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Free Will in Averroes' Compatibilism

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ABSTRACT

Averroes, a prominent Islamic philosopher, reconciled divine omniscience with human free will through a compatibilist framework. He argued that God's foreknowledge does not necessitate determinism; instead, it reflects the reality of events as they unfold. Drawing on Aristotelian metaphysics, Averroes distinguished between necessary events, like natural phenomena, and contingent events, such as human actions shaped by reason and choice. He maintained that human free will exists within a deterministic universe, preserving moral accountability. Averroes integrated Islamic theology with philosophy, addressing tensions between divine omnipotence and human agency. He proposed that God's knowledge does not compel human actions, likening it to an astronomer predicting an eclipse—knowledge does not equate to causation. Human actions are influenced by reason, imagination, and external factors, but free will arises from rational deliberation and the ability to act intentionally. In reconciling religion and philosophy, Averroes emphasized metaphorical interpretations of the Quran, appealing to both laypeople and intellectuals. He argued that verses emphasizing divine control foster submission among the masses, while those highlighting human agency guide scholars. Averroes' compatibilism upholds the coexistence of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, legitimizing philosophy within Islamic thought and supporting ethical accountability.

Keywords: Averroes, compatibilism, desire, free will, intention.

Known as Averroes in the Latin West, Abu al-Walid Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn Rushd was a prominent scholar of the Islamic Golden Age. Averroes was born in Córdoba, Spain, in 1126 CE. The Almoravid and Almohad empires were at their height during this time, which was characterised by intellectual exchange and cultural blossoming in the Muslim world. He came from a distinguished Andalusian family known for its judicial and academic traditions. Abu al-Walid Muḥammad, his grandfather, was a prominent Maliki jurist and the head judge (qadi al-Jama`ah) of Córdoba. Because his father was a judge as well, Averroes was raised in a culture that was closely linked to Islamic law and scholarship. He was given a thorough education, which was

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typical of the Islamic culture at the time. He studied astronomy, mathematics, medicine, theology, and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) according to the Maliki school. But his training in philosophy was very influential (Hourani 1962).

Like his ancestors, Averroes started his professional career as a jurist and eventually became the top judge of Córdoba. He was appointed the court physician for the Almohad caliphs in Marrakesh because of his exceptional medical knowledge and legal expertise. He had a crucial friendship with the scholar Ibn Tufayl (1105-1185) during this period, and it was through him that he met the Second Almohad Amir, Caliph Abu Yaqub Yusuf al-Mansur (1135-1184). Averroes's intelligence pleased the caliph, who asked him to write commentary on Aristotle's writings. But Averroes's career wasn't without its difficulties. Under Abu Yusuf Yaqub al-Mansur's rule, his philosophical endeavours were questioned. The Almohad court's conservative elements saw philosophy as a danger to traditional Islamic doctrine. Because of this, Averroes was persecuted and exiled in his later years, but he was later restored to court just before he passed away in 1198 CE.

His in-depth analyses of Aristotle are what made Averroes most famous. As a reflection of the larger intellectual endeavour of the Islamic world at the time, his works attempted to bring Aristotelian philosophy and Islamic theology into harmony. He wrote three different kinds of commentary that carefully examined and understood Aristotle's writings: short epitomes, medium commentaries, and extended commentaries (Rescher 1959). Averroes left behind a rich intellectual legacy when he passed away in Marrakech in 1198. His writings were still read in the Latin West and the Islamic world, although opinions on them differed greatly. While his views sparked important advancements in philosophy, theology, and science in Europe, his rationalist thought was largely overshadowed in the Islamic world by the emergence of mysticism and traditionalism.

When Averroes's writings were translated into Latin and Hebrew, his intellectual legacy gained further traction in Europe (Debeuf 2024). Scholasticism was sparked by translations of his Aristotelian commentaries that made their way to the fledgling colleges of Oxford, Bologna, and Paris in the 12th and 13th century. Averroes's theories were extensively discussed by Christian philosophers including Albertus Magnus (1200-1280), St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), and Siger of Brabant (1240-1284), who referred to him simply as *The Commentator*.

Later thinkers credited Averroes with creating the contentious "*Double Truths*" theory in the Latin West. According to this theory, philosophical and theological truths might coexist even if they seemed incompatible. Averroes's original opinions will be misrepresented by this interpretation, yet it stoked discussions throughout mediaeval European philosophy and theology. Comprehending his idea of compatibilism in philosophy requires a grasp of the "*Double Truths*" notion. According to him, philosophical inquiry is not fundamentally opposed by Islamic law (Sharia) but rather is enhanced by it. Deeper discussion of difficult theological and metaphysical issues was made possible by Averroes' emphasis on allegorical interpretation of the Quranic scripture. His treatise *Fasl al-Maqal* (The Decisive Treatise) is a landmark work on the relationship between religion and philosophy. In this text, Averroes argued that the Quran encourages the pursuit of knowledge and rational reflection, thus legitimizing philosophy within the Islamic tradition.

Divine Omniscience and God's Foreknowledge

Averroes began his view on free will by affirming God's absolute omniscience, a fundamental tenet of Islamic theology. For Averroes, God possesses complete knowledge of all that has happened, is happening, and will happen. This includes all future human actions, down to their minutest details. However, such foreknowledge raises an immediate problem: if God knows what a person will do in the future, does that not imply that the action is predetermined and inevitable? If so, how can human beings be morally responsible for their choices? To address this, Averroes emphasized the distinction between knowing an action and causing an action. According to him, God's knowledge of future events does not necessitate that He directly causes those events in a

deterministic sense. Rather, God's knowledge reflects the reality of events as they unfold, without undermining the autonomy of human agents.

Similar to Averroes, Aquinas held that God's foreknowledge does not conflict with human free will. God exists outside of time and sees all events (past, present, and future) simultaneously. His foreknowledge does not determine human choices but rather encompasses them. Thus, humans are free in their actions, even though God knows what choices they will make (McDonough 2022). Central to Averroes' argument is the distinction between necessary and contingent events. A necessary event is one that cannot be otherwise—it is fixed and immutable. A contingent event, however, is one that depends on certain conditions and can occur in more than one way. For instance, the rising of the sun is a necessary event, while a person's decision to act virtuously or sinfully is contingent.

Averroes posited that human actions fall under the category of contingent events. While God's foreknowledge encompasses both necessary and contingent events, His knowledge of contingencies does not render them necessary. In other words, God's knowing that a person will choose a specific path does not mean that the person was compelled to choose that path. The action remains contingent and subject to the individual's free will. This distinction allowed Averroes to maintain the coexistence of divine omniscience and human free will. God's foreknowledge does not impose necessity on human actions; instead, it reflects the outcomes of choices made freely by human beings. Averroes' philosophy rejects the notion of necessity and freedom as imposed by fate or arbitrary actions, focusing on the importance of free will and independent action in human life (Rakhimdjanova 2024).

Averroes' argument is deeply rooted in Aristotelian metaphysics, particularly the concept of causality also known as the Four Causes. According to this Greek philosopher, everything in the world has four causes that contribute to its being and purpose. They are *Material Cause (Hylē)*, *Formal Cause (Eidos)*, *Efficient Cause (Kinetikē Aitia)*, and *Final Cause (Telos)*. These causes address different aspects of existence and change and used for explaining the action of human beings. Aristotle believed that human actions are inherently teleological—they are directed toward achieving a specific goal or purpose (the final cause) through the series of causes (Reece 2018). Thus, for Aristotle, this ultimate purpose is linked to eudaimonia (happiness), which he considers the highest goal of human life. All human actions, when analysed through the four causes, ultimately aim to contribute to this state of flourishing.

Similarly, Averroes argued that human actions are the result of a chain of causes, including external circumstances, internal desires, and rational deliberation. While God is the ultimate cause of all existence and the sustainer of the universe, He does not directly intervene in every individual decision. Instead, God created a world governed by natural laws and endowed human beings with the faculty of reason and the capacity for moral choice. Averroes likened divine foreknowledge to the knowledge of an astronomer who predicts a solar eclipse. The astronomer's prediction does not cause the eclipse; it merely reflects an understanding of the natural laws governing celestial bodies. Similarly, God's knowledge of future actions does not cause those actions; it merely reflects His infinite awareness of all causal relationships in the universe.

Free Will in Averroes' Philosophical Perception

The debate over free will and predestination has deep roots in Islamic theology. Three prominent theological schools dominated the discourse: (a) The Qadariyya, who emphasized human free will, arguing that individuals are fully responsible for their actions and that God does not predetermine human choices; (b) The Ash'arites, who leaned toward predestination, maintaining that God creates every action, and humans merely acquire these actions. (c) The Muktazilites, a rationalist school of Islamic theology, emphasizing the importance of human responsibility and moral accountability. They believed that humans possess free will and are fully responsible for their actions. They rejected the idea that God predetermines or compels human choices. This belief stems from their commitment to the principle of justice (*'adl*). For them, it would be unjust

for God to punish humans for sins or reward them for good deeds if their actions were predetermined (Altine & Adam 2019).

Averroes, as both a philosopher and a jurist of the Maliki school, inherited this complex theological landscape. His challenge was to navigate these competing doctrines while incorporating Aristotelian philosophy, which offered a naturalistic and rational framework for understanding causation and human agency. Averroes believed that free will could coexist with divine omniscience. His central argument was that God's foreknowledge does not necessitate determinism. In *Tahafut al-Tahafut (The Incoherence of the Incoherence)*, Averroes explains that God's knowledge is fundamentally different from human knowledge. While humans understand events in a temporal, linear manner, God's knowledge encompasses all events simultaneously, beyond the constraints of time. This view allows Averroes to maintain that God's foreknowledge does not interfere with human choice. For Averroes, divine knowledge is not causal but rather all-encompassing. Therefore, humans retain agency in their actions without contradicting God's omniscience.

Drawing from Aristotle, Averroes emphasized the role of reason and deliberation in human decision-making. He believed that free will arises from the ability of humans to weigh alternatives and act based on rational judgment. Unlike animals, which act on instinct, humans have the unique capacity for intentional and moral choice.

In this context, Averroes aligns with Aristotle's idea of voluntary action. He argues that actions stemming from ignorance or compulsion cannot be considered truly free. For Averroes, true freedom lies in rational deliberation, where individuals act with full knowledge of the consequences of their choices. For Averroes, the existence of free will is essential for moral responsibility. If human beings were mere automatons acting under divine compulsion, concepts such as reward, punishment, and accountability would lose their meaning. By affirming free will, Averroes upheld the moral teachings of the Quran, which emphasize the importance of choosing righteousness and avoiding sin.

However, Averroes also recognized that human free will operates within certain constraints. Human choices are influenced by external circumstances, personal inclinations, and the broader framework of divine providence. While individuals are free to choose within these constraints, their freedom is not absolute. Averroes thus struck a balance between human autonomy and divine sovereignty, affirming that both play a role in shaping human destiny. He legitimizes the connection between philosophy and religious faith, promoting it as a highly recommended practice for those with deep knowledge, enhancing their intellectual elite status (Dragoman 2023).

It should be noted that, in the development of his theory of action, Aristotle began to divide the action into two major kinds viz. what a man does (*poiesis*) and what really happens to him (*pathos* such as affection or passion). The former refers to voluntary action and the latter refers to involuntary action. This division is included as part of Averroes' discussion of the philosophy of mind especially his account of will as a basis of action.

Averroes' account of what the mind does and how it does it, divides naturally into his theories of will and intellect. In this part, the writer will focus on the problem of will. As an Aristotelian, Averroes thinks that the problem of action must be related to the concept of will where it is the root of the subject of the human agent, his action and responsibility. He extends the issue of freewill into his discussion of providence and predestination in which his aim is to reconcile the omnipotence of God and the freedom of the human agent.

The importance of will in Averroes' ethics can be seen through his commentary on Plato's *Republic* by methodological observation on the relationship between practical and theoretical sciences. The subject matter of the practical science is freewill and choice with its principle of nature. The subject matter of theoretical science is physical entities. The practical science is divided into two major parts: First, ethics that includes the discussion of voluntary actions and habits, and medicine that deals with the problem of achieving good health and avoiding disease, and secondly, a manner that deals with habit established in the soul (Averroes 1956).

However, in searching for Averroes' conception of action, we are very unfortunate because there is no particular part of his works dealing clearly with the subject of freewill. Considering the problem of human will -where the human agent is a rational animal and not pure intelligence Averroes attributed to human being two kinds of will viz. rational will (or rational desire) and irrational will (or appetite) -this division is developed from Aristotelian theory of form and matter. The former, i.e. rational will, which is sometimes known as soul (corresponding to the Aristotelian form) moves to the activity of intellect that is based on the notion of will (power). The latter or irrational will (corresponding to Aristotelian matter) desires for something that is desired by plants such as nutritive, vegetative and generative desire, and desired by animals such as perceptive and imaginative (Averroes 1956).

In the question of whether the will is ever subject to necessity or not, Averroes answered that there are two kinds of necessity. First, Natural Necessity such as "preserving and protecting their bodies and preserving their senses" because it is impossible -for example, for animals- to exist without the senses. Secondly, Final Cause Necessity that is when there are some choices in front of him, -for example human agent "has an end that has something better in it than existence at the level of the necessary."

The different kinds of necessities that are explained by Averroes' are in accordance with the schematicism of Aristotle's four causes: formal, material, efficient and final cause. However, Ibn Rushd arranged it in three kinds of causes: (a) formal cause: when he says that the relation between body and soul is compared to the relation between matter and form. Body is moved by soul (intellect) as matter is moved by form; (b) efficient cause where human action is moved by choice and will. This is a kind of an autonomous will where an agent has the power to control him or herself and he or she is not determined by anything external to himself, and; (c) final cause when the rational faculty (will) is moved towards the ultimate end. i.e., happiness.

There is, however, a problem in Averroes' conception of will, in which he did not make a clear distinction between wish (*boulesis*) and choice (*prohairesis*) as Aristotle did in his Ethics. Aristotle relates the wish to the end and choice to the means, thus we wish to be happy but we cannot choose to be happy. By contrast, Averroes claims that one's will is only related to the end. However his concept of will contains two kinds of the roles; on the one hand, it is a capacity for certain kinds of wanting for something in a long term to be achieved such as the will for the good society or the for the ultimate happiness. On the other hand, will is capacity for realisation of free action.

In the next discussion we will see how Averroes has a difficulty in his conception of will, when on the one hand he defines "Will" as a non-rational desire shared by animal and human beings, and on the other hand, "Will" is defined as rational desire that consists of the concept of cogitation and thought.

Will as Non-Rational Desire

Will is understood here as non-rational desire where it is shared both by animals and human beings It is a kind of power that must be distinguished from wishing, because a person might wish for something impossible (imagination). By contrast, desire is directed to the individual's power that causes motion and it is an important aspect of action in that it must be directed to acts that were within the individual's power to perform. Averroes (1969) stated:

The meaning of will in man and in an animal is a desire which causes movement, and which happens, i.e., in animal and man to perfect a deficiency in their essence.

Besides that, in this passage, it is understood that Averroes defined will as an action that happens to individual and he declined to attribute knowledge in making choice. If the contribution of knowledge (ie, language) is denied, it entails that we do not use our powers of reason and thought (Averroes 1956). Furthermore, Averroes said that will (non-rational desire) is not a free action because it is compelled by the external circumstance or by the internal condition such as imagination. This kind of will definitely is not a freewill but a compulsory will which at least mitigated responsibility where consequently there is no blame for the agent. Thus, I should not

be blamed for kicking an older pensioner because my action is aroused by my imagination that I kicked a ball. He admitted this will is not a choice. Averroes (1949) explained this as:

The will in us, is the urge to do something from our imagination (*takhayyul*) or the judgement of the truth of something, and this judgement is not a choice, but is something that happens to us from events outside ourselves.

Therefore, in this statement, Averroes explained two reasons that caused the non-rational desire, first, it is caused by the imagination; and secondly it is due to the wrong judgement.

a. *Imagination*: Imagination (*takhayyul*) is one of the reasons that prevents animals from having a freedom of action (Averroes 1956). It may be a case where a fox imagines eating the grapes where it no more uses its reason to think whether it is ripe or not. However, it is not clear what Averroes means by saying that imagination compelled the will because let us consider a chimpanzee imagine driving a car. He has a freewill to do so. Perhaps Averroes wants to say that imagination will lead to the overambitious or mental problem from performing an action. For example, prior to him, Aristotle stated that imagination sometimes leads to overambitious, stupid or crazy actions if it is used to imagine something impossible such as one imagines living forever (Averroes 1956). Aristotle also said that passions also lead to incontinence where one cannot control his desire. To him sometimes a man's desire or appetites are in conflict with his reason, precisely in the sense that he desires something bad even while knowing that it is bad, which is the very essence of incontinence. Similarly, in modern tradition, John Locke said that a drunkard knows well that his use of alcohol is bad for him, but the mere knowledge of this cannot be depended upon to extinguish his desire for them. So, in both cases will or desire is so strong in influencing human action.

b. *Judgement*: Both Averroes and Aristotle agree that sometimes judgement makes one err. Judgement, in Aristotle's system seems to be an appetite act, not the cognitive. This is due to the fact that will has no choice in making judgement or due to the external factors as Aristotle explains in his theory of *Akrasia*. One's basic failure may be because he failed to understand the good conclusion or because of not fully seeing that it is the better course. However a good self-controlled man does fully understand the good conclusion, and his judgement is not clouded when he acts, although he is aware of the power of the attraction of the opposed course. For example, Aristotle said: "The juryman cannot judge clearly or correctly, cannot respond appropriately, when private pain or pleasure obscure his judgement." (Aristotle, *Rhetorica* 1345b10).

Considering the problem of how something desirable is presented to us from outside, Averroes said that we desire it involuntarily and move towards it, and similarly when there happens to us something repellent from outside, we avoid it violently. Averroes thinks his view is in accordance with the spirit of al-Quran, and hopefully can solve the problem of predestination:

"He has attendant angels before him and behind him watching over him by God's command." (al-Quran, al-Ra'd 13:11).

Besides the wrong judgement and imagination, one's will is determined by the wrong belief. This is due to his psychological problem such as sorrow and fear, or he is compelled by deception and falsehood (Averroes 1956).

Will as Rational Desire

Appetite is found both in human beings and animals. However, there is rational appetite or intellectual desire in the human agent by which he desires something good or virtue. It is necessary to examine here what Averroes actually means by rational desire when he says that it is a voluntary action when will accompanied by reason. It should be noted here that there are two conceptions that perceive action as an effect of intention or deliberation viz. "Intentional conception" and "deliberative action." The former insists that every action issues from a

motivating reason, from a reason in the sense in which the rational beliefs and desires, constitutes reason (Davidson 1963). Meanwhile, according to the latter conception, in process of choosing, the object has a property that gives some justification for choosing it such as providing pleasure for the agent, conducing to better social order or happiness to the agent (as suggested by Aristotle and Averroes). In other words, there is a justifying reason in a such choice. Although it seems that there is a difference, there is no contradiction between them.

The point here, the writer thinks, is that Averroes' concept of rational desire is a combination of both conceptions viz. intentional conception and deliberative conception. In other words, human rational desire is a kind of a rational belief. This is clear when he asserted that there is a complete harmony between reason and belief. However, this conclusion is in contrast to the first statement in previous part where he asserted that belief is an irrational will. Averroes distinguishes two kinds of rational desire viz. cogitative desire and thoughts that are against the nature of appetite desire.

a. *Cogitative Desire*: This kind of desire is attained through the experience of study, knowledge and self-experience. For example, a doctor needs to know the reality of the sickness of his patient by experiencing the sickness for himself. Averroes (1956) explained:

This is done through the cogitative faculty, which he acquires through experience. Therefore, the physician will not be of this character until-over and beyond his study of the art of medicine- he has encountered many of the illnesses and experiencing this in others and in himself. By experience of illness in himself he acquires for himself knowledge that he could not acquire by perceiving them in others.

Now, if he thinks that cogitative desire is derived from the experience, it necessarily means that it is bound to the causal necessity. One's experience may come from a different source such as education, environment, knowledge or inner experience. Whatever happens to me, happens necessarily as it does because the happening is causally necessary. If I knocked down a pedestrian, I should not be blamed for my action because it was a causal condition from my training.

In other place, Averroes sees that cogitative desire has inclination to the virtue or good which gives someone noble and choice worthy character. This inclination towards virtue is natural or necessary in human beings. Virtue, according to Averroes is raised by cogitation and is an important condition to the philosopher besides the theoretical science in order to achieve the ultimate perfection, i.e., happiness and as a natural condition to be a philosopher king (Averroes 1956) Socrates chose death rather than life because his cogitative desire found it is a virtue. Thus, he gave advice to the physician to maximise his cogitative faculty in making a decision towards his patient.

They will have need there of a physician to distinguish one in whom there has appeared a defect that can be cured from one in whom there has appeared a chronic defect that cannot be cured. The former will be cured; the latter will be let come to grief, even if it were possible to keep him alive through medicines but (at the cost of) is no longer participating in any of the city's affairs. This, then, is what Plato asserts about the defective ones; Namely that there is no need to cure anyone for whom it is impossible that he truly has all the virtues. (Averroes 1956).

b. *Theoretical Desire/Thought*: Besides the cogitative desire, a man has the theoretical desire to achieve the ultimate good. Perhaps Averroes suggests that it be not absurd or a compulsion to apply imagination to achieve the ultimate good. He might agree with Aristotle that an agent could not appeal to the compulsion through anticipation of what was held to be pleasurable and admirable. The ultimate good for him is achieving happiness (Averroes 1956).

Happiness, Averroes said, only can be achieved through the realisation of happiness that is performed with virtue (Averroes 1956), There are two kinds of virtue namely speculative virtue

and ethical virtues. Anyone who achieves this virtue, i.e., speculative virtue will have an ultimate perfection and happiness.

This virtue exists not because of anything else; on the contrary; it is sought after for its own sake, while any other (virtue) is desired for it. This is man's ultimate perfection and utmost happiness (Averroes 1956).

However, the writer thinks, desire should be understood as rational activity rather than rational desire -which does not exclude the element of knowledge. Desires are per se reasons for acting. They are reasons through their own nature. Desires provide the agent with reason for doing. For example, my wanting or desire to stay dry is a desire for me to take an umbrella because my doing so will satisfy that desire: that is, it will result in what I want to be the case being the case. Desire constitutes reason for us to act because its contents are represented as states of affairs the realisation of which would be good.

The desire that *p*, is a reason to make it true that *p*.

Therefore, the desire itself makes an act rational because I have reason to perform though not a good one but still under a process of reasoning or reason. This is what we called as per se authority of desire. It is authority because it is not by mere force or sheer power that desire moves an agent (Stampe 1987). Generally, Averroes outlines two principles of will viz. active and positive.

Will as a Passive Principle

Averroes did not consider the will solely as an active power. He asserted that the human soul by itself is not the sufficient active as positive principle of either intellection or volition. Therefore, he concludes that intellect and will are both passive in some respect, in so far as each is respective of an act; and then they are active, in so far as they are active principles of their own proper acts. He said that intellect needs to be informed by the proper intelligible species before being able itself to proceed to the act of knowing. In the following passage Averroes said that one's intellect is regarded as passive and an effect because it depends on reality and his knowledge being posterior to knowledge: "For knowledge that implies the concepts of universal and individual are a passive intellect and an effect." (Averroes 1969).

About the will, Averroes said that it must also be compelled or informed by a prior judgement of the intellect on the object before proceeding to the act of volition proper. He maintained that the object must first be known, in order to be willed and that such knowledge acts to help to produce the act of volition. His will ceases when the object is reached, as Averroes (1969) stated: "Further, when the willer has reached his object, his will ceases and, generally speaking will is a passive quality of change".

Again, Averroes following Aristotle asserts that what necessitates human will is happiness. Thus, in he said that cogitative desire is necessitated by the end, i.e., happiness. Happiness basically encompasses all aspects of human life and behaviour, including moral virtue and practical wisdom, in addition to the activity of theoretical reason. According to Aristotle, man is sometimes viewed as a composite being—a conglomeration of perception, action, emotion, and reason in a single body (Leaman 1980).

It is understood then that Averroes' position enmeshed the will in the bond of causal necessity: my will has desires, interests or motives no less than the character traits I now have or had at any other time in the past. His desires and motives depend on the causal antecedents. This is in accordance with what Thomas Hobbes says that to say that man acts freely is to say that his action 'proceeds from his will' i.e. that his action has his will, namely, 'the last Appetite in Deliberating', as causal antecedent. If there is a causal antecedent, it means that I have no responsibility to what I am and what I am doing today. Therefore, I could no more choose, will and act freely (differently) from the way I do.

In modern philosophy, Kant also adopted the theory of passive principle. He follows Averroes in asserting that will is compelled by another cause, i.e., desire. Kant said that there are two aspects of the will: The autonomous will that is free to act freely according to moral law and the heteronomous will which is compelled by desire (Trusted 1984).

Will as an Active Principle

However, on the other hand, Averroes admitted that will is a liberty of choice, i.e., it is an active principle able freely to determine itself. The agent has a liberty to cause which is not necessitated by anything. The will to choose by the contraries is not determined by reason. The human agent has power to perform opposite acts and is the will that is the active principle, and he is the master. Averroes (1969) said: "The second kind of agents is those that perform a certain act at one time and its opposite at another; These, acting only out of knowledge and deliberation."

Besides that, the Commentator insisted that will is an activity or process of the human agent where choice or desire is used as some kind of intuitive judgement that is able to distinguish between the right and the wrong as the dominant element in the life of a philosopher. If the rational part of the human agent rules the passionate and concupiscent parts, so that his passionate part is subordinated to the rational part, he will achieve the virtue of wisdom as do the philosophers.

About the hierarchy of the will, similar to Aristotle, Averroes suggested that Intellect is higher than will. This view is agreed by his later proponent, Pietro Pompazzi (1462-1525) who asserted that the intellect is higher than the will and also in the mode of active principle.

"Either the intellect and the will are one and the same power or, if they are different, the intellect is the power wherein the act of freewill is properly found since it is there constitutively, whereas it is in the will improperly and in a secondary sense it merely concurs passively in these acts. Freedom, however, consists more in activity than in passivity." (Poppi 2008).

Free Will and Intention

Averroes places significant emphasis on the role of **intention** in human action, aligning with both Islamic theological principles and his Aristotelian philosophical framework. For Averroes, intention is the rational and volitional component of human action that distinguishes purposeful deeds from mere instinctive or accidental behaviour. It serves as the bridge between the human mind and external actions, imbuing those actions with moral and philosophical meaning.

Averroes considers human beings as rational agents who act not only out of necessity or impulse but also with deliberate intent. Intention (*niyyah*) stems from a person's awareness and rational deliberation about their goals and motives. It involves the conscious decision to act in a particular way based on an understanding of the consequences and ethical dimensions of the action. For an act to be considered truly human, rather than automatic or mechanical, it must involve intention. In this sense, Averroes aligns with Islamic teachings, where intention plays a central role in determining the moral value of an action. The Prophet Muhammad famously said, "Actions are judged by intentions," underscoring that the internal purpose behind an action holds greater weight than the outward appearance of the act itself. Averroes integrates this principle into his philosophical analysis, emphasizing that intention reflects the agent's inner moral state and rational capacity.

For Averroes, intention is closely tied to human free will and moral responsibility. Humans possess the ability to deliberate, choose, and act according to their rational judgments. Intention arises when a person consciously directs their will toward a specific action, guided by their understanding of good and bad. This voluntary aspect of human action is essential for moral accountability; individuals are responsible for their intentions even if the external outcomes of their actions are beyond their control. Averroes argues that intention is what separates morally significant actions from mere happenstance. For example, if someone accidentally causes harm, the lack of intent means the action does not carry the same moral weight as a deliberate harmful

act. Conversely, a good deed performed without genuine intention loses its ethical value, as it lacks the deliberate alignment of will and purpose.

Averroes views human action as arising from a combination of knowledge, desire, and intention: (a) Knowledge provides the rational basis for understanding what is beneficial or harmful; (b) Desire motivates a person to pursue or avoid specific outcomes, and (c) Intention, in turn, integrates these elements by directing the will toward a chosen course of action.

This tripartite structure reflects Averroes' Aristotelian influences, particularly the idea of humans as rational beings who strive for their highest potential through deliberate and purposeful action. Intention thus becomes the key to aligning human behaviour with ethical and intellectual goals, enabling individuals to act in accordance with reason and moral principles.

Perhaps this viewpoint contradicts Kant's ethical rationalism, which holds that morality is based solely on reason and is unaffected by feelings, desires, or other influences. It is a central tenet of his moral philosophy, highlighting the universality and rationality of moral concepts. His writings, including the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* and the *Critique of Practical Reason*, are the best examples of this method. According to Kant, practical reason—a branch of logical thought that establishes our proper behaviour—is the source of moral laws. According to Kant, practical reason—a branch of logical thought that establishes our proper behaviour—is the source of moral laws. Furthermore, he asserts that moral principles are a priori—known by reason—and independent of experience or empirical observation (Zaitseva 2023).

Averroes Compatibilism

The idea that humans may still have free will even if we live in a deterministic universe/nature is the foundation of compatibilism. This theory's implication that moral behaviours that rely on free might not alter even if determinism were proven to be accurate is one of its alluring features. Put another way, compatibilism tells us that we shouldn't be concerned about determinism because it would not necessitate a drastic change in many of our commonsense beliefs about our moral lives if it were proven to be true. Compatibilism is therefore a rather conservative and hopeful viewpoint with regard to our moral behaviour (Talbert 2009). The Commentator adopted a deterministic view of nature, influenced by Aristotle's conception of causality. He believed that every event has a cause, forming an unbroken chain of causation. However, this deterministic framework did not negate human free will. Instead, Averroes distinguished between different types of causes to preserve human agency: (1) Necessary Causes: Events that must occur due to natural laws (e.g., the rising of the sun), and; (2) Contingent Causes: Events that involve human choice, where multiple outcomes are possible.

For Averroes, human actions fall into the latter category. While causality governs the physical universe, human intellect and will introduce a degree of contingency, allowing for genuine choice within the deterministic structure of nature. Averroes' philosophical view on determinism is rooted in the idea of God as the "First Cause," a concept derived from Aristotle's *Prime Mover or First Principle*. He believed that God sets the universe in motion and sustains its order. This framework raises questions about whether human choices are predetermined by the divine order (Kukkonen 2002).

Averroes resolves this tension by arguing that God's role as the First Cause does not negate secondary causes, including human actions. In other words, while God is the ultimate source of causation, He allows for the autonomy of created beings within the limits of their nature. This view preserves human moral responsibility. He argued that the concept of moral responsibility, central to Islamic law, presupposes free will. Humans are accountable for their actions because they have the capacity to choose between right and wrong. Without free will, concepts like justice and divine reward or punishment would lose their meaning. In his legal writings, Averroes emphasized the importance of intention in determining moral responsibility. For instance, two individuals committing identical acts might bear different degrees of accountability depending on their intentions and circumstances. This perspective reinforces the idea that human actions are not entirely predetermined but involve conscious deliberation.

Averroes sought to align his philosophical compatibilism with the Quran. He interpreted verses on predestination, such as “Allah has created you and what you do” (Quran 37:96), as affirming God’s ultimate authority without negating human agency. Similarly, verses emphasizing personal responsibility, such as “Whoever does righteousness, it is for his own soul” (Quran 41:46), support the notion of free will. To reconcile these perspectives, Averroes employed a metaphorical interpretation of scripture. He argued that certain verses are addressed to the masses, emphasizing God’s power and control, while others are directed at intellectuals, highlighting human agency and moral responsibility.

Averroes developed a sophisticated approach to interpreting scripture, emphasizing the importance of balancing theological and philosophical truths. His perspective was deeply influenced by his efforts to reconcile Islamic theology with Aristotelian philosophy. One of Averroes’ most intriguing contributions was his metaphorical interpretation of scripture, particularly regarding the apparent tension between divine omnipotence (fatalism) and human agency (free will). He argued that the Quran addresses different audiences—laypersons and intellectuals—using language tailored to their capacities. In this essay, we will explore the nuances of Averroes’ metaphorical interpretation, focusing on his argument that scriptural verses about divine power and control serve to guide the masses, while those highlighting human agency are directed at intellectuals.

Averroes lived during a time of intellectual flourishing and theological debate in the Islamic world. He was part of a broader tradition of Islamic philosophers, including Al-Farabi and Avicenna (Ibn Sina), who sought to harmonize faith and reason. One of the central issues in Islamic theology was the reconciliation of God’s omnipotence with human free will—a debate that divided various theological schools, such as the Ash’arites, who emphasized divine power, and the Muktazilites, who stressed human responsibility.

Averroes positioned himself as a mediator in the debate between Ash’arites and Muktazilites arguing that scripture contains truths accessible at different levels of understanding. His approach reflects a commitment to intellectual pluralism, where both laypeople and philosophers could find guidance in religion, albeit through different interpretive lenses. Averroes believed that scripture serves two primary audiences: (1). The Masses: Ordinary believers who lack the intellectual training to engage in complex philosophical reasoning. For this group, scripture often emphasizes divine power, control, and predestination. This approach fosters a sense of submission to God and trust in His justice, which are essential for maintaining moral and social order. (2). The Intellectuals: Scholars and philosophers capable of deeper contemplation and reasoning. For them, scripture contains allegorical or metaphorical messages that encourage reflection on human agency, ethical responsibility, and the natural order established by God. An allegorical interpretation as Averroes explains (Gracia 1997), entails the:

Extension of the significance of an expression from real to metaphorical significance, without forsaking therein the standard metaphorical practices of Arabic, such as calling a thing by the name of something resembling it or a cause or consequence or accompaniment of it, or other things such as are enumerated in accounts of the kinds of metaphorical speech (Hourani 1961).

Averroes’ framework suggests that the Quranic verses emphasizing God’s control are not meant to negate human free will but rather to instill a sense of awe and humility in the masses. In contrast, verses addressing human agency appeal to those capable of understanding the complexities of divine causation and human responsibility. The Quran frequently highlights God’s absolute power and control over all creation, using verses that emphasize predestination and divine decree. For example, verses such as “And you do not will except that Allah wills” (Quran 76:30) underline the idea that human actions ultimately depend on God’s will.

Averroes argued that these verses serve an essential purpose for the masses. Ordinary believers, who may lack the intellectual capacity to grasp philosophical abstractions, benefit from a straightforward message that reinforces God’s sovereignty. This message fosters moral discipline and submission to divine authority, ensuring social cohesion and a sense of

accountability. If the masses were exposed to overly complex ideas about free will and causality, it might lead to confusion or even moral laxity. By emphasizing divine control, scripture provides the masses with a simple, actionable framework for understanding their place in the world. It encourages reliance on God and acceptance of life's trials, which are seen as part of a divine plan beyond human comprehension.

To conclude, Averroes' compatibilism harmonizes divine omniscience with human free will, emphasizing that God's knowledge does not undermine moral agency. Rooted in Aristotelian causality, he argued that human actions remain contingent and subject to rational deliberation, enabling free will within a deterministic universe. By advocating metaphorical interpretations of Quranic verses, Averroes balanced divine sovereignty with personal accountability, preserving the ethical and theological foundations of Islamic thought. His approach legitimized philosophy as a tool for deepening understanding of religious doctrine, bridging faith and reason. Averroes' work remains a critical contribution to debates on free will, morality, and the role of rationality in theology.

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