CHAPTER 9

Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, and the Political Functions of Punishment in the Islamic Hell

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> Who is the man here below who has never committed a sin, tell me?
> He who had never committed one, how could he have lived, tell me?
> If, because I do evil, you punish me with evil,
> what difference is there between you and me, tell me?
>
> ʿUMAR KHAYYĀM[1]

The eternity of hell is among those issues on which Ibn Taymiyya (d. 723/1328) and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) opted for an original theory, one that is in contrast to established Sunni doctrine. From the perspective of the latter, hell is eternal for infidels, while the faithful dwell there only temporarily. The two Ḥanbalī theologians, instead, argued in favour of the eventual annihilation of hell. Numerous recent studies that have analysed this theory have also examined its relationship with that of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638/1240), for whom the punishment, but not hell, is finite, thus prompting interesting cues for comparison.[2]

The comparison is legitimate, given that the stance taken by the two Ḥanbalī authors can, in part, be explained as a reaction to Ibn ʿArabī's theory. Ibn al-Qayyim refers to it explicitly, clearly distancing himself while at the same time implicitly acknowledging his debt.[3] Here, I would like to return to the issue,

1 Khayyām, *Rubāʿiyāt*, tr. Fitzgerald 70 n. 2.

2 Al-Manāʿī underscores the points of concordance between the three authors, from the perspective of a cautious rehabilitation of Ibn ʿArabī in a Salafi modernist intellectual context. See Manāʿī, ʿAqīda. Khalil considers Ibn ʿArabī's theories and those of the Ḥanbalīs as alternative visions of "universal mercy." See Khalil, *Salvation* 73. He concludes, however, that Ibn Taymiyya "moved beyond Ibn ʿArabī's quasi-universalism." See ibid., 86. At least in as much as concerns Ibn al-Qayyim, Ajhar arrives at a similar conclusion: *yumkinu al-qawl inna Ibn al-Qayyim qad fāqa Ibn ʿArabī fī hādhihi al-masʾala wa-dhahaba abʿad minhu*. See Ajhar, *Suʾāl* 263. See also Hoover, *Theodicy* 46–8; idem, God's wise purposes 126.

3 Ibn al-Qayyim quotes a long passage from Ibn ʿArabī (*Fuṣūṣ* i, 93–4) where the latter argues in favor of the possibility for God to renege on his threat of punishment (*khulf al-waʿīd*).

focusing on an aspect of Ibn ʿArabī's eschatology which may prove useful in comparing the two theories further: the concept of punishment that lies at the root of Ibn ʿArabī's theory. What does infernal punishment actually involve? And which legal model of punishment does it match?

Ibn ʿArabī's own speculations on the nature of eschatological castigation are part and parcel of his reflections about the notion of punishment, which are in turn a recurring motif in his legal thought. For the topic to be covered suitably, a thorough catalogue and correlation of the many relevant passages scattered throughout Ibn ʿArabī's entire works would be necessary. The task would be all the more difficult because Ibn ʿArabī's writing is more akin to hermeneutics than to philosophy or theology. His aim, in the field of eschatology as elsewhere, is to disclose the multiple aspects (*wujūh*, lit. "faces") of the Revelation rather than giving a systematic presentation of doctrine. Moreover, without having to subscribe to any schools, Ibn ʿArabī is able to find a *wajh ṣaḥīḥ* (an aspect that is real and true) in the disparate opinions voiced in Islamic systematic theology (*kalām*), philosophy (*falsafa*) and Sufism, including those distrusted by the heresiographers.

My own knowledge does not extend far enough for such an undertaking; I will, however, endeavour to determine major themes. The positions taken by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim, following the principle that things can be discerned through their opposites, will help identify these themes, that is to say those sensitive points in Ibn ʿArabī's outlook that may have triggered a creative response in the two Ḥanbalīs. Among these issues, the notion of punishment appears to me to be of particular relevance.

Thus, prior to illustrating some of Ibn ʿArabī's ideas on the topic (sections 3 and 4), Ibn al-Qayyim's position will be covered, dwelling primarily on the jurisdictional-political element (section 2). We cannot proceed, however, without first of all covering the essential features of the ongoing debate on the eternity of hell in the realm of Islam before the seventh/thirteenth century (section 1). I make no pretence of exhausting the topic, but doing so will allow me to clarify the approach taken in this paper.

See Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 352. Ibn al-Qayyim supports the same theory. See ibid., 383–4. Ibn al-Qayyim remarks that one should not reject the theory of the annihilation of the Fire only because "innovators" have supported it (ibid., 364). In fact, both Ibn ʿArabī and Ibn Taymiyya limit binding consensus to the Salaf, making room for the adoption of opinions rejected as "innovations" by the majority of the Sunni schools. Finally, it should be remembered that Ibn Taymiyya, at least in his formative years, held a favorable view of Ibn ʿArabī. See Ajhar, *Suʾāl* 119–21; Khalil, *Salvation* 87; Manāʿī, ʿAqīda 101. However, Ibn Taymiyya rejected Ibn ʿArabī's views of hell. See ibid., 96; Chodkiewicz, Procès 102.

1 Universal Salvations

Quranic exegesis (*tafsīr*), the hadith and the *kalām* tradition offered a vast and varied arsenal of arguments in favour of the end of hell; Ibn ʿArabī, Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim take advantage of all of these arguments in different degrees. The underlying idea is that, in God, mercy prevails over wrath and that it will triumph at the end of time. Going into specifics, these can be listed as follows: God will most certainly honour His promise of reward but is not obliged to fulfil His threats; when the Quran refers to the "eternity" of hell, the term can be taken to mean a "long period"; an eternal penance would not be rightful, as it would be inconsistent with the offence, which was committed in a limited time-span; penance has a purifying function and therefore has a finite duration; the intercession of the faithful and the Prophet, or God's own direct intervention, can save sinners. There are also isolated traditions that announce the final emptying and annihilation of hell.[4]

According to Sunni authors, these arguments apply only in the case of sinning believers, not in that of unbelievers, but nevertheless, they appear to offer an opening for universal salvation. All of these arguments are actually echoed by Christian supporters of universal salvation, a position rejected by Augustine in book 21 of *City of God*. Augustine's well-known rejection helps us hone in on the various nuances this concept can take on. The targets of his criticism are on the one hand Origen, whose position had been condemned by the church, and, on the other, "tender-hearted" Christians whom Augustine does not regard as heretics, but as misguided by a misplaced compassion for the damned (*De Civ. Dei* 21.17).[5] These two tendencies have distinctive features. Origen's doctrine of apocatastasis (restoration) fits into a framework of optimistic theodicy, sharpened by the dispute with dualists: evil is accidental and transitory and is, in the end, removed. The trials of hell have a purgative and therapeutic function whose duration is limited. Ultimately leading to the total destruction of evil, they help to restore the original harmony and unity of creation.[6]

The "tender-hearted," in turn, split into two distinct groups. The first are universalists who envisage the salvation of unbelievers through the intercession of the saints (*De Civ. Dei* 21.18).[7] This act of mercy, rather than a necessary

4 For an in-depth analysis of exegeses of verses on the eternity of hell in early *tafsīr* see Hamza, Hell 74–119. For further developments in exegesis, see Manāʿī, ʿAqīda; Khalil, *Salvation*. Cf. also Pagani, Vane speranze 184–93 (tr. 286–90).

5 Bauckham, *Fate* 151.

6 Daley, *Hope* 48–60.

7 Bauckham, *Fate* 147, 155–6.

return to a primordial state, is the outcome of a salvation history in which the saints' mediation plays an essential role. In this context, much is made of the conflict between justice and mercy, and castigation in hell is seen more as retributive punishment that can be revoked by virtue of the victim's forgiveness than as a necessary corrective penalty.[8] The source of this view may have been the *Apocalypse of Peter*,[9] where the legal paradigm underlying the unlimited possibility of forgiveness may have been retaliation.[10] In Muslim eschatology this chance of salvation is foreseen, but it is limited to believers. Al-Nasafī (d. 508/1114), for example, suggests that the Quranic verses on retaliation allow believers to hope for salvation.[11] Here, private justice, which helps to right wrongs, only applies to the believing "brothers," and not to the unbelievers, whose irreparable wrongdoing is punished in eternity. This two-tiered justice brings to mind Plato's afterlife where the punishment of "curable" sinners comes to an end when their victims have been contented and appears principally to regard private offences, while the exemplary punishment of the "incurable," which is eternal, is inflicted mainly on tyrants, whose wrongdoing afflicts the *polis*.[12]

The second category of "tender-hearted" refuted by Augustine are those who wish to extend the scope of salvation to people who profess Christian faith, but who have lived wicked lives (*De Civ. Dei* 21.19–21).[13] This last tendency, which we can call confessional universal salvation, and which is echoed in the 'catholic' tendency voiced by Jerome "at his most generous,"[14] finds an exact match in the position that the traditionalists succeeded in enforcing at the end of a long struggle by basing themselves on the authority of the Sunna. Feras Hamza has given us a clear sketch of the polemic atmosphere of the early centuries of Islam in which the "People of the Sunna and the Community" (*ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamāʿa*) developed their doctrine of temporary hell while

8 Ibid., 132–48.

9 Ibid., 149–59.

10 For a critical appraisal of this interpretation, with further references, see Roig Lanzillotta, Punishment 141–52.

11 Nasafī, *Tabṣira* ii, 771–2. For further references on retaliatory punishment in Islamic eschatology, see Lange, *Justice* 147 n. 64.

12 Plato, *Gorgias* 525b–d; see also idem, *Phaedo* 114a–b; idem, *Republic* 615a–e.

13 Bauckham, *Fate* 147.

14 Daley, *Hope* 104: "And as we believe that the devil and all apostates and impious sinners, who say in their heart, 'There is no God,' will undergo eternal punishments, so we think that those who are sinners—even impious ones—and yet Christians will have their works tried and purged in fire, but will receive from the judge a moderate sentence, mingled with mercy" (Jerome, *In Is* 18.66.24).

simultaneously defining the boundaries of the faith group. This doctrine hinged upon bestowing the status of believers on Muslims guilty of grave sins, saving them from eternal hell-fire (in contrast with the Kharijis and Muʿtazilis), although not sparing them all forms of punishment (a position attributed to the "corrupt" Murji'is).[15]

Yet eternal hell-fire in the Sunni tradition is a poorly guarded realm, open to attack on many sides. Here are but four of them. Firstly, some theological arguments could lend themselves to universalist outcomes. This is especially the case for the *khulf al-waʿīd* (renege on the threat of punishment): if God is free to recant on His threats then why should He not forgive unbelievers, too?[16] The Ashʿaris are, in fact, forced into conceding this possibility, in theory at least.[17] These snags caused Maturidi theologians to discard the argument.[18] Secondly, Islam has kept many of those concepts that precede purgatory in Catholic theology,[19] but without confining the temporary castigation to a well-defined location. This lack of a clearly-defined purgatory results in a pervious frontier between paradise and hell, offering the damned a chance of escape, the opposite of what took place in the Latin Middle Ages, when the precise location of purgatory acts as the final bolt on the portal of hell, that is to say, the creation of eternal hell-fire.[20] Alongside the uncertainties as to its whereabouts, there are those regarding the nature of the punishment, which the eschatological traditions illustrate as both purgative and retributive. Thirdly, the idea of intercession, despite its confessional limitations, may have provided an opening for the hope of universal salvation. The Prophet's negotiations with God, which feature so prominently in the narratives of his Ascension (*miʿrāj*), highlight the oppositeness of promise and threat and raise hopes in the delay or annulment of the sentence.

Lastly, on a wider scale, eternal hell-fire turns out to be a stumbling block for Islam as universalist monotheism. The heated overtones with which the Quran

15 See Hamza, Hell. On the last point, see Nasafī, *Tabṣira* ii, 766 (*wa zaʿamat al-murjiʾa al-khabītha anna aḥadan min al-muslimīn lā yuʿāqabu ʿalā shayʾ min al-kabāʾir*). On this passage, see Lange, Sins 163 n. 122.

16 Vasalou, *Moral* 195; see also Vajda, Perpétuité 34–5.

17 Cf. Nasafī, *Tabṣira* ii, 784, 789; Nābulusī, *Qawl* 217a–218b.

18 See Lange, Sins 22–9. The Ashʿari position did, in fact, encourage theologians in the Ottoman era to accommodate 'universalist' opinions favored by the study and diffusion of Ibn ʿArabī's work. Nābulusī, *Qawl*, vindicates the legitimacy of this trend, which had been criticized by Harawī, *Qawl*, 51–53.

19 Cf. Le Goff, *Nascita* 37–107.

20 Baschet, *Justices* 554. For a wider discussion, see Pagani, Vane speranze 199–200 (tr. 299–300).

spells out the eternity of hell suggest that this concept has been the object of inter-religious debate from the beginning and may even have taken on an intra-religious dimension. The gaps in our knowledge of the history of nascent Islam prevent us from establishing whether the Quran's tirades are directed at other religious groups or at "believers"; particularly as we have no way of knowing who the "believers" actually were at this point in religious history.[21] The Quran censures the Jews for believing that the punishment lasts for a limited number of days; however "Jews" may actually mean "misguided judaizing believers." The Quran's polemic against intercession, in any case, fits in well with the rejection of the Jewish and Christian exclusivist claim that "no one will enter paradise unless he [or she] is a Jew or Christian" (Q 2:111).[22] On the other side, the idea of *fiṭra* (original constitution) and the emphasis on God's mercy and the return of all things unto him do actually share some points with the philosophical concept of apocatastasis.

Leaving the Quran aside, it is clear that the issue of eternal hell is a problem shared by Islam and Christianity alike, two universalist monotheisms that went on to become the official creed of empires, in which ties with political power required religious legitimization of the use of force by the state. The imposition of the dogma of eternal hell (a development that did not arise in either Zoroastrianism or Judaism), in this light, takes on a significant political function. Hannah Arendt, reflecting on the profound political implications of Augustine's espousal of the doctrine of eternal hell, suggested that, through it, "an element of violence was permitted to insinuate itself into both the very structure of Western religious thought and the hierarchy of the Church."[23] Arendt compared Augustine's use of the belief in hell to that of Plato, in so far as the Church Father, like the Greek philosopher before him, "understood to what an extent these doctrines could be used as threats in this world, quite apart from their speculative value about a future life."[24] The Ḥanbalī judge Ibn al-ʿAqīl (d. 513/1119) is startlingly forthright on the point: whoever plays down the dread of hell, as do Murjiʾis who deny the punishment of believers and Sufis who claim to be able to quell the Fire, weaken the coercive power of law (*siyāsat al-sharʿ*) and are therefore to be condemned as infidels and, if possible,

21 Donner, *Muhammad*, without solving the issue, deserves acknowledgment for having rekindled the debate.

22 Khalil, *Salvation* 8.

23 Arendt, Authority 132–3.

24 Ibid., 131; see also Eslin, L'Au-delà. In the Neoplatonic tradition, Plato's eschatological myths were overtly read as expressions of the judicial part of his political philosophy. See O'Meara, *Platonopolis* 107–11.

eliminated by the sword.[25] As a judge, Ibn al-ʿAqīl compared his sentencing to death of an Ismaʿili to God's sentencing sinners to hell.[26] Ghazālī's crusade against esoteric and philosophical interpretations of eschatology was prompted by similar concerns for public order.[27] Both cases illustrate the particularly important role hell played in legitimizing the violence of the state during the Seljuq period.[28] Ibn al-ʿAqīl's argument ties the success of the religion to coercion through fear. But this point was highly problematic for Muslim religious scholars, who shared in many respects the deep ambivalence of their Christian counterparts towards the political sphere.[29] Moreover, it can be argued that the failure to recognize the humanity of one's opponent, which the recourse to violence entails,[30] jeopardizes the very foundations of the universal mission of a religion that claims to be destined for all men created equally according to the *fiṭra* or in the likeness of God.[31]

As a consequence of these various factors, both in Islam and in Christianity, critiques of the eternity of hell follow on the heels of the dogma of eternal hell. Despite official condemnation, they badger and hound it from within, so hell is not solely vulnerable to attacks from without by dualists and *zindīq*s (free-thinkers),[32] but also from religious key figures in the community, even though the orthodoxy of these figures may be contentious. In fact, it was primarily the mystics, both Muslim and Christian, who voiced criticism of hell from within. It is in the area of mysticism that cross-pollination between Islam and Christianity appears most clearly.[33]

Isaac of Nineveh (d. ca. 80/700), who lived in Iraq in the first Islamic century, criticised the eternity of hell with arguments that combined the theological-philosophical theory of apocatastasis and the eschatological hope of the "tender-hearted." His case is particularly significant because it proves that this trend survived in eastern Christianity, despite official hostility, especially

25 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs* 82, 332, 335.

26 Griffel, *Apostasie* 282.

27 See Lange, Throne 144–5.

28 See on the whole issue, Lange, *Justice*, esp. 47, 147, 239.

29 See Crone, No compulsion 167–9.

30 See Brague, *Philosophies* 198–216.

31 The interpretation of the notion of *fiṭra* is the basic problem behind the controversy over the salvation of babies born to polytheists and the related debate on the legitimacy of their killing in *jihād*. See Gobillot, *Conception* 26–45, 83–4.

32 See Crone, Abū Saʿīd 101–3; Urvoy, *Penseurs* 114, 125.

33 For further parallels between the arguments made by Muslim, Jewish and Christian theologians, see van Ess, Das begrenzte Paradies 111–112.

in monastic spheres and more specifically in Syriac monasticism.[34] Isaac of Nineveh's tract on hell was translated into Arabic by the monk Ḥanūn b. Yūḥannā Ibn al-Ṣalt (d. after 286/900) at the end of the third/ninth century, and the spread of thinking similar to his own among Persian Christians in the following century is reported by ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025).[35] Both Isaac's name and ideas were known to al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), who calls him Mār Isḥāq (Saint Isaac) and sums up his stance on hell in terms that would have sounded familiar to the Muslim supporters of salvation for all: the universality of mercy, the incompatibility of divine benevolence with the eternity of castigation, the possibility of *khulf al-waʿīd*.[36]

Ibn al-Ṣalt opens his translation with a very interesting remark: at his time the works of Isaac were kept and studied yet their diffusion was discouraged. The translator, nevertheless, appears to feel that making them more accessible was useful. It has been suggested that his aim was to make use of them in the debate with Islam.[37] This remark by Ibn al-Ṣalt illustrates the delicate position that the criticism of eternal hell occupied when put forward by a saint within the context of a religion that officially condemned this attitude. Although questionable and marginal, this opinion would continue to be transmitted privately and informally, and could be tolerated as long as it remained an intellectual hypothesis and an aspiration, without turning into a dogma, that is to say "heresy."

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34 On Isaac of Nineveh's eschatology see Chialà, *Ascesi* 263–282. In 170/786–7, Origenism was condemned anew by Timothy I (d. 207/823), the Nestorian patriarch of Baghdad; the initiative was related to the doctrine's survival among the monks. See Berti, Grazia, 223. There is evidence that these ideas were still circulating in the 7th/13th century. See Reinink, Origenism 241, 249. A further witness to the universalist tendencies in Syriac monasticism can be located in an early eight century dispute between a monk and a Muslim *amīr*. To the latter's question: "Are the sons of Hagar going to enter the Kingdom or not?", the monk answers: "If there is a man who has good deeds, he will live in grace, in abodes far removed from torment. However, he will think of himself as a hired man and not as a son." See Griffith, Disputing 49–50.

35 Cf. Reynolds, Medieval 223–5. Reynolds says that to imagine here an influence from Origen would be "farfetched and speculative," but he seems overcautious in view of the circumstantial evidence.

36 Shahrastānī, *Milal* ii, 28–9 (ch. on the Melkites). Another possible clue suggesting that Isaac was known to Muslims can be found in the catalogue of Christian sects compiled by the Muʿtazili theologian al-Nāshiʾ al-Akbar (d. 293/906), which mentions among these the "Isaacites" (Isḥāqiyya), who can presumably be identified with the followers of Isaac of Nineveh. See Thomas, *Christian doctrines*, 53.

37 Chialà, *Ascesi* 60–3, 334–5; Swanson, Ibn al-Ṣalt 161.

Tolerance shown towards such doctrines obviously depended on whether or not there was a willingness to allow for mystical approaches to religion within the community. In Islam, as we know, the delicate balance between mystics and theologians was upset whenever the formers' more dubious 'secret doctrines' surfaced in the public domain through writings or preaching.

Among the Muslim mystics of the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries, the case of al-Ḥakīm al-Tirmidhī (d. between 295/905 and 300/910) deserves greater attention. Al-Tirmidhī, who was temporarily banished from his hometown, Tirmidh,[38] for having "spoken of love," was particularly concerned with the notion of *fiṭra* and the question of the salvation of infants, and his description of the purifying function of hell-fire shares some features with the Christian doctrine of apocatastasis.[39] The most open testimony to the criticism of hell in Sufism at this time are the ecstatic utterances (*shaṭaḥāt*) attributed to al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874) and al-Shiblī (d. 334/945): they voice the universal mercy characteristic of the friends of God, with overtones of a protest against the doctrine which restricts the intercession (*shafāʿa*) of the Prophet to his own community.[40] Insolence that, as we have seen, was harshly checked by Ibn al-ʿAqīl.

The spread of this defiant criticism of hell is one of the issues that brought Sufism and the political and religious orthodoxy into open conflict. In the case of the mystics, their criticism of eschatology was quite distinct from that of the philosophers (*falāsifa*) as it sprang from a religious impetus of charity and was accompanied by a claim to sainthood. Moreover, the allegorical interpretation of hell typical of the philosophical tradition does not necessarily question the usefulness of its political function for the masses.

This background information demonstrates that Ibn ʿArabī, illustrating comprehensively in writing his own "compassionate" interpretation of eschatology, performed an act of great moment, perfectly in line with his very high conception of his own function as "seal of the saints" (*khatam al-awliyāʾ*). Indeed, the issue of the cessation of infernal castigation occupies a key role in Ibn ʿArabī as it is the destination of his line of thinking on the encompassing universality of divine mercy (*ʿumūm* and *shumūl al-raḥma*). For him, this

38 A city in which Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/746) had lived for a long time, leaving there a following. See van Ess, *Theologie* ii, 494; cf. also ibid., ii, 507–8, for a suggestion that there were possible affinities between Jahmites and local Sufis. An awareness of Jahmite ideas may be detected in al-Tirmidhī's theology. See Radtke, Theosophie 163–4.

39 Gobillot, *Conception*, 53–8, 105–7; eadem, Corps 246.

40 Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs* 332, 335. See also Hatem, *Amour* 54, 64, 79. On the case of al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), see ibid., 85; Massignon *Passion* iii, 217; Addas, *Victoire* 76–7.

thread running through his work is not merely a theory deriving from his metaphysical vision but "glad tidings" (*bushrā*) which he himself brings to humankind.[41] Ibn ʿArabī shares this expectancy with the ecstatic mystics who came before him, yet differs from them because he does not challenge the Shariʿa and the Sunna, but claims to be their inspired interpreter. Universal salvation is neither against the Law nor in competition with Muḥammad's intercession, rather, it is the deepest meaning of the universality of the Shariʿa and the *telos* of Muḥammad's mission.[42] This meaning and this *telos* are as yet unaccomplished, and the saint, who is both commentator and intercessor, provides decisive aid in bringing them about. For this very reason the "seal of the saints" considers himself to be the "heir of Muḥammad" and not an ecstatic mystic or the *maître à penser* of a particular school.

The link between universal salvation and the doctrine of sainthood, as well as the implicit claims to authority, could not have escaped Ibn Taymiyya, who channelled much of his dialectic skill into dismantling Ibn ʿArabī's hagiology. It may even have provided the Ḥanbalī scholar and his disciple Ibn al-Qayyim with a cue for radically rethinking eschatology, thus safeguarding the universalist tendency of Islam without following Ibn ʿArabī in his more dangerous ideas.

2 Ibn al-Qayyim's Reform of Political Hell

Ibn al-Qayyim resolutely disentangles the disorderly and contradictory mesh of the Sunni hell, putting forward a coherent and rational reform within the framework of a strict theodicy.[43] Castigation, in so far as it entails infliction of pain, constitutes an evil; however, within the cosmos created and governed by God, evil, in itself, cannot exist. It is therefore a relative evil justified by a wise purpose (*ḥikma*). It is not retributive, as retribution brings nothing of benefit to either the evildoer or God, who has no need for revenge. It has, hence, a purifying function and as such cannot but have a limited duration. This is because once the sinner is healed and reformed the castigation has fulfilled its

41 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* ii, 206–7.

42 Cf. Chodkiewicz, *Océan* 66; idem, Banner 51; Addas, *Victoire* 57–79. To my knowledge, the latter study is the most exhaustive on the concept of apocatastasis in Ibn ʿArabī, with special attention to the soteriological role of the Prophet, which will not be covered in this article.

43 For a detailed examination see Hoover, Islamic Universalism; idem, God's Wise Purposes; Manāʿī, ʿAqīda; Khalil, *Salvation* 92–102; Ajhar, *Suʾāl* 257–69. See also Abrahamov, Creation.

purpose. Even when this requires a long lapse of time, the punishment restores man's original constitution (*fiṭra*) to its primary state much in the same way as drastic medical treatments, such as cauterization or amputation "remove alien matter that has accidentally corrupted the sound nature (*ṭabīʿa mustaqīma*) of an invalid".[44] By way of its beneficial, although painful, character, punishment is an expression of mercy, an attribute of the divine essence that prevails over the incidental attribute of wrath.

This therapeutic model of punishment[45] is located inside a providentialist outlook in which evil lacks an ontological standing of its own and will, ultimately, be completely eliminated, so much so that even Iblīs will probably be redeemed. As Hoover remarks "[Ibn al-Qayyim's] aim is apologetic. He is trying to explain why God creates evil and to defend God's wise purpose against detractors."[46] One is tempted to add that Ibn al-Qayyim is also a political writer who defends state power; not an arbitrary power that indifferently shows clemency or inflicts punishment but a rational and wise power.[47]

Ibn al-Qayyim employs legal terms to describe the punishment of hell, associating it with the *ḥudūd* (divinely ordained punishments), and by doing so setting it within the framework of public criminal law, in which the *ḥudūd* are generally characterized as "rights of God" (*ḥuqūq Allāh*):

> God does not quench his thirst for revenge by punishing His servants, as does he who has suffered wrongdoing when he takes revenge on the offender. He does not harrow His servant with this purpose, but with the aim of redeeming him and because of His mercy towards him. His punishment is, in fact, a benefit (*maṣlaḥa*) to him, despite the infliction of great pain; likewise the application of the *ḥudūd* in this world is of benefit to whoever is subjected to them.[48]

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44 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 370. The same analogy is found in Ghazālī, *Maqṣad* 68. See also Khalil, *Salvation* 46–7. It was already used by Neoplatonists. See O'Meara, *Platonopolis* 109.

45 On the importance of this model see Hoover, God's wise purposes 115; idem, Islamic Universalism 189; Khalil, *Salvation* 97.

46 Hoover, God's Wise Purposes 127.

47 Instead, al-Nasafī, in response to a Qadarī objection, compares God to the ruler, who for the same offence may grant a pardon or impose a punishment. See Nasafī, *Tabṣira* ii, 767, 776. On the correlation between the arbitrariness of Seljuk rulers and that of the Ashʿari God, see Lange, Throne 141.

48 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 369.

The analogy of the *ḥudūd* appears to be even more effective than that of medicine in describing infernal castigation. Indeed, Ibn al-Qayyim foresees the objection that the treatment that causes the sick person suffering, differently from the torment of the damned, is not referred to as "punishment" as the physician cares for his patient and feels no anger towards him. This is true, replies Ibn al-Qayyim, "but this does not mean that the punishment cannot be mercy towards them, as the *ḥudūd* in this world are simultaneously punishment, mercy and purgation."[49]

In one of his legal works, Ibn al-Qayyim explains that the *ḥudūd* have a purifying and reforming function: in the case of capital punishment, these penalties rehabilitate the sinner's soul, though not his body, because they exempt him from hell.[50] Like the *ḥudūd*, infernal castigation, by virtue of its being gainful, is inevitable, even though mercy is dearer to God than punishment,[51] and even though the suffering experienced by those who are punished evokes pity in others.[52] Indeed, "tribulation is mercy" (*al-ibtilā' raḥma*), and for this reason, God answers those who pray for mercy for those who suffer great tribulation: "How can I be merciful towards him by depriving him of the very same thing through which I show him mercy?" (*kayfa arḥamuhu min shay' arḥamuhu bihi*).[53] The *ḥikma* and the *maṣlaḥa* (utility, common good) justifying the punishments and the sufferings borne in this world and the next are one and the same: following careful contemplation one can discover the perfect correspondence (*tanāsub*) and harmony (*tawāfuq*) between earthly and otherworldly rewards and punishments, all similarly serving the purpose of healing and purification.[54]

In conclusion, the temporary hell, which is described by Ibn al-Qayyim either as a hospital (*māristān*)[55] or as a prison, is a political hell: a place where violence is employed in the name of the common good, within the limits of reason. Hence, unlike the mystics' protests against hell censured by Ibn al-ʿAqīl, Ibn al-Qayyim's 'reform' of hell does not undermine the coercive power of the

49 Ibid., 371. See also Ibn al-Qayyim, *Shifā'* 692–4, 698, 720–1.

50 Ibn al-Qayyim, *I'lām* i, 97; ii, 72–3; iii, 15–6. On the theory that *ḥadd* crimes are expiated by earthly punishments, see Lange, Sins 148 n. 29, 151 n. 59.

51 Khalil, *Salvation* 96.

52 Cf. Ibn Taymiyya's argument for the divine mercy concealed in the enforcement of *ḥudūd*: the father would spoil his son if he refrained from punishing him as his tender mother would have it. See Ibn Taymiyya, *Siyāsa* 79; cf. also Ghazālī, *Maqṣad* 68.

53 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 376.

54 Ibid., 369; see also ibid., 379. On the correspondence between worldly and otherworldly legal rules see also idem, *I'lām*, iii, 115.

55 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Shifā'* 692.

law (*siyāsat al-shar*ʿ), but instead rationalizes it. In this regard, Ibn al-Qayyim's understanding of justice in the netherworld, while reminiscent of ancient precedents,[56] anticipates the critique of eternal hell that would affirm itself in Modern Europe along with the adoption of a penal theory founded on the ideas of reform and deterrence rather than retribution.[57] It hardly comes as a surprise, therefore, that Ibn al-Qayyim has been favourably received among Islamic modernists.[58]

3 The Hell of Wrath and the Hell of Mercy

Ibn ʿArabī's conception of hell is much less easy to circumscribe than that of Ibn al-Qayyim. If we approach it from the angle of its legal implications, we are confronted with two major questions. The first concerns the relationship between the legal function of hell and the other roles it fulfils through its continued existence. The second concerns the model of justice to which its legal function is related. We will deal with the first question in this section, and with the second in the next one.

According to Ibn ʿArabī, once a term of infernal punishment has come to an end, hell ceases to be "painful," although it does not cease to exist altogether. As is done in the mainstream Sunni tradition, Ibn ʿArabī makes a distinction between sinful believers whose stay in hell is only temporary and "the people of the Fire, those who are its inhabitants" (*ahl al-nār alladhīna hum ahluhā*), and will stay there eternally. However, according to him, the eternity of the stay does not necessarily imply that the punishment (*ʿadhāb*) will be eternal, too.[59]

The term *ʿadhāb* raises some issues as Ibn ʿArabī uses it both in its primary meaning of "castigation," as in the Quran, and also in the broader sense of "suffering." Thus, certain passages may lead us to think that the cessation of *ʿadhāb* is solely the end of suffering but not of the punishment in the legal sense. As

56 On otherworldly punishment as therapy in Plato and Origen, see, respectively, McKenzie *Plato* 177–8, 184, 187, 203; Daley, *Hope* 57. Cf. also Augustine, *De Civ. Dei* 21.13. For the sake of coherence, Neoplatonists adhering to Plato's reformative conception of justice rejected his idea that "incurable" souls will suffer eternal punishment. See O'Meara, *Platonopolis* 107–111.

57 Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians* 13. See also Walker, *Decline of hell* 29–32.

58 Manāʿī, ʿAqīda 93, 100, 121; Khalil, *Salvation* 110–35.

59 Chittick, Death 77; Chodkiewicz, *Océan* 67; Addas, *Victoire* 64; Manāʿī, ʿAqīda 106; Khalil, *Salvation* 62–3. I leave aside here the question of what kind of people actually qualifies for eternal hell, which is in turn related to Ibn ʿArabī's definition of infidelity. See Chittick, *Religious diversity* 152–5; Khalil, *Salvation* 55–62; Gril, Pharaon.

an example, describing the way in which the *ahl al-nār* ("the people of the Fire") lose their sensitivity to the pain (*al-iḥsās bi-l-ālām*) of burning, Ibn ʿArabī compares their situation to that of sinful believers who, according to a hadith, God lets die (*amātahum Allāhu fihā imātatan*) so as to spare them the suffering of their temporary stay in hell.[60] In this case, the absence of pain can be considered simply as an easing, but not a discontinuation, of the punishment.

However, further passages clarify that, for Ibn ʿArabī, what draws to a close is the punishment in its legal sense: "When the fixed penalty (*ḥadd*) against *ahl al-nār* comes to its end, they dwell in hell-fire because they are suited to it (*bi-l-ahliyya*) and not as recompense (*bi-l-jazāʾ*)."[61] Indeed, the duration of the castigation in hell stands as a "proportional recompense" (*jazāʾ wifāq*, Q 78:26), corresponding exactly to what is merited (*istiḥqāq*) on account of one's evil deeds in this world. It is, therefore, limited, insomuch as limited sin could not warrant unlimited punishment.[62] At the same time, while in the Quran the expression *jazāʾ wifāq* (proportional recompense) appears solely in reference to infernal punishment, Ibn ʿArabī also applies it to the reward that the faithful receive through merit, in a special paradise called the "paradise of deeds" (*jannat al-aʿmāl*). In the case also of the blessed, the reward earned through deeds is bestowed over a limited period of time.[63]

Thus, limited duration pertains to the function of the two abodes in so far as they are loci of reward and punishment. Once the spell is over, both the eternal extension of the pleasures of paradise and the transformation

60 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* i, 303. The hadith is found in Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ, k. al-īmān* 82 (*bāb ithbāt al-shafāʿa wa ikhrāj al-muwaḥḥidīn min al-nār*). It specifies that experiencing death in hell is a special favour accorded to sinful believers. This restriction is mentioned elsewhere also by Ibn ʿArabī. See *Futūḥāt* ii, 161; Shaʿrānī, *Yawāqīt* ii, 469. In his commentary on Muslim, al-Nawawī says that the death accorded to the sinful believers is "real" (*hādhihi al-imāta imāta ḥaqīqiyya*), and that it makes them lose their sensibility after they have suffered a punishment proportional (*ʿalā qadr*) to their sins. See Nawawī, *Sharḥ* iii, 38. According to Qurṭubī, "death" can be taken here either literally (*mawta ḥaqīqiyya*) or as a metaphor for a state of unconsciousness. He further explains that even if God does not torment these sinners (*wa-in lam yuʿadhdhibhum*), their stay in hell is a punishment (*ʿuqūba*), in the same way as serving a prison sentence without being put in chains. See Qurṭubī, *Tadhkira* 769–71 (*bāb man dakhala al-nār min al-muwaḥḥidīn māta wa-ḥtaraqa thumma yakhrujūna bi-l-shafāʿa*).

61 Ḥakīm, *Muʿjam* 1089, quoting Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iv, 120.

62 Chittick, Death 77.

63 Ḥakīm, *Muʿjam* 288; 1021–2. Cf. also Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* ii, 212–3, transl. in Addas, *Victoire*, 65–6: once the spell of reward and punishment is over, all are "rewarded" by divine mercy by virtue of their original disposition to love and serve God.

of infernal misery into bliss depend on divine grace (*minna*), as opposed to deserts (*istiḥqāq*). Indeed, both perpetual reward and perpetual punishment are beyond equity. Going beyond equity in reward is generosity (*faḍl*), while it would be blameworthy in the case of punishment.[64] Once the period of reward or punishment has ended, divine mercy embraces the people of the two abodes, notwithstanding the fact these are separate and that different forms of bliss (*naʿīm*) are found in each.

Although some critics, from the time of Ibn Taymiyya onwards, have drawn parallels between Ibn ʿArabī and the Jahmiyya,[65] this idea does not imply the annihilation of paradise and hell, rather, it amounts to a downgrading of the retributive concept of the afterlife in a spirit akin to Rābiʿa al-ʿAdawiyya (d. 185/801), who wished to burn paradise and put out hell as places of reward and punishment.[66] So, despite having fulfilled its legal function, hell continues onto eternity.

The reason for hell's eternity is both theological and anthropological. Theologically, it fulfils the economy of the Divine Names: hell is the eternal manifestation of wrath, even when its *ḥukm* (rule) comes to an end, in contrast to that of divine satisfaction (*yantahī ḥukmuhu wa-lā yantahī ḥukm al-riḍā*).[67] That Divine Names of wrath manifest themselves without exercising their *ḥukm* is a key concept that deserves attention. In linguistic terms, this means that the names lose their referential, but not their significative function.[68] In legal terms, this means that penal law ceases to be operative, without being declared invalid. Ibn ʿArabī compares God's giving preponderance (*tarjīḥ*) to mercy over wrath to the choice of the judge between two equally legitimate decisions: "When God weighs mercy against wrath, mercy preponderates and is heavier, and wrath is lifted; that something is lifted has no other meaning that it ceases to be in operation; therefore, in the outcome, divine wrath has

64 Cf. Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iv, 171.

65 Cf. van Ess, *Theologie* ii, 508. Yet, in a way that recalls an opinion attributed to the Jahmiyya, Ibn ʿArabī says that, despite not being believers, those who know the oneness of God are not among the permanent inhabitants of hell. See Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* i, 314, and cf. van Ess, *Theologie* ii, 503; Ibn al-Jawzī, *Talbīs* 22.

66 A possible parallel in Syriac mysticism can be found in Stephen Bar Sudaili (c. 480–c. 543), who posits an end to both reward and punishment, after which all will be enveloped in divine mercy. See Guillaumont, Conférence 370; Daley, *Hope* 176–8. Cf. van Ess, *Theologie* iv, 548; idem, Das begrenzte Paradies 111.

67 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iii, 383. Cf. Chittick, *Religious diversity* 115–6; idem, Death 79.

68 Cf. Ajhar, *Suʾāl* 193.

no enforcement power."[69] Notwithstanding this, the Divine Names of wrath do not lose the "right" to be fulfilled, which is implemented through the manifestation of their properties in the imaginative realm.[70] In other words, the outward show of punishment is eternal in its exemplarity. It is a pure spectacle, hiding the reality of divine mercy.[71]

Anthropologically, eternal hell, as a "veil" or "separation" (*ḥijāb*) from God, is made necessary by the inability of certain natures to sustain the vision of God and bear the climate of paradise.[72] The *ḥijāb*, being deprivation, is a form of suffering, but as hell is not punishment in the legal sense of the term, it does not qualify as a *poena damni*, but is the inevitable consequence of a lack of knowledge.[73] This is close to Ibn Sīnā's intellectualist conception, where imperfect souls cannot aspire to absolute beatitude, but also to the mystical vision of Emanuel Swedenborg, where the souls that lack charity

> were seized by such anguish of heart from the approach of heavenly heat, which is the love in which angels are, and from the influx of heavenly light, which is Divine truth, that they perceived in themselves infernal torment instead of heavenly joy, and being struck with dismay, they cast themselves down headlong.[74]

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69 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iii, 176: *fa-lammā wāzana Allāh bayna al-raḥma wa l-ghaḍab rajaḥat al-raḥma wa-thaqulat wa-irtafaʿa al-ghaḍab al-ilāhī wa lā maʿnā li-irtifāʿ al-shayʾ illā zawāl ḥukmihi; fa-lam yabqa min al-ghaḍab al-ilāhī ḥukm fi l-maʾāl*. It is interesting to note that the notion that a law can lose its binding force without being rendered null by abrogation plays an important role in Ibn ʿArabī's view of the relationship of Islam with Judaism and Christianity. See Chittick, *Religious diversity* 125.

70 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iii, 119: *fa-ḥaythu ẓahara ḥukm al-Muntaqim* […] *fa-qad istawfā ḥaqquhu bi-ẓuhūr ḥukmihi*. For a translation, see Chittick, *Religious diversity* 115.

71 Cf. Ibn ʿArabī's interpretation of the "wall" dividing the Garden from the Fire in Q 57:13. Chittick, *Religious diversity* 117–8.

72 Chittick, Death 79–80; idem, *Religious diversity* 117–8.

73 Cf. ʿAfīfī's comment in Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ* ii, 96. For the same reason, the "paradise of the knower" (*jannat al-ʿārif*) is different from that of the believer. See ibid., ii, 90.

74 Swedenborg, *Heaven and hell* 340. Cf. Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iv, 14: "And if they were resurrected from their graves in the constitution of their own abode and were given a choice between the Garden and the Fire, they would choose the Fire, just as a fish chooses water and flees from the air through which the inhabitants of the earth have life" (tr. Chittick, *Religious Diversity* 118). For the comparison with Swedenborg, see Corbin, *Imagination* 260, 270.

Ibn ʿArabī imagines 'infernal pleasure' both as the cessation of pain and as an actual "independent bliss" (*naʿīm mustaqill*) alongside it.[75] He remarks on a number of occasions that *ʿadhāb* comes from the same root as *ʿudhūba* (sweetness), and this shows that the torment of hell-fire will turn into pleasure.[76] Before him al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144) had dwelt on the link between the two meanings, putting forward an explanation based on the meaning of *ʿadhāb* as deterrent penalty: as freshwater (*ʿadhb*) quenches thirst, the deterrent penalty (*ʿadhāb*) quells the desire to commit a crime.[77] The double meaning of the root *ʿ-dh-b*, exploited in erotic poetry (being tortured by your beloved is sweet), is further expanded in the mysticism of amorous martyrdom. This is the case of Ḥallāj, who calls forth and pursues "la suave extase dans le supplice" (*maldhūdh wajdī bi-l-ʿadhāb*).[78] The idea seems even to have captivated Ibn al-Qayyim, who states that the punishment turns into bliss (*inqalaba naʿīman*) for those who accept it as rightful and healing.[79]

However, Ibn ʿArabī is far from extolling suffering. *Naʿīm* in his hell has nothing sublime about it: in contrast with *ʿadhāb*, it is whatever is appropriate (*mulāʾim*) to the "nature" (*ṭabʿ*) or "temperament" (*mizāj*) of each man.[80] *ʿAdhāb* thus becomes sweet when it is no longer against nature. The *ahl al-nār* relish hell like natives love their homeland (*mawṭin*) and are drawn to it like iron to a magnet.[81]

Occasionally, Ibn ʿArabī appears to emphasize the redeeming properties of the *ahl al-nār*'s happiness, as when he compares them to Abraham, who found "coolness and safety" (*bardan wa-salāman*) in the furnace.[82] Elsewhere their pleasure is described as relish in wretchedness, quite simply "natural perversion":[83] something more akin to Fourier's utopia, where everyone follows his inclinations, than to the "virtuous city" of the *falāsifa*. To all appearances, given Ibn ʿArabī's definition of the notions of pleasure and pain, there is a variety of natural pleasures which, though being peculiar, should not be

75 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ* i, 114. Cf. Addas, *Victoire* 74.

76 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ* i, 94; idem, *Futūḥāt* ii, 207. Cf. Chodkiewicz, *Océan* 66; Khalil, *Salvation* 66.

77 Zamakhsharī, *Kashshāf* (*ad* Q 2:7). See also Lane, *Lexicon* v, 1982.

78 Hatem, *Amour* 113.

79 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 373.

80 Ḥakīm, *Muʿjam* 786–8; Chittick, Death 79–80; idem, *Religious diversity* 117–8.

81 Ḥakīm, *Muʿjam* 1089, 1091.

82 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ* i, 169. Cf. Q 21:69.

83 Ḥakīm, *Muʿjam* 1091 (*inziʿāj yaqtaḍīhi ṭabʿuhu*). See also Qayṣarī, *Maṭlaʿ* i, 432, commenting on *Fuṣūṣ* i, 94: "bliss for corrupt (*khabītha*) souls comes only from vile things, like a dung beetle relishes filth and cannot abide good things."

considered as diseases.[84] Such an outlook is foreign to Ibn al-Qayyim for whom medicine restores us to "sound nature" (*ṭabīʿa mustaqīma*) in the same way as infernal punishment restores our "original constitution" (*fiṭra*) to health.[85] But the natural aversion of certain souls from paradise is problematic also in connection with what Ibn ʿArabī himself says of the *fiṭra*. In fact, the *fiṭra* is for him a key argument in favour of universal salvation, in so far as he considers it as the original and unalterable disposition to know God, which is common to every human being.[86] Thanks to this, hell cannot be the "home" (*mawṭin*) of the rational soul, and if it were to alight there the flame would be smothered.[87] But *fiṭra* has for Ibn ʿArabī a great variety of meanings.[88] So, while adhering to a universalist conception of *fiṭra*, he does not dismiss altogether the alternative interpretation of this notion which prevailed in Sunni tradition, and according to which God gives men different "original constitutions" ordaining them *ab aeterno* either to hell or paradise.[89] However, Ibn ʿArabī curbs this idea from its predestinarian outlook towards a universal determinism: God's decree does not damn people but only establishes their dwelling-place.[90]

We have here a major difficulty: if the "people of the Fire" are not restored to the fullness of the original disposition, because it was pre-determined that their individual natures would not attain the felicity of human perfection, in what sense can we say that Ibn ʿArabī maintains "universal salvation"? In order to answer this question, we have to go back to Ibn ʿArabī's original use of the theological distinction between God's ontological and moral will, or His "creation" and His "command."[91] The paradoxes of determinism are a recurring motif in Ibn ʿArabī's writings. The real meaning of the "decree" (*qadar*) is a "secret" that revelation jealously veils,[92] because it betrays the fact that

84 Cf. the debate on the possibility of sodomy in paradise. See Lange, *Justice* 211.

85 Cf. above, n. 44.

86 See Addas, *Victoire* 64–6. Cf. also Chittick, *Religious diversity* 51–2.

87 Ḥakīm, *Muʿjam* 296, quoting Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iii, 360. On the dignity (*sharaf*) of the rational soul, see ʿAbd al-Qādir, *Mawāqif* ii, 932, 936, 941.

88 See Gobillot, *Conception* 60–1.

89 See ibid., 32–45, 46–51 (on the theological debate), and 62–5 (on the rejection of the predestinarian interpretation by Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn al-Qayyim). Cf. Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* ii, 330, where Ibn ʿArabī says that certain rational souls are not originally disposed to knowledge of God (*lam tufṭar ʿalā al-ʿilm bi-llāh*), and were destined to hell since the pre-eternal Covenant (cf. Q 7:172). See also ʿAbd al-Qādir, *Mawāqif* ii, 935.

90 Cf. Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iii, 76; Chittick, Death 77.

91 For references to the use of these concepts before Ibn ʿArabī, see Hoover, *Theodicy* 128–9; Ajhar, *Suʾāl* 227–8.

92 Cf. Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ* i, 131; see also ibid., 109–10.

disobedience to God's "command" is morally evil but ontologically good. God's creative mercy lets everything subsist conforming with its "fixed entities" (*aʿyān thābita*),[93] the concrete determinations of singular beings that since pre-eternity are established as potentialities in God's knowledge, and which, in themselves, are neither good nor evil, but "indifferent". God's "command," instead, is what confers their legal-moral qualifications to the actualized manifestations of the "fixed entities," through the revelation of the Law.[94] The injunctions and prohibitions of the Law can be disobeyed: they are a verbal imperative through which God commands what He lacks the power to impose, unlike God's creative imperative, the *kun*, which is necessarily fulfilled.[95] Hell as a temporary legal institution where moral evil is punished is under the sway of God's wrath, but as an eternal dwelling-place it is the object of God's creative will and mercy, which encompasses and "precedes" wrath.

Precisely this aspect of Ibn ʿArabī's eschatology is the target of Ibn Taymiyya's criticism: according to the latter, the emphasis on God's ontological mercy leads to disregard His moral will, and actually paves the way for the antinomian tendencies of some of Ibn ʿArabī's followers.[96] Ibn ʿArabī's distinction between the two dimensions of hell, the legal and the existential, is obviously incompatible with the view held by the majority, for whom eternal hell is the fulfilment of an irrevocable sentence against unbelievers. Yet it is also incompatible with Ibn al-Qayyim's hell as this too, as long as it lasts, has a penal function. Ibn al-Qayyim is without doubt unfair when he states that according to Ibn ʿArabī "nobody at all is punished in hell" (*ʿindahu lā yuʿadhdhabu bihā aḥad aṣlan*),[97] as he does not take account either of the temporary punishment or of the deprivation of the vision of God that Ibn ʿArabī foresees. Yet the accusation is not entirely unfounded in so far as the driving force behind Ibn ʿArabī's hermeneutics is the desire to dispense with punishment altogether:

> We have experienced in ourselves and in those God made benevolent by nature that they have compassion for all men, to such an extent that if God were to give them authority over creation they would erase punishment completely from the world.[98]

93 On this translation, see Chittick, *Cosmology* xxxviii.

94 Cf. Chittick, *Religious diversity* 47–8.

95 Cf. Ajhar, *Suʾāl* 186.

96 Knysh, *Ibn ʿArabi* 92; Hoover, *Theodicy* 110, 125, 130; Ajhar, *Suʾāl* 227, 256.

97 Ibn al-Qayyim, *Ḥādī* 353. See Manāʿī, ʿAqīda 93, 127–9; Khalil, *Salvation* 93.

98 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iii, 25. For a translation, see Addas, *Victoire* 63.

Ibn ʿArabī's desire, however, is reined in by *adab*, the proper manner of behaving with God, which is a consequence of the receptivity to His Word.[99]

As we will see in the next section, Ibn ʿArabī considers the end of punishment not only as the necessary consequence of God's ontological mercy, but also as the deepest intention of His revealed Law. This intention, however, can only be fulfilled if man understands it and freely chooses to put it into practice. In this sense, God's moral command plays a key role in Ibn ʿArabī's scheme of salvation, a scheme where man is an active participant and not only the passive recipient of mercy. But salvation, which is "universal" from the point of view of God's ontological mercy, can only be individual in so far as it results from man's answer to God's personal revelation.

4 "Rights of God" and "Rights of Men"

We have seen that Ibn al-Qayyim plainly affirms the "correspondence" between earthly and otherworldly punishment in so far as both aim at the restoration of the common good. *Iṣlāḥ*, which has the meaning of "making wholesome,"[100] or "restoration," and is thus very close to "apocatastasis," is also a key-term of Ibn ʿArabī's eschatology. The latter, however, uses it in reference to two different processes: reparation in the afterlife is brought about both by a purifying and inescapable punishment, and by reconciliation and forgiveness. We will now attempt to show how these two different processes are related to each other and to their respective legal counterparts in earthly justice.

As we have seen, hell is the place of proportional recompense (*jazāʾ wifāq*), where one can only receive what one deserves. This requital is inevitable as it is literally the product of deeds: one is punished (or rewarded) by the personification of one's actions. It is, therefore, the individual who "creates" and "builds" the hell of punishment (as with the paradise of reward).[101] Nevertheless, Ibn ʿArabī also describes this penalty as imposed by God, attributing to it a purifying function: "Divine mercy involves punishment solely as a purifying recompense (*jazāʾ li-l-taṭhīr*): were it not for the purification, the punishment would not take place."[102] God, like a doctor, makes his patient suffer for his wellbeing:

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99 Cf. Gril, *Adab*.

100 Cf. Chittick, *Cosmology* 122.

101 Ḥakīm, *Muʿjam* 1089–90; Chittick, *Religious diversity* 109.

102 Ḥakīm, *Muʿjam* 786–7, quoting from Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iii, 352. On the purifying function of punishment, see also Chittick, Death 78; idem, *Religious diversity* 109; Feiz, "Qahr" 12.

> The punishment inflicted by God is an act of mercy towards he who undergoes it and a purification, like medicine for an invalid made to suffer by a doctor because of mercy towards him, and not to exact revenge.[103]

While being merciful, punishment is not, however, absolute mercy (*raḥma*): for this reason, when God punishes He is not defined as "the Merciful" (*al-raḥmān*), but as "Lord of the Worlds" (*rabb al-ʿālamīn*). The title *rabb* ("Lord") encompasses mercy as it implicates reform (*iṣlāḥ*) and education (*tarbiya*).[104] Intrinsic to the *rabb* is being a

> teacher (*murabbī*) […]: that is he who has the task of reforming the status (*iṣlāḥ ḥāl*) of those educated—and education can be a source of pain, as when a person beats his son to teach him a lesson. […] Similarly, God's *ḥudūd* are a lesson to His servants.[105]

Ibn ʿArabī thus justifies punishment in the netherworld by making use of both therapeutic and pedagogic models, as well as legal ones that liken infernal punishment to *ḥudūd*. Much like Ibn al-Qayyim after him, he compares the healing properties of the Fire with cauterization and *ḥudūd* punishments, which in this world serve as atonements, exempting sinners from punishment in the afterlife.[106] In this way, Ibn ʿArabī deals with the issue from a theodicean perspective: a relative evil is justified by its wise purpose, in this world as in the next. This approach also safeguards God's transcendence (*tanzīh*), which literally indicates "exempting" God from all that does not become His perfection. Defending God as a transcendent principle implicates defending the cosmic order and the political order as well.

This perspective does not however decide the issue. Another point of view is that of immanence (*tashbīh*), the idea that there is a "resemblance" between the Creator and the creature, a personal relationship between God and man created in His image. From this angle, Ibn ʿArabī does not speak as a theologian justifying divine castigation but as an advocate-intercessor eager to spare

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103 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iv, 256–7.

104 Ibid., i, 308.

105 Ibid., iii, 383.

106 Ibid., ii, 161: *fa-jaʿala Allāh lahum al-nār* […] *dawāʾ ka-l-kayy bi-l-nār fī l-dunyā* […] *idhā jaʿalnāhā wiqāya kamā jaʿalnā fī l-ḥudūd al-dunyāwiyya wiqāya min ʿadhāb al-ākhira wa-lihādhā hiya kaffārāt ay tasturuhu hādhihi l-ḥudūd ʿan ʿadhāb al-ākhira*. Cf. above, n. 44 and 50. Ibn ʿArabī also defines punishment in the afterlife as "the period in which God's penal laws are operative" (*muddat iqāmat al-ḥudūd*). See ibid., iii, 346, 383.

each individual suffering, and for this reason cannot sidestep the issue of pain with a rational line of reasoning. While it is true that many Sufis describe evil as a trial to endure and a chance to reform,[107] there are notable exceptions, as for example in ʿAṭṭār's (d. 627/1230) *Muṣībat-nāme*, where nameless "madmen" and "paupers" argue with God with overtones that recall those of the *zindīq*s, yet in intimate and personal conversation with Him.[108] Ibn ʿArabī, for his part, in commenting on the case of Job, approves his complaint (*shakwa*), countering the position of those Sufis who preach total resignation: "Not to complain to God when you feel an ill contrary to His desire, is to want to resist the divine constraint […]. *Adab*, all *adab*, is in that complaint addressed to God and to Him alone without losing by that the virtue of patience."[109]

As we have seen, Ibn ʿArabī is a "well-mannered" intercessor, who does not challenge the Shariʿa, but seeks to unfold its potentialities. In this case, like a skilful lawyer, he homes in on the "rights of men" (*ḥuqūq al-ʿibād*) rather than the "rights of God" (*ḥuqūq Allāh*). From this viewpoint, the cornerstone of his discourse on the justice of hell is retaliation (*qiṣāṣ*). The *lex talionis* is suitable to his purpose precisely because it corresponds to a relational model of justice, where the focus of the law is the harm done to a person, requiring compensation, rather than the transgression of a norm, requiring punishment.[110] Unlike public penal law, *qiṣāṣ* is based on the principle of private prosecution: man has the "right" to forfeit his right to retaliation,[111] and is even encouraged to do so. The recommendation to pardon is a strong ethical component of Islamic law, which, however, does not abrogate *qiṣāṣ* as a law, revoking the right to retaliation or compensation.[112]

Ibn ʿArabī's reflections on *qiṣāṣ* apply equally to this world and to the next. In the chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ* on the prophet Jonah, he gives special attention to the following Quranic verse: "The recompense of one evil is an evil like it (*wa-jazāʾu sayyiʾa sayyiʾa mithluhā*), but whoever pardons and makes reconciliation (*aṣlaḥa*), his reward is with God" (Q 42:40). In his commentary, Ibn ʿArabī emphasizes the fact that God Himself calls retaliation an "evil," "even

107 Cf. Hoover, *Theodicy* 3.

108 See Ritter, *Ocean* 165–87; idem, Strife.

109 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iv, 143, (tr. with commentary in Gril, *Adab*). See also Chittick, *Cosmology* 121.

110 This fundamental distinction plays a key role in the Muʿtazilite reasoning on otherworldly justice. See Vasalou, *Moral* 81–2.

111 Peters, *Crime* 39, 45–6.

112 This interpretation of the *lex talionis* was also typical of Rabbinic law. Jesus' instruction to turn the other cheek in Matthew 5:39 can be read within this legal framework. See Johnson, Jesus and Moses 100–106.

though it is legal," and that He promises to reward the person who forfeits his right to kill another man, "because he is in His image."[113] In the final part of the chapter, Ibn ʿArabī argues against the eternality of hell, clearly establishing an analogy between killing in retaliation and eternal damnation. This analogy is made stronger by the fact that a Quranic verse from the sura of Jonah describes eternal castigation in terms very close to retaliation: "And for those who have earned evil deeds the recompense of an evil deed shall be the like of it (*wa-alladhīna kasabū sayyi'āt jazā'u sayyi'a bi-mithlihā*) […]. Those are the companions of the Fire. They will abide therein eternally" (Q 10:27).

The institution of retaliation has an important place in Ibn ʿArabī's reflections about the relationship between law and spirituality. Talionic punishment is an evil for the receiver because suffering is an evil by definition. Yet it is also an evil for he who inflicts it as it negates the *makārim al-akhlāq* (noble character traits), by virtue of which man becomes like God and achieves his own happiness (*saʿāda*). Even though retaliation cannot be defined as an "evil" from a legal point of view, according to the Law it is better not to claim it. There is in fact a difference between "good" and "better" rulings of the Law, just as there is a hierarchy of Divine Names, and the noble character traits which correspond to the "most beautiful names" (such as the Generous or the Merciful) can only be acquired by practising the best part of the Law.[114]

Saʿāda is thus attained enacting the Law in its entirety, not only obeying what it enjoins, but also preferring what it recommends. Ibn ʿArabī pays particular attention to the ethical value of not exerting violence when one is given the choice (*takhyīr*),[115] which is the case of *qiṣāṣ*, but not of *ḥudūd*.[116] The happiness attained by freely choosing what God most desires is clearly distinguished from "natural" happiness. The choice not to repay evil with evil is actually a way to go beyond man's nature (*ṭabīʿa*), the *amor sui naturalis* that man shares with other living beings and that drives him to seek pleasure—and revenge is a pleasure, too. In this sense, the moral law acts to bridge the abyss

113 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ* i, 168 (tr. in Austin, *Bezels* 209). For further references and commentary, see Pagani, *Imago* 252; Feiz, Notion 137–8; idem, "Qahr" 7–8; Chittick, *Cosmology* 122–3, 217.

114 Cf. Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iv, 171.

115 See Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ* i, 129–30: The Prophet, when free to choose, opts not to use his powers. The founding principle of the *futuwwa* is to forego retaliation when one has the strength to enforce it. Cf. Hatem, *Amour* 87 (quoting from *Futūḥāt* i, 241). On clemency as a political virtue, see Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* iii, 179–81 (*K. dhamm al-ghaḍab; b. faḍīlat al-ʿafw wa-l-iḥsān*).

116 Cf. Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iv, 46–7.

of one's nature, as the *ṣirāt* over hell.[117] By overcoming the inborn yearnings in their animal soul, humans become truly human; becoming truly human, human beings become divine, actualizing in themselves the image of God.[118] Spiritual happiness is also distinguished from the common good, because it is not justified by utilitarian considerations, but is an end in itself. Forgiveness grants an immediate spiritual benefit to the one who pardons the offender, to such an extent that "if God removed the veil, and we were to see with our own eyes what great good is there for us in the next world in consequence of that offence, we would say that nobody benefited us more than that so-called wrongdoer."[119] The "love of one's enemy," therefore, is not a sacrifice: the point is not to substitute oneself for the enemy, to die or condemn oneself to damnation in his place, but rather, to actualize in oneself the image of God and, at the same time, to leave the other alive in order not to preclude him from the possibility of achieving the same goal.[120]

The implication that what is "evil" for man is equally "evil" for God is articulated by Ibn ʿArabī when he argues for the possibility that God may not carry out His threat. God can only be praised by saying of Him what is praiseworthy *per se* (*al-maḥmūd bi-l-dhāt*), but this only applies to pardon (*tajāwuz*) and not to "sincerity in menace" (*ṣidq al-waʿīd*), and God Himself says that He "overlooks their misdeeds" (*yatajāwazu ʿan sayyiʾātihim*) (cf. Q 46:16).[121] In this passage, as in the chapter on Jonah, where he hints at the parallelism between killing in retaliation and eternal damnation, Ibn ʿArabī argues against the eternality of punishment, equating it with a blameworthy form of retribution.

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117 Ḥakīm, *Muʿjam* 296. On the contrary, those souls condemned to hell "love only those things fitting their nature." See Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* ii, 330. See also ʿAbd al-Qādir, *Mawāqif* ii, 935. According to Ibn ʿArabī, the prophets, who serve the divine "command" aiming at man's salvation, resist the divine decree, in the same way as the doctor who strives to save the invalid's life resists the law of nature. See Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ* i, 98.

118 Cf. Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* ii, 332–3, where Ibn ʿArabī distinguishes between natural love, which loves the beloved only to satisfy its own needs, and spiritual love, which loves the beloved for himself, also in his freedom not to love us. For Ibn ʿArabī the specific distinction between man and animal is not language, but the image of God. See Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iii, 154.

119 Ibid., iv, 47.

120 Cf. Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ* i, 168. See also Ibn ʿArabī's commentary on Noah's saying: "Lord, leave not a single soul of the unbelievers alive on the earth" (Q 71:26). Ibn ʿArabī states that "now perhaps, had they lived longer, they would have returned to God, or from their loins would have sprung men who would have believed in God, and brought delight to the believers." See Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iv, 60 (trans. in Gril, *Adab*).

121 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ* i, 93–4. See also idem, *Futūḥāt* iv, 46–7.

Thus, one could think that the plea for the annulment of punishment in the hereafter cannot be extended to the case of the 'therapeutic' *ḥudūd*. However, in actual fact it is possible to intercede also for the annulment of temporary punishment:

> In intercession, a servant, through his role of advisor (*nāṣiḥ*), upon seeing that God wishes to punish a man for his misdeed, says to Him: Oh Lord, You have urged us to forgive and made forgiveness a noble trait, preferable to taking revenge on the wrongdoer [...], You are more worthy of such ways [...]. Punishing evil is gainful only in this world, as the fulfilment of the *ḥudūd* wards off public harm (*maḍarra ʿāmma*). Just as God is praised in this world (*dunyā*) for the institution of the *ḥudūd* [...], so is He praised in the next (*ākhira*) for His forgiveness. For *ḥudūd* in this world no intercession is possible, as they are God's rights; in the next, however, the common good (*maṣlaḥa*) that here below wanted the application of the rights of God, no longer holds sway. In the case of men's rights, on the other hand, God Himself urged forgiveness.[122]

This passage is noteworthy as it sets out an asymmetry between *dunyā* and *ākhira*: in the hereafter, the common good (*maṣlaḥa*) that calls for public criminal law no longer applies. Consequently, the legal principle upholding punishment in this world cannot be extended by analogy to the hereafter. Another passage hints that in the afterlife God punishes *only* the wrongs done to other creatures:

> As the Lord (*rabb*) is He who restores (*al-muṣliḥ*), on Resurrection Day God will reconcile (*yuṣliḥ*) His servants with each other. Indeed, the Prophetic tradition tells of two men, one of whom has a claim to make against the other: they appear in front of God, and when the victim says: "Avenge me for the wrong he did to me," God answers: "Look heavenward!" The man sees there great goodness and says: "Whose is this, Lord?" And God answers: "It belongs to whoever can give me its price." So the man says: "Who could ever have that much?." So God says to him: "You will have that much if you forgive your brother." And he says: "I forgive him!" and takes him by the hand and they both enter paradise together. The Prophet, having told this story, said "Fear God and seek reconciliation between you as God will bring together His servants on the Day of Resurrection." But if God is so generous as to bring about reconciliation

122 Ibid., 468–9.

> between His servants in such a way that the victim renounces his right, it goes without saying that He too will renounce the rights He has in their regard. Indeed, God punishes whom He wills for wrongs done to others, but not for His own right (*bi-ḥaqqihi al-mukhtaṣṣ bi-hi*). Associationism (*shirk*) is punished in as much as it is a wrong done to others. God does not stand up for Himself, but for others (*mā yantaṣir li-nafsihi wa-innamā yantaṣir li-ghayrihi*). On the Day of Resurrection the "associates" will disown their followers [cf. Q 2:166].[123]

In other words, idolatry, the ultimate crime against God, is not punished in order to safeguard a right of God, but because those who have been associated with God have been "wronged" by their followers, who attributed to them something they did not claim.

The benefit of forgiveness, which is "veiled" in this world, becomes evident in the next. Nevertheless, the victim is given the choice. In the tradition on righting wrongs in the afterlife reported by Ibn ʿArabī, God is not a forgiver but a conciliator (*muṣliḥ*): He does not annul the punishment by unilaterally bestowing grace. Rather, He reconciles the victim and the offender by paying the blood-money himself.[124] A well-known version of this theme features David and Uriah: David is already on the pulpit at the gate of heaven reciting Psalms when Uriah grabs his robes claiming his right to retaliation. God, however, ransoms David by compensating Uriah with a number of castles in paradise.[125] According to Ibn Isḥāq (d. 150/767), this story answers a problem raised by the "People of the Book": if God pardons David, must one not deduce that his victim will have no justice?[126] Al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1272), in reporting this story, stresses that the likelihood of God stepping forward as a conciliator comes about only for penitent wrongdoers, as David was, otherwise no one would go to hell (*wa-law kāna dhālika fi jamīʿ al-nās mā dakhala aḥad al-nār*).[127] In the same way, nobody would go to hell were one to take the following report attributed to the Prophet seriously: "On the Day of Resurrection, a herald will proclaim from beneath the Throne: Oh community of Muḥammad, I forgive

123 Ibid., iii, 383: *fa-inna al-shurakāʾ yatabarraʾūna min atbāʿihim yawm al-qiyāma*.

124 The idea that God "funds" the settling of accounts in the afterlife also plays an important role in Muʿtazili thinking on compensation (*ʿiwaḍ*). See Vasalou, *Moral* 80–1. Ibn ʿArabī's focus on "rights" is a continuation of this line of reasoning. Cf. ibid., 41–3, 60–2, 79–86.

125 Ghazālī, *Durra* 86–8.

126 Déclais, *David* 221. On the topic of the forgiveness of victims in the afterlife in Zoroastrianism and in rabbinical Judaism, see Winston, Iranian 213. See also above, n. 8.

127 Qurṭubī, *Tadhkira* 662 (*bāb fī irḍāʾ Allāh taʿālā al-khuṣūm yawm al-qiyāma*).

you whatever I could claim from you; as for the injuries which remain, forgive each other for them (*fa-tawāhabūhā*) and enter the Garden for My mercy."[128]

By suggesting that only crimes against other creatures, and not those against God, are punished in hell, Ibn ʿArabī exempts hell entirely from the reach of public penal law where the common good justifies state violence. Even where the sin does not appear to be transitive it impinges on the rights of "others": the rational soul, entrusted with "governing" one's animal soul (*nafs*) and the limbs of one's body, breaches their rights when it disobeys divine command, acting as a tyrant (*wālī jā'ir*) who forces his subjects to commit crimes.[129] For Ibn ʿArabī, among sins, haughtiness (*takabbur*) is the first in line to be punished eternally in hell, Pharaoh being the archetype of this class of sin in the macrocosm.[130] But every iniquitous soul is a "tyrant" in the microcosm, the focus of Ibn ʿArabī's interest, who shifts politics from the administration of others to the administration of oneself, from the common good to individual happiness.[131]

Even if punishment relates to the "rights of men" and not to the "rights of God," any wrongs committed against men are at the same time a wrong against God:

> [In hell] there is hunger as God created it from the manifestation (*tajallī*) of His word [reported] in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim: "I was hungry and you did not feed Me, I was thirsty and you did not quench My thirst, I was sick and you did not come to visit Me." This is the most awe-inspiring personal revelation through which God has descended among His servants in His gentleness towards them. Hell has been created from this reality. May God protect me and you all from it.[132]

Precisely because He is immanent, God 'suffers' sin and takes revenge—a reprisal not vitiated by mercy—but only for a limited spell: as long as it takes for Him to free Himself from His pain.[133]

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128 Ibid.; cf. Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'* iv, 530 (*k. dhikr al-mawt wa-mā baʿdahu, b. fī saʿat raḥmat Allāh*). Augustine had warned the "tender-hearted" not to interpret the Our Father in this way: "For He does not say, if ye forgive men their sins, your Father will also forgive you your sins, no matter of what sort they be" (*De Civ. Dei* 21.27.4).

129 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* iii, 76. This is also quoted in ʿAbd al-Qādir, *Mawāqif* ii, 938; see also ibid., 934, 936.

130 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* i, 301.

131 Cf. Nyberg, *Schriften* 15–7. Ibn ʿArabī calls man, as microcosm, *al-madīna al-fāḍila*. See Ḥakīm, *Muʿjam* 1018.

132 Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt*, i, 297; Shaʿrānī, *Yawāqīt* ii, 463.

133 Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ* i, 172. On the "suffering" of God, see also Ibn ʿArabī, *Futūḥāt* ii, 206.

5 Conclusion

In conclusion, Ibn al-Qayyim can help us better comprehend Ibn ʿArabī's eschatological ideas; things can be discerned through their opposites. The inhabitants of paradise comprehend their own felicity by contemplating the Fire,[134] and in a similar way, an examination of Ibn al-Qayyim facilitates comprehension of Ibn ʿArabī's concept of universal salvation. Ibn al-Qayyim perfects political hell, taking the principle that violence is justified by the common good as far as logic will allow: in the eternal *civitas* the use of violence will no longer be necessary as enemies will be wholly reformed and reinstated in the normality of a single sound nature. Ibn ʿArabī downplays the political and legal aspect of hell, to the advantage of its ethical and spiritual values. The underlying principle is not *maṣlaḥa* but happiness: the unshadowed joy of those who, by going beyond "nature" have actualized in themselves the image of God, and the "veiled" joy that can take on as many forms as there are temperaments and natures of men.

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134 Cf. Chittick, *Religious diversity* 117–8.

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