25 GODINA MEĐUNARODNOG FORUMA BOSNA / 25 YEARS OF INTERNATIONAL FORUM BOSNIA

PRVI DIO

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Uredili
Fatima ✳ Veispahić
Desmond ✳ Maurer
Rusmir ✳ Mahmutćehajić

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IBN ARABI ON THE ONTOLOGY OF TRUST

William C. Chittick

In a world where people often relegate God to the realm of illusion and look on "trust in God" as a psychological crutch, to speak about trust as an actual dimension of reality must seem odd. People would rather imagine that trust is something we should have in our favorite ideology, or perhaps science, or technology, or our doctors, or some politician. Most people agree that we should trust in change, given that the current situation is unsustainable.

As an antidote to the fickleness of modern versions of trust, it may be useful to reflect on the views of Ibn Arabi (d. 1240), arguably the greatest of all Muslim theologians and philosophers. His insights into the manner in which human nature is utterly dependent on trust may help us understand why we are making a hash of our world, and why every change in which we trust eventually turns out for the worse. Before looking at what he has to say about trust, let me first provide some general background for those unfamiliar with the Islamic tradition.

1. Basic Givens

Islamic praxis is built on five acts, called the Five Pillars. These include the daily ritual prayers and the pilgrimage to Mecca. But the first and foremost act is to bear witness that "There is no god but God" and that "Muhammad is God's messenger." This act of "bearing witness," Shahadah (*shahāda*) in Arabic, is presupposed in every Muslim.

It is important to understand that the two halves of the Shahadah have different orientations. By testifying that Muhammad is God's messenger, people acknowledge that God sent Muhammad with a message, namely the Divine Word known as the Quran,

which offers guidance to the human race. Trust in the truthfulness of the Messenger and the divine origin of the message plays an important role. Without such trust, people would have no reason to pay attention to the message.

The first half of the Shahadah, however, is not contingent on the revelation of the Quran or trust in its message. It is not necessary to acknowledge the authority of the Quran and Muhammad to bear witness that "There is no god but God," a statement that the Quran attributes to all prophets (traditionally numbered as 124,000). Known as "the word of asserting unity" (*kalimat al-tawḥīd*), this statement makes no reference to historical circumstances, nor are people expected to accept it on the basis of trust. Generally blind acceptance and rote repetition of these words are considered worthless. This is because the understanding of *tawḥīd* has always been considered innate to human nature, without regard to time and place. For thoughtful Muslims over the centuries, *tawḥīd* has appeared not as an item of belief but rather as an assertion of fact, much like "two plus two equals four."

The Muslim philosophers looked on *tawḥīd* as a self-evident truth, in no real need of proof. They were concerned rather with working out its implications for understanding the universe and the nature of the human situation. The great scholars who are often looked back upon in admiration as "scientists" in something like the modern sense of this word were representatives of the philosophical tradition. They were not concerned simply with mathematics, astronomy, medicine, optics, and other such fields. They also investigated psychology (the nature of the human soul) and ethics (the science of transforming the soul) along with metaphysics (the exposition of Ultimate Reality). The modern reading of Islamic history according to which science flourished and then was quashed by religious "orthodoxy" is rooted in many contemporary prejudices, not least the common belief that science is the only source of trustworthy knowledge. Such a reading remains oblivious to the fact that the Muslim "scientists" of the past were also theologians, metaphysicians, psychologists, and ethicists. They saw no contradiction or opposition between physics and metaphysics, geology and theology, biology and morality, but rather considered all of them branches of the overarching vision of *tawḥīd*, which affirmed that all truths are rooted in a Single Truth, that of the One Reality.

Despite the fact that the Muslim philosophers were often criticized for raising questions about the authority of the Quran and Muhammad—or at least about the authority of the interpretations offered by jurists and Kalam experts—few if any of them ever questioned the truth of *tawḥīd*. In effect they said, "Of course there is no god but God. This is simply to say that there is nothing real but the True Reality and that there is no True Being but that which is necessarily so. Our concern as philosophers is to investigate the nature of this True and Necessary Being." From Avicenna onward, the most general philosophical designation for this One Reality was *wujūd* (Existence or Being), and philosophy itself was sometimes defined as "the study of *wujūd* qua *wujūd*." The philosophers wanted to understand being per se, not simply the beings that make up the universe, nor the reports about beings that have come by way of the prophets. And they wanted to understand being for themselves, with their own God-given intelligence, not by trusting in what was transmitted from the prophets or from the authorities in the sciences like Aristotle.[1]

a. Tawḥīd

The sentence of *tawḥīd* is generally understood to have two basic implications. First is that the reality of God is absolute, and second that the reality of everything else is relative. The first standpoint asserts that God's reality is absolute because nothing is truly real but the Real (*al- ḥaqq*, one of the primary names of God). The typical theological discussion, based on the names and attributes of God mentioned in the Quran, explains that saying "God is merciful" amounts to asserting that God alone is merciful, and nothing else deserves the attribution of mercy to it.

Saying that God "acts" means that there is no true agent or actor but God (*lā fāʿila illa'llāh*, as al-Ghazali liked to say). Any name or attribute that God ascribes to himself in the Quran designates the same One Reality and indicates that this Reality alone deserves to be called by the name.

The second standpoint of *tawḥīd* addresses the status of "everything other than God," which is the basic definition of the

1   On the primary importance of knowing by way of personal realization rather than by parroting the words of others, see my *Science of the Cosmos, Science of the Soul: The Pertinence of Islamic Cosmology in the Modern World* (Oxford 2007).

world or cosmos. When we refer to individual beings in terms of life or knowledge or mercy or justice or love or any of the other divine attributes, the discussion must be taken with a grain of salt. In fact, all such discussions refer to qualities of the Supreme Reality that have been made present in things by the creative act of the Sole Agent.

Any reality other than God is derivative. Avicenna liked to carry out this discussion in terms of necessity and possibility (or contingency). In his way of putting things, all real qualities of the Real—what he commonly called the Necessary *Wujūd*—are necessary (*wājib*) in the Real itself, but merely possible (*mumkin*) in anything else. Inasmuch as the Necessary *Wujūd* is itself, it stands infinitely beyond the universe. Inasmuch as it gives existence to the world, its qualities appear necessarily in the possible things that we know as the universe (possibilities which are, in his terms, "necessary through the Other," not through themselves).

b. Two Commands

One way to understand the absence of historical reference in the first half of the Shahadah and the historical grounding of the second half is to look at the concept of *amr*, "command" or "commandment." This Quranic term is central to the way Muslims have dealt with the world and society. In its most obvious meaning—that which attracts the attention of jurists and the Kalam experts—it designates God's commandments to human beings, much like the ten commandments of the Bible.

When theologians undertook to analyze the meaning of the word *amr* in the Quran, however, they recognized that it also refers to God's creative act. For example, the Quran says, "His command, when He desires a thing, is to say to it 'Be!', and it comes to be" (36:82). This command has nothing to do with instructions concerning right activity. It is addressed to all things other than God. The theologians referred to it with expressions like "the creative command" (*al-amr al-khalqī*) and "the engendering command" (*al-amr al-takwīnī*). In contrast, they referred to the command to right activity with terms like "the religious command" (*al-amr al-dīnī*) and "the prescriptive command" (*al-amr al-taklīfī*).

The creative command brings all things into existence. Verses that speak of it are asserting God's unity, which is to say that they

tell us that there is no agent but God, no speaker but God, no creator but God, no bestower of being but God. Moreover, Islamic theology in its various forms insists that the creative Word is eternal while exercising its effects in the cosmos through the endless unfolding of temporal succession, which is to say that the creative command re-creates the universe at each instant. Everything is obedient to this divine command because the Necessary Being alone bestows existence on things moment-by-moment.

In contrast, the religious command can be disobeyed. It provides guidance to humans in keeping with the historical situation, which in Islamic terms is acknowledged by the second half of the Shahadah, "Muhammad is God's messenger." It addresses people as free agents and holds them responsible for the manner in which they exercise their freedom. The fact of their freedom—however limited it may be—calls forth guidance from the Supreme Reality, and failure to take full advantage of this guidance can lead to negative consequences. In the non- theistic language usually favored by the philosophers, the discussion of the consequences of freedom for human becoming has striking similarities with issues that arise as soon as Hindu and Buddhist philosophers discuss karma, the law of cause and effect.

c. Human Nature

If the religious command responds to human freedom, where does freedom come from? The typical mythic answer goes back to God's purpose in creating the world. As a conscious, powerful, loving, and wise Being—and in fact as the only reality properly described by these attributes—God must have a purpose in creating humans the way he does, that is, by putting them into a situation where they are forced to deal with freedom and responsibility. As Ibn Arabi among others often remarks, people are "compelled to have free choice." God's purpose in creating the universe is commonly explained by citing the extra-Quranic divine saying, "I was a Hidden Treasure and I loved to be recognized, so I created the creatures in order that I would be recognized." In other words, God created the cosmos to disclose his own nature and to be recognized by others for what he is. He wanted others to share in the bounty of unlimited reality, which embraces all good, consciousness, and joy. In order to share it, he had to create something

worthy of receiving it, and that worthiness to receive the unlimited is precisely the job description of human beings.

A typical way to explain this human worthiness is to refer to the Biblical statement, "God created Adam in His image," though in the version voiced by Muhammad, it can better be translated "God created Adam in His form [*ṣūra*]." The Quran makes the point by saying that God created humans to act as his vicegerents in the earth, and, in order to make them worthy of this task, he taught them *all* the names (2:30-31). In other words, primordial human nature embraces all awareness, consciousness, and understanding, so people have the capacity to know everything that exists. That this is in fact the human situation is a universal intuition, driving not only the Buddhist and Hindu search for enlightenment, but also the quest of modern science for omniscience.

In this way of looking at things, the human role in the cosmos is to be the conscious, subjective, knowing, wise, compassionate, and loving pole of manifest reality, and the role of other things is to provide the passive and receptive means through which human beings can develop and actualize their potentialities, perfect their understanding and awareness, conform themselves to the Real, act as God's representatives in the universe, close the gap between the Creator and the created, and recognize God for what he is. In order to fulfill this role, human beings need guidance, and providing guidance is the role of the prophets.

Islamic thought is rooted in three principles. The first is *tawḥīd*, as voiced in the first half of the Shahadah. The second is prophecy, the specifically Islamic version of which is voiced in the second half of the Shahadah. The third is Return (*maʿād*), though the Arabic word is often translated as "eschatology."

The first principle explains reality as it is, and the second sets down the path that must be followed if one wishes to live up to human potential. The third provides the existential rationale for the first two, which is to say that it explains the urgency of the message. It says that everything that has come from God—that is, the universe and all that it contains—is on its way back to where it came from.

The texts explain two sorts of return in keeping with the two sorts of command. The return demanded by the creative command is compulsory (*iḍṭirārī*), because all things that come to exist in

this world must also cease to exist in this world. As the Quran puts it, "Everything is perishing but His face" (28:88).

The second sort of return, which correlates with the religious command, is different because it is contingent on free choice (*ikhtiyārī*). God commands people to live their lives in certain ways, but he does not force them to do so. Nonetheless, the circumstances of their existence force them to make choices—"they are compelled to have free choice." Right choices will most likely lead to a happy state in the long term; wrong choices will probably not. It is here that the law of cause and effect—karma if you prefer—displays its activity in the invisible realms of posthumous becoming.

2. Ontology

Let me now turn to Ibn Arabi. He shares with many theologians and Sufis a focus on explaining the manner in which *tawḥīd* can be put into practice, that is, how the religious command should be observed. He shares with Avicenna and other philosophers the concern to understand reality in terms of *wujūd* per se, that is, the Necessary Being that gives rise to possible things by means of the creative command.

Although *wujūd* as used in philosophical and theological texts is typically translated into English as "being" and/or "existence," its literal sense is finding, perceiving, feeling, and enjoying. Philosophers took the passive sense of the word's basic meaning— "to be found"—as the designation for that which exists, in whatever modality it may be found. Some of them paid little attention to the literal sense of the word, others always kept it in mind. Certainly, for Ibn Arabi and later Islamic philosophy, the sense of "finding" is never ignored. For them, that which is found—the object out there—can never be divorced from the subject that finds. To speak of *wujūd*, in other words, is to speak not only of existence but also of awareness, consciousness, and knowing.

This is clearly the case in Avicenna. When discussing the Necessary *Wujūd*—that which is and cannot not be—he says that it has several concomitant attributes. These include not only unity and eternity, but also knowing, desiring, power, wisdom, and generosity. These are hardly qualities that are nowadays

associated with existence per se. When we look at Ibn Arabi, we see that he keeps the multivalence of the word *wujūd* in the forefront. "Existence" or "being" cannot suffice as its translation. We would do better to translate the word with the Sanskrit expression used in reference to Atman, that is, *sat-chit-ananda*, "being-consciousness-bliss"—not least because these three meanings are all present in the etymological sense of the word *wujūd*.

Let me now try to summarize, as briefly as possible, Ibn Arabi's position on what he calls *al-wujūd al-ḥaqq*, that is, the Real *Wujūd*, which by definition embraces infinite being, infinite consciousness, and infinite bliss, not to mention all other real qualities of the Real. In the simplest analysis of the way things actually are, there is no god but God, which is to say that there is no *wujūd* but the Real *Wujūd*, and everything other than the Real *Wujūd* is the manifestation of this *Wujūd*.

As infinite and absolute, the Real *Wujūd* is unknowable to anything that is finite and relative, that is, to anything other than itself. Human knowledge of this *Wujūd* is not in fact knowledge of it in itself, but rather knowledge of its self-disclosure (*tajallī*), which takes three basic forms: the cosmos as a whole, human beings as conscious subjects, and scripture, that is, revelation of guidance to the prophets. By knowing the world, the self, and scripture, people can come to know the self-disclosure of *Wujūd*. In other words, they can come to know the Real *Wujūd* in the measure of their capacity to actualize the attributes of *wujūd* that our latent in their own divine form.

When the One *Wujūd* discloses itself, it becomes manifest as an infinite variety of things and countless modalities of consciousness. We can say that this diversity comes forth *ex nihilo* in the sense that things do not exist in the world before God says "Be!" to them. Notice, however, the phrasing of the Quranic verses concerning the creative command: "When He desires a *thing*, He says to it 'Be!' and it comes to be." One of Ibn Arabi's many contributions to Islamic thought is his clarification of the nature of the "things" (*shayʾ*) to which God says "Be!" Before they are addressed by the creative command, these things do not exist, yet, despite their nonexistence, they are objects of God's omniscience, known to him eternally. They are, in other words, the infinite possibilities of being and consciousness that are latent in the Real *Wujūd*.

God's self-disclosure, then, is nothing other than the fruit of the creative command, which is the word "Be!" Viewed as a divine attribute, this command is one like the Commander, but as a divine self-disclosure, it is infinitely diverse in keeping with the infinite diversity of things. From this point of view, *Wujūd* has an infinity of self-disclosures, though each of them is one, just like the One from which each emerges. Given that oneness rules on every level, no two self-disclosures of the Real can ever be the same, which is to say that each thing is a unique being at every instant of its existence, and no two things are ever identical.

In this ever-renewed and diverse cosmos, each thing appears as the unfolding of possibilities designated by one or more of the attributes of Real *Wujūd*. Things can be classified into three basic realms in keeping with the intensity of the divine qualities that are disclosed within them. Those that are dominated by unity, life, light, consciousness, and wisdom pertain to the spiritual, intelligible, and angelic realms. Those that reflect these divine qualities dimly appear to be dominated by their opposites, that is, manyness, death, darkness, unconsciousness, and ignorance; examples include inanimate objects, plants, and animals. Still other things dwell in an intermediate realm of manifestation that is neither spiritual nor bodily, or rather, both spiritual and bodily. This way of looking at things gives us a typical three-world scheme, found in much of Islamic philosophy. The in-between realm, which Henry Corbin has rightly dubbed the *mundus imaginalis*, plays an especially important role in Islamic thought from Suhrawardi (d. 1191) and Ibn Arabi onward.

The totality of these three worlds is called the "macrocosm." It embraces not only what we would call the physical universe, but also the incomparably vaster dimensions of invisible reality inhabited by angels and other conscious beings. As for humans, they are forms of God. Hence they are disclosures of the full range of divine attributes in a concentrated and unitary manner. They have the capacity to gain access to the invisible side of the cosmic spectrum.

They are subjects who can take as their objects everything in the macrocosm, including angels and spirits. Their bodies are indefinitely divisible, but their spirits are deeply rooted in the unitary consciousness of Real *Wujūd*. Along with body and spirit, however, they also embrace a third, imaginal realm that is neither

body nor spirit. It is nothing other than their own self- awareness, their own selfhood, their "soul" (*nafs*) to use the standard term.

In short, the Infinite *Wujūd*, by issuing the creative command, "Be!," discloses its own real, exteriorizing qualities as the macrocosm and its own interiorizing qualities as the human microcosm. Human beings, however, are able to reach only certain levels of life, consciousness, desire, and power by following the natural course of events—that is, by being born and growing up in a knowable universe. In order for them to actualize the full range of divine attributes latent in their own divine forms, they must exercise their freedom. To develop the divine attribute of speech, for example, they cannot depend upon their surrounding circumstances. They must themselves work at it, and there is no limit to the possibilities of actualized speech, as witnessed by the enormous diversity of language and literature over history.

Many other divine attributes also call for a proper use of freedom for their actualization, such as mercy, love, compassion, justice, generosity, and wisdom. These qualities are precisely those that give meaning to human life and institutions. Actualizing them in any more than a superficial or self-interested way demands serious effort, and, without actualizing them, people fail in their human function, which is to act as conscious representatives of the wise and compassionate God.

In this perspective, qualities such as wisdom and generosity—mentioned by Avicenna as pertaining to the very essence of the Necessary Being—are embedded in reality itself. Ethics, far from being an exercise in providing principles for right conduct, is a science that analyzes real, objective qualities pertaining to the very stuff of existence—which is nothing but *wujūd*, that is, *sat-chit-ananda*, being-consciousness-bliss. The role of ethics is to explain how to assimilate these qualities and how to be assimilated by them.

3. Trust

Finally we get to trust. The Arabic word is *tawakkul*, a fifth-form gerund of the base verb *wakala*, which means to entrust, to assign, to put in charge. The fifth form usually points to the subjective quality suggested by the base verb, and *tawakkul* is no exception. It means confidence in someone such that we put him

or her in charge of some or all of our affairs, not only outwardly in the world but also inwardly in our souls. This is its meaning in the Quran, where it is used verbally in forty-two verses, commanding or urging people to have trust in God.

Ibn Arabi deals with trust from a variety of perspectives. He has a great deal to say about the moral and spiritual transformation that must occur before anyone can truly actualize it. In a typical passage, he writes,

> Trust is relying on God in what He brings to pass or promises. Over and above knowing, actualizing it means not to become agitated at lacking what the soul leans upon, for it leans upon God, not a designated means. Someone finds in his soul a confidence in God greater than the confidence found by someone else who has the means to reach something. For example, someone is hungry, and he does not have the means—the food—that will allow him to eliminate his hunger. Someone else is hungry, but he has the means to eliminate his hunger. The possessor of the means is strong because he has the existence of the eliminator, but the other, who has nothing other than God, is equal to him in calm and lack of agitation, because he knows that his provision—if he is to receive any more provision—must reach him.[2]

a. The Trustee

For Ibn Arabi, the investigation of the nature of any real quality must take us back to the divine root of the quality, that is, the ontological possibility that it represents. These possibilities are frequently designated by Quranic divine names. In the case of trust, the Quran uses the name *al-wakīl* or "the Trustee" in twenty-four verses. It is a past participle from the verb *wakala*, so it means "the one to whom something has been entrusted." The modern Arabic dictionaries tell us that it means authorized representative, attorney, lawyer, agent. In other words, it designates the person to whom one turns over some or all of one's affairs.

Much of what Ibn Arabi says about the importance of having trust in God can be found in earlier books, such as al-Ghazali's famous *Iḥyā' ʿulūm al-dīn*, the 35th volume of which is called *Kitāb al-tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul* ("The Book of *Tawḥīd* and Trust"). We can sum up al-Ghazali's long disquisition on these two topics

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2   *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* (Cairo 1911), vol. 4, 221, line 6.

with the Quranic verse, "There is no god but He, so take Him as a trustee" (73:9). In other words, there is no creator but God, none wise but God, and nothing real but God, so entrust all of your affairs to him.

Al-Ghazali, in keeping with his role as theologian and preacher, interprets the command in this verse —"Take Him as a trustee"—as a religious command. Ibn Arabi agrees, but he adds that we can see a deeper meaning in the verse when we understand it as an creative command.

This is a strategy that he often uses in interpreting Quranic verses. For example, he points to the verse, "Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him" (17:23). Jurists and Kalam experts understand this to mean that God has issued a religious command that tells people they must serve and worship him, so the proper response is to follow the guidance provided by the prophets.

Ibn Arabi acknowledges that this as a correct interpretation, but he points out that it is not the only meaning of the verse. It is sufficient to look at another verse to see that something else is also meant. Elsewhere the Quran says, "When He decrees something, He says to it 'Be!' and it comes to be" (3:47). Here the same word *decree* (*qaḍāʾ*) clearly designates the creative command. So, if God "has *decreed* that you worship none but Him," this can also mean that you have no choice but to worship God. People worship him willy-nilly because everything serves the creative command. This is why Ibn Arabi commonly draws a distinction between "essential worship" (ʿibāda *dhātiyya*), which is performed by all things without exception and "accidental worship" (ʿibāda ʿaraḍiyya), which is performed by those who obey the religious command.

The fact that everyone without exception worships God is one of many arguments Ibn Arabi offers to show that the suffering of those who enter hell cannot be everlasting, since they will eventually reap the reward for their worship, even if it was not by choice.

When Ibn Arabi reads the Quranic commands to have trust in God as creative commands, he reminds us that trusting in God means to rely on God and to turn one's affairs over to him, that is, to take him as a Trustee. This is precisely what we do when we come into existence by following the creative command. Before

coming into existence, we have plenty of affairs—all our attributes and qualities, whatever makes us what we are at any point in the unfolding of our selves, for all of these are known eternally by God. When God says "Be!," we and our affairs come into being. We entrust our affairs to the Real *Wujūd* by responding to the command. Then God makes our affairs manifest moment-by-moment through his self-disclosure, which is the radiance of *Wujūd*. We come to recognize ourselves and our own affairs to the extent that we grow in awareness, consciousness, and understanding. In short, by coming into *wujūd*— existence and consciousness—we have turned our affairs over to the Real *Wujūd*, who now discloses us to us and to others.

From this point of view, God does not *make* (*jaʿl*) things the way they are. Rather, things are what they are, always and forever. The role of the Creator is simply to say "Be!" to what he knows in his beginningless knowledge. In other words, the existence of things is contingent on the creative command. It does not belong to the things. Their thingness in God's knowledge, however, belongs to them—it is precisely what makes each thing this thing rather than another thing. God knows the thing by perceiving its "whatness." He does not make them *what* they are, since they are always and forever what they are. The Arabic word here is *māhiyya*, derived from the question *mā huwa*, "What is it?" The Latin translation of this word gave us "quiddity," which is the thing's essence as opposed to its existence.

In short, the Real *Wujūd* knows all things for all eternity. As nonexistent things we have the possibility of coming into existence, and by means of that possibility we voice our need for something to give us existence. Our possibility requests being from God, and he in his mercy responds to us by saying "Be!" Thereby we gain something of the color and flavor of his *Wujūd*— his being-consciousness-bliss.

Someone may argue that he did not *ask* to be given existence, so he has never trusted in God. But this is to miss the point. A whatness, by the very fact of being a possibility, begs for existence. What we call asking has nothing to do with our existence, only our whatness. We have no freedom to be or not to be, because our being never belongs to us in the first place. It belongs rather to the Real Existence, and it is given to us on loan by the creative command. The freedom to ask for one thing rather than another

thing enters the picture only when we consider our human situation in terms of the religious command, that is, the moral and spiritual demands made upon us by our divine form.

In a chapter on the divine name *Trustee*, Ibn Arabi explains that this name is applied only to someone who has been appointed as a trustee and that it is we who have appointed God to our trustee. Our acceptance of the creative command is identical with our act of appointing him. Whether we know it or not, this Trustee has taken over our affairs by bringing us into existence. He does not *make* us do what we do, nor does he force us to choose *what* we choose. Rather, his only act is to give us being. Having explained this, Ibn Arabi tells us why this is significant for our long-term destiny. After death, we may complain to God about the apparent unfairness of our situation in the world. We may argue that there was no creator but God, so God himself is responsible for *what* we did. God, however, will show us that we ourselves were responsible. Here he sometimes quotes the Quranic passage that mentions Satan's response when the people of hell curse him for causing their damnation: "Do not blame me, blame yourselves" (14:22).[3]

Nonetheless, in the last analysis, since we did not choose our own quiddities, we will have an excuse for what we did, and those who have excuses will be exposed to mercy.

> The Real Trustee has given us knowledge that He acts freely within us. He does not add anything to *what* we give Him from ourselves, for the Trustee is only so by virtue of the one who appoints him. He takes over only in that in which He has been given permission. The trustee has the "conclusive argument" [Quran 6:149], for He does not add anything to *what* has been handed over to Him, and there is nothing there that would receive addition.

> You may say to the Trustee, "Why did You do such-and-such?" He will unveil you to you, and then you will see that it is you who made Him do that for which you are reproaching Him. He will unveil to you your own reproach, so [you will see that] there was no escape from reproaching Him. He will excuse you, and you will excuse Him.[4]

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3   For a passage in which he addresses this issue, see Chittick, *Sufi Path of Knowledge* (Albany 1989), 299-300.
4   *Futūḥāt* 4:280.33.

In a chapter dedicated to explaining why people should exert effort in order to have trust in God, Ibn Arabi discusses various ways of thinking about our relationship to the religious command. The first is to begin with the notion that God created the universe for the sake of human beings so that we could come to recognize the Hidden Treasure and thereby achieve permanent deliverance from ignorance and suffering.

> Part of God's revelation to Moses was the words, "O children of Adam! I have created the things for you, and I have created you for Me."

> The human response may be this: "If He has created the things for me, then He has created only that in which is in my best interest. But I am ignorant of what is in my best interest in order to bring about my salvation and felicity. So let me make Him my trustee in my affairs, for He knows better what my best interest is. He created it, so it is also more appropriate that He take over from me in dealing with it. All of this is required by my rational mind without any divine command. What then if a divine command has come in this regard? God says, 'There is no god but He, so take Him as a trustee' [Quran 73:9]."[5]

Having shown that reflection on the human situation agrees with revelation in telling people that they should entrust their affairs to God, Ibn Arabi concludes that the conscious decision to trust in God and to conform to the religious command simply makes people aware of their actual situation—the fact that their very existence came about only because they had entrusted their affairs to the creative command. So, when they choose to take God as their trustee, their actual situation does not change in any way. God's generosity, however, demands that they will receive the reward that the Quran promises to those who trust in God.

> Thus the knowing person of faith takes God as a Trustee and turns his affairs over to Him, putting the reins in His hands in accordance with the actual affair, so he adds nothing to the actual affair in existence. Then God praises him for that, even though it leaves no trace in God's kingdom. This is the utmost generosity—laudation for something that leaves no trace![6]

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5   *Futūḥāt* 2:200.6.
6   *Futūḥāt* 2:200.11.

b. God's Trustee

I said earlier that *tawḥīd* has two basic implications: that the Real alone is real, and that all apparent reality derives from the Real's reality. In terms of the divine name Trustee, this means that there is no trustee but God—none has true worthiness to be trusted and relied upon but God himself. It also means, however, that *Wujūd*, having disclosed itself as the cosmos and all that it contains, will also disclose the divine attribute of trusteeship (*wikāla*) in various creaturely forms.

After all, human beings appoint God as their trustee first by obeying the creative command, and second by freely observing the religious command. They have this ability to trust only because God has already trusted in them. This he did by creating them in his own form and thereby appointing them as his trustees. The Quran makes the point by saying that God created human beings to be his "vicegerents" (*khalīfa*). In order to live up to this vicegerency, they cannot simply follow the creative command. They also need to observe the religious command, which defines the terms of their trusteeship and sets down the guidelines for putting it into practice.

> God appointed the human being as a "vicegerent," which is a trustee. He says, "Expend of that unto which He has made you vicegerents" [Quran 57:7], and He set down for us various things in trusteeship that we should not transgress. Our trusteeship is not unrestricted like that to which we appointed Him. He sets down limits for us such that, if we transgress them, we transgress God's limits. "And whosoever transgresses God's limits has wronged himself" [Quran 65:1].[7]

Few humans beings are actually capable of fulfilling their roles as God's vicegerents. Their father Adam did so, and he was also appointed as the first prophet. Generally, Muslim scholars think that most if not all prophets reached the station of vicegerency, Muhammad to the highest degree:

> "Whoever obeys the Messenger has obeyed God" [Quran 4:80], for God has appointed him trustee over His servants. The Messenger commands, prohibits, and takes control in what is shown to him by God, who appointed him as trustee. And we appointed Him as trustee at His command and urging. His command is His words,

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7   *Futūḥāt* 2:200.17.

"Take Him for a trustee" [Quran 73:9]; and His urging, "Take no one for a trustee apart from Me" [Quran 17:2].

So the Messenger is the trustee of the Trustee. He is one of those whom God has appointed as trustee by His command. He is one of us, so he is trustee over us on behalf of the Trustee. It is therefore incumbent upon the one who appoints [God as] Trustee to obey [God's] trustee, because he is only obeying himself.[8]

In other words, the moment we obey God's religious command to trust in him and to take him as our trustee, we have also accepted to follow him whom God appointed trustee over us.

Even if we do not acknowledge the legitimacy of God's trustee and the authority of the religious command, nonetheless we have already acknowledged God as our trustee by following the creative command. The contradiction between our ontological acknowledgment of God as Trustee and our freely chosen denial of God's trustee will mean that we are denying our own nature and, in Quranic terms, "wronging ourselves." It is then, as the Quran says, that God will have a "conclusive argument" (6:149) against us. We will not be able to hold ourselves blameless on the Day of Resurrection. This is because, as Ibn Arabi puts it, "Those who do not appoint the Real as their trustee verbally have nonetheless appointed Him by their states, so the argument against them stands."[9] Their "states" (*aḥwāl*) are their actual situations in their existence, an existence that they experience because they appointed God as their Trustee.

In short, we can speak of an ontology of trust because trust is a word that designates the relationship between the Necessary Existence and the possible things. Once people understand that they are possible, contingent things, their way to ultimate happiness will be to trust in the Trustee's trustees, the prophets who have been sent explaining their best interests. To have trust in anything other than the Trustee and his trustees is to fall into ignorance of the human situation and to wrong oneself and others, and certainly wrongdoing seems to be the hallmark of our times. A Quranic verse sums up nicely the fruit of the lack of trust that we see everywhere today: "Corruption has appeared in the land and the sea because of what people's hands have earned" (Quran 30:41)

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8   *Futūḥāt* 4:281.5.
9   *Futūḥāt* 4:281.9.