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Both traditionalism and rationalism are two sides of the same coin of highly theorized theology not meant for laymen. But since the six ulama share a common didactic purpose to educate both the “dhimmi” and their lay audiences, they also offer some advice (which the dhimmi initially requested in his poem). In addition to asking the dhimmi to listen attentively to their responses, and promis-

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tion, and the human agent acquires (*kasaba*) the ability from Him—was glossed and refined by Ash‘ari theologians in order to prove that the human agent’s actions are not his, but also were not forced upon him. The *kasb* theory was perceived by its proponents as a golden mean between the Mu‘tazili concept of free will, with the human agent as the creator of his actions, and the traditionalist position, which negated any possibility of the human agent being a creator of his actions. A definitive article on *kasb* is: Michael Schwarz, “Acquisition (*kasb*) in Early Kalām,” in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition: Essays Presented by His Friends and Pupils to Richard Walzer on his Seventieth Birthday* (Columbia, SC, 1972), 355–87. For more references, see: Livnat Holtzman, “Human Choice,” 183, n. 3.

<sup>122</sup> Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:353 (Al-Bāji’s Response, verse 6).

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 10:358 (The Response of Ibn al-Labbān, verses 12–13).

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 10:360–61 (The Response of Ibn al-Rif‘ah, verses 17–18, 33–34).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 10:355 (The Response of Ibn Taymiyah, verses 10–11); *ibid.*, 10:358–59 (The Response of Ibn al-Labbān, verses 9–11, 20, 26); *ibid.*, 10:366 (Al-Qūnawī’s Response, verses 9, 14).

<sup>126</sup> See Appendix II, B, Part 2 (a few more verses by Ibn Taymiyah).

ing him that if he follows their line of thinking he will reach the peace of mind that he is seeking,<sup>127</sup> the ulama mainly guide the dhimmi through the etiquette of religious discourse. They urge him to listen to their voice, which is the true voice. “Stop using this language of protesting!” suggests Ibn al-Labbān.<sup>128</sup> “You should be pleased with that predetermination,” advises al-Bājī, “Abandon all your straying doubts and embrace the most apparent proof!”<sup>129</sup> Ibn Taymīyah’s suggestions are similar: “Do not abandon the apparent truth. Do not turn your back to the upright idea.”<sup>130</sup> The ulama’s direct approach to the dhimmi represents a mixture of self-confidence and disdain. Each scholar is convinced that his advice is the ultimate guide for attaining the truth, and the dhimmi’s success in reaching this truth is guaranteed (provided that he follows the scholar’s advice). All six responses represent the practical aspect of theology; however, al-Qūnawī’s apology is by far the most pragmatic and realistic of the six: knowing that the dhimmi will not listen to his sage advice, let alone understand it, al-Qūnawī decides to issue a brief response, and not to waste his time on the lost soul of a dhimmi.

## CONCLUSION

The ample anecdotes in the biographical sources indicate that composing poetry was one of the favorite and most prestigious activities of the Damascene and Cairene ulama. The historian al-Ṣafadī, a distinguished poet himself, refers to didactic poems about grammar and prosody, but also about *fiqh* and the *Quran*, as a remarkable achievement, an indicator of the ulama’s linguistic skills.<sup>131</sup> The ulama’s six responses to the dhimmi’s question indeed represent an important aspect of the intellectual life in Mamluk Damascus and Cairo.

The case-study of the dhimmi’s question—although we have only partial and scanty textual evidence—demonstrates how an intellectual activity is ignited, and how a fashionable trend is established. First, a riddle in rhyme was orally circulated. Perhaps several students of Islamic law in Mamluk Cairo excitedly and amusingly recited the dhimmi’s question in one of the *majālis*, without knowing how to correctly answer the paradox it posed. Perhaps laymen repeated the catchy short poem of the dhimmi. Finally, the dhimmi’s question reached al-Bājī. The horrified scholar decided to confront the controversial poem, and composed his response. Al-Bājī’s peers envied his literary endeavor, and challenged his re-

<sup>127</sup> See, for example, al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:357 (The Response of Shāfi‘ ibn ‘Alī, verse 7).

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:358 (The Response of Ibn al-Labbān, verses 14).

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:353–54 (Al-Bājī’s Response, verses 12, 14).

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:356 (The Response of Ibn Taymīyah, verse 37).

<sup>131</sup> Al-Ṣafadī, *Nuṣrat al-Thā‘ir ‘alā al-Mathal al-Sā‘ir*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Alī Sulṭānī (Damascus, [1971]), 386–87.

sponse by composing their own responses. The anonymous “dhimmi” faded into oblivion, and his identity was never categorically defined. Still, the ulama added another academic achievement to their résumé: they defied the heretic while demonstrating their intellectual superiority.

The general framework of the medieval *munāẓarah* includes mainly lengthy debates in prose. The dhimmi's question and the ulama's six responses expanded the boundaries of this genre to include poetry. The use of poetry enables these theological works to become a powerful tool in polemics, simply because the texts are easily and orally proliferated. The theological argumentations, which are usually difficult to grasp, are molded into rhythmic texts with a clear enthusiastic tone. The medieval debates appear in abundance in the theological literature; while the *munāẓarāt* written in prose have received much attention in modern scholarship, those written in poetry were neglected. The stage is now set for researchers to turn their attention to the theological debates written in poetry—although these poems demand extra effort in order to understand their contents, and to study these challenging works of theology.



## APPENDIX I: NOTES ON THE ULAMA

The following description contains some details about the ulama who wrote responses to the dhimmi's question, including the scholar's poetic skills, his experience in debating, and his relationship with other members of this group. Ibn Taymīyah's biography is not included, for obvious reasons.

1. **‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Bājī** (‘Alī ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Khaṭṭāb, d. 714/1314):<sup>132</sup> A prominent Shafi‘i jurist, who according to his own avowal was a close friend of the famous Muḥyī al-Dīn al-Nawawī (d. 676/1277), the author of the famous commentary on Muslim's *Ṣaḥīḥ*.<sup>133</sup> According to al-Subkī, al-Bājī was a skilled and almost undefeated debater, and an expert in Ash‘ari *kalām*.<sup>134</sup> An elliptical anecdote, told by an eyewitness, connects al-Bājī to a debate with a Jew: “We were at Ibn Daqīq al-‘Īd’s, and he said: ‘O *fuqahā*!’ A Jewish fellow came in and wanted to debate.’ We stayed still, but al-Bājī did not hesitate and promptly said: ‘Bring him over! With God’s grace we will oppose his sophistic argument (*shubḥah*)!’”<sup>135</sup> Unfortunately, there is no record of the debate itself. Al-Subkī’s father, *al-imām al-wālīd*, Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 756/1355), learned the art of debating from al-Bājī. The celebrated Ibn Daqīq al-‘Īd admired al-Bājī, and treated him with an extraordinary measure of respect.<sup>136</sup> Al-Bājī was also treated with the utmost respect by Ibn Taymīyah: “Whenever Ibn Taymīyah saw him, he treated him with admiration. When in the presence of al-Bājī, Ibn Taymīyah dared not make an utterance. So ‘Alā’ al-Dīn used to say: ‘Speak so we can argue with you!’ And Ibn Taymīyah said: ‘The likes of me does not speak in your presence. It is my duty to benefit from you.’”<sup>137</sup> Al-Subkī

<sup>132</sup>For al-Bājī’s biography, see: al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:339–67 (biography no. 1394); Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 3:60–61 (biography no. 2865); al-Kutubī, *Fawāt al-Wafayāt*, 3:73–74 (biography no. 352); al-Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 3:483–87 (biography no. 1210).

<sup>133</sup>Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:341–42

<sup>134</sup>Ibid., 10:339–40. Al-Subkī describes al-Bājī as an undefeated lion (*wa-kāna asad lā yughālabu*). Ibid., 10:339. Al-Bājī’s expertise in Ash‘ari *kalām* is reflected by the names of the books for which he wrote abridgements, for example Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (d. 606/1209) *Kitāb al-Arba‘īn*. His profound understanding of Shafi‘i *fiqh* is demonstrated by an anecdote which appears in *Al-Durar*. Apparently, as a youth he attended a class in which al-Ghazālī’s (d. 505/1111) *fiqh* manual, *Al-Wasīṭ*, was studied. The young al-Bājī addressed one of the issues in the text, raising fifteen different questions and giving elaborate answers to each question. The astonished teacher asked al-Bājī his age, and conveyed his admiration at his knowledge. Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 3:60.

<sup>135</sup>Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 3:60; al-Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 3:485. Al-Ṣafadī claims that al-Bājī was well versed in the Torah, and he used to argue with Jews about it.

<sup>136</sup>Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:339.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid., 10:342. Al-Bājī is mentioned as one of the six ulama who discussed Ibn Taymīyah’s release from prison with the amir Salār. The ulama demanded that Ibn Taymīyah correct his creed.

establishes the reputation of al-Bājī as a poet by quoting two of al-Bājī's poems: one short autobiographical poem,<sup>138</sup> and a long *manẓūmah*, which al-Bājī's students memorized after hearing al-Bājī recite it to himself (*anshada li-nafsihi*). This 122-verse *manẓūmah* or *urjūzah* describes the happiest of all men as a believer whose knowledge of all branches of science, such as *fiqh*, *tafsīr*, history, languages, and medicine, is vast. In the poem, al-Bājī advises his listeners to travel in order to acquire knowledge.<sup>139</sup>

2. **Nāṣir al-Dīn Ibn 'Asākir al-'Asqalānī** (Shāfi' ibn 'Alī ibn 'Abbās al-Kinānī al-'Asqalānī al-Miṣrī, d. 730/1330).<sup>140</sup> A poet and historian, who wrote biographies of the Mamluk sultans. He was skilled in calligraphy and versification.<sup>141</sup> He was blinded by an arrow during the Mongol attack on Ḥimṣ in Rajab 680/October 1281.<sup>142</sup> An enthusiastic bibliophile, Shāfi' ibn 'Alī, who had eighteen closets full of rare books, recognized each book by feeling it and touching it. Al-Ṣafadī, who was a personal acquaintance of Shāfi' ibn 'Alī, lists his numerous works in various Islamic sciences, which include a *dīwān* of his poems, glosses of poetry, and a poem describing a dispute between the sword and the pen.<sup>143</sup> Al-Ṣafadī, however, does not associate

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Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:46 (the events of 706/1306–7). Al-Bājī is also named among the many *fuqahā'* who attended Salār's residence in order to witness the debate between Ibn Taymīyah and the three qadis, a debate that never took place, as the qadis declined the invitation to attend. Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:49. In the edition of *al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah* that I use, the text incorrectly writes al-Bājī as al-Tājī, and also writes Ibn al-Rif'ah as Ibn Raf'. These errors are corrected in the anthology: *Al-Jāmi' li-Sirat al-Shaykh Ibn Taymīyah*, ed. Muḥammad 'Uzayr Shams and 'Alī ibn Muḥammad 'Imrān, with an introduction by Bakr Abū Zayd (Mecca, 1420/1999–2000), 363.

<sup>138</sup> Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:344. According to al-Ṣafadī, al-Bājī himself told him that he made Ibn Taymīyah retract things that he wrote. Al-Ṣafadī, *A'yān*, 3:485.

<sup>139</sup> Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:345–52.

<sup>140</sup> The identification is that of the editor of al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt*, 19:357, n. 1. Shāfi' ibn 'Alī's biography appears in al-Ṣafadī, *Nakt al-Himyan fi Nakt al-Umyān*, ed. Aḥmad Zakī Bak (Cairo, 1427/2007), 166–70. A similar biography appears in Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 2:109–10 (biography no. 1923). Shāfi' ibn 'Alī is also mentioned in the events of the year 730/1329–30 in Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Nujūm al-Zāhirah fi Mulūk Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah* (Beirut, 1413/1992), 9:207.

<sup>141</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 2:109. For a short biography, which is mainly based on Ibn Ḥajar, see P. M. Holt, "Shāfi' b. 'Alī," *EI2*, 9:180. Holt was interested in Shāfi' ibn 'Alī because of the latter's biography of Baybars.

<sup>142</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 2:109–10 (biography no. 1923).

<sup>143</sup> As far as I know, the poem is no longer extant. The theme of a debate between a pen and a sword is well known in Arabic poetry. Perhaps Shāfi's poem preceded Ibn al-Wardī's dispute poem on the same theme, which drew van Gelder's attention. Geert Jan van Gelder, "The Conceit of Pen and Sword: On an Arabic Literary Debate," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32, no. 2 (1987): 353–56.

Shāfi‘ ibn ‘Alī with responses to the dhimmi’s question.<sup>144</sup> Here is a nice *khafīf* verse by him: “Whoever saw the morning brightness of white hair, which has broken in the blackness of my curls, asked me:/Pray, what is it? And I answered: This is a night of worries [about love], obliterated by the wise conviction of the morning.”<sup>145</sup>

3. **Shams al-Dīn Ibn al-Labbān** (Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Mu‘min, d. 749/1348, from the plague).<sup>146</sup> A gifted Sufi preacher of the Shādhiliyah order and teacher who conducted regular sessions of recitations (*majlis tadhkīr*) and sessions of academic sermons (*majlis al-wa‘z*) in Cairo.<sup>147</sup> He also wrote a few treatises on Shafi‘i *fiqh*, grammar, and *tafsīr*. There are several references to Ibn al-Labbān’s reputation in the brief entries which were written about him. Al-Subkī is subtle and does not disclose many details: “He sometimes uttered spontaneous words of which the literal meanings could raise doubts about him, but we are sure he was innocent of them. And also a dreadful thing happened to him.”<sup>148</sup> Ibn Ḥajar volunteers a few more details: apparently, Ibn al-Labbān’s reputation as a Sufi preacher preceded him; however, he was heard producing monist utterances (*kalimāt ‘alā ṭarīq al-ittiḥādīyah*). He was put on trial, but eventually rescued by the Maliki qadi.<sup>149</sup>
4. **Najm al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Ṭūsī** (Shaykh al-Islām, Najm al-Dīn Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī ibn Murtafi‘ ibn Ṣārim Ibn al-Rif‘ah, d. 710/1310). Al-Subkī refers to Ibn al-Rif‘ah as the greatest Shafi‘i of his time, and adds various superlatives to his name. Ibn al-Rif‘ah was a skilled debater, who had a reputation of never being defeated in debates, as he never met his equal on these occasions (*lā yuqāwamu fī majlis munāzarah wa-lā yuqāwá*).<sup>150</sup> According to Ibn Ḥajar, Ibn al-Rif‘ah

<sup>144</sup> Al-Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 3:484 (the biography of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn, no. 1210); *ibid.*, 3:292 (the biography of ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Qūnawī, no. 1122).

<sup>145</sup> Al-Ṣafadī, *Nakt*, 168; Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 2:109. Yāqūt ascribes the poem to someone else. Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-Udabā’*: *Irshād al-Arib ilā Ma‘rifat al-Adīb*, ed. Iḥsān ‘Abbās (Beirut, 1993), 1163 (biography no. 406).

<sup>146</sup> Al-Ṣafadī, *A‘yān*, 4:300.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*; al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:94.

<sup>148</sup> Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:94.

<sup>149</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 3:201.

<sup>150</sup> Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 9:25 (biography no. 1298). Ibn Rif‘ah’s biography in al-Subkī’s *Ṭabaqāt* is brief (three pages long) for a scholar of his caliber. Cf. Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:66 (the events of the year 710/1310–11) and Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Manhal al-Ṣāfi wa-al-Mustawfā ba‘da al-Wāfi*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥammad Amīn (Cairo, 1999), 2:82–83 (biography no. 256).

was appointed to be Ibn Taymīyah's rival in a debate. After the event was over (Ibn Ḥajar does not report who won the debate), people asked Ibn Taymīyah about Ibn al-Rifʿah. Ibn Taymīyah complimented Ibn al-Rifʿah's knowledge of Shafiʿi law: "I saw a shaykh from whose beard the laws and regulations of the Shafiʿis were flowing."<sup>151</sup> The well-to-do Ibn al-Rifʿah, who was appointed to several official positions in Cairo during his lifetime, was subjected to a slander campaign initiated by other scholars, but from which he was exonerated.<sup>152</sup>

5. **ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Qūnawī** (ʿAli ibn Ismāʿīl ibn Yūsuf, Qāḍī al-Quḍāh, d. 729/1329). Al-Qūnawī, born in Konya, was a Shafiʿi *faqīh* and a prominent Sufi, who lived and worked in Cairo for thirty years. He conducted a life of piety and poverty in Cairo, until he was appointed as a teacher in the Sharīfiyah, and as the director of the Ṣāliḥiyah *khānqāh*. Two years before his death, he was appointed as the Shafiʿi head judge of Damascus.<sup>153</sup> Al-Qūnawī was well-versed in Ashʿari *kalām*, logic, and polemics.<sup>154</sup> He also had poetic skills: apart from his response to "someone who meant to defame the divine law," al-Qūnawī composed a poem in the *ṭawīl* meter which discusses different kinds of head wounds (*shijāj*).<sup>155</sup> Al-Subkī also mentions a debate (*munāzarah*) between al-Qūnawī and Taqī al-Dīn al-Subkī, but unfortunately the contents of this debate are no longer extant.<sup>156</sup> In 727/1328, prior to his departure from Cairo to take up his position as the new chief Shafiʿi judge in Damascus, al-Qūnawī was asked by the sultan al-Nāṣir ibn Qalāwūn to intervene with the governor of Syria to release Ibn Taymīyah from prison. The following is a description of these relationships, as it appears in al-Ṣafadī's *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr*: "Although he (i.e., al-Qūnawī) had disagreements with Shaykh Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymīyah, and although he thought that Ibn Taymīyah was wrong in many issues, he praised Ibn Taymīyah, admired him, and defended him. However, when al-Qūnawī was about to leave Cairo [for his post in Damascus], the sultan said to him: 'When you arrive in Damascus, tell the governor of Damascus to free

<sup>151</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:169 (biography no. 730). Cf. al-Ṣafadī, *Aʿyān al-ʿAṣr*, 1:325 (biography no. 169).

<sup>152</sup> Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 1:169–70.

<sup>153</sup> Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:132–34 (biography no. 1388); Ibn Taghrībirdī, *Al-Manhal al-Ṣafī wa-al-Mustawfā baʿda al-Wāfi*, 8:51 (biography 1568); Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:169 (the events of the year 729/1328–29); Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Bughyat al-Wuʿāh fī Ṭabaqāt al-Lughawiyina wa-al-Nuḥāh*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Faḍl Ibrāhīm (Cairo, 1384/1965), 2:150 (biography no. 1674).

<sup>154</sup> Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:133.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:134–35.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 10:135–36.

Ibn Taymīyah.’ [Al-Qūnawī] asked: ‘Your Excellency, on what grounds did you put him in jail?’ The [sultan] replied: ‘Because of his *fatāwá* on that issue.’” Al-Qūnawī indeed met the governor upon his arrival in Damascus;<sup>157</sup> however, his mission failed. It was probably the governor who made Ibn Taymīyah’s release conditional on his retracting his *fatāwá*, although a lacuna in al-Şafadī’s text does not allow us to determine this with a great deal of certainty. According to al-Şafadī, “He [probably the governor] said: ‘If he retracts them, we shall set him free.’”<sup>158</sup> Ibn Ḥajar concludes: “Some say that this answer is the reason for the continuance of Ibn Taymīyah’s stay in prison until he died, because it was unconceivable that he would retract.”<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup>Shams al-Dīn Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm ibn Abī Bakr al-Jazarī, *Tārīkh Hawādith al-Zamān wa-Anbā’ihī*, ed. ‘Umar ‘Abd al-Salām Tadmurī (Sidon-Beirut, 1419/1998), 2:196, 369; Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāyah wa-al-Nihāyah*, 14:141 (the events of the year 727/1326–27).

<sup>158</sup>Al-Şafadī, *A’yān*, 3:290 (biography no. 1122). The ambiguity in al-Şafadī’s text (which was copied by Ibn Ḥajar) remains in Laoust’s description of al-Qūnawī’s intervention for Ibn Taymīyah. Henri Laoust, *Essai sur les doctrines sociales et politiques de Takī-d-Dīn Aḥmad b. Taimīya* (Cairo, 1939), 148, n. 1. See also Michot, *Muslims under Non-Muslim Rule*, 168.

<sup>159</sup>Ibn Ḥajar, *Al-Durar al-Kāminah*, 3:16 (biography no. 2687); al-Shawkānī, *Al-Badr al-Ṭālī*, 1:479 (biography no. 305).

## APPENDIX II: TRANSLATION OF THE SIX RESPONSES

Notes:

1. The translation is as accurate and literal as possible, although I often had to paraphrase text.
2. The terms *mashī'ah* and *irādah* are consistently translated as [divine] creative will and commanding will, respectively.

### A. AL-BĀJĪ'S RESPONSE:<sup>160</sup>

1. Hear me out, you scholar, who exposed the signs of his embarrassment, who craves for the guidance of a small and selected group of notable men.
2. I was so pleased to see that you seek the truth. May a breath of truth coming from the clouds of His mercy reach you!
3. You know that truth is regained only by truth, so seek refuge at its doorstep, like other reasonable people, and abandon the tricks and snares.<sup>161</sup>
4. A long time ago did God decree who strays from the correct path and who walks in it. He did that through His power as an effective agent (*fa'āl*). So [do not look] for the restrictions of wise purpose [in creation].<sup>162</sup>
5. God created human reason, and more so, He created the action of thinking that God's actions are good (*taḥsīn*). The limitations of human beings do not apply to the Creator.
6. Both our actions and essences are created by God. We do not create either of them, not really.
7. But He granted those He created, the human beings, a guide to all these predetermined eternal actions.
8. Through that guide we were able to recognize the people of happiness, the believers, from the people of misery, the heretics. The same applies to us: what He had wished for us is solely by virtue of His creative will.
9. As we put on clothes for everyone to see, so we mark our actions. These actions were created either as actions that please Him, or actions that make Him angry.

<sup>160</sup> Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:353–54.

<sup>161</sup> Trick and snares, here *ḥabā'il ḥīlah*. What al-Bājī means here, obviously, is that the dhimmi is requested to abandon the incorrect reasoning and logical analogies which the Mu'tazilah usually use.

<sup>162</sup> Wise purposes, here *ḥukm ḥikmah*. Al-Bājī refers here to the Ash'ari notion according to which God did not create the world for a cause or a wise purpose. Cf. Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-Aqdām fī 'Ilm al-Kalām*, ed. Alfred Guillaume (Baghdad, [1960]), 397.

10. His relationship to us is like the relationship of a king, who is beyond asking “how” his actions are performed, and “what is the reason” for his actions.
11. It is He who ordains life and death. It is He who is exempt from any condemnation. What the weak minds think as good is but a shameful thing.
12. Thus, you should be pleased with that predetermination, while you shouldn’t be mistaken and be pleased with the object of this predetermination, when it is a predetermined act of heresy.
13. That we are assigned commands and interdictions obliterates our excuses on the Day of Resurrection.
14. Therefore you should come through that entrance, whether it is blocked or open. Abandon all your straying doubts, and embrace the most apparent proof!
15. The commands and interdictions are clearly revealed, and there is no doubt about it and no delusion.

#### B. THE RESPONSE OF IBN TAYMĪYAH:<sup>163</sup>

1. Hey, you there! Your question is the question of a stubborn man, who argues with the Lord of the Throne, the Creator of all beings!
2. A long time ago, the devil Iblīs, who is the root of all evil, used this question in order to argue with [the angels], the most respectable creatures residing up above.<sup>164</sup>
3. The root of all errors that people make—regardless of the group or sect they are affiliated to—is to question the reasons for God’s actions.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>163</sup>Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:354–57. This version of Ibn Taymīyah’s poem is abridged, but all the same it retains the kernel of the complete version of the poem. There is no doubt that Ibn Taymīyah’s poem should be studied for its own merit. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this study, Ibn Taymīyah’s poem is presented as part of the six responses found in the original set of al-Subkī. When translating the poem, I consulted what seems to be the most complete version of the poem as it appears in: Ibn Taymīyah, *Majmū‘at al-Fatāwā* (1998) 4:149–54 (here indicated as MF). This version contains 124 verses. I also consulted Serajul Haque’s version (here indicated as SH), which contains 103 verses. Another version of the poem, which I have not consulted, appears in Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Ibn ‘Abd al-Hādī, *Al-Uqūd al-Durīyah min Manāqib Shaykh al-Islām Ibn Taymīyah*, ed. Abū Muṣ‘ab Ṭal‘at ibn Fu‘ād al-Ḥulwānī (Cairo, 1423/2003), 300–6. Serajul Haque’s summary of the poem was of great help. In addition, the following studies on Ibn Taymīyah’s poem also were of help: ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Nāṣir al-Sa‘dī (d. 1376/1956), *Al-Durrah al-Bahīyah: Sharḥ al-Qaṣīdah al-Tā‘īyah fī Ḥall al-Mushkilah al-Qadariyah*, ed. Abū Muḥammad Ashraf ibn ‘Abd al-Maqṣūd (Riyadh, 1419/1998); Muḥammad ibn Ibrāhīm al-Ḥamd, *Al-Qaṣīdah al-Tā‘īyah fī al-Qadar li-Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymīyah* (Riyadh, 1424/2003).

<sup>164</sup>Cf. verses 1–2 in MF and SH.

<sup>165</sup>Cf. verse 6 in MF and SH.

4. The creative will of God, the Lord of the Throne and the Creator of all beings, necessitates the actual existence of all the creatures.
5. The essence of God is necessary, with its necessary and eternal attributes.<sup>166</sup>
6. Therefore, when you ask “why did He want [this and that from me]?” it is the same as asking “why did He exist from all eternity?”
7. Such a question negates every reason, and it was sanctioned by every religion.
8. In this reality, there are many particular phenomena or particularities (*takhṣīṣ*). Anyone with a certain degree of reason can point out the fact that these particularities came about by virtue of His will.
9. [The theory] that one existent emanates from another, and the theory that two creators are possible, are like shots that miss the mark.<sup>167</sup>
10. There is no doubt that every effect (*musabbab*) has its entailing cause (*‘illah*).
11. However, causes—as you can very well see—emanate by virtue of His creative will.
12. Therefore, when you say: “why did God want [this and that from me]?” your words make people fall right into the pit.
13. The Zoroastrians believed that there is one creator who creates things that are good and benefit us, and one creator who creates things that are evil and harm us.
14. The ancient Zoroastrians stumbled and fell into this sophistic argument of dualism, because they inquired about the cause of evil.<sup>168</sup>
15. The heretical philosophers, who believe in the “eternal intellect” (*al-‘aql al-qadīm*) as the [first] cause,
16. Were looking for a cause of existence after non-existence, and they failed to find it. Therefore they went astray.
17. The roots of evil in any nation which was blessed by the religion of the prophets
18. Were revealed when these nations delved into these questions and their idolatry was thus evident. As a result, the indisputable evidences were erased throughout the era of apostasy.

<sup>166</sup>Verses 4–5 here correspond to verses 8–9 in MF and verses 7–8 in SH.

<sup>167</sup>Ibn Taymīyah refers here to the theory of *iṣḍār* (emanation) of the philosophers, and the Mu‘tazili view which allows (*tajwīz*) the existence of another creator (which is the human being) other than God. See: al-Sa‘dī, *Al-Durrah al-Bahīyah*, 128–29.

<sup>168</sup>“The cause of evil”: the text says *‘illat al-sirr*, which is “the cause of the secret.” However, Serajul Haque’s version provides a better solution (*‘illat al-sharr*), which I decided to adopt. Cf. verse 18 in SH.



19. We can easily contradict what you say, because this excuse that you seek can be easily refuted by anyone who possesses pure instincts.<sup>169</sup>
20. Let us assume that you stop blaming heretics and sinners who divert from the correct path.
21. This approach inevitably leads you to ignore every offender, whether he committed a murder, or stole property, or violated the sanctity of one's marriage.
22. In other words, you have no right whatsoever to be angry with a murderer or with a thief who robbed the needy.
23. You have no right to be angry with a man who abuses your well-guarded honor, even if he abuses you publicly. You have no right to be angry with the adulterer for fornicating.
24. You have no right to be angry with the highway robbers. You cannot be angry with the perpetrators of corruption in the land.
25. You cannot be angry with false witnesses who spread evil lies and slander. You cannot be angry with those who recklessly defame women of unblemished reputation on the basis of one single doubt.
26. You cannot be angry with those who purposefully annihilate the civilization of mankind, nor can you be angry with the corrupt ruler.
27. So stop condemning every perpetrator. Do not demand to punish the offender.
28. In sum, you must smooth the way of these liars and slanderers.<sup>170</sup>
29. Can people's minds or their innate nature accept the claim of this vile person, who says: "What could I have done?"<sup>171</sup>
30. When someone is administered a poison, this surely guarantees his death. And still, everything was predetermined by virtue of God's creative will.
31. In the same vein, your apostasy is like a poison you swallow. Its outcome is the punishment of hellfire, just as the outcome of gulping poison is death.
32. Don't you think that in this world, whoever perpetrates a crime is bound to be punished, either by predetermined punishment, or by a punishment as prescribed in the divine law?
33. The perpetrator is never pardoned, and this is God's predetermination. [The perpetrator will be punished] also in the hereafter. There is no doubt about that.<sup>172</sup>
34. If you wish to receive an answer, which may possibly save you from God's great fire,

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<sup>169</sup>Verses 6–19 here correspond to verses 30–43 in MF and verses 11–23 in SH.

<sup>170</sup>Verses 20–28 here correspond to verses 47–55 in MF and verses 27–35 in SH.

<sup>171</sup>Verse 29 here corresponds to verse 69 in MF and verse 49 in SH.

<sup>172</sup>Verses 30–33 here correspond to verses 74–77 in MF and verses 54–57 in SH.

35. Beware of the Lord of creation! Go towards Him humbly, and implore Him that would He guide you to the truth.
36. Entrust the shackles of your soul in the hands of the truth, and listen attentively. Never defy whoever preaches for the sound divine law.
37. Do not abandon the apparent truth. Do not turn your back to the upright idea.<sup>173</sup>
38. We are content with God's decree, because we were ordered to be content, even with misfortunes,
39. Like diseases, poverty, humiliation, and exile. We are pleased with every hurtful thing, provided that it is not a crime.
40. As for the evil deeds that are considered reprehensible, there is no Qurānic text which orders us to be pleased with these acts.<sup>174</sup>
41. The knowledgeable people said: We should not be pleased with acts of disobedience and hateful sins.
42. A group of people said: We are pleased with His decree, but we are not pleased with the outcome of this decree [when this outcome is bad deeds performed by the human being]. [These bad deeds] deserve the ugliest epithets.
43. Another group of people said: [These bad deeds] are attributed to Him, but since we perform them, we should be discontent with them.
44. We are pleased with these deeds because He created them. We are discontent because we acquire or perform these sins.<sup>175</sup>

### C. A FEW MORE VERSES BY IBN TAYMĪYAH:<sup>176</sup>

1. There is no escape for the human being from what God predetermined, but he can choose between a good act and a vile one.
2. He is not compelled to act, and he is not devoid of a will. But he wills because a will was created [for him].

<sup>173</sup>Verses 34–37 here almost correspond to verses 85–88 in MF and verses 65–68 in SH. However, the second hemistich of verse 36 corresponds to the second hemistich of verse 88 in MF and verse 68 in SH, while the second hemistich of verse 37 corresponds to the second hemistich of verse 87 in MF and verse 67 in SH.

<sup>174</sup>“There is no Qurānic text”: the text in al-Subkī actually says *fa-lā hunna matī*, which does not make sense. I therefore adopted Serajul Haque's version, which has: *fa-lā naṣṣun yatī*.

<sup>175</sup>Verses 38–44 here correspond to verses 99–104, 106 in MF and verses 79–84 and 86 in SH. In the case of verse 44 above, I preferred the version in MF; otherwise, the verse is incoherent.

<sup>176</sup>The above are verses 116–22 in MF and verses 96–102 in SH. Al-Subkī omitted these verses, but because they present the kernel of Ibn Taymiyah's approach, I decided to include them.

3. One of the most wonderful things is the creation of the will, by virtue of which the human being can choose the correct path from the erroneous path.
4. When you [O dhimmi] say: Do I have the choice to abstain from God's decree? it is as if you say: Do I have the choice to abstain from God's creative will?
5. [You could have said]: I choose not to choose to perform an erroneous act. If only you had taken this approach to abandon heresy, you could have earned redemption.
6. This approach is possible, although it is dependent on what God wills from the individual who has a will.
7. Be careful and make an effort to understand the significance of the many notions I conveyed to you. If you use your innate nature, you will surely grasp these notions.

#### D. THE RESPONSE OF SHĀFI' IBN 'ALĪ:<sup>177</sup>

1. You asked, however you did not express your words clearly. A small group of scholars conducted numerous inquiries about Him, who holds the truth.
2. You, O dhimmī, are not—as you are presumptuous to assume—a creator whose actions are not predetermined.
3. Indeed, everything necessarily exists by virtue of His predetermination, and for this there is the clearest evidence.
4. Is it possible that the things He does not want exist in His kingdom? Indeed, whoever holds this opinion goes astray.
5. So, you should be pleased with whatever He predetermined, and nothing else, so do not struggle with what He wanted by virtue of His creative will.
6. For He, the Most Sublime, has the ability to erase and confirm. So do not resist His judgment, and accept this as true.
7. If you follow my response, you will be a Muslim and resign yourself to the will of God. So, by following the truth, you will be a part of the best of all nations.

#### E. THE RESPONSE OF SHAMS AL-DĪN IBN AL-LABBĀN:<sup>178</sup>

1. Hear me out! After praising God, the creator of all created, for giving us guidance through the Quran and Sunnah

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<sup>177</sup> Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:257.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 10:357–59.

2. And through the most virtuous messenger, who was sent to the best of all nations, carrying with him the purest greeting from the All-Merciful:
3. Indeed, things exist by virtue of God's creative will. Things which do not correspond with His will do not exist.
4. However, He was never pleased with heresy. He never liked that for the human being. Heresy is not praiseworthy.
5. Whosoever is not guided by God uses the following artifice (*hīlah*): at every moment, he emphasizes what cannot be done.
6. He ignores the thorn in the flesh of his thought. He does not let his intellect distract him from his destination.
7. But at the same time, he endeavors with all his might to appeal to his Lord, with a sincere, determined, and passionate prayer.
8. At that time, let us hope that the grace and mercy that he hopes for will be granted to him.
9. Still, God's predetermination applies at times to heresy, and at other times to belief. But this predetermination is concealed, because of God's wise purpose.
10. Many a time, what is predetermined for us occurs by virtue of a cause, which we are accustomed to perceive as conditional.
11. Thus we see, for instance, that the causal connection between poison and death, cure and good health, is like the causal connection between actions of obedience and happiness, and actions of disobedience and misery.
12. God the All-Knowing created in the human being a choice between actions which entail God's satisfaction and His alienation.
13. Through this [choice], God enabled the human being to perform what He predetermined for the human being, thus God's will always prevails.
14. So, stop using this language of protesting. Remove your locks of hair and pretty clothes. It is good to be patient in times of distress (*al-ṣabr 'inda al-muṣībah*).
15. As for displaying our satisfaction with God's predetermination, it is obligatory, because it means subservience to the ruling of the divine creative will.
16. The fact that you are pleased with your misery is misery itself, because you do not recognize the miracle of predetermination.
17. This miracle will be revealed when you empty your heart of caprices, and be pleased with the right belief and conviction.
18. Then you will be pleased with what God is pleased with and with what He predetermined. That way you will eliminate one perplexity after the other.
19. You said: If my Lord wishes me to be an apostate, then I should wish it too. These words are true, provided that you wish to repent.

20. The effect of the cause is separated from the outcome. In the same vein, you should confirm that what He actually wants is for you to repent.
21. When you disobey the divine ordinance, you are considered a rebel, even though you act in accordance to God's will.
22. There is no doubt that the human being has a choice. One person believes that he can affect his action alongside the divine eternal power.
23. Another person says: human actions are varied and specific, like performing pilgrimage or adultery.
24. Therefore, the human agent can affect his action to be either adultery or pilgrimage. However, this action is actually predetermined.
25. According to the people of truth, the Ash'aris, the human agent cannot affect the action with his created ability.
26. God has the power to create in the human being the action and the ability which accompanies it, in a mechanism of causality (*sababīyah*).
27. This is a choice in us, which has no effect on the action. The greatest proof is for God.
28. In a nutshell, we are submitted to the sovereignty of the Creator of the creation.

#### F. THE RESPONSE OF IBN AL-RIF'AH, NAJM AL-DĪN AL-ṬŪSĪ:<sup>179</sup>

1. Lend me your ears, O dhimmi! If only you were able to hear the response to your question, a response backed up with proofs, a response which you sought!
2. Use your intelligence and try to decipher the secret of all that the Lord of Existence created.
3. He predetermined and compelled the creation of all the existents through His knowledge and power, entirely of His volition.
4. He dealt with His creation as He pleased. Nobody knows what He wishes. His goal is well-concealed.
5. Indeed, He created the entire existence, which had no shape in the beginning.
6. But, hey, you! Your question should have never been written down; because it implies that He causes every despicable thing to appear;
7. And that He, as a proprietor, causes the slave to act by creating his act, whether an act of kindness, or an act of evil;
8. And that He grants the human being the ability to understand all the facts, so he is able to distinguish between the various things he is given;

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<sup>179</sup>Ibid., 10:359–65.

9. And that He has partners in His property and in the object of His will, and thus the evil deeds of some of His creatures should be ascribed to Him;
10. And that He creates in all mortals the incapability to act, and that He compels them to act.
11. According to what is known to all His creatures, this is sheer misery which demonstrates your slip of the tongue.
12. All the things that we quoted are from a poem rhyming with *tī*, which is the response of a despicable slave to the acts of his Lord. These things make our Lord angry.
13. An action whose benefit we cannot see, like the death of a dear friend bitten by a snake, is not necessarily reprehensible.
14. There is no injustice when He deprives His creatures of their ability and compels them to act (*ilzām*),
15. Because He creates things by virtue of His knowledge, and He knows the invisible. He endows these things that He creates with life and existence through His generosity and mercy.
16. And so, He does with His creatures as He pleases, even though the external signs of His wisdom are concealed from us.
17. If God did not state that the acquisition of human acts (*kasb*) existed, then actions would not have been specifically attributed
18. To a specific creature, not metaphorically and not otherwise, because it was as if He categorically stated that there was no creative will.
19. People who claim to use their minds should not contemplate their regular false analogies;
20. For example, when they say that tying up a child and then commanding him to walk is an ugly act. This claim is adjacent to their stupidity.
21. This analogy to His actions is false, because everything exists by virtue of the divine will.
22. If this is their claim, then the reply to them should be: For what purpose did He create humankind, if after a while He makes them die in disgrace?
23. When He acts, He is above any benefit or damage. These are the words of a person who should be flogged with a whip.
24. He is the Creator, the All-Merciful, utterly and totally. When He created [the world] with His sound judgment, He made clear
25. What He wished: He wished for light and life, and He wished to lead His creatures through the darkest nights.
26. And so He arranged the parts of existence (*ajzā' al-wujūd*) and brought them to realization by His actions. All this came about when the spirits were at the beginning of creation.

27. When this was created, He brought to light a third substratum (*maḥall thālith*), in which even the strange and mysterious secrets became evident.
28. And after all was created, He created [a creature] whose attributes are manifested. By virtue of His power He made [this creature] perfect in his understanding and knowledge.
29. He informed [this creature] what He wanted him to be, and He also informed him that He wanted him to obey His continuous command.
30. This is Man, the crown jewel of His creation. He is more magnificent than any other being, because he is able to go higher and nearer [to God] than any other being.
31. He gave him a mind, with which he understood what goodness and piety were. When using the mind, this creature is able to prove the existence of his Creator, while using the clearest proofs.
32. He gave him knowledge and the ability to hear. He also granted him light, so he was able to distinguish between the various forms.
33. He made him choose from whatever he wished for himself the things which he needed in order to improve his posture and shape.
34. He made him acquire good deeds as he pleased, deeds the outcome of which is generous and scented.
35. He installed in him an irascible faculty (*quwwah ḡadabīyah*). By using it he could push back anything harmful, like mortal sins and other calamities.
36. He also installed in him the lustful faculty. By using it he could obtain anything his instincts desired.
37. So, it is entirely up to this creature to acknowledge the deeds which his [Creator] wishes and loves, and to push back the deeds which his [Creator] hates and despises.
38. Therefore, the All-Merciful entrusted him with the divine law, after He expelled any possible flaw that was originally in him.
39. When this creature followed the desires of his heart, and dived into the ocean of ignorance without a doubt in his mind,
40. In came the messengers, carrying a message from his Creator to each soul. The message was about the illuminating roads, which the Creator made visible.
41. [The Creator] obligated mankind to follow the Messenger, and to acknowledge every religious duty and every Prophetic habit.
42. [The Creator] made clear that everything that came into existence came from Him. He also declared that every creature definitely must obey Him.
43. [The Creator] predetermined that a certain man would be an ignorant heretic, remote from his [Lord], and that even if he followed the divine law, it would not benefit him.

44. [The Creator] predetermined that another man would be created with a pure mental constitution. This man rigorously opposed what was perceived by the senses.
45. However, nobody knows what was predetermined for him, so he cannot graciously follow his destiny as he wishes.
46. But when a vile soul inclines to the road which is not the road of Islam and its followers,
47. She tends to ascribe the will that drove her to act to the Creator, without having a substantial knowledge about that.
48. That this soul remains in the state of heresy is not by virtue of a divine command. [This soul] was expelled from the doorstep of heresy, and all the same [it became a heretic].
49. It is possible that a man lives as a heretic all his life, and suddenly the happiness of the Islamic belief that was preordained for him will catch him.
50. And so he converts to Islam, and by doing so, he will erase his biggest sins. By virtue of God's grace, he will become one of the inhabitants of heaven.
51. Another man, who is a devout Muslim, praying night and day, constantly invoking God's name, and performing the pilgrimage to Mecca every year,
52. And suddenly what was preordained for him, by virtue of God's knowledge, will catch him, and so he will be led to be one of the inhabitants of hell.
53. This is the judgment that is always carried out. It is well-concealed even from the shrewdest heart.
54. And so, I clarified the highlights of the way this judgment is carried out from the beginning of this world until the very last generation.
55. So, you dhimmi! Do you acknowledge that according to the people of the divine law you are definitely a heretic?
56. That is because you stated, God forbid, that God predetermined your heresy, whereas God never wished that the people of any religious faith would be heretics!
57. Look, since He predetermined at the beginning of creation that people would be heretics, He will not change the verdict of His will.
58. That is what the Prophet of God, who never became silent, said: that things materialize by virtue of His creative will.
59. Therefore, we cannot be positively certain that you are a heretic, because there never is a final resolution at any epoch, if you turn to Islam.
60. However, the predetermined verdict only clarifies where a person is headed to, whether heaven or hell.
61. If you were predetermined to be one of the inhabitants of heaven, the fact that you were a Jew before the Prophet was sent did not do you any harm.



62. And if you were predetermined to be one of the inhabitants of hell, then your atonement would not benefit you at all.
63. The predetermined verdict is never known. Performing deeds which do not please God does not necessarily lead to hell.
64. He gave you a mind and an established understanding. He also showed you a way of natural behavior, a way which includes every natural disposition that you have.
65. So, pronounce the Muslim profession of faith, and walk under the flag of the divine law as a believer, using your power to do good deeds.
66. Furthermore, you choose for yourself anything that you wish to try, whether disturbing doubts or lustful desires.
67. If you do not believe in abrogation (*naskh*), then you consider the divine message and law that Moses brought a lie,
68. Because the message and law that Moses brought abrogated customs that some people used to have, such as the marriage of a sister to several of her brothers.
69. So, if you affirm the truthfulness of *naskh*, then you should follow the divine law, which contains every agreeable and nice rule.
70. But if you defame *naskh*, then there is no textual proof for the notion that you prefer (*tarjih*).
71. When poverty strikes you, do you not make your best own effort in order to protect [yourself] from hunger?<sup>180</sup>
72. And when you are suddenly hit by a crime, like an attempt to kill you or rob you, or by any other evil deed or temptation,
73. Do you actually attribute all these, at any moment, to the All-Merciful Creator?
74. If you choose to strengthen your soul, preach to her the message of the Muslim profession of faith.
75. The particular is entailed from the general, without any exception. You can clearly see that from the various signs of the divine wisdom.
76. If, in your time of trouble, you make a speedy effort to shove away any sin that comes your way,
77. And at the same time you lie, and you are truly not pleased with God's actions,
78. Then know this: He called you, and He did not block the entrance for you. So seek refuge in Him, and ask Him to lead you to the good path.
79. If you were born just to burn in His hellfire, then following the divine law was of no avail.

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<sup>180</sup>This translation is approximate given the fact that one of the words (*hūbīyā*), as the editor of al-Subkī's *Ṭabaqāt* comments, is unreadable and has no meaning.

80. Whether or not you are pleased is of no importance, because you are seized by the most evil grasp.
81. The Lord of all beings obligated you to be pleased with what He predetermined and created by virtue of His knowledge and power.
82. At the same time, He is not pleased that you are pleased with a certain thing that He predetermined. Therefore, He forbade you to refrain from vile deeds at any time.
83. Therefore, to be pleased with what He forbade you to be pleased with, does not please Him at all. He is pleased only when you follow His legislative will.
84. [He is pleased when you follow] what emerged after the world was created. [He is pleased when] you see the deeply hidden things in your natural disposition.
85. But since He wanted you to be a heretic, you became stubborn and did not accept and fear the divine law.
86. That you are pleased with what was predetermined for you does not please Him. Following the judgment of His creative will is not the correct way.
87. In time immemorial He shaped you in a form through which His judgment was carried out and His proof installed.
88. So actually there is no option to resist His firm judgment or to deviate from it.
89. But He granted you with the power and the ability to acquire your action. He generously granted you a great gift, which is the ability to achieve complete understanding.
90. So, O dhimmi, your argument is sophistical and cannot be considered as sound.
91. Do not meddle in God's words and actions. He chooses every action, as He pleases.
92. There is no good outcome to what you desire, because it is a distressful deed, which only miserable and sinful souls possess.
93. My answer to you, O dhimmi, includes ninety-six verses, the gems of my artistic skills.
94. You wished to refute the truth, woe unto you, by your invalid and absurd verses.
95. My Lord! Have compassion and mercy for your slave Aḥmad, who was born in Ṭūs.
96. Aḥmad plunged into the oceans of knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is the ultimate goal. He plunged into the light of divine providence,

97. Equipped with the highest spiritual states (*aḥwāl rifʿah*) he acquired with the help of His shaykh: the spiritual states of passion (*wajd*), exaltation (*ijlāl*), and repentance (*inābah*).
98. Aḥmad is very knowledgeable and devout, because he recognizes the splendor of the divine grace.
99. Whoever bows sincerely to the divine presence, which is the ultimate haven of every soul,
100. Has a vast knowledge of secrets. When you travel there by night, you sense the gentle breeze of happy spirits.
101. You, who contemplates this response and tries to understand it, you should reflect on this knowledge and not dismiss it.
102. Place the meaning of each and every word in its right place. Note that we have included here numerous virtues.
103. Do not blame others before you accomplish in good faith what He created you for.
104. [Do not] act meanly towards Him, who created human mind and particularized it with the ability to understand, every hour of the day.
105. We send our prayer to the Prophet Muḥammad. This prayer will grant us closeness [to God] in the Day of Recompense.

#### G. THE RESPONSE OF ‘ALĀ’ AL-DĪN AL-QŪNAWĪ:<sup>181</sup>

1. I praised my Lord before every word I uttered. I prayed in order to glorify the Prophet, the best of humankind.
2. I tried to come up with sound advice for the person who sought a clarification in order to solve a sophistic argument.
3. The first thing that a person who seeks the truth and wishes to follow the truth should do
4. Is to grab every difficult puzzle and sophistic arguments by their halter and make them move away. These arguments interfere with our efforts to versify our proof.
5. Next, you should listen carefully and refrain from being stubborn, because there is no use in a stubborn-head who wishes to seek the truth.
6. If you truly wish to reveal the grief that was inflicted on you, then listen to me, and I hope that you will be guided to the correct path.
7. You are right: God the All-Knowing indeed predetermined by virtue of His creative will everything that was and everything that will be.
8. If you think about that seriously, you will realize that after He sent His prophet, He never blocked the entrance.

<sup>181</sup> Al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt*, 10:365–66.

9. It is a well-known fact that His predetermination is dependent on conditions.
10. And that is what a healthy mind sees as possible and never rejects. The same happens when you see how things are created after other things happen.
11. For example, you can quench your thirst each time you drink. And you can satisfy your appetite only after you eat.
12. No wonder that it is dependent on conditions. God, who created all beings, predetermined
13. That you will be a heretic, as long as you are in a state of committing injustice, and as long as you refuse to take [into consideration] the causes leading to divine guidance, and the capacity [to rightly act].
14. Among the causes that you rejected are divine ordinance, the ability to act, and the uttering of the Muslim profession of faith.
15. You are like a person who fasts for a very long time, thinking to himself: "I should die from starvation, since He predetermined that I would starve."
16. If you submissively turned to your Lord and surrendered to the true religion,
17. If you paid your dues to the good contemplation in full, and fixed your eyes attentively and willingly with every glance you have,
18. Then the good guidance that God wished for you would come true, and His predetermination would not be violated at all.
19. Hear me out! The effusions of God in eternity are plentiful. Address yourself to God so you win an effusion.
20. Or else trust the Lord and act, because every good deed is made easy for the man who is meant to perform it. There is no doubt about that.
21. Had I known that your mind is capable of understanding things which are vague and subtle,
22. I would have elaborated on this and gone on and on about it. I would have investigated the matter according to the methods of theology and philosophy.
23. But since my goal here is to persuade the likes of you, what I present is but a summary of long chapters.
24. The ship would have sunk in the depths of the sea had it not been forbidden to discuss these matters on which you had inquired.
25. Therefore I fold the carpet that I spread before, and I beg the Almighty God to forgive my slip of the tongue.

### APPENDIX III: TWO ADDITIONAL RESPONSES

The following two responses are not included in al-Subkī's account. The first response was composed by Abū Sa'īd Faraj ibn Qāsim ibn Aḥmad ibn Lubb al-Taghlibī (d. 782/1380–81). Ibn Lubb was the mufti of Granada and taught in al-Madrasah al-Naṣrīyah. His response is quoted by the Andalusian Maliki scholar Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā al-Shāṭibī al-Andalusī (d. 790/1388), in his *adab* compilation *Al-Ifādāt wa-al-Inshādāt*. According to al-Shāṭibī's account, Ibn Lubb was asked about the dhimmi's question, probably in a letter. Ibn Lubb signed his response with the following note: "These written verses are a response to the above six verses." The dhimmi's question in this version is, then, a six-verse question (verses 5–6 of the original do not appear in this version). Al-Shāṭibī, who provides a brief interpretation of Ibn al-Lubb's response, heard the author recite his response in Rajab 759/July 1358.<sup>182</sup>

The Response of Ibn Lubb:

1. The Lord predetermined the heresy of the heretics; however He did not determine that this heresy is an obligation, which pleases Him. This principle applies to all religions.
2. He forbade His creatures to perform the [bad] deeds that He all the same wished to occur. His sovereignty is the conclusive proof.
3. We are pleased with God's decree, while our hatred is reserved for sins.
4. You should not be pleased with a human act which was specifically forbidden by the divine law. However, you should commit your cause to the way He organized things and to the rule of His creative will.
5. He invited everyone to observe the practices of religion. He made some of them successful in performing their religious duties. In sum, the success was granted to a few, but the invitation to perform these duties was to all.
6. Therefore, when you take other routes than the route of His divine law, you are disobedient, even though you walk in the path of the divine creative will.
7. The choice of performing an act is yours, while God is the creator. His will is materialized in His creation.
8. What God does not want to exist, does not exist. God, who created creation, is exalted and sublime.
9. This is the answer to the questions of an ignoramus, a blind man who shouts:

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<sup>182</sup> Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Mūsā al-Shāṭibī, *Al-Ifādāt wa-al-Inshādāt*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al-Ajfan (Beirut, 1403/1983), 172–75.

10. Listen, you scholars of Islam! I, the non-Muslim under the protection of your religion, am baffled, so please lead me towards the clearest theological proof.

The second response, that of Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn As'ad al-Tustarī (d. ca. 737/1336), appears in a Hanafi *kalām* manual written by Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wāḥid ibn Humām (d. 861/1457). The Persian al-Badr al-Tustarī visited Cairo in 727/1326–27, but there is no indication that he learned about the dhimmi's question during his stay there. Al-Tustarī's poem comprised two verses only:

1. God predetermines heresy, which means that He knows the most secret truths by virtue of His eternal knowledge.
2. Then He created things according to what He knows, by virtue of His eternal power.<sup>183</sup>

According to Ibn al-Humām, al-Tustarī “wrote a preface in prose in which he summarized the essence of his two-verse response. He wrote: the meaning of God's predetermining the heresy of the heretic is that God has knowledge of things.”<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>183</sup>Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Abī Bakr ibn 'Alī Ibn Abī Sharīf, *Al-Musāmarah: Sharḥ al-Musāyarah fī al-'Aqā'id al-Munjiyah fī al-Ākhirah li-Kamāl al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Wāḥid al-Hanafī al-Ma'rūf bi-Ibn al-Humām wa-ma'ahu Hashiyah 'alā al-Musāyarah li-Zayn al-Dīn al-Qāsim ibn Quṭlūbughā al-Miṣrī al-Hanafī*, ed. Muḥammad 'Umar al-Dumyāṭī (Beirut, 1423/2002), 136.

<sup>184</sup>Ibn Abī Sharīf (d. 905/1499–1500), the Shafi'i scholar who glossed Ibn al-Humām's text, sees these verses as an explanation to the term *al-qadā' wa-al-qadar*: God's *qadā'* indicates God's eternal knowledge, while God's *qadar* indicates God's creating by virtue of His power. Ibn Abī Sharīf, *Al-Musāmarah*, 136.