

## AL-JAMI ON WHETHER AN ETERNAL EFFECT CAN RESULT FROM AN AGENT WITH CHOICE

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In his work *al-Durrah al-Fākhīrah*,<sup>1</sup> ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī (d. 898 A.H.) compares the Sufi position on a number of theological questions with the positions taken by the theologians, on the one hand, and by the philosophers, on the other. Most of the questions discussed are those over which philosophers and theologians were generally in disagreement, and include, for example, the following:

1. The nature of existence and the relationship between God’s existence and His essence.
2. The relationship of God’s attributes to His essence.
3. The question of God’s power, that is, whether God is a necessary agent or an agent with choice.
4. The question of God’s knowledge of particulars.
5. The problem of the emanation of multiplicity from unity.

In presenting the Sufi viewpoint on these questions al-Jāmī generally takes a position which is midway between the opposing positions of the philosophers and the theologians. On some points he agrees with the philosophers and on other points with the theologians. Often, however, he presents a third position in which he differs from both the philosophers and the theologians.

An example of this middle position often taken by al-Jāmī can be found in his discussion of the question of whether an eternal effect can result from a free agent or agent with choice.<sup>2</sup> This question, however, involves two other questions:

1. Is God a free agent (*mukhtār*), that is, an agent with choice? or is He a necessary agent (*mūjīb*), that is, one without choice?
2. Is the world eternal or originated?

The position of the theologians was, of course, that the world is originated and that if the world is originated then God must be an agent with choice. They reasoned that if God were a necessary agent and cause of the world, then the world would have to be eternal due to the fact that an effect cannot temporally lag behind its cause if that cause is complete in all respects. On the contrary the effect must always exist simultaneously with the cause, and if the cause, namely God, is eternal

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jāmī, *al-Durrah al-Fākhīrah fī Taḥqīq Madhhab al-Şūfīyah wa-al-Mutakallimīn wa-al-Ḥukamā’*.

<sup>2</sup> al-Jāmī, *al-Durrah al-Fākhīrah*, pp. 28-29, *The Precious Pearl*, p. 57.

then the effect, which is the world, must also be eternal. The world, however, is originated, and therefore God cannot be a necessary agent, but must, on the contrary, be an agent with choice.<sup>3</sup>

The philosophers, on the other hand, took the opposite position, namely, that God is a necessary agent and, using the same argument that the effect cannot lag behind its cause, concluded that the world must be eternal.<sup>4</sup>

Both groups agreed, however, that if God is a necessary agent, then the world must be eternal, but if, on the other hand, the world is originated, then God must be a free agent. Consequently, both philosophers and theologians denied that it was possible for an eternal effect to result from an agent with choice. They argued that the act of intending or choosing to create the world must necessarily precede the act of creating it, because it is impossible to intend to create something that at the moment of the intention already exists. In other words, the world must be non-existent when God chooses to create it. Thus, if God is an agent with the choice of creating the world or not creating it, then the world must be originated.<sup>5</sup>

Al-Jāmī's position on this question is the exact opposite of that of the philosophers and the theologians, for he maintains that the world is eternal and yet is nevertheless caused by an agent with choice. He supports this position with an argument proposed by al-Āmidī in his *Abkār al-Afkār* and which is later quoted by al-Jurjānī in his *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*. This argument asserts that the act of intending to create the world need not necessarily precede the act of creating in time, but need only precede it in essence (*bi-al-dhāt*) in the same way that a cause is said to precede its effect in essence even though both exist simultaneously. Thus God's intention to create the world, His creating the world, and the world's coming into existence are all temporally coexistent.<sup>6</sup>

To summarize al-Jāmī's position we can say that he agrees with the philosophers in maintaining that the world is eternal, and with the theologians in declaring that God is an agent with choice. He differs from both groups, however, in asserting that it is possible for an eternal effect to result from an agent with choice.

Some understanding of why al-Jāmī takes this unusual position can be had by examining more closely what he has in mind when he asserts that God has choice, and also what he means by an eternal effect.

The existence of an eternal effect, al-Jāmī says, has been affirmed by the Sufis as a result of knowledge gained through mystical experience. He identifies this eternal effect with "the most exalted pen" which, he says, following a tradition cited by

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<sup>3</sup> al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, III, 180; VIII, 50; al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, II, 59 ff.; al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, p. 234.

<sup>4</sup> al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, VIII, 53, al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, p. 234.

<sup>5</sup> al-Jāmī, *al-Durrah al-Fākhirah*, p. 28, *The Precious Pearl*, p. 57; al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, I, 96 ff.; al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, III, 178 ff.

<sup>6</sup> al-Jāmī, *al-Durrah al-Fākhirah*, pp. 28-29, *The Precious Pearl*, pp. 57-58; al-Jurjānī, *Sharḥ al-Mawāqif*, III, 182 ff.; al-Taftāzānī, *Sharḥ al-Maqāṣid*, I, 96; al-Āmidī, *Abkār al-Afkār*, fol. 190b.

al-Tirmidhī, and Abū Dāwūd among others, was the first thing created by God.<sup>7</sup> He further maintains that the cause of its existence is God's essence alone and that consequently no intermediary stands between it and its cause. Such being the case, it endures as long as its cause endures, and, since its cause is the eternal essence of God, it also is eternal.<sup>8</sup> A twelfth-century A.H. commentator on *al-Durrah al-Fākhīrah* adds at this point that the most exalted pen is identical with the first effect (*al-ma'lūl al-awwal*) or first intellect (*al-'aql al-awwal*) of the philosophers and also with what the Sufis call the first individuation or emanation (*al-ta'ayyun al-awwal*).<sup>9</sup>

As for what he means when he asserts that God has choice, al-Jāmī declares that he is in complete agreement with the theologians who say that God's choice means that if He wills to create the world, He creates it, and if He does not will to create the world, He does not create it. Like the theologians al-Jāmī accepts both of these hypothetical propositions as true. He differs from them, however, in his explanation of why they are true. According to the theologians both are true because each proposition contains a true antecedent and consequent. Al-Jāmī, however, like the philosophers, accepts only the first one as true because both its antecedent and consequent are true, and maintains that the second one is true only because its antecedent and consequent are both false. In other words, what he says is that it is impossible for God not to will to create the world and therefore impossible for the world not to exist.<sup>10</sup>

This, however, is basically the position of the philosophers, who make God a necessary agent. Nevertheless, to avoid portraying God as a mere mechanical agent compelled to create the world, al-Jāmī prefers to follow the theologians in attributing freedom and choice to God even though his interpretation of God's choice is closer to that of the philosophers than it is to that of the theologians. Furthermore, by affirming God's choice he is able to preserve his middle position between the two schools and thus avoid some of the censure that would be directed against the Sufis were their position identical with that of the philosophers.

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<sup>7</sup> al-Jāmī, *al-Durrah al-Fākhīrah*, pp. 28-29, *The Precious Pearl*, p. 57; Wensinck, *A Handbook of Early Muhammadan Tradition*, p. 49.

<sup>8</sup> al-Jāmī, *al-Durrah al-Fākhīrah*, p. 29, *The Precious Pearl*, p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> al-Husaynābādī, *al-Risālah al-Qudsīyah al-Ṭāhīrah bi-Sharḥ al-Durrah al-Fākhīrah*, fol. 116a.

<sup>10</sup> al-Jāmī, *al-Durrah al-Fākhīrah*, p. 28, *The Precious Pearl*, p. 57. Note that a hypothetical proposition is false only when its antecedent is true and its consequent is false.

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