

God of Ibn Sīnā: Immutable yet Responsive

Yasin Ramazan Başaran

0000-0003-4699-7451

yasinramazan@gmail.com

Marmara University, Fac of Theology, Department of Philosophy of Religion, İstanbul, Türkiye

ror.org/02kswqa67

Abstract

The term “God of the philosophers” refers to the concept of God as understood and discussed in philosophical discourse. It is a philosophical concept of God that is often considered distinct from the concept of God found in religious traditions. Throughout history, various philosophers and theologians have used the term to refer to God whose existence and attributes have been the subject of philosophical reasoning and reflection. In this study, I explore Ibn Sīnā’s way of reconciling two concepts of God. I argue that Ibn Sīnā, a philosopher with an Aristotelian and Neoplatonic heritage, sees no contradiction between the God of the philosophers and the God of the scriptures. Ibn Sīnā’s way is interesting because it is an attempt to bridge the gap between two concepts of God without compromising the classical theistic understanding of divine attributes. First, I will briefly present the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic contexts of Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy to show his way of reconciliation. Second, I will give an account of Ibn Sīnā’s concept of God as it is revealed in his understanding of the divine attribute of immutability. Finally, I will examine his views in which he most explicitly offers the concept of a God who is responsive, who is present, and who is engaged with human beings. His ideas about God’s agency, petitionary prayer, and divine providence provide ample evidence that the God of Ibn Sīnā is the God of the religious traditions known to and worshipped by human beings.

Keywords

Philosophy of Religion; Theism; Open Theism; Immutability; Petitionary Prayer; Divine Providence; Divine Knowledge

Highlights

- If there is no change in God's knowledge, bringing anything from non-existence to existence is only meaningful when it means a temporal change.
- God is causally present everywhere and always in the ultimate sense.
- Prayer is included in the order as a cause. If order comes from God and God is the cause of everything, then petitionary prayer can function as a cause in the world.
- With the chain of causality, Ibn Sīnā claims that God never breaks the ties with His creation and continually reaches it with the chain of providence.
- God is a person in the sense that He is self-aware and has intentional actions.

Citation

Basaran, Yasin Ramazan. "God of Ibn Sīnā: Immutable yet Responsive". *Eskiyeni* 51 (December 2023), 977-991. <https://doi.org/10.37697/eskiyeni.1386518>

Article Information

<i>Date of submission</i>	05 November 2023
<i>Date of acceptance</i>	24 December 2023
<i>Date of publication</i>	31 December 2023
<i>Reviewers</i>	Two Internal & Two External
<i>Review</i>	Double-blind
<i>Plagiarism checks</i>	Yes - Turnitin
<i>Conflicts of Interest</i>	The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest
<i>Complaints</i>	eskiyenidergi@gmail.com
<i>Grant Support</i>	No funds, grants, or other support was received.
<i>S. Development Goals</i>	--
<i>License</i>	CC BY-NC 4.0 creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0

İbn Sînâ'nın Tanrısı: Değişmez ama Karşılık Verir

Yasin Ramazan Başaran

0000-0003-4699-7451

yasinramazan@gmail.com

Marmara Üniversitesi, İlahiyat Fakültesi, Din Felsefesi Anabilim Dalı, İstanbul, Türkiye
ror.org/02kswqa67

Öz

“Filozofların Tanrısı” terimi, felsefi söylemde anlaşıldığı ve tartışıldığı şekliyle Tanrı kavramını ifade eder. Bu, genellikle dini geleneklerde bulunan Tanrı kavramından farklı olduğu düşünülen felsefi bir Tanrı kavramıdır. Tarih boyunca çeşitli filozoflar ve teologlar bu terimi, varlığı ve sıfatları felsefi akıl yürütme ve düşünmenin konusu olan Tanrı'ya atıfta bulunmak için kullanmışlardır. Bu çalışmada, İbn Sînâ'nın iki Tanrı kavramını uzlaştırma yolunu araştırıyor ve Aristotelesçi ve Neoplatonik mirasa sahip bir filozof olan İbn Sînâ'nın filozofların Tanrısı ile kutsal kitapların Tanrısı arasında bir çelişki görmediğini iddia ediyorum. İbn Sina'nın yaklaşımı, ilahi sıfatların klasik teistik anlayışından ödün vermeden iki Tanrı kavramı arasındaki boşluğu doldurmaya giriştiği için oldukça ilgi çekicidir. Makalede ilk olarak, İbn Sînâ'nın uzlaştırma yolunu göstermek için felsefesinin Aristotelesçi ve Neoplatonik bağlamlarını kısaca sunuyorum. İkinci olarak, İbn Sînâ'nın Tanrı tasavvurunu, ilahî değişmezlik sıfatı anlayışında ortaya çıktığı şekliyle açıklıyorum. Son olarak, İbn Sina'nın duyarlı, karşılık veren ve insanlarla ilişki içinde olan bir Tanrı kavramını en açık şekilde sunduğu görüşlerini inceliyorum. Tanrı'nın failliği, dua ve inayet hakkındaki fikirleri, İbn Sina'nın Tanrısının, bilinen ve ibadet edilen dinî geleneklerin Tanrısı olduğuna dair bol miktarda kanıt sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Din Felsefesi; Teizm; Açık Teizm; İlahî Değişmezlik; Dua, İnayet; İlahî Bilgi

Öne Çıkanlar

- Eğer Allah'ın ilminde bir değişiklik yoksa, bir şeyin yokluktan varlığa getirilmesi ancak zamansal bir değişim anlamına gelir.
- Tanrı nedensel olarak her yerde ve her zaman nihai anlamda mevcuttur.
- Dua bir sebep olarak evrendeki düzene dahildir. Eğer düzen Allah'tan geliyorsa ve her şeyin sebebi Allah ise o hâlde dua da bir sebep işlevi görmektedir.
- İbn Sînâ, nedensellik zinciriyle Allah'ın yarattıklarıyla bağını hiçbir zaman koparmadığını, sürekli olarak inayeti aracılığıyla onlara ulaştığını iddia eder.
- Tanrı, kendisinin farkında olması ve kasıtlı eylemleri olması anlamında bir kişidir.

Atıf Bilgisi

Başaran, Yasin Ramazan. "İbn Sînâ'nın Tanrısı: Değişmez ama Karşılık Verir". *Eskiyeni* 51 (December 2023), 977-991. <https://doi.org/10.37697/eskiyeni.1386518>

Makale Bilgileri

<i>Geliş Tarihi</i>	05 Kasım 2023
<i>Kabul Tarihi</i>	24 Aralık 2023
<i>Yayın Tarihi</i>	31 Aralık 2023
<i>Hakem Sayısı</i>	İki İç Hakem - İki Dış Hakem
<i>Değerlendirme</i>	Çift Taraflı Kör Hakemlik
<i>Etik Beyan</i>	Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde etik ilkelere uyulmuştur.
<i>Benzerlik Taraması</i>	Yapıldı – Turnitin
<i>Etik Bildirim</i>	eskiyenidergi@gmail.com
<i>Çıkar Çatışması</i>	Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.
<i>Finansman</i>	Herhangi bir fon, hibe veya başka bir destek alınmamıştır.
<i>S. Kalkınma Amaçları</i>	--
<i>Lisans</i>	CC BY-NC 4.0 creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/deed.tr

Introduction

The expression “God of the philosophers” denotes the philosophical apprehension and deliberation of the concept of God within the realm of philosophical discourse. This conceptualization of God is frequently perceived as divergent from the understanding of God as delineated in religious traditions. Throughout the annals of intellectual history, diverse philosophers and theologians have employed this term to allude to a deity whose existence and attributes are subjected to reasoned and contemplative examination through the application of philosophical methodologies. The philosopher’s God is typically seen as a rational and abstract concept, arrived at through philosophical inquiry rather than revelation or religious experience. Philosophers have proposed various arguments and theories to explore the nature and existence of God. Some of the most famous arguments include the cosmological, teleological, and ontological arguments, which aim to provide logical and rational justifications for the existence of a divine being.

It is important to note that the God of philosophers is not necessarily tied to any particular religious tradition or belief system. Different philosophers have proposed different conceptions of God, and these ideas can vary greatly depending on the philosophical context and the specific philosophical tradition being discussed. For instance, Pascal criticizes the God of the philosophers, whom he sees as an abstract and distant concept, arrived at through reason alone.¹ He argues that philosophical reasoning alone is insufficient to truly understand and experience God. According to Pascal, human reason and philosophical arguments cannot fully grasp the depth of God’s existence, nature, and relationship with humanity. Pascal implies that God cannot be reduced to mere intellectual abstraction or logical deduction. He emphasized the importance of personal encounters and religious experiences in understanding God. Pascal ultimately defends the concept of God, which is historical, not distant but intimate, responding to human activity, conversing with people, and engaging the world in different ways, as in the scriptures. Even though Pascal has in mind in his criticism the rationalist concept of God like Descartes’ and Leibniz’s,² the charge has been frequently extended to cover philosophical theologies of theistic religions that are rooted in the Aristotelian Prime Mover and the Neoplatonic One.³

1. The Divide

We observe that the God of the philosophers and the God of the Scriptures can differ in several ways. Dividing lines are drawn in the way of knowing about Him, talking about Him, connecting with Him, and attributing personality to Him. We may examine each of these in order.

God of the Scripture is believed to have revealed Himself through sacred texts, prophets, and religious experiences. In contrast, the God of philosophers is often

¹ Georg Picht, “The God of the Philosophers,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48/1 (1980), 61–79.

² Robin Attfield, “The God of Religion and the God of Philosophy,” *Religious Studies* 9/01 (1973), 1–9.

³ For example, see: Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press, 1979). “It may well be argued that the deity of Mill’s natural religion differs no more than the deity of scholastic and rationalist philosophy does from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob described in the Scriptures.” (p. 122).

approached through rational inquiry, philosophical arguments, and logical reasoning. Philosophers seek to understand God through the use of human reason rather than relying on specific religious revelations.

The God of the Scripture is central to the beliefs, practices, and traditions of various religious faiths, such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These religions emphasize faith, worship, moral codes, and adherence to religious doctrine. The philosopher's God, however, is primarily discussed within the realm of philosophical discourse and does not necessarily entail religious obligations or rituals. Philosophers may approach the concept of God purely as a philosophical inquiry independent of religious beliefs or affiliation.

The God of the Scripture is often understood to have revealed Himself through specific events, scriptures, and religious experiences. The teachings and narratives found in religious texts provide the foundation for understanding God in the context of faith. In contrast, the philosophers approach God through logical arguments, philosophical reasoning, and intellectual contemplation. Philosophers seek to establish rational justifications for God's existence and attributes, often using logic and evidence-based reasoning. This way of conceiving God has also been subject to the criticism of inconceivability. Anthony Kenny, for instance, argues against Boethius that timelessness and omniscience cannot be attributed to God because if God is simultaneous with all moments in history, then all history would be simultaneous. If God is simultaneous with both Mehmed the Conqueror and Sulaiman the Magnificent, then Mehmed and Sulaiman must be simultaneous too, which is not correct." The doctrine of the timelessness of God is theologically unimportant and inessential to the tradition of Western theism."⁴

The God of the Scripture is described as a personal and active being involved in human affairs, capable of emotions, and possessing characteristics such as love, mercy, and justice. The God of philosophers, on the other hand, is often conceived as an abstract, transcendent, and impersonal entity. Philosophical conceptions of God may emphasize attributes such as omniscience, omnipotence, or perfection, while downplaying or omitting characteristics such as personality or emotional engagement. Alvin Plantinga denies attribution of simplicity to God for the reason that being a person requires having knowledge, power, and intelligence. However, it is unimaginable that an abstract entity is intelligent, knowing, and powerful. In this respect, an abstract entity can neither create the world nor be a person. Therefore, according to Plantinga's reasoning, God's simplicity contradicts His being a person as described in the Scriptures.⁵

In response to these distinctions, a philosophical current called open theism has arisen over the last century. Open theism is a theological perspective that challenges classical theistic understanding of God's omniscience. It views the future as either partially open or uncertain. It proposes that God has granted human beings genuine, free will. It also proposes that the future may contain possibilities that are not fully determined or known by God. Richard Swinburne as a supporter of this perspective agrees with Kenny that divine knowledge cannot be timeless, but he argues that God's

⁴ Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford -New York: Clarendon Press - Oxford University Press, 1979), 40.

⁵ Alvin Plantinga, *Does God Have a Nature?* (Milwaukee: Marquette Univ Pr, 1980), 58-59.

knowledge does not have to cover future events. Therefore, he concluded that God's knowledge is open and extends as history unfolds.⁶

In open theism, God is seen as actively engaging in creation and interacting with humans in a dynamic and responsive manner. Unlike the classical view of God's omniscience, which holds that God knows all events, choices, and outcomes of the eternity past, open theism argues that God voluntarily limits his knowledge of future free human choices. According to this perspective, because human decisions involve genuine freedom, they have not yet been actualized and, therefore, are not predetermined.

Proponents of open theism argue that this view maintains human responsibility and genuine relationship with God. They contend that it is more compatible with the scriptural (mostly biblical) narrative, emphasizing the significance of human choices and the impact of prayer as well as allowing for the possibility of God responding to changing circumstances and human decisions. It can be argued from the classical theistic perspective that open theism compromises God's omniscience, sovereignty, and foreknowledge of future events to save God's more intimate relationship with the world, particularly with humans. The position of open theists is more in line with the source of religion, which is scripture and tradition. They refuse to identify philosophical concepts like Aristotle's Prime Mover or Plotinus's The One with the Yahweh, the Father, or Allah of the Scriptures.

As we have seen, open theism attempts to bring together the God of philosophers and the God of scriptures. At the expense of absolute and timeless knowledge of God, open theists aim to rescue the God who is interested in worldly affairs. Is there a way to avoid such a high price? Does a believer have to choose between these two concepts of God? In this study, I explore Ibn Sînâ's way of reconciling two concepts of God. I argue that Ibn Sînâ as a philosopher with Aristotelian and Neoplatonic heritage sees no inconsistency between the God of the philosophers and the God of the scriptures. Ibn Sînâ's way is interesting because he attempts to bridge the divide between two concepts of God without compromising classical theistic understanding of divine attributes. To show Ibn Sînâ's way of reconciliation, first, I will briefly provide the Aristotelian and Neoplatonic contexts of his philosophy. Second, I will give an account of Ibn Sînâ's concept of God as exposed in his understanding of the divine attribute of immutability. Finally, I will examine his views, in which he most explicitly offers the concept of God, who is responsive, present, and engaged with humans. His exposition of two other important and interrelated divine attributes, namely eternity and simplicity, are left aside in this study to discuss one attribute in detail.

2. Ibn Sînâ's God in Context

In Aristotelian philosophy, the Prime Mover refers to a transcendent and eternal entity that initiates motion and change in the world without being moved or changed (*Metaphysics XII*, 1072a).⁷ The Prime Mover is the ultimate cause of all motion and change in the universe. According to Aristotle, everything in the world is in a state of potentiality

⁶ Richard Swinburne, *The Coherence of Theism* (Oxford University Press, 2016), 180-183.

⁷ Aristotle, "Metaphysics," trans. Jonathan Barnes, *Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 1: The Revised Oxford Translation* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 1552-1729.

and actuality, and it is the Prime Mover who actualizes this potential by setting things in motion. The Prime Mover is not affected by or subject to the changes it initiates but rather serves as the primary cause of motion itself (*Physics VIII*, 266a).⁸ However, Aristotle's Prime Mover moves the universe not as the efficient cause but as the final cause.

The Prime Mover also serves as the final cause, or the ultimate purpose or goal, towards which all motion and change in the world strive. Aristotle argues that all things in the natural world have inherent tendencies and goals, and the Prime Mover provides the ultimate telos or purpose that drives this natural teleology (*Generation of Animals* 5.8, 789a8–b15).⁹

The Prime Mover transcends the physical world and exists beyond it. It is a purely actual being devoid of potentiality and imperfections. Unlike objects in the material realm, the Prime Mover is unchanging, eternal, and perfect. Its relationship with the world is one of transcendence, guiding, and sustaining the world's motion and development while remaining separate from it. Aristotle suggests that the Prime Mover engages in intellectual contemplation or self-reflection. As a perfect being, the Prime Mover's activity is centered on contemplating its own nature and perfection. This contemplation is seen as a pure and self-sufficient activity unaffected by the imperfections and contingencies of the material world. In other words, the knowledge of the Prime Mover is understood as self-knowledge rather than the knowledge of the changing world. Its activity is directed inward, contemplating its own nature and perfection, rather than outward, and acquiring empirical knowledge about the particulars of the world.

Similarly, Plotinus's concept of "the One" or "the Good" as the ultimate principle and source of all existence is a target of the accusation.

Plotinus describes a process of emanation whereby the One generates subsequent levels of reality (*Enneads* V.2 [11]).¹⁰ The One is described as utterly transcendent and ineffable, beyond any attributes or characteristics. From the One, emanates the Intellect (or Nous), which represents the realm of Forms or Ideas. In turn, the Intellect emanates the Soul, and from the Soul emanates the material world. The One is characterized by absolute transcendence and unity. (*Enneads* V.5 [32]) It is the source from which all things emerge, but it remains separate and unaffected by the world it creates. The One is beyond any division, multiplicity, or differentiation, representing a pure unity that precedes and transcends all the levels of reality.

Plotinus emphasizes that the One does not directly interact with or govern the material world. (*Enneads* VI.4 [22] and [23]) Rather, its influence is indirect. The One serves as the ultimate ontological foundation and guiding principle, providing the impetus and structure for the subsequent levels of reality to exist and unfold. The world participates

⁸ Aristotle, "Physics," trans. Jonathan Barnes, *Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 1: The Revised Oxford Translation* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 315–446.

⁹ Aristotle, "Generation of Animals," trans. Jonathan Barnes, *Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 2: The Revised Oxford Translation* (Princeton University Press, 2014), 1111–1218.

¹⁰ Plotinus, *The Enneads: Abridged Edition*, ed. John Dillon, trans. Stephan MacKenna (London: Penguin Classics, 1991).

in the One's perfection and goodness to varying degrees, but the One itself remains beyond the realm of phenomenal existence.

Plotinus posits that human souls, through philosophical contemplation and mystical ascent, can strive to reunite with the One. (*Enneads IV.9 [8]*) This process involves turning away from the material world and ascending through the levels of reality toward the higher realms of Intellect, and ultimately, the One. By transcending the limitations of the material realm, individuals can realize their inherent unity with the One and achieve a state of ultimate fulfillment and spiritual liberation.¹¹

Thus, in Plotinus' philosophy, the relationship between the One and the world is one of emanation, transcendence, and indirect influence. The One serves as the ultimate ontological principle and source of existence, providing the foundation for the hierarchical structure of reality. However, the One remains untouched and unaffected by the activities of human beings, including human contemplation, ascension of the human soul, or any mystical experience.

3. God as Necessary and Immutable

İbn Sînâ, whose philosophy is formed by the necessary existence ontology, uses existence and necessity as synonyms and then distinguishes the Necessary Existent in itself (*wâjib al-wujud li-dhatihi*) and the necessary beings through something else (*wâjib al-wujud li-ghayrihi*). This distinction is based on the ontological separation between essence and existence. While the Necessary Existent has no essence, the beings in the second category must be brought into existence by a being other than themselves, since their essence is separate from their existence. According to İbn Sînâ, beings in the second group comprise of everything except the Necessary Existent in itself. The essence of beings in the world is possible at the point of whether they come into existence. Their possible existence becomes necessary existence by the principle that brought them into existence, that is, through the other (*Metaphysics of Shifa I, 6*).¹²

According to İbn Sînâ, the Necessary Existent is metaphysically simple, because a composite being needs something other than itself. This obviously contradicts the first premise, as it means that its necessity is not of itself. All properties of the simple being are identical with itself. Therefore, it cannot be gained or lost. Cannot his own characteristics be eternal together with his essence? İbn Sînâ argues that if there is more than one necessary entity in itself, they will need each other, and that the Necessary Existent must be one in itself. This proves the claim that the Necessary Existent and its properties are one.¹³ As a result, God's knowledge, power, goodness, will, and all His other attributes are identical to His essence.

According to İbn Sînâ, since God's essence and attributes are one and His knowledge completely encompasses other beings, it is unthinkable that there would be a change in

¹¹ Dominic J. O'Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford - New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 44-46.

¹² Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of "The Healing": A Parallel English-Arabic Text = Aş-Şifâ': Al-Ilâhiyyât*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 30-32.

¹³ İbn Sina, *Danışname-i Alai*, trans. Murat Demirkol (İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, 2013), 226.

His knowledge (*Metaphysics of Shifa VIII, 6*). If there is no change in His knowledge, bringing anything from non-existence to existence is only meaningful when it means a temporal change. In other words, the fact that God is now creating shows us that this act of creation is an eternal feature of God (*Metaphysics of Shifa IX, 4*). A pre-world or post-world situation that He did not or will not create is unthinkable. Otherwise, we would have to claim that God's knowledge had changed. Unlike humans, God acts with an aimless will - that is, not out of a need but simply out of self-knowledge - and this action means the creation of the world in eternity (*Metaphysics of Shifa IX, 1*). Ibn Sīnā particularly wants to strengthen this point with several arguments. According to him, if the creation of the world took place with a will independent of God, then we wonder if this divine will was created. If this will also be created, then we ask whether it was created, and these questions continue forever. After all, we are unable to ask this question because of infinite regression. However, according to Ibn Sīnā, the creation of the world is the necessary result of God's generosity. To put it differently, the creation of the world is due to the fact that God is essentially a knower. (*Metaphysics of Shifa VIII, 7*)

4. God as Responsive

So far, we have seen how Ibn Sīnā's concept of God suits the descriptions of the God of philosophers. He is immutable and simple. However, Ibn Sīnā's views on God's agency, his justification of petitionary prayer, his characterization of divine providence connects his description of God seamlessly to the God of the Scriptures.

First, as Rahim Acar argues convincingly, for Ibn Sīnā, God's knowledge of Himself encompasses everything else. Like Aristotle's Prime Mover, He contemplates His own nature and perfection. This contemplation is pure and self-sufficient. However, by knowing Himself Ibn Sīnā's God knows everything that exists.¹⁴ He departs from the Aristotelian Prime Mover. God is essentially the knower as an agent, the knowledge, and the known. He is aware of everything at all times. Since He is not only self-conscious, but also knows and aware of everything else, Ibn Sīnā's God is not merely a cosmic principle. He is an agent. Moreover, according to Ibn Sīnā, God is a being who knows Himself and knows that He is the cause of all existence just as he knows Himself. In this respect, Ibn Sīnā's God is aware of everything that He influences causally. In this context, it is understood that Ibn Sīnā, who points to the Qur'anic verse stating, "Nothing will be hidden from Allah by the smallest amount in the heavens and on the earth" (*Al Imran:5*) and did not think of God as an abstract quality, but as a self-conscious agent. This view is supported by the fact that Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics takes the Necessary Existent not only the ultimate final cause of motion but also as the remote efficient cause of the universe that grants and preserves existence. For Ibn Sīnā, the proximate efficient cause of the existence of sublunary substance is the Agent Intellect (*al-aql al-faal*), while its ultimate efficient cause (*'illa al-failiyya*) is God. God is causally present everywhere and always in the ultimate sense.

Second, Ibn Sīnā's God may be an agent but if His role in the universe is limited to being a principle of existence, He cannot escape the charge of being unresponsive to and

¹⁴ Rahim Acar, "Yaratan Bilmezse Kim Bilir? Ibn Sīnā'ya Göre Allah'ın Cüz'leri Bilmesi," *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi* 13 (2005), 1-23.

disinterested in the world and humans. Ibn Sînâ's views on petitionary prayer suggests that God has other roles in the universe through the medium of the intellects. Ibn Sînâ says that with the prayer of people, an interaction occurs between humans and celestial beings. In other words, while we pray, we somehow affect heavenly beings, and the answer to prayer occurs as a result of such an influence. While explaining prayer in *al-Ta'liqât*, he states that we affect heavenly beings as follows.

Sometimes it is thought that celestial beings are influenced by terrestrial beings.

This is so because we pray to those celestial beings, and they respond to our prayer.¹⁵

Ibn Sînâ regards this interaction similar to the natural interaction between secondary causes. However, how is this considered a response by God? If we affect celestial beings, and celestial beings change the state of affairs to our liking, is God missing in this interaction? At this point, Ibn Sînâ brings causality into picture again.¹⁶ For him, prayer is one of the causes through which God brings effects into the universe. A long quotation from *al-Ta'liqât*

He [Allah the Almighty] has made prayer the cause of the existence of that thing. Almighty Allah creates medicine to cure the disease. However, this would not be true if the patient had not taken the drug. The situation is the same for petitionary prayer and (timely)prayer are suitable for that thing. Therefore, both prayer and the coming into existence of that thing are compatible with (divine) wisdom, according to what destiny (qadar) and accident (qada) require. Therefore, prayer is necessary. Responding to prayer is also necessary. For this reason, we turn to prayer (in the presence of Almighty Allah). Thus, our prayer is the cause of the prayer response. The fact that prayer is appropriate for the realization of the desired work is because both are the results of a single cause. Sometimes one of the two takes place through the other.¹⁷

In short, since everything in Ibn Sînâ's universe operates according to the laws of causality, prayer itself is included in this order as a cause. If order comes from God and God is the cause of everything, then it is not difficult to consider petitionary prayer as a cause functioning in the world.

Third, the order to which Ibn Sînâ appeals is closely linked to his views on divine providence. The causal order is providential; that is, it is a necessary consequence of God's all-encompassing goodness. Providence represents an order that God causes, reasons, encompasses with His knowledge, and comes into being via emanation. These are the things that Ibn Sînâ listed while he was dealing with the issue of providence. He describes providence as follows.

There is nothing in the world as a whole with its lofty and lowly parts, of which God is not the cause of its existence and formation, or which He does not know, not arrange, does not want it to happen. On the contrary, the entire universe is by His decision, arrangement, knowledge and will.¹⁸

¹⁵ Necmettin Pehlivan, "İbn Sina'ya Göre Duaya İcabet ve Duanın Tesiri," *Diyaret İlmî Dergi* 50/1, 139–156. The article presents The Ta'liqât's translation in Turkish, from which I have translated in English.

¹⁶ Emine Gören Bayram, "İbn Sina'nın Dua Anlayışı," *Rize İlahiyat Dergisi* 23 (April 2023), 153–163.

¹⁷ Pehlivan, "İbn Sina'ya Göre Duaya İcabet ve Duanın Tesiri", 154.

¹⁸ I rendered the text in English by consulting the original with its Turkish translation. İbn Sina, "Er-Risâletu'l-Arşıyye Fî Hakâiki't-Tevhid ve İsbati'n-Nübüvve," trans. Gürbüz Deniz - Hadi Ensar Ceylan, *Din Felsefesi Açısından Meşşâi Gelen-Ek-i*, ed. Recep Alpyağılı (İstanbul: İz Publishing, 2019), 843–854. Frank Griffel wrote an

It is seen in this description that for Ibn Sīnā providence is directly related to God's knowledge, causal influence, and the order of creation. In other words, whatever we do in the universe as agents, God responds by keeping things in order. With this chain of causality, Ibn Sīnā claims that God never breaks the ties with His creation and continually reaches it with this chain of providence. At this point, it can be objected that the word response here is overplayed because this is only an indirect and general 'response' - not a deliberate one for a specific particular. However, if we consider Ibn Sina's general approach to God's mode of creation, which is responsible for the existence of everything, we will see that God's response is not only proximate but also immediate (*Metaphysics of Shifa VI, 1-3*). It is interesting to note that Ibn Sīnā's understanding of providence bases the causal chain not on necessity (*wujub*) but on generosity (*luzum*).¹⁹ Ibn Sīnā seems well aware that the language of necessity is more suitable when natural explanation is concerned. When it comes to theology, he prefers to stress God's generosity. (*Metaphysics of Shifa I, 3*) In this case, nature becomes a divine response as it is the generous arrangement of God's knowledge, power, and will. This is what we might call operational prayer. Therefore, constant engagement between God and humans occurs within the parameters of necessities in nature. If one is aware of this engagement, there is a possibility that the divine presence will be comprehended by one's intellect. However, this comprehension is characterized on several occasions in Ibn Sīnā's corpus as a matter of spiritual ranking. In other words, even though God interacts with humans and communicates through nature, not everyone can receive the message and reply back. One needs to deserve this rank by preparing one's mind and purifying one's means of knowledge. Thus, God is never distant from His creatures.

It is important to note at this point that Ibn Sīnā's reference to the order of creation implies no change in God. All that comes from God is His true generosity. This is why lower ones in the hierarchy of being do not influence God in any way. Therefore, there is a system in which neither petitionary nor operational prayers bring about changes in God. The providential system is asymmetrical; that is, the effects do not bring about a change in the cause. According to Ibn Sīnā, this is only an order in which secondary causes are effective on each other. God is responsive to prayers through the medium of secondary causes, which is no different from His activity of granting and preserving existence. As Ibn Sīnā remarks on *al-Risalat al-'arshiyya*:

The Necessary Existent is free from all final causes (He does not aim at anything). Providence is a matter of the universal conception of the order of goodness and its entry into the realm of existence through knowledge. Providence is a transcendental, lofty, and unchanging concept. All perfection is an effect of His providence and will.²⁰

In *the Metaphysics of Shifa*, Ibn Sina established the point in a similar manner:

article to show that the treatise of *Risalatul' Arshiyya* does not belong to Ibn Sina. Still, Griffel notes that ideas in the treaties reflect the Avicennan spirit. See Frank Griffel, "On the Authenticity of The Throne Epistle (al-Risāla al-'Arshiyya) Ascribed to Avicenna," *Penser avec Avicenne. De l'héritage grec à la réception latine: un état de la recherche en hommage à Jules Janssens*, ed. Daniel De Smet and Meryem Sebti, Leuven (Belgium): Peeters Publishers, 2022., 193-229.

¹⁹ Emine Taşçı Yıldırım, "İbn Sīnā'nın İnhāyet Anlayışının Ontolojik ve Epistemolojik Boyutu," *Journal of Islamic Research* 30/1 (2009), 158-181.

²⁰ İbn Sina, "Er-Risāletu'l-'Arşīyye Fī Hakāiki't-Tevhid ve İsbati'n-Nübüvve", 844.

at there [should] become established for it the structure of the whole [cosmos], the relation of its parts to each other, and the order deriving from the First Principle [down] to the most remote of the existents that fall within its arrangement; that [the soul should] conceive providence and the manner thereof; that it should ascertain what proper existence and what proper unity belongs to the essence that precedes the whole, and the manner in which [this essence] knows (whereby neither multiplicity nor change attaches to it in any respect), and the manner of the relation of the existents to it.²¹

In sum, since change is an exclusive characteristic of beings in the order of creation, God's response to prayers does not have to bring about change in God. His response takes place within the realm of essences that are possible in themselves, to which He bestows existence under the necessary conditions. God's act of creation is no different from His act of responding to prayer.

5. A Personal God?

My analysis to the conclusion that Ibn Sînâ's God cannot be characterized as the god of the philosophers for the reasons that Ibn Sînâ's God is an agent, He is responsive to the prayers, and His providence encompasses all beings including human actions do not indicate that He is a person like you and me. Attributing God with knowledge, power, and will suggests that He is more like a person than a natural entity. Unlike a person, a natural entity does not act, but behaves. A natural entity does not have will or volition, and its behavior is determined by external factors. In contrast, God is characterized by His creative will. There is no external force that determines His actions. One can object at this point that an action is not free if it is necessary. However, Ibn Sînâ's deliberate attempts to distinguish between necessity and purpose underlines that an action is not considered 'forced' if it stems from necessities internal to the agent. In other words, since God's actions flow from His good nature necessarily, then His actions are not considered to be imposed from outside. Moreover, the fact that He is the knower suggests that He is like a mind, not like matter. On a similar train of thought, the idea that God's power is not potential but actual implies that He is in stark contrast with the matter, which is traditionally characterized by being potential. In all of these respects, God is conceived to be like a person. However, knowledge of Ibn Sînâ's God is essentially different from knowledge of humans. Also, Ibn Sînâ's God acts by will, but His will is not like human volition which denotes ability to choose between alternatives. God's power again qualitatively differs from the bodily and mental powers of human beings, which are usually characterized by potency. If His knowledge, power, and will are not like human persons, is it reasonable to call Ibn Sînâ's God a person (*dhât*)? Is not being a person the central dividing point between God in the scriptures and God in the philosophers?

If self-awareness is one aspect of personhood that can be univocally attributed to humans and God, Ibn Sînâ's God can be considered a person. Even though His knowledge, power, and will are essentially different from human qualities, self-awareness of God and humans only differ in degree not of kind. Since our selves are limited and contingent, our awareness of them is undeniably limited and contingent. In contrast, God's awareness of Himself is eternal and absolute since He is eternal and absolute. However, there is no

²¹ Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of "The Healing"*, 353-354.

qualitatively different awareness of one's self because the statement "I know that I am" is true for both humans and God. Ibn Sīnā's God is undeniably self-aware because God's knowledge is primarily knowledge of His being the cause of everything else. Since knowledge is the knowledge of the causes of Ibn Sīnā's epistemology, God knows everything by knowing Himself as the ultimate cause of all existence.²²

The second aspect of personhood that might be attributed to God is intentionality. Intentional action is an instant of intelligence and intelligence is an instant of personhood. As humans do, it is difficult to say that we always act intentionally. We are also driven by natural tendencies such as growth and survival. Natural species, such as trees, bees, and rocks, behave of necessity under the right conditions. However, we are not completely at the mercy of natural tendencies. We can act deliberately to fulfil this purpose. If goodness constitutes God's intention in creation, as the doctrine of providence suggests, then it is legitimate to propose that God is a person. God's intentional action towards ultimate goodness, as manifested in His relationship with the world through creation and sustenance, and His involvement in history through revelations and covenants establishes that He is a person. In Ibn Sīnā's terminology, nature and will are contrasting causes of change. According to Him, God does not act by nature but by will (*Metaphysics of Shifa VIII, 7*). Ibn Sīnā thinks that God is the source of all goodness and His act of creating the universe is goodness itself (*Metaphysics of Shifa IX, 6*) Yet, as I discussed above, God can have no purpose in creation because it might indicate a prior privation of the aimed goodness. His intentionality is not directed at fulfilling this purpose. It is purely out of divine generosity.

Ibn Sīnā refers to God as a person, but he does not attribute human-like personality to Him. Our personality is contingent on the conditions that surround us. It is also open to change due to external forces. In this respect, we cannot talk about God's purpose or self-fulfillment. He does not change. For Ibn Sīnā, God is free from all sorts of contingencies that determine or influence personal characteristics of humans.

Conclusion

God of Ibn Sīnā is responsive to His creation and interested in human actions in a special sense. He is not frozen in His necessity, nor is He eternally static relative to the world of change. He is immutable but is also present everywhere as the ultimate final and remote efficient cause of everything. He engages with humans and converses with them through celestial beings, which can be affected by petitionary prayers. God responds to humans by creating and preserving nature's order through providence. Ibn Sīnā's God is not God of the philosophers if by that we mean the passionless cosmic principle of Aristotle called Prime Mover or the disinterested self-perceiving the One of Plotinus. Ibn Sīnā's concept of God incorporates attributes of immutability, simplicity, and eternity of God of the Philosophers without compromising the responsiveness and intimacy of God of the Scriptures. In fact, Ibn Sīnā pursues the same ambition in his justification of prophecy and revelation, his account of cosmic sympathy, and his discussion of free will and responsibility. Unfortunately, I left out these discussions, but I hope to pursue them in a future study to complement this one.

²² Acar, "Yaratan Bilmesez Kim Bilir? Ibn Sīnā'ya Göre Allah'in Cüz'ileri Bilmesez", 17.

References

- Acar, Rahim. "Yaratan Bilmezse Kim Bilir? İbn Sînâ'ya Göre Allah'ın Cüz'ileri Bilmesi". *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi* 13 (2005), 1-23.
- Aristotle. "Generation of Animals". trans. Jonathan Barnes. *Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 2: The Revised Oxford Translation*. 1111-1218. Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Aristotle. "Metaphysics". trans. Jonathan Barnes. *Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 1: The Revised Oxford Translation*. 1552-1729. Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Aristotle. "Physics". trans. Jonathan Barnes. *Complete Works of Aristotle, Volume 1: The Revised Oxford Translation*. 315-446. Princeton University Press, 2014.
- Attfield, Robin. "The God of Religion and the God of Philosophy". *Religious Studies* 9/1 (1973), 1-9.
- Avicenna. *The Metaphysics of "The Healing": A Parallel English-Arabic Text = Aş-Şifâ: Al-İlâhiyyât*. trans. Michael E. Marmura. Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005.
- Gören Bayram, Emine. "İbn Sina'nın Dua Anlayışı". *Rize İlahiyat Dergisi* 23 (April 2023), 153-163. <https://doi.org/10.32950/rid.1285235>
- İbn Sina. *Danışname-i Alai*. trans. Murat Demirkol. İstanbul: Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı Press, 2013.
- İbn Sina. "er-Risâletu'l-Arşıyye fî Hakâiki't-Tevhid ve İsbati'n-Nübüvve". trans. Gürbüz Deniz - Hadi Ensar Ceylan. *Din Felsefesi Açısından Meşşâî Gelen-Ek-i*. ed. Recep Alpyağıl. 843-854. İstanbul: İz Publishing, 2019.
- Kenny, Anthony. *The God of the Philosophers*. Oxford - New York: Clarendon Press - Oxford University Press, 1979.
- O'Meara, Dominic J. *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads*. Oxford - New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Pehlivan, Necmettin. "İbn Sina'ya Göre Duaya İcabet ve Duanın Tesiri". *Diyanet İlmî Dergi* 50/1, 139-156.
- Picht, Georg. "The God of the Philosophers". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 48/1 (1980), 61-79.
- Plantinga, Alvin. *Does God Have a Nature?* Milwaukee: Marquette Univ Press, 1980.
- Plotinus. *The Enneads: Abridged Edition*. ed. John Dillon. trans. Stephan MacKenna. London: Penguin Classics, Abridged edition, 1991.
- Swinburne, Richard. *The Coherence of Theism*. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Taşçı Yıldırım, Emine. "İbn Sînâ'nın İnâyet Anlayışının Ontolojik ve Epistemolojik Boyutu". *Journal of Islamic Research* 30/1 (2009), 158-181.