





إِنَّ اللَّهَ فَالِقُ الْحَبِّ وَالنَّوَىٰ ۖ يُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَمُخْرِجُ الْمَيِّتِ مِنَ الْحَيِّ ۗ ذَٰلِكُمْ اللَّهُ ۗ

“Indeed, it is God who causes the seed-grain and date-stone to split and sprout. He causes the living to issue from the dead and the dead from the living. That is God”

(Qur’ān 6:95)



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## **Transliterations**

Transliteration/Romanisation of Arabic, Turkish, Persian, words in this research follows the Library of Congress (ALA-LC) standard.

The dating follows Common Era dates

All translations are my own unless specified. Qur'ānic verses have been translated from the King Fahd printing complex (Madīna) edition 1998.

## Introduction

Ideas and theories have reached us through the posing of questions in a historical setting that was responsible for their genesis. Philosophical problems as other ideas, are rooted in the melting pot of history. For a robust analysis of the problem of causation to take place, a historical insight is necessary to understand its emergence, formulation, synthesis and appreciation in the contemporary period.

The beginnings of causation in Greek thought, the Arabic and subsequently Latin translation movements yield a great deal of diversity, ambiguity and nuance. The theological debates such as atomism<sup>1</sup> and the nature of God in the Islamic milieu prior to the intrusion of Hellenistic writings were instrumental in redefining, Islamising and moulding ancient Greek thought to accord with Muslim theological assumptions. Causation subsumed under the title of *al 'illah wa al ma'lūl* (cause and effect) in modern Arabic philosophical works such as that of Ṭabāṭabā'ī<sup>2</sup> is considered the most important of debates and a philosopher's views on causality have ultimately defined the paradigm his philosophical speculation has adhered to. Given the fundamentality of the discussion, many hidden assumptions with far reaching assumptions are concomitant with the problem such as the idea of the extraordinary in the course of natural events, prophetology<sup>3</sup>, predestination and nature of God. David Hume remarked in the opening of his work 'Treatise of Human Nature':

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<sup>1</sup> A theory discussed by Democritus in Hellenic thought and vigorously promulgated by Mutakallimūn in Muslim thought. This hybrid thought was debated by Muslim theologians prior to the Graeco-Arabic translation movement becoming nuanced with differing groups such as the Baṣran Mu'tazila, the Baghdad Mu'tazila and the Asharites. The theory holds that the most basic substance is an atom (likened to a mustard seed in early texts) which is indivisible (*al juz' alladhi la yatajazza'*) and it is these atoms which in the milieu of time and space combine to form bodies and subsequently account for a theory of contingent events. (See Danani, alNoor. *The physical theory of Kalām: atoms, space and void in Basrian Mu'tazilī cosmology*. (NY: Brill, 1993)

<sup>2</sup> Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Muḥammad Husayn. *Bidāya al Ḥikmah*.

Also translated by Qarai, Ali Quli. *The elements of Islamic Metaphysics*. (London. ICAS Press, 2003)

<sup>3</sup> The claim of prophethood is traditionally vindicated by the rendering of miracles. A popular argument on theories of prophetology. (See Ḥillī, Allāma. *Sharḥ tajrīd al I'tiqād*. (Beirut: Dar al Kutub. 1998)

“There is no question, which on account of its importance, as well as difficulty has caused more disputes both among ancient and modern philosophers, than this concerning the efficacy of the cause, or that the quality, which made them, be followed by their effects.”<sup>4</sup>

Causation has come to be regarded as an axiomatic truth by the philosophers that is built upon an edifice of necessity<sup>5</sup> and theory of everything possessing a nature or essence<sup>6</sup>. Based on these philosophical premises, the theory of knowledge is constructed, since a regularity in nature is required to define, name and predicate things, in absence of this the resultant irregularity, discontinuity and haphazardness would render all propositions null and void.<sup>7</sup> Ibn Rushd says in this regard

“Denial of cause implies the denial of knowledge, and denial of knowledge implies that nothing in this world can be really known, and that what is supposed to be known is nothing but opinion, that neither proof nor definition exist, and that the essential attributes which compose definitions are void”<sup>8</sup>

The issue of an event which breaks with the order of nature, signifies discontinuity in the natural order and severs the causal nexus by way of a miracle (generally wrought at the hands of a prophet in the Qur’ān) was fervently taken up by the Asharite theologian, Abu Hamid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al- Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). Ghazālī in his famous work, *the incoherence of the philosophers*.<sup>9</sup> The work takes the philosophers to task on many doctrinal issues, some of lesser importance than others of which three he singles out in his conclusion-

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<sup>4</sup> Hume, David. *A Treatise on Human Nature: Book 1. Of the Understanding*. (London: Biblio Repr. 2008), p 10

<sup>5</sup> A famous philosophical principle of Avicenna states ‘*mā lam yajib lam yūjad*’ ‘that which is not necessitated does not exist’. This principle of necessity is key in Avicenna’s speculation which assumes a rational regularity stemming from Aristotelean assumptions of substances and natures. See Dinānī, Ghulam Hossein. *Qawā’id kullī falsafī dar falsafā e Islāmī*. (Tehran: Institute for humanities and cultural studies. 2000), vol1, 282

<sup>6</sup> The Muslim commentators on Aristotle absorbed the theory of Aristotelian substances which undergo change under the ambit of the four causes and all knowledge reverts back to the why question that appropriates the four causes.

<sup>7</sup> Fakhry, Majid. *Islamic Occasionalism and its critique by Averroës and Aquinas*. (London: Routledge, 2008 Repr.), p. 5

<sup>8</sup> Ibn Rushd. (Trans. Van den Berg, Simon). *Averroes’ Tahāfut al Tahāfut. (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*. (Oxford: Gibb Memorial Trust. 2016 Repr.) p. 313

<sup>9</sup> Ghazālī, Abu Hamid. *Tahāfut al falāsifa (the incoherence of the philosopher)*. (Trans. Marmura, Michael. Utah: Brigham University Press, 2000)



cum-edict as proof of heresy and departure from the fold of Islam<sup>10</sup>. The seventeenth discussion of the incoherence is where Ghazālī tackles the issue of causation under physical sciences in a somewhat well intentioned motive to reassert the omnipotence and absolute sovereignty of God in the created order in wake of the philosophical notions of causality that bind, curtail and obfuscate the Quranic idea of a wilful, autonomous, all-powerful creator-sustainer God. The major concern of Ghazālī is maintaining volition and freedom in the divine act<sup>11</sup> and hence his repudiation of causality in this sense meant the influence of God was unbounded and thoroughly operative in a contingent world. This was the only way Ghazālī could restore the logical validity of miracles, an idea referred to as occasionalism.

The Ghazālian universe and arguable the Asharite-cum-Mutakalim universe is a realm of contingent events that is, a world of infinitesimal possibility, irregularity in its events and abolition of so called defined natures or essences that bind the possibility of events. All of the aforementioned ultimately opened up by the 10<sup>th</sup> century an ‘orthodoxy’ whose ontology, epistemology and worldview that was at its core fatalistic as it had divested the cosmic system of any efficacy, potency or even existence save God. A fascinating period of Islamic intellectual history is the contemporaneous movements of Kalām and falsafa where proponents of both currents vied for hegemony each imbued by antecedent heritage, the philosophers rallying the freshly incorporated Hellenistic ideas and theologians engaged in physical theories of atoms. The eternal universe of Aristotle became the necessary by another of Avicenna and the notion of creation in space and time defined the anti-Aristotelian atomism of the Asharites and Mu‘tazila.<sup>12</sup>

The Quran, regarded in itself as the miracle *par excellence*, relates many miracle stories in a sacred history obtaining from the narratives of past prophets and in concurrence with much of what is found in pre Qur’ānic scriptures such as the Old Testament and Torah. Miracle stories are considered the strongest proofs for the veracity of prophetic claims and the

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<sup>10</sup> Ghazālī issues his ‘fatwa’ on three issues against the philosophers which he regards as tantamount to heresy and infidelity namely the eternity of the universe, Gods knowledge of particulars and bodily resurrection. (Tahāfut. p. 226)

<sup>11</sup> Tahāfut (p.21 translators introduction)

<sup>12</sup> Sabra, A.I. *Kalām Atomism* (in Arabic theology, Arabic philosophy, from the many to the one: essays in honour of Richard M. Frank). (Belgium: Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 2006) p.216

challenge presented by them is considered to signify the absolute omnipotence of God to act with volition that violates any continuous regularity or axiomatic causal nexus. Thus, two accounts of rebellion governed Ghazālī's anti *falsafa* rhetoric, the unique omnipotent God and the contingency of miraculous events that defy natural events. In light of this a miracle can be rationally perceived and the scriptural integrity of the Quran maintained<sup>13</sup>. The debate can, from a perspective, be viewed as one over the nature of God, the Asharite-Ghazzalian in contrast to the Avicennan.

The scope of this analysis is limited to the response of Muslim intelligentsia to causation and the intra-Muslim polemic found therein rather than a broader analysis of causation and/or miracles in the Latin world and beyond such as in the writings of Aquinas or Hume. Majid Fakhry has masterfully dealt with the issue of Islamic occasionalism and its critique both in Arabic (Averroes) and Latin thought (Aquinas).<sup>14</sup>

This endeavour will narrow the discussion to the writings on contemporary philosopher-exegete, Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī (d.1981) who can be considered a modern representative of synthetic Islamic philosophical thought. Synthetic in the sense that since the Graeco-Arabic translation movement philosophy in Arabic-Islamic lands has undergone much development and synthesis in the melting pot of history bringing it into contact with other disciplines such as theology and mysticism. Ṭabāṭabā'ī can be considered an inheritor of this synthesis notwithstanding the fact that he was amongst the most prominent thinkers of philosophy in the modern Muslim world<sup>15</sup>. The *Bidāya al Ḥikmah* (elements of Islamic metaphysics) represents a modern approach to the study of Islamic philosophy insofar as it presents Islamic philosophy in a mature twentieth century setting having undergone much development amidst critiques, censure and inter-disciplinary refinement. Furthermore, it is beneficial to the modern reader of Islamic philosophy by virtue of its analytic composition and textbook-like layout. This differs somewhat to earlier works of authors such as Sabzawārī, Dāmād or Ṣadra, which are dense and demanding in prose, dictum and general accessibility for one ill acquainted with early Islamic philosophy

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<sup>13</sup> Fakhry p.19

<sup>14</sup> Fakhry, p.10

<sup>15</sup> Algar, Hamid. '*Allāma Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī: Philosopher, Exegete and Gnostic*. (Oxford: Oxford journal of Islamic studies. 2006). pp 1-26



































## The Bodily Cause

These type of causes have limited efficacy from the viewpoint of number, duration and existential intensity (of the effects they can produce). By substantial motion a new cause is acquired to achieve a higher state of being with greater efficiency<sup>64</sup>.

The metaphysicians hold that bodily species are in substantial motion (*al ḥarakah al-jawhariyya*)<sup>65</sup> hence their specific forms and faculties are divisible and analysable into limits and stages, each of which is bracketed by two non-beings. They are finite in themselves as well as in their external effects. Also, bodily causes do not act without there being a special configuration between them and the matter of the thing affected. The metaphysicians state that since the bodily cause needs matter for its existence, it also needs matter for bringing something else into existence. Its need for matter in bringing into existence lies in its attaining through matter a special position in relation to the thing affected. Hence proximity and remoteness and special configurations interfere in the effectiveness of bodily causes.

## The Theory of Necessity

This gained notoriety with Avicenna who stated that in order for anything to exist it must become necessary albeit necessary by another rather than essentially necessary.<sup>66</sup> It has been of debate amongst the proverbial rivals, theologians and philosophers but also the Jurists in

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<sup>64</sup> Bidāya. p.123

<sup>65</sup> The theory of trans-substantial motion is amongst the foundations of Sadrian ontology. The theory, in brief, marks a departure from traditional Aristotelian-Avicennan theories of motion where the motion is occurring in accident rather than substance. In Sadra's framework the motion occurs in the very ground of being, the substance (*jawhar*). This debate has major repercussions in philosophical mysticism and ethics – the peripatetics say there are 4 categories in which motion can occur (*quantity, quality, posture, place*) – the school of ibn arabi and Sadra states motion can occur in substance not accidents (four according to peripatetics who accept change in substance but only at level of *kawn wa al-fasād* – creation and destruction so not the same thing). In contrast Sadra et al state the movement in substance has grades such as strength and weakness/precedence etc. based on the theory of modulation (*tashkīk*). Thus, the Sadrian notion stands at odds with the Aristotelian notion of substance (ousia) and his Muslim commentators i.e. Avicenna et al. (see Rizvi. S. *Mulla Sadra and Metaphysics*)

<sup>66</sup> Marmura, M. *Probing Islamic philosophy: studies in the philosophies of Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazal and other major Muslim Thinkers*. (New York: SUNT, 2005); Gutas, D. *Avicenna and the Aristotelean tradition*. Leiden. Brill, 2015), Wisnowsky. R. *Avicenna's metaphysics in context* (London: Duckworth, 2003); Adamson, Peter. *Interpreting Avicenna*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014)

*Uṣūl al fiqh* debates where the idea of necessity impinged on debates surrounding ethical propositions and value judgements that ultimately influenced theories on natural law and the efficacy of independent reason in forming Sharʿī precepts.<sup>67</sup>

A philosophical principle states, 'A thing which is not made necessary, will not exist', (*al shay mā lam yajib lam yūjad*).<sup>68</sup> This principle cum theory was rejected by Ghazālī's 'no-necessary connection'<sup>69</sup> thesis and Asharite theologians who maintained that God is not bound by any necessity imposed upon him that results in a limited, incapable and choice-less deity. The philosophical position most notably championed by Avicenna argues that once the exigent factors are present and impediments are absent, a cause will, by necessity, yield the effect which is intrinsic to its nature. For example, fire will definitely, by necessity burn when all the requiring factors for combustion are present and impediments such as lack of oxygen or moisture are absent. The re-evaluation of modal principles, especially the modal 'necessary' is a salient feature of causal metaphysics initially promulgated by Avicenna and generally accepted by post-Avicennan philosophers such as Ṭabāṭabāʾī in Bidāya.

The debate on necessity is closely linked to the nature of God, The essentially necessary existent<sup>70</sup>, distinct from the contingent existents reliant upon his being. In explicating the emanative scheme (something rejected by the Asharites/Occasionalists), Avicenna states that the first intellect, which is the first and immediate effect of God, is necessary. This necessity of producing the first intellect is borne out of the idea that a necessity being must by definition be necessary from all aspects (*wājib al wujūd bi dhāt wājib al wujūd min jamīʿ al jihat*)<sup>71</sup>,

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<sup>67</sup>The divine command theory as it is known in western literature can be considered a hallmark of Asharite ethical theories, the Muʿtazilites and Imāmiyya have provided contrasting views more clement to rational judgements and their binding nature. Rational good and bad' known as *al husn wa al qubḥ al aqliyān* is an arena of frenetic debate straddling multiple sciences such as ethics (moral judgements), law (the idea of benefit and harm in legal precepts), philosophy (is God bound by rational laws or not?), theology (the justice of God is dictated by rational good or bad) and spirituality. See Bhojani, Alireza. *Moral Rationalism*. (Routledge: Oxford, 2012), Muḍafar, Muḥammad Rida. *Uṣūl al Fiqh*. (Beirut: Turāth Arabī, 2006) and Emon, Anver. *Islamic natural law theories*. (

<sup>68</sup> Dinānī. *Qawāʾid Kullī*. vol 1 p. 124

<sup>69</sup> Hume, in the latter Western philosophical tradition speaks of causation in a similar vein. Defining it as a habitual or customary connexion that is not logical nor metaphysical. See Clatterbaugh, Kenneth. *The Causation Debate in Modern Philosophy, 1637-1739*. (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), p. 195

<sup>70</sup> Avicenna differentiates other necessary existents such as the first intellect in his emanative schema by stating the necessary existent can be either essential (*wājib al wujūd bi dhātihī*) or made necessary by another (*wājib al wujūd bi ghayrihī*)

<sup>71</sup> Dinānī. vol 2 (under w)

namely, knowledge, power, will and the other attributes of God. Thus, the logical conclusion drawn is that God's ability to act as an agent is necessary by his own nature and that necessitates being a causative agent, hence the first intelligence is necessary too albeit made necessary by another i.e. God (*bighayrihī*). The necessity (*wujūb*) in the nature of God is self-obligated or internally emanates within the divine nature rather than externally (*wujūb 'ala*) which would imply compulsion or it is a choice between others (*wujūb lahu*) thereby implying contingency<sup>72</sup>. Thus the principle of 'A thing which is not made necessary, will not exist' alluded to earlier is necessitated by a volitional agent who acts by necessity through an internally emanated necessity. This acts as the volitional agent throughout the cosmological scheme of emanation with all intermediary causes being merely preparatory or connective. Antagonists of this theorem failed to grasp this subtle point when making the conclusion that necessity implies compulsion (*al wujūb yusāwīq al idṭrār*) and thereby, a God who lacks volition (*fā'il mujbar*).

### The Principle of the One

This principle argues that there must be a mutual affinity or conformity (*sinkhiyyah*) between the cause and the effect that is unique to only that singular cause-effect nexus. The principle states 'None issues from the One but One' (*la yaṣdur min al wāḥid illa' al wāḥid*).<sup>73</sup> The affinity or conformity in the causal nexus means a particular cause produces a particular effect otherwise an anarchic situation would result where any cause would produce any random effect<sup>74</sup> and vice versa such as shaking a bottle of water produces cheese.

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<sup>72</sup> Al Ḥaydarī, Sayyid Kamal. *Sharḥ Bidāya al Ḥikmah*. (Qum: Mu'assassa al Jawād, 2007)

<sup>73</sup> This principle has its roots in Avicennan philosophical cosmology that is grounded in Plotinian cosmogony. This principle is amongst other principles according to which the manifestation of the cosmos takes place. Pure being is the only independent order of reality that is one, unique, simple and uncompromised in its oneness. The absolute transcendence of being is maintained in an emanative hierarchical structure where every strata is emanated from simple Being, hence from Unity (or One) can Unity (or One) come into being (see Nasr, S.H. *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*. (OUP: Oxford, 1964), p. 203 and Dinānī. Vol 1. p. 123)

<sup>74</sup> Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Al-Sayyid Muḥammad Husayn. *Bidāya al Ḥikmah*. (Qum: Mu'assassa Ma'ārif al-Islāmiyya, 2010), p. 113

The quiddity of the effect is somewhat ‘dictated’ by the essential affinity between the cause and its effect and it follows that only an essentially multiple cause would emanate or cause an effect that is multiple qua multiple. Likewise an essentially United/Singular/One cause cannot produce an essentially disparate multiple effects.

### **The Impossibility of Circularity and Regress in causes**

The impossibility of an infinite regress and vicious circle in causality. There are several principles at play that comprise the metaphysics of causation (law of quiddity, the law of the one, the law of necessity and the law of necessity between cause and effect) and the title of this chapter is another that compliments the discussion of causality. The definition of *istihālah* is literally impossibility and here it means in all four types of causes (formal, material, final and agent). *Dawr* implies dependence of something on itself and can be either explicit (*muṣarriḥ*) such as *a* depends on *b* and *b* depends on or it could be implicit (*muḍmir*) such as *a* depends on *b* which depends on *c* and this depends on *a*. The consequent of both is the precedence of thing to itself which is impossible.

The discussion here is backgrounded by the Avicennan argument of *wājib al wujūd bi dhātihī* i.e. the sufficient cause is complete for the being of the thing, the mind conceptualises no cause outside of the thing conceived. On the other hand Ghazālī renders the division of existence by Avicenna as redundant since the division by the theologians is primary (eternal and caused) and takes argument with the ‘*b*’ in ‘*bi dhātihī*’, he states, the ‘*bi*’ is *ba al sababiyyah* (the causative *ba*) and there is cause implied here. In reply, the Avicennan would state agree that the *bi* here does not imply the *dhāt* causes the *wājib al wujūd* rather it is the reason<sup>75</sup> why there is the necessary existent i.e. an internal cause within *wājib al wujūd* (the necessary existent) and this falls into the broader ontological schema espoused by Avicenna that in summation is the principle *māhiyyatuhū inniyatuhū* (his cause is himself or literally ‘his quiddity is his existence’). Ghazālī’s scathing attack on Avicenna’s analysis attempts to bankrupt his ontology on the basis that his key statement implies a separation i.e. an external

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<sup>75</sup> Reason is ratio in Latin and the Arabs had a difficulty with defining reason here as it does not mean cause necessarily in the meaning Ghazzālī was attacking Avicenna.

cause. However this can be rebutted by saying the cause is not *munfaṣil* (disjointed) rather, it is *mutaṣṣil* (joined consecutively). Rāzī wades into the debate stating the Asharite position which distinguishes between the essence and existence of God (*dhāt* and *wujūd*). He says, *dhāt Allah 'illah li wujūdihi*<sup>76</sup> (the essence of God is a cause for his existence), the bifurcation of God into essence and existence here creates further problems of regress and circularity since the non-existence of one engenders the nonexistence of another.

The foremost commentator on Avicenna, Naṣīr al Dīn Ṭūsī, corrects the aforementioned positions. The proof negating infinite regress or causes requires more argumentation than that which is required for circularity (a self-evident fallacy). The proof offered by Avicenna is the most firm in this regard:<sup>77</sup> a cause (b) causes an effect (a), the cause (a) has its own cause too called the *'illah al 'illah* (c) – each of these three have their own unique or quintessential property

- A is an effect and ONLY only an effect
- B is a cause and a effect
- C is only a cause and NOT a effect

Now, if we added further components to the scheme such as c, d and e acting only as a cause we would have intermediaries increasing but ending with an *'illah al 'illah* (cause of causes) at the end such as e or c in the above example. Infinite regress implies there is no c or a, and we have the intermediaries in infinite succession. The proof of Avicenna would say that there has to be a *ṭaraf* (limit) to the intermediary chain. Infinite regress spoken of here means the simultaneous existence of an eternal amount of causes and effects, this is the point of contention for Avicenna not non-simultaneous cause and effect. We cannot have a *rābiṭ* (connector) without a *marbūṭ bihi* (that which is connected by the connector) *i.e.* the finitude of causes that lead to a first cause then we left with independent existents that are not connected to a first cause.

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<sup>76</sup> Al Rāzī, Fakhr al Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Umar. *Maṭālib al 'āliyah min al 'ilm al 'Ilāhī*. (Beirut: Dar Kutub al 'ilmiyya, 1999), vol.1 p. 55

<sup>77</sup> Sina, Ibn.

## Causal Determinacy and the Invalidity of Chance

The rejection of chance is a primeval debate amongst philosophers and the Greek philosopher Democritus argued for eternal matter (not form) as did Aristotle<sup>78</sup>. This trend of thought informs Ghazālī's riposte to the philosophers regarding the eternity of the cosmos<sup>79</sup> (something he regarded as antithetical to the theology of Islam which posits a single eternal agent/cause as God and all that is his creation is temporal). The subject matter of metaphysics is existence qua existent and in physics it is existence qua body. The discussion here is metaphysical but discussed by Aristotle in the physics books one and two.

There must be an ontological link between the agent and the act. Thus finding treasure without intending may be defined as good luck or a wall falling on someone as bad luck. Luck and chance are not synonymous rather, luck is more specific and chance is more general, including natural events etc. Ṭabāṭabā'ī rebuts the notion of atoms being scattered in space and coming together by chance as the natural philosophers hold. *Ittifāq* is synonymous with *ṣidfah*<sup>80</sup> and can mean two things: negation of the agent cause (*naḫī al illah al fā'iliyyah*) - this is the denial of agency or negation of the final cause (*naḫī al illah al ghā'īyyah*) – this is the denial of purpose albeit maintaining an agency. For the second type, Aristotle speaks of a man who visits the market to purchase fruit and happens to meet someone who owes him money thereby recuperating his dues.

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<sup>78</sup> Most Greek philosophers are known as naturalists or materialists, holding the pre-existence or eternity of matter. See Belo, Catarina. *Chance and Determinism in Avicenna and Averroes*. (Brill: Oxford, 2007), p. 10-25

<sup>79</sup> Many Muslim philosophers have written treatises under the rubric of *ḥudūth al 'ālam* (for example see Gilani, Mulla Shamsa. *The Incipience of the Cosmos (Ḥudūth al alam)*. (London: Iranshahr. 2015) and Sadra, Mulla. *Ḥudūth al alam*. (Tehran: Institute of Philosophy, 2010); Taymiyya, Ibn. *Mas'alat ḥudūth al 'alam*. (Beirut: dār Kutub al 'ilmiyya, 2005)

<sup>80</sup> From the Greek *ta automaton*. It has numerous meanings amongst them (al Haydari, *Sharḥ Nihāya*, P. 244):

- *Al ḥādīthah laysa lahā illah fā'iliyyah* – a temporal thing does not have an efficient cause
- *Inna fi 'lan qad quṣida min fā'lan 'ala shay'in la yatawaqqa'a minhu* – the act was intended by an agent for a thing unexpected by the agent
- *Inna al fā'il qad qāma bi 'amalin min 'ajli hadaf khāṣ wa laqinnahu qad intahā ila natījatin lam yaqṣudhā* - an act can be wrought for a specific purpose but terminates with a conclusion that was not intended
- *Inna zāhiratan lam yata'allaq bihā qaṣd aḥadin muṭlaqa* – the phenomenon is unattached to the intention (or will) of anyone absolutely, complete negation of agent and purpose.
- *Anna zāhiratan lam tūjad 'an qaṣd il fā'il al ṭabī'ī* – a phenomenon devoid of the will of a natural agent i.e. a fire did not intend nor possesses such a thing.

The Muslim philosophers deny chance outright and divide phenomena into four classes: those that occur invariably (*dā'im al wujūd*<sup>81</sup>), some that occur on some occasions, some most of the times and others that are rare (e.g. certain congenital issues). The occurrence of phenomena at varying degrees is based on the absence or presence of conflicting factors such as birth disabilities are the result of factors that conflict and cause these things.<sup>82</sup> Everything is invariable and conditioned only by other conflicting/causative factors. Ṭabāṭabā'ī states:

“Those which occur most of the time differ from those which occur always due to the occasional existence of a conflicting factor, as in the case of the number of fingers on a hand, which is five (disregarding and deformity or disability<sup>83</sup>). However, occasionally, the fashioning principle of the fingers (in the foetus), comes upon surplus matter possessing the capacity the form of a finger and it shapes that into a finger. From this, it is known that the fingers, being five, is conditional upon the non-existence of surplus matter and this phenomenon with this condition occurs invariably, not most of the time. That which occurs rarely will also occur invariably and always on condition of the conflicting factor being present. Hence, if the phenomena that occur mostly or rarely in fact occur invariably on the presence of requisite conditions. The case of phenomena that occur half of the time is quite obvious. Hence, all phenomena involve causal invariability, following a continuous, fixed system that neither changes nor is violated”<sup>84</sup>

Ṭabāṭabā'ī continues to state that what is perceived as an omen of luck or misfortune is actually a failure on the observers part to differentiate the fact that digging for water and finding

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<sup>81</sup> The word *dā'im* here refers to the logical meaning i.e. invariably x will occur if the subject exists (from the propositions that are bound by variables)

<sup>82</sup> Ṭabāṭabā'ī says everything is natural and it is how it is supposed to be based on the fact that everything has a cause, defects, natural disasters etc. are caused by something known or unknown. Thus, the issue of miracles refers to the shrinking of natural causes, variables to a very short time interval and not protracted as we may see i.e. the staff turning to a snake is completely natural but quickened by the will of Allah. A philosophical principle states *al wuqū' tadullu 'ala al imkān* – occurrence indicates possibility (Ṭabāṭabā'ī. p. 120 and Dinānī. Vol. 2 p. 125)

<sup>83</sup> This would still not be chance or bad luck as Ṭabāṭabā'ī will explain.

<sup>84</sup> Ṭabāṭabā'ī. p. 78 (Trans. Qarai)



treasure or a roof collapsing on one seeking shelter are 'invariable and essential ends of their causes, which are only accidentally ascribed to something else'. The digging is an essential action whose end would be to invariable, find treasure, though the ascription to the individual digging for water is merely accidental. Similar is the case of a 'bad luck' situation when a roof collapses on one seeking shelter. Essentially the roof possesses all the prerequisites to collapse such as a compromised structure owing to weather damage or defective construction. The essential end or even 'final perfection' of the roof is to give way and actualise its lack of integrity and it is a mere accident to think the roof was there to provide shelter from the elements.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī concludes a lengthy section by stating chance and the like are beliefs resulting from an ignorance of causality. This reiterates the view as per Ṭabāṭabā'ī that causality proffers regularity, continuity and allows for logical process. It also affirms that everything has a telos, a final goal and essential nature that guides it to its perfection cum completion.

## Chapter Two

### Miracles and the Qur'ān

#### Miracles: Concept and Definition

The Arabic word for miracle or the miraculous is *mu'jiza* or *i'jāz* which denotes “that which renders one incapable or impotent”.<sup>85</sup> This term does not appear in the Qur'ān as is the case with other theological idioms rather, the Qur'ān employs the word *ayah* (sign)<sup>86</sup> and this is used in a threefold sense<sup>87</sup>: with reference to the verses or dictum of the Quran that challenges Muḥammad's interlocutors to present anything of its similitude in rhetoric and style,<sup>88</sup> the miracle of itself and the signs of soul and cosmos that allude to a higher authority.<sup>89</sup>

The mere conceptualisation of the term miracle heralds a foray into epistemic lacunae regarding its reality. Probing the arcana and mythical is deemed a matter of belief and devotion that should be considered beyond the realm of rational discourse. The celebrated reviver of Aristotelianism in the Islamic world, Ibn Rushd (d. 1198 ) (or Averroës in Latin), despite articulating a robust rejoinder to the arguments of Ghazālī in *Tahāfut* regarding substance ontology and peripatetic thought, he failed to win the argument as far as miracles and the extraordinary in relation to the necessary causal-nexus<sup>90</sup>. Averroës considered the

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<sup>85</sup> Jurjānī, Al Sayyid Al Sharif. *Kitāb al ta'rīfāt*. (Under *mu'jiza*). (Beirut: Dar al Kutub, 2000)

<sup>86</sup> Isfahānī, Rāghib al. *Al Mufradāt Gharīb al Qur'an*. (Beirut: Dar al Kutub, 1999)

<sup>87</sup> Gril, Denis. *The Encyclopaedia of the Qur'ān* (ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe). (Brill: Leiden, 2003), p. 392 (under Miracles)

<sup>88</sup> The Quran in a self-referential manner presents a challenge to the disbelievers to bring verses of its like. The exegetes and theologians have provided varying reasons for the incapability of the Arabs of the time to rise to this challenge amongst the arguments being divergence (*al ṣarf*) where God rendered the opponents unable to carry out this task by his extraordinary ability to affect minds or diverted their attentions and dissuade them from this challenge. However this view has been thoroughly refuted as nonsensical by the likes of Ṭabāṭabā'ī on the basis of the inherent qualities found within the Qur'ān and its emphasis on inability of human production by the fact that it is from the knowledge of the omniscient creator. The book thus has an inherent miraculous quality not that men can contrive to debunk it but are prevented so by God. . (See Al Mizān vol. 1 p. 75 and Ma'rifa, Hādī. *Al Tamhīd fī 'ulūm Qur'ān al Karīm*. (Qum: *Mu'assassa al tamhīd*. 2007), vol 4, p. 10)

<sup>89</sup> Gril, Denis. p. 392 (under Miracles)

<sup>90</sup> Fakhry. Islamic Occasionalism. p.21 and Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al Tahāfut*

matter of miracles a precept of the religion or Shari'ah that should be believed outright and delving into their probity would render one liable to punishment.<sup>91</sup>

A miracle proves the veracity of a claim to prophethood,<sup>92</sup> this is a recurrent theme Muslim theological discourse.<sup>93</sup> However Fakhry makes the argument that the basic assumption of a miracle validating the claim of prophethood can be questioned as to why this assumption is so, does a prophet necessarily need to produce a miracle to vindicate his prophethood? Furthermore, he remarks that if a miracle proves the claim of prophethood and if likewise prophethood validates the miracle, a circular argument becomes apparent.

The philosophers have approached the problem in several ways, some have argued miracle stories found in the canon are merely allegories, symbols for higher truths rather than real occurrences whereas the Avicenna and his commentators have adhered to a trifold explication of theoretical, imaginative and intellectual purport. The latter predicates ideas of prophecy and the incumbent acts of prophets on their psychic powers that lend way to prognostication. The theory of prophecy is also based on this psychological rationale<sup>94</sup>. The Aristotelian character and Neoplatonist doctrine of forms and emanation is salient in the Avicennan purview of the miraculous

### **Sacred History: A Qur'anic perspective**

The stories around the text what theologians term "sacred history" is not necessarily history as defined by the science we know as history with its concomitant structures, methods and epistemic framework. The narrative proffered by the Qur'an from the perspective of a Muslim is an unquestionable truth claim that it is the direct word of God. In this light, Qur'anic history is meta-history, in the sense that the revealed scripture conveys the consecutive,

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<sup>91</sup> Ibn Rushd. *Tahāfut al Tahāfut*. p. 322

<sup>92</sup> Hillī. *Sharḥ Tajrīd*. p. 66

<sup>93</sup> See Hillī, Allāma. *Kashf al Murad fi Sharḥ Tajrīd al I'tiqād*. (Beirut: dar al 'Amira, 2006), p. 157 and 'Ījī, Aḍud al Din 'Abd al Rahman ibn Ahmad. *Mawāqif fi ilm al kalām*. (Beirut: dar al Jabal. 1997), p. 342 and Saflo, Mohammad Moslem Adel. *Al-Juwaynī's thought and methodology: with a translation and commentary on Luma' al-Adilla*. (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag. 2000), p. 259

<sup>94</sup> Marmura, Michael E. "Avicenna's Psychological Proof of Prophecy." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22. no. 1 (Jan, 1963) 49-56

uninterrupted and uniquely unadulterated hand in the cosmic system. It is in this background that Ghazālī in the *ḥayāt* allows for the literal acceptance of Qur'ānic events rather than resorting to *ta'wīl*. Thereby, he upholds Asharite occasionalism over predetermined causality where according to his framework the rational possibility of miracles is negated.<sup>95</sup> The speculative dilemma of the miraculous has its antecedents in antiquity prior to the advent of Islam in the Judaeo-Christian milieu and ancient civilisations such as the Greek, Egyptian and Mesopotamian. Thus, a thorough understanding of the phenomenon requires an appreciation of the speculative ambience that generated, nurtured and sustained the debate in Muslim philosophical and theological circles.

### **The Prophet and Miracles**

Ascriptions of miracles to Muḥammad are scant or absent in comparison verses detailing the miraculous happenings at the hands of previous prophets. The prophet is found imploring his Lord to puncture mundane happenings with extraordinary signs at the behest of his sent envoy in a bid to convince the unrelenting antagonists. These requests are ultimately denied of him and the Qur'ān reiterates that such miraculous occurrences will not vindicate his claim since the hardened disbelievers he is up against will naught any such occurrence by way of sorcery and magic<sup>96</sup>. The Quran says: "If you could wish for a passage opening into the ground, or a ladder up to the sky in order to give them a sign! If God had wanted to he would have gathered them all on guidance. Therefore do not be among those who are ignorant".<sup>97</sup>

Christian polemicists cast anathema upon the 'prophet of the Saracens' as a sensuous, war-mongering charlatan who performed no miracles nor related past/future events through revelation, the comparison between Jesus and Muḥammad was readily presented in this

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<sup>95</sup> Whittingham, Martin. *Al-Ghazālī and the Qur'an: One book, many meanings*. (Routledge: Oxford, 2007), p. 23.

<sup>96</sup> See the Qur'an (34:43-45) (And those who disbelieve say of the truth when it has come to them, 'This is not but obvious magic.') and Qur'an (26:221-223) where the prophet condemns sorcery as an insinuation of the devil (And those who disbelieve say of the truth when it has come to them, 'This is not but obvious magic.') my translation

<sup>97</sup> *Quran*. (6:36)

regard.<sup>98</sup> It is clear from the earlier passage that Muḥammad himself declared he was unable to work miracles of the nature demanded by the idolaters in his midst. However, the most penetrating and celebrated miracle of the prophet is that of the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān despite denying miracles of an order, affirms the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān and sets it out as a challenge that will dumbfound and render opponents incapable. The question thus arises, how do we define the Qur'ān as miraculous? It is not as tactile and sentient as a staff morphing instantly into a spitting serpent, a blind man being cured or the parting of a large body of water. The concept of *i'jāz al qur'ān* (inimitability of the Qur'ān) is the most fundamental subject in the arena of Qur'ānic studies as it aims to prove the inimitability, immutability and divine origin of the Qur'ān.

### **Miracles: A Metaphysical or Historical analysis?**

A key question one may ask here is what reality a miracle actually has in so far as historical or empirical proof. This is a very valid question that has been raised in modern philosophical discourse, especially in the empirically oriented strands and in light of modern science the whole dilemma of the extraordinary or miraculous is cast aside as superstitious and mere belief devoid of robust evidence. Historically speaking, miracles are the least probable evidence since a historian is incapable of empirically performing scientific experiments that yield strong probabilities of how the natural world functions. Theologically, the assertion of miracles and the activity of god in the ancient world is viable but historically one cannot insert theology or metaphysics into their investigation<sup>99</sup>. History is not necessarily a retelling of the past as it actually occurred rather it is an accumulation of patterns of life from sources that are independent, multiple and preferable contemporaneous.

Despite the validity of the argument and the need to provide proofs, our speculation is of a different order as Fakhry as pointed out in his introduction.<sup>100</sup> Substantiating the historicity of

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<sup>98</sup> Tolan, John. *European accounts of Muḥammad's life*. (In *The Cambridge companion to Muḥammad*. ed. Jonathon E. Brockopp). (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 234

<sup>99</sup> Ehrman, Bart. D. *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee*. (NY: Harper One, 2014). The author discusses history and the miracles of Jesus according to the historical method.

<sup>100</sup> Fakhry. p. 12

a miracle requires its own methodology, epistemic structures and questions of an order unrelated to the field of metaphysics. Notwithstanding the above, it would be foolhardy to insert or even assert the miraculous and extraordinary into the cosmic order by metaphysical means only. The question of miracle and its verifiability (if at all possible) is inevitably multifaceted since its reliability on probative historical evidence strays little from anecdote (especially in light of modern scepticism and scientism) and metaphysical analysis has propriety subsequent to a historical appraisal of the phenomenon.

The study of miracles can be somewhat a bewildering excursion into the mythological and arcane. Nonetheless, religious people all venerate miracles of some sort or the other that are found in their scripture and oral or written history. Thus, there are several problems when studying miracles, the first is how acceptable critical or sceptical forays into a sacrosanct and cherished belief are welcomed within the believing community<sup>101</sup>? Secondly, to what extent the intelligentsia, philosophers and the like have disseminated the study beyond the experts of those respective fields. Thirdly, the issue of prophetology is inextricably linked with miracles in the Qur'ān where many verses echo the words of prophets who endeavoured to vindicate their divine appointment by way of miracles demanded by their interlocutors.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Ibn Rushd as stated earlier said to discuss or cast doubt on the issue of miracles is to slander the Shari'ah and disintegrate belief. He uses this argument to somewhat sidestep the whole issue without delving into a robust defence in his *Tahāfut al Tahāfut* as he did with all the other contentions raised by Ghazālī in his original polemic. Avicenna also falls in the line of criticism, Averroës laments the open Avicennan perception of miracles, an issue which he should have remained silent on. See *Tahāfut al Tahāfut*. p. 320 (English translation)

<sup>102</sup> The prophet Ṣāliḥ is asked to provide a sign proving his mission in (26:104 – 'you are aught but a man like us, bring a sign if you are of the truthful ones')) a recurring motif in Qur'ānic discourse. In other places the prophet has already mentioned his ability to bring about miraculous events along with the announcement of his prophethood such as the case of Moses in (7:105-7 – 'I have come with clear evidence from your lord, so dispatch the children of Israel with me. They said, if you have come with a sign, then bring it forth if you are of the truthful ones'). In the case of Jesus, the Quran quotes him in (3:49 – 'and a messenger to the Children of Israel that I have come to you with a sign from your lord')

## Chapter Three

### Miracles and the law of Causation

The metaphysics of causation as contextualised in the *Bidāya* of Ṭabāṭabā'ī and the nature of miracles especially in the Quranic context have been analysed thus far. We can logically proceed to the crux of the argument after discussing both concepts to a reasonable degree of clarity, the critique and counter argument can be delved into.

### Ghazālī<sup>103</sup>, the Seventeenth discussion of *Tahāfut al falāsifa*: Islamic Occasionalism

Ghazālī perhaps, represents the most influential and scathing criticism against important aspects of Islamic philosophical thought in the early period. Some have erroneously understood Ghazālīan critiques to herald the decline of Islamic civilisation on account have the fatal blows he dealt the rational disciplines shifting discourse to an insular religiosity.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> He is Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ibn Muḥammad Aṭ-Ṭūsī Al-Ghazālī (d.1111), regarded as one of the greatest Muslim theologians, jurists and theoreticians. He produced many works (400 according to popular opinion) ranging from logic such as *mi'yār al 'ilm*, a magnum opus on devotion, ethics and spirituality called *Iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn*, a personal autobiography retelling his tumultuous engagement with the truth called *al-Munqidh min aḍ-ḍalāl*, on philosophy he wrote works that influenced western thinkers such as *Maqāṣid al-falāsifah*, the powerful and influential critique under discussion here, the *Tahāfut* and other works in jurisprudence and theology such as the *al-Mustasfā* and *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-'itiqād*. See Frank. R. *Al-Ghazālī and the Asharite School*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Naseemrafiaabadi, H. *Emerging from darkness: Ghazālī's impact on western philosophers*. (Delhi: Sarup and sons, 2002); Al-Ghazālī. *Al-Munqidh min aḍ-ḍalāl*. (Washington: The council for research in values and philosophy, 2001)

<sup>104</sup> This misrepresentation was much celebrated by orientalist and academics working under their paradigm. Modern scholars in the academy and already so in traditional circles are more reasoned in analysing the so called decline of Islamic scientific and intellectual thought, basing their theories on multiple agents that contributed to the slowed progress, if it actually occurred. Islamic civilisation flourished for many hundreds of years post-Ghazālī, especially so in rational disciplines. The flowering of philosophy and theoretical mysticism in Persian lands especially Iran to this day is a noteworthy testament to this. For the orientalist narrative of decline see Gillespie, Michael Allen. *The theological Origins of Modernity*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 292; Nicholson, R. *A Literary History of the Arabs*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 442-3 and for the alternative readings see; Robert Wisnovsky, "The Nature and Scope of Arabic Philosophical Commentary in Post-Classical (CA. 1100-1900 AD) Islamic Intellectual History: Some Preliminary Observations" in *Philosophy, Science and Exegesis in Greek, Arabic and Latin commentaries*, edited by P. Adamson, H. Balthussen, and M. W. F. Stone, II, 149-191; Khaled Rouayheb, *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

The issue of causation in the *Tahāfut* is very much a continuum of a general trend of Asharite theological tenet upheld by Ghazālī's predecessors such as his teacher Al-Juwaynī (d.478 AH), al-Bāqillānī (d.403 AH), Ibn Fourek (d.406 AH), Isfarayīnī (d. 437 AH), and the eponymous founder of the school, Imam al-Ash'arī (d.324 AH). It was the aforementioned luminaries of Asharite thought and the master himself who posited the absolute omnipotence of God as the ultimate desideratum of their theology dialectic and the imperative reality ordained by the cannon of Islam. Imam al-Ash'arī in *al-Ibānah 'an uṣūl al-diyānah* outlines in edict-like fashion, the fundamentals of his creed<sup>105</sup>. Others such as the later Asharite, al-Sanūsī (d.895 AH) following in the same vein reiterated popular Asharite doctrine in much the same edict like dictum as the schools namesake scribed in his declaration of Asharite orthodoxy<sup>106</sup>.

Ghazālī has probably gained notoriety and influence as his critique is probably the most scathing, reasoned and directly addressed to the *falāsifa*. Furthermore, shortcomings in certain parts of the Averroean critique, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, bolstered the Ghazālian hegemony in the Islamic east in contrast to the influence of Averroës in the Latin West. Especially on the problem of miracles, Averroës relegated metaphysical analysis to a mute spectator with no authority to unravel its rational underpinnings, it was merely a matter of devotion and belief obliged by the divine lawgiver<sup>107</sup>.

Ghazālī divides opinion on causation in the seventeenth section of the incoherence, one displaying conformity with philosophical notions and another which departs from their assumptions. He draws upon the issue of rationally explicating miracles especially in light of Qur'ānic verses that contrast with ideas of causation on first impression. Two pertinent examples invoked in this critique is that of the prophet Ibrahīm being cast into the fire of Nimrūd and remaining unscathed by the inferno and the classic example of the casual nexus between the combustion of cotton on contact with fire. In both causation is merely a relation which has no mutual necessity and it is the working of custom or habit of God (*'ādat Allah*).<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Fakhry. *Islamic Occasionalism*. p. 57 and al-Ash'arī, 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl. *Al-Ibānah 'an uṣūl al-diyānah*. (Al-Riyād: Dār al-Faḍīlah lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 2011). p. 5

<sup>106</sup> Foudah, Sa'īd and Abdul 'Azīz, Suraqah. *A Refined Explanation of the Sanūsī Creed the Foundational Proofs*. (London: Sunni publications, 2013)

<sup>107</sup> Fakhry. p. 10/25/ 40/ 60-75

<sup>108</sup> *Tahāfut*. p. 245



He accepts secondary causes which are sustained by god in an ever renewing or re-creating (*khalq jadīd*) fashion through him as a primary cause. God is the primary cause of the whole system of potencies, contingencies and powers.<sup>109</sup> In wresting the God from the heretic *falāsifa* Ghazālī sterilises the divinity of all fecundity, vitality and dynamic by isolating everything into an unrelated, nature-less and illogical ontological realm.<sup>110</sup> Thus for Ghazālī, there are no necessary relationships between things like based on cause and effect, no inherent natures in things that defines their capacity, ability and perfection, causality is merely observed but needn't occur always as that (although the question of improbable regularity was used as a critique of Humean causation) and God is free from all determinations (although Ghazālī concedes logical impossibilities cannot occur) that restrict him such as the aforementioned doctrines held by the *falāsifa*<sup>111</sup>.

### **Averroes on miracles in *Tahāfut al Tahāfut***

The causation debate typifies a dialogue of thought preoccupying minds in both the Islamicate tradition and upon its reception, western intellectual circles such as Aquinas and Hume. Ghazālī's proto-Humean ideas were critiqued by Averroes<sup>112</sup> (d. 1198 CE) in a substantial analysis of the controversy, Averroes, a puritan Aristotelean, regurgitates Ghazālī's arguments and critiques them in a sustained and penetrating analysis. The rehabilitation of causation, defence of substance ontology and explication of the philosophers' premises is robust. However, as both Kogan<sup>113</sup> and Fakhry<sup>114</sup> have both remarked, there is no theoretical framework for the miraculous rather, the miracle is relegated to mere belief and according to the reading of Kogan, magic or sorcery.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Griffel. p. 156

<sup>110</sup> Fakhry, p. 110

<sup>111</sup> *Tahāfut*. 220, Kogan, p. 126 and Fakhry. p. 200

<sup>112</sup> He is Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Rushd, Averroës, Latin Averrhoës, also known as Ibn Rushd (1126-1198 CE). Averroës was a distinguished philosopher, jurist, judge and physician during the Almoravid dynasty in Andalusia. His work include extensive commentaries on the works of Aristotle and Plato's Republic which accessed by the Jewish, Christian and Latin world in the centuries after his death

<sup>113</sup> Kogan. p. 79

<sup>114</sup> Fakhry. p. 12

<sup>115</sup> Kogan. p. 79

Averroës dissociates himself from naturalistic theories of miracles, antagonising the Avicennan view that the power of the soul is capable of producing miraculous events.<sup>116</sup> Averroës wrestled with the idea of emanation that comprises the Neoplatonist superstructure of Avicennan thought, accepting it in earlier works and rejecting it in latter works.<sup>117</sup> He also castigates his predecessors such as Fārābī and especially Avicenna for misappropriating Aristotelian thought, heavily Platonising it with theories of forms and emanation, methodological and linguistic faults and predicating revealed religion on pre-ratiocination<sup>118</sup>

He considers miracles the sole prerogative of prophets who have been graced and blessed with such a power that lies beyond the reach of other humans. Virtue and rectitude is borne out conviction is such events which herald a manifesto of virtue for the common man. Thus, they lie beyond the reach of even trained minds, even if their basis is known it should not be divulged to the masses. Averroës gives the impression that any explication of miracles or doubt created therein will undermine the law and thereby compromise virtuosity. Thus, he is led to the belief in the unquestionable nature of miracles as implied in the revelation. The concern is acutely practical rather than theoretical which could possibly stem from the pragmatic exigencies Averroës was faced with being the Chief Judge of Cordoba.

### **Ṭabāṭabā'ī on miracles and causation in *Al Mīzān fī Tafsīr al Qur'ān***

Ṭabāṭabā'ī's explication of miracles is generally grounded in the Avicennan psychological analysis where he states the causal nexus that defines the rational discussion is, *prima facie*,

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<sup>116</sup> Atiyeh, George. *Avicenna's conception of miracles*. (PhD thesis submitted to University of Chicago, 1954), p 40. Also See Rahman, Fazlur. *Avicenna's Psychology* (Oxford, 1952, Repr. Westport, Conn., 1981), p 67, Rahman, Fazlur. *Prophecy in Islam-Philosophy and Orthodoxy*. (Chicago. Repr. 2007) and Ibn Sina. *Al Shifā: Ilāhiyyāt*. (Beirut. Dar al fikr, 2008) Book 9 Ch. 4

<sup>117</sup> Kogan. p

<sup>118</sup> Bertolacci, Amos. *Averroës against Avicenna on Human Spontaneous Generation: The Starting-Point of a Lasting Debate*. (In Akasoy, Anna and Giglioni, Guido. *Renaissance Averroism and Its Aftermath: Arabic Philosophy in Early Modern Europe*. (NY: Springer, 2012), Ch. 2 p. 37. Bertolacci discusses a particular doctrine that Averroës criticised but also locates this critique in the broader framework of Averroës overarching defiant strand to Avicennan metaphysical speculation although he is somewhat affable to his medical works.

absent when confronted by a miraculous occurrence that is heterogeneous to the logically observed natural order<sup>119</sup>. There is no recourse for the credulous or the sceptic to the crux of the matter since the recurring causal connections customarily observed are hidden and one remains ignorant of them despite acknowledging summarily that the extraordinary psychic powers of prophets allow them to impress upon the natural order in a way that departs from the norm.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī directs attention to the problem of miracles in the exegesis of (2:22) where the Qur'ān puts forth a challenge to bring a verse of its similitude if the deniers are capable of such. The challenge is twofold, the reality of extraordinary, miraculous events and that the Qur'ān as an extension and instance of a miracle. Proof of the former would vindicate the latter. The Qur'ānic position is definitive on the principle of miracle with numerous verses being challenges to disprove its veracity, but, it also establishes a framework that can explicate acts indifferent to the natural causal nexus. In fact, the Qur'ān abides by the law of causality to prove its veracity by stating it independently puts forth the challenge rather than prove the prophethood of Muḥammad directly. The causal nexus here rests on the fact that if the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān is proved then by logical consequence prophethood of Muḥammad is proven. Prior to both the former is proving the very nature of *khāriq al ādah* (literally break in habit) and (if possible) what sort of theoretical framework this would be rationally possible.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī highlights the traditional arguments for the miraculous nature of the Qur'ān (*I'jāz al Qur'ān*) such as its stylistic perfections, the inconceivability of an untaught man producing such a text of his own accord, the consistency of claims despite the evolving environment of its reception and recipient, the unseen and future events foretold in it, the absence of inconsistencies, and the intellectual dimensions that cannot be replicated.<sup>120</sup> The aforementioned aspects viewed in their entirety invalidates habitual, natural and material causes for the compilation of such a text. The causal nexus seems to be disrupted and one is compelled to seek an alternative provenance in divine authorship.<sup>121</sup> The arguments

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<sup>119</sup> Al Mizān. Vol 14. p 304 (under the verse 20:79)

<sup>120</sup> Al Mizān. Vol 1. p 64

<sup>121</sup> Al Mizān. Vol 1. p 75

Ṭabāṭabā'ī begins with assume the occurrence of a miracle and he is only vindicating the fact the Qur'ān is a miracle on the basis of the extraordinary aspects it has. The determining factor for our enquiry is how he harmonises the principle of causality with heterogeneous acts like miracles in a philosophical-exegetical analysis. He does embark on this analysis by arguing the Qur'ān assents to the general principle of causality, establishes the propriety of heterogeneous phenomena, reiterates Allah as the real and independent cause for everything and establishes the efficacy of prophetic souls in rendering acts contrary to the habitual course of nature save it is by the will and command of Allah<sup>122</sup>.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī initially answers some criticisms regarding the linguistic miracle of the Qur'ān which revolve around language being a manmade phenomenon and thereby no linguistic creation can be beyond the reach of men and the issue of only one stylistic composition can be preeminent not one idea expressed in several ways all enjoying miraculous parity. Ṭabāṭabā'ī counters by posing a question that granted, language is a human construct but does that imply the nonexistence of a literature that is unattainable by the very makers of that language? Otherwise the inventors must be the most superior in utilising their inventions as a sword-maker must be the best swordsman or the inventor of chess must be the best chess player. In reply to the latter critique, Ṭabāṭabā'ī states that a stylistic, rhetorical and eloquent miracle is based on a meaning that encompasses and exhausts all aspects that are mental and extra-mental.<sup>123</sup>

Ṭabāṭabā'ī initially outlines his view on causation, one that conforms to the philosophical tradition he hails from. He mentions the general principle of causation (*qanūn al 'illiya al 'āma*) as being established by the Qur'ān, man by nature is predisposed to seek a cause for every material thing without hesitation or doubt and provided at requisite conditions are present there is a necessary relationship between cause and effect. This is axiomatic and granted in Qur'ānic discourse when natural events, life, death and sickness is mentioned.

The natural order is also punctuated by heterogeneous events ascribed to the prophets in the Qur'ān such as the curing of the blind, the parting of the seas, the splitting of the moon and

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<sup>122</sup> ibid

<sup>123</sup> ibid

the speaking of animals. These, Ṭabāṭabā'ī acknowledges as *khāriq al 'āda* although with the caveat that they are not rational impossibilities in essence such as the affirmation and negation of two opposite propositions together from all aspects<sup>124</sup> or a thing can be negated from itself or one is not half of two and so on and so forth. These are essential impossibilities which all rational peoples in all epochs have assented to and if miracles were of the same impossibilities then their rejection would have been equally obvious to the sane and reasonable but the history bears witness that all religious peoples have accepted miraculous events.<sup>125</sup> However, Ṭabāṭabā'ī's argument that religious people have accepted miracles on the basis they are not impossible like the aforementioned axioms assumes religious belief and miracles must be rational because a large number of people have accepted them and they are on par with axioms like the one is half of two.

Miracles are effects of causes that are not observed or experienced physically (*al asbāb al mādiyya al mashhūda*) rather, the causes are fewer, inconspicuous and expedited. For example, a decomposed body enriches the earth, becomes organic matter and through a gradual and causative scheme become a living creature again and similarly a wooden staff can undergo the same natural transformative stages that at some point may well be the genotype and phenotype of a hissing snake. Ṭabāṭabā'ī argues all such natural phenomena are dictated by specific temporal, spatial and causative factors that are sequential and affirmed by experimentation and observation.

The miracle, invariably elicited by the will of a prophet, shatters the time barrier and invalidates material causes. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, further argues that unexplainable super natural events are always occurring even in the atomic age. However the assumption of them being supernatural is inherent in Ṭabāṭabā'ī's thought process, whereas a sceptic could say they are not really supernatural but, events that need analysis and science can explicate them now or in the future supernatural occurrences in history were deemed so because of primitive scientific understanding and science today is more refined and accurate in ascertaining material causes. However, Ṭabāṭabā'ī answers the sceptic arguing that science may well

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<sup>124</sup> *Al Mizān*. vol 1. p. 77. *Al 'ijāb wa al salb yajtami 'ān ma'an wa yartaḥi 'ān ma'an min kulli jiha*

<sup>125</sup> *ibid*

discover electromagnetic energy fields that a human can access and manipulate. Such a theory could supersede other theories, reducing causation to a single cause of magnetic (or quantum) fields.<sup>126</sup>

Ṭabāṭabā'ī interprets verses alluding to the all-pervasive command of God, the omnipresent answerer of prayers and his exhaustive dominance over everything as God disclosing himself as the bestowing, causing, willing agent that knows no bounds to what he permits in the natural order.<sup>127</sup> In a nutshell the verses affirm every occurrence natural or supernatural is connected to his will and command albeit conventional pathways may appear disconnected.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī states 65:3 (*indeed Allah has decreed a measure for everything*) clarifies that it is God who acts within the causal nexus and the causative factors all adhere to the 'measure' decreed by God.<sup>128</sup> There is an existential link that God is privy to and humans are invariably ignorant. The causative efficacy is rendered so by the 'measure' God apportions, wills and bestows. Ṭabāṭabā'ī and the Qur'ān are unequivocal on the matter of causation being dependent on the prime factor i.e. God. The Asharite emphasis on the sovereignty of God and all possibility being possible with him resonates in this discourse when Ṭabāṭabā'ī says "cause and effect is in the hand of God and he engages with it however he pleases' (*bal ithbāt 'annahā bi yad Allāh subhānahu yahawwiluhā kayfa shā'a wa 'arāda*).<sup>129</sup>

Notwithstanding the above, he does admit to the system of cause and effect and that there is a substantive, real relationship of a cause to its effect which cannot be thoroughly explicable without including the knowledge of God in it. The issue of 'decree' and 'measure' such as in the 15:21 (*and there is not a thing save we possess the treasures (hidden knowledge) of it and we do not reveal it save in a decreed measure*<sup>130</sup>) is a crucial in Ṭabāṭabā'ī's exegesis as it alludes to everything possessing a defined, apportioned, decreed nature that descends or is

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<sup>126</sup> *ibid*. This is beyond the scope of this work and the author although a very interesting field of enquiry that straddles physics, philosophy and theology.

<sup>127</sup> He quotes 65:2-3 (*and whoever fears Allah He will render a deliverance for him and provide him sustenance from where he perceives not*), 39:36 (*I am very close and answer the call of the petitioner when he calls out to me*) and 12:21 (*and Allah holds sway over his command (affair/creation), but most men do not know*)

<sup>128</sup> *Al Mizān*. vol 1. p. 79

<sup>129</sup> *ibid*

<sup>130</sup> *wa in min shay'in illā khazā'inuhu 'indana wa ma nunazziluhu illā bi qadar il ma'lūm*

revealed from an the realm of absoluteness to a stage of entification (*ta'ayyun*)<sup>131</sup> and individuation (*tashakhkhuṣ*). The decree and measure precedes and accompanies the thing thereby making its definition possible in relation to other things which have their own respective identities. An interconnected system of relations between things reveals each of their identities and natures such that other things serve as moulds to restrict, delimit and define other things. In such a schema a nexus is established which Ṭabāṭabā'ī interprets as cause and effect. We can see the Aristotelian and Avicennan influence here as the argument of defined natures has been deduced by Ṭabāṭabā'ī albeit by way of a philosophical exegesis of scripture.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī proceeds to interpret other verses<sup>132</sup> as affirmations of the law of causality, a homogenous nexus (*Sunnah Allah* or *ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*), a cause always precedes an effect be it material or non-material, that there is a single schema and pattern without deviation or chaos (*watīrah wāḥidah wa nasq muntaẓim*), real causes always produce their concomitant effects such as influenza results from strains of the *influenzae* virus not the cold weather and miraculous events follow the aforementioned trend albeit the cause is not immediately discernible. The author quotes several verses relating to the nature of God as the ultimate source of everything, the sustainer, the self-sufficient being upon whom all things are dependent for their subsistence. Thus, all effects are in reality his effects and all causes are mere intermediaries acting as causes by his leave and command.<sup>133</sup> He in effect proffers a permission of usufruct entirely contingent upon his will to bestow or withhold. Ṭabāṭabā'ī

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<sup>131</sup> *Al Mizān*. vol 1. p. 80. The terminology employed here is typically Sadrian who in turn benefitted from the Akbārian mystical concepts of *waḥdat al wujūd* alongside the *Ishrāqī* and peripatetic strands and demonstrates how philosophy is a synthetic process that absorbed various ideas over the centuries prior to reaching Ṭabāṭabā'ī who, represents a maturation of mystical-philosophical speculation in Persian lands. For further reference see Nasr, S.H. *Islamic philosophy from its origin to the present: philosophy in the land of prophecy*. (NY: State University of New York Press, 2006) and for a thorough analysis of the mystical-philosophical worldview in the teachings of ibn 'Arabī, Chittick, W. *The Sufi path of Knowledge*. (NY: The State University of New York Press, 1989)

<sup>132</sup> 40:62 (*zālikum Allāh rabbukum Khāliq kull shay'*) and 11:56 (*ma min dābah illā 'ākhizun bi nāṣiyatihā inna rabbi 'ala ṣirāṭ mustaqīm*). *Al Mizān*. vol 1. p. 80

<sup>133</sup> Ibid. Ṭabāṭabā'ī entitles this section as "*al qur'ān yusnidu mā usnida ila al 'illati al mādiyyah ila Allāh..*" (The Qur'ān attributes that which is attributed to material causes to Allah). The concept of attribution can be twofold; a metaphorically attribution in the realm of rhetoric and language or philosophical/rational attribution (*isnād*) that is not derived from usage as in language but reality such as attributing whiteness to a body, the whiteness is not really in the body rather the attribution is metaphorical with the body being indifferent to the white. Such is the relation of God to the world of cause and effect (*lā mu'aththir fi al wujūd illa Allāh*).

makes an interesting observation here that the Qur'ānic concept of intercession (*shafā'ah*) and intermediaries is radically derived from the divine permission (*idhn*) granted to causes in so far as they can be efficacious agents in the created order.<sup>134</sup> Every cause is 'permitted' to create its effect by the creative command<sup>135</sup> cum permission of god which is prior and concomitant to it (the 'permission' or 'creative command' is none other than an aspect of God which paves the way for the cause to act).<sup>136</sup>

Subsequent to the discussion on causation *vis a vis* God, Ṭabāṭabā'ī introduces the role of prophets in effecting the casual order with heterogeneous acts. He states '*al qur'ān yuthbit ta'thīran fī nufūs al anbiyā' fī al khwāriq*' (the Qur'ān establishes efficacy of prophetic souls in producing supernatural acts).<sup>137</sup> The role of God's permission is important here too as prophets cannot elicit such prowess independently to the extent it is argued that similar to miracle, magic has a psychological basis that is borne out of the divine permit. The will power or psychological aptitude of the prophet (or other agent such as a sorcerer or believer who has acquired this acumen through diligent discipline) is the driving factor for miracles, it overpowers and supersedes other causes. Albeit the caveat is that the causative factor is the special power bestowed upon them by god which is a cause for the miraculous effect. In this regard amongst the verses he quotes are 40:78 which speaks of the apostle being sent with a sign and a divine permission, 2:102 where satanic beings caused mischief in Solomon's kingdom by way of sorcery, here too God says he granted permission and verses pertaining to the mastery, preponderance and sweeping hegemony of prophetic power over all causes in all possible conditions (37:171-173, '*...most surely they shall be the assisted ones...*' and 58:21,

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<sup>134</sup> See the short treatises of Ṭabāṭabā'ī entitled *al rasā'il al tawhīdiyya*. In this collection of four treatises (on the unity of God, the divine names, the divine acts and existential intermediaries), the treaty on intermediaries (*Risālah al waṣā'it*) discusses various intermediaries that fulfil an existential role between God and the natural realm. These intermediaries have been made existent one after the other according to their existential rank and manifestation which can be discerned by proofs and unveiled by spiritual wayfaring. The cosmology is distinctly theosophical and Akbārian (with a clear Neoplatonist antecedent), a cosmology that permits only one true, real existence, God and all other existents being mere entification or shadows that possess no real existence save by and through the real and unique singularity of God. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, M.H. *al rasā'il al tawhīdiyya*. (Qum: Mu'assassa Nashr al Islāmī, 1991), p. 108

<sup>135</sup> He quotes) 10:3 '*man za alladhi yashfa'u 'indahu illā bi idhnihi*' (who is he that he can intercede with him save by his permission?)

<sup>136</sup> *Al Mizān*. vol 1. p. 80

<sup>137</sup> *ibid*



'...I will most surely prevail, I and My apostle...').<sup>138</sup> Thus, it can be deduced that Ṭabāṭabā'ī's exegesis highlights a cause beyond the natural, material order. It is of divine remit and hegemonic over lower, delimited, corruptible causes present in the material realm, and even abstract things too. This source is a spiritual, psychological one aided by the will of God which by definition can overpower a material impediment (miracles require impediments of matter to be removed generally speaking). Thus, any impediment is insignificant to prevent the supernatural act from taking place.<sup>139</sup>

In the entirety of this discourse, the key point is the command of God being overarching, effective, immanent and direct. The Averroean distaste for emanation probably stemmed from his reading of Ghazālian remonstrations against Avicennan theories of necessity and emanation where God is seen to be constrained and unlike the God described by the Qur'ān. The analysis of Ṭabāṭabā'ī strikes a sympathetic tone with both Averroean and Ghazālian worlds despite acknowledging much of peripatetic thought. The argument is imbued with scriptural authority, something which the early peripatetics did not utilise in their explications with any distinction.

The command (*amr* or permission, *idhn*) of God drives the Qur'ānic discourse on how God effects the contingent realm. This is epitomised in 36:82, *his command is such that when he wills a thing he says to it 'be!' and it is*, the word 'be' represents the existential creativity of God. It is not a word uttered defined by linguistic parameters, rather it is creative command that effects all causes. This will of god enshrined in his creative command defers all real agency to God and confers a relative, dependent, contingent agency to man. Sadra pertinently remarks that the relation of God to the world is not like a builder to a building or writing to a write but as speech is related to a speaker, speech ceases when the speaker stops speaking.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> *Al Mizān*. vol 1. p. 83

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*. p 83

<sup>140</sup> Rahman, Fazlur. *The philosophy of Mulla Sadra Shīrāzī*. (Chicago. Repr. 2005), p. 77. Sadrian ontology is critical of emanation as described by early peripatetics due to their insistence the contingents on the vertical scale are involved in causation (i.e. are causes for the existence of lower intelligences or bodies). Sadra draws much from the *faqīr/ghanī* distinction found in the Qur'ān in negating Avicennan/Farabian notions of intelligences creating other existences. Any contingent is essentially impoverished for its existence and it is absurd to scruple it can create or cause another existent. Sadra resolves the issue based on the key premise of existence (*esse*) being a simple, singular modulated reality that manifests aspects of itself whilst remaining unique, simple and simply being in essence (*haqīqah wāḥidah mushakkika* or a famed Sadrian phrase, *basīṭ al haqīqah kull al ashya'*, the simple reality of all things).

Off course, Ṭabāṭabā'ī explains, the will of man is preserved in the sense despite all effects being contingent upon God's will, human action is based on the volitional will of man himself directly and indirectly on the will of God, both human action and will are under the creative command of God which is the existential imperative of 'Be!'.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī agrees that all events fit into the causal nexus and governed by natural laws be they commonplace or heterogeneous events. There is no distinction between positive events such as miracles or malevolent such as sorcery and magic. All natural events are dependent upon the will of God. They either coincide or are united with this will and command. All natural causes are impotent in instantiating an effect without the will and permission of God being, real efficacy and agency, lies in this existential force (*idhā taḥaqqāq al idhn wa al 'amr taḥaqqāqat 'an asbābihā, wa idhā lam yataḥaqqāq al idhn wa al amr lam tataḥaqqāq*). All events are on par on this basis, miraculous or not.<sup>141</sup> The prophet or sincere believer can perform seemingly supernatural events on the basis of this extra necessitating factor, the decisive command of God which has hegemony over all other causes. In a nutshell there is a cause for everything and causes are hierarchical with the permit and command of God being all encompassing. Off this command and will needs further clarification, is it a belligerent hegemony of power epitomised in Asharite theistic determinism or a self-consumed intellectual inactivity defined in Averroean deistic determinism? Fakhry discusses this issue thoroughly, stating both tangents do not permit the fullness of the godhead to be expressed in terms that vouchsafe his undisputed attributes of power and wisdom yet fulfil the prerogatives of the causal dilemma arguing both averroist0asharite positions have their merits albeit unsatisfactory and inconsistent.<sup>142</sup>

Ṭabāṭabā'ī reiterates, all events, extra-ordinary or natural, do not diverge from the causal principle and they are preceded by metaphysical causes. The argument resonates with the Ghazālian endeavours to rationally insert miracles into the causal order based on theories of lapsed time or occult causes or things being subject to a myriad of determinations although Ṭabāṭabā'ī differs on issues such as the Asharite claim natural causes inert as mentioned earlier on the discussion of natures and the decreed measure. The Qur'ān continuously

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<sup>141</sup> *Al Mizān*. vol 1. p. 84

<sup>142</sup> Fakhry. p. 141

mentions the triumphant and insurmountable act of God that is embodied in his will and command. Ṭabāṭabā'ī renders this as the invincible cause of a miracle (*sabab ghayr maghlūb*).<sup>143</sup> He goes on to differentiate between various causes and their effects:

- normal events that are mutual necessities of apparent causes and invariably accompanied by concrete material causes that have the command and will of God associated with them (*umūr 'ādiyya mulāzimah li asbāb zāhiriyya tuṣāhibuhā al asbāb al ḥaqīqiyyah al ṭabī'iyah ghāliban aw ma'a aghlab*)
- Extraordinary events of an evil nature such as divination and sorcery or of a good nature such as the answering of prayers. These are based on natural causes that are unusual and irregular albeit based on a concrete cause that has the permission and will of God. However, positive or negative extraordinary events mentioned above are not wrought to vindicate a claim of any sort.
- Miracles that challenge others and vindicate a truth claim such as prophethood. These, as all other events are based on natural concrete causes associated with the divine will and authorisation. The last two categories (extraordinary events – *khwāriq al 'āda*) have an insurmountable and incontrovertible cause in contrast to ordinary natural phenomena which have surmountable causes (*al qismayn al ākhīrayn yufāriqān sā'ir al aqsām fī anna sababahumā lā yuṣīr maghlūban maqhūran qaṭṭ bi khilāf sā'ir al musabababāt*)<sup>144</sup>

The essence of the miracle is not determined by an occult cause rather, it is the fact that its cause is insurmountable and detached from the ordinary occurrence (*ghayr maqhūr aw maghlūb*) otherwise one can argue if a occult cause is discovered, the miracle would be rendered null and void and knowledge of it would entail invalidity of any claims associated with that miracle. Ṭabāṭabā'ī uses the example of a sick person cured by the supplication of a believer, the cure could have been medical but this ordinary method was surmounted by an extraordinary one. The miracle was in the hegemonic cause of prayer healing rather than the conventional medical route.<sup>145</sup> At this juncture, Ṭabāṭabā'ī proceeds to discuss the

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<sup>143</sup> *Al Mizān*. vol 1. p. 84. It could be argued that this is similar to the secondary cause vs primary cause argument that yes the fire does burn the cotton but this is a secondary cause and primarily it is the act of God who is the direct cause. However as we have seen, Ṭabāṭabā'ī does not bring in a distinction here, he simple states the will, permission and command of God are united with the natural cause such that the real cause is God and the natural cause is predicated, instantiated or exists because of it being made efficacious by divine providence.

<sup>144</sup> *Al Mizān*. vol 1. p. 84

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*. p. 85

probative force of miracles in substantiating Prophetic claims and not as general evidences.  
The debate on general nature of myth and religion is discussed

## Conclusion

All human beings without analysis can decipher that every natural phenomenon requires a cause notwithstanding the philosophical, theological or scientific background of the observer. Basic sense experience and intuition at the very minimal can assent to this. The attribution of an act to an agent on a material level is one aspect of the debate, the other is that presented by revealed scriptures. The staff of Moses becoming a serpent, the parting of seas, Jesus raising of the dead or curing the sick by a hand stroke or pebbles in the palm of Muḥammad praising God. From all of these extraordinary acts, the rational basis for a series of material events that yields such a heterogeneous conclusion is lacking. The snake is born of a reproductive process undergone by its progenitor, sickness is cured through a logical continuum of diagnosis and treatment and speech requires vocal apparatus for the production of audible communication.

Ṭabāṭabā'ī, has broken down the issue of miracles and causation on two levels. Firstly by highlighting the shortcomings in appreciating the problem from all the available aspects and secondly the inability of the antagonist to appreciate the understanding of causation as expressed by the philosophers. The absence of a material cause for a phenomenon that average people are accustomed to leads to the erroneous supposition that a cause does not exist in the case of a miracle, rather it relies on no cause except the direct intervention of God and is purely random. Ghazālī found this to be the only way to rationally affirm a miracle. Ṭabāṭabā'ī as his predecessors, asserts that the absence of a customary material cause is not an absolute nullification of causality nor invalidates a cause, rather, the nullification concerns the propriety and efficacy of a specific set of causes. The nullification of a specific does not qualify as evidence for the nullity of a general notion.

In a miracle, some specific causes are abrogated, these are material causes our sense oriented minds are accustomed to observing and anticipate to occur. Ṭabāṭabā'ī mentions this in the exegesis of the verse relating to the fire becoming cool and peaceable for Ibrāhīm by virtue of an existential address command or decree that Ṭabāṭabā'ī mentioned earlier) renting the

customary order where fire burns the human body<sup>146</sup>. This is ordinarily taken for granted in the natural, physical world which is expected to fall into place as clockwork. We are habituated to the working of nature in such a way by sense experience. Causality is never extensionally observed such as when fire meets cotton, we cannot see, observe or feel causation qua causation. A miracle is the effect of a cause veiled to the observer and that is its essential nature.

The causation debate is fundamental because of its many implications impinging on or even defining the nature of God, man and cosmos. The determinists, fatalists and their respective opponents have all vied for a version that is logical and absolves God from all lack and imperfection. The controversy highlights the dynamicity, fecundity and diversity of Islamic intellectual life where wholesale structures, systems, ontologies and epistemologies are refined, defined and perfected in an evolutionary and processual dialectic. Ṭabāṭabā'ī, uniquely represents the fullness of this debate due to the convergence of philosophical erudition and Qur'ānic master exegete in his person. The debate remains open and echoing the celebrated adage of a bygone sage, it is a matter between the two matters (*al 'amr bayn al 'amrayn*), neither staunch occasionalism where the real, unreal and divine are isolated entities actin and being acted upon whimsically nor absolute determinist causality where logical analysis exhausts being of its unfathomable depth, breadth and mystery.

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<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* vol 14. p. 304

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