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Research Article

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Divine Causality and Human Free Will: Ṭūsī's Solution and Its Historical Background

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Abstract: This article aims to delve into the approach of Ḫwāğa Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī to a fundamental philosophical question concerning human agency: How can human free will coexist with a necessitating causal framework, where every effect is bound by its complete cause? Ṭūsī's solution, which left a lasting impact on subsequent philosophical discussions on the issue, particularly within Shiite scholarly circles, revolves around the introduction of a differentiation between types of causes. I will examine Ṭūsī's elucidation delineated in two of his works: *Ǧabr wa Qadar* in Persian and a concise Arabic text on *Afʿāl al-ʿibād*. Additionally, I will endeavor to uncover the historical origins and intellectual influences that may have shaped Ṭūsī's approach to the question of human free will.

Keywords: proximate cause; distant cause; free will; causality

1 Introduction

In his renowned ethical treatise, *Aḫlāq-i Nāṣirī* (The Nasirean Ethics), Ḫwāğa Naṣīr ad-Dīn Ṭūsī (1201–1274) emphasizes that the focal point of ethics is the human soul in its capacity to engage in virtuous or malevolent actions through the exercise of its will.[1] Fundamentally, what sets humans apart from other animals is their capacity for thinking and willing, the sources of theoretical and practical wisdom. Consequently, human happiness is intrinsically linked to activities that stem from his deliberation (*rawiyya*) and his will (*irāda*).[2] Ṭūsī specifically delineates a mode of

1 Ṭūsī 1413: 15.
2 Ṭūsī 1413: 29.

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human activity in which the individual's will is directed solely towards the action itself, one that is inherently good. In this scenario, there are no external interests at play, including natural desires; rather, there exists a pure will towards an inherently virtuous action. Ṭūsī posits that this mode of action bears a striking resemblance to the way God acts, and achieving it would lead to the ultimate happiness for human beings.[3]

Thus, it is expectable that Ṭūsī as the author of one of the most renowned texts on ethics in the history of Islamic philosophy, who believes that human free will constitutes the prerequisite for the existence of ethics, endeavors to offer an explanation to the contentious issue of human agency. To delve into his philosophical perspective and the arguments he presents regarding the possibility of human free will, however, a thorough examination of two of his specific writings is essential. The first of these works is a treatise titled *Ǧabr wa Qadar* (Compulsion and divine destiny) written in Persian.[4] The second is a concise piece in Arabic, known as *Afʿāl al-ʿibād* (The acts of human beings), which is a part of Ṭūsī's *Fawāʾid Ṭamāniyya*.[5] These writings provide insights into his exploration of the intricate problem of human free will, a topic he perceives as challenging and often difficult for most people to comprehend in its entirety.[6]

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3 Ṭūsī 1413: 55–56. It is worthy to note that Ṭūsī explores the concept of *ḥurīyyat* (freedom) in two distinct contexts within *Aḫlāq-i Nāṣirī*. The first one pertains to the virtue of chasteness (*ʿiffat*) as one of the quadruple virtues. In this context, a free individual is one who acquires wealth through morally upright means, refraining from improper courses of action, and then allocates it towards noble and praiseworthy objectives (p. 78). This type of freedom implies liberation from worldly desires that can otherwise steer human perceptions and actions towards unvirtuous ends. The second usage of the term takes on a social dimension within the context of Ṭūsī's political philosophy. When he discusses his categorization of different types of communities, Ṭūsī, influenced by the ideas of Plato (cf. Plato 2007: 557 b) and Fārābī (cf. Farabi 1995: 129) delineates the concept of the "community of freedom" (*madīna ḥuriyyat*) or the "democratic society" (*madīna ǧamāʿat*) as one of the categories within the "ignorant community" (*madīna ǧāhila*). In such a community, free individuals have the liberty to pursue their own will. Ṭūsī contends that in this society, it is highly unlikely to have an excellent leader (raʾīs fāḍil). In essence, there is no distinction between the ruler of the state and the common people within this type of community. The community of freedom accommodates diverse individuals with varying ideas and desires, and as a result, both the highest degrees of good and evil may be given rise within such a state (pp. 253–555).

4 The treatise has been translated into Arabic by Rukn ad-Dīn Ǧurǧānī (d. after 728/1327) under the title of *Risāla fī ḫalq al-aʿmāl* (Epistle on the creation of actions).

5 The text has been published in: Raḍawī 1354 h.š: 549–550.

6 The recently published book, "The Heirs of Avicenna: Philosophy in the Islamic East, 12–13th Centuries" by Peter Adamson and Fedor Benevic, contains translated excerpts from Ṭūsī's *Ǧabr wa Qadar* and a translation of his concise Arabic work, *Afʿāl al-ʿibād*; cf. Adamson / Benevich 2023: 628–630, 633–634.

2 Ṭūsī's Account of Human Free Will

In his Arabic short treatise on the question of free will, Ṭūsī begins by making a distinction among various kinds of human actions: (a) The actions that follow upon the individual's power (*qudra*) and will (*irāda*), such as walking and the eating of a healthy person. (b) The actions that are beyond the individual's control, such as the movement of a person who is falling from a higher place. He proceeds by explaining different meanings of human power:

> Power signifies the soundness of bodily organs for action. It also means the human's state when the action emanates from him. The former exists both before and concurrently with the action; and this is what the Muʿtazilites mean by power. The second, [however], occurs only simultaneously with the act; and this is what the Ashʿarites mean by power.

Ṭūsī underscores that when both power and motivation arise, the occurrence of the willed action becomes necessary. However, this necessity does not contradict human free will, as the action is necessitated by the individual's own power and will. He highlights that the primary cause of human power and will is God. Therefore, it is accurate to consider the individual as the free agent of their actions, but it is also accurate to attribute these activities to God. In Ṭūsī's view, "the action is not accomplished by one of them without the other".[7] This means that both human agency and divine involvement are interconnected and necessary for the completion of the act. In other words, the two aspects, human agency and divine will, work in harmony. According to Ṭūsī, this is the true meaning of a famous saying in the Islamic Tradition: "There is neither *ǧabr* (compulsion [of man]), nor *tafwīḍ* (delegation [of authority to man]), but something in between".[8]

Ṭūsī's attempt to find a middle ground between two extreme positions, namely *ǧabr* and *tafwīḍ*, which has a long history in the discourse on human free will among Muslim thinkers,[9] is further elaborated in his Persian work titled *Ǧabr wa Qadar*. In this work, he embarks on a comprehensive exploration of the contentious issue of human agency. His aim is to provide a comprehensive account of his philosophical perspective on the compatibility of human free will and causal necessity. The treatise, consisting of ten chapters, is structured as follows: Initially, he provides an

7 Raḍawī 1354: 550.

8 Raḍawī 1354: 550.

9 In debates concerning the concept of free will, adopting a middle ground was seen as a sensible and equitable stance, averting the pitfalls of extremism. Consequently, the notion of striking a fair balance between compulsion (*ǧabr*) and delegation (*tafwīd*) held considerable appeal. The pursuit of this middle path was also a commonly favored approach among Shīʿa scholars, and they supported their stance by citing a saying attributed to the Shiite Imam Ǧaʿfar aṣ-Ṣādiq: "There is neither *ǧabr* (compulsion [of man]), nor *tafwīḍ* (delegation [of authority to man]), but something in between".

overview of the controversial problem of human free will as debated among the different Kalām schools. Subsequently, in the following five chapters, Ṭūsī delves into the three modes of necessity (*wuǧūb*), contingency (*imkān*), and impossibility (*imtinā'*), elucidating how, despite the fact that all effects only come into existence when their causes are necessary, free will in human beings remains a viable concept. The seventh and eighth chapters of the treatise focus on the examination of human soul faculties, particularly the faculties of power and will. Ṭūsī expounds on how actions stemming from free will are derived from these human faculties. Finally, in the tenth chapter, he endeavors to address potential suspicions regarding the apparent conflict between free will and destiny. He achieves this by summarizing his aforementioned arguments and bolstering them with references to several oral traditions.

2.1 The Differentiation Between Two Types of Causes

Ṭūsī justifies his notion of a middle way by distinguishing between two types of causes: proximate cause (*'illat-e qarīb*) and remote cause (*'illat-e ba'īd*). This distinction is rooted in his perspective on the necessitating causal system of relations. According to him, "The proximate cause is a cause which generates an act, while the remote cause is the cause of that cause".[10] In this framework, Ṭūsī posits that the proximate cause of human's freely performed activities is the human will, while the distant cause of human's voluntary actions is the first cause, which is the cause of human's being and all of his faculties.

Influenced by Ibn Sīnā, Ṭūsī affirms in both his works that nothing occurs in the world without being necessitated by a cause or a series of causes. This is because contingent entities cannot come into existence unless an external cause alters their essential state of potential existence or non-existence, propels them towards existence, and consequently generates or creates them. He asserts that even what might seem accidental or random actually holds a necessity, which would be evident to someone who comprehends their underlying causes.[11] Therefore, according to Ṭūsī, there exists a causal chain where causes and effects are interconnected, leading to the necessary occurrence of every event in the world and not happening by chance. It should be noted that, clearly in Ṭūsī's perspective, this is a divine system of causality, and all causes in the chain ultimately trace back to God.

As a direct consequence, the occurrence of human voluntary actions also adheres to the principles of this causality. In other words, these actions cannot take

10 Ṭūsī 1335: 14.

11 Ṭūsī 1335: 15–17.

place unless they are necessitated by certain causes. Nevertheless, Ṭūsī argues that this causal necessity does not undermine human free will, as the human will itself constitutes the final element of the complete cause of voluntary actions.[12]

2.2 Human Power and Will

Ṭūsī defines a free agent (*muḫtār*) as one who performs an action if he wants to do it, and refrain from it if he wants not to do it. In other words, the execution or abstention from an action performed by a free agent stems from his own volition (*ḫwāst*). Conversely, when an agent's action or inaction doesn't arise from his own volition but rather from the volition of another individual, or is brought about in some other way, then the agent is called compelled (*mağbūr*).[13]

To elucidate his notion of free will, Ṭūsī proceeds by classifying human actions into three distinct categories: (a) Actions generated by human power unconsciously, such as digestion and growth. (b) Actions generated through human perceptual faculties, where the will is not involved; for instance, a person imagining sickness and subsequently falling ill. (c) Actions performed by both human power and will, constituting voluntary actions. These third group of acts can be physical, such as bodily movements and sensory activities, or intellectual, such as imagination and thought.[14]

While in his Arabic text on human agency Ṭūsī offered a brief account on meanings of human power, here in *Ǧabr wa Qadar*, his primary focus lies in providing a detailed examination of the concepts of will (*irādat*) and free will (*iḫtiyār*).[15] According to him, will represents a determined resolution (*ʿazm-i ǧāzim*) originating within the soul, when something is perceived as agreeable and an aspiration (*šawq*) arises in the individual to possess it, or conversely, when something is perceived as disagreeable, and an aspiration emerges to avoid it. However, in many cases, something may appear pleasant from one perspective and unpleasant from another due to the diverse faculties in individuals. For instance, an object may be perceived as agreeable through external senses while being disagreeable in illusion or imagination. Notably, with the presence of the intellectual faculty in humans, it is highly likely that an individual perceives something as pleasant through his animal faculties but conceives it disagreeable through his intellectual faculty or vice versa. In all these instances, a motivating factor (*dāʿiya*) arises for the

12 Ṭūsī 1335: 19.

13 Ṭūsī 1335: 14.

14 Ṭūsī 1335: 21.

15 It is worth noting that in his work "Fī ḥudūd al-ašyā' wa rusūmihā", al-Kindī defines *iḫtiyār* as a will preceded by deliberation (*rawiyya*) together with discernment (*tamīz*). *Irāda* in turn is defined as a faculty aims for a specific thing (1978: 115, 117).

pleasant perception, while a deterrent (*ṣārif*) emerges for the unpleasant perception. When the motives hold precedence over the deterrents, the soul becomes resolute in pursuing the perceived object. This determined resolution is termed as will (*irādat*). However, when no clear preference is attained between the motives and deterrents, the soul experiences confusion and doubt. Then, imagination and thinking (*tafakkur*) endeavor to establish a preference. This movement within the soul, seeking a preference between motives and deterrents, constitutes what is referred to as free will (*iḫtiyār*). This process persists until it culminates in a determined resolution based on deliberation to either carry out the respective action or abandon it.[16] Consequently, although the motives and deterrents in voluntary actions stem from various involuntary perceptions in humans, ultimately, it is human's mental movement of imagination and thinking, namely his free will, that firmly determines the will. Subsequently, the action is carried out willingly.

On the basis of this explanation of free will, which stems from the agent's deliberation, Ṭūsī asserts that while a capable agent (*qādir*) is one who can perform or cease an act when a determinator determines the act's performance or cessation, a free agent (*muḫtār*) is a capable agent whose actions are determined by their own will. Therefore, power and will serve as the causes of every freely performed action. When both of them are involved in an action, it becomes a necessary occurrence. Yet, this necessity doesn't contradict the agent's free will, since the act is determined by the individual's own free will:

> The necessity and impossibility previously discussed don't contradict the concept of free will. This is demonstrated by the fact that someone considered capable (*qādir*) – as mentioned – is characterized by the ability both to perform and not perform an act. This means that both acting and refraining are feasible for him and are equally applicable to him. When a preponderating factor (*muraǧǧiḥ*) favors one option, that particular choice is actualized. Now, if preponderating factor is his [i.e., the agent's] will, enabling him to perform actions when he wants and not to perform actions when he doesn't want, then he is called a free agent (*muḫtār*). This reveals that the free agent possesses two attributes: power and will. [...] This means that, through the existence of both power and will, the actualization of the action becomes necessary, and refraining becomes impossible. [...] This is the pure meaning of his [i.e., the agent's] free will, not contradictory to it.[17]

2.3 Human Free Will as the Proximate Cause

As mentioned earlier, while power and will are direct causes of the performance of a voluntary action, they operate within the framework of a necessary causal nexus, which according to Ṭūsī, is initiated primarily by the first cause. In other words,

16 Ṭūsī 1335: 22.

17 Ṭūsī 1335: 19.

power and will, as faculties created in humans, are effects of other specific causes, and all these diverse causes in a causal chain ultimately trace back to the prime cause. Thus, the causator of causes (*musabbib al-asbāb*) should be considered as the creator of power and will in humans and, consequently, the genuine cause of all his activities. In this sense, whatever humans do is, at another level, the execution of God's will, since their being and faculties are ultimately derived from Him as the prime cause of the world. In simpler terms, the divine fiat serves as the remote cause of all human actions, while human power and will function as the proximate causes.[18] Ṭūsī believes that this solution represents the true interpretation of a middle way between rigid determinism and absolute freedom. Acknowledging human free will as the proximate cause of actions allows humans to be considered free agents of their voluntary activities, while recognizing God's fiat as the distant cause in a causal chain confirms His omnipotence.

2.4 Human Free Will and God's Foreknowledge

In the final step, Ṭūsī briefly addresses another challenge connected to the question of human agency, and tries to resolve it through the same explanation suggested in his writing. How can God's omniscience be compatible with human freedom in their actions? Initially, he offers a controversial response: just as God knows human actions before their occurrence, He also knows His own acts before creating them. Now, if determinism were to apply to human acts based on this foreknowledge, then the same would hold true for God. Therefore, any solution used in the case of divine acts can also serve as a response in the case of human activities.

> However, Ṭūsī's affirmative response to the issue is based upon his exploration of human free will and its relation to God's will:
>
> Even though God's knowledge, may He be exalted, necessitates a specific action, [since] the proximate cause of the action is the person's power and will, this doesn't contradict the person's free will.[19]

Through this line of reasoning, Ṭūsī addresses a famous suspicion: why bother exerting effort if God has predestined everything, so that individuals reach what has been decreed for them regardless of their effort? According to Ṭūsī's argument, God

18 Ṭūsī 1335: 25.
19 Ṭūsī 1335: 25.

has determined that human voluntary acts occur through his own endeavor, hence, if no effort is made, the outcome won't be actualized.[20]

The significant aspect of Ṭūsī's mentioned statement is his assertion that divine foreknowledge renders a certain action necessary. In other words, God's knowledge doesn't solely have a descriptive role; rather, it determines the occurrence of human actions as a remote cause. Nevertheless, as emphasized in this treatise, the immediate cause behind these actions remains the individual's own power and will. Therefore, divine foreknowledge does not conflict with the person's free will.

However, in Ṭūsī's concise Arabic writing, his approach to reconciling God's knowledge and human free will differs. There, he claims that divine knowledge does not necessarily cause the events foreseen within it. Consequently, this knowledge doesn't result in the compulsion of human being:

> The true response is that the knowledge of something is not necessarily cause (*sabab*) for it. [For instance,] when someone knows that the sun will rise tomorrow, his knowledge is not a cause of the sunrise. If knowledge doesn't influence the action, then the action isn't performed through compulsion or necessitation (*ījāb*).[21]

Ṭūsī's varying perspectives on the relationship between divine foreknowledge and human actions might be influenced by the different audiences he had in mind for his two writings on the subject. However, regardless of these differences, he remains steadfast in his conviction that God's eternal knowledge doesn't conflict with human free will.

As the author of a renowned treatise on ethics who believes that the possibility of moral acts is based upon individual's capacity to exercise his own will, Ṭūsī is resolute to demonstrate that human being has been created as a being endowed with free will, enabling him to perform certain actions freely through his own power and will. However, human will, as the last component in a chain of external causes, is ultimately determined by the prime cause. This raises another question: is the content of human will predetermined by God? If so, can we still affirm the existence of free will for human beings? If not, is the content of human will entirely independent of God? Ṭūsī does not explicitly answer these questions. Nevertheless, his proposition in the last part of his short writing on free will, which clearly states that human freely performed actions cannot be accomplished solely by the proximate cause (human will) or the distant cause (God's will) without the contribution of the

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20 The suspicion known as the "lazy argument" receives a comparable response from the Stoics. Chrysippus distinguished between simple and complex facts. If a patient's recovery hinges on contacting a doctor – a complex fact – then the action of reaching out to the doctor is just as fated as the eventual recovery. So, even if all events are predetermined by God, humans should exert effort, since events and actions are "co-fated" (Kenny 2006: 195).

21 Raḍawī 1354: 550.

other, indicates that Ṭūsī does not intend to merely ascribe a formal-metaphorical meaning of free will to human beings. He believes that human will is genuinely effective in his voluntary actions, but the extent and quality of this effectiveness are not clearly discussed in his main writings on human free will. Thus, investigating the historical context that shaped Ṭūsī's ideas about human agency and delving into the nature of the connection between primary and secondary causes might provide valuable insights into our discourse.

3 Tracing Back the Historical Background of Ṭūsī's Solution to the Question of Human Free Will

As explored earlier, Ṭūsī sought a middle path to address the question of human agency. His solution, which involved distinguishing between two types of causes, was deeply rooted in his perspective on the necessitating causal chain. This approach, involving the recognition of different levels of causes within a causal nexus, reflects the influence of his predecessors in the Islamic tradition. Furthermore, the distinction he made can be traced back to ancient Greek philosophy,[22] and especially to Neoplatonism. In Neoplatonic metaphysics, a foundational principle known as the One is positioned at the culmination of a chain of intermediate causes, ultimately giving rise to everything in the world.[23] According to this perspective, all beings, excluding the One, have both direct and indirect causes. This theory of emanation supports the acknowledgment of a differentiation among various grades of causes.

3.1 Proclus on Primary and Secondary Causes

As mentioned, the Neoplatonic causal theory of emanation, by recognizing a series of intermediate causes flowing from the One, implies a distinction between different levels of causes. Proclus (d. 485), the renowned systematizer of Neoplatonism that the

22 It's intriguing to note that the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus (d. 206 BC), a proponent of a causal arrangement governing the world (Daiber 1980: 134, 136; Cicero 1991: 87) who also aimed to resolve the dilemma of human agency without negating the existence of voluntary actions while maintaining his position on causality, founds his solution on the basis of a distinction between two different kinds of causes: perfect-principal cause and auxiliary-proximate cause. According to his view, the causes preceding an action in a causal sequence are merely auxiliary causes of the act, not the perfect cause that necessitates its occurrence (Cicero 1991: 87). Hence, even if these supplementary causes are beyond our control, it doesn't imply that our desire is inevitably predetermined by external factors. Therefore, while external influences like perceiving an object may aid human actions, they do not necessitate the execution of that certain action.

23 Remes 2008: 42.

Arabic translation of parts of his *Elements of Theology*[24] in the Graeco-Arabic translation movement (from the mid-eighth to the late tenth century) played an important role in the history of Islamic thought,[25] and was a prominent source of Neo-Platonic philosophy in the Islamic tradition,[26] explicitly outlines two types of causes.

In line with his Neoplatonic predecessors, Proclus aimed to elucidate the derivation of the multiplicity of existents from a first principle, the primary cause. He delineates a chain of intermediate causes originating in the One, which is identified with the Good. Within this causal chain, he asserts that "Every productive cause is superior to that which it produces".[27] In other words, there is a hierarchy of causes and effects which establishes that each cause is superior and more perfect than its corresponding effect, and every effect is reliant on its cause. Hence, the prime cause, being the most perfect cause, overflows precisely due to its highest degree of perfection. This overflowing occurs because anything that is complete naturally gives rise to the generation of things within its capacity to produce.[28] Consequently, the emanation of the perfect, self-subsistent One serves as the origin of the hierarchy of all beings.

The prime cause clearly surpasses all secondary causes as it is the cause of them. The initial propositions of *Liber de Causis* (The Book of Causes) not only draw a distinct line between the primary/distant cause and the secondary/proximate cause but also delve into the difference of their effectiveness. It commences with the statement, "Every primary cause exercises more influence (*akṯaru fayḍan*) on its effect than the universal second cause". Consequently, even when secondary causes lose their influence on their effects, the primary cause retains its effectiveness in beings due to its precedence.[29] It can be inferred that in the hierarchy of causal relations, secondary causes are not independent but owe their capability to generate effects to the prime cause. Thus, every effect in the world is, in essence, the effect of the One.

The author employs an example to elucidate his concept. He argues that "being" as the distant cause of humanity exerts a more profound causative influence (*ašaddu*

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24 The *Al-Ḫayr al-Maḥḍ* (The Pure Good) is an Arabic adaptation of parts of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*. The translation is partly very free and partly more closely related to the Greek text. It is still a controversial question when the treatise was created (Endress 1973: 20). *Liber de Causis* was the title given to the later translation of the treatise by philosophical circles in the thirteenth century (Fakhry 2002: 77).

25 Rudolph 2017: 38.

26 Endress 1973: 13.

27 Proclus 1963: 9.

28 Proclus 1963: 29.

29 Bardenhewer 1882: 58.

ʿilla) on man than "living" and "rationality" as the proximate causes. Although man may not keep his identity as a human being without rationality, he would remain alive even when he loses his rational faculty. And even without livingness, he would still "be", since "being" is the underlying cause of livingness and the cause itself persists even if its effect is eliminated.[30]

To put it in another way, within the hierarchical structure of causes and effects, the efficacy of causes relies on their distance in the causal chain from the effect: greater distance corresponds to greater effectiveness. Thus, each effect is fundamentally subject to the influence of the first cause, which serves as its farthest cause encompassing all other contributing causes. Consequently, it is the prime cause that fundamentally initiates, sustains, and governs every entity in the world, even when the proximate cause withdraws its influence from the effect.

The influence of the concepts presented in *Liber de Causis* on the notion of different levels of causes on the Islamic philosophy seems to be evident. Although in this treatise the distinction between distant and proximate causes is not linked to the issue of human free will, it can lead us to hypothesize about Ṭūsī's perspective. If we assume that Ṭūsī had a conception similar to Proclus regarding the relation between the distant cause and the proximate cause, it becomes challenging to assert that he truly endorsed human freedom. According to *Liber de Causis*, it appears that the efficacy of the prime cause does not depend on any proximate cause, suggesting that even in the absence of the proximate cause, the distant cause remains effective in generating the effect. However, as previously mentioned, Ṭūsī argues that the execution of human freely performed actions necessarily requires human free will as the proximate cause for such activities. Although Ṭūsī doesn't provide a clear account of the efficiency degrees in the chain of causal relations, he emphasizes the crucial interplay between distant and proximate causes in the occurrence of human's voluntary actions. He explicitly asserts that our freely performed acts may not be accomplished solely through either the proximate cause or the distant cause, highlighting the indispensable collaboration between these causal elements.

3.2 Different Levels of Causes: Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā

In the broader context of inheriting and developing the Neoplatonic theory of emanation with causal connections from God, both Fārābī (d. 950) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037) recognize distinct levels of causes. Fārābī attributes the generation of celestial spheres to a succession of separate intellects (*ʿuqūl mufāriq*) emanating from God. The First Intellect, having two thoughts, establishes a causal chain where the thought

30 Bardenhewer 1882: 59.

of the prime cause necessitates (*yalzam*) the existence of the Second Intellect, while the thought of its own essence necessitates the existence of the first sphere. This process of intellect and sphere generation continues until reaching the Tenth Intellect, whose activity is not directed towards a celestial sphere.[31] In this way, Fārābī acknowledges causal connections cascading through a vertical hierarchy of non-material existents,[32] considering separate intellects as secondary causes for the existence of celestial spheres.

Furthermore, the celestial spheres, in their own turn, are regarded as secondary causes for the processes of generation and corruption in the sub-lunar world.[33] In one of his concise treatises on astronomy, titled *Fīmā Yaṣiḥḥu wa-lā Yaṣiḥḥu min Aḥkām an-Nuǧūm* (Treatise on Admissible and Inadmissible Judgements [Based on the Observation] of the Stars),[34] Fārābī delves into two categories of events: those with evident causes and those that seem contingent, yet possess causes necessitating them, albeit beyond our complete comprehension. Fārābī asserts that the causes of the latter category are the celestial spheres.[35]

The concept of such a distinction becomes more apparent in the works of Ibn Sīnā. His understanding of emanation, similar to Fārābī, leads to the recognition of a series of Intellects intermediating in the generation of the universe.[36] Ibn Sīnā posits that God and the intellects possess different levels of efficiency in bringing about existents,[37] given that God, as the unique Necessary Existence, is the ultimate cause of all beings. In other words, He is the Prime Cause (*al-ʿilla al-ūlā*)[38] or the causator of the causes (*musabbib al-asbāb*), serving as the One who instigates the causal action of the intermediary causes. God directs the intellects to fulfill their causal role in bestowing existence upon the celestial spheres and the intellects subordinate to them.

On the contrary, the celestial spheres fulfill their causal role in the sub-lunar world. Given that the entities in the terrestrial realm are subject to continual change, they cannot be directly and solely caused by the intellects. Here, the proximate cause must be something that accepts various kinds of change. Consequently, Ibn Sīnā asserts that the celestial spheres must participate in the generation of the sub-lunar world by preparing the matter to receive diverse forms.[39]

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31 Fārābī 1995: 52–54.

32 Davidson 1992: 45.

33 Fārābī 1995: 74.

34 This treatise was composed as a response to the Christian scholar Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Baġdādī (Rudolph 2017: 538).

35 Fārābī 1890: 106.

36 Ibn Sīnā 1383: 78–79.

37 De Cillis 2014: 33.

38 Seemingly, Ibn Sīnā derives this notion from his Arabic Proclus source (Janssens 1987: 265).

39 Ibn Sīnā 1383: 83.

Furthermore, the constitution of matter is not solely attributed to the celestial bodies but also to their forms. In *aš-Šifā: al-Ilāhīyyāt*, Ibn Sīnā articulates that matter cannot be the proximate cause of form; rather, it is the other way around.[40] According to at-*Taʿlīqāt*, a proximate cause is the cause without which the chain of causes would not be complete,[41] and referring to *aš-Šifā: at-Ṭabīʿīyyāt*, a proximate agent is an agent with no intermediary between it and the object of its act.[42] Thus, form represents the proximate cause of matter, signifying that it is the final element in the chain of causes.

Nonetheless, form itself is directly subject to the causal influence of the Active Intellect (*al-ʿaql al-faʿʿāl*). When matter becomes prepared to receive a new form, facilitated by the involvement of the celestial spheres, the Active Intellect, acting as the *Dator Formarum* (*wāhib aṣ-ṣuwar*) imparts the specific form onto the matter awaiting it. Consequently, it actualizes the potentiality inherent in the matter.[43] In this context, the Active Intellect assumes the role of a distant cause, bestowing forms upon matter, while form, in turn, exercises its causative influence over matter as its proximate cause.

Ibn Sīnā's concept of causality, influenced by Fārābī and inspired by the Neoplatonic causal theory of emanation, which involves multiple intermediary causes that bring about the existence of contingent entities by changing their inherent state from potential existence or non-existence, may suggest a deterministic view. In this perspective, all beings are essentially predetermined by their necessitating causes. Necessity plays a pivotal role in Ibn Sīnā's philosophical account of existence, asserting that a contingent entity cannot exist unless it becomes necessary due to a sufficient cause. Hence, contingent existents only come into being when necessitated by their causes and inherently exist as necessary once formed.

Ibn Sīnā emphasizes that the entirety of this necessary causal process adheres to God's knowledge which is identical to His will. Therefore, God directs the causal actions of all intermediary causes to execute their causal functions in accordance with His providence (*ʿināya*), that is His prior knowledge of the existence of all creatures in a universal good arrangement.[44] Thus, the discourse on the different levels of causality in the universe's generation can be examined within the framework of divine decree and destiny. In his treatise on *al-Qadāʾ wa-l-Qadar*, Ibn Sīnā posits that divine decree (*qaḍāʾ*) refers to God's primary and singular command that encompasses all things and serves as their origin, while divine destiny (*qadar*)

40 Ibn Sīnā 1404a: 84-5.
41 Ibn Sīnā 1404c: 118.
42 Ibn Sīnā 1404b: 1: 56.
43 Ibn Sīnā 1404b: 2: 190.
44 Ibn Sīnā 1404 a: 367.

denotes God's arrangement of events cascading from His decree in a sequential manner. In essence, divine destiny represents an orderly arrangement in which the first makes the second subservient, and the subsequent follows the precedent. This systematic arrangement, fulfilling God's eternal decree, "continues to necessitate various wills and actions".[45] Therefore, although various causes at different levels, such as the intellects, celestial spheres, and even human beings,[46] play roles in generating events in the world, their actions are ultimately and totally directed to fulfill God's eternal decree.

We have already observed that Ṭūsī, like Ibn Sīnā, acknowledges the presence of intermediary causes originating from the Prime Cause. While there might be some nuances in their explanations of this causal chain,[47] Ṭūsī, following the footsteps of his predecessors, recognizes a system of causal relations which necessitate all actions and events in the world. This focus on the notion of necessity, borrowed from Ibn Sīnā, becomes the crux of Ṭūsī's inquiries into human agency. However, as a prominent figure in ethical discourse, his aim is to demonstrate that despite the philosophical justification for such a causal necessity, which cannot be circumvented, a portion of human activities must be executed through free will. Consequently, he posits that human will stands as the final element in the series of causes for voluntary actions, without which a human act cannot be fulfilled.

So, in Ṭūsī's perspective, the interplay between human will as the proximate cause and God as the distant cause of human voluntary actions stands distinct from the relationships between the Intellects, celestial spheres, form, and matter drawn by his predecessors, who conceived the roles of these intermediary causes as solely fulfilling God's eternal decree. Ṭūsī implies a coexistence between the divine causal influence and human autonomy. According to him, while the causal chain stemming from God inevitably shapes events and actions, it doesn't completely eradicate the

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45 Ibn Sīnā 1383: 99–100.

46 Ibn Sīnā in aš-Šifā: al-Ilāhīyyāt points to human being's resolute will (*irāda ǧāzima*) which in contrast to his inclining will (*irāda mumīla*) necessitates the action of the organs, and so must be regarded as the cause of the organ's activity (1404a: 174). However, human will is itself influenced by a series of causes that determine it. These causes which are managed by God as motivators (*dawāʿī*), direct human's actions in specific ways (Ibn Sīnā 1889-1899: 13–14.).

47 Ṭūsī's stance on the existence of the vertical intellects within the chain of causes remains a subject of debate. In his principal theological work, *Taǧrīd al-Iʿtiqād*, he critiques the philosophical arguments proposed to establish the intellect as God's primary creation, finding them inadequate (1407: 155). Yet, in a separate treatise, he argues for the existence of the universal intellect (*ʿaql kullī*), attributing it as the source of multiplicity in the world (1393: 7–8). Adding to this complexity, in another writing, Ṭūsī refrains from considering God as the prime cause, reasoning that in any causal sequence, plurality inevitably emerges. Instead, he assigns the role of the primary cause to the divine fiat (*amr*), which as the mediator between the unity of God and the multiplicity of creations, is also the final end of all beings (1998: 37–41). Cf., Meisami 2019: 37–38.

role of human will in the decision-making process. This nuanced view offers room for the coexistence of divine causal influence and the essential agency of human will. Hence, it diverges from deterministic interpretations found in the philosophies of his predecessors.

3.3 ʿĀmirī on Primary Agent and Secondary Agent

In the concluding section of this article, making reference to an insufficiently explored yet significant treatise on the question of human agency, authored by a Muslim philosopher contemporaneous with Ibn Sīnā, proves beneficial for our objective. In his work *Inqāḏ al-bašar min al-ǧabr wa-l-qadar*, Abū l-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmirī (d. 992) presents concepts strikingly similar to those found in Ṭūsī's writings on human agency. ʿĀmirī, too, endeavors to establish a middle ground between the extremes of complete compulsion over humans and delegating absolute authority to them.[48] Furthermore, similar to Ṭūsī's approach, he elucidates his solution by introducing two types of causes, namely the proximate cause and the distant cause.

A significant portion of ʿĀmirī's treatise focuses on various distinctions among different types of actions and their causes. He initially asserts that all actions are essentially neither necessary nor impossible; instead, they are contingent entities. However, when they come into being due to a cause, they transition from contingency to necessity (*wuǧūb*).[49] Hence, every action that exists does so necessarily. ʿĀmirī then categorizes all worldly actions into compulsory (*aḍ-ḍarūrī*) acts and voluntary (*al-irādī*) acts. Compulsory acts, in turn, can be carried out naturally (*ṭabīʿī*) or forcibly (*qasrī*), while voluntary acts can be performed based on eagerness (*šawqī*) or done deliberatively (*fikrī*).[50]

According to ʿĀmirī, it is evident that we never seek an explanation for the actions of an agent who has acted compulsorily. In other words, we do not inquire about the "why" behind specific actions of compelled agents. The same applies to actions solely driven by eagerness. This is because using the terms "why" (*lima*) and "because" (*liʾanna*) in reference to actions where free will doesn't play a role is meaningless and nonsensical. However, there exists a category of human actions for which we use these terms and inquire about the whyness behind them. These actions are human deliberative acts that must be regarded as those performed through free will.[51] To put it differently, we already believe that humans are in possession of free

48 ʿĀmirī 1988: 265.
49 ʿĀmirī 1988: 250–251.
50 ʿĀmirī 1988: 251.
51 ʿĀmirī 1988: 266–267.

will, and because of that we expect that they have reasons for a certain category of their actions.

However, according to ʿĀmirī, humans, in all their activities, rely on God, and so, absolute authority cannot be entirely delegated to them. Therefore, only by embracing a middle ground between rigid determinism and complete delegation can we truly elucidate the essence of human agency in the world. In order to elaborate his position, ʿĀmirī initially mentions three of the four essential causes in Aristotelian philosophy: matter, agent, and end. He then introduces a distinction between proximate and distant causes, which can be applied to all these three kinds of causes. For instance, the final cause of a medical treatment can be proximate (the patient's immediate physical health) or distant (achieving virtues through being healthy). Likewise, just as the material cause of an object, such as a chair, might be either proximate (wood) or distant (the four elements), its efficient cause could similarly be either a proximate agent (the carpenter) or a distant agent (the mentors of that carpenter). ʿĀmirī designates the distant efficient cause (*as-sabab al-baʿīd*) as the primary agent (*fāʿil awwal*) and the proximate efficient cause (*as-sabab al-qarīb*) as the secondary agent (*fāʿil ṯānī*).[52]

Based on this distinction between two types of agents, ʿĀmirī asserts that human actions carried out through free will should be approached from two viewpoints. The first perspective regards the act as something that humans are commanded to do. The second perspective, however, examines the act concerning its ultimate cause. From the first standpoint, when considering voluntary acts as obedient or disobedient, faithful or blasphemous, human being is the agent of his activities. From the second standpoint, God stands as the ultimate cause, bestowing existence and actuality upon these actions. Consequently, while God remains the primary agent generating all events, human being as a secondary agent, a free acquisitor (*muktasib muḫayyar*) and an immediate producer (*mawǧid mubāšir*) is actively engaged in his voluntary actions.[53]

In this manner, ʿĀmirī endeavors to illustrate that humans execute a set of their actions through their free will, based on the fact that we inquire about the "whyness" of these activities. Nevertheless, as an advocate for a middle ground between hard determinism and complete freedom, he refutes the notion of entirely delegating authority to humans. So, he attempts to resolve the problem by delineating two distinct dimensions of voluntary actions, assigning each aspect to God and humans respectively. In this context, as an individual commanded to act, a human assumes the role of the secondary agent in their actions, whereas God, as the source bestowing existence upon all beings, assumes the primary agency behind these activities.

52 ʿĀmirī 1988: 253.

53 ʿĀmirī 1988: 267, 269–270.

Through this approach, ʿĀmirī aims to explain the complex interplay between divine influence and human agency within voluntary deeds. However, his elucidation of the relationship between God's will and human free will lacks comprehensive clarification. Even though at the beginning of his treatise, he implies that human actions, like all other events, are necessary entities in terms of their causes, the primary focus of his inquiry into human agency doesn't center on the relationship between necessitating divine causality and human will.

As evident, the fundamental elements shaping Ṭūsī's perspective on human free will are discernible in ʿĀmirī's depiction of a middle path between determinism and the complete delegation of authority to humans. Although reconciling the necessitating causality and human agency isn't the focal point of his treatise, ʿĀmirī acknowledges the necessity of created acts. Additionally, he outlines two types of agents, viewing humans as the proximate cause or secondary agents of their freely performed actions, while positioning God as the distant cause or primary agent of these activities. Nevertheless, the manner in which ʿĀmirī elaborates on this perspective concerning the relationship between these distinct types of agents diverges from Ṭūsī's approach. Unlike ʿĀmirī, Ṭūsī explicitly regards human free will as the ultimate component within the chain of causality, emphasizing that without the intervention of him, the action might not be accomplished. Remaining steadfast in his central inquiry about the relation between causal necessity and free will throughout his treatise, Ṭūsī provides a detailed account of the process of generating free will and carefully situates this free will within its appropriate position in the causal chain. In doing so, he aims to offer a systematically organized account of human agency.

4 Conclusions

Ṭūsī's stance on human free will significantly impacted the attitudes of subsequent scholars, particularly Shiite thinkers, toward the question. This influence began with his student, ʿAllāma Ḥillī (d. 1325), and continued among later philosophers, who in their discussions on human free will implicitly or explicitly referenced our philosopher's resolution articulated in his texts on human agency.[54] His formulation of a middle path relies on his account of a series of necessitating causal connections, with

54 See for instance: Mīr Dāmād 1391: 94–98; Mullā Ṣadrā 1340: 4–5; ʿAbd ar-Razzāq Lāhīǧī 1383: 327–330. Eichner, in his article "Willenfreiheit und Handlungstheorie", highlights the close similarities between Ṭūsī's concise Arabic text on human agency and the perspectives articulated by Šams ad-Dīn al-Samarqandī (d. c. 702/1303), a Māturidite philosopher and theologian, in his "aṣ-Ṣaḥīfa al-Ilāhiyya" concerning the question of human free will (Eichner 2019: 190–192).

human will positioned as the last component among secondary causes leading to voluntary action. Influenced by Ibn Sīnā's emphasis on the notion of necessity, Ṭūsī's exploration of human agency aims to reconcile the necessity of all actual events, including human voluntary actions, with the concept of human free will. Drawing from Neoplatonic ideas about a succession of intermediate causes stemming from a primary source, Ṭūsī elaborates his solution by framing human free will as an influential level within the chain of causality. Notably, the foundational concepts within Ṭūsī's explanation of the issue also appear in ʿĀmirī's treatise on human free will. However, these ideas attain a more structured and organized framework in Ṭūsī's work due to the emphasis on the concept of a necessitating causal chain comprising multiple levels of causes.

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