its resultant effects. As far as human free will is concerned, Abū al-Barakāt takes the anonymous philosopher to mean that human voluntary actions are likewise predetermined as they are subject to the permanent and circular motion of spheres: They must occur in their determined time, place, and measure.<sup>61</sup> In Chapter 9, Abū al-Barakāt critically considers Avicenna's conception of divine knowledge and, more specifically, the latter's claim that God does not know the particulars in a particular way. Abū al-Barakāt attempts to persuade his readers that Avicenna's claim creates a problem for belief in religious commandments. One will show no interest in observing religious commandments if the God one worships is found to not know them.<sup>62</sup> Obviously, this contradicts his previous claim that Avicenna is a predeterminist. But as has just been mentioned, Abū al-Barakāt's main intention is not to provide an accurate account of his predecessors' doctrines. Rather, he picks the points he thinks can be easily subjected to criticism.

The religious libertarians were the other group to which Abū al-Barakāt directs his criticism. In fact, he does not think that they were completely off the mark. Like them, he endorses a strong belief in human freedom and divine justice. Nonetheless, he finds their argumentation inconsistent in its own merits and not fully satisfying. The religious libertarians, as Abū al-Barakāt interprets them, conceived human acts and those pertaining to religious commandments and prohibitions in particular to be intrinsically contingent. Accordingly, they excluded them from the domain of divine determination (*qadar*), which for them encompasses only what is necessary (*ḍarūrī*). The human acts will remain in the realm of contingency (*imkān*) until humans, by means of their free will and choice, decide to act.<sup>63</sup> In the second half of Chapter 8, Abū al-Barakāt narrates a debate between a metaphysical determinist and a religious libertarian.<sup>64</sup> While the former tries to demonstrate the inconsistency of the arguments advanced by the religious libertarian, the latter tries to defend his doctrine. Abū al-Barakāt ends the debate by showing that the determinists' objections are more convincing while the

61 al-Baghdādi, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 180–181.

62 al-Baghdādi, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 192–193.

63 al-Baghdādi, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 181–182.

64 al-Baghdādi, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 184–187.

religious libertarians' defense is untenable.<sup>65</sup> In what follows, I shall address the key objection on determinism that Abu l-Barakāt directs against the libertarian, and which Abū al-Barakāt personally endorses. I admit that I find the structure of the debate incoherent. It is scattered throughout Chapter 8. Therefore, I will not commit myself to following Abū al-Barakāt's order of the debate; rather, I will reorganize the objection in a manner that makes it more structured.

However, before moving to Abū al-Barakāt's determinist objection, one point needs to be clarified. On the one hand, the position of the libertarian, as presented by Abū al-Barakāt, is consistent to a great extent with that of the Mu'tazilites. Both positions evoke a strong belief in divine justice and human free will. On the other hand, however, the way Abū al-Barakāt formulated the opinion of the libertarian is not found in Mu'tazilite literature as far as I can tell. The Mu'tazilites, up to the time of Abū al-Barakāt, did not use the concepts of necessity (*ḍarūra*) and contingency (*imkān*) in this context in the same way he does when presenting the opinion of the libertarian. Having said that, I have argued elsewhere that the libertarian's position is indeed that of the Mu'tazilites, albeit not quoted directly from any of their works. I have showed that Abū al-Barakāt's treatment of the question of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar* in the metaphysics of *al-Mu'tabar* is but a modification of Avicenna's discussion of the same subject in his *Risāla fī l-qadar* where he debates a Mu'tazilite.<sup>66</sup>

Let me now return to *al-Mu'tabar*. At the very end of Chapter 8, Abū al-Barakāt objects to the religious libertarians' conception of contingency and divine determination. He states:

Why has it [i.e., the human voluntary act] been excluded from His determination, which necessarily proceeds from his knowledge? Does He foreknow it or not? They [the libertarians] cannot say that He foreknows everything other than it. And if He does foreknow it, it cannot but occur in accordance with the manner that He foreknew it would be. [Hence,] if it is included in His foreknowledge, it will also be included in His necessary judgment (*ḍarūri ḥukmihi*) that has been ascribed to the divine decree and determination (*al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*).<sup>67</sup>

As has just been mentioned, the religious libertarians divided the events in the world into two categories: necessary events (*ḍarūri*) and contingent events

65 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 186.

66 Based on my doctoral thesis titled: *God, Time, and the World, Abū al-Barakāt Al-Baghdādī's Theory of Divine Temporality*. (in progress at the time of writing)

67 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 187.

(*mumkin*). Strictly speaking, the first category includes all the circumstances under which a human being lives. This extends to the external motivations and the impediments that trigger human will (*irāda*) to act in a specific manner. The religious libertarians argue all these events to be predetermined by God. The second category includes only human voluntary acts: They are excluded from divine determination (*qadar*). The metaphysical determinists find this view rationally inconsistent. On behalf of them, Abū al-Barakāt asks the religious libertarians first about the purpose of excluding human voluntary acts from divine determination. This is a rhetorical question, for Abū al-Barakāt already knows that they maintain this position for the purpose of affirming human responsibility and obligation. He does not even expect an answer but instead moves directly to the next question, which I suggest is of greater interest to him. He asks the religious libertarians whether God foreknows human voluntary actions. The libertarians cannot but admit that God does foreknow them. Abū al-Barakāt finds in their response an opportunity to undermine their position. For him, excluding these sorts of events from divine determination is not sufficient for safeguarding their contingency. As long as these events are foreknown by God, they can by no means remain contingent; instead, they will be necessary (*darūrī*). This recalls the arguments he advanced earlier in his logical account regarding the angel, the prophet and the astronomer. In metaphysics, he applies the same rule to God. However, a difference still exists between the two cases. As mentioned earlier, the knowledge attributed to the prophet, for instance, is not causative and the necessity thereby ascribed to the contingent is merely epistemological.

The situation is quite different with regard to divine eternal knowledge. Abū al-Barakāt seems to perceive God's eternal knowledge to be intrinsically causative in the sense that it necessitates the occurrence of its objects. As the given definition of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar* suggests, divine decree (*al-qaḍā'*) is nothing but God's eternal knowledge. If future contingent events are known to God from past eternity, as the libertarians are forced to admit, these events must have been included in God's necessary decree. In other words, they must be causally *predetermined*. This leaves the libertarians no opportunity to argue for human freedom.

Abū al-Barakāt's determinist objection retargets the libertarian position:

[The determinists say that] God knows the existents He has created, and [that] He knows the actions that proceed from them by virtue of the capacity He created in them. He gave them the capacity and readiness to act and react according to motives and impediments. Accordingly, He knew what proceeds from them at every time and in every



place in accordance with each motive and impediment. The acts and conditions were thus determined by the remote and proximate causes without any increase or decrease. His knowledge encompasses all of this. All things came to be in the manner He knew them to be and He knew that they were going to be. The decree did not escape His knowledge, nor did the determination exceed its limit, which was set by Him.<sup>68</sup>

This passage comes immediately after the presentation of the libertarian position. On their part, the determinists try to persuade the libertarians to agree that the so-called contingency, which they hold characterizes human will, is a mere hypothesis. For the determinists, everything exists necessarily regardless of its time. This necessity arises from divine knowledge, which has predestined the events in the world. This includes the so-called voluntary actions of human beings: These are likewise predetermined because the circumstances under which humans live are predetermined. Hence, the point which the determinists want to demonstrate and on which Abū al-Barakāt agrees is that, in the libertarian account, no sufficient reason is found to exclude human voluntary acts from divine determination (*qadar*) while maintaining that the circumstances antecedent to free choices (i.e., the circumstances under which the choice is made) fall in the domain of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*. Because the circumstances are necessary (*ḍarūrī*), the libertarian cannot but admit that human will and acts are likewise necessary.

As we have mentioned earlier, Abū al-Barakāt finds the determinists' objections to be more convincing. Nonetheless, by the end of Chapter 9, he severely rebuts the position upheld by both metaphysical determinists and religious predeterminists. He states their positions to agree in "the corruption of practical wisdom (*al-ḥikmat al-'amaliyya*) and human arrangements (*al-tadābir al-insāniyya*), inasmuch as they invalidate reward and punishment."<sup>69</sup> Saying that human voluntary actions are predetermined cannot but impose unpleasant theological and ethical problems. These include divine injustice or God's punishing humans for the evil acts they have been compelled to do. Another problem is the lack of divine wisdom, particularly when it comes to religions, which primarily aim at guiding people to God. Religions and religious commandments become pointless. Moreover, value systems become corrupted because people will pay no heed to ethics and values due to their false belief that their acts are predetermined.<sup>70</sup>

68 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 187.

69 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 192.

70 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 194–195.

### 3. Abū al-Barakāt's Solution

The problem with the abovementioned views as Abū al-Barakāt conceives it appears to be that their authors centered the question of human freedom on God rather than on the human being. In other words, they tried to develop their views in a manner that harmonized with their understanding of divine perfection, especially their conception of divine omniscience. This is why their views are logically and theologically inconsistent. From a logical standpoint, the truth value of the contingent is not yet definite or to be more precise, it is *presently* unknown. Hence, voluntary human acts can by no means remain possible if the fashion in which they will happen is known to God in advance. Theologically speaking, the argument for the compatibility of God's foreknowledge and human free will would undermine two religious fundamentals: human moral responsibility and divine justice. As a result, Abū al-Barakāt sets about the task of developing a view that avoids the pitfalls of both alternatives, a view that centers primarily on the human and secondarily on God. In other words, one must proceed from the fact that human beings are free agents and morally responsible for their acts. Based on this fact, the divine attributes and divine knowledge in particular must be redefined in such a manner that one can safeguard the genuineness of human freedom. Evidently, Abū al-Barakāt here shares the religious libertarians' concern for maintaining human moral responsibility and obligations, but unlike them, as I shall shortly show, he takes a crucial step by excluding most future contingents events, including human voluntary acts and the circumstances within which one lives, from divine knowledge.

Having said that, Abū al-Barakāt opens Chapter 9 with the following passage:

It is neither possible nor an object of power that an individual knower comprehensively knows everything that exists in time, that has existed and ceased to exist, and that will exist and come into being. The argument that God, exalted be He, would not fully know does not necessarily implicate deficiency or incapacity in His knowledge, because the impediment is rather from the side of the known object than from the side of the one who knows. The knowledge occurs when the known objects exist in the world. And if existence cannot encompass the finite, what about the infinite which infinitely increases. [...] Rather, the power (*qudra*) and the knowledge of God, exalted be He, encompasses everything in the manner that God wills and wherever He wills, including the distant past (*ghābir sā-lif*), the present existent (*mawjūd ḥāḍir*), and the existent which is in becoming (*kā 'in musta'anif*). He is neither overpowered by doing so, nor does He get tired by continuing to do so. Such is the magnitude of His knowledge, sufficient is such power and expansiveness.<sup>71</sup>

71 al-Baghdādi, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 187.

As the passage shows, Abū al-Barakāt does not hesitate to reject the traditional view of divine omniscience. For him, divine knowledge does not encompass everything, in particular not the things which are yet to happen. He is certainly aware that his argument will not be readily accepted by his potential opponents inasmuch as they see in it a violation of divine perfection. Thus he unsurprisingly begins his proposal by asserting that his argument does not undermine divine perfection. He does so by adapting the typical dialectical strategy that he utilizes each time he proposes a controversial novel idea in *al-Mu'tabar*: He aims at turning the objection against his opponents. The problem lies solely on their misconception of the notion of God's knowledge: The assumed imperfection or deficiency results from the objects of knowledge and not from God. God, by definition, is capable of knowing everything that *can* be known.<sup>72</sup> Yet there are an infinite number of objects or events that can by no means be known because they have not yet come to exist. Hence, if a specific event is not known to God at a certain moment of time, this is not because His knowledge is defective, but because there is no possibility for the event to become known yet.

To fully grasp Abū al-Barakāt's argumentation, I shall briefly refer to his conception of divine knowledge, which has been a subject of a number of studies.<sup>73</sup> Abū al-Barakāt has been argued to consider God's direct awareness of external reality to be of the same kind as man's. On various occasions in his metaphysics, he is seen quite explicitly highlighting the relational characteristic of the divine attribute of knowledge. For him, knowledge denotes the relation between a knower, be it God or a human being and an object of knowledge.<sup>74</sup> Hence, for the act of knowing to be accomplished, three entities must exist: the one who knows, the object of knowledge, and the relation. This means that in order to be known, the object of knowledge must exist either in the mind or in reality; otherwise it will remain unknown. Assuming that God's knowledge encompasses the future leads to a logical dilemma that Abū al-Barakāt intends to avoid, namely that the future both exists and does not exist and is both known and unknown at the same time, which is logically impossible.

72 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 193–194.

73 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, II.6, 388–417; III.1, 1; and 88–93. For more details on Abū al-Barakāt's theory of divine knowledge, see Abdalhakeem al-Khelaifi, *The Psychology of Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī* (PhD Diss., University of Manchester, 1995); Shlomo Pines, 'God's knowledge,' in Pines, *Studies in Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī*; and Aḥmad al-Ṭayyib, *al-Jānib al-naqḍī fī falsafat Abi al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī* (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2004).

74 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.1, 1.

Another argument relates to the notion of infinity. As the most previous cited passage shows, Abū al-Barakāt conceives knowable objects (*ma'lūmāt*)<sup>75</sup> to be infinite in number. Accordingly, they can by no means be fully included in God's knowledge. Logically speaking, if infinity were fully encompassed or known, even by God, it would no longer be infinite, but would instead be finite. This is logically impossible because it contradicts the very nature of infinity, which is to be unlimited.<sup>76</sup>

If divine knowledge does not encompass everything, one may ask, "What does God *presently* know?" In the concluding sentence from the previous cited passage, Abū al-Barakāt responds to this hypothetical question. He classifies the three types of temporal events that are known to God: the distant past (*ghābir sālif*), the present existent (*mawjūd ḥāḍir*), and the existent which is in the process of becoming (*kā'in musta'anif*). As can be seen, the common feature of these temporal events is their actual existence in reality. In the first two types, God knows the events because they either have existed or presently exist. As for the third type, the events actually exist (*kā'in*) but are still in the state of becoming (*musta'anif*). Although they have yet to take place, God is aware of their present state. Abū al-Barakāt does not mention whether God's knowledge encompasses the future. Instead, he continues by arguing that the capacity (*si'a*) of God's knowledge extends only to these three types of temporal events. One could infer that God does not comprehensively foreknow the future and that His knowledge of the events occurring in the physical world in particular is constrained to the time in which events happen.

Let me now revisit the argument made by 'Amārī. By centering his investigation on Abū al-Barakāt's position on both divine and human attributes of power and will, Amārī argued that, for Abū al-Barakāt, humans perform their acts autonomously: They are the real agents of their voluntary acts.<sup>77</sup> I argue that human voluntary acts, namely those that pertain to ethical values and to religious commandments and prohibitions, are also neither foreknown nor willed by God. By combining the two arguments, I can conclude that humans enjoy free will, which refers to their capacity to choose between alternatives. My reading gains its support from the fact that at the end of Chapter 9, Abū al-Barakāt mentions again the concept

75 In this context, Abū al-Barakāt uses an unrestricted definition of the term *ma'lūmāt*. It refers to those things which can be known, and not merely to those which are actually known.

76 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 191.

77 'Amārī, 'Mushkilat hurriyat al-insān 'inda Abi al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī,' 17.

of contingency. In this context, he asserts that contingency must have a reality, as in the case of necessity (*darūra*) and impossibility (*imtinā*).<sup>78</sup> In addition, he correlates the concept of contingency with human will, emphasizing humans' moral responsibility for their actions, and maintains that contingent things do not fall within the realm of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*.<sup>79</sup>

The conclusion one must draw is that, in practical terms, one should think of the future as open rather than predetermined. Although initially promising, this proves problematic, particularly when considering the question of the cosmic order. What I mean is that imposing restrictions on divine knowledge may eventually lead to the collapse of the world order, because God will not only be incapable of foreseeing the future, but due to His lack of knowledge, He will also be unable to interfere with the course of events in the world when needed. In order to avoid falling into this chaos, Abū al-Barakāt aims at redefining divine omniscience in a manner that maintains both the genuineness of human free will and the universal order of the world. I have discussed his alternative definition of divine omniscience elsewhere.<sup>80</sup> Thus, in what follows, I shall merely point to this in brief.

Having excluded future events from divine knowledge, Abū al-Barakāt aims at clarifying the content of divine knowledge in general. In this context, he differentiates between two sets of knowable objects: stable and changeable objects. The first class includes things that cannot be otherwise (i.e., "the natures and *naturata* (*al-ṭabā'ī' wa-l-maṭbū'āt*) that proceed uniformly and invariably at all times and places".<sup>81</sup> These things are included in *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*: They are both known to and willed by God. In any given situation, these things must act according to their natures, and God knows that they will act in such a manner. The second type of things are the infinite temporal events that occur in the physical world. These events are not encompassed in *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*: they are neither foreknown nor willed by God.

Based on this distinction, Abū al-Barakāt adopts a theory of clashes (*muṣādamāt*), in which all events occurring in the physical world are generated by the clash of at least two different bodies or causal chains. This model is seen

78 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 195.

79 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 194.

80 Shehata, *God, Time, and the World*.

81 al-Baghdādī, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 187; the translation is from Pines, 'The Problem of the Eternity of the World, God's Decision and Determination,' 321.

in Avicenna's metaphysical system as well, but unlike Avicenna, who views these clashes as caused by God, albeit indirectly, Abū al-Barakāt argues that some of these causal chains are caused directly by God, whereas others are caused by His angels, others by the motion of the celestial spheres and a fourth type autonomously caused by human beings.<sup>82</sup> These clashes constitute separate, albeit parallel, chains of causation. Both God's direct awareness of universal process and His ability or power (*qudra*) to temporally intervene in world history serve to guarantee His maintenance of the universal world order.

In the discussion on logic, I suggested that Abū al-Barakāt had introduced two categories of necessary events: events that are causally predetermined and events that are causally determined. The first category includes things that cannot be otherwise (*ḍarūrī*) or that act in a uniform manner. Along with the natures and *naturata*, Abū al-Barakāt adds the order of the superlunary realm (*'ālam al-azāl*).<sup>83</sup> As for the second category, it includes most events (both voluntary and natural ones) that occur in the world of generation and corruption as a result of the clashes happening among them. These clashes that occur between voluntary acts or between voluntary and natural acts do not fall within the realm of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*.<sup>84</sup> Instead, they are causally determined by the circumstances in which they occur. In this sense, human voluntary acts are causally determined. Each voluntary act is a product of a set of external and internal causes, including human will itself, arising from the clashes occurring in the physical world.

Now I shall be able to answer the question that remained unsolved in the discussion on logic: Can humans claim to have free will if humans' voluntary acts are causally determined? Abū al-Barakāt seems to not conceive this as a problem. His main concern is to exclude human voluntary acts from *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*, which for him is nothing but God's foreknowledge. He does not intend to deny the fact that human acts are determined by a cluster of internal and external causes. God, angels, and other human beings can be among the causes that might motivate a person to choose to act in a certain way.<sup>85</sup> However, this does not violate human voluntary agency insofar as these causes are not determined by God's foreknowledge and will. For Abū al-Barakāt, a human voluntary act also appears

82 al-Baghdādi, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 191–192.

83 al-Baghdādi, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2.

84 al-Baghdādi, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 188; 192–193.

85 al-Baghdādi, *al-Mu'tabar*, III.2, 190–191.

to become causally determined only after it actually happens. Prior to that, the human being is still able to choose either to perform or not to perform the act, as in the example of the person being educated.

Appealing to an argument *e silentio*, Pines contends that Abū al-Barakāt by no means believes that humans have free will.<sup>86</sup> Abū al-Barakāt does not explicitly use the term *free will* in the discussion on metaphysics. Instead, he asserts particularly in Chapter 9 that human volition is causally determined. Pines seems to understand causal determinism and free will as mutually exclusive and to take this as an indication of Abū al-Barakāt's rejection of human free will. If human volition is causally determined, humans by no means possess free will. But if Abū al-Barakāt does reject human free will, why does he so vehemently criticize the views of both the metaphysical determinist and the religious predeterminist?

Furthermore, why should Abū al-Barakāt say that human voluntary acts are of two types, as Pines claims he does? The first of these consisting of those acts that occur as the result of the intertwining of at least two causal chains, such as meeting a friend by chance. In Pines' interpretation, such events are not foreknown or willed by God, and therefore the concept of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar* does not encompass them. The second type consists of those acts that pertain to religious commandments and prohibitions. Such acts, Pines argues, are foreknown by God and therefore fall within the realm of *al-qaḍā' wa-l-qadar*.<sup>87</sup> As I have mentioned earlier, nowhere in the metaphysical discussion does Abū al-Barakāt explicitly introduce such a distinction. And even if God were assumed to have foreknowledge of some voluntary acts, subsume these acts under the second type, i.e., acts of religious

86 Pines, 'The Problem of the Eternity of the World, God's Decision and Determination,' 324–327.

87 In addition, Pines bases his interpretation on two passages that he quotes not from *al-Mu'tabar*, but from Abū al-Barakāt's commentary on the *Ecclesiastes*. These passages reveal a very predeterministic view, for Abū al-Barakāt explicitly states that all events, including human voluntary acts, are intended and predetermined by God. It seems that Pines attempts to reconcile the two accounts by means of the above-mentioned division. This, however, is not an accurate way to depict Abū al-Barakāt's real position. The commentary, which was composed decades before *al-Mu'tabar*, aims to interpret the teachings that were taught by the author of *Ecclesiastes*, that is, king Solomon, according to the Rabbinic tradition, and all that Abū al-Barakāt there provides is an interpretation of the predeterministic view espoused by the author. This is corroborated by the fact that on occasion, Abū al-Barakāt objects to the author's predeterministic view. After interpreting verses 3–16 of *Ecclesiastes* – which Pines quotes and in which the author reveals his predeterministic view – Abū al-Barakāt expresses briefly his concern that such a view would definitely undermine any argument for divine justice and wisdom, and thereby the practical function of religion (MS Bodl. Pocock 274, foll. 40b–41a). This is, in effect, the same concern that Abū al-Barakāt raises in the metaphysics of *al-Mu'tabar*, which was composed in a mature stage of his scholarly career.

and ethical value. Actually, Pines' suggestion contradicts Abū al-Barakāt's initial purpose of the discussion. As we have seen, he rejects the views of the different schools of thought merely because of their insistence on God's foreknowledge of human voluntary acts, namely those concerning religious and ethical values. For him, their positions weaken the arguments for human moral responsibility for their acts, and for divine justice and wisdom.

To conclude, logically speaking, the contingent is that which can either take place or not take place. Human free will, according to Abū al-Barakāt, is a manifestation of contingency. It indicates the human capability of choosing between acting and not acting in any given situation. As we have seen, Abū al-Barakāt conceives foreknowledge as a threat to the concept of contingency, and hence to human free will. In order for a future contingent to remain contingent, it must remain unknown. On the basis of this, Abū al-Barakāt seems to have no qualms in sacrificing the traditional concept of divine omniscience for the sake of human free will. He does not believe that God's lack of knowledge of most future events, and human acts in particular, is evidence of divine imperfection. The deficiency arises from the side of knowable objects and not from God. Nonetheless, God's omnipresence, direct awareness of all events, and capability to intervene in the course of events in accordance with His wisdom, are clear-cut proofs of His divine sovereignty.

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