CHAPTER FOUR

GOD'S CREATION OF ACTS IN THE HUMAN AGENT

Ibn Taymiyya’s View of the Human Act in Prior Research

Ibn Taymiyya’s view of the human act has received considerably more scholarly attention than other aspects of his theology. Henri Laoust observes in his Essai that the shaykh criticizes the Ash’ari doctrine of acquisition (kasb) and sometimes admits secondary causality but that he also maintains God’s full omnipotence. The result is an irresolvable duality of perspective: “Through theological reflection, the human being becomes more and more profoundly conscious of absolute determinism. He must, for the sake of the necessities of the social and moral life, willingly convince himself of his freedom.” Laoust adds in a footnote that the shaykh often contradicts himself by affirming God’s omnipotence and human freedom simultaneously.1 Laoust’s observations are correct so far as they go, but they do not illuminate Ibn Taymiyya’s position fully.

More enthusiastically, Victor Makari finds Ibn Taymiyya’s view of the human act “inescapably convincing” and “lucid and profound.” Makari’s commendation appears to derive from reading Ibn Taymiyya against the backdrop of causal chain theories attributed to the Ash’ari theologian al-Juwaynî and the philosopher Ibn Rushd.2 While Ibn Taymiyya does employ the philosophical language of secondary causality, this chapter will show that these causes are not efficacious but only instruments in God’s acts of creation. God creates all existents directly; human acts are not links in a causal chain headed by a First Cause.3

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2 Makari, Ibn Taymiyyah’s Ethics, 76–81 (quotes on 80).
3 Thomas Michel, A Muslim Theologian’s Response to Christianity, 44–55, does not analyze Ibn Taymiyya’s doctrine of the human act in detail, but he does demonstrate a historically significant point. The shaykh’s criticism of the Ash’ari doctrine of divine determination for undercutting human responsibility adds a new dimension to the traditionalist Hanbali censure of Kalam theology. Earlier Hanbali polemicists had not condemned the Ash’aris for this.

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Makari unfortunately does not take note of the earlier and far more thorough work of Daniel Gimaret. In a 1977 article on the human act in Hanbali thought, Gimaret devotes a section to Ibn Taymiyya’s views in Minhāj and Irāda. Among the features of the shaykh’s doctrine that Gimaret highlights are mediation between the Ashʿarīs and the Muʿtazilīs, polemic against the Ashʿari doctrine of acquisition, assertion that human agency is both real and created by God and affirmation of some kind of secondary causality. Gimaret also briefly mentions the two kinds of divine will—ontological and legislative—which were treated in the previous chapter. Gimaret is impressed with Ibn Taymiyya’s ingenuity and originality and with the degree to which he gives a role to human agency. However, Gimaret is rather less admiring in his 1980 book on the human act in Sunnism as a whole. He justifies his exclusion of the Hanbalis and Ibn Taymiyya from the book by stating that they did not make an original contribution to this doctrine in the Sunnī tradition. In a short footnote Gimaret explains that when writing his earlier article on Hanbali views he was not aware of the extent to which Ibn Taymiyya had been inspired by the Ashʿarī theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Unfortunately, Gimaret says no more about this linkage.

The present chapter examines Ibn Taymiyya’s views afresh, going beyond the work of Gimaret by drawing on a wider range of the shaykh’s texts, clarifying how he is similar to al-Rāzī and showing that he is less comfortable than are both al-Rāzī and Ibn ‘Arabī with compulsion (jabr) and paradox. First, however, more attention must be given to these and others among Ibn Taymiyya’s predecessors.

The Theological and Philosophical Context

As is evident from the preceding chapter, the fundamental division in Islamic theological reflection on the human act turns on who creates and determines this act: God or human beings? Out of concern for God’s justice in reward and punishment, the Muʿtazilīs maintain that humans create their own acts

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5 Also, following Gimaret, “Théories de l’acte humain dans l’école Hanbalite,” George Makdisi, “Ethics in Islamic Traditionalist Doctrine,” 51–6, provides a brief exposition from Minhāj, showing that for Ibn Taymiyya God is the Creator while the human is the agent of the human act.

with libertarian freedom, that is, with freedom to choose apart from the decisive control of external determinants. Out of concern for the all-pervasive quality of God’s power, the rest of the Islamic tradition affirms that God creates and determines the human act. Western philosophy of religion distinguishes determinism of this sort into two basic kinds. Hard determinism denies the human will any role in producing human acts; human freedom is an illusion. Soft determinism or compatibilist freedom gives significance to human action and will without granting libertarian freedom. In this latter view, human beings paradoxically exercise choice and are thereby morally responsible even though external causes fully determine their wills.\(^7\)

The pure compulsion (\textit{al-jabr al-mahd}) attributed to Jahm b. Safwān is the archetypal case of Islamic hard determinism. In this view, God not only creates and determines the human act but is also the act’s sole Agent (\textit{fā’il}). If humans may be said to act, it is only in a metaphorical sense. There is no difference between human acts and the movements of inanimate bodies or between voluntary and involuntary acts. God creates all of them equally.\(^8\)

Some scholars portray Ibn Sinā as a hard determinist or nearly so, while others argue that he makes room for human freedom.\(^9\) Ibn Sinā’s best pos-

\(^7\) For conceptual analysis of the notions libertarianism, compatibilism (i.e. soft determinism) and hard determinism which I introduce here, see Thomas P. Flint, “Providence and predestination,” in \textit{A Companion to Philosophy of Religion}, ed. Philip L. Quinn and Charles Taliaferro (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 569–576.

\(^8\) Gimaret, \textit{Théories de l’acte humain en théologie musulmane}, 64–6. Gimaret adds that this view of Jahm’s doctrine may need to be qualified from al-Ash’arī’s \textit{Maqālāt}, which indicates that Jahm gives humans a power and a will in a sense resembling that of the Ash’arī doctrine of acquisition (\textit{kasb}).

sible world order in which all contingent existents are necessary by virtue of external causes leading back to the First certainly precludes libertarian freedom, but it goes beyond our present purposes to sort out whether Ibn Sīnā’s determinism is hard, soft, or ambiguous and underdetermined. What is of interest here is that Ibn Sīnā speaks of free choice (ikhtiyār) in a way that has soft determinist or compatibilist potential and is employed by later thinkers including Ibn Taymiyya. In the following passage from al-Taʿlīqāt, Ibn Sīnā explains that human beings perceive themselves to be choosing freely for their own purposes even though they are fully determined by external causes.

The [human] soul is necessitated in the form of one who chooses freely (al-nafs muttarrā fi širāt mukhtārā), and its movements are also subject to subjection like natural movement. It depends on purposes and motives, and it is subjected to them, except that the difference between it and natural [movements] is that it perceives its purposes, and nature (al-šābi‘a) does not perceive its purposes.

Formulations of this kind find their way into the post-Avicennan tradition in the writings of al-Ghazālī, al-Rāzī, Ibn ʿArabī and, as we will see, Ibn Taymiyya. Al-Ghazālī for example writes in his Iḥyāʿ ulūm al-dīn that the human being is “compelled to choose freely (majbūr alā al-ikhtiyār),” which means “his being compelled is that all [of his acts] occur in him from outside of him, not from him . . . [and] his freely choosing is that he is a substrate (mahall) for a will which originates in him.”

Most Ashʿarī theologians may be described as compatibilists, but they articulate this in different ways. In the view traditionally ascribed to al-Ashʿarī by later Ashʿarīs, God is both Creator and Agent of the human act—as in the doctrine of Jahm b. Ṣafwān—but the human acquires this act with a power originated by God in the person. There is no causal connection between the power and the acquisition (kasb) of the act, and this power does not determine the act/acquisition in any respect. Yet, the power and the acquisition do establish human responsibility for acts. The Ashʿarī theologian Bāqillānī takes a slightly different course, maintaining that the

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10 Reading ʿaghrād instead of ʿārād.
11 Ibn Sīnā, Al-Taʿlīqāt, 53.
human power determines an attribute of the act, but other Ashʿarīs, such as al-Juwaynī in his *Irshād*, and later al-Āmidī and Ījī, deny the human power any efficacy in the act, and this is the strict Ashʿarī determinism that Ibn Taymiyya denounces.  

A second stream of Ashʿarī thought on the human act is couched in causal terms. In al-Juwaynī’s *al-ʿAqīda al-niẓāmiyya*, the human power is created by God to serve as an intermediate or secondary cause for His creation of the human act.  

Al-Shahrastānī sees in this the philosophers’ doctrine of a chain of causes leading back to the First Cause, God. Gimaret hesitates to interpret al-Juwaynī’s secondary causality along Neoplatonic lines of this kind because al-Juwaynī explicitly states that God creates the causes producing the human act directly.

Similar uncertainty surrounds the interpretation of al-Ghazālī. There is little dispute that he employs Ibn Sīnā’s causal vocabulary, but its meaning is not entirely clear. According to Gimaret and Michael Marmura, al-Ghazālī is a strict Ashʿarī denying causal efficacy between the human power and the human act. God creates each cause and each effect directly in the chain of causes and effects that constitute the world. While there is no efficient causality between causes, causes do function as conditions (sg. *shart*) upon which subsequent causes depend. In order for God to create the human will, there must be prior human knowledge; for knowledge there must be prior human life; for life there must a prior human body; and so on. In Marmura’s

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summation, “Ghazali...adopts Avicennan ideas. But these are reinterpreted and cast in Ash’arite occasionalist terms.”

Binyamin Abrahamov and Richard Frank read al-Ghazālī differently. They explain that al-Ghazālī adheres ultimately, but not explicitly, to a chain of natural cause and effect leading back to God as the First Cause and Sustainer, a chain in which God cannot intervene. To make sense of the inconsistencies in al-Ghazālī’s writings, Frank argues that al-Ghazālī is Ash’ārī in outward allegiance and teaching while holding various Neoplatonic notions in his private belief. Frank’s proposals have not escaped critique. Both Michael Marmura and Ahmad Dallal criticize Frank for misreading al-Ghazālī’s texts and misunderstanding his terminology. This yet unresolved debate over al-Ghazālī well illustrates that Muslim theologians’ use of causal language is subject to diverse interpretations. Ibn Taymiyya is a prime case in point. Whereas Makari reads the shaykh’s theology of the human act in terms of efficacious and natural causality, I will show that, from the theological perspective at least, conditional or instrumental causality is the better interpretation.

A key figure in post-Avicennan Islamic theology and a frequent foil in Ibn Taymiyya’s writings is the Ash’ārī theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. Gimaret explains that al-Rāzī is inspired by both Ibn Sīnā and the Mu’tazilīs in his approach to the causal relations involved in the human act. Yet, al-Rāzī reduces Mu’tazili libertarian freedom to either compatibilist freedom or compulsion. Al-Rāzī either does not speak about the traditional Ash’ārī notion of acquisition or simply rejects it as a word without meaning. Moreover, al-Rāzī does not believe that proofs from the Qur’ān can give certain

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knowledge on the question of the human act because the sacred text may be used to prove either the Qadarī or the Jabrī theses. Only rational proofs are decisive.19

Al-Rāzī’s primary rational proof is the preponderator (murajjiḥ) argument, which we have already seen Ibn Taymiyya use to prove the existence of God and refute the arguments of the philosophers and the Kalām theologians on the origin of the world. Gimaret credits al-Rāzī with having invented this argument even though the terms murajjiḥ, ruḥān (preponderance), and their cognates go back to Ibn Sinā and the Muṭṭazīlī theologian ‘Abd al-Jabbar (d. 415/1025). To begin the argument, al-Rāzī presupposes with the Muṭṭazīlīs that God creates the human power by which the human acts. In the Muṭṭazīlī conception, this power is a power to perform either an act or its contrary. Al-Rāzī argues that there is nothing to “tip the balance” for this human power in favor of one of the two equally possible acts. The human power cannot preponderate out of itself. It requires a preponderator that makes one act preponderate (rājiḥ) over the other. So, al-Rāzī maintains, God must supply this preponderator. Thus, the human act comes into existence by means of a human power and a preponderator, both of which God creates.20

Gimaret suggests that al-Rāzī devises the preponderator argument to embarrass the Muṭṭazīlīs by drawing out what he believes to be their implicit determinism. The Jubba’ī Muṭṭazīlīs, among them ‘Abd al-Jabbar and his student Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣri, maintain that voluntary human acts arise not only from human power but also from a motive (dā‘ī).21 Like al-Rāzī, Gimaret claims that this Muṭṭazīlī doctrine leads inevitably to determinism since the motive that God creates determines the act. Richard Frank and Wilferd Madelung have both refuted Gimaret in the case of ‘Abd al-Jabbar, for whom, they say, the motive does not necessitate the act. Frank does not

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19 Gimaret, *Théories de l’acte humain en théologie musulmane*, 134–140. In discussing al-Rāzī, Gimaret draws extensively, but not exclusively, from a manuscript of al-Rāzī’s *Al-Matālib al-‘alīyya*. The material on the human act is now found in the ninth part of the published edition. Also, see now Shihadeh, *Teleological Ethics*, 13–44, for a more detailed treatment of al-Rāzī’s theology of human action than that provided by Gimaret. Shihadeh clarifies that al-Rāzī did adhere to the traditional Ash’āri doctrine of acquisition in his earliest works but abandoned it later on. Additionally, according to Shihadeh (10 n. 34), the ninth part of the edited *Al-Matālib al-‘alīyya* is rather a separate and earlier work called *Al-Jabr wa al-qadar*.  
speak to the case of Abū al-Ḥusayn, but Madelung contends that he also, albeit with difficulty, retains the non-necessitating character of motives and factors of preponderance in bringing about the human act. For Abū al-Ḥusayn, it is human choice that decides the act. These clarifications aside, it remains that al-Rāzī imputes to Abū al-Ḥusayn the doctrine that the motive is necessitating, and, as Gimaret explains, he draws out the logical conclusion of compulsion (jabr). The motive necessarily brings the act into existence. Otherwise, the act would require another motive prior to it, and so on ad infinitum. The stark choice is thus between compulsion and determinism on the one hand and denying the Creator on the other. Al-Rāzī chooses compulsion and the Creator, and, unlike his Ashʿarī predecessors, he does not hesitate to call himself a Jabrī.

Apart from anti-Muʿtazili polemic, al-Rāzī conceives the operation of the human act in compatibilist terms with parallels in the Muʿtazili psychology of voluntary action. The human is the agent of his act, but God creates and determines the act. When the motive combines with the power that is equally powerful for an act and its contrary, then the act becomes necessary. Gimaret notes that al-Rāzī sometimes calls the motive an intention (qaṣd) or a will (irāda or mashīʿa). He also speaks of the decisive will (al-mashīʿa al-jāzima) that brings the act into existence necessarily. The human being acts by his will, but God creates this will. Accordingly, employing a formula like those of Ibn Sinā and al-Ghazālī noted above, al-Rāzī affirms, “The human being is necessitated in the form of one who chooses freely (al-insān muḍtarr fi ṣūrat mukhtār).”

In addition to this compatibilism, a passage in al-Rāzī’s Tafsīr finds him underlining the contradictory character of human agency. Al-Rāzī sets out his comments when interpreting the verse: “God has sealed the hearts [of the


unbelievers] and their hearing” (Q. 2:6). After concluding that the qur'anic evidence on the human act falls into the realm of contradiction (ḥayyiz al-ta'ārud), al-Rāzī turns to the rational arguments of the Ashʿarīs—whom he calls Sunnis—and the Muʿtazilis. He first notes that the Shāfiʿī jurist Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī (d. 512/1118) argues that neither Muʿtazilis nor Sunnis (i.e. Ashʿarīs) should be called unbelievers on this matter because both exalt God. Al-Rāzī explains that Sunni emphasize God's greatness and say that God must be the sole Creator (mūjid) while Muʿtazilis stress God's wisdom (hikma) and say that it is unbefitting of God's sublimity to commit bad deeds (qabāʾih). After this, al-Rāzī goes on to a second “mystery (sirr),” this time dealing with the cause of the human act. On the one hand, he writes, “Establishing the Divinity leads necessarily to the view of compulsion (jabr).” On the other, “Establishing the Messenger leads necessarily to the view of [human] power.” In the latter view, that of the Muʿtazilis, God's guidance through the Messenger Muḥammad entails human accountability and human power to commit acts. Al-Rāzī proves the contrary compulsion position with his preponderator argument. Acts that are merely contingent or possible (mumkin) require a preponderator (murajjiḥi) to bring them into existence. God must create this preponderator. So, denying that human acts require a preponderator is tantamount to denying the Creator, but affirming a preponderator entails compulsion and determinism in human acts and is tantamount to denying the Messenger. Al-Rāzī then outlines a third mystery. We intuitively sense a need for a preponderator to determine something’s existence or nonexistence, but, following the logic of the previous mystery, this insight leads to compulsion in human acts. Conversely, we know intuitively that there is a difference between voluntary and involuntary acts, between the good of praise and the bad of blame, and between command and prohibition. This entails the doctrine of the Muʿtazilis. Al-Rāzī concludes that it seems as though the dictates of reason and the exaltation of God's power and wisdom lead into the realm of contradiction, and he closes his discussion by asking God to lead us to truth and to good ends. In this text, al-Rāzī pits Muʿtazili libertarian freedom against compulsion and makes no attempt to render the two perspectives compatible.  

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26 Al-Rāzī, Al-Matālib al-ʾāliyya, 8:118, observes the same contradiction or opposition (ta'ārud) and indicates that it is obligatory for ordinary people (al-ʾawāmm) not to delve into it. Shihadeh, Teleological Ethics, 181–203, provides a sensitive discussion of al-Rāzī's late-life skepticism concerning apodictic knowledge in metaphysical and theological matters.
Three somewhat different outlooks may be detected in the above review of al-Rāzī’s thought on the human act. First, he calls himself a Jabrī, openly confessing compulsion (jabr) in human acts and reducing Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī’s libertarianism to compulsion as well. Second, he articulates a compatibilism in which the human being is the agent of his act while God creates the act by creating the power and the decisive will through which the act comes into existence. Third, al-Rāzī in his Tafsīr stresses the contradiction between libertarian freedom and compulsion and makes no attempt to articulate their compatibility.

In some sense, Ibn ʿArabī picks up where al-Rāzī leaves off. For the Sufi theorist, proofs from revelation contradict each other, and while the Muʿtazilis and the Ashʿarīs both make strong and valid rational arguments—the first based on God’s command, the second based on God’s power—their views are contradictory as well. With Ibn ʿArabī, ambiguity is the fundamental character of reality, and all perspectives—even if contradictory—have their proper validity. So, in this question as in others, it is perhaps missing the point to try to pin Ibn ʿArabī down to one position or another. Nonetheless, he does say that the truth of this matter is found only through unveiling (kashf) and that this gives greater credence to the Ashʿarī view. Ultimately, the gnostic sees that all acts are God’s acts and that there is no linkage between secondary causes or between the human power and the human act. At most, the acquisition or performance (kasb) of the act is attributed to the human being, and this is his free choice (ikhtiyār).  

As the following sections will bear out, Ibn Taymiyya resists the drift toward open admission of contradiction characteristic of al-Rāzī and Ibn ʿArabī and refuses to surrender claim to rationality in the face of this most intransigent of theological paradoxes. Working within a metaphysical framework developed in al-Rāzī’s theology, Ibn Taymiyya holds fast to the compatibility of human agency and God’s preponderance of human acts. This, as well as his polemic against Jabrīs and strict Ashʿarīs, explains why Ibn Taymiyya may look—in Gimaret’s words—“much more anti-Ashʿarī than anti-Muʿtazili,” even though the underlying metaphysic is fully deterministic.

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God Is the Creator, Originator and Preponderator of the Human Act

Ibn Taymiyya supports the view that God is the Creator of human acts with quranic verses such as, “[Abraham and Ishmael said,] ‘Our Lord! Make us (ij‘ alnā) submissive to You and of our progeny a nation submissive to You’” (Q. 2:128), “We made (jā alnā) leaders from among them guiding under our command” (Q. 32:24), and, “Surely, the human being was created (khuliqa) fretful, when evil touches him, anxious, when good touches him, grudging” (Q. 70:19–21). For rational proof that God is the Creator of the human act, Ibn Taymiyya turns to al-Rāzī’s preponderator argument and an equivalent originator argument. The shaykh uses these extensively in Minhāj to counter the Mu‘tasilism of al-Hilli.

One full and clear version of the originator argument proceeds as follows. Ibn Taymiyya first notes that the human will or act originates after not existing. Now, he argues, an originating event either has an originator or it does not. If it does not, then we have origination without an originator. If the act has an originator, it must be either the human, or God, or someone else. If it is the human, then the act’s originator itself requires a prior originator and so on ad infinitum. This is impossible because an infinite regress of originating events cannot subsist in humans who are themselves originated. If the originator of the act is someone else, the same difficulty of an infinite regress recurs as when the originator is the human himself. Therefore, God must be the Creator and Originator of the human act and will.0

The preponderator argument has already been presented from al-Rāzī above, and its details need not be repeated here. For Ibn Taymiyya, it yields the same result as the originator argument. The shaykh occasionally even interchanges the terms ‘origination’ and ‘preponderance’ in the course of the same argument.2 The upshot of the preponderator and originator arguments is that God creates, preponderates or originates human acts directly by supplying the complete cause that makes the respective act necessary.

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For Ibn Taymiyya, there is also no essential difference between voluntary and involuntary human acts from the perspective of God's creation. He explains that God creates human acts “through the intermediary of His creation of the servant’s will and his power just as He creates the effects by their secondary causes (asbāb). He creates clouds through wind, rain through clouds, and plants through rain.”

More will be said about secondary causality later in this chapter. Here it suffices to note that the modes of God's creation in the moral and natural spheres are identical, the only difference being that human will and power are the relevant intermediaries in the moral realm. Moreover, all human activities are contingent upon God's will to create them. In support of this, Ibn Taymiyya frequently cites the verse, “To whomsoever among you wills to go straight: You will not unless God, the Lord of the worlds, so wills” (Q. 8:8–9). He explains that this verse affirms against the Jabriyyans that humans have a will and against the Qadariyyans that this will is dependent upon the will of God. He also notes that belief in the human will is vital for belief in command and prohibition, promise and threat, while belief in God's will is central to belief in determination. Nonetheless, he maintains that the human will and power are totally dependent upon God's creation for their operation. Ibn Taymiyya discusses human power and will often, although not always precisely. The following two sections analyze this discourse further.

**Determining Power and Legislative Power**

Ibn Taymiyya uses several terms to indicate power in humans: power (qudra), capability (istiṣṭā’a), ability (taqa) and strength or potency (quwwa). Power and capability occur most commonly. All four of these terms are used...
synonymously in the course of four pages in the third volume of the edited *Minhāj*. In *Dar* the shaykh says similarly that the “capability” of the human “is his power and his ability.” Ibn Taymiyya speaks of two kinds of power in humans. On the one hand is “the legislative power that is the factor of [bodily] soundness (*muṣāḥḥih*) for the act which is the crux of command and prohibition” or “the power that is the condition for imposing obligation (*al-quḍra al-mashruṭa fī al-taklīf*).” On the other hand is “the determining power necessitating the act which is conjoined to the thing empowered and is not posterior to it.” The shaykh also calls the latter the power that makes the act follow necessarily (*mustalzim*). The power that is a factor of soundness is both before and with the act, and it is a condition (*sharṭ*) for the act to take place. The necessitating power comes into force at the very time of the act and not prior to it. Capability falls into the same two types as noted in a passage from the brief fatwa *Istiṭā‘a*:

In a number of texts, the shaykh uses a few key quranic verses and hadith to illustrate the soundness factor senses of both capability and power. He quotes, for example, “It is the duty of people to God to take the Pilgrimage (*ḥāj*) to the House, whoever is capable of making his way there” (Q. 3:97). He argues that if this were the capability conjoined to the act, then the obligation of the Pilgrimage would fall only on those actually taking the Pilgrimage. In this case, those with requisite means for the Pilgrimage would not be disobeying if they did not take it. He also quotes the hadith in which the Prophet says, “When I have commanded you with a command, do of it what you are capable.” This capability is not conjoined to the act.

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38 *Minhāj*, 3:47–50/2:274–5. See also the interchangeable usage of *qudra* and *istiṭā‘* in *Irāda*, MF 8:129; *Istiṭā‘a*, MF 8:371; and *Ṭā‘a*, MF 8:441–2.
39 *Dar*, 1:60.
40 *Irāda*, MF 8:129.
41 *Minhāj*, 3:103/2:15.
42 *Irāda*, MF 8:129.
46 Bukhārī, 6744, Al-Iqtidā‘ bi-l-kitāb wa al-sunna, Al-Iqtidā‘ bi-sunan rasūl Allāh; Ahmad, 9158.
Otherwise, the hadith would mean that they were commanded to do only what they did.\(^{47}\) As examples of the conjoined and necessitating capability, the shaykh cites, “They were not capable of hearing, and they were not seeing” (Q. 11:20), and, “Those whose eyes were covered from My Reminder, and they were not capable of hearing” (Q. 18:101).\(^{48}\) Ibn Taymiyya adds in \textit{Isti\[a\]a} that the first type of capability is legislative and the second ontological, and he ties these to the commanding, legislative words and the creative, ontological words, respectively, which we observed in Chapter Three.\(^{49}\) The shaykh’s two senses of capability thus correspond to God’s command and creation, respectively.

Ibn Taymiyya attributes his doctrine of the two senses of power and capability to “those who grasp the full truth among the Kalām theologians, jurists, hadith specialists and Sufis.”\(^{50}\) He reports that the Mu\[tazilīs and their followers among the Shī\[īs affirm only the soundness factor type of human power while the Ash\[̱arīs and others grant only the necessitating power. The former group insists that humans could do other than what they do. The human power is effectual for either an act or its opposite. However, the shaykh says that this violates the principle of preponderance. The latter group says that humans can do only what they actually do. Human power is only effectual for and conjoined to the act it creates. Ibn Taymiyya notes, however, that some from this latter group uphold the former type of capability when working in the realm of jurisprudence.\(^{51}\)

\textit{Imprecision in the Human Will}

In view of the fact that Ibn Taymiyya conceives the conjoined power or capability to be immediately effectual in producing the human act, the place of the will is not apparent. Further investigation shows that the shaykh’s psychology of human action becomes imprecise when pressed beyond the basic distinction between power as the bodily soundness to perform an act and the complete cause that brings the act into existence.

We begin with several passages solely from \textit{Minhāj} to demonstrate Ibn Taymiyya’s variety of expression. One passage sets out will and power in

\(^{47}\) \textit{Irāda}, MF 8:129; and \textit{Isti\[a\]}, MF 8:372–3.

\(^{48}\) \textit{Isti\[a\]}, MF 8:373; and \textit{Dar\[\]}, 1:61.


\(^{50}\) \textit{Dar\[\]}, 1:60.

\(^{51}\) \textit{Isti\[a\]}, MF 8:371; \textit{Abū Dharr}, MF 18:173; \textit{Sa\[da\}}, MF 8:290, 292; \textit{Dar\[\]}, 1:60; and \textit{Minhāj}, 1:408–9/1:114. On jurists adhering to an anterior capability in jurisprudence but not in theology, see \textit{Irāda}, MF 8:130.
equivalent terms. Without giving names, the shaykh notes that people dispute over the “choosing agent (al-fā‘il al-mukhtār).” Is his will before the act, conjoined to the act, or both? Likewise, is power prior to the act, conjoined to the act, or both? The shaykh then gives what he believes to be the correct view: “The decisive will (al-irāda al-jāzima) with the complete power (al-qudra al-tāmma) make the act follow necessarily and are conjoined with it. The act does not come to be by an unconjoined prior power only or an unconjoined prior will only.” Ibn Taymiyya observes that before the act there may be power but not will, or will but not power. There may also be resolve (‘azm). Then he writes, “When the time for the act comes, the resolve strengthens and becomes an intention (qaṣd). The will at the time of the act is more perfect than it was before it, and likewise, the power at the time of the act is more perfect than it was before it.” Although this discussion holds will and power in perfect symmetry, there is no attempt to explain how the two are related or whether they are identical.

A second passage in Minhāj eliminates power as a necessitating factor in the act and gives this role solely to will. After noting that some say that the power is before the act and others say that it is conjoined to it, Ibn Taymiyya articulates his own view:

The power is the factor of soundness only, and it is with it and before it. As for [the factor] making it follow necessarily, it only occurs upon the existence of the will with the power, not by the very thing that is called power. The will is not part of what is called the power. This view is the one agreeing with the language of the Qur’an and, moreover, the language of the rest of the nations. It is the most correct of the views.

At a later point in Minhāj, the shaykh distinguishes will from power in similar terms. Power is the condition for imposing obligation, but will is not. Rather, the will is the condition for the existence of the act. A fourth passage just a little earlier in Minhāj gives less prominence to the will. After explaining the two views that power is either before the act or at the time of the act, Ibn Taymiyya claims that there is both a power prior to and extending up to the time of the act and a second power necessitating the act. The power existing prior to the act is not sufficient to make someone believe or disbelieve. God must single out the believer with special blessing and produce
his will to believe. This will is part of “the entirety of the power conjoined with the act.” Here, the will has been subsumed under the power that is complete and produced directly by God. In a fifth passage from Minhāj, Ibn Taymiyya says that the human act follows necessarily when the decisive will and the complete potency (al-quwwa al-tāmma) combine (ijtama’). He then explains that what brings an act into existence is the complete cause (al-‘illa al-tāmma) which is necessarily conjoined to the act and not prior.

Beyond Minhāj, there are a number of other texts presenting similar diversity. A discussion of necessitating capability in Dar construes capability as will. Ibn Taymiyya notes that the Salaf interpret the verse, “They were not capable of hearing, and they were not seeing” (Q. 11:20), to mean that something—in this case hearing and seeing—is not possible, not due to a lack of power but a lack of will. The shaykh writes, “Their souls were not capable of willing it, even though they had the power to do it if they had so willed. This is the state of one whose caprice or corrupt opinion diverted him from listening to the books of God sent down and following them.” Elsewhere, Ibn Taymiyya says that a decisive will is needed to make an act necessary, but he also allows that this will falls under the ensemble of factors constituting the conjoined capability. A brief passage in Kasb subsumes not only will but also every other cause that may be involved in the production of an act under the conjoined power: “Power here is absolutely nothing but an expression of that from which the act [comes] with respect to intention, will, soundness of [body] members, created potency in the limbs, etc. Therefore, it must be conjoined with the act.”

In short Ibn Taymiyya maintains one power that is the soundness of the human body for performing acts that is the condition for God’s imposition of obligation. He also upholds a second power—variously called will, power, capability or some combination thereof—that generates the human act and is created directly by God. Beyond this, nothing more precise may be said about how the shaykh conceives the psychology of human action.

56 Minhāj, 3:104.
57 Minhāj, 3:50/1:275.
58 Dar, 1:61.
59 Tā’ā, MF 8:441–2.
60 Kasb, MF 8:390.
Reconciling the Jabris and the Qadaris with Compatibilist Freedom

Ibn Taymiyya occasionally articulates the compatibility of human accountability with God’s creation of human will and power by reconciling the Ash’ari Fakhr al-Din al-Razi with the Mu’tazili Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Barṣī. In Minhāj, the shaykh quotes a passage from al-Razi’s Arbain in which the Ash’ari theologian accuses Abū al-Ḥusayn of contradiction. On the one hand, al-Razi argues, Abū al-Ḥusayn goes to the extreme in Mu’tazilism by asserting that it is necessary knowledge that humans bring their acts into existence (iṣāḥ). On the other, Abū al-Ḥusayn falls into extreme Jabrism because he holds that the occurrence of the act is dependent on a motive (dā’ī), which al-Razi understands as necessary to preponderate the existence of the act. Ibn Taymiyya accuses the Shi’i Naṣir al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) and Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī of the same contradiction that al-Razi finds in Abū al-Ḥusayn. Despite this accusation, Ibn Taymiyya goes on to use al-Razi’s deterministic reading of Abū al-Ḥusayn’s motive theory to argue, sophisticatedly it will appear, for the compatibility of the Mu’tazili and Ash’ari viewpoints. He maintains that Abū al-Ḥusayn’s theory is equivalent to the teaching of the majority of Sunnis, and he claims that al-Juwayni, the Ḥanbali Abū Khāzim b. Abū Ya’la (d. 527/1133) and the Karrāmis come close to this position. The existence of human power alone is inadequate for an act to become preponderate. A motive, that is, a complete preponderator, must be conjoined to this power for the existence of the act to become necessary. According to the shaykh, the Mu’tazilis err only when they claim that the motive arises apart from God’s will and power.

Ibn Taymiyya also uses the deterministic interpretation of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Barṣī to reconcile two data of necessary knowledge that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Razi took to be contradictory. As in the passage translated below from Istiṣa’a, the shaykh affirms first that it is necessary knowledge that voluntary acts are attributed to the human who is their agent and originator (muhdith). Second, he contends that it is necessary knowledge that human will and action require an originator or preponderator from God. Thus, Ibn Taymiyya

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maintains that both the Qadarīs and the Jabrīs have part of the truth on the human act. The human act truly exists, and it is fully dependent upon God for its existence. Unlike al-Rāzī, he claims that the necessary knowledge of voluntary human agency is not incompatible with the necessary knowledge of the need of the human act for a preponderator, and he sees no contradiction in this.66 Here is his argument in full:

The Qadarīs and the Jabrīs separate into two contradictory sides. Each of them is correct in what it establishes but not in what it denies. Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥarīrī and whoever follows him among the Qadarīs claim that the knowledge that the servant originates (yuḥdith) his acts and his actions is necessary knowledge and that denying that is sophistry.

Ibn al-Khaṭīb [Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī] and his like among the Jabrīs claim that the knowledge that preponderating the servant’s act over his not acting requires a preponderator apart from the servant is necessary. [This is] because one of the two positions of something which is possible and has two equal positions will not become preponderant over the other except with a preponderator.

Both of these views are correct. However, the claim that the necessary implication of one of them is to deny the other is not correct. The servant is originating his acts [and] acquiring (kāsib) them, and this origination is in need of an originator. The servant is acting, fabricating (sāni’) and originating, and his being acting, fabricating and originating after he was not [thus] must inevitably have [another] agent. As He said, “To whomsoever among you wills to go straight”—When he wills to go straight, he begins going straight. Then, He said—“You will not, unless God, Lord of the worlds, so wills” (Q. 81:28–9).

All of what is known necessarily and what traditional (samī’) and rational (aqlī) proofs demonstrate is true. Therefore, there is neither might nor power except by God. The servant needs God. [He has] an essential need for Him in his essence, his attributes, and his acts. Nonetheless, he still has an essence, attributes and acts.67

It is apparent that Ibn Taymiyya effects his reconciliation of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Ḥarīrī in this passage by reading the term originate (yuḥdith) in a much different sense from the usual Muʿtazilī sense of create. In Ḳiṣṭā’a, from which this passage is taken, the shaykh does not elaborate how humans may be said to originate their acts, but he does broach this question in Minhāj. There he explains that God’s origination (iḥdāth) of acts means that He creates them disjoined from Himself and subsisting in humans whereas human origination (iḥdāth) of acts means that acts originate

67 Ḳiṣṭā’a, MF 8:375.
(hadatha) from humans by their will and power which God creates. Thus, human origination of acts does not involve human creation of acts for Ibn Taymiyya as it would for the Mu’tazilis. The shaykh follows al-Rāzī in insisting on God’s preponderance of the human act, and he maintains the compatibility of this with human accountability by replacing a libertarian account of human agency with the simple existence of a human agency willed and created by God. Ibn Taymiyya maintains that human beings have acts that exist in reality just as they have essences and attributes that are real, but, if human beings may be said to have choice and freedom in the shaykh’s thought, it is strictly in a compatibilist sense.

The Substrate Principle: Humans Are the Agents of their Acts in Reality

In a number of texts and especially in Minhāj, Ibn Taymiyya distinguishes between God who creates the human act (fi’l) and the human who is its agent (fā’il) by limiting attribution of the act to the substrate (maball) (i.e. the human) in which it subsists. The shaykh draws this distinction to counter the Mu’tazili objection that a God who creates acts of disobedience is bad and unjust. God cannot be called to account for creating bad acts because He creates them in a substrate other than Himself, namely, human beings, and He is not qualified by them. By virtue of this 'substrate principle', only the substrate is qualified by the acts subsisting in it.

The shaykh explains that God’s creation of acts in humans is like God’s creation of their attributes. God creates some black and some white, some tall and some short, and so on. So also, He creates some believing and some disbelieving, some unjust and some oppressed. In each of these cases, it is not God but humans who are qualified by what He creates. God is not black or white, tall or short, believing or unbelieving but only the humans in whom He creates these things.

From the human perspective, humans are the agents of their acts in reality (haqīqatan)—not metaphorically as Jahm b. Ṣafwān would have it—by virtue of what God has created to subsist in them. Humans act by their will, power

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68 Minhāj, 3:239-240/2:49.
and free choice (iqkhtiyār), and judgments for their acts are attributed to them and not to God. Ibn Taymiyya suggests that if things that cannot choose may even be said to come from a certain place—as fruit from a certain tree or a crop from a particular plot of ground—then acts are a fortiori attributed to those with free choice, even though God is their Creator. As the shaykh puts it in one discussion of the human act, “The Qur’an has informed that servants believe, disbelieve, act, commit deeds, acquire, obey, disobey, pray, give alms, undertake the Hajj, undertake the ‘Umra, kill, commit adultery, steal, tell the truth, lie, eat, drink, fight and wage war.” Thus, both acts of obedience and disobedience are attributed to humans, and humans thereby become worthy of reward and commendation or punishment and blame.

Passages employing the substrate principle often include polemic against the ideas that God’s creation (khalq) and act (fi’il) are identical to the thing created (makhlūq) and the thing enacted (maf’ūl), respectively. Ibn Taymiyya attributes these views to Jahm b. Ṣafwān, al-Ash’arī and their followers in the four Sunni schools of law including the Ḥanbalīs Ibn ‘Aqīl and Ibn al-Jawzī. He explains that their intention is to avoid saying that the human act has two agents (i.e. God and the human). But he counters that one must distinguish an act from the thing enacted and creating from the thing created. Thus, the human act is the act of the human in reality and a thing created and enacted by God. God creates the act, but He does not commit the act. If it is said that the act (fi’il) is His, it means that it is enacted (maf’ūl) by Him in another. The shaykh attributes this view to Sunnis generally on the report of the Shāfi’ī jurist al-Baghawī (d. 510/1117), to Sufis on the report of al-Kalābādhī (d. 380/990 or 384/994), and to a number of Ḥanbalis. He also tells us that it was the last of two positions held by Abū Ya’lā, and he attributes it to the Ḥanafi law school, possibly

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77 Minhāj, 1:457/1:127, 2:296–7/1:213–4, 3:112/2:17; and Jabr, MF 8:428. Ibn Taymiyya also reports in Minhāj, 2:296/1:123, 3:240/2:59, that the Ash’arī theologian Abū Iṣḥāq al-İsfarāyīnī (d. 418/1027) taught that the single act had two agents (i.e. God and the human).
78 Jabr, MF 8:428.
having in mind the Māturīdī school of theology that was prominent among the Ḥanafīs. Gimaret notes that Ibn Taymiyya’s distinction between the act and the thing enacted corresponds to the Māturīdī theological position, and he suggests that Ibn Taymiyya or an earlier Ḥanbali, such as Abū Ya‘lā, may have borrowed this idea from the Māturīdis.

In view of the substrate principle, Ibn Taymiyya maintains that God is not unjust in what He creates. As for why God would create unbelief and disobedience, Ibn Taymiyya asserts that God has wise purposes in this. In Minhāj the shaykh also provides a fortiori arguments to defend God’s retributive justice further. He argues that, if a human is not unjust to punish his servant for injustice that God creates, then God Himself is a fortiori not unjust to punish injustice that He creates. Likewise, if someone is not considered unjust to chastise another when that is necessary to gain a certain benefit, then God Himself is a fortiori not unjust to do the same. In a similar argument just a little later in Minhāj, Ibn Taymiyya explains that this is in keeping with the God who is not like anything, but Who, in His right to perfection, is given the highest similitude. These arguments and the substrate principle that lie behind them may not have satisfied Ibn Taymiyya completely. In Hasana, which will be examined in the next chapter, he goes beyond the substrate principle and attempts to absolve God of responsibility for creating bad deeds by locating the ultimate cause of human disobedience in nonexistence.

Ibn Taymiyya’s View of Divine Creation by Means of Secondary Causes

An Overview of Secondary Causality

As was noted previously, Ibn Taymiyya says that God creates the human act by means of human will and power just as He creates plants in the natural

79 Minhāj, 1:457–8/1:127. Cf. Minhāj, 2:298–301/1:214, 3:112/2:17, 3:149/2:27. Ibn Taymiyya, Ta‘ā, MF 8:438, identifies Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī as a Kalâm theologian among the Ḥanafīs. In Irāda, MF 8:120–3, Ibn Taymiyya gives a detailed account of the act (fi‘l)/thing enacted (maful) distinction, but the early part of this passage is confusing and may be textually corrupt. Two lines that appear in MF 8:121 (mid-line 4 to mid-line 6) are lacking in the MRM and MRK1 versions of the text. Moreover, the two lines in question include the key term musammā al-masdar, which appears to be used inconsistently in the wider context.


81 Abū Dharr, MF 18:155; Minhāj, 3:148/2:27; Irāda, MF 8:123; and MF 8:238.


83 Minhāj, 3:150–1/2:27.
world through secondary causes like clouds and rain. Yet, what exactly is meant by secondary causality? In Tadmuriyya the shaykh gives an overview of his views on this that is translated below. This will serve as the basis for exploration of this question in other texts, especially in Kasb, which contains much illustrative material. In Tadmuriyya Ibn Taymiyya affirms that God is Creator, Lord and Sovereign of all things and that He is powerful over all things and knows all things. Nothing occurs apart from His will (mashī'a).

The shaykh continues:

Along with this, [the People of Guidance and Prosperity] do not deny what God creates of secondary causes (asbāb) by which He creates effects (musabbabāt). For example, He—Exalted is He—said, “[It is He Who sends the winds . . .] till when they have carried a heavy-laden cloud. We drive it to a land that is dead. Then We send down rain to it, and thereby We bring forth every kind of fruit” (Q. 7:57). He—Exalted is He—said, “By [the Book] God guides whoever follows His good pleasure to ways of peace” (Q. 5:16). He—Exalted is He—said, “By [this parable], He leads many astray, and by it He guides many” (Q. 2:26). Thus, He informed that He acts by means of secondary causes.

Whoever [e.g. a strict Ashʿarī] says that He acts with them (ʿindahā) and not by means of them (bihā) opposes what the Qurʾan has brought and denies what God has created of potencies (quwāʾ) and natures (ṭabāʾī). This is similar to denying what God created of potencies that are in living beings by which living beings act, like the power of the servant. Likewise, whoever [i.e. a Muʿtazilī] makes them the creators of that has given associates to God and attributed His act to another.

That is because there is no cause among the causes but that needs another cause for its effect to occur, and there must inevitably be an impediment (māniʿ) impeding what is entailed by it (muqtaḍahu) when God does not repel [the impediment] from the [cause]. There is not one thing in existence that does anything independently when it wills, except God alone. He—Exalted is He—said, “And of everything We have created pairs, that you might remember” (Q. 51:49), that is, that you may know that the Creator of the pairs is one.

Therefore, whoever [e.g. Ibn Sinā] says that from God only one [thing] emanates because nothing emanates from one but one is ignorant.84 Indeed, there is no one thing in existence from which emanates anything alone—neither

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84 According to Ibn Sinā, only unity can flow from the One (i.e. God) so as to preserve the utter simplicity of the One. Since the One cannot be the source of multiplicity, multiplicity arises from the First Intellect, which emanates from the One. For further discussion, see Ibn Sinā, Al-Talīqāt, 54, 99–100; Ian Richard Netton, Allāb Transcendent (Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1989), 162–7; and Nicholas Heer, “Al-Rāzī and al-Ṭūsī on Ibn Sinā’s Theory of Emanation,” in Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought, ed. Parviz Morewedge (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 111–125. Ibn Taymiyya argues in Irāda, MF 8:134, that Ibn Sinā’s One is devoid of attributes and ultimately has no existence outside the mind.
one [in number] nor two—except God who created all the pairs among what the earth makes to grow, their souls, and what they do not know.

Burning does not occur except by the fire in which God created heat and in a substrate receptive to burning. When [fire] falls on a phoenix, sapphire and such like, it does not burn them, and a body may be coated with something that prevents it from burning. As for the sun from which rays come, there must inevitably be a body that receives the reflection of the rays upon it. When there is an obstacle such as a cloud or a roof, the rays do not pass below it.85

In other texts, Ibn Taymiyya gives numerous examples of God’s creation through secondary causality. God may create market price rises by means of (bi-sabab) human injustice and price drops by means of human beneficence.86 God may grant humans their provision by the usual means of human endeavor or by the rarer means of angels and jinn.87 God may make an eclipse or a strong cold wind a cause of chastisement.88 God may make the celestial bodies (kawākib), the blowing of the wind, and the light of the sun and the moon secondary causes of originating events in the earth.89 Also, invocation and intercession are among the secondary causes by which God brings to pass what He decrees.90 Marriage and sexual intercourse are the divinely established customary causes of begetting children.91 God has made deeds causes of reward and punishment just as He has made poison a cause of illness and illness a cause of death.92

**Polemic on Secondary Causality**

The Tadmuriyya passage translated above includes polemic, first, against those who say that God creates only with or at (‘ind) the instance of the causes, but not by (bi) them, and, second, against those who give human power the

85 Tadmuriyya, MF 3:112–3.
86 MF 8:520.
87 Tawakkul, MF 8:534.
89 Mantiqiyin, 270 and MF 25:198–9, both of which are translated in Yahya Michot, “Pages spirituelles d’Ibn Taymiyya: XIII. Contre l’astrologie,” *Action* (Mauritius), January 2001, 10–11, 26 (the passage from Mantiqiyin is at 10 n. 4).
91 Sā‘da, MF 8:276; and MF 8:68.
ability to create acts. The former charge is leveled against the tradition of strict Ashʿarism in which whatever appears to be causally connected is simply a matter of God creating things conjoined at the same place and time. The human act does not occur by means of human power, but only with it. The latter charge is directed against the Muʿtazilīs who argue that humans must create their own acts in order to be held properly accountable for them and also to free God from creating evil deeds. For Ibn Taymiyya, however, this is tantamount to giving God an associate (ṣūr) in His creative enterprise, and it must be rejected because God is the sole Creator. A discussion of secondary causality in Irāda adds a third charge. While some deny causes as the means by which God creates, others disregard causes that God has commanded such as invoking God and performing righteous deeds. The latter think that whatever God determines will happen whether or not they do what God has commanded. The shaykh counters this with two exchanges found in the Hadith:

[Some asked the Prophet], “Should we not leave deeds and trust completely on what has been written?” He said, “No! Perform deeds! Each is facilitated into that for which he was created”…. It was said, “O Messenger of God! Have you seen medicine by which we may be cured, charms by which we may invoke [God], and piety (taqwā) by which we may fear [God]? Do they ward off anything of God's determination?” He said, “They are part of God's determination.”

Ibn Taymiyya adds furthermore that God makes one thing a cause of another and that what God has determined has been determined to happen by means of secondary causes. In summing up these positions in Irāda, Ibn Taymiyya cites a saying, which he elsewhere attributes to al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Jawzī in their writings on complete trust (tawakkul):

Turning to the causes (aṣbāb) is giving associates in [violation of God’s] uniqueness (ṣūr fī al-tawḥīd). Obliterating the causes by denying that they are causes is an aberration with respect to reason. Abandoning the causes entirely is defamation of the Law.

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93 For this see also Minhāj, 3:239/2:49; Irāda, MF 8:136–7; Bughya, 35; and Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology,” 155–6 and n. 34, which translate MF 35:168 and MF 9:287–8, respectively.
94 Irāda, MF 8:138–9.
95 Irāda, MF 8:138. The first hadith is found in Bukhārī, 4568, Taṣfīr al-Qurʾān, Fa-sanuyassiruhu lī-l-usrā, and the second in Ibn Māja, 3428, Al-Ṭibb, Mā anzala Allāh dāʾan illā anzala lahu shifāʾ.
96 The attribution to al-Ghazālī and Ibn al-Jawzī is found in Bughya, 35.
97 Irāda, MF 8:138–9.
In the context of this dictum in *Irāda*, it appears that the Muʿtazilis are those “turning to the causes” in their attribution of the creation of acts to humans. The strict Ashʿarīs “obliterate” the causes, and those who fail to do what God has commanded because of determination “abandon” the causes. The shaykh also mentions this aphorism in other places with minor changes of wording, but its interpretation is not always apparent.\(^98\) In one text, however, he gives an extended discussion that clarifies what he thinks it means. “Turning to the causes” is depending upon them and putting one’s hope in them. For Ibn Taymiyya, there is no cause worthy of this because all causes depend upon God for their origination. Nothing originates itself. Here he criticizes the philosophers and the astrologers at length for believing that the motions of the nine celestial spheres are the causes of all originating events.\(^99\) He also identifies the naturalists and the Muʿtazilis with this first part of the aphorism. Moving to its second part, he notes that “obliterating the causes” is not only an imperfection in reason but also defames the Law, and he identifies this position with many of the Kalām theologians, presumably the Ashʿarīs.\(^100\) Regarding the third part, the shaykh says that “abandoning the causes entirely” is not only “defamation of the Law” but also irrational, and he censures those who think their deeds play no role in what will happen to them because of divine determination.\(^101\) For Ibn Taymiyya, the first part of the aphorism negates God’s creation and the last two parts undercut the Law.

*Secondary Causality from the Divine Perspective Is Instrumental*

A key point in the *Tadmuriyya* quotation above is that the secondary causes by which God creates do not in themselves have the ability to entail their effects. No secondary cause can act alone. Examples from *Kashf* clearly illustrate that the causes are thus purely instrumental from God’s perspective. Ibn Taymiyya notes that God punishes via human effort: “Fight against them; God will chastise them by your hands” (Q. 9:4). Then, he explains that “our hands are the secondary causes, the instruments (ʿālāt), the intermediaries (awsāt) and the tools (adawāt) in bringing the chastisement to

\(^{98}\) *Wāsita*, MF 1:131; *Tubha*, MF 10:35; MF 8:70; *Qawlʿ Alī*, MF 8:169; *Tawakkul*, MF 8:528; MF 10:256; and *Baghya*, 35. I am indebted to Michot, “Ibn Taymiyya: Les intermédiaires entre Dieu et l’homme,” 8 (including n. 12), for the first two references.


\(^{100}\) *Qawlʿ Alī*, MF 8:175.

\(^{101}\) *Qawlʿ Alī*, MF 8:175–8.
them.” In *Kasb* he also illustrates the efficacy (َتَأْثِير) of human power on the human act with the images of a pen writing, an adz hewing and a stick striking. The pen, for example, is not considered an associate (شَرِيك) in the act of writing. The implication is that God has no associates in creating the human act. Nevertheless, the shaykh maintains that the effect (اثار) of the pen cannot be ignored, and it is said that the act is performed by or with (بِ) it. Here the shaykh adds in passing that God is given the highest similitude. Apparently, he is alerting the reader that he is not necessarily describing the very modality of God’s action but simply trying to speak well of it in accord with the principle of giving God the highest human perfection, as I have described in Chapter One. Following through on the pen and stick similes a little later in *Kasb*, Ibn Taymiyya fields the objection that no one has ever seen a writer’s pen rewarded or a striker’s stick punished. The images obviously fail him at this point, and he does no more than divert attention from the divine perspective to the human. He asserts that humans are agents in reality and do indeed have a will. He adds that every reasonable person knows intuitively that there is a difference between someone praying or committing adultery and someone shivering from fever, that is, there is a distinction between voluntary (َإِكْتِيَارِي) and involuntary (َإِدْسَتَارِي) acts.

The shaykh’s integration of God’s guidance into the scheme of secondary causes also illustrates their instrumentality. The passage from *Tadmuriyya* quoted earlier cites an example from the Qur’an: “By [the Book] God guides whoever follows His good pleasure to ways of peace” (Q. 5:6). The Book, that is, the Qur’an, is a means by which God guides. In *Kasb* Ibn Taymiyya explains further that God’s command is a secondary cause distinguishing obedience from disobedience. It is part of the ensemble of causes that brings God’s determination of human destinies to fruition in happiness or punishment. The command in itself does not necessitate an obedient act,
but it is the instrument that determines whether an act is an act of obedience or disobedience.\textsuperscript{107}

In other texts, Ibn Taymiyya gives additional discussion on the dependence of the secondary causes on other causes and of these on the will of God. He notes that fire cannot burn, food cannot fill the stomach, and drink cannot quench thirst by themselves. These things require at least one other secondary cause. Heat, for example, requires two causes. It requires the agent fire, and it requires a receptacle (\textit{qābil}), such as a body that is receptive to heat and burning.\textsuperscript{108} Rain cannot make plants grow without air, soil and other such things, and anyone who provides help is depending on a great number of other causes beyond his own power.\textsuperscript{109} According to the shaykh, there is ultimately no secondary cause and no created thing that can be a complete cause (\textit{ʕilla tāmma} or \textit{sabab tāmm}) entailing its effect necessarily. Everything is totally dependent on the will of God. It is God who perfects the combination of causes and conditions (\textit{shurūt}) and removes impediments (\textit{mawāni}) so that something comes into being.\textsuperscript{110} “If God does not make the causes perfect and repel the impediments, what is intended will not happen. What He—Glory be to Him—wills is, even if people do not will it, and what people will is not unless God wills.”\textsuperscript{111} It is not sufficient, for example, that a couple engages in sexual intercourse in order to bear a child; God must also will to make the woman pregnant. Likewise, good deeds are a cause, but not a sufficient cause, of happiness; God must also grant His mercy and pardon.\textsuperscript{112}

\textit{Secondary Causality from the Human Perspective Is Natural}

Even though Ibn Taymiyya’s dominant emphasis is that secondary causes are instrumental and cannot bring effects into existence apart from God’s will,
he nonetheless often presents them as having certain and predictable effects once activated by that will. As stated in the long passage from *Tadmuriyya* quoted earlier, fire burns whatever is receptive to burning, and roofs and clouds necessarily block the rays of the sun. Also, Ibn Taymiyya’s assertion in the same text, “There must inevitably be an impediment impeding what is entailed by [the cause],” strongly suggests that causes automatically entail effects apart from impediments. The implication is that once God removes impediments the causes are free to exercise their efficacy in a natural causal fashion, at least from the human perspective. Once the cloud is removed (by God’s will), the sun’s rays will naturally heat the earth. Here God’s direct willing of every event begins to recede from the picture. In *Kasb* the shaykh presents human deeds and recompense in a similarly naturalistic fashion. After discussing the divine side of the human act at some length in this fatwa, Ibn Taymiyya turns to the human basis of reward and punishment:

Know that God—Exalted is He—created the act of the servant to be a cause entailing praiseworthy or blameworthy effects (*āthār*). A righteous deed like prayer...is followed immediately by light in [the servant’s] heart, gladdening in his chest, tranquility in his soul, increase in his knowledge, confirmation in his certainty, strength in his reason, and other than that. [This includes] the strength of his body, the splendor of his face, his renouncing abomination and wrong, fostering love for him in human hearts, repulsion of trials from him and other things that he knows and we do not know. Furthermore, these effects of light, knowledge, certainty and otherwise, which occur to him, are secondary causes leading to other effects of the same kind, of another kind higher than these, and so on. Therefore, it has been said that from the reward of a good deed is a good deed after it and that from the punishment of an evil deed is an evil deed after it. One who commits an evil deed like lying, for example, is punished immediately by darkness in the heart, hardness and tightness in his chest, hypocrisy, restlessness, forgetting what he has learned, blocking of the door to knowledge he was seeking, a decrease in his certainty and reason, disgrace, hatred of him in human hearts, boldness in other sin of the same kind or of a different kind, and so on, unless God sets him right by His mercy.

This naturalistic account of reward and punishment shifts the focus from God’s all-pervasive will to the responsibility of humans for their destiny. Yet, its naturalism involves a kind of inevitability in the results of acts, and this shifts the focus back to God who set up this cause and effect world. The

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114 *Tadmuriyya*, MF 3:112.

shaykh goes on in Kasb to explain that God has bound certain causes to certain effects with a “firm bond (raḥt muḥkam)” such that, from the perspective of creatures, the operation of the secondary causes is that of natural causality. Someone who eats gets full. Someone who drinks quenches his thirst. Yet, this account, even from the human perspective, is not entirely naturalistic. According to Ibn Taymiyya, God can break these causal bonds if He wills. He can take the potency out of food or place an impediment in the stomach. He can even make people full and quench their thirst by some other means if He so wills. However, humanity cannot violate the causal bonds that God has arranged. No one can eat without getting full or drink without satisfying his thirst. Following this in Kasb, Ibn Taymiyya attributes everything to God’s wise purpose. God has a wise purpose in sending His messengers, and He has a wise purpose in creating the secondary causes and effects. Yet, the shaykh in Kasb also relates everything back to God’s vanquishing power, operational will and even pre-eternal knowledge. God’s determination is a mystery (sīr). It is enough to know that God is “All-Knowing, All-Wise and All-Merciful.”

Conclusion on Secondary Causality

To sum up this overview of secondary causality in Ibn Taymiyya’s thought, God’s perspective appears to be that of a real but inert world of tools and raw materials that is wholly dependent upon God’s will for its every movement. God creates by means of these instruments in accord with His wise purpose. The human perspective is that of a world of naturalistic cause and effect and reward and punishment into which God can intervene at any point. The language of secondary causality does not resolve the rational difficulty that God’s all-encompassing will poses for free human agency and moral accountability. The shaykh’s comparison of human agency to the writing of a pen successfully models instrumental causality from God’s perspective, but it fails to make sense of voluntary human agency. When Ibn Taymiyya is faced with the injustice of an instrument like a pen being punished for what it writes, he can do no more than switch from the divine to the human perspective. In the course of his argument, he simply stops trying to explain how God creates human agency, and he appeals instead to rational intuition of the differences on the human level between acts that

are good and bad, and voluntary and involuntary. Despite such rational difficulties, Ibn Taymiyya’s notion of secondary causality provides him with a powerful rhetorical tool for speaking of the compatibility of the divine and human spheres and for identifying error in those who he believes falter in one of the two domains.

Ibn Taymiyya on Controversial Kalām Terms Relating to Human Agency

No Ashʿari Acquisition (kasb) and No Independent Efficacy (taʿthīr)

This and the following two sections examine what Ibn Taymiyya writes about certain controversial terms and issues in the Kalām tradition, namely, human efficacy (taʿthīr) in acts, human acquisition (kasb) of acts, God’s obligation of what humans are not able to do (taklīf mā lā yuṭāq), and compulsion (jabr).

Laoust and Gimaret both note that Ibn Taymiyya rejects the Ashʿari view of acquisition, and this will be reviewed below. However, they do not mention that the shaykh still employs the term to refer to the act itself, as in, “The act is the acquisition.” Ibn Taymiyya also suggests that “acquiring” does not differ from saying that someone “acts, brings into existence, originates, fabricates, performs deeds, etc.” The term also indicates to the shaykh that human acts have results. The act that God creates in the person is “an acquisition by which [the person] attracts profit to himself and by which he repels harm from himself.”

In Kasb Ibn Taymiyya links acquisition to the quranic verse, “What [the soul] has acquired is accounted to it, and what it has acquired is held against it” (Q. 2:86). Thereafter, he observes that acquisition appears as the act through which human beings gain what they need to develop from deficiency to perfection.
Ibn Taymiyya disparages the strict Ash‘arī concept of human acquisition with the aphorism, “There are three things having no truth: the ‘leap’ of al-Nazzām, the ‘states’ of Abū Hāshim and the ‘acquisition’ of al-Ash‘arī.”\(^{123}\) The shaykh reports that for al-Ash‘arī God is the Creator of the human voluntary act, which the human then acquires conjoined to his temporally originated power in the same substrate. The existence of the originated power distinguishes voluntary from involuntary acts. However, this power has no efficacy in bringing the act into existence, and the human being is not the agent of his act. The shaykh believes that this is irrational, and he explains that this comes very close to the complete denial of human power set forth by Jahm b. Ṣafwān.\(^{124}\) In Minhāj he writes,

As for the Jabris such as Jahm and his followers, according to them, the servant has no power at all. Al-Ash‘arī agrees with them in meaning. He says that the servant does not have an efficacious power (qudra mu‘aththira). He maintains something he calls a power, and he makes its existence like its nonexistence. Similarly for the acquisition that he maintains.\(^{125}\)

Ibn Taymiyya asserts that merely conjoining the power to the acquisition without positing any efficacious link erases any distinction between the powerful and the impotent or between power and any other human attributes, such as life, knowledge or will.\(^{126}\) Moreover, there is then no difference between voluntary and involuntary acts.\(^{127}\)

It was noted in the discussion of secondary causality above that the efficacy (ta‘thīr) that Ibn Taymiyya himself posits between human power and the act itself is not of the kind that produces effects independently. Independent causal efficacy is solely God’s prerogative. Human power is rather a condition and a secondary cause for God’s creation of the act. It is thus apparent that Ibn Taymiyya can criticize al-Ash‘arī for no more than failing to maintain that human power is among the secondary causes by which God creates the


\(^{125}\) Minhāj, 1:397–8/1:111.


\(^{127}\) Jabr, MF 8:467; and Minhāj, 3:209–210/2:42.
act. In this regard, the shaykh also rejects a third sense of efficacy proposed by al-Bāqillānī in which the human power is efficacious in determining an attribute or state of the act, but not the act itself. The shaykh says that this posits something—even if only an attribute—that falls outside the domain of God’s creation. He argues that there is no difference between giving efficacy to a speck or an elephant apart from God. Both equally involve giving God an associate (shirk).128

Ibn Taymiyya has no difficulty employing the terms efficacy and acquisition according to his own senses despite the fact that he believes Ash’arī theologians have stripped them of meaning. However, the shaykh is much more reticent to say that God obligates humans to do what they are not able or that God compels them to act. As the next two subsections show, Ibn Taymiyya believes that these two ways of speaking, even if given correct senses, should not be used because they too easily suggest ideas that are inappropriate for God.

No Obligation of What One Is Not Able to Do (taklīf mā lā yuṭāq)

Closely connected to the issue of human power is that of the obligation of what one is not able to do (taklīf mā lā yuṭāq). On a number of occasions, Ibn Taymiyya notes that two different kinds of obligation come under this label. The first kind is obligating people to do what they have no power to do, as in obligating humans to fly, the blind to vocalize copies of the Qur’an, the chronically ill to walk or the sitting simultaneously to stand. The shaykh asserts that most Sunnīs, including most Ash’arīs, deny that this kind of obligation is found in the Law. The second kind is obligating people to do that of which they are capable in the sense of being sound of body and limb. However, the obligated does not commit the act because he lacks the will to do it and is preoccupied with something else. For example, an unbeliever could believe but does not do so because he is preoccupied by unbelief.

According to Ibn Taymiyya, the first kind of obligation of what one is not able to do does not occur, but the second kind does. However, he does not believe that the second kind should be given this label even though the Ash’arī theologian al-Bāqillānī, the Ḥanbalī Abū Ya’lā and many others do identify it as such. He explains that calling the second kind obligation of what one is not able to do is based on the Ash’arī principle that the human

power or capability to act is present only at the time of the act and is only for the act that actually takes place. Thus, all imposition of obligation prior to an act itself is obligating what is beyond human ability.\textsuperscript{129} Presupposing his doctrine of two capabilities, Ibn Taymiyya argues that this is not in keeping with the teachings of the Qur’an, the Sunna and the Salaf because the Qur’an explicitly states that God has obligated acts of which one is capable. This includes things like going on pilgrimage and fasting (cf. Q. 3:97, etc.)\textsuperscript{130}

Ibn Taymiyya also addresses a more extreme version of obligation of what one is not able to do, that of al-Rāzī.\textsuperscript{131} The shaykh provides a full discussion of this in \textit{Jabr}. For al-Rāzī, this doctrine is not just a matter of obligating something of someone who lacks potency, as in commanding the blind to see. Rather, God obligates what is rationally impossible, as in combining two contradictories. Moreover, al-Rāzī believes that this is found in revelation. The prime example is when God obligated the Prophet’s uncle Abū Lahab to believe while knowing and revealing that he would not do so. Since God’s foreknowledge could not have been contradicted lest He become ignorant, it was inherently impossible that Abū Lahab believe. Additionally, obligation of anything apart from God’s knowledge of what will happen is obligation of what one is not able to do.\textsuperscript{132}

Ibn Taymiyya evades al-Rāzī’s conclusions by switching from the eternal divine perspective adopted by al-Rāzī’s argument to the human historical perspective, and from the necessitating divine knowledge to the secondary causal sense of human power. Ibn Taymiyya explains that God commanded Abū Lahab to believe and that God did not put Abū Lahab in the predicament of having also to believe that he would not believe. God did not tell the Prophet to share the quranic verse, “[Abū Lahab] will burn in a fire of blazing flames” (Q. 111:3), with Abū Lahab himself. The shaykh also cites the parallel example of Noah and his people. God told Noah that no more

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\textsuperscript{129} For a detailed discussion of al-Ash’arī’s views on this, see Gimaret, \textit{La doctrine d’al-Ash’arī}, 437–9.

\textsuperscript{130} \textit{Jabr}, 8:469–470; \textit{Dar’}, 1:60–3; and \textit{Minhāj}, 3:52–3/1:276, 3:102–7/2:15–6. There is also considerable discussion of \textit{taklīf mā lā yuṭāq} in \textit{Saʿāda}, MF 8:293–302, and numerous scholars are linked to the various positions identified. However, I have not relied on this text because its structure is confused and may be corrupt. This should entail no loss since its basic ideas are found in the other texts employed.


\textsuperscript{132} See also \textit{Tā’}, MF 8:438ff.
of his people would believe (cf. Q. 11:36), but God did not tell Noah to convey this message to his people.

Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyya argues, human disobedience occurs for lack of human will, not for lack of power, and not because God knew it would occur. A discussion of impossibility (al-mumtani’) later in Jabr clarifies the shaykh’s point. He says that it is correct that what is contrary to God’s foreknowledge will not happen and that if it did happen it would turn God’s knowledge to ignorance. However, this does not mean that someone obligated to do what God knows will not happen is unable to carry out the respective obligation. It could be that the one obligated is able but has no will to do it. “Then,” the shaykh concludes, “he is obligated to do only what he is able to do despite the knowledge of the Lord that it will not be.”

Ibn Taymiyya advances his argument further by invoking a parallel with the operation of God’s will. God knows that what He does not will will not exist. However, this does not mean that God could not will it. What He knows will not exist is only impossible by virtue of His not willing it, not because it is inherently impossible or because He is unable to do it. The shaykh supports this with a number of quranic verses including, “If your Lord had willed, He would have made you one nation” (Q. 5:48). Likewise, then, humans may be able to do something but not will to do it.

This bit of polemic works for Ibn Taymiyya only because he has diverted the reader’s attention from the perspective of God’s fixed foreknowledge to that of temporality and history, in respect both of human power and God’s will. Possibly it would be fairer for him to argue that the human act is contingent from the perspective of human power and necessary from that of God’s knowledge. However, to conclude from this that humans are obligated beyond what they are able to do would not fit his interpretation of the Qur’an and would probably offend his sense of what befits God’s perfection.

No Speaking of Compulsion (jabr)

In a number of texts, Ibn Taymiyya devotes attention to the term compulsion (jabr), which Jahm b. Šafwān and al-Rāzī employ to describe the

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135 Jabr, MF 8:498–500. In Darʾ, 1:62, the shaykh also observes that those who deny God’s power to do anything but what He knows share a fundamental presupposition with the extremist Qadarīs who deny God’s foreknowledge: “Both sects agree that the opposite of what is known is not possible (munkin) or within the realm of possibility (maqdūr’ alayhi).”
human act. In *Dar*’ the shaykh draws directly from a discussion of the early Jabri/Qadari controversy in Abū Bakr al-Khallāl’s *al-Sunna*, which appears no longer to be extant.136 Following al-Khallāl, Ibn Taymiyya reports that the early hadith specialist al-Zubaydī (d. 149/766) completely denies that God compels. This is because the generally accepted meaning of the term is coercing (*ilzām*) someone against his good pleasure (*riḍā*), as when jurists say that a woman is compelled to be married apart from her choice and good pleasure. The shaykh explains that God does not compel someone in this sense because God has the power to make someone choose and be well pleased to do what he does and to make someone hate what he does not do. Someone who chooses his acts is not compelled.137

Ibn Taymiyya reports a second view, that of the early jurist al-Awzā’ī (d. 157/774), who prohibits speaking about compulsion since the term does not appear in the Qur’an and the Sunna.138 The shaykh explains that al-Awzā’ī’s prohibition against discussing the term compulsion is better than al-Zubaydī’s complete denial. The reason relates to the fact that one of God’s names, which does appear in the Qur’an, is “Compeller (*al-Jabbar*)” (Q. 59:23), a name with the same Arabic root as compulsion. In this regard, Ibn Taymiyya notes that a certain Muḥammad b. Ka‘b (d. 118/736)139 said, “[God] is only called Compeller because He compels creatures to [do] what He wills.” The shaykh takes this to be a correct usage of compulsion. Thus, al-Zubaydī’s position may deny something that is true in the process

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138 *Dar*, 1:66–7. Still drawing on al-Khallāl, Ibn Taymiyya notes that Sufyān al-Thawrī also denies compulsion and says that God “naturally disposèd (*jabala*)” people. In response, the hadith specialist Abū Bakr al-Marwazi (d. 292/905) supposes that al-Thawrī had in mind the following hadith: “[The Prophet said to Ashajj ‘Abd al-Qays], ‘In you are two characteristics that God loves: gentleness and deliberateness.’ He said, ‘Two characteristics that I have affected or two characteristics to which I have been naturally disposed (*jubiltu*)?’ [The Prophet said], ‘Of course, two characteristics to which you have been naturally disposed.’ He said, ‘Praise be to God who has naturally disposed me with two characteristics God loves.’” This is as quoted in *Dar*, 1:68, where it is traced to the collection of Muslim. However, very little of this hadith appears in Muslim (see e.g. Muslim, 24, 25, Al-Imān, Al-Amr bi-l-imān bi-Allāh, ta‘āla…). Closer, but not exact, versions appear in Abū Dāwūd, 4548, Al-Adab, Fī qublat al-rijl; and Ahmad, 17160, Musnad al-shāmiyyin, Hadith wafd ‘Abd al-Qays ‘an al-Nabī. Ibn Taymiyya often quotes this hadith, as in *Minhāj*, 3:247/2:51; *Jabr*, MF 8:462; and *A’lā*, MF 16:142.

139 In *Kash*, MF 8:395, Ibn Taymiyya says that Muḥammad b. Ka‘b was among the most excellent of the second generation in Medina.
of denying what is false, whereas the position of al-Awzā‘ī does not run this risk.40 In Minhāj, Ibn Taymiyya also attributes al-Awzā‘ī’s position to Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778) and Ahmad b. Ḥanbal.41

In Jabr Ibn Taymiyya elaborates his views more extensively. He explains that in ordinary language contexts the term compulsion means coercion (iqrāḥ) of others against their wills. He notes, “It is said, ‘The father compelled his daughter to marry, and the judge compelled the man to sell what he had to pay his debt.’”42 The shaykh also distinguishes right coercion from wrong coercion. Coercion is justified to make a warring unbeliever accept Islam or pay the jizya, to return an apostate to Islam and to make Muslims perform their religious duties, pay their debts as they are able, and so on. However, it is wrong to coerce someone to disbelieve or disobey as in rape and coercing someone to drink.43 Whether right or wrong, “Servants commit this compulsion, which is coercion, with each other because they cannot originate will and free choice in [each others’] hearts or make them commit their acts.”44 Humans cannot compel others to will, love and hate. The most they can do to get others to follow their wills is arouse desire or strike terror. Coercion consists in terrorizing someone else to the point that the other commits an act he would not otherwise will and choose. Apart from cases in which the one coerced has no power to resist—the shaykh gives rape as an example—the victim does in fact will and choose to commit the act. However, he wills his act only secondarily. His primary intention is to avoid the greater evil that might befall him for noncompliance.45

In contrast to human compulsion, which is necessarily coercive, Ibn Taymiyya asserts in Jabr that God’s compulsion is not coercive, because He has the power to create the will and the free choice by which humans commit their acts. God makes humans will and love what they do. He can even make humans will something that they hate: “He is able to make [the servant] do something despite his hatred of it. He wills it to the point that he does it despite his loathing of it. For example, an ill person may drink medicine despite his hatred of it.”46 The shaykh adds that God moreover creates this hatred (karāha). He illustrates this with two Quranic verses, “To

140 Dar’, 1:69.
141 Minhāj, 3:242/2:51.
142 Jabr, MF 8:462–3.
146 Jabr, MF 8:464.
God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and the earth obediently or with hatred (karhan)” (Q. 13:15), and, “To Him has submitted whosoever is in the heavens and the earth obediently or with hatred” (Q. 3:83). Speaking of God’s name “Compeller,” Ibn Taymiyya explains that it is “from His compulsion, His subjugation and His power that He makes servants willing to do what He wills from them.” He also clarifies that all that God does is wise and just, while the compulsion that creatures commit may be unjust, ignorant and foolish.

Despite denying coercion on the part of God in the above discussion, Ibn Taymiyya adds confusion in Jabr by also attributing right coercion to God when he asserts, “God—Exalted is He—does not coerce anyone except in truth.” This inconsistency aside, the shaykh’s primary concern is to underline that God’s compulsion, if the term be permitted, consists in creating human free choice and will directly with wise purpose in a way that is impossible for humans to create in each other. Even with this clarification, Ibn Taymiyya is reticent to use the word. In Kasb, for example, he argues against direct divine compulsion of human acts on the basis of an intuitive difference between involuntary and voluntary acts. There is a rational and intuitive difference between the shivering of the feverish on the one hand and sitting, praying or stealing on the other. In the latter case, human beings are willing, choosing and able to commit their acts while in the former they are not. Ibn Taymiyya maintains that it is still God who creates the human will that necessitates human acts, and he admits that this is “compulsion by means of will (jabr bi-tawassut al-irāda).” Yet, he will not break with tradition and call himself a Jabri as did al-Rāzī who holds essentially the same view. He argues that it is better not to speak of compulsion lest it be confused with that which humans impose on each other. As with purpose (gharad) and passionate love (ishq), which were discussed in Chapter Two above, it is a matter of the ordinary language meaning of compulsion suffering too many negative connotations for use in theological discourse.

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147 Jabr, MF 8:464.
149 Jabr, MF 8:465.
150 Jabr, MF 8:505.
151 Kasb, MF 8:394.
152 Kasb, MF 8:395.
It remains to note that what I have been calling Ibn Taymiyya’s compatibilism—his conviction that God’s all-encompassing power is compatible with real human will and action—is perhaps better expressed in his own quranic idiom as the golden mean (wasat), the balanced intermediate position that avoids extremes (cf. Q. 2:143). In a number of places, the shaykh explains that the People of the Sunna (ahl al-sunna) stand in an intermediate position between the various Muslim sects and diverse religions on numerous religious issues. For example, on the question of God’s attributes they take the golden mean between stripping God of His attributes (ta’til) and assimilating God to creatures (tashbih), and on the issue of the Companions of the Prophet they take the middle course between the Shi’is and the Kharijijis. Among other things, Ibn Taymiyya charges Shi’is with preferring ‘Ali over the first two Sunni caliphs Abū Bakr and ‘Umar, and he accuses the Kharijijis of calling the third Sunni caliph ‘Uthmān an unbeliever and rejecting ‘Ali’s caliphate.

With respect to God’s creation of human acts, Ibn Taymiyya states tersely in Wāṣīṭiyya, “[The People of the Sunna and the Community follow] a golden mean concerning the subject of God’s acts—Exalted is He—between the Qadarīs and the Jabrīs.” He outlines his view more fully in another text translated below. Although there is nothing substantially new here, this passage does show Ibn Taymiyya employing the notion found in Ibn Sinā, al-Rāzī and others that God necessitates or compels the human being to choose freely more clearly than we have seen above. However, he uses the quranic terms ‘make’ (ja’ala) and ‘create’ in lieu of the linguistically unredeemable ‘compel’.

Concerning the subject of [God’s] creation and His command, [the People of the Sunna follow] a golden mean between those who belie the power of God, who do not believe in His perfect power, His all-inclusive will and His creation of everything, and between those who corrupt the religion of God, who take the servant not to have a will, a power or a deed. They strip away the command and the prohibition, the reward and the punishment, and they become equivalent to those associationists who said, “If God had willed, we

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154 Wāṣīṭiyya kubrā, MF 3:373, 375.
155 Wāṣīṭiyya, MF 3:141.
would not have given associates, nor would have our fathers, and we would not have forbidden anything [against His will]” (Q. 6:48).

The People of the Sunna believe that God is powerful over everything—He is thus able to guide servants and turn their hearts—that what God wills is and what He does not will is not—There is nothing in His sovereignty that He does not will, and He is not incapable of executing His will—and that He is Creator of everything with respect to concrete entities, attributes and movements. And they believe that the servant has a power, a will and a deed and that he is freely choosing (mukhtār). They do not call him compelled (majbūr), given that one who is compelled is coerced [to act] differently from his free choice. God—Glory be to Him—made (ja'ala) the servant someone who freely chooses what he does. He is thus someone who freely chooses and wills. God is his Creator and the Creator of his choice.156

**Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that Ibn Taymiyya uses several different terms to set out a view of God’s creation of human agency that is essentially that of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in its metaphysical structure and that has its roots in the causal language of philosophers like Ibn Sīnā. Ibn Taymiyya speaks of the complete necessitating cause with which God creates all human acts directly using terms such as origination, preponderance, decisive human will, complete human power and potency, determining power, and conjoined capability. In order to provide a basis for human accountability to God’s command, the shaykh identifies an anterior and legislative power that denotes the bodily soundness of the human agent for undertaking acts. Ibn Taymiyya also discusses the created world and human agency in terms of secondary causes, which are the instruments and raw materials with which God creates, and which, from the human perspective, form a world of natural cause and effect. Among the secondary causes that are relevant to human voluntary action, and which God uses to originate human acts, are human power and will, as well as God’s command.

Ibn Taymiyya insists on the compatibility of God’s creation of human acts alongside real human agency and responsibility, and, unlike al-Rāzī in his *Tafsīr*, the shaykh does not acknowledge rational difficulty in upholding the two simultaneously. He maintains that human agency is real insofar as it is

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something that God creates, but he does not affirm human freedom in the libertarian sense. The shaykh argues that God is just to reward and punish deeds that He creates because He creates them in a substrate that is separate from Himself, that is, in the human being. By virtue of this substrate principle, God is not qualified with the human acts that he creates just as he is not qualified with their attributes, such as blackness or tallness.

Ibn Taymiyya’s view of God’s creation of human agency may be compared to a marionette show in which God is wisely directing the performance in all its detail in order to tell a good story. God cannot be charged with injustice in creating this or that misdeed of a particular marionette because it is necessary to the wise purpose of forwarding the narrative plot. The marionettes perceive themselves to be free agents involved in a drama of obedience and disobedience to the divine command that God has interjected into the story, but God is Author and Creator of the drama as a whole. This gives full scope to God’s power, will and wise purpose, while also affirming the reality of human choice and activity.

When faced directly with the contradiction between God the determiner of human acts and human free choice and responsibility, Ibn Taymiyya sometimes switches from God’s perspective to the human. This occurs in his use of the image of an author writing with a pen to illustrate how God creates acts in the human. When faced with the absurdity of pens being punished for what they write, the shaykh evades the problem by dropping the pen image and asserting that human beings do have a will and are agents in reality. He then appeals to intuitive knowledge of the difference between voluntary and involuntary acts to complete his switch to the plane of human rationality. Something similar happens when Ibn Taymiyya broaches Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s claim that Abū Lahab could never have believed because God’s eternal foreknowledge made his belief impossible. Without notice, the shaykh shifts from God’s perspective from which this claim is made to the historical human perspective and explains that Abū Lahab was never put in the predicament of having to believe the revelation of God’s foreknowledge that he would not believe.

Ibn Taymiyya does admit that his theology involves divine compulsion (jabr) of human acts by the intermediaries of human will and power. Al-Rāzī holds essentially the same view, but, unlike al-Rāzī, the shaykh does not allow this position to be called ‘compulsion’ lest it be confused with direct divine compulsion and evoke negative connotations concerning God. This, along with his insistence on human responsibility and his unannounced perspective switching to avoid mentioning contradiction in God’s economy, reflects his
concern to speak of God according to the highest similitude. Open admission of contradiction would detract from God’s perfection and praiseworthiness, and it would open the door to the Iblîsī style irrationality and ethical laxity that he seeks to stem. Rather, Ibn Taymiyya portrays his compatibilism positively as the golden mean between the extremes of the Jabrîs and the Qadarîs, between hard determinism and libertarian freedom.