

Untangling Determinism: Revisiting the Principle of Sufficient Reason in the Post-Avicennian Debates on Free Will*

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Abstract: Avicenna was one of the premodern philosophers who argued for the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), namely the claim that everything has a cause and that no uncaused beings can exist. One of the consequences of PSR is necessitarianism, which is the assertion that whatever exists actually also exists necessarily because each and every member of the causal chain is determined by antecedent causes. PSR thus goes against human intuition that suggests that things could have been otherwise. My goal is to investigate whether post-Avicennian authors tried to mitigate the necessitarian consequences of PSR by excluding human will from it. I will concentrate on the comparison between Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's (d. 1274) Persian treatise *Jabr va qadar* and his theological summa *Tajrīd al-i'tiqād*. The immediate reason for choosing this issue is al-Ṭūsī's assertions that humans intuitively know that they are autonomous agents of their actions, which seems to contradict the universal applicability of PSR. I will argue that al-Ṭūsī espoused somewhat different views on free will. Depending on the character of the texts and the period in which they were written, sometimes being consistent with Avicenna while other times engaging with Mu'tazilism. I will show how al-Ṭūsī left room for human freedom, however causally ineffective at times, which he understood as a different kind of determination that is able to act independently of the other types of determination to which humans are subject, be they physical or divine. Overall, the discussion tests al-Ṭūsī's allegiance to either Avicennian philosophy or Shi'i theology and even forces him to take a stance against Avicenna's view on knowledge in some of his works.

Keywords: necessitarianism, free will, PSR, determinism, indeterminism, Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, Avicenna

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Much has been said about the extent of Avicenna's determinism, namely whether he had thought everything that exists to be causally determined by one or more systems of causes (e.g., natural, teleological, or divine). On an even stronger claim, in his answer about the modal status of the world, Avicenna was a necessitarian who held that the world as a whole and in all its individual parts could not be different than the way it actually is.¹ The latter possibility of the necessitarian reading of Avicenna has been articulated in the context of his adherence to the Principle of Sufficient Reason (PSR), which is believed to entail necessitarianism.²

PSR was accepted by the majority of post-Avicennian authors who followed Avicenna in understanding causality modally and argued that causes produce their effects necessarily. The question concerns whether PSR is applicable to the whole world as well as God. To be more precise, some authors disagreed with Avicenna because they wanted to qualify PSR to grant freedom of voluntary actions, be they divine or human.³ As for

- 1 As for the important positions taken so far on this matter, they can be divided roughly into two camps, determinist or necessitarian and anti-determinist, but the majority of scholars assert Avicenna's determinism. They include Amélie Marie Goichon, Michael M. Marmura, Jean R. Michot, Richard Frank, Catarina Belo, Maria De Cillis, and George Hourani. Defenders of (a version of) indeterminism are Alfred Ivry, claiming some indeterminacy in Avicenna's account of matter; Lenn E. Goodman, maintaining that Avicenna's modal ontology provides a sufficient account of contingency, and Jules Janssens, arguing that the possibility of ethics requires indeterminism. For a fuller overview and bibliography, see: Jari Kaukua, "Freedom and Responsibility in Avicenna," in *Penser avec Avicenne: De l'héritage grec à la réception latine, en hommage à Jules Janssens*, Jules L. Janssens, D. De Smet, and Meryem Sebti (Eds.), *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales*. Bibliotheca 20 (Leuven ; Paris ; Bristol, CT: Peeters, 2022), 149–50.
- 2 Cf. Kara Richardson, "Avicenna and the Principle of Sufficient Reason," *Review of Metaphysics* 67, no. 4 (2014): 743–68. Richardson claimed that while Avicenna had adhered to PSR, he did not subscribe necessitarianism with his account of contingency, cf. *idem*, 757–68.
- 3 One of the first authors to do this was al-Ghazālī. In the *Tahāfut*, he rejected PSR in human and divine voluntary actions, arguing that a voluntary agent can discriminate between equivalent alternatives without a sufficient reason, cf. *idem*, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, Michael E. Marmura (Tran.), 2nd ed. (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 21–24. However, how consistent he was in the endorsement of this idea is a matter of debate. Michael Marmura and Frank Griffel claimed that divine actions are exempt from PSR throughout al-Ghazālī's works, cf. Michael E. Marmura, "Al-Ghazālī on Bodily Resurrection and Causality in the *Tahāfut* and the *Iqtīṣād*," in *Probing in Islamic Philosophy: Studies in the Philosophies of Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī, and Other Major Muslim Thinkers* (Binghamton: Global Academic Pub., Binghamton University, 2005), 285–95; Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 173, 259. Conversely, Richard Frank holds that al-Ghazālī's account of causality was essentially consistent with Avicenna's, cf. *idem*, *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazālī & Avicenna: Vorgelegt Am 27. April 1991*, *Abhandlungen Der Heidelberger Akademie Der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Jahrg. 1992, 1. Abhandlung* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1992), esp. 62–63, 84–5, and conclusion on p. 86; *idem*, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School* (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 1994), 4., 4. See also: Marmura's review of Frank's book where he challenges Frank's interpretation, cf. "Ghazālīan Causes and Intermediaries," Richard M. Frank (Ed.), *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 1 (1995): 99–100, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3163000>.

Avicenna himself, the implications of his strongly deterministic metaphysics on his views about freedom, will, and responsibility have also been discussed in the context of the contemporary controversies between compatibilism and incompatibilism.⁴ Two recent articles investigated these issues while arriving at different conclusions. Ruffus and McGinnis argued for compatibilism, claiming that God and some humans (i.e., only prophets and sages) can act freely.⁵ Meanwhile, Kaukua held that Avicenna's compatibilism eventually collapses into necessitarianism and does not allow for a meaningful conceptualization of human freedom and responsibility.⁶

I shall refrain from discussing Avicenna's views on the matter apart from saying that I agree that Avicenna does not offer convincing arguments against necessitarianism in the area of ethics. Instead, I will look at the shape of this debate in the 13th century using the texts from al-Ṭūsī and how these were received in the two centuries after to see if he or any of his commentators were willing to find concessions in their

org/10.2307/605311. Most recently, Francesco Zamboni analyzed the views of some of the other 12th-13th century post-Avicennian commentators who had questioned the applicability of PSR on exactly these grounds (i.e., whether it allows for a meaningful notion of freedom in human and divine actions). And so, Ibn al-Malāḥimī modified PSR and claimed that voluntary actions might have motives that make a given action more adequate but do not necessitate it; al-Shahraṣṭānī defended a form of voluntarism in divine actions in which God's knowledge acts as a sufficient reason for His volition; while al-Rāzī consistently affirmed that human actions always require a motive but was hesitant in regards to divine actions, sometimes arguing for voluntarism, sometimes for necessitarianism, and other times remaining silent on the matter, cf. Francesco Omar Zamboni, "What Tips the Scales? Volition, Motivation, and Choice in Fahr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," in *Willing and Understanding Late Medieval Debates on the Will, the Intellect, and Practical Knowledge*, Monika Michałowska, Riccardo Fedriga (Eds., Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2023). Idem, "At the Roots of Causality: Ontology and Aetiology in Avicenna and His Islamic Interpreters (XI–XIII c.)" (Pisa, Scuola Normale Superiore, 2020), 180–94. Griffel claimed al-Rāzī to have upheld a double truth theory on divine agency, "Was Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī an Averroist After All? On the Double-Truth Theory in Medieval Latin and Islamic Thought," in *Studying the Near and Middle East at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, 1935–2018*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Piscataway, NJ, USA: Gorgias Press, 2018), 205–16, <https://doi.org/10.31826/9781463240035-028>. Other reasons to want to qualify PSR are also found, such as whether it applies to the Necessary Existent, cf. Allen Bäck, "Avicenna's Conception of the Modalities," *Vivarium* 30, no. 2 (1992): 242–46. Cf. Richardson, who argued this to not be restricted to possible beings, Richardson, "Avicenna and the Principle of Sufficient Reason," 750.

4 Compatibilists claim that human actions are free because they come from one's will, even if these actions and will are causally determined. On this view, freedom of will is opposed to compulsion or constraint, not necessity. Incompatibilism is the view that these two cannot be reconciled and so are incompatible. This can then lead either to the rejection of free will or the denial of determinism. The latter side of incompatibilism is libertarianism, which claims that freedom means the ability to do otherwise and seems the least tenable given Avicenna's explicit statements.

5 Anthony Ruffus and Jon McGinnis, "Willful Understanding: Avicenna's Philosophy of Action and Theory of the Will," *Archiv Für Geschichte Der Philosophie* 97, no. 2 (June 28, 2015): 160–95, <https://doi.org/10.1515/agph-2015-0007>.

6 Kaukua, "Freedom and Responsibility in Avicenna," 168.

otherwise Avicennian metaphysics so as to grant humans any meaningful sense of freedom of will and choice. By offering a historical and philosophical reconstruction of the post-Avicennian debates on this matter, the paper will contribute to the current understanding of the ongoing debates between contemporary compatibilism and incompatibilism. The paper will also advance knowledge of the 13th- and 14th-century intellectual landscape marked by the continuous rapprochement between Avicennian philosophy and *kalām* theology. While al-Ṭūsī is routinely acknowledged as a thinker instrumental in this rapprochement within the Shi‘i circles, the exact nature of his contributions has not been studied to any sufficient degree.

Before delving into the matter at hand, I want to mention one fact in Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī’s (597-672/1201-1274) intellectual biography. Its division between two periods can be evidenced by certain important shifts in the doctrines analyzed here. The first period of more than 20 years is the time al-Ṭūsī had spent in the Nizārī Isma‘īli community in northern Iran (1233-1256), and the second one is the Ilkhanid period, namely the time after the Mongol conquest of Baghdad. The most important difference in his intellectual activities during these two periods is that most of his philosophical works (i.e., in which he defends Avicennian philosophy) come from the first Isma‘īli period, while his works on philosophical theology belong to the Ilkhanid period. Here, I will be looking mainly at the two texts most representative of these two periods.

The first text is *Jabr va qadar* [Determinism and Destiny];⁷ this Persian treatise is al-Ṭūsī’s fullest exposition of the topic of free will. The treatise has some references to distinctly Isma‘īli features⁸ but is overall a rather faithful interpretation of Avicenna’s philosophy with some additional Mu‘tazili influences. As al-Ṭūsī admitted, *Jabr va qadar* is an exposition of his moderate position on the topic, the so-called *amr bayna*

7 Here and elsewhere, I translate the term *jabr* as determinism. In al-Ṭūsī’s writings, *jabr* is used to express a position that all events are a consequence of preceding causes. His discussions on human freedom are framed around this problem. Also, al-Ṭūsī does not explicitly differentiate between determinism and necessitarianism, the latter claiming that everything that happens could not have happened differently. For these reasons, I will focus on the question of determinism. However, in the course of this study, I will argue his deterministic understanding of free will to not threaten the universal applicability of PSR. In other words, if pressed, al-Ṭūsī would have to accept necessitarianism.

8 These include radical transcendence of God, the use of the terms of actualized time or primordial past (*mafrūgh*), and the inchoative state, or subsequent future (*musta‘naf*), as well as references to the people of *da‘wa*, cf. Parviz Morewedge, *The Metaphysics of Ṭūsī: Treatise on the Proof of a Necessary Being, Treatise on Determinism and Destiny, Treatise on Division of Existents*, Islamic Philosophy Translation Series (SSIPS, 1992), 40. Henceforth, I will refer to this edition as *Jabr va qadar*.

l-amrayn, of which I will say more below. The other text, *Tajrīd al-i-tiqād* [The Summary of Belief] was probably written in 660/1262 and is considered al-Ṭūsī's last book. The brevity and systematic character of this work made it attractive to commentators. To reconstruct al-Ṭūsī's views, I will look at three of these commentators. Al-ʿAllāma al-Ḥillī's (d. 726/1325) commentary *Kashf al-murād* is the earliest one. Al-Ḥillī was one of al-Ṭūsī's closest disciples, so his commentary defends the doctrines his teacher had outlined. The second important commentary, usually referred to as *al-Sharḥ al-qadīm*, is by Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī (d. 749/1351). Although written by a Sunni author, it is still largely explanatory. The last commentary by ʿAla al-Dīn al-Qūshjī (d. 879/1474) is called *al-Sharḥ al-jadīd*. It is the most comprehensive of the three commentaries and the most critical. Al-Qūshjī often reconstructed sectarian debates over different theological positions to then defend the Ashʿari stance.

I. PSR in al-Ṭūsī and His Commentators

In its Avicennian and post-Avicennian version, PSR states that everything has a cause and no uncaused contingent things can exist. If a thing is possible in itself, it needs an extrinsic cause that gives preponderance (*tarjih*) and determines whether the possible thing exists or not, otherwise that possible thing remains in equilibrium between existence and non-existence (this should not be understood as a real ontological state). Similar formulations are found in al-Ṭūsī's works as part of his discussion on efficient causality:

*The prevalence of one of the two sides [existence or non-existence of a possible thing] cannot be conceived by looking at [the thing's] essence only, and no external factor [the fact that something outside the essence of the possible thing gave prevalence to either of its two sides] will suffice [for either] because, even if it is assumed, the opposite is not ruled out, so it must go all the way to some necessitating endpoint.*⁹

In his commentary on the *Tajrīd*, al-Ḥillī added a section on the intuitiveness of PSR, considering it as one of the first principles of being and thought. This is consistent not only with al-Ṭūsī's beliefs expressed in other works but also with Avicenna's

9 Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd al-ʿaqāʾid*, ʿAbbās M. Ḥ. Sulaymān (Ed.; Alexandria: Dār al-maʿrifah al-jāmiʿa, 1996), 67. Henceforth abbreviated as *al-Tajrīd*. Cf. also Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and Avicenna, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, Sulaymān Dunyā (Ed.), 3rd ed., vol. 3 (Cairo: Dār al-maʿarif, 1985), 96–97. [=Ishārāt]; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Talkhiṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, ʿAbd Allāh Nūrānī (Ed.; Beirut: Dār al-aḥwāʾ, 1405), 111 [=Talkhiṣ]. The clearest exposition of the principle in Avicenna can be found in: *al-Shifāʾ. Al-Ilāhiyāt*, al-Ab Qanawātī and Saʿīd Zāyid (Eds.; Cairo: al-Hayʾa al-ʿamma li-shuʾun al-maṭābīʿ al-amira, 1960), *Met.* 1.6, 38. Cf. also Richardson, "Avicenna and the Principle of Sufficient Reason," 747–48.

view in *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*.¹⁰ Al-Ḥilli expounded on this in the standard language of PSR as follows:

*Everyone who conceives that the two sides of the possible thing are equal must [also] be absolutely certain that one of them, being equal [to the other] does not preponderate [over it]; I mean [it cannot preponderate] because of itself, but because of the prepondering factor that came along. This judgement is definitive, and there is no doubt about it. Others stated it to be inferential, but this is wrong. The reason for their mistake is that they did not conceptualize the possible thing correctly.*¹¹

Al-Ṭūsī's commitment to the causal deterministic explanation was fully prevalent and found in many areas of his inquiry. Sometimes he used it quite ingeniously, as I will point out below. The first and least controversial aspect for any thinker who grants efficacy to secondary causes in nature is to hold to determinism in the physical world. First of all, regularity in nature must have a causal ground:

*The experientials (al-mujarrabāt) require two things. One is repeated experience, and the other is hidden syllogism. Also, that syllogism is to know that the repeated occurrence in one way is not accidental and that it depends on a cause. Therefore, we know from this that a cause exists, even if one does not know what that cause is. And whenever we know that the cause has occurred, we rule that the effect is definitely present, because knowledge of the causation of the cause, even if one does not know its nature, is sufficient for knowing the existence of the effect.*¹²

Experientials belong to the sixfold division of necessary knowledge. However, contrary to the observentials (*al-mushāhadāt*), which require one to only provide simple sensory data to arrive at certain knowledge, the necessity of one's knowledge based on

10 In *al-Talkhīṣ*, al-Ṭūsī explicitly asserted the intuitiveness of PSR and dealt with the objections against it. The objection against the intuitiveness of PSR rests on its failing to be intuitive when compared with other intuitive truths. For al-Ṭūsī's response, see *al-Talkhīṣ*, 114. For Avicenna's formulation, in which he admits that the mind may sometimes be perplexed about PSR and look for a proof, see: *Ishārāt*, 3:96. Among the commentators of Ṭūsī's *al-Tajrīd*, Qūshjī was the strongest to assert the primitiveness of PSR; he claimed PSR to be inherent even in animals that are repelled by the sound of wood, cf. 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Qūshjī and Muḥammad b. As'ad al-Dawānī, *Sharḥ Tajrīd al-'aqqā'id*, Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Zārī'ī al-Riḍāyī (Ed.; Qum: Intishārāt-i ra'id, 1393), 248. Qūshjī is probably thinking here about Avicenna's example of a dog that has learnt to fear wooden rods because it remembers that it was beaten with them in the past, cf. *Avicenna's De Anima (Arabic Text): Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifā'*, Fazlur Rahman (Ed.; London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 184–85.

11 Al-Ḥasan b. Yūsuf b. al-Muṭaḥhar al-Ḥilli, *Kashf al-murād fī sharḥ Tajrīd al-i'tiqād* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-'alami li-l-maṭbū'āt, n.d.), 38. Henceforth abbreviated as *Kashf al-murād*.

12 Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and Avicenna, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, Sulaymān Dunyā (Ed.), 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Cairo: Dār al-ma'ārif, 1983), 346. Cf. Hassan Mahmud Abdel-Latif, "Naṣir Al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) and His Tajrīd al-I'tiqād. An Edition and Study" (London, SOAS, 1977), 2:404. This is consistent with what Avicenna states at the beginning of the Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), *Al-Ilāhiyāt*, I,1, 8.

repeated observations requires adding to them causal principles, such as PSR and its concomitants that act as the hidden premise.¹³ Given that al-Ṭūsī also denied irregular events as being accidental and claimed all things to have their essential necessitating causes even if these are interrupted by some causes on rare occasions that are non-essential to them but which necessitate a different-than-expected result in turn, he fully supported the determinist view, which does not allow for random or accidental physical facts.¹⁴

One of the corollaries of natural and voluntary causation is found in epistemology. In *al-Talkhīṣ*, al-Ṭūsī enumerates the views regarding what causes knowledge after reasoning (*al-‘ilm ba‘d al-naẓar*). The Ash‘arīs held that, because knowledge is originated, it needs an efficient cause and that the immediate and only real cause of knowledge is God because God is the only immediate cause of everything that is originated. Reasoning is just an apparent cause by way of custom (*bi-l-‘āda*), which God can always suspend. In other words, reasoning does not necessitate knowledge. The Mu‘tazilīs granted efficient causality to agents other than God and claimed knowledge to be obtained through the mediation of inferential reasoning by way of generating (*bi-l-tawallud*). Generation establishes a necessary causal link between reasoning and knowledge and acts as sufficient reason for it. It is the complete cause, so its effect (i.e., knowledge) is necessary.¹⁵ Apart from the Ash‘arī theory of custom and the Mu‘tazilī theory of generation, an account is also found where al-Ṭūsī’s commentator al-İṣfahānī explained it by calling it the philosophical account.¹⁶ On this view, reasoning is a preparatory cause, while the Active Intellect plays the role of the real cause of knowledge that is produced by way of necessitation (*ijāb*). The position al-Rāzī adopted was an amalgamation of the necessity of knowledge after reasoning (whether of the Mu‘tazilī or philosophical kind) with the view that God is the only real cause of knowledge, while any other factor

13 This is the Avicennian view, expressed in Avicenna (Ibn Sinā), *Al-Mantiq: Al-Burhān*, Ibrāhīm Madkūr and Abū al-‘Alā‘ Afīfī (Eds.; Cairo: Maṭba‘a al-amīriyya, 1956), 95, 96; al-Ṭūsī and Avicenna, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, 1983, 1:394–96. Marmura had already pointed it out: Michael Marmura, “The Fortuna of the Posterior Analytics in the Arabic Middle Ages,” in *Knowledge and the Sciences in Medieval Philosophy*, Monika Asztalos, John E. Murdoch, and Ilkka Niiniluoto (Eds.), vol. 1 (Helsinki: Helsinki University Press, 1990), 97.

14 *Al-Ṭajrid*, 84. This is consistent with Avicenna’s account, cf. *al-Shifā‘: al-Samā‘ al-ṭabī‘ī*, ed. Ibrāhīm Madkūr and Sa‘īd Zāyid (Cairo: al-Hay‘a al-‘amma li-shu‘ūn al-matābī‘ al-amīra, 1983), 65–66.

15 *Al-Talkhīṣ*, 60. Cf. also Abdel-Latif, “Naṣir Al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) and His *Tajrid al-‘Itiqād*. An Edition and Study,” 1:290–291.

16 Maḥmūd b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-İṣfahānī and al-Sayyid al-Sharīf Abū l-Ḥasan ‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Jurjānī, *Tasdīd al-qawā‘id fī sharḥ Tajrid al-‘aqā‘id*, ed. Eşref Altaş et al., vol. 3 (Istanbul: İSAM Yayınları, 2020), 316. Henceforth abbreviated as *Tasdīd al-qawā‘id*.

remains causally inactive in the production of knowledge.¹⁷ Now, al-Ṭūsī in *al-Talkhiṣ* remained entirely non-committal, while in *al-Ṭajrīd* he was content to state obtaining conclusions to be necessary after sound reasoning, without specifying if he preferred the Mu‘tazilī or the philosophical view.¹⁸ These positions share the assumption that necessitation is through a cause that coexists with reasoning but differ in that, for the Mu‘tazilī, this cause is internal through the *taṣḍīqāt* that represent premises and are arrived at by generation, while this cause is external for the philosophers through emanation. Perhaps the reason for al-Ṭūsī’s reluctance to disclose his opinion at this logical introductory stage of the discussion was that it would have entailed his commitment to the corollary of one or the other of the two views. To be specific, the important corollary of the Mu‘tazilī view, wherein reasoning necessitates knowledge by way of generation, is the intentional and voluntary character of cognition: Knowledge is a product of a person’s intention and choice.¹⁹ This is because inferential reasoning, which the Mu‘tazilī understood as generation, is an action and involves free will, as is the case with all actions. A person can choose to know, but once they make that choice, the reasoning that follows is necessitated by its cause.²⁰ In contrast and according to the standard philosophical view, concepts (*taṣawwurāt*) are emanated by the Active Intellect, which denies free will in their acquisition. Even though al-Ṭūsī did not commit to either of these views in the present discussion, his reservations about the theory of emanation as expressed in *al-Ṭajrīd*²¹ alongside his adoption of the view of generation elsewhere in the same work²² suggest al-Ṭūsī to have been sympathetic to the Mu‘tazilī stance that reaching a conclusion is necessary due to psychological reasons.

17 *Al-Talkhiṣ*, 61. Al-Ṭūsī suggests that al-Rāzī borrowed the necessity of knowledge from the Mu‘tazilī, but I do not see a reason why al-Rāzī’s direct influence could not be the philosophical view. Al-Rāzī rejected the Mu‘tazilī theory of generation more explicitly in his *Maṭālib*: As generation is indirect, reasoning or thought (*fīkr*) must be a cause that is temporally prior to its effect of knowledge. This, however, violates the coexistence thesis (i.e., the claim that the effect follows necessarily and immediately from its cause). Instead, Rāzī concluded reasoning to consist of the sum of two premises that are obtained simultaneously with the knowledge of the conclusion, cf. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya min al-‘ilm al-ilāhī*, Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā (Ed.), vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-‘arabī, 1987), 133.

18 *Al-Ṭajrīd*, 105, cf. also *Kashf al-murād*, 217.

19 *Al-Talkhiṣ*, 62. This is the differentia between reasoning and remembering, as the latter does not require intention.

20 One has to remember that freedom of choice is not understood here as freedom of indifference but as having a cause internal to the agent.

21 Cf. *al-Ṭajrīd*, 95, where al-Ṭūsī rejects the emanationist principle “from one only one proceeds” because it applies to the necessary agent, while God is a free agent and as such can produce many effects.

22 Cf. *al-Ṭajrīd*, 123.

An interesting and original application of PSR can be found in al-Ṭūsī's discussion on social matters, wherein human power and will are presented as one of many causal systems that necessitate people act a certain way. As al-Iṣfahānī remarked, al-Ṭūsī had recognized four different causal chains at play in people's social life. In his discussion on prices, al-Ṭūsī defined price as the assessment of the equivalent of what something may be sold for, not the intrinsic value of a thing. This allowed him to make price dependent on both objective physical determinants (time and place) as well as social factors such as customs and practices; this is a specific application of the idea that motives depend not on reality but on subjective belief. The remaining two causal chains of social phenomena such as prices are human will and God.²³ Al-Ḥillī explicated that God may reduce the types of given goods and increase people's desire for them (and vice versa) such as in the form of favor or for some religious benefit. Prices can also depend on the will of individuals, such as tyrannical rulers who are able to control prices.²⁴

II. Human Free Will: An Overview of the Positions

With regard to al-Ṭūsī, the reason why human actions pose a particularly difficult challenge to the universality of PSR is his unambiguous statement that humans intuitively know they are autonomous agents of their actions: "Necessity dictates that the actions depend on us" (*al-ḍarūra qāḍiyatun bi-stinād al-af'āl ilaynā*).²⁵ The strength and exact meaning of this statement can be determined by the correct understanding of two of its core assertions: (1) the intuitiveness of the claim that actions are dependent upon the individual and (2) the dependence itself. As for the intuitiveness, such a view is nowhere to be found in Avicenna. Instead, al-Ṭūsī followed Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, who disagreed with the Bahshamī branch of the Mu'tazila that maintained the knowledge of one being the author of one's actions is inferential.²⁶ To be sure, the necessity of our knowledge that some actions are dependent upon us does not stem from any kind of self-knowl-

23 *Al-Tajrid*, 126. Al-Ṭūsī's succinct formulation states that, when considering the price of something, "It is necessary to consider the custom together with time and place. They [cheapness and expensiveness] may depend on Him, the Most High, and on us as well."

24 *Kashf al-murād*, 322. Al-Iṣfahānī repeated al-Ḥillī's explanation verbatim, *Tasḍīd al-qawā'id*, 3:445. Al-Qūshjī's explanation is briefer and he does not give these examples, 'Alī b. Muḥammad al-Qūshjī, *Sharḥ al-Qūshjī 'alā Tajrid al-'aqa'id li-l-Ṭūsī: Mabḥath al-ilāhiyāt*, 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Fu'ād (Ed.; Alexandria: Dār al-wafā' li-dunyā l-ṭabā'a wa-l-nashr, 2002), 134–35.

25 *Al-Tajrid*, 122.

26 *Kashf al-murād*, 285–286. Cf. also Sabine Schmidtke, *The Mu'tazilite Movement (III)*, *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 171.

edge or our subjective feeling that we exercise agency over some actions. Our knowledge is necessary because praise and blame, as well as reward and punishment, hinge on the attribution of certain actions to their agents.²⁷ The second assertion about action's being dependent on us presents a bigger interpretative problem. Avicenna would agree that our actions depend on us (i.e., a proper psychological process preceding the actions), but he would add here that this psychological process itself is causally determined.

But is this all al-Ṭūsī had to say? His concern with the issue of human responsibility for actions and his insistence on the fact unattested in Avicenna that we intuitively know ourselves to be free agents suggest that he might have used dependence (*istinād*) in a stronger sense as it better explains the attribution of moral responsibility to human agents. However, if al-Ṭūsī had in fact wanted to defend this stronger sense of dependence, he would have had to face a dilemma familiar to all those who have tried to reconcile intuitions about our freedom of choice with our equally strong intuitions about universal causal determinism in the extramental world. The dilemma is that the intuitiveness of human freedom of choice seems to contradict the universal applicability of PSR. To put differently, can any real sense of freedom exist in the naturally and theologically determined world?

In trying to reconcile these contradictory intuitions, al-Ṭūsī overtly aligned himself with the Shi'ī position. When Shi'ī authors discuss human actions, their predetermination, or lack thereof, they usually start by enumerating the three positions that have traditionally been taken. These are the complete compulsion of actions (*al-jabr*), the complete delegation of actions (*al-tawfiq*), and the preferred position of the Shi'ī authors, the so-called "something between the two" (*amr bayna l-amrayn*).²⁸

The first position of *al-jabr* states that human actions are not owned in a real sense; humans have no free choice in the actions that have been destined for them by God.²⁹ The metaphysical foundations typically associated with this view are the denial

27 *Al-Tajrīd*, 122–3.

28 For examples, see: Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Ya'qūb al-Kulaynī, *al-Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, ed. 'Alī Akbar al-Ghafārī, vol. 1 (Tehran: Maktabat al-ṣudūq, 1381), 155–60 (*Kitāb al-Tawḥīd, Bāb al-jabr wa-l-qadar wa-l-amr bayna l-amrayn*); Ibn Bābawayh (Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. 'Alī b. Bābawayh al-Qummi), *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, ed. Hāshim al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭīhrānī (Beirut: Dār al-ma'rifa, 1387), 359–64 (Ch. 59: *Bāb naḥw al-jabr wa-l-tawfiq*); Shaykh al-Mufīd (Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Nu'mān al-'Ukbarī al-Baghdādī), *Taṣḥīḥ al-i'tiqādāt al-imāmiyya* (Qum: al-Mu'tamar al-'ālamī li-alfīyyat al-Shaykh al-Mufīd, 1413), 46–47.

29 In *Jabr va Qadar*, al-Ṭūsī differentiated between two main groups of determinists. The first one claims that humans have no efficacy whatsoever in action or its performance. He probably referred here to the views of Jahm b. Ṣafwān (696-745), cf. *Kaṣḥf al-murād*, 286. The second group are Ash'arī theologians

of causality in the physical world (i.e., occasionalism) and the refutation of the objective character of good and evil. One of the strongest theological arguments in favor of determinism is based on the incompatibility of divine omniscience with human free will. The argument postulates that God must know every act of humans before their creation; if humans had free will to choose their actions, God's knowledge would not be true knowledge³⁰ due to being incomplete and subject to change. An often-evoked counterargument, and one that al-Ṭūsī is seen to have emphasized across his works, is that determinism is counterintuitive: We feel that our decisions are up to us and that they matter, thus allowing us to influence the course of actions.

The second view of *al-tafwīd* assumes that humans are solely responsible for their actions; no agent or creator of these actions exists other than the self. The main advantage of this position is that people can be held accountable for what they do. This is the position of the majority of the Mu'tazila, who argue for it by saying that, if a person did not have free will, their moral responsibility would be nullified.³¹ Praise and blame, as well as reward and punishment, for one's actions would not only be unjust but would also be rendered meaningless. This libertarian view was professed by 'Abd al-Jabbār as follows: Human action is subject to one's intention and will, and a person is free to do otherwise.³² The theological and metaphysical foundation of the doctrine of delegation is that compulsion in action would amount to God burdening people with moral obligations they are unable to fulfil (*taklīf mā lā yuṭāq*), which would be evil. Therefore, God cannot create good human voluntary actions, just as He cannot create evil human voluntary actions.³³ The opponents counterargue delegation to be a kind of dualism and to contradict the principle of monotheism in creation and planning, because then two creators would exist: God and humans. In other words, even though God creates humans, they are the creators of their own actions.

who claim that God creates an act (*khalq*), humans perform it (*kasb*) but have no influence over it. When God creates an act, He also creates an attribute in a person, which is called will, cf. *Jabr wa qadar*, 4.

30 *Jabr wa qadar*, 5.

31 *Jabr wa qadar*, 6.

32 Abū al-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-khamsa* (Beirut: Dār ihyā al-turāth al-'arabi, 1422), 226, 527–28.

33 In classical Baṣran Mu'tazili theology, not only human acts but also divine acts should be noted as not being causally predetermined, because God is also obligated to do what is right and to reward us for our good actions, which are in themselves not causally predetermined, cf. Richard M. Frank, *Classical Islamic Theology: The Ash'arites. Texts and Studies on the Development and History of Kalām*, ed. Dimitri Gutas, vol. 3 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), III:207.

According to al-Ṭūsī, both these positions of hard determinism and unqualified delegation are untenable. As claimed by its adherents, the third position of *amr bayna l-amrayn* escapes the radicalism of the other two views by stating, “Neither determinism nor delegation, but something between the two.”³⁴ Regardless of its numerous reformulations according to various philosophical schools, this position generally considers that both the will of God and the will of a person are effective in human voluntary actions and that these two wills act simultaneously. The main theological advantage of this position seems to be the possibility of essentially attributing beneficial effects to God and evil effects essentially to humans and only accidentally to God.

III. Free Will in al-Ṭūsī’s Writings

What has become clear thus far is that however al-Ṭūsī considers free will to be granted to humans, it has to agree with an otherwise determinist account. Al-Ṭūsī started the treatise *Jabr va qadar* with a full Avicennian account of causality, which serves as the foundation for the subsequent discussions. His acceptance and application of PSR in this account is undisputed and comprehensive. An effect can only be issued if the cause is of the necessitating kind, as anything less than a complete and necessitating cause would not be enough to tip the scales between existence and non-existence; however, once preponderance is given to either of them, the effect becomes necessary. Preponderance is what makes the cause complete, or as al-Ṭūsī put it, “Without preponderance, a cause is not a cause in reality, but only a part of the cause.”³⁵

These general rules of causality are necessary for introducing and explicating al-Ṭūsī’s notion of a voluntary agent. Namely, in al-Ṭūsī’s definition, a voluntary agent is someone who has the power and will to act. Power is understood as the sheer ability to act or to refrain from acting. However, power on its own is not a sufficient reason for an action; a prepondering factor that determines if the agent acts or not is needed. This is will, which is otherwise identified with a motive through which the soul is able to decide which action to perform based on its perceived benefit. Will acts as the sufficient cause of an action; once it is actualized, the action becomes necessary.³⁶ As all

34 Because this position became the flagship in Imāmi Shi‘ism, Imāmi scholars often looked for the origins of this position already in the sayings of the Imams. However, the mature formulation of this position came as an effect of rapprochement between Mu‘tazilism and Shi‘ism in the works of al-Shaykh al-Mufid (d. 413/1022) and then in al-Sharif al-Murtaḍā (d. 436/1044).

35 *Jabr va qadar*, 16.

36 Cf. *Jabr va qadar*, 25.

three commentators recognized, al-Ṭūsī had adopted the position associated with Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī against the Bahshamis, who claimed power without a motive to be sufficient in producing an action.

Now we have arrived at the heart of the contested issue. The theory of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, which postulates a person's action to become necessary once that person's power to act is coupled with will, seems to directly contradict free choice, because it sees actions as determined by their necessitating causes. In *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, al-Rāzī used an argument against the Mu'tazilis to demonstrate how a person's power has no efficacy over their actions, thus showing that understanding will as the sufficient reason ends either in absurd consequences or in admitting determinism.

The argument presents a hypothetical situation when a person produces an act. If that person cannot refrain from producing it, the action is necessary. This entails determinism. Now, if the person can refrain from producing an action, it is unnecessary. This again leads to facing two possibilities. According to the first, the action is produced without a prepondering factor, but this is the absurdity of preponderation without a preponderator (*tarjih bi-lā murajjih*). According to the second possibility, the action is by a preponderator (*murajjih*). In this case, the action by the preponderator is either unnecessary, which again will lead to the absurdity of an action performed without a preponderator, or it is necessary, which entails determinism. Al-Rāzī concluded this to refute the Mu'tazili view in its entirety and to be a definite argument against their position.³⁷

Al-Ṭūsī repeated this argument in at least three of his works and presented modified refutations of it. In his commentary on *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, he offered two rather unsubstantial remarks, quibbling over al-Rāzī's somewhat imprecise language and an inconsistency in al-Rāzī's overall position on the matter of free will. As shown above, the first part of al-Rāzī's argument states that, if a person cannot refrain from producing an action, then the Mu'tazila's view is invalidated. He then analyzed a second case of a person being able to refrain from an action and after demonstrating the impossibility of an action being free in this case as well, added this to be the conclusive invalidation of the entire Mu'tazili view. Al-Ṭūsī, however, maintained that al-Rāzī had not refuted the Mu'tazili view in its totality but rather only the claim of *one* Mu'tazili, Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī. Second, al-Ṭūsī pointed out how in certain places as in the case of God, al-Rāzī had accepted the notion of a free agent as one who can choose without a prepondering

37 Al-Rāzī and al-Ṭūsī, *al-Talkhiṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 325–26. By the time of al-Ṭūsī and al-Ḥilli, this argument had become the standard objection against the Mu'tazili view, cf. *Kashf al-murād*, 286.

factor.³⁸ Overall, al-Ṭūsī's remarks in his commentary on the *Muḥaṣṣal* did not address any problems inherent in the argument.

In *al-Tajrīd*, al-Ṭūsī reiterated the argument and was content with a quick retort, asserting that if this argument refutes free will in humans, it must do the same in the case of God.³⁹ Namely, God also produces acts based on prepondering factors, so if one were to say that this mechanism contradicts the free will in human actions through which they are compelled to act, by the same token one would have to admit that God is also not a free agent.⁴⁰ In *Jabr va qadar*, al-Ṭūsī maintained the agent to still be free, even if their action had at one point been made necessary, because their will is what necessitated the action in the first place. Rather than negating free will, this implies its absolute affirmation.⁴¹ Thus, free will is not understood as the ability to choose between alternative possibilities, namely the Bahshamī view of the freedom of indifference (*tarjih aḥad maqdūrayn 'alā l-ākhar min ghayr al-murajjih*) or the non-existence of the external constraint or compulsion. The latter is a necessary condition, but it is insufficient because freedom of choice is understood as a rational process informed by motivations internal to the agent.

The details of what free voluntary actions consist of can be worked out in regard to the physical account of power and will, which has again been couched in Avicenna's language. Al-Ṭūsī defined power (*qudrat*) as a psychic quality (*kayfiyatiyy nafsānī*) that is realized whenever the humoral temperament (*mizāj*) is harmonious in a healthy person. It makes the issuance or non-issuance of voluntary motions, both psychic and bodily, possible. This quality comes to be in a person from God according to the disposition (*isti 'dād*), with that person having no efficacy in its acquisition once disposition has been acquired.⁴²

Will (*irādat*) is defined as a kind of knowledge; al-Ḥillī added that knowledge is only in a general sense due to being a living being's belief or conjecture of the benefit in a

38 Al-Rāzī and al-Ṭūsī, 326.

39 *Al-Tajrīd*, 122.

40 Interestingly, Ṭūsī was not comfortable to make this point in *Jabr wa qadar*. Instead, he emphasized the absolute transcendence of God, which I have said to be a sign of his Isma'ili commitments. So, rather than pointing to the commonality of the prepondering factor in human and divine actions, al-Ṭūsī stressed there that ascribing free choice as defined for humans to God would introduce the multiplicity of being an agent and having power, knowledge, and free will and would contradict divine unity. In the case of creatures, action is issued from the agent's will; in God's case it is from His essence, cf. *Jabr wa qadar*, 42–43.

41 *Jabr va qadar*, 25–26.

42 *Jabr va qadar*, 31–32.

given action.⁴³ Knowledge is a decisive determination (*'azm-i jāzim*) that follows desire (*shawq*), either as attraction or repulsion, which on their own are insufficient for a decision. Therefore, al-Ṭūsī went into the details of the process of decision-making, such as in cases where one thing can be both an object of attraction and repulsion based on its varying aspects or the case where different powers or sensations can judge differently (e.g., as in the case of smell against taste, or animal powers against intellect).⁴⁴

I contend that two main reasons occurred as to why al-Ṭūsī had provided a fairly detailed physical and psychological account of power and will and how they cause actions. The first reason is for differentiating between the faculties that act according to will and reason, which hence can be perfected by one's efforts and those that act according to a nature to which no perfection can be added.⁴⁵ Specifically, al-Ṭūsī showed that free choice can be exercised in one of two ways in the actualization of dispositions. A person can manage their temperament, so it remains healthy. If it then becomes corrupted, it can be reestablished. A person can also become accustomed and habituated to performing actions in such a way that they increase the person's disposition. This is so because repetition in the performance of certain actions increases the power that originates this particular action.⁴⁶

Al-Ṭūsī defined practical philosophy in a standard way as a branch of knowledge that deals with existents whose existence depends on and is determined by human voluntary actions, thus contrasting practical philosophy with theoretical philosophy (i.e., the branch of knowledge that deals with existent things that are outside of human will).⁴⁷ In *Jabr va qadar*, al-Ṭūsī's focus was not so much on ethics as a philosophical discipline as it was on "the encouragement and persuasion of prophets, saints, and philosophers," which leads to the refinement of the soul and directs it toward acquiring virtues, sciences, and intelligibles, ultimately enabling the soul to achieve felicity in the hereafter.⁴⁸ Regardless, the core incentive is the same: Humans must be autonomous free agents responsible for their actions for any type of instruction (be it purely religious or philosophical) to be efficient and for the religious commands, rewards, and

43 *Kashf al-murād*, 231. This reduction of will to knowledge is not found in Avicenna.

44 *Jabr va qadar*, 32–33. For a brief account of the qualities of power and will in *al-Tajrīd*, see *ibid.* 106–107.

45 This is a point al-Ṭūsī made particularly explicit in Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Nasirean Ethics: Akhlāq-i Nāṣiri*, ed. Mujtabā Mināwī and Ali Riḍā Ḥaydari (Tehran: Intishārāt-i khwārazmi, 1356), 57–58. Cf. also *Jabr wa qadar*, 34.

46 *Jabr va qadar*, 31–32.

47 Al-Ṭūsī, *Nasirean Ethics: Akhlāq-i Nāṣiri*, 38. Cf. Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā), *Al-Manṭiq: al-Burhān*, I:2, 12.

48 *Jabr va qadar*, 35.

punishments to be meaningful. This is an imperative that remains consistent in all of al-Ṭūsī's works, whether ethical or theological or of either the Imāmi or Twelver persuasion.⁴⁹ This seems to entail his rejection of determinism. However, one has to be cautious about accepting this entailment at face value. A similar claim, namely that the possibility of ethics requires an indeterminism that leaves room for voluntary human actions, has been made about Avicenna.⁵⁰ However, if and how ethics can be squared with the broader metaphysical system of Avicenna is far from clear. Even though al-Ṭūsī's commitment to ethics was much more profound than Avicenna's, the success of his ethical account ultimately rests on the sacrifices he was willing to make in the otherwise deterministic metaphysical picture.

In fact, the second reason al-Ṭūsī had gone into detail regarding the physical and psychological account of power and will was to demonstrate how human will is limited within the boundaries of the person's physical make-up and to mitigate the view espoused by the adherents of complete delegation. This weakening of the threat of complete delegation, however, did not accomplish fully what al-Ṭūsī had intended to do with his moderate account of free will, for it did not take the general metaphysical picture of the providential order of the universe into consideration. In some of his works, al-Ṭūsī argued power and will to depend on other causes and all to depend on First Cause, the Necessary Existent in itself. This double view of agency in which a person is the proximate cause of their action while God is the remote cause was how al-Ṭūsī understood and explained the third position of *amr bayna l-amrayn*:

*If we look at the causes of power and will, they originally come from God. When they exist, the action is necessary; when they do not, it is impossible. And if we look at the action, it originates from the person according to their ability and will. This is why it has been said, "There is neither determinism nor delegation, but something between these two." So [both] free choice as well as dependence on God are true, and actions are not completed with one and not the other.*⁵¹

49 Cf. *Jabr va qadar*, 38. Not surprisingly, the human moral obligation is associated with God's justice especially in *al-Tajrid*; the discussion on human free will is in the section on God's actions, as it arises from a discussion on God's justice, one of the fundamental tenets of both the Mu'tazila and the Shi'a.

50 Jules L. Janssens, "The Problem of Human Freedom in Ibn Sina," in *Ibn Sina and His Influence on the Arabic and Latin World* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 112–18. Kaukua reversed the question, asking how there can be any meaningful sense of freedom and responsibility in the face of PSR, cf. idem, "Freedom and Responsibility in Avicenna," 167.

51 "Af' al al-'ibād," in *al-Talkhiṣ*, 477. Cf. also *Jabr va qadar*, 37.

Al-Ṭūsī arrived at this position with an explicit focus on the theological debates and by accepting the theory of Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī. However, he also must have seen it as consistent with Avicenna's account. In any case, the proponents of this view may be argued to have not gained much room for free action; they had only transferred necessity from the direct external causes, be they natural or divine, to internal factors which might as well be ultimately traced back to causes outside the agent. For example, one's faculty of power and will is proven to depend on one's physical make-up, which results from heavenly movements which in turn depend on their causes. This seems to mean that if my will is preceded by other factors outside my will, these factors render it (almost) completely determined and my choice of actions rather limited (if not completely void), even if they do not make will itself causally inefficacious. Al-Ṭūsī apparently accepted this conclusion:

[One's] existence, powers, and voluntary and involuntary actions are organized in the causal chain starting from God. Due to [one's] powers, their actions are necessitated by God's determination and will, just as the divine decree. If someone is called determined and denied free choice because their action necessarily follows from their power and will or because their actions depend on a chain of effects that goes back to the First Cause, then no problem exists with calling it God's action based on this explication. But if one were to say that these actions do not follow from the person's power and will, that it is God's action without the intermediary of causes, and that the prescription of command and prohibition, as well as human efforts and endeavors, have no efficacy over it, then this has not the slightest truth nor does it correspond to reality.⁵²

The evident target of critique is the Ash'arī view that denies secondary causes to human actions. Once again, the critique is shown to have been motivated by the need to retain the meaningfulness of moral obligations. The validity of moral obligations is grounded in the self-evidence of the fact that commanding, forbidding, praising, and blaming inanimate objects is forbidden, and the intuitiveness of human agency in turn stems from this.⁵³

Unfortunately, this only means a return to the initial dilemma: Everything seems to be determined by God and yet our actions being up to us appears equally strongly. Yet, to say that al-Ṭūsī could somehow genuinely uphold both views would be to admit a fundamental inconsistency in his thought. To try to avoid this, one has to ask if and

52 *Jabr va qadar*, 38.

53 Cf. *al-Talkhiṣ*, 328, where al-Rāzī explicitly relates the two views (i.e., the self-evident character of moral obligations and free will) and attributes them to all those who believe in free will.

where was he willing to make concessions. Was it in his commitment to the intuitiveness of free will or in his metaphysical and theological commitments?

If al-Ṭūsī were to deny the truthfulness of human intuition that humans are free agents, he would fall into illusionism (i.e., the claim that humans are free agents only appears as an introspective illusion, whereas everything including human free will is in reality determined). But al-Ṭūsī never questioned this claim. Quite the contrary, the claim is central to almost all of his investigations, and he was well aware of it being an element in which he differed from Avicenna.⁵⁴

In other words, I see no reason not to take al-Ṭūsī's insistence on the intuitiveness of free will as being necessarily true and as expressing his genuine position. From among the commentators on *al-Tajrīd*, al-Iṣfahānī was the one who noticed most clearly that this connection between intuitiveness of the claim and its consequence (i.e., the necessity of free will) was truly al-Ṭūsī's genuine position.⁵⁵

Now, al-Ṭūsī's assertions about the intuitiveness of free will, albeit going beyond Avicenna, did not necessarily amount to his overall disagreement with the latter's compatibilist view. Namely, al-Ṭūsī might still have maintained that people perform free actions which are necessitated by their causes, including one's internal motivations, which are precisely what makes actions free. To assess his faithfulness or lack thereof to Avicenna's theory, I need to show how al-Ṭūsī had answered two previously seen arguments: (1) the argument about the unity of actions (*tawḥīd al-af'āl*), which seems to disprove human will as colliding with divine will, and (2) the argument about divine omniscience that seems to lead to determinism.

To recap, the first argument says that, if a person has the power to act, a combination of two powerful agents (i.e., human and divine) over one object of power would be necessary. This leads to impossible consequences. The first case involves a situation in which God wants to bring an action into existence, and the person wants its non-existence: Having both intentions or neither one realized would result in two contradictory

54 In his commentary on *al-Ishārāt*, al-Ṭūsī discusses Avicenna's view that punishing people for actions that are determined for them and in which they have no choice is appropriate as long as it serves the providential goal of installing fear of God in people. In this necessitarian picture, little evil is justified in light of great good. Al-Ṭūsī admitted such a conclusion to be in accordance with Avicenna's philosophy but to be unacceptable for the Mu'tazila, who believe in the necessity of God bestowing moral responsibility on people who then receive an appropriate reward/punishment for their actions. Al-Ṭūsī pointed out that these self-evident truths according to the Mu'tazila had no such status for Avicenna, who deemed them only praiseworthy opinions, cf. *al-Ishārāt*, 3:314.

55 *Tasdid al-qawā'id*, 3:428.

things occurring, which is absurd. In the second case, if only one of the two wills obtains what it wants, despite being assumed to be equal, then preponderation becomes necessary without a preponderator. Al-Ṭūsī answered that divine power prevails in such cases,⁵⁶ adding that the will of God is realized because His power is stronger than the power of the person and acts as the prepondering factor.⁵⁷

Prima facie, the scenario sketched above can be explained in the already described framework: Human actions take place through a series of psychological secondary causations in which power coupled with decisive will is the necessitating cause; however, a hindrance produced by other causes removes that power's efficacy. Meanwhile, al-Ṭūsī's solution seems to introduce a genuinely alien element into this otherwise consistent Avicennian/Mu'tazili picture: His solution proposes an idea that God directly intervenes in the course of events set in motion by a person in order to stop one's will from becoming realized. Perhaps this can be explained by the *ad hoc* character of al-Ṭūsī's answer, in which he addressed an objection from his Ash'ari opponents who deny that God acts through secondary causes and tried to answer it on the opponents' terms. Nevertheless, other explanations may be found. One is his possible adherence to the Shi'i doctrine of *badā'* [change] in God's will. The similarity between al-Ṭūsī's argument about God intervening in one's affairs and the standard examples of His *badā'* is that the interventions in both cases concern particular, material, and temporal events. Another important similarity is that God is not restricted by His eternal decree in the eyes of both al-Ṭūsī and the adherents of the doctrine of *badā'*. In other words, both accounts preserve God's free will and omnipotence. The problem with this explanation is that al-Ṭūsī seemed to deny that the Shi'a believe in His *badā'*.⁵⁸ Regardless of any actual historical influence, the comparison between the two views helps highlight

56 Cf. *al-Tajrid*, 122, *al-Talkhiṣ*, 327, where this argument is mentioned by al-Rāzī.

57 *Al-Talkhiṣ*, 327. Cf. also *Kashf al-murād*, 287. Al-Ṭūsī remarked that this argument had been adopted by al-Rāzī based on the argument by which the theologians argue about the oneness of God, called the proof from hypothetical mutual hindrance (*dalīl al-tamānu*). There it proves that the possibility of only one God; otherwise, two deities with equal powers would have to exist, which leads to absurdities as described. Here, however, it does not, because being independent in one's efficacy is not contradictory to this efficacy's gradation (i.e., an efficient agent can be stronger or weaker), cf. *al-Talkhiṣ*, 327, and *Tasdiḍ al-qawā'id*, 3:429; al-Qūshji, *al-Sharḥ al-jadīd*, 119.

58 Cf. *al-Talkhiṣ*, 421-422. This assertion perplexed later thinkers: Mullā Ṣadrā (Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Shirāzī), *Sharḥ Uṣūl al-Kāfi*, Muḥammad Khwājavi (Ed.), vol. 4 (Tehran: Mu'assasah-yi muṭali'āt va taḥqīqāt-i farhangī, 1383), 179-80; Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisi, *Mir'at al-'uqūl*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Tehran: Dār al-kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1404), 123-24. On the other hand, Fazlur Rahman suggested that the doctrine of *badā'* had influenced al-Ṭūsī's views on divine knowledge, cf. idem, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā (Ṣadr Al-Dīn Al-Shirāzī)*, 1st ed., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), 180.

al-Ṭūsī's willingness to preserve a robust notion of free will, even at the risk of introducing certain inconsistencies into his own theoretical framework, such as a potential threat to divine omniscience.

This becomes even more apparent when al-Ṭūsī deals with the second argument (i.e., that divine omniscience apparently leads to determinism). To recap, the argument states that if free will exists, God's knowledge would be subject to change due to being based on undetermined and changing events, thus making it incomplete and deficient. Because this cannot be the case, what is contrary to God's knowledge cannot happen. Importantly, the argument is supposed to work in support of determinism, which assumes God's knowledge to be the cause that necessitates human actions.

Al-Ṭūsī describes the first answer he provides as dialectical, a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*. It simply points out that, if one were to assume that knowledge necessitates action in the case of people, then it does so, too, in God because He is not only eternally knowledgeable of human actions but also of His own.⁵⁹ In other words, if knowledge were to necessitate actions, God would be eternally aware of what He would do in the future, and so His future actions would be either necessary or impossible, and He would not be a free agent.⁶⁰ This would also be a restriction of His omnipotence, even though this is not a conclusion al-Ṭūsī explicitly drew.

In the second answer, which al-Ṭūsī admits goes deeper into the issue than his previous dialectical maneuver, he claims that God's omniscience does not prevent freedom of actions, because knowledge of a thing is not its cause:

*The true answer is that knowledge of a thing cannot be its cause; for regardless of who knows that the Sun will rise tomorrow, this knowledge does not cause the sunrise. Hence, if knowledge has no effect on the action, then the action is not by compulsion or necessitation (lā yakun al-fi'l bi-l-jabr aw al-ijāb).*⁶¹

The terms al-Ṭūsī used here are not accidental: compulsion (*al-jabr*) is the Ash'ari view, while necessitation (*al-ijāb*) is the philosophical position. The doctrines to which he refers in the passage are doubtless, so al-Ṭūsī's rejection of the latter position indicates that he has distanced himself from the view expressed in the *Jabr va qadar*, wherein he had stated that God's knowledge necessitates particular actions, even if

59 "Af' al al-' ibād," 478, *Jabr va qadar*, 38–39.

60 *Al-Talkhiṣ*, 328.

61 "Af' al al-' ibād," 478.

the person's power and will are proximate causes that make free will possible in some sense.⁶² Therefore, al-Ṭūsī specifically attacks Avicenna's view on God's knowledge with the second answer to the problem of the incompatibility of divine omniscience with free will. The relative dating of the two works, *Jabr va qadar* coming before *al-Talkhīṣ*, reveals al-Ṭūsī's subsequent closer alignment with the Mu'tazili-inspired doctrine of knowledge.

Al-Ṭūsī labelled his view on knowledge with the phrase that knowledge is subsequent to (i.e., dependent on) the known (*al-ʿilm tābi ʿ li-l-ma ʿlūm*). This position introduces a necessary condition for a free action: Knowledge that depends on its object has no efficacy over it, and thus the object of knowledge remains possible. Knowledge neither renders its object necessary nor impossible (*lā yakūn muqtaḍiyan li-l-wujūb wa-l-imtina ʿ fi l-ma ʿlūm*).⁶³ Al-Ṭūsī repeated the same statement about knowledge being dependent on its object with a further qualification in *al-Tajrīd* with the following phrase:

[Knowledge] is necessary or contingent (wājib wa-mumkin), namely it is subsequent in the sense of the primacy in the equilibrium of mutual congruence (tābi ʿ bi-ma ʿ nā aṣālat muwāzana fi l-taṭābiq).⁶⁴

This customarily laconic statement requires elucidation. First of all, al-Ṭūsī divides knowledge here into necessary and contingent, which corresponds to Avicenna's ontological division.⁶⁵ Consequently, the necessary kind of knowledge is limited to the knowledge of the Necessary Being of His Own essence. Noteworthy, this kind of knowledge is also beyond the division into active and passive. The latter, possible knowledge encompasses everything other than the Necessary Existence's essence,⁶⁶ due to everything other than His essence being possible in itself and only necessary through another. This kind of knowledge is subsequent to its objects (*tābi ʿ li-l-ma ʿlūm*).

Among the major commentators on *al-Tajrīd*, al-Jūrjānī gave the most explicit exposition of al-Ṭūsī's goal by tracing it back to the controversy over the freedom and com-

62 *Jabr va qadar*, 39.

63 *Al-Talkhīṣ*, 328.

64 *Al-Tajrīd*, 104.

65 Note that this division is different than the standard theological division between necessary and acquired types of knowledge (*ḍarūrī wa-muktasab*), both of which are within human reach. Al-Ṭūsī enumerated these two as well in his list and distinguished them from the necessary/contingent division of knowledge that reflects the ontological division, cf. *al-Tajrīd*, 104.

66 Cf. *Kashf al-murād*, 209.

pulsion of human actions between the Ash‘arī and Mu‘tazilī camps.⁶⁷ In other words, Jurjānī recognized al-Ṭūsī’s adoption of the Mu‘tazilī theory of knowledge to be congruent with his commitments in the area of free will. Namely, in response to the Ash‘arī argument that human actions cannot be free because God eternally knows about their occurrence, the Mu‘tazilī had objected to knowledge being subsequent to its object and therefore is not its cause. However, as the possible resolution to this objection goes, this introduces vicious circularity: God’s knowledge follows its object, so knowledge must be posterior to the known thing; however, being eternal, knowledge also precedes it. As an objection to this resolution, al-Ṭūsī answered with no circularity being present here due to the subsequence of knowledge meaning the essential rather than the temporal posteriority of knowledge. Namely, when perceiving the correspondence between knowledge and its object, the intellect judges the primacy of the object; in other words, that knowledge is derived from it and depends on it in the sense that knowledge is of something and in this sense the object is prior.⁶⁸ If subsequence is understood in this way, the object may be temporally prior or posterior to the knowledge of it, and circularity is avoided.

This raises another problem, which is that knowledge cannot be active (i.e., causal or existentiating). This in turn produces two problematic consequences. First, it contains an apparent falsehood: al-Ṭūsī is previously seen to have defined will as a kind of knowledge instrumental in the agent’s determining their actions and to have devoted a lot of effort to explaining the intricacies of decision-making processes. For al-Ṭūsī, knowledge is the element that actualizes the agent’s power to act by establishing the motives for a particular action. The second and theologically more serious consequence is that it renders God’s knowledge of the actions of existents passive. Al-Jurjānī recognized these problems, writing:

67 *Tasdid al-qawā‘id*, 3:302 (al-Jurjānī’s gloss). I believe this to be the most historically accurate explanation of the origin of al-Ṭūsī’s theory of knowledge. However, other suggestions were made as well (e.g., Ṣadrā claimed that al-Ṭūsī had borrowed his views on knowledge from Suhrawardī), cf. Mullā Ṣadrā (Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm al-Shīrāzī), *al-Ḥikma al-muta‘aliya fī l-asfār al-‘aqliyya al-arba‘a*, ed. R. Luṭfī, I. Amīnī, and F. Ummīd, 3rd ed., vol. 6 (Beirut: Dār iḥyā’ al-turāth al-‘arabī, 1981), 181, 209, 233, 253. Cf. also: Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā (Ṣadr Al-Dīn Al-Shīrāzī)*, 165, n. 58. Ṣadrā’s claim is interesting, but to corroborate it, one would need to investigate the exact nature of the relation between the two philosophers, a task all the more difficult given the lack of textual evidence of al-Ṭūsī’s acquaintance with Suhrawardī’s works. Overall, the theological context of the issue at hand and the explicit remarks of the commentators strongly indicate al-Ṭūsī to have been reliant on the Mu‘tazilī doctrines.

68 *Tasdid al-qawā‘id*, 3:302 [al-Jurjānī’s gloss]. In response to the objection that the dependence of God’s knowledge on temporarily successive, changeable particulars involves change, Ṭūsī claims that the change of things does not affect God’s knowledge: what ceases is the connection between knowledge and the known, not knowledge itself, cf. *al-Tajrīd*, 117. Al-Ḥillī identified this as a view first held by Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, *Kashf al-murād*, 207.

*Knowledge, insofar as it is knowledge and representation of the known, does not necessitate [this object's] existence and does not bring it about. But inasmuch as it becomes a means of choosing the action and willing it, it brings it about. This is the meaning of it being active. In this way, the free agent's knowledge of their voluntary actions is active knowledge, and God's knowledge of the actions of others is inactive, even if it is prior.*⁶⁹

The answer to the first problematic consequence (i.e., the subsequent knowledge of human agents can neither be active nor determine the motives of their actions) is the differentiation between the two ways human mental states correspond to the world. Knowledge understood as a certain belief attempts to depict the world as it is and has the mind-to-world direction. However, knowledge understood as will and desire has an opposite direction of fit, because it concerns a state of the world the agent wills to be realized. This kind of knowledge has causal efficacy.

So far, I believe al-Ṭūsī would not have objected to the way al-Jurjānī had explained his doctrine in the passage quoted above. When dealing with the second problematic consequence (i.e., divine knowledge being passive), al-Jurjānī's rendition suggests that proponents of the doctrine of the subsequence of knowledge are aware of and accept it. This perhaps is the case, even though neither al-Ṭūsī nor commentators sympathetic to him such as Ḥilli ever admitted so.⁷⁰ Still, his views on divine knowledge are more nuanced. On one hand, al-Ṭūsī claimed that God's knowledge of things as their source is causal and identical to their existentiation by Him. When it comes to particulars, however, al-Ṭūsī criticized Avicenna's view that God knows them through their forms and claimed instead that He perceives them directly.⁷¹ Al-Ṭūsī also seems to have said that God knows directly the First Intellect and other things through the intermediary of this Intellect, as it contains all forms of material things without their spatiotemporal dimensions.⁷²

69 *Tasdīd al-qawā'id*, 3:303.

70 Among the major commentators on *al-Tajrid* as discussed here, al-Qūshjī was the only one to explicitly defend the active, causal character of divine knowledge. Namely, he noticed that the subsequence or posteriority of knowledge only relates to assents (*taṣdiqāt*), which necessarily have extra-mental correlates, while active knowledge applies to the conceptions (*taṣawwurāt*) that capture essences. Therefore, God's knowledge of essences must always be of the necessitating and existentiating kind. Cf., 'Alī Ibn Muḥammad Qūshjī, *Sharḥ Tajrid al-'aqa'id*, *Litograph* (Tabriz: As'ad Kitābfurush. Middle Eastern Division of the Widener Library at Harvard University, OL 22800.10.5., n.d.), 286.

71 Al-Ṭūsī and Avicenna, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, 3:304.

72 Cf. the concise accounts by Ṣadrā and his commentators: *al-Asfār*, 6:226, fn. 1, 254–56, and 254, ft. 2. Cf. also Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā (Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shirāzī)*, 158–59, 243.

To analyze al-Ṭūsī's theory of divine knowledge in detail or address all the difficulties it raises is beyond the scope of this essay.⁷³ Suffice to say, the theory constitutes a conspicuous departure from Avicenna's theory in that it rejects God's knowledge of things through their forms impressed in His essence as being inconsistent with divine unity, instead postulating that God's knowledge is directly related to its objects. These objects of knowledge subsist in the external reality, which al-Ṭūsī identified as the first separate intellect.⁷⁴ Furthermore, God's knowledge depends on things themselves and follows them. This is captured in the formula that knowledge is subsequent to its objects (*al-ʿilm tābiʿ li-l-maʿlūm*). The formula al-Ṭūsī used in *al-Tajrīd* had expressed the Muʿtazili position, and it likely became a Shiʿi doctrine as well under al-Ṭūsī's influence.⁷⁵

Al-Ṭūsī's philosophical views on divine knowledge bore on his discussion regarding the connected issue of free will. In a passage from *Talkhiṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, which I have already mentioned briefly, al-Ṭūsī explained the implications for the problem of free will regarding the view that God's knowledge of everything other than His essence is contingent and depends on its objects. Namely, this dependency of knowledge means that the future remains a realm of contingency in a way:

*The claim that whenever God knows something, its existence becomes necessary does not mean denying that persons are agents. This would necessarily lead to admitting that people have no free will, and if this invalidates one's actions, [similarly] it would invalidate His action. And if this invalidates people's free will, then it would invalidate His free will. Therefore, He is forever aware of what He will do in the future. His future actions would be either necessary or impossible. And the answer to that is what has already been said: Knowledge depends on the known, and at that time it requires neither the necessity nor the impossibility regarding the known.*⁷⁶

73 For example, how can God perceive in a non-spatiotemporal way particular and material objects that are essentially spatiotemporal and thus successive and mutually exclusive? Would that not make God's knowledge contradictory? Also, how can this be reconciled with God also having prior, existentiating, and providential knowledge? Finally, al-Ṭūsī's distinction between God's passive knowledge of others and His will and action seem to undermine divine unity. It seems to me an especially difficult challenge to al-Ṭūsī's theory of knowledge as far as it criticizes Avicenna's impression theory of knowledge by introducing multiplicity to divine essence. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for bringing this last problem to my attention.

74 He does it in his treatise "The Proof of the Separate Intellect," where he further equates the separate intellect with the *nafs al-amr*, which he understands as the truth-making domain for our judgments about objective and timeless entities such as mathematical propositions. Cf. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, "Ithbāt al-ʿaql al-mufāriq," in *Talkhiṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Nūrānī (Beirut: Dār al-aḍwāʾ, 1405), 479–81.

75 The Muʿtazili provenance regarding this doctrine was recognized by the commentators, cf. *Tasdīd al-qawāʿid*, 3:302 (al-Jurjānī's gloss). To my knowledge, al-Ṭūsī was the first Shiʿi thinker to integrate this Muʿtazili doctrine into his theology.

76 *Al-Talkhiṣ*, 328.

This passage says that divine knowledge does not contradict free choice. Al-Ṭūsī's main concern seems to have been theological. If this were the case, all divine actions would be necessary or impossible, and this would impose unacceptable limitations on God. As a solution, al-Ṭūsī suggested that God's knowledge depends on known things and follows them while remaining contingent itself (neither necessary nor impossible) and causally ineffective. Al-Ṭūsī also claimed that the known things subsist in the separate intellect, the only direct object of God's knowledge. But insofar as all things emanate from Him, they also *are* His knowledge. Importantly, this second claim means that the universality of PSR or universal determinism is not under serious threat. The separate intellect is the only direct object of God's knowledge as well as the only direct effect of His emanation. However, for God to be the cause of everything through the intermediary of secondary causation and to know everything as its cause is sufficient for Him. In this sense, nothing exists that is not causally determined by God. These secondary causes remain causally efficacious, and some of them (those which have power and will such as humans) are free.

Conclusion

Reconstructing al-Ṭūsī's position is not always a straightforward task. This is in large part due to the fact that many of his texts are an interplay of his various intellectual commitments, which tested al-Ṭūsī's allegiance to either Avicennian philosophy or Shi'i (Isma'ili, Twelver) theology. In his earlier works, his position on free will had not diverged in any substantial way from that of Avicenna's. The interpretative quibble seems to have focused on semantics, namely the issue of whether or not and in what sense the psychological mechanism of internal motives or human awareness that actions depend on us can be called free. However, al-Ṭūsī overall claimed human actions to be both causally necessitated and willed freely. Given that al-Ṭūsī had engaged directly with the Mu'tazilī debates, his position has some historical relevance, but it ultimately boils down to that of Avicenna.

When addressing his later works, he is seen to have attempted to integrate a theory of knowledge that was critical of Avicenna regarding his account of free will and determinism. His arguments hold for both God and human agents. In one way, God's knowledge does not predetermine human (or His own) actions, as it follows or depends on them and has a passive character (i.e., mind-to-world direction). Both God and people are free agents because future events are contingent. This does not, however, threaten

the universal applicability of PSR. Firstly, because knowledge which has the opposite direction of fit (i.e., one that is constituent of will and desire) is causally efficacious and determines the state of the world. Secondly and even more importantly, God remains the First Cause, that which necessitates the whole universe. Therefore, all other causes (proximate and intermediary) eventually return to Him. Overall, al-Ṭūsī's theory of knowledge, which in itself constitutes a significant departure from Avicenna, turned out not to have devastating consequences on the discussion of free will versus the necessitarianism of PSR. Al-Ṭūsī remained a compatibilist of the Avicennian kind. Importantly, he viewed the latter's position on free will as consistent with both that of Abū Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī and with the so-called *amr bayna l-amrayn* doctrine, which through its many reformulations would become one of the cornerstones of Shi'ī theology.

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