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To cite this article: Ozgur Koca (2017) Ibn 'Arabī (1165–1240) and Rūmī (1207–1273) on the Question of Evil: Discontinuities in Sufi Metaphysics, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 28:3, 293–311, DOI: [10.1080/09596410.2016.1267969](https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2016.1267969)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2016.1267969>



Published online: 13 Dec 2016.



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Ibn ‘Arabī (1165–1240) and Rūmī (1207–1273) on the Question of Evil: Discontinuities in Sufi Metaphysics

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ABSTRACT

This article compares and contrasts Ibn ‘Arabī’s and Rūmī’s accounts of evil. Ibn ‘Arabī explains the existence of evil as a consequence of both metaphysical necessity and God’s volitional act. Evil is the inevitable ‘shadow’ of existence implied by the Infinity of God, and God’s mercy existentiates the possibilities ‘hidden’ in the Infinite, allowing this metaphysical necessity to emerge. In contrast to Ibn ‘Arabī’s necessitarian-cum-volitional theodicy, Rūmī presents an almost exclusively volitional theodicy. He traces the roots of evil to the Divine Will. To preserve God’s moral perfection, he frequently points to the positive compensating functions of the existence of evil in the world. Ibn ‘Arabī’s theodicy enables him to accentuate the necessity of evil in order to save the act of will, and hence God’s perfection, from being directly related to the emergence of evil. Rūmī’s volitional theodicy, however, relates the Divine Will directly to evil, and subsequently attempts to preserve the purity of the Divine intention by accentuating all the positive compensations.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 1 June 2016

Accepted 30 November 2016

KEYWORDS

Ibn ‘Arabī; Rūmī; theodicy; evil; Sufism; Islam

Why does God not abolish evil? Is God not able to or does God not wish to? The problem of evil is one of the most challenging questions to any worldview that is based on belief in a transcendent, omnibenevolent, and omnipotent God. For there is tension between the sheer goodness and limitless power of God and the abundance of evil, including gratuitous suffering, in the world. Muslim theologians, philosophers, and mystics have also been challenged by this apparent contradiction and have produced more or less ingenious explanations.¹

This article compares and contrasts Ibn ‘Arabī’s and Rūmī’s accounts of evil. I am aware that comparative reading of the two figures can be tricky, because there are differences in their styles and sometimes in their intended audiences. While Ibn ‘Arabī is predominantly an explicit mystico-philosopher, Rūmī is much more an ecstatic poet-mystic. Rūmī’s audience for his ecstatic love poetry appears to be different from Ibn ‘Arabī’s audience for his *Futūḥāt*. Any careful comparative attempt should take into account these distinctions, which may influence the meaning of Ibn ‘Arabī’s and Rūmī’s writings. Despite these differences, both Rūmī and Ibn ‘Arabī can be said to be drinking from the same well of the Islamic mystical tradition of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Certain aspects of their thought and style converge. Rūmī’s poems have a philosophical and theological

content, while Ibn ‘Arabī sometimes expresses himself like an ecstatic Sufi and, while Rūmī wrote some more systematic texts, such as *Fīhi mā fīhi*, Ibn ‘Arabī wrote plenty of poetry.

Both Ibn ‘Arabī and Rūmī were prolific writers, but they did not write in a systematic fashion. To understand their take on any topic, one has to collect snippets and extracts from their large corpus and bring them together in a coherent fashion. To the extent that they are explicit, I shall follow them. When their discourse is elusive, I shall offer my interpretation, not in an arbitrary fashion, but by taking into consideration their overall metaphysical frameworks and the sources that shaped their worldviews.

With these caveats, I argue in the following pages that, although there is a great deal of rapport between the two thinkers, they seem to diverge in their approaches to the question of how to reconcile the existence of evil with God’s moral perfection and omnipotence.² They both seem to assert that the world, mysteriously, is plunged in and neither identical with nor separate from God; that God’s grace and mercy is the reason for creation; that the world is a multiplicity of loci for the ever-changing and continuous manifestations of God’s names and attributes; that phenomena are the totalities of their relationships to God; that human perfection lies in being a comprehensive mirror for reflections of God’s names and attributes; and that human individuals are microcosms equal in reflective potentiality to the macrocosm.

Despite these and similar continuities between the two thinkers, there are important differences in their treatments of the problem of evil. Ibn ‘Arabī explains the existence of evil as a consequence of metaphysical necessity. Evil is the inevitable ‘shadow’ of existence implied by the Infinity of God. His theodicy also has a volitional element in that it is God’s mercy that existentiates the possibilities ‘hidden’ in the Infinite and thus allows this metaphysical necessity to emerge without directly willing and creating it. In contrast to Ibn ‘Arabī’s *necessitarian-cum-volitional* theodicy, Rūmī presents an almost exclusively *volitional* theodicy. He traces the roots of evil to the Divine Will. To preserve God’s moral perfection, he frequently accentuates the positive compensating functions of the existence of evil in the world. God wills and creates/manifests evil not for its own sake, but for the greater good. Evil will ultimately be integrated within the universal mercy.

I first briefly indicate some of the dominant tendencies in Islamic intellectual history on the question of evil between the ninth and twelfth centuries to provide a context for discussing Ibn ‘Arabī and Rūmī. Then, I examine their theodicies. Finally, I compare and contrast their accounts.

Islamic accounts of evil

The Qur’an lends itself to multiple interpretations on the question of evil. Some verses accentuate divine sovereignty and omnipotence: ‘God is powerful over everything’ (Q 2.20); ‘He cannot be questioned about what He does’ (Q 21.23); ‘You do not will except what God wills’ (Q 76.30); ‘God created you and what you do’ (Q 37.96).³ These verses, with their almost exclusive emphasis on divine sovereignty, power, and will, appear to indicate that God is the creator of human actions. God’s might is limitless to such an extent that it includes even the determination of human choices, and neither human will nor secondary causality has any real existence in the world.

This is only one side of the qur’anic narrative, however. Many other verses in the Qur’an indicate that human will is real, individuals are responsible and accountable for

their actions, and absolute justice will be established: ‘God does not do injustice to the weight of an atom’ (Q 4.40); ‘Certainly you are accountable for what you do’ (Q 16.93); ‘What comes to you of good is from God, what comes to you of evil is from you’ (Q 4.79).⁴

How can one reconcile the apparent contradiction here? If God is the creator of one’s actions, why are human beings responsible, rewarded, or punished for their deeds? The first generation of Muslims, as evinced by the lack of any systematic discussion on the topic among the Companions of the Prophet, left the tension unresolved. God is the creator of our actions, and whatever happens in the world happens by divine fiat, but human beings are nevertheless responsible and God is absolutely just.

In the following centuries, when the nascent Muslim community encountered preceding religious traditions and ancient philosophical systems, they moved towards a more systematic analysis of the problem of evil. The treatments of the topic offered by different theological schools sometimes accentuated one aspect of the qur’anic narrative almost exclusively, at the expense of the other, and sometimes attempted to bring the ideas of human liberty and divine determination together in synthetic systems.

The Mu’tazilite school of theology, originating in Basra in the second/eighth century and led by such theologians as Wāsil ibn ‘Aṭā (d. 131/748), ‘Amr ibn ‘Ubayd (d. 144/761) and Abū al-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf (d. 235/849), offers the first systematic treatment of the question of evil. The Mu’tazilites reacted against the extreme emphasis on divine sovereignty, will, and power at the expense of rendering the notions of divine justice and human free will meaningless. This attitude was not uncommon in early Islam. Mu’tazilites argued that overemphasis on divine sovereignty undermines divine justice and omnibenevolence. If God is the author of all actions, and even of our preferences, on what basis does He judge us? How can the divine authorship of actions be reconciled with heavenly reward and punishment without undermining divine justice and benevolence? To transcend this predicament, they offered a highly rationalistic notion of divine justice and human free will. According to their theory, God is not the creator of good and evil; free will is real and man is the author of his actions and is rewarded or punished accordingly. Wāsil ibn ‘Aṭā, for example, writes:

The creator being wise and just, it is forbidden to establish a relation between Him and evil (*sharr*) or wrong (*ẓulm*) ... So man is the author of good, evil, faith, unbelief, obedience, and transgression, and is rewarded or punished for his acts. (al-Malaṭī 1936, 30; trans. Ormsby 1981, 23)

This seems to solve the problem of justice. If man is the author of good and evil, God can judge man according to his deeds. Justice is established. Questions, however, arise. Does God have to be just? Is this not imposing a limitation, even an obligation, on divine sovereignty? More importantly, what are good and evil? Are they intelligible? To what extent can the limited human mind discern good from evil? If we do not have a clear view of good and evil, on what basis can we deem divine acts just or unjust?

Having seen these difficulties, the Ash‘arite school of theology, established by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/936), rejected the Mu’tazilite theory. The heart of their argument was as follows: The human mind is unable to discern good and evil decisively, but the whole discussion of theodicy is built on the assumption that we do know what good and evil are. Without this basis, theodicy is a meaningless discussion. This characteristic

principle of the Ash'arite school was given succinct expression by Abū Bakr Muḥammad al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013):

We emphatically deny that there is in the intellect, acting on its own, any way to know the evil of an act or its goodness, its legal prohibition or legal neutrality, or its obligatory nature. These judgments in their totality may not be posited for acts except through the divine law, and not through the determination of the intellect. (al-Bāqillānī 1957, 105)

Thus, the Ash'arites broke away from the Mu'tazilites, returned to the earlier emphasis on divine sovereignty and power, and adopted what one could call a qualified agnosticism on the issue of evil. God is the creator of everything and the human mind cannot access the divine mind and objectively evaluate what is good and evil.⁵ Al-Ash'arī succinctly summarizes this school's position: 'Good and evil (occur) through the decree and power of God. We believe in God's decree and power, the good as well as the evil, the sweet as well as the bitter' (1929–33, 1: 291; cited in Ormsby 1981, 27) and 'What God wills, is; what he does not will is not' (al-Ash'arī 1977, 15). They also integrated some of the rationalistic elements from the Mu'tazilite school to mitigate the overly deterministic implications here. The theory of acquisition (*kasb*) allocates a very important role to human will. God remains the creator of good and evil but individuals *acquire* the consequences. This, in the Ash'arite view, establishes human responsibility and preserves both the omnipotence and benevolence of God.

Some Sufi authors take a somewhat similar approach to Ash'arites. God's will and mercy seem to be at the centre of their explanations. Namely, one must submit to the will of God. The world is created by God in an utterly 'just and beautiful manner' (al-Makkī [1351] 1932, 3: 52). Therefore, man must accept the divine fiat with contentment (*riḍā*) and rely on (*tawakkul*) the Merciful and Wise God. Al-Qushayrī (1966, 1: 368), for example, writes that human beings are 'in the hands of God like a corpse in the corpse-washer's hands who turns him or her however he wishes, for there is no motion or self-direction in him'.

Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) approach the problem of evil primarily by harking back to the sources of Greek philosophy. In an approach similar to Neo-Platonic emanationism, Ibn Sīnā posits that God creates/emanates the world out of the necessity of his own being (*ijāb dhātī*). From the First Reality, everything pours forth in a gradational schema. Just as the sun's nature is to radiate, so God's nature is to emanate and give existence. That is to say, the world is not created as an act of the divine will or choice (*ikhtiyār*) but existed pre-eternally and necessarily along with God. Clearly, the idea of divine freedom, which is so much emphasized by more 'orthodox' theological schools and Sufis, is decentralized in Ibn Sīnā's metaphysical cosmology. He does not, however, completely lose the concept of divine freedom. It reappears as a function of the divine knowledge, which is, in turn, indistinguishable from the Divine Essence. As al-Ghazālī (1961, 235) succinctly explains, for Ibn Sīnā, God 'knows what is emanating from Him and consents to it. This consent may be termed will'. Moreover, the First is perfect and averse (*karīh*) to imperfection. Whatever comes from the perfect must be perfect. Now, if imperfection is not consistent with the idea of the First, to whom can one ascribe evil? At this point, Ibn Sīnā inherits the solution proposed by Plotinus.⁶ Evil has no essence. It is a privation of good, a deficiency, and a necessary concomitant of emanation (Ibn Sīnā 1960, 2: 415; see also al-Ghazālī 1961, 297). God is the cause of

existence and creates the world in the most perfect manner as much as this is in accord with the world's being a possibility (*imkān*). 'God knows by His very nature what exists in the order of good: and by His very nature [he is] a cause of goodness and perfection in so far as (this is) possible (*bi-ḥasab al-imkān*)' (Ibn Sīnā 1960, 2: 415).

The *Ikhwān al-Ṣafā* (Brethren of Purity), a secret society of philosophers who resided in Basra around the tenth century and composed a giant compendium of 52 treatises on various topics, argued for the emulation of the Prophetic example in the face of calamities. They appear to blend the Islamic emphasis on trust in God's will and wisdom with Stoic fortitude and temperance: 'the world's maker is one, living, powerful, and wise. He arranged the world's affairs in the best way and in the most excellent order due the perfection of wisdom' (*Rasā'il* 4: 72–73; trans. Ormsby 1981, 101). Individuals may not be able to see the wisdom and benefit behind all events, but trust in the just, wise, and merciful God leads to acceptance of the rigour and beauty in the world.

Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/111) largely benefitted from the discussions on evil that had taken place before. He presents, in my view, a synthetic approach. His famous statement, 'It is not possible for anything to be more wonderful than what is' (*laysa fī al-imkān abdā min ma kān*) (al-Ghazālī 1916a, 4: 223, ll. 6–7; also al-Ghazālī 1916b, 270) is indicative of the influence of various strands of Islamic thought. It implies that the world is created in the optimum (*al-aṣḥaḥ*) state of perfection, a concept that can be traced back to the Mu'tazilite school. The world is a possible being, as in Ibn Sīnā's modalities of being. Al-Ghazālī, however, diverges from Ibn Sīnā in his emphasis on the Divine will. In his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (The Inconsistencies of the Philosophers), al-Ghazālī (1997) argues that the world was created in time through the Divine will, not as a necessity.

But how can these apparently conflicting ideas be brought together? This is not the place to delve into al-Ghazālī's theodicy, but we may briefly note that, in order to answer the question, he posits that there are limits to God's power, without rejecting the notion of omnipotence. He writes: 'It is the cardinal principle of omnipotence that it stands in relation with all objects of power. By the objects of power I mean all possible things' (al-Ghazālī 1962, 93).

God is all-powerful within the domain of *possibilia* (*mumkināt*). Logical contradictions are not objects of power (*maqdūrāt*). That is to say, divine omnipotence is limited by the law of contradiction. God cannot make yes and no true at the same time nor can God create a second God. These propositions are logical absurdities (*tanāquḍ*). A created being cannot be God, for God explains its own existence. A created being would be explained with reference to another being, and thus cannot be God. Similarly, the concept of a 'perfect world' is a logical absurdity.

Ibn 'Arabī on infinity, existence, and evil

Before answering the question of evil, Ibn 'Arabī asks two preliminary questions: 'Why does the world exist?' and 'What is the nature of its existence?' The answers he gives to these questions allow him to locate the question of evil in a larger metaphysical framework in which he offers what I call a *necessitarian-cum-volitional* theodicy.

To the first preliminary question, his answer is that the world exists as a consequence of both a metaphysical necessity and God's volitional act. It is a necessity because it is implied by the Infinity of God. That is, the world is a 'possibility' and all possibilities are included

in the Infinity of God. Ibn 'Arabī refers to these 'ontological possibilities contained in the Absolute' (Izutsu 1983, 157) as fixed entities (*a'yān thābita*). They are 'fixed' in relation to Divine knowledge, for in God's knowledge everything exists in an eternally unchanging form.⁷ They exist as possibilities; therefore, they can be said neither to exist nor not to exist. God knows these possibilities latent in the Divine Self, for God knows Himself.⁸ The Divine Essence (*dhāt*) is eternally manifested to God.

If these possibilities are not actualized, it would be contrary to the very concept of infinity. God's infinity implies infinite potential for creativity and, without creation/manifestation, God would not be infinite. For God to be infinite, in the real sense, the possibilities must be existentiated. The creation/manifestation of these 'hidden treasures' is 'demanded' by the Infinity of God.⁹

In the existentiating of these possibilities, the Divine Names (*al-asmā' al-ḥusnā*) are manifested. The Divine Names are theological categories denoting the relationships God bears to these possibilities.¹⁰ When 'possibilities' are existentiated, the Divine Names are reflected in their loci. Since the creation/manifestation is continuous and infinitely variegated, the number of relationships must be infinite. 'The possible things are infinite, so the Names are infinite' (Ibn 'Arabī 1972–91, 4: 288.1).¹¹ That is to say, according to Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysical cosmogony, both the infinity of all possibilities and of the divine qualities and the necessity of their existentiating are implied by the Infinity of God. If God is infinite, the world cannot not exist.

The concept of infinity also explains why God re-creates the world anew at each moment. For the realization of infinite possibilities, the act of creation must not repeat itself (*lā takrār fī al-tajallī*).¹² There must always be change. The world that is in a constant state of change serves as a locus for the continuous realization of infinite possibilities. By creating unceasing change in the finite world, the Infinite makes the finite a better mirror for the manifestation of infinite possibilities. Even certain seemingly durable and long-lasting objects are in a constant state of change. God never reproduces His manifestations in exactly the same form; each is uniquely different, and, for this reason, there must always be change. Ibn 'Arabī uses Q 55.29 to support his conclusion: 'Each day He is upon some task (*sha'n*).' His day, according to Ibn 'Arabī (1972–91, 5: 1.292), could be the indivisible moment (*ān*): 'Some days are long and some are short. The smallest of them is the indivisible moment, in respect of which came the verse, "Each day he is upon some task".'¹³ The infinity of God (*al-tawassu' al-ilāhī*) necessitates that the world is re-created anew at each moment (*al-khalq al-jadīd*).¹⁴

To this extent, Ibn 'Arabī's cosmogony sounds necessitarian. At this point, he introduces the concept of mercy (*rahma*). God does not create the world out of mere metaphysical necessity but also as a gracious act of mercy. This, in my view, adds a volitional element to his cosmogony. To explain this in more anthropomorphic terms, Ibn 'Arabī uses the expression 'the Breath of the Merciful' (*Nafas al-Rahmān*). In Ibn 'Arabī's technical language, the Breath of the Merciful refers to God's continuous existentiating act.¹⁵ By breathing out the word 'be' (*kun*), God brings possibilities into existence (*kawn*). God breathes out because God is *fayyāḍ al-jūd* (effusing due to God's bounteousness, or infinity). In the exhalation of the Divine Breath, possibilities are existentiated and the Divine Names are made manifest in their loci. 'The world is made manifest in the *Nafas al-Rahmān* to ease the sadness of the Divine Names' (Ibn 'Arabī 1946, 145). Both the possibilities and the Names 'demand' to be manifested. God is all-knowing and all-merciful,

and thus knows and responds to these demands. God eases the sadness (*qurba*) of the possibilities. ‘The reality (*ḥaqq*) of names demands that every name become manifest, ad infinitum’ (65).

Thus, God’s infinity and mercy explain the mystery of creation for Ibn ‘Arabī. But Ibn ‘Arabī’s ideas still do not answer the question of why there should be evil in the world.

Here he asks the second preliminary question: ‘What is the nature of the world’s existence?’ The answer is a short one: The world is a possible thing (*mumkin* or *imkān*) situated between the two absolutes: God and non-existence. But what is a possible thing? To answer this question, he appears to hark back to the discussions that took place on this issue among previous Muslim theologians and philosophers. For al-Ghazālī (1962, 249), for example, the term ‘possibility’ denotes ‘the negation of necessity for existence and non-existence simultaneously’. These definitions, which were probably available to Ibn ‘Arabī, suggest that a possible thing is neither necessary nor impossible by its own nature.

The most systematic and in-depth treatment of the concept of possibility, however, is found in Ibn Sīnā. In his view, there are three modes of existence: the necessary existent, the possible existent, and the impossible existent. The Necessary Existent cannot not be, whose ‘non-existence entails impossibility (*muḥāl*)’ (Ibn Sīnā 2005, 262). The possible existent (*mumkin al-wujūd*) is ‘an existent whose existence does not entail impossibility’. The necessary existent is its own cause, due to itself (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihi*). The possible existent is, in a sense, necessary too; otherwise it would not exist. But the necessity of the possible existent is due to something other than itself (*wājib al-wujūd bi-ghayrihi*). The impossible existent (*imkān al-wujūd*) cannot exist. Its existence entails logical contradiction.

The necessary Existent coincides with God, the impossible existent with non-existence, and the possible existent with the world. That is to say, the world is located in the shadowy domain of possibility. Ibn ‘Arabī frequently uses such terms as isthmus (*barzakh*) to refer to this ontologically intermediate location of the world. He describes *barzakh* as follows: ‘A *barzakh* is something that separates (*fāsil*) two other things while never going to one side, as for example the line that separates shadow from sun-light’ (Ibn ‘Arabī 1972–91, 1: 304.16; see also 3: 361.5). It is right to say that *barzakh* is anything that simultaneously separates and unites while at the same time being coloured by that which it separates.¹⁶ The cosmos, being located between God and nothingness, is in its totality a *barzakh*, but everything in the cosmos is also a *barzakh* between two subsequent degrees of *wujūd*. ‘There is nothing in existence but *barzakhs*’; everything is ‘somewhere between’ and ‘both/and’ or ‘neither/nor’. The world of being and becoming is a *barzakh* between God and nothingness, itself non-existent (3: 156.27).

This distinction between necessary existence, possible existence, and non-existence allows Ibn ‘Arabī to introduce an ontological dimension into the question of good and evil. Good is tantamount to existence and evil is equal to non-existence. This ontological differentiation appears in the domain of morality as good and evil.

Since God was kind towards us through the names as indicated by the name All-Merciful, He brought us from *evil*, which is non-existence, to good which is existence. That is why God reminds us of His kindness through the blessing of existence. (3: 157. 15)

God made the possible things come to exist as entities only to bring them out from the *evil of non-existence*, for He knows that existence is Sheer Good within which is no evil, except accidentally. (3: 207.33)

God is sheer good, for he has pure existence. There is no limit to God's existence, for it exists due to itself as the Necessary Existence.

The Real possesses Non-delimited being without any delimitation. He is sheer good without any delimitation. He stands opposite non-delimited nothingness, which is sheer evil, without any good. (1: 47.2; trans. Chittick 1989, 290)

Accordingly, evil is ontologically traced back to non-existence and good to Necessary Existence. Non-existence, which stands as the opposite of 'Non-delimited Existence', is sheer evil in which there is no good.

Every evil that becomes manifest in the cosmos derives from this root (sheer evil, non-delimited nothingness). Evil is the nonexistence of perfection. At the same time the agent of every good that becomes manifest is Non-delimited Existence. (Ibn 'Arabī 1972–91, 2: 576.2; trans. Chittick 1989, 292)

The world is the shadow of the Real (*al-Ḥaqq*). As a shadow, it is akin to its source, because shadow is eroded light. Shadow is less perfect than pure light. That is to say, it is distant from God, for God is pure light (Ibn 'Arabī 1946, 103–104; trans. Izutsu 1983, 94). Shadow does not mean darkness or lack of light. Every particularized, determined, limited form of the Real is shadow. Colour in this sense is a shadow of the Light. Light assumes the colour of the glass, while in itself it is colourless. Coloured glass is a shadow, for it delimits and manifests the light at once. Being, which is a delimited manifestation of the Non-delimited, is then shadow. Manifestation is delimitation and the world is manifestation; thus, the world is God's shadow (*zill al-Nūr*) (Ibn 'Arabī 1946, 100–104). We are mixed light, for we are not God. God is pure light, pure existence, pure good. We are situated between light and darkness or existence and non-existence. We are that line separating light and shadow where opposites meet. Having been situated in an intermediate realm, we are 'coloured' by both light and darkness. It is precisely our mixed nature that allows us to know God. Witnessing our own shadow, we know the Pure Light. The notion of possibility is the key to the perception of the Necessary Existent (Ibn 'Arabī 1972–91, 2: 303.28).

After establishing the nature of the world as a possible existent and equating good with existence and evil with non-existence, Ibn 'Arabī turns to talk about evil as an inevitable shadow of the act of creation/manifestation. That is, if things are 'possible', they cannot be like Necessary Being, God. And a possibility is situated between God and non-existence and bears the traces of both. To give existence to something implies its possibility and this implies differentiation between the Creator and the created. This differentiation cannot not happen.

... the cosmos is in the grasp of Sheer Good, which is complete Being. But nonexistence gazes upon the possible thing, so in that measure is attributed to it. ... In its essence the possible thing does not possess the property of the Being which is Necessary thought Its own essence, and this is why evil presents itself to possible things. But the possible thing does not continue or become fixed in evil, since it dwells in the grasp of Sheer Good and being. (3: 315.6; trans. Chittick 1989, 291)

A possible being remains connected to non-existence due to its intermediate position between existence and non-existence. Creation/manifestation implies otherness and otherness implies imperfection, for nothing can be like God, the Perfect. Here evil comes from the 'direction' of the possible being, not from God.

A thing's possibility does not prevent it from becoming connected to non-existence. To this extent evil becomes manifest within the cosmos. Hence it only becomes manifest from the direction of the possible thing, not from the direction of God. (3: 389.21)

To say that there should be no imperfections is to say that there should be no creation. Creation means differentiation from the Divine Essence. This differentiation implies 'otherness' (*ghayriyya*). To say creation, manifestation, or existentiation is to say 'otherness' and, thus, inevitable imperfection. This explains why evil is an ontological necessity. But there is still one more question Ibn 'Arabī has to answer: "To whom do we attribute evil, then?"

Now if God is the Absolute Existence, and existence and good are one and the same thing, then what comes from God must absolutely be good. 'Evil is opposite of good, and nothing emerges from good but good' (3: 373.26; trans. Chittick 1989, 290). Ibn 'Arabī (1972–91, 3: 528.6) writes: 'This why the Prophet said in his supplication, "The good, all of it, is in Thy hands, while evil does not go back to you".' Ibn 'Arabī does not ascribe evil to God. God creates good, but evil is not a created thing. Evil has no ontological quality. It represents lack of ontological qualities and lack of existence.

Ignorance consists if lack of knowledge, nothing else. Hence it is not an ontological quality (*amr wujūdī*). Nonexistence is evil. Hence he [the Prophet] did not ascribe evil to him [God]. *Were evil an ontological quality, its coming into existence would go back to God, since there is no agent but God.* Hence all existence is good, since it is identical with sheer Good, who is God. (3: 528.6; italics added)

Evil is not created. It is lack of existence. Its roots cannot be found in the Divine. From Sheer Good comes only good. The world is a possible being existentiated due to God's mercy, and evil necessarily emerges as an accidental property and as a consequence of the act of creation/manifestation. Again, a possible being cannot be like the Necessary Being, God. This would be a logical contradiction. The world is situated between the Absolute Being and absolute nothingness, and therefore cannot help but carry the properties of both.

God created the cosmos only for *felicity* in its Essence. Wretchedness occurs for whom it occurs as an accidental property. The reason for this is that nothing emerges from Sheer Good ... except that which accords with it, which is specifically good. Hence good belongs to the cosmos in its essence. But the *cosmos possesses the property of possibility, since it is alternately qualified by one of the two sides [existence and nonexistence]*, so it does not stand in the level of the Being which is necessary through Its own Essence, and hence evil occurs to it as an accident. (3: 389.21; italics added)

The cosmos is necessarily imperfect. However, from another perspective it is in the most perfect form for a possible being. Ibn 'Arabī adopts al-Ghazālī's approach, which sees the world as the best of all possible worlds. He writes, 'Everything in this world occurs to display the divine names. Since this is so, there is in possibility nothing more wonderful than this world' (2: 126; see also 3: 586). God is perfect and what comes from God must be in the most perfect form, insofar as this is possible for a possible being. The imperfection in the cosmos is its perfection. 'Hence the part of the cosmos's perfection is the existence of relative imperfection within it' (2: 244.21). Nothing issues from the Perfect without being in accordance with 'the appropriate perfection'. Thus, The Creator of the cosmos remains perfect.

The foundational premises of Ibn ‘Arabī’s theodicy can be summarized as follows: (1) The Divine Essence is infinite and merciful. The Infinite has infinite possibilities. Its infinite nature has infinite possibilities including its own negation – hence creation/manifestation. God’s infinity implies that things other than God must exist. The Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*) answers the prayer of the infinite possibilities and existentiates them. (2) The world is a possibility situated between Necessary Existence (God) and non-existence. Existence coincides with good and non-existence with evil. The world as a possible being participates in both existence and non-existence. Therefore, it participates in both good and evil. This is the inevitable consequence of being a possible being. (3) The world is a necessary manifestation due to the Infinity of the Divine Essence. Manifestation implies otherness. To say that the world is other than God is to say that the world cannot be perfect. What is other than God cannot be like God, perfect. The world cannot be perfect without annihilating the distinction between the world and God. There is good in this world since the world ‘exists’, but there is also evil in the world, for in existing we are separated from God. This explains why evil is inevitable. (4) God is not the author of evil. Evil is not a created thing and does not have any ontological quality. Its root is in non-existence. It appears as a necessary shadow of existence. It does not and cannot exist of itself. (5) Ibn ‘Arabī’s emphasis on the role of mercy in creation also implies that creation is due not only to necessity but also to God’s will. Ibn ‘Arabī does not see a contradiction here. Necessity and freedom are reconciled in God. (6) God’s mercy comes before God’s wrath. Thus, good always has the upper hand in this and in the other world. Evil finally dissolves in the universal good.¹⁷

Rūmī’s theodicy

Rūmī’s volitional theodicy traces the root of evil to the Divine Will. The direct relationship between will and evil does not affect God’s moral perfection, for God wills and creates evil in connection with the good that compensates for it. Rūmī presents some of the positive functions of the existence of evil and explains that God’s mercy, in the end, will be victorious and evil will be integrated into the universal good.¹⁸

In the same vein as Ibn ‘Arabī, to explain the mystery of creation, Rūmī goes back to a famous saying attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, which explains that the purpose of the creation/manifestation is to make the ‘hidden treasures’ latent in the Divine known to other conscious beings. Accordingly, the world is a multiplicity of mirrors manifesting the hidden treasures and the Divine qualities. By witnessing these reflections one can, to some extent, know God. Love of God emerges as a consequence of knowledge of God. ‘The universe was created for the sake of manifestation, in order that the treasure of wisdom might not remain hidden’ (Rūmī 1925–40, 4: 3029).

What is manifested in the ‘mirror’ of the creation is God’s Beautiful Names (*al-asmā’ al-ḥusnā*) and Attributes. The Divine Essence remains hidden. ‘Since you have not the endurance for His Essence, turn your eyes toward the Attributes’ (Rūmī 1957–67, 4106; trans. Chittick 1983, 44). This implies that phenomena can be explained and interpreted in terms of the Divine Names. Now, the world is a display of opposites such as good and evil, beauty and ugliness, determination and freedom, gentleness and severity. How can one explain this duality in terms of the Divine Names and Attributes? Here, Rūmī introduces a distinction between the Names of Gentleness and

the Names of Severity. The Names of Gentleness coincide with good and the Names of Severity with evil.

God says 'I was a hidden treasure, so I wanted to be known.' In other words, 'I created the whole of the universe, and the goal in all of it is to make myself manifest, sometimes through Gentleness sometimes through Severity.' (Rūmī 1969, 176–177; trans. Chittick 1983, 48)

... while the believers manifest His Gentleness and the unbelievers manifest His Severity. (Rūmī 1969, 226–227; trans. Chittick 1983, 46)

This, however, is not a relationship between two equals. The Names of Gentleness take precedence over the Names of Severity. At the end of the day, mercy, gentleness, and beauty are victorious over majesty and severity, even in this world. 'Although He has such a mighty and overpowering severity, look at the coolness of His Gentleness, which is prior to it' (Rūmī 1925–40, 4: 3743; trans. Chittick 1983, 47).

The existence of evil makes the world a more comprehensive mirror for the reflection of the two kinds of Divine Names. In a world where there was no evil, such names as 'the Forgiver' or 'the Vengeful' would remain unknown. The Names of Gentleness and Severity 'demand' to be manifested, and the Divine Will responds to this demand. This implies that the root of evil can be traced back to the Divine volitional and creative act. As I shall discuss in what follows, this brings us to an important aspect of Rūmī's theodicy where he differs from Ibn 'Arabī. In Rūmī, evil is ascribed to God.

God wills both good and evil, but He only approves of good. (Rūmī 1969, 179; trans. Chittick 1983, 56)

God wills evil in one respect, but in another respect he does not ... Had he not willed these evils, he would have willed the ego ... Moreover had he approved of these evils He would not have commanded and prohibited the good. In short evil is willed but not for its own sake. (Rūmī 1969, 179–180; trans. Chittick 1983, 56)

This does not affect God's moral perfection, for evil is willed for the 'greater good'. God is good, and what comes from the Divine Will must necessarily be good. Evil must have compensating functions. What then are these compensating functions?

First, for Rūmī, evil functions to provide a contrast in the world. Things are known through their opposites. The good is known through its opposite, evil. The Absolute Good without a contrasting reference point, even if it is infinitesimal, remains unknown. So, evil makes the good known and in a way 'highlights' it.

God created suffering and heartache so that joyful-heartedness might appear through its opposite. (Rūmī 1925–40, 1: 1130; trans. Chittick 1983, 50)

No opposite can be known without its opposite. Having suffered a blow you will know a caress. (Rūmī 1925–40, 5: 599; trans. Chittick 1983, 50)

This also explains why God's essence remains ineffable. God has no opposites, and something without an opposite cannot be known. Moreover, God is the coincidence of opposites (*jam' al-azdād*). There can be no opposite to God's incomparable essence.

His description is not contained within the intellect, for He is the *Coincidence of Opposites*. Wonderful composition without composition. Wonderful freely acting Compelled One. (Rūmī 1957–67, 26832; trans. Chittick 1983, 50)

Second, for the world to be a ‘comprehensive mirror’, evil must exist. If there were no evil in the world, some of the Divine Names would be hidden. The appearance of ugliness in the world is indicative of the richness of divine possibilities. Moreover, ‘what sins could He forgive or take vengeance for’ without evil?

Do you consider it permissible to destroy both worlds for the sake of keeping open the shop of your worthless natural disposition. (Rūmī 1925–40, 6: 1745; trans. Chittick 1983, 56)

If he cannot make ugly pictures, he is imperfect. (Rūmī 1925–40, 2: 2542; trans. Chittick 1983, 55)

Third, Rūmī suggests that things are good or bad only in relation to us and not in relation to God. In its cosmic context, evil appears as an indirect good. Evil is accidental, existing relatively. It has local reality, as it were. From the vantage point of God, who sees things in their most proper place, things appear differently.

Everything is good in relation to God, but not in relation to us ... In a king’s realm there are prisons, gallows, robes of honor, wealth, estates, retinue, banquets, drums, and banners. In relation to the king all are good. Just as robes of honor are the perfection of his kingdom, so also gallows and executions and prisons are all perfections of his kingdom. In relation to him, all are perfection. But in relation to his people, how could the gallows be the same as a robe of honor. (Rūmī 1969, 31, 42–43; trans. Chittick 1983, 54)

Moreover, the distinction between severity and gentleness exists from our perspective. In God’s undifferentiated essence, the two are one and the same. They become differentiated in respect to the creation or in creation.

Since those who have attained union with Him are drowned in the Essence, O youth, how should they gaze at His Attributes. (Rūmī 1925–40, 2: 2812–2813; trans. Chittick 1983, 44)

After all you see God at this very moment in His Effects and Acts. Every instant you see something different, for none of His Acts resembles any other. (Rūmī 1969, 113–114, 124–125; trans. Chittick 1983, 44)

Fourth, there is no absolute evil. There is never a sharp distinction between evil and good in the world. Things are always a mixture of good and evil. Rūmī (1969, 214) writes, ‘Show me evil without good or good without evil.’

So there is no absolute evil in the world, for evil is relative – know this also.

In the whole time there is no poison or candy that is not a foot for one and a shackle for another ...

The snake’s poison is life for the snake, but death in relation to man

Creatures of water see the ocean as a garden, creatures of earth see it as death and torment. (Rūmī 1925–40, 4: 65–69; trans. Chittick 1983, 53)

Fifth, Rūmī also frequently harks back to the qur’anic idea in that evil is a test. We are tested for a purpose. The test discloses the tested one’s true-self.

If there were no bitter commands, beauty and ugliness, stones and pearls

If there were no Satan, ego, and self-will, and if there were no blows, battle, and war then by what name would the King call his servants, ‘Oh abandoned man’ How could he say, ‘Oh

patient man! Oh forbearing man?’ How could he say ‘Oh brave man! Oh wise man!’ (Rūmī 1925–40, 4: 1747–1749; trans. Chittick 1983, 55)

To sum up, for Rūmī, God creates the world to make hidden treasures manifest. The names can be divided into two categories: the Names of Gentleness and Severity. The Names of Gentleness take precedence over the Names of Severity in accordance with the famous Prophetic tradition. The existence of evil makes the world a more comprehensive mirror for manifestations of the Divine Names. That is, the manifestation of such names as ‘the Forgiver’ or ‘the Vengeful’ is intelligible only in a world where evil exists. Evil also has a ‘contrasting function’ in that it makes the good known by serving as its opposite. The absolute and unlimited good without its opposite as a comparative reference point would remain unknown. Evil is an accidental and local reality in that it exists from the point of view of limited perception. When put in its universal context, evil appears as an indirect good. There is also no absolute evil; things exist in this world as blends of good and evil. Finally, evil is a test to reveal who we really are. Having posited these positive compensating functions, Rūmī’s volitional theodicy ascribes evil to God.

Ibn ‘Arabī and Rūmī: the origin and nature of evil

Ibn ‘Arabī and Rūmī agree on certain points. They both believe that the world is a multiplicity of loci for the manifestations of the Divine Names, and that the existence of evil makes the world a more comprehensive mirror. If there were no evil in the world, some names, such as ‘the Forgiver’ or ‘the Avenger’, would remain ‘hidden’. What sins could God forgive or take vengeance for without evil? The existence of evil adds more complexity to the world, and this complexity allows richer interaction between God and the world. To use Rūmī’s analogy, the ‘perfection of a painter’ demands that he be able to paint ugly pictures. It must also be added that, in accordance with this metaphysical cosmology, both Rūmī and Ibn ‘Arabī hold that human perfection lies in being a mirror for divine qualities and balancing severity and gentleness. ‘The prophets are the locus of manifestation for both Attributes, while the believers manifest His Gentleness and the unbelievers manifest His Severity’ (Rūmī 1969, 224–227; trans. Chittick 1983, 46).

Second, they agree that evil is real on its own level. It is not merely an illusion. From a God-like vantage point, however, one can say that evil is integrated into the greater good. ‘The King’s dungeon’ represents his justice and sovereignty, but, for his subjects, it appears as a form of severe punishment. ‘A snake’s poison’ is a threat from one perspective, but a cure from another. Things are good or bad only in relation to us, not in relation to God.¹⁹ The imperfection of the world does not affect God’s perfection.

Third, both hold that the imperfection of the world is actually its perfection. That is to say, evil has positive roles to play in the great cosmic game. For instance, evil has an epistemological function to make the good manifest as a contrasting reference point. As both thinkers say, ‘things become clear through their opposites’ (Rūmī 1925–40, 5: 599; trans. Chittick 1983, 50). Moreover, evil as a test implies a challenge that serves the unfolding of hidden potentials in human nature. One’s response to ‘Satan, ego, blows, and wars’ paves the way for humans towards self-realization.

Despite these commonalities, they diverge on certain points, the most important of which, in my view, is that Ibn ‘Arabī perceives evil as both *a metaphysical necessity and*

a *volitional act* whereas Rūmī sees it, almost exclusively, as a *volitional act*. The element of necessity, implied by God's infinity, does not appear to exist in Rūmī.²⁰

As discussed above, the necessitarian and volitional implications of Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysical cosmogony are reflected in his theodicy. The very concept of the creation/manifestation of the world implies an 'otherness'. The world is other than God and cannot be like God, and so cannot be perfect. Ibn 'Arabī harks back to the Ash'arite school and Ibn Sīnā's modalities of being to convey this idea. The world is a possible existence, whereas God is the Necessary Existence. The possible existence is situated between the Necessary Existence and non-existence. Thus, the possible existence bears the traces of both pure existence (God) and non-existence. Imperfection is implied in its possibility, in its intermediate position between the two absolutes, God and non-existence. Rūmī's theodicy follows a different path and emphasizes the volitional element almost exclusively. Evil is willed for greater good. The world is created/manifested to make the hidden treasures known. It is a mirror for reflections of the Divine Names and Attributes. The existence of evil makes the world a more comprehensive mirror by, as it were, allowing richer interaction between God and the created order.

It follows that their views on the origin of evil also differ. For Ibn 'Arabī, evil is not created. Evil does not have any 'ontological quality'; it is the lack of all ontological qualities. Evil participates in existence, but of itself it neither exists nor is intelligible. It is intelligible only in relationship to existence. Ibn 'Arabī finds the root of evil in nothingness, itself non-existent. Therefore, he sees evil as a metaphysical necessity without ascribing it to God. In Rūmī, however, the world is a display of both beauty and majesty. Therefore, in order to express this duality, the divine qualities are grouped under two headings, the Names of Gentleness and Severity. Beauty, mercy, and good are manifestations of the Names of Gentleness. Ugliness, harshness, rigour, and evil are traced back to the Names of Severity. For Rūmī, tracing the origin of evil to God does not negate God's moral perfection. Everything has its origin in God in its positive content.

Ibn 'Arabī, too, makes a similar distinction between gentleness and severity in the Divine Names. Both thinkers hold that the existence of evil makes the world a more comprehensive mirror. But, in accordance with his general necessitarian-cum-volitional theodicy, Ibn 'Arabī believes that the Divine Names cannot be considered as the causes of evil. The origin of the good can be traced back to God, to the Names of Gentleness. But the Names of Severity are not the causes of evil, for evil is non-existent. Something that is not created does not require a cause. The Names of Severity can be viewed as divine responses to the necessary emergence of evil. In the end, in both Rūmī and Ibn 'Arabī, the Names of Severity are manifested fully. The difference is that they are manifested in Rūmī as *causes* of evil but in Ibn 'Arabī as *responses* to the necessary emergence of evil.

As mentioned above, the volitional element exists in both Rūmī and Ibn 'Arabī, but there is a difference here too. Rūmī's volitional theodicy makes a distinction between 'willing' and 'approving'. He writes, for example, 'God wills both good and evil, but He only approves of good' (Rūmī 1969, 179; trans. Chittick 1983, 56). This protects God's moral perfection while at the same time establishing God as the creator of both good and evil, because to will evil is 'reprehensible only when it is willed for its own sake, but when it is willed for the sake of good, then it is not reprehensible' (Rūmī 1969, 188; trans. Chittick 1983, 57). Ibn 'Arabī, in my view, would make a similar distinction between 'willing' and 'allowing'. God wills good and gives existence to possible beings.

God also knows that evil is going necessarily to emerge due to the act of existentiation. God does not will evil but allows it as a necessary consequence of creation/manifestation. At the end of the day, this metaphysical necessity is condemned to defeat and will be integrated into good. The necessitarian-cum-volitional nature of Ibn ‘Arabī’s theodicy enables him to accentuate the necessity of evil to save the act of will, and hence God’s perfection, from being directly related to the emergence of evil. Rūmī’s volitional theodicy, however, relates the Divine Will directly to evil, and subsequently attempts to save the purity of the Divine intention by accentuating all the positive compensations.

Furthermore, Ibn ‘Arabī’s distinction between God’s will and knowledge allows him to approach the related issue of the relationship between human destiny and evil. He holds that our destinies stem not from God’s compulsion, but from our own fixed entities. Destiny means pre-knowledge, not pre-determination, and therefore does not preclude human freedom. As touched on earlier, God knows the fixed entities, or, in other words, our possibilities latent in the Infinity of God, and brings them into existence as an act of mercy. That is to say, God does not make the world the way it is. He merely knows the way it is and bestows existence accordingly.²¹ The act of existentiation has the necessary consequence of otherness, and hence of evil. God wills to existentiate these fixed archetypes in accordance with their possibilities as an act of mercy, but allows, not wills, the necessary consequences of the act of existentiation. Again, the concepts of infinity and mercy explain the necessity of all possibilities in God, their manifestation, and freedom without making God the creator of evil or the imposer of destiny.

Rūmī’s volitional theodicy does not end in ‘fatalism’ either. Rūmī, as mentioned above, teaches that man, as a microcosm, is a mirror for the reflection of the Divine qualities. Man’s reflective capacity is as comprehensive as the universe. This capacity is an allusion to man’s creation in the image of God. Man, therefore, as the image of God, must partake in God’s freedom to some extent. ‘God’s free will has given existence to our free will’ (Rūmī 1925–40, 5: 3087–3088). In creating free will in man, God also wills, but does not approve, the possibility of man leaning towards evil.

Both Ibn ‘Arabī and Rūmī develop a solid grounding for free will. The difference here lies in their points of departure and emphases. Ibn ‘Arabī accentuates the concepts of infinity and mercy in his explanation of creation, and thus has both necessitarian and volitional elements in his account of destiny and evil. Rūmī, on the other hand, centralizes the concept of the Divine Will and, therefore, accentuates the role of God’s volitional act in his explanation of both destiny and evil. The difference here is one of accentuation, not of privation.

Ibn ‘Arabī’s synthetic theodicy borrows extensively from Ash‘arites, Sufis, and Muslim philosophers. He attempts to integrate these seemingly divergent tendencies into a larger metaphysical framework. Ibn ‘Arabī’s perspective first introduces the creation/manifestation of the world as a *necessary-cum-volitional* act of the Infinite and the All-Merciful. For him, the act of creation/manifestation necessarily implies differentiation between God and the world. This differentiation necessitates imperfection and evil. Evil is not a created thing, and therefore God is not the creator of evil. Evil is another name for non-existence, the lack of all ontological qualities. Rūmī’s *volitional* theodicy has a different point of accentuation: the Divine Will. God wills and creates, but does not approve, evil. To preserve God’s moral perfection, Rūmī focuses extensively on the positive compensating

functions of the existence of evil in the world. Evil, although willed by God, will eventually be integrated into the universal good.

Notes

1. The literature on the problem of evil is very extensive. I can only list some of the works that I have found helpful. A good overview of the problem can be found in Hick (1972) and Pereboom (2005). For a comparative approach, see Bowker (1975), Goldziher (1981, 51–99), and van Inwagen (1995). For theistic and atheistic treatment of the topic, see Hume (1990), Martin (1978), Mackie (1955), La Croix (1974), and Plantinga (1974).
2. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1987, 138) mentions that Rūmī sometimes performed his daily prayers behind al-Qonawi, the famous and authoritative interpreter of Ibn Arabī, in Konya. This, for Nasr, suggests that Ibn ‘Arabī had an indirect influence on Rūmī through his student. On the other hand, William Chittick (2012) argues that, although both Ibn ‘Arabī and Rūmī can be said to be inspired by the same spiritual literature, there is no conclusive evidence that Rūmī was acquainted with Ibn ‘Arabī personally or knew of his thought firsthand. Franklin Lewis and Annemarie Schimmel also believed that Rūmī was not intellectually influenced by Ibn ‘Arabī.
3. Translations of Qur’anic texts are taken from <https://quran.com> on 11/26/2016. Several translations are available on this website. I use ‘Sahih International’.
4. See also Q 3.165; 10.61; 34.3. In fact, all the legal and hortatory verses can be included here, for they are based on the assumption that human individuals are free.
5. This is also reflected in the Ash‘arite occasionalist theory of causality.
6. For Plotinus’ discussion, see *Enneads*, III.2.5. This explanation was also favoured by Thomism (see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, 3: 6–15).
7. For things, even in their state of pure potentiality hidden in the un-manifested essence, have a positive status (*thubūt*) from eternity (Corbin 1969, 186; Izutsu 1983, 90).
8. Ibn ‘Arabī calls this pre-eternal relationship that the Divine Essence bears to Itself ‘the Most Holy Effusion’ (*al-fayḍ al-aqdas*). With a second effusion, which Ibn ‘Arabī calls the Holy Effusion (*al-fayḍ al-muqaddas*), the fixed entities are existentiated. Throughout this article, I shall mostly use translations by Toshihiko Izutsu (1983) and William Chittick (1989).
9. The concept of ‘hidden treasure’ is inspired by a Prophetic Hadith: ‘I was a hidden treasure and loved to be known. Therefore I created the creation.’ This famous Hadith, although the chain of transmission is considered weak, was cited by Ibn ‘Arabī and other Sufis. Ibn ‘Arabī (1972–91, 2: 399.28) asserts that its soundness was verified to him through inspiration.
10. Ibn ‘Arabī offers several ways of understanding the Divine Names. Going against the entire *kalām* tradition, he holds that the Divine Names denote relations or realities of relations (*ḥaqā’iq al-nisab*) between God and the world. The Divine Names are like various perspectives from which we can approach this mysterious relationality. As Izutsu (1983, 99) writes: ‘Each name is a special aspect of the divine self-disclosure... They are realities of the relations, i.e. the relation which the One reality bears to the world.’ This profound relationality transforms the world into a multiplicity of loci on which the Divine Names are ever-ceasingly manifested. A being can even be considered as a totality of its relations to God and a specific combination of the Divine Names.
11. For Ibn ‘Arabī translations, I use William Chittick’s *The Sufi Path of Knowledge* (1989) and *The self-disclosure of God* (1998).
12. ‘*Lā takrār fī al-tajallī*’ is a basic principle of Ibn ‘Arabī’s thought. Things are in a constant state of change and everything is renewed. The world is re-created anew at each moment. The idea of constant re-creation of the world appears to have emerged in earlier discussions among Muslim theologians on causality. Ash‘arites famously argued, for a number of theological reasons, that both cause and effect are created by God and attached to each other on a habitual path. This, for Ash‘arites, establishes God’s sovereignty and the absolute dependence of the world on God’s constant sustenance and manifestation. This idea appears to have been appropriated by scholars like Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī (d. 996) because of its spiritual

- implications, such as the overwhelming divine presence at each moment. For the Ash'arite doctrine of causality, see al-Ash'arī (1967, 9–10), Ibn Fūrāk (1987, 131), and Koca (2016).
13. See also Ibn 'Arabī (1972–91, 2: 500.16 and 2: 384.31).
 14. The phrase '*al-khalq al-jadīd*' is also found in Q 50.15.
 15. Ibn 'Arabī makes a distinction between the Mercy of Gratuitous Gift (*raḥmat al-imtīnān*) and the Mercy of Obligation (*raḥmat al-wujūb*). The former is the cause of existence. It is therefore universal and encompasses every existing being. The latter implies a more specific manifestation of mercy. It is for those who respond to the universal existentiating mercy by following the divine revelation. See, for example, Ibn 'Arabī (1980, 226–227).
 16. For further elucidation of the concept of *barzakh* and how Ibn 'Arabī uses it to express the relationship between God and the cosmos and the paradoxical implications of this relationship, see Bashier (2004).
 17. Now if evil finally dissolves in the universal good, how then is evil punished? Ibn 'Arabī fleshes this out with his understanding of the fires of hell which, on the one hand, are eventually extinguished and, on the other, are felicitous for those for whom fire is required. See, for example, Ibn 'Arabī (1972–91, 3: 25.14); trans. Chittick (1998, 188). For Mohammad Hassan Khalil, Ibn 'Arabī is a 'liberal inclusivist' as far as soteriology is concerned. That is, Ibn 'Arabī accepts the eternity of Hell but 'mercy', the most essential of all divine attributes, will eventually prevail, even in Hell. There will still be a difference between Heaven and Hell. Ibn 'Arabī's is a 'paradisical Hell' but is not Paradise. For an extensive discussion on Ibn 'Arabī's soteriology, see Khalil (2012, 54–74) and Smith and Haddad (2002).
 18. Zailan Moris's (1997–98) very good article elucidates certain aspects of Rūmī's theodicy. Moris appears to ascribe a certain necessitarianism to Rūmī's account of evil. I argue that Rūmī offers a volitional explanation of the existence of evil in the world, and in this regard differs from the necessitarian-cum-volitional account of Ibn 'Arabī. A good introduction to Rūmī's theology, theodicy, and conception of free will vs. predestination is provided by A.-H. Zarrinkub (2009).
 19. That is, evil would no longer be called evil from the perspective of the Divine because of its compensating functions and because it will be integrated into the greater universal good. It would, however, still be called evil from the perspective of man because of his particularity. Evil would still be perceived as real at this level.
 20. In certain passages, Rūmī implies that for good and evil to be brought into view, it is necessary for everything to be tested. See, for example, 'In order that we may strain the pure (folk) from the dregs, how much tribulation must our minds endure!' (Rūmī 1925–40, 2: 2950) or 'These threats and promises He hath sent forth on account of this good and evil which He hath mingled' (2965). These passages explain the function of evil, but they do not elucidate the origin of evil in the way Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysical treatment of the topic does.
 21. What causes the immutable archetypes to be as they are? I think that Ibn 'Arabī's account of human freedom may be important for the answer to this question. In my view, Ibn 'Arabī defends a participatory account of freedom. If there is no real separation between God and the world, as Ibn 'Arabī seems to hold, then there should not be a real separation between human free will and the divine free will. If there is no real separation, it can be said that humans participate in the divine freedom. To the extent they participate in the divine freedom they are free. And if this is so, it possible to perceive a degree of freedom even in the immutable archetypes.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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