THE PHILOSOPHERS AL-GHAZĀLĪ AND AVERROES ON NECESSARY CONNECTION AND THE PROBLEM OF THE MIRACULOUS

Barry S. Kogan
Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati

The 17th Discussion of Averroes' *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* examines the relation between efficient causes and their effects. At the same time, it also reveals both the fundamental point at issue between the philosophers, al-Ghazālī, and Averroes regarding causal efficacy and the basis for their divergent approaches to it. At the close of his own preface to the discussion, al-Ghazālī states this point rather succinctly, "It is necessary for us to discuss this matter [necessary connection] in order to assert the existence of miracles and for another reason, in order to preserve that belief which those who are perfect in belief have attained, namely, that God can do all things."[1] To al-Ghazālī, the affirmation of necessary connection plainly entails a corresponding denial of miracles and divine omnipotence, whereas a denial of necessary connection at least allows for, although it does not entail, an affirmation of miracles and divine omnipotence. As is well known, the philosophers and Averroes affirm necessary connection, while al-Ghazālī, for the most part, denies it. But does it thereby follow that the philosophers and Averroes deny miracles and divine omnipotence? It is this question which we hope to answer.

Given the conjunctive form of al-Ghazālī's initial observation, it is natural to begin by determining the precise scope of his claim against the philosophers. Does he want to assert simply that there are miracles, or that Deity is omnipotent with respect to all things, or both taken together?

In fact, neither the philosophers nor Averroes deny that there have been instances of miracles in the past. What

they do reject is the notion that God is absolutely omnipotent in the sense that He can sever the relation between causes and their effects. Because both the philosophers and Averroes regard this relationship as necessary, albeit in substantially different ways, they regard direct intervention on the part of God as being quite impossible. Indeed toward the end of the debate even al-Ghazālī backs away from the radical view that God has absolute power with respect to *all* things and lists several kinds of logical impossibilities which not even God can affect.[2] But whether the philosophers' and Averroes' denial of absolute omnipotence entails a denial of miracles as well remains an open question. It depends of course on how they define miracles or, in the absence of definition, what they cite as characteristic examples. This must await an analysis of the sources.

In general, however, it can be stated that their responses to the problem involve three different intellectual projects. While the philosophers deny divine omnipotence and assert necessary causal connections, they nonetheless wish to identify at least certain kinds of miracles as extraordinary instances of natural causation. By so doing, they hope to insure the possibility of scientific knowledge, which in their opinion properly pertains to the causes of things. Their aim is essentially epistemological.

Al-Ghazālī, of course, affirms omnipotence and denies necessary connections between causes and effects. In view of his treatment of agency, this commits him either to the view that every existent is miraculous, since it is created *ex nihilo* and with an instantaneous temporal beginning, or to the view that the miracles are only *extraordinary* moment-creations of God, not His ordinary, recurrent creations. Whichever it may be, al-Ghazālī's intention is clearly to lend support to a source of knowledge he already has, namely, Scripture, which affirms the omnipotence of God. His project, in the final analysis, is theological.

Averroes, for his part, agrees with the philosophers that Deity is not omnipotent and that the relations between causes and their effects are necessary, albeit in different senses. But he insists that the existence of miracles simply must not be doubted. For doing so compromises the principles by which moral virtue, itself a prerequisite of theoretical knowledge, is attained. Thus he attempts to separate his defense of necessary connection from the issue of miracles altogether, sharing thereby the philosophers' aim of insuring the possibility of scientific knowledge, but now from a practical as well as a theoretical standpoint. His aim is evidentially twofold: to protect the philosopher in his pursuit of knowledge from unwarranted interference by society, and to protect society from unwarranted assault on its moral and political foundations by philosophers. In examining Averroes' account of miracles, therefore, we shall find that his project is, broadly speaking, political.

Each of these three thinkers undertakes to outline and advance his project in the preface to Discussions 17 through 26, on "The Natural Sciences." The preface first states the philosophers' position on necessary connection, prognostication, prophecy, and miracles. This is followed by al-Ghazālī's brief criticism of their views and Averroes' evaluation of both positions. Our analysis of their respective positions will focus primarily on this introductory exchange rather than the body of Discussion 17 itself. We shall attempt first to outline the position of the philosophers, then that of al-Ghazālī, and finally that of Averroes toward both his philosophic and theological counterparts in the discussion.

The Philosophers on Miracles

The philosophers' conception of miracles is entirely determined by their assertion that the connection observed to exist between causes and effects is one of "consequence by necessity" *tiqtirān talāzum bi-'l-ḍarūra)* or inseparability. As this notion is then analyzed, two distinct propositions emerge: (1) there is no real capability *(maqdūr)* or possibility *('imkān)*, for the cause to exist without the effect, and (2) there is no real capability or possibility for the effect to exist without the cause.[3]

The first proposition claims that (a) causes have effects and that (b) causes necessitate their effects or bring them into existence necessarily. The second proposition asserts in turn that (a) effects have causes and (b) that effects must have causes. But it does not suggest that effects necessi-

tate their causes or *bring them into existence* necessarily. Interestingly, an occasionalist like al-Ghazālī could accept the second proposition if it were clear that the cause which any given effect *must* have, is God. A Humean could likewise accept it, on the assumption that the cause which any effect must have is a prior event that is regularly conjoined with it. But neither could accept the first proposition, as Avicenna, the chief representative of the philosophers, does.

What prompts him to link the two propositions together is his view that the relation between causes and their effects is characterized by reciprocity or mutual entailment. On this analysis, we find once again that causal necessity is presented as but another variety of logical necessity, namely, that which Avicenna claims to find in the domain of particular existents and events.[4] What is more, any interruption in this relation is *ex hypothesi* impossible, since anything that is "necessary of existence" is defined as something which cannot be supposed not to exist without the occurrence of an impossibility.[5] Any miracle, therefore, which is conceived as an interruption in the course of nature *(al-muʿjizāt al-khāriqa li-l-ʿadāt)* is thus ruled out of court *a priori*.

When confronted with narratives from the Qur'ān telling, for example, of Moses' staff being changed into a serpent, or the resurrection of the dead, or the splitting of the moon to herald the final Judgment, the philosophers either resort to allegory or question the authenticity of the text itself. Thus they interpret the miracle of the staff as an indication that the demonstrations, *in Moses' hands*, were sufficient to refute the views of the impious magicians. The resurrection connotes the end of ignorance, which is likened to death. The cleavage of the moon is something they are said to deny outright. In their view, only three kinds of miracles can occur, and these are not so much interruptions of the course of nature as they are extraordinary extensions of it.[6] All three involve the unusual psychic powers of prophets.

The first is imaginative revelation involving the prognostication of concrete events in the future. According to this theory, of which Avicenna is clearly the author,[7] forms,

including the causal laws of nature, emanate from the celestial Intelligences upon the souls of their respective spheres. Inasmuch as these celestial souls are associated with matter as a particularizing element and likewise have the power of producing representations qua souls, they are able to represent the particular concatenations of causes and effects which bring about concrete events in the future. In short, they represent future events in their particularity.

Those passages of the Qur'ān which speak of such events being inscribed on the Indelible Tablet by a Pen should therefore be taken to refer to the souls of the spheres and the separate Intelligences respectively. Now when the imaginative faculty of certain individuals achieves exceptional power over the five external senses, so as not to be distracted by them, they become suitably disposed to receive an emanation of these same representations from the celestial souls. Metaphorically they are said to observe the Indelible Tablet, since they can reveal the future in prophetic discourse.[8] This, for the philosophers, is a miraculous occurrence. The miracle does not consist in an interruption in the course of nature, for there is none. It is to be found rather in the extraordinary power and receptive capacity of the prophet's imagination.[9]

The second kind of miracle countenanced by the philosophers, i.e., Avicenna and his followers, is intellectual revelation, which they explain as extraordinary acumen. They observe that just as some individuals cannot solve theoretical problems in even very lengthy periods of time, certain others display such prodigious intellectual sagacity or power of conjecture *(quwa al-ḥads)*, that they can formulate demonstrative proofs to answer problems of this sort in the shortest possible time. With no more than the middle term of a syllogism or perhaps the major and the minor only, they can reconstruct the proof and, indeed, derive others from it in rapid succession.

Insight for such persons requires only the slightest hint. They require no human teacher to acquire their marvelous and comprehensive knowledge of the intelligible world. Learning by themselves, therefore, they progressively discover the links between the celestial and terrestrial realms

and in this respect apparently go on to know all of the intelligibles themselves *(fa-rabba nafsin muqaddasatin . . .*[10]*)*. Still, they do not acquire their knowledge entirely on their own, since fully actualized intellects do not exist essentially even in such extraordinary men as these. Rather it comes to them by emanative overflow from another Intelligence in which actual knowledge exists essentially. This is the universal Active Intelligence, which gives forms to all beings in the sublunar sphere.[11] While the prophet needs no human teacher, his prophecy obviously demands a divine one.

The third and final class of miracles according to the philosophers consists of those occurrences which apparently violate necessary causal connections in nature but are in fact only rare and extraordinary instances of them. These include such prophetic acts as summoning storms, bringing down thunderbolts, and producing earthquakes to punish the wicked. How can these phenomena be explained as natural events? The philosophers' account is once again presented within the framework of their psychology.

The human soul is not impressed upon the body of man as its form, but is a substance in its own right associated with the body[12] *(li'ana nafsahu laysat muntaba'atan fī-badanihi)*. The soul, moreover, is so constituted that it has both an impulse and a desire to regulate the activities of the body, while the body and its faculties are created to be governed by the soul. If it is possible for the soul to govern the members of the body with which it is associated, despite its essentially separate character, the philosophers reason that it should be equally possible for it to affect the behavior of other material bodies from which it is also separate. All that is required is a sufficiently high degree of productive or practical psychic power *(al-qūwa al-nafsiya al-'amalīya)*. When this level of influence has been attained, "these things [the aforementioned wonders] are generated from it without any apparent natural cause" *(wa-tatawalladu minhu hādhihi al-'umūr min ghairi ḥuḍūri sababin ṭabī'iyin ẓāhirin)*, but only when matter is properly disposed.[13] Clearly, however, natural causes which are not apparent and to which the soul of the prophet is causally related represent the means by which the event ultimately takes place. Once again, the

miraculous character of the event lies in the extraordinary psychokinetic powers of the prophet, not the absence or disruption of real causal connections, whether they be manifest or hidden.

This account of miracles presented by the philosophers draws upon two distinct theories of causation. One of these, as several scholars have noted, is the Stoic conception of "sympathy." The other is the Neoplatonic theory of emanation. What is not immediately evident, however, is that the two theories are essentially incompatible.

According to the doctrine of natural sympathy, everything in the world is interrelated with everything else. These reciprocal connections existing between the world's parts derive from the fact that it is an organic whole in an entirely literal sense. The world is represented as a living creature, animated by a soul which unites and pervades all things in it. The Stoic doctrine further characterizes these interconnections as causal, so that the operation of causal efficacy throughout the universe is in principle unrestricted. Causal "chains," such as they are, may proceed along vertical, horizontal, and altogether oblique paths in a criss-cross pattern, and in view of the world's animation, the links need not be physical or mechanical in all cases. Causal determinism in such a theory is absolute. Indeed it is, properly speaking, a fatalistic account. Avicenna's conception of animated spheres endowed with particular representations of all concatenations of causes, the notion of "indelibility" associated with the celestial Tablet, *i.e.*, these souls, and his theory of psychokinesis all reflect this Stoic doctrine of sympathy.

The second theory, that of emanation, asserts causal interrelations, to be sure, but they are universal. It is not claimed that everything is causally related to everything else. While causal connections can be established over considerable distances, and may even exist between things of entirely different orders, the fundamental pattern of causal efficacy exists in vertical chains only. The higher, more powerful, and more real entities overflow and thereby produce or otherwise affect things which are lower, less powerful, and less real. Causal chains may or may not intersect

by chance. But it is not suggested that all events, including these random intersections, could not have been otherwise or that their occurrence was known in advance by any of the hypostases. When Avicenna suggests therefore that imaginative and intellectual prophecy are an overflow from the celestial realm, that the prophet's soul is holy and akin to the divine, thereby having power over bodies in virtue of its higher rank, or that the miracle *may* not occur *if* matter is not properly disposed, we can identify characteristic elements of the theory of emanation.

The problem is that Avicenna's account of miracle is largely a conflation of the two theories rather than a synthesis. As such, it involves several serious inconsistencies. Either there are chance occurrences or there are not. If there are, then clearly delineable causal sequences or chains intersect at some one point. But for that very reason, they cannot intersect at all points or be causally interrelated at all points. Yet this is what the theory of sympathy asserts.

Secondly, it is difficult to see how the notion of causal chains makes sense in a theory where everything is causally related to everything else. Instead of identifiable lines of efficacy and influence, which can be initiated, diverted, or impeded, we have what has been called a block universe, where the identification of causal chains seems purely arbitrary. Particular effects are neither initiated, impeded, nor altered by particular causes, nor are they attributable to them. They are produced rather by the previous state of the universe as a whole, all of which is supposedly recorded in the celestial souls.

This raises a third difficulty. It would seem that knowledge, conceived as a capacity to identify and explain things by their causes is impossible—for ordinary men, for prophets, and even for the celestial souls themselves. For if Avicenna seriously accepts the Stoic thesis that everything is causally related to everything else, what the knower must know, whoever he may be, is nothing less than the interrelations of everything in the universe past, present, and future. These are surely infinite in number at any given moment and unquestionably so, given the philosophers' belief in the eternity of the universe. Thus whatever

the merits of the philosophers' account as an attempt to explain miracles within the framework of natural causation, it nevertheless founders by incorporating antithetical assumptions in its formulation.

Al-Ghazālī on Miracles

To the philosophers' account of miracles, al-Ghazālī offers, surprisingly enough, a qualified endorsement. He allows that "we do not deny anything of what they have mentioned and that [all] this may be the case regarding the prophets; nevertheless we do reject their being satisfied with only these cases."[14] On the face of it al-Ghazālī appears to have completely reversed himself on the issue. Yet the reversal is more apparent than real, for he has already denied the key assumption of Avicenna's account—the existence of inseparable, necessary connections between causes and their effects. Moreover, immediately after his assessment of the philosophers' account, he declares his intention is to affirm the occurrence of miracles, without qualification and thereby to give additional support to the doctrine of divine omnipotence.

In point of fact al-Ghazālī has conceded very little. What remains of the original theory is really quite harmless. Thus, for example, even al-Ghazālī's occasionalist interpretation of agency allows for God to act through intermediaries to achieve his purpose, whether these be angels, prophets, or ordinary persons. They are simply instruments of the Divine Will, not agents in their own right.

He likewise finds the notion of complete and irreversible determinism quite compatible with his Ashʿarite theological presuppositions. All that exists at any moment, he has argued, is created *ex nihilo* by Deity and determined in all respects by Him. Nothing, moreover, which is determined by God is alterable, for al-Ghazālī agrees with the philosophers that the Divine Will is eternal and unchanging.[15] Whatsoever He has willed must occur just as He willed it from eternity.

Finally, among the particular events in the philosophers' account of miracles, which are known and determined by the celestial souls, is the prophet's own prophecy and what-

ever miraculous activities he performs. In the absence of any genuine agency or causal efficacy on the part of the prophet, both his extraordinary mental endowments and their concomitant achievements are referred to the realm of divine activity and not to nature. Here again there should be little wonder that al-Ghazālī can accept this account. It is, given his understanding of it, a mirror-image of his own view.

Averroes on Miracles

Averroes' treatment of miracles is not so much a systematic exposition or analysis as it is a set of passing remarks, and even these are exceptionally brief, ambiguous, and scattered. Both their form and content have prompted the charge that Averroes failed "to fathom the problem of miracle to its depths"[16] by not providing a metaphysical framework to account for both the heterogeneous and extraordinary character of divine agency. Not only does he refrain from enlightening the credulous in this regard, he does nothing to convert the skeptic.[17] Most serious of all, it appears that what Averroes does say about miracles reduces them to the level of magic or sorcery.[18] In view of these criticisms, one is left with the impression that Averroes has offered no theoretical account of miracles in the *Tahāfut* and that his few observations on the issue empty the category of religious significance.

Are these criticisms valid? Has Averroes failed to do what he set out to do? Are his remarks on miracle devoid of religious import for him and other Muslims? In the analysis to follow, we shall attempt to show that Averroes did have a general view of miracles, but one which he tried to conceal. Such an aim would account for the apparent deficiency in his treatment of the subject. Similarly we wish to argue that Averroes did in fact carry out the project he set for himself, but that it was neither to enlighten the credulous nor to convert the skeptic. If anything he tried to reinforce the former's credulity and enlighten the latter's skepticism regarding nature and the function of miracles. To take him to task for not undertaking a different project would thus be beside the point. Finally, we hope to make

clear precisely what religious significance Averroes saw in his conception of miracles and likewise in his way of presenting that conception.

Averroes' account of miraculous events is prefaced by the observation that the ancient philosophers, on whose behalf he speaks, deliberately refrained from making any statement about miracles *(fa-laysa fīhi li-l-qudamāi min al-falāsifati qaul)*.[19] They did so despite their awareness that such occurrences were well known all over the ancient world.[20] The reason for their silence lay in their conviction that miracles and belief in them are among the fundamental principles establishing religious laws *(fa-'innahā mabādi' al-sharā'i')*.[21]

Now the aim of all such laws is to enable men to attain a life of virtue. Since a virtuous life is in itself an absolute prerequisite for studying the theoretical sciences, Averroes argues that one must not engage in a theoretical investigation of the principles which cause virtue before one is competent to do so, that is, before one has attained virtue and acquired the intellectual training necessary for this kind of study. Even after both have been acquired, when the philosopher may be entitled to investigate the subject, he is still obliged to acknowledge these principles without qualification. "It should be stated in regard to them [i.e., the religious laws] that their principles [i.e., miracles] are divine things which exceed the grasp of human intellects."[22] Averroes, not surprisingly, follows his own principle when he maintains that the occurrence of miracles is not doubted *(lā yushakku wujūdihā)* and that their modality is something divine and beyond the grasp of human intellects *(huwa 'amru al-ilāhiy muʿjaz ʿan 'idrāk al-ʿuqūl al-'insāniyaj)*.[23] He does so, however, as a matter of practical, not theoretical, necessity.

These prefatory remarks show that while the philosopher must refrain from making statements about miracles, in view of their status as practical principles of the law and even his own discipline, he is not prohibited from having views on the subject. Moreover, while he may not investigate such principles before attaining virtue, nothing prevents his investigating them afterward. At one point Averroes even allows that a trained thinker might be able

to explain one of the principles of religion, that is, to disclose its causes. But if this is the case, he is duty-bound not to reveal it, lest he undermine the law.[24] More important for our analysis, however, is the way in which he characterizes miracles. They are divine things which contribute to the attainment of virtue. They are beyond the capacity of intellect to understand. Finally they have causes of which we are ignorant.

Had he dropped the subject here, as by rights he should have done, we would hardly have much material for a theory of miracles. Indeed the criticism leveled against him would have been correct. But Averroes goes on and expressly indicates that he is sensitive to those who would not be satisfied with his passing over the matter in silence.[25] Thus, in the context of evaluating Avicenna's position, he proceeds to say more about miracles, but systematically introduces ambiguity where he would have surely preferred to say nothing at all. Since he is obliged to conceal his views, even though the philosophers and al-Ghazālī had revealed theirs, Averroes can allow himself no more than a compromise—to conceal and reveal them at the same time. His procedure on miracles then is simply a special case of his method in the *Tahāfut* as a whole. He may very well have fathomed the problem and come to a conclusion, but he cannot take all of his readers with him.

Averroes' first step is to dissociate himself from the *obviously* naturalistic account of the philosophers. Thus he immediately casts doubt upon it by suggesting, characteristically, that only Avicenna maintains it. His rejection of the theory is confirmed when he goes on to argue that even if the facts of the case were verified and it were possible for a body to be altered by what is neither a body nor a power within it without absurdity,[26] the cause mentioned by Avicenna would only be a possible explanation. In short, it is neither a probable nor a conclusive one as far as Averroes is concerned.

But why not? Averroes' answer, as we shall see, indicates not only his difference with Avicenna, but, taken with his other remarks about miracles, also expresses the main elements of his own view.

> . . . Not everything which is possible in its own nature *(fī ṭab'ihī)* is possible for man to do. For what is possible to man is well known, and most of the things which are possible in themselves *(fī-'anfusihā)* are impossible for him. Therefore the truth that the prophet interrupts the natural course of things is impossible for man, but possible in itself *(fī-nafsihī)*. Nor is it necessary for one to assume that things which are impossible in regard to the mind are possible for the prophets, and if you reflect carefully on the miracles whose existence has been verified, you will find that they are of this kind. The most evident among them is the Book of God Almighty, the existence of, which has not departed from the [natural] course of things as is assumed by way of what is traditionally heard . . . but rather it has been proved to be a miracle by sense perception and reflection for all men who have existed and who will exist even to the Day of Judgment. In this regard, these miracles [the repeated miracle of the *Qur'ān* itself] are superior to the other miracles.[27]

The defect in Avicenna's analysis of miracles is that he ascribes them entirely to the extraordinary powers of the prophet's soul. Averroes, on the other hand, maintains that while the events ascribed to prophets are logically possible in themselves, physically possible, and nonetheless outside the usual course of nature, they are still impossible for men to bring about. For what man qua man is capable of doing is already well established. The "truth" is that such extraordinary acts of interrupting nature are possible only for prophets.

This is unusual. What Avicenna ascribes to the soul of the prophet as a human being, Averroes apparently ascribes to prophets as superhuman beings. Now if Averroes' point is simply that prophets are not like ordinary men, he hardly differs in this respect from his predecessor. Yet he has indicated just the opposite by criticizing Avicenna. If we take his criticism seriously, Averroes apparently means that prophets are not men at all, since miracles are possible for them but not for men! But this is surely an astonishing conclusion and, indeed, one which orthodoxy itself does not require. Is there any basis for supposing that this was his view?

No textual evidence appears elsewhere in the *Tahāfut* or in his commentaries, to my knowledge, to support this

supposition.[28] It is worth noting, moreover, that this "conclusion" is not explicitly stated by Averroes. It is merely an inference which not all of his readers would have taken the trouble to notice or to question. In addition it involves a far more dubious thesis than Avicenna's view, which Averroes had already criticized as unverified. Lastly we should recall that Averroes informs his readers quite explicitly that it is obligatory for the learned to acknowledge the miracles of the prophets as necessary principles for the attainment of virtue. He obviously does this even to the point of suppressing an obviously false premise: that prophets are not members of the human species. This peculiarity in his account is really a device for concealment, and it arises, in our view, because of Averroes' need to affirm the principles of the laws while stating the truth as unobtrusively as possible.

What then is the truth about miracles which he wished to conceal? It appears to be that miracles, insofar as their existence can be verified, are purely spontaneous natural events in the sense which Aristotle describes in Book II of the *Physics*. From all that Averroes has said regarding such occurrences, it is clear he thinks that (1) they are logically possible; (2) they are also physically possible, but disruptive of nature; (3) they are impossible for men to perform (even, we may add, men who are prophets); (4) they are caused; (5) their causes are unknown to us, although a philosopher could conceivably discover them; (6) they may serve particular ends insofar as they are principles of the laws, e.g., enabling men, through belief in the law, to achieve virtue. These same features are matched virtually point for point with the Stagirite's account of spontaneous events.

Such events plainly occur, for men are familiar with events which happen neither always nor for the most part. To occur at all, they must be logically possible and physically possible.[29] Aristotle speaks of them, moreover, as being contrary to nature, which acts the same always or for the most part.[30] Spontaneous events, unlike chance events, are not brought about by moral agents, although they may happen to them.[31] They do, however, possess external causes. Since the number of possible causes is nonetheless infinite or indefinite, they are, practically speaking, unknowable.[32] Lastly, events of this kind may still be "for the sake of something," since they "include whatever may be done as a result of thought or of nature."[33]

Whichever occurrences can be verified as possessing these characteristics qualify as miracles for Averroes, if the end they serve is to establish religious laws.[34] If this is the case, they must be acknowledged as divine. But the "truest" miracle, in his view, is the Qur'ān itself. It is such a miracle precisely because it does not violate the course of nature. Here Averroes is not speaking for the miraculousness of the Qur'ān in terms of its flawless Arabic style, as traditional interpreters do. His point is rather that the Qur'ān can be shown to enable men to attain virtue and happiness in all generations in the most effective way. If anything, it assists in realizing the specific natures of men by means of the religious regimen and images of reward it presents to men. Compared to the Qur'ān, therefore, all other miracles or spontaneous natural events which impress the masses with the truth of the prophet's message are distinctly inferior, for they are neither repeatable nor do they impress all men. This, in essence, is Averroes' theory of miracles.

From the above analysis, it is clear that Averroes did not regard miracles as heterogeneous and freely chosen incursions of the divine will into the domain of natural causation. Given the radical divergence between his view and the apparent meaning of the Qur'ān, his project would hardly be to enlighten the ordinary believer. Indeed, by constantly emphasizing the obligation of the philosophers to pass over the subject in silence, it is clear that he felt such enlightenment was positively dangerous for the mass of the faithful. Its chief result, as he had himself observed, would be to deprive them of their belief without providing anything in its place which they would be equipped to grasp.[35]

What then of Averroes' implicit obligation to convert the skeptic? If the skeptic were a genuine philosopher, Averroes suggests that he would readily acknowledge that the miracles which constitute the foundations of the religious laws were "divine things" and beyond the grasp of

human minds. His conversion, of course, would be to an appreciation of their practical significance for a social order founded upon a religious law, not to a theoretical affirmation of direct divine intervention in the course of nature. If, on the other hand, the skeptic were to persist publicly in his questioning or outright denial of the Scriptual accounts of miracles, Averroes maintains that he is no longer a skeptic to be considered susceptible, in principle at least, of conversion. He is, on the contrary, a perverse and heretical figure, and the ultimate penalty Averroes reserves for him is execution. Such a man, in his view, simply undermines the foundations of society. He further impairs the social means by which all its members are led to virtue and happiness in accordance with their capacities. Clearly, then, whatever the intrinsic limitations of Averroes' views in the *Tahāfut*,[36] he does not fail to carry out the project he set for himself.

Does he then reduce miraculous events to the status of magic or sorcery? Majid Fakhry has suggested that Averroes does just that by emptying miracles of their supernatural content. Once this course is adopted, he argues, "we are left with nothing but an extraordinary phenomenon which is incapable of insertion into the natural processes, and at the same time is without special theological relevance. But this is the very definition of magic and sorcery."[37]

Taking this definition as it stands, however, the only criterion which is shared by Averroes' conception of miracles, as we have understood it, is their status as extraordinary phenomena. *Ex hypothesi* they are inserted into the order of natural processes, for spontaneous events have causes. They arise from the intersection of causal sequences at unexpected points. By the same token they are hardly without theological significance for Averroes. Such events, as he has repeatedly stressed, are the principles on which religion is based, on which both the learned and the masses are brought to virtue and salvation, and on which any theoretical understanding of God as the Artisan of the universe is rendered possible.[38] To be sure, we are more inclined to think of Averroes' theological enterprise as a philosophical rather than a dogmatic one. Still, there seems

to be no reason to claim that his novel theory of miracles was without special theological relevance to those in his *milieu* who were equipped to understand it. A philosophical theology is a theology nonetheless.

NOTES

1. Averroes, *Tahāfut-al-Tahāfut*, p. 514. The Arabic text suggests specifically that God is all-powerful with respect to any thing, that is, in the distributive sense. ". . . *'anna allāha qādirun 'ala kulli shay'in.*"

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 536-537.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 512.

4. Avicenna, as we might expect, likewise presents both propositions in conjunction. "The existence of every effect is necessary together with the existence of its cause, and the existence of its cause necessitates the existence of the effect from it." *Al-Shifā': Al-Ilāhiyyāt* I, p. 167.

5. Avicenna, *Al-Najāt*, p. 224.

6. Averroes, *Tahāfut.*, p. 512.

7. Avicenna suggests independent causal sequences or emanations to account for both purely intellectual revelations and imaginative ones. Al-Fārābi, on the other hand, maintains that only emanations from the separate Intelligences and especially the Active Intelligence produce prophecy. In intellectual revelation, the emanation overflows upon the rational faculty alone, while in imaginative prophecy, it overflows upon the imaginative faculty. No imaginative representations, in his view, derive from the celestial realm as such. For a thorough exposition of their views on this and related subjects, see F. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), pp. 30-45 plus notes.

8. Averroes, *Tahāfut.*, pp. 512, 494-497.

9. However successful Avicenna's theory may be in accounting for prognostication, it involves a number of inconsistencies with other elements in his system. Perhaps the most obvious of these is the assertion that forms and representations emanate from the Intelligences and Souls which function as efficient causes of the prophet's predictive knowledge. Given Avicenna's definition of efficient causes, it should be pure existence which emanates from these celestial beings, not intelligible forms and imaginative representations, which are both associated with essence.

It should also be noted that Avicenna seems to confuse the functions of imagination and sensation in the prophet's acquisition of predictive knowledge. The imagination may conserve, combine, or produce images, but by Avicenna's own standards, it hardly sees or apprehends anything, least of all images from the imaginative faculty of another soul.

Finally the whole process of acquiring knowledge seems to be reversed. Instead of deriving universal propositions from particulars, the celestial Souls evidently derive knowledge of concrete particulars from universals. But how is this possible in the absence of any concrete

data? At most the celestial Souls would be able to produce imaginative representations of universal notions or propositions, but not of particular events as such. For not even "universal" causal laws entail particular statements about a cause and its effect in the absence of additional premises referring to the particulars in question.

10. Averroes, *Tahāfut*, pp. 512-513. The Latin translation of Calonymos differs here from the original. It states that in learning by themselves, such individuals establish a kind of kinship *(propinquitas)* with the pure and holy celestial souls. In the Arabic it is stated that "the possessor of a holy, pure soul may go on to know all of the intelligibles." The Latin is apparently based on a manuscript variation of *rabbun* (master, possessor), namely, *qarbun* (near, akin to).

11. For a fuller account of the intellectual revelation bestowed upon the prophet and its relation to the theory of emanation, see F. Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, pp. 30-36 and his accompanying notes. A critical discussion of Avicenna's arguments for prophecy appears in M. E. Marmura's "Avicenna's Psychological Proof of Prophecy," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22 (January 1963): 49-56.

12. Averroes, *Tahāfut*, p. 513. *Cf.* F. Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), pp. 8-12, 99-100. The dualistic assumption implicit in this statement evidently raises no difficulties for Avicenna. Even if it were the case, moreover, that the relation of soul to body was in fact comparable to that of ruler to servant, this still fails to explain *how* a separate soul-substance exerts any influence whatever on a body.

13. Averroes, *Tahāfut*, pp. 513-514.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 514.

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 11, 13.

16. Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroes and Aquinas* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), p. 104.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

19. Averroes, *Tahāfut*, p. 514.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 527.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 514, 527.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 527. Here, too, the Latin text departs from the Arabic of the *Tahāfut*. In the original Averroes suggests that miracles must be acknowledged as divine things which exceed the grasp of human intellects *("yūjibu 'an yuqāla fihā 'anna mabād'aha hiya 'umūr 'ilāhiya tafūq al-'uqūl al-'insāniya")*. The Latin text omits this reference to exceeding the grasp of the mind. "Et quod debet dici de eis, est quod principia eorum sunt res divinae in quibus convenire debent intellectus humani ad confitendum eis cum ignorantia causarum eorum."

23. *Ibid.*, p. 514.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 528.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 516.

26. It is evidently the prophet's soul that is being described in this passage. It is neither a body nor a power in a body, since it is not impressed in the body in Avicenna's view.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 515.

28. In his procmium to the *Long Commentary to the Physics*, Averroes does suggest that the term "man" is predicated equivocally of ordinary men, untrained in the natural and theoretical sciences, and genuine philosophers who are so trained. But it is quite clear from the context of his remark that the primary signification of "man" is the philosopher. The derivative signification is the ordinary man. Only the philosopher is a man in the fullest sense. While it was common in Arabic texts to refer to philosophers by such epithets as "divine" and "holy," these were largely honorific terms, not indications that philosophers were not members of the human species. "Et in hac scientia manifestum est quod predicatio nominis hominis perfecti a scientia speculativa, et non perfecti, sive non habentis aptitudinem quod perfici possit est aequivoca; sicut nomen hominis quod praedicatur de homine vivo et de homine mortuo, sive praedicatio hominis de rationali et lapideo." *Prooimium Averrois in Libros Physicorum*, fol. 1vaH *(Antiqua Translatio)*.

29. Aristotle, *Physics*, 2,4, 196b14.

30. *Ibid.*, 2:5, 197b34-35.

31. *Ibid.*, 2:6, 197b1-17.

32. *Ibid.*, 2:6, 197b20.

33. *Ibid.*, 2:5, 196b22-23.

34. Our interpretation of Averroes' theory of miracles as spontaneous natural events rather than heterogeneous incursions of Deity into the natural course of events receives additional confirmation from the following facts:

(1) Averroes consistently speaks of miracles as the principles of religious laws in the plural *(al-shara'i')*. Yet it would hardly be acceptable to suppose that the Deity confirms the truth of several distinct and often contradictory revelations by deliberate intervention, while it is conceivable that a variety of impressive, spontaneous events could be taken to authenticate several revelations, at least in the view of the masses. Clearly miracles would have little probative force in themselves.

(2) In fact the learned do not even look to miracles to justify their belief in prophets, according to Averroes; belief in prophets is justified by their ability to explain hidden things *(al-'i'lām bi-l-ghā'ibāt*, that is, to speak convincingly about the nature and actions of God and the angels and to establish religious Laws *(wad' al-sharā'i')*. Again such an attitude is more likely in the case of chance spontaneous events than in the case of divine incursions into nature or superhuman acts of prophets. *Averroes, Tahāfut*, p. 516.

(3) Averroes insists that the philosopher is obliged to choose the best religion of the time in which he lives. He must also believe that the best existing religion will be superseded by the appearance of others which are better still—a rather shocking admission for one who spoke earlier of the Qur'ān as a repeatedly verifiable miracle. One would hardly

expect this to occur by divine intervention, if Mohammed is the *seal* of the prophets. Nor would it be obligatory to hold it *will* happen, if miracles represent the superhuman powers of prophets; for what makes it necessary that those powers ever be exercised? Spontaneous events, however, as the outcome of intersecting causal chains would have to occur from time to time on the assumption of causal necessity, which is just the thesis Averroes defends in this discussion. *Ibid.*, p. 583.

(4) In the *Long Commentary to the Physics*, Averroes takes up an interpretation of chance, which proposes that it is a cause in its own right and that this cause is mysterious and divine. The comment does not specify whether the divine cause is thought to be God, or some other superhuman agency. Nevertheless Averroes' response to it is clear. He denies that chance is an independent, unknowable cause, distinct from the traditional four, and he likewise notes that Aristotle passes over in silence the view of those who regard this cause as divine. But here the reason for his silence is not that the principles of religious laws are at stake. It is rather because Averroes regards this view as irrational. ". . . Incoepit inducere tertiam sectam et sunt illi, qui concedunt ipsum esse causa et dicunt quod nullus scit quidditatem eius, sed est res divina. Et tacuit istos, quia iste sermo est irrationabilis, sc. ut sit hic causa ignorata naturaliter. Et contradiction eorum est demonstrando eis quid sit casus." See *In Libros Physicorum*, t. c. 47, fol. 66 rA. *cf. Physics*, 2.4, 196b5-7. While Averroes' comment does not directly prove that miracles, which he calls divine things, are instances of chance and spontaneity, it clearly rules out the notion of miracles as examples of divine, *i.e.*, superhuman, interruptions of the course of nature. Indirectly, however, by the appearance of the expression *res divina* and the reference to Aristotle's silence, Averroes establishes a clear connection, in our view, between the problem of chance and spontaneity, and that of miracles.

(5) In his *Commentary to Plato's "Republic,"* Averroes at one point speaks of "the miraculous" in a thoroughly unguarded, unselfconscious manner, expressing what he naturally believed the term to mean. After arguing that it would be impossible for every individual to attain all of the virtues, he goes on to suggest by contrast, "if it were possible for these perfections to be combined in one man, this would be considered difficult, if not miraculous. The usual situation is that each and every kind of human being is disposed toward some particular one of these perfections." Here again the miraculous is presented as both logically and naturally possible, but extremely unlikely. *Averroes on Plato's "Republic,"* trans. Ralph Lerner (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1974), p. 86.

35. Averroes, *Tahāfut*., p. 356.

36. *Ibid*., pp. 527, 586-587.

37. Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism*, p. 108.

38. Averroes, *Tahāfut*, p. 527; *cf.* Averroes, *On the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, trans. George F. Mourani (London: Luzac and Co., Ltd., 1961), p. 44.