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**Arguments for the Existence of God in Classical Islamic Thought:
A Reappraisal of Perspectives and Discourses**

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2015

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Abstract of Thesis

The endeavour to prove the existence of God through reason and rational argumentation formed a key element of medieval Islamic theological and philosophical discourses - this is an assumption frequently articulated in the secondary academic literature devoted to the subject. But is this really the case? The discourse these theologians and philosophers are said to have participated in is commonly compared to the discourse on arguments for the existence of God formulated in western philosophy: both traditions, as it were, it is argued are concerned with proving that God exists. This thesis, however, argues that proofs for God's existence are actually absent from the theological and philosophical works of the classical Islamic era (3rd/9th – 7th/13th centuries). This is not to say that the arguments we encounter there are flawed or unconvincing arguments and do not succeed in proving what they set out to establish: that is, God's existence. Reviewing the constellation of arguments and discussion germane to this subject, this thesis argues that medieval Islamic theologians and philosophers did not *seek* to prove that God exists, but that there existed an entirely different purpose which informed their endeavours. Various indications can be found that suggest the need for a re-appraisal of the discussions in question, and this thesis shall identify them. Since we seek not only to identify what it is the participants of this discourse sought to prove, but also to examine its development with regards to the use of arguments, concepts and terminology – the former would, obviously, not be possible without the latter –, we shall approach our sources in a chronological order with eight chapters being dedicated to a number of the most important classical Islamic theologians and philosophers.

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ولواهب العقل والحكمة الحمد كثيرا دائما

Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr mā ba'da al-ṭabī'a*

Introduction

The endeavour to prove the existence of God through reason and rational argumentation was an integral part of medieval Islamic theology as well as philosophy, it has often been argued in secondary literature¹ – but is this really the case?

It has been said that Islamic theologians and philosophers formulated their arguments taking their inspiration from the philosophical thinking of Aristotle and Plato, with whom they had in common the intention of proving that God exists.² Some scholars have argued that these medieval Islamic arguments can also be linked to the attempts to prove that God exists to be found among western thinkers, who were in fact inspired by the former. Herbert Davidson, for instance, traces the origins of the ‘cosmological and ontological proofs for the existence of God’, appearing from the time of the philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650), to the Islamic ‘cosmological proofs, initiated by Avicenna’.³ William Lane Craig, to name but one more scholar, has likewise stated that his so-called *kalām* cosmological argument for the existence of God ‘originated in the minds of medieval Arabic theologians, who bequeathed it to the West’.⁴

It is certainly important to bear in mind that – what we could call – the western discourse on arguments for God’s existence is not a homogenous one: thinkers such as Descartes and Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), but also Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) and many others, whom Craig had in mind when he spoke of ‘the West’, might have had different reasons for formulating their proofs of God’s existence and might also have written for different audiences.⁵

¹ This shall become evident from our engagement with the secondary literature in the following chapters.

² In particular with regards to the cosmological and the teleological argument for God’s existence, it is said that their roots lie in Greek philosophy (Evans and Manis 2009, p. 68 and p. 77; Kvanvig 2008, p. 106; J. L. Mackie in Taliaferro and Griffiths 2002, p. 242; Davidson 1987, p. 2).

³ Davidson 1987, p. 388.

⁴ Craig 1979, p. ix

⁵ Nancy Kendrick (2011) has pointed out that Anselm of Canterbury, for instance, formulated his argument in the *Proslogion*, which has often been referred to as an argument for God’s existence, not with an atheistic audience in mind, notwithstanding the fact that Anselm addresses himself to ‘the fool who hath said in his heart, There is no God’. His argument is addressed at ‘fellow monks, to understand through reason what they already accept through faith’ (p. 74). Robert J. Fogelin (1990) has noted that Thomas Aquinas’ *Five Ways* to

The same, it could be argued, is true for the audiences different Islamic theologians and philosophers had mind when they formulated their proofs.⁶ Yet, besides these details, it is nevertheless the case that, generally speaking, the discourse western thinkers engaged in has often been likened to the Islamic discourse on arguments for God's existence: in both traditions,⁷ it has been suggested, we encounter various attempts to prove that God exists. Further parallels have been drawn by scholars of the Islamic discourse where they classify the arguments put forward by Muslim theologians and philosophers following Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) categorisation of arguments for God's existence as cosmological, teleological or ontological⁸ – categories which are

demonstrate 'that God exists', as Aquinas himself has it, are addresses at those who uphold that 'appeals to natural principles and appeals to human reason and human will do not wholly explain natural phenomena. Thus for a complete explanation of natural phenomena, these natural principles must be supplemented by an appeal beyond the natural realm' (p. 306). In recent years, William Lane Craig (1949-), a Christian apologist, has employed his own so-called *kalam* cosmological argument for God's existence in debates with atheists (see, for instance, his chapter "Five Reasons God Existst" in his and Walter Sinnott-Armstrong's *God? A Debate Between A Christians and An Atheist* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004)).

⁶ Much of al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, for example, is written in response to certain dualistic beliefs held by Zoroastrians and Manichaens who lived, like him, in Samarqand, as well as to theologians of the Mu'tazilite school. The implications of this, in particular with a view to his role in formulating arguments for God's existence, will be discussed in Chapter 2. Al-Ghazālī, on the other hand, in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* addresses himself first and foremost to the philosophers and attempts to defend certain propositions accepted among, as he states, all proponents of *kalām*. He, too, is said to have discussed the question of the proof and provability of God's existence in this work, which we shall discuss in Chapter 6.

⁷ When speaking in the following of the Islamic and the western 'tradition', then this is not done without acknowledging the difficulty of 'lumping together', as it were, many varying thought systems, forms of argument and intentions behind them in one single 'tradition'. Maybe speaking of Islamic and western 'traditions', respectively, would do more justice. Yet, in order to distinguish one discourse (namely the one Islamic theologians and philosophers engaged in and where they responded to each other) from another (namely the one associated with the 'West'), this broad classification makes sense. Compare Jan-Peter Hartung's "Schulen, Netze, Traditionen: Zur Institutionalisierung von Wissen in der persophonen Welt der Frühen Neuzeit" on the question of what constitutes, and when we speak of, a 'school of thought'.

⁸ See Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Herausgegeben von Wilhelm Weischedel, Band 4, Zweiter Teil, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), p. 526. By a cosmological argument for God's existence we mean the following: 'cosmological arguments are, as the name implies, attempts to infer the existence of God from the existence of the cosmos or universe. Such arguments may take as their starting point the existence of the universe as a whole, the existence of particular objects or the existence of even the individual object. These arguments are sometimes called *first-cause arguments* because they attempt to infer that God must exist as the first cause or ultimate cause of the universe' (Evans and Manis 2009, p. 67). A teleological argument, which is a subcategory of the cosmological argument, is defined in the following way: 'it too begins with the existence of the cosmos. It begins, however, not merely with its existence but with its character as a cosmos, an orderly universe. It is often referred to as *the argument from design*' (Evans and Manis 2009, p. 77). By an ontological argument, we mean one which 'takes its departure from a given concept of the nature of God. Through nothing more than an analysis of the concept, it undertakes...to deduce the actual existence of the corresponding object' (Davidson 1987, p. 390). Cosmological and teleological arguments are *a posteriori*

likewise used to refer to the proofs by the aforementioned western philosophers.

This thesis proposes that a re-evaluation of what has been referred to as medieval Islamic arguments for God's existence is necessary. Contrary to the widely held view, described above, that Islamic theologians and philosophers sought to prove that God exists, this thesis argues that proofs for the existence of God are absent from their works. By this, we do not mean that their arguments are bad arguments for the existence of God or that they do not succeed in what they aspire to accomplish. This thesis is not concerned with evaluating the strengths or weaknesses of their proofs. Rather, what we are referring to is the *purpose* and *objective* of these arguments: what are they meant to prove? We argue that medieval Islamic theologians and philosophers did not attempt or seek to prove that God exists. The identification of certain passages in their works with arguments for God's existence, as has been argued by numerous scholars, seems to pose a misunderstanding and misrepresentation of what these proofs are meant to establish. This thesis is dedicated to a re-evaluation of the medieval Islamic philosophico-theological discourse which, in the scholarly meta-discourse, has been regarded as a discourse on the proof of God's existence. It shall examine and explain what the participants in this discourse sought to prove, if it is not the existence of God. In doing so, this thesis does not attempt a comparison of the discourse in question between the western philosophical tradition and the Islamic tradition either. It is rather trying to show that it seems to be mistaken to assume that Islamic scholars were concerned with the proof and provability of God, from which it follows that it would likewise be mistaken to assume – as has been done – that one and the same discourse can be found in both the Islamic and the western tradition.⁹

arguments which are based on experience and certain observations about the world, while ontological arguments are *a priori* arguments which conclude that God exists before considering this world (Jackson 2011, p. 18).

⁹ While the discourse on arguments for God's existence is therefore absent from medieval Islamic works of theology and philosophy, as this thesis argues, it can of course be maintained that other discourses do appear in both traditions: such as the problem of evil or theodicy, to mention but one. See, for instance, Eric L. Ormsby's *Theodicy in Islamic Thought: The Dispute over al-Ghazālī's 'Best of all Possible Worlds'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) and

A number of reasons emerge why past research has seemingly misunderstood the nature of the discourse in question, and this thesis shall identify where these misconceptions lie. In some cases, a more exact understanding of the meaning and use of certain terminology is required in order to appreciate the concerns of the aforementioned discourse participants. It shall be seen that the phrase ‘argument for God’s existence’, for instance, can denote entirely different things, depending on the context in which the discussion takes place and on what the argument is meant to prove. To avoid confusion, we will speak of ‘classical’ or ‘traditonal’ arguments for God’s existence when intending a cosmological, teleological or ontological argument seeking to show that God exists, as discussed before. Other meanings associated with the phrase (that is, arguments or proofs of God’s existence), which we will encounter throughout this thesis, will be indicated and explained where necessary. In other cases, important indications as to what these theologians and philosophers sought to prove have been overlooked because only those passages which are usually associated with the discourse on proofs of God’s existence were taken into consideration while neglecting other relevant evidence dispersed throughout the philosophico-theological works.

In addition to this, we also need to bear in mind another consideration: all arguments for the existence of God cannot do without defining what they mean by ‘God’ in order to succeed at all.¹⁰ It is known that in the history of these arguments in western philosophy, for instance, different concepts of God have been put forward. Anselm of Canterbury (c. 1033-1109) famously proposed a

McBrayer, Justin P., Howard-Snyder, Daniel (eds), *The Blackwell Companion to the Problem of Evil* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

¹⁰ Nicholas Everitt (2004, p. 15) has pointed out that, in arguments for God’s existence, ‘God’ does not so much stand for a proper name as for a description. They must therefore answer the question: ‘for which description in particular is it a shorthand?’ In many instances of such arguments it is actually the case that the entity proven to exist is rather different from common descriptions of God. With regards to the conclusion reached by Leibniz in his proof, Everitt highlights ‘how very ungodlike Leibniz’s necessary being is. Although Leibniz refers to this being as ‘God’...there is no ground in this argument for thinking that the being possesses such traditional attributes as omnipotence, omniscience or moral perfection.’ (ibid., p. 75) With regards to what he perceives as Islamic arguments for God’s existence, Davidson has pointed out the same difficulty: ‘the Kalam thinkers unfortunately do not state what, precisely, a complete proof must comprise. After arriving at a cause of the universe, adherents of the Kalam proceed to argue that the ultimate cause of the universe is eternal, one, and incorporeal... – but they do not tell us precisely which of these attributes are being established as part of their proofs of the existence of God and which are ancillary attributes’ (1987, p. 214).

concept of God which entailed that He was ‘a being than which none greater can be conceived’¹¹ and argued for God’s existence on the basis that existence is a ‘great-making property’ which must, therefore, be affirmed for God.¹² Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), in the fifth of his *Five Ways* to prove God’s existence, presents God as the cause of the workings of natural bodies, while conceding that it is only God’s existence which can be inferred from these effects, not, however, His comprehensive nature.¹³ Yet, no matter what the concept proposed is and whether we are dealing with a cosmological, a teleological or an ontological argument, what they all have – and must have – in common is that they want to establish that there *is* a certain entity, that is, to refute the *non-existence* of this entity. Since this is the case, it is doubtful whether certain instances in the works of Islamic theologians and philosophers, which secondary literature has identified as arguments seeking to prove God’s existence, fit this description; it rather seems to be the case that all their proofs are concerned with is a debate and dispute about the *nature* of God where the mere *existence* of the entity which we refer to as God is already accepted. To label such proofs as arguments for God’s existence, rather than arguments for a certain nature of God, seems to confuse two separate and distinct points of enquiry and hence leads to a misrepresentation of the discourse these scholars engaged in.¹⁴ Yet, someone could object to this important point we just made by asking: does it still make sense to speak of a dispute about the *nature* of God, rather than His *existence* if two people disagree to such an extent about what they mean by ‘God’ that the concepts they defend have not much, or nothing, in common? Would then not the attempt on the part of a theologian, for instance, to prove his conception of God and thereby to disprove that held by a philosopher constitute an argument for God’s existence? Something similar has

¹¹ Quoted from Anselm’s *Proslogion* in Evans and Manis 2009, p. 63.

¹² Evans and Manis 2009, p. 63 and p. 65.

¹³ Fogelin 1990, pp. 306-307.

¹⁴ This point has already been hinted at by Nancy Kendrik with reference to Saint Anselm’s proof in the *Proslogion*, yet she does not go so far as to reject labelling it an argument for God’s existence. She writes: ‘Anselm’s argument in the *Proslogion* is often said to be an attempt to prove that God exists. This is true, but one must be careful in asserting it. ... He is not trying to convince atheists that there really is a God. Instead, Anselm is arguing for a particular conception of God’ (2011, p. 73). Graham Oppy has, more fittingly, phrased Saint Anselm’s argument as a ‘proof for the existence *and* nature [my emphasis] of God’ (Oppy in Jordan 2010, p. 22).

indeed been argued by Craig in a different context.¹⁵ Here we need to bear in mind two things: firstly, it will be seen that the theologians and philosophers engaged in this kind of dispute always concede to their opponents belief in the godhead even where fundamentally different conceptions are involved. Secondly, while the above point may be valid in itself, it might not be the case that this is how medieval Islamic theologians and philosophers perceived their own endeavours. It can be shown, this thesis argues, that these scholars did not conceive of their disputes about God's *nature* as tantamount to disputes about God's *existence* (that is, their particular 'God' and His existence), and it is *their* understanding of this discourse this thesis enquires into.

The misrepresentation of the medieval Islamic discourse in question we spoke of above, as well as the causes leading to this confusion, becomes most apparent when it comes to arguments which have been identified as cosmological proofs. We need to bear in mind that the inference of the cause from a given effect, which is what all cosmological arguments attempt to do, can mean two distinct things: in the case of an argument for God's existence it means that the effect points to the *existence* of a cause, having certain qualities, which is then identified as 'God'. A cosmological argument for God's existence therefore seeks to show that an instance of what we mean by 'God' really *exists*, rather than that it *does not*. Yet, the inference of a cause from an effect can also refer to something entirely different, and it is this what classical Islamic theologians and philosophers had in mind, as this thesis argues. It can be the answer to the question, 'What or who is the cause of a given effect?' or put differently, 'Who did this?' In this case, the intention is to identify who the agent of a given action is, based on the action. The explanations of the great philosopher Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037) shall serve us as an example to clarify this point: when writing

¹⁵ In response to Francis J. Beckwith's article "Do Muslims and Christians Worship the Same God?" (17 December 2015, www.thecatholicthing.org). Beckwith argued that Christians and Muslims indeed do worship the same God as 'the fact that Christians may call God "Yahweh" and Muslims call God "Allah" makes no difference if both "Gods" have identical properties. ... The fact that one may have incomplete knowledge or hold a false belief about another person...does not mean that someone who has better or truer knowledge about that person is not thinking about the same person.' Craig ("Do Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God", 7 February 2016, www.reasonablefaith.org) objected to this view, arguing, 'I think we can argue that the conceptions of God in Christianity and Islam are so fundamentally different that they are not the same God.' Based on Craig's view, one could argue that a Christian and Muslim's dispute about God's nature is tantamount to a dispute about the very existence of (their respective) God.

about a type of syllogism called *dalīl*, he states that it ‘clarifies the cause from the effect’.¹⁶ The example Ibn Sīnā gives to illustrate its working is the following: this tree is burnt; everything burnt came into contact with fire; hence, this tree came into contact with fire.¹⁷ What this example clarifies is how the inference of the cause from the effect can, and indeed is, used to answer the question of what has to be *identified as* the cause belonging to a given effect. A burnt tree, the effect before us, allows the inference that it is nothing but fire which has to be identified as its cause. Importantly, this inference of the cause from the effect does *not seek* what the inference of the cause from the effect seeks in all cosmological arguments for God’s existence. Yet, it is the objective discussed last, we will argue, medieval Islamic theologians and philosophers pursued when they presented arguments along the lines of, or following a similar structure as, what we mean by cosmological proofs for God’s existence.

It was the philosopher Karl Popper (1902-1994) who pointed out that all truly scientific theories must be falsifiable; a theory that cannot, in principle, be falsified cannot claim to be scientific and is not a good theory at all: ‘wir fordern, daß es die logische Form des Systems ermöglicht, dieses auf dem Wege der methodischen Nachprüfung negativ auszuzeichnen: Ein empirisch-wissenschaftliches System muß an der Erfahrung scheitern können.’¹⁸ This must hold true as well for the claim this thesis makes. We shall therefore stress the following: it will be seen that the strongest argument in favour of our thesis has to do with the meaning of certain phrases, as indicated above, which allow us to establish what particular arguments associated with the discourse in question are meant to prove. If our thesis, therefor, to a great extent hinges on the meaning of these phrases (among other indications!), it follows that they, at the same time, guarantee the falsifiability of our thesis. These phrases, for instance, are not used to ‘fit’ our thesis, rather they are evidence to strengthen it since, in principle, they could falsify it. We must therefore also conclude that what lends support to one thesis, falsifies the claims of a contrary thesis. It is

¹⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ*, *al-Burhān*, p. 33.

¹⁷ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, *al-Burhān*, p. 103.

¹⁸ Popper, Karl, *Logik der Forschung: Zur Erkenntnistheorie der modernen Naturwissenschaft*. Wien: Springer-Verlag, 1935, pp. 12-13.

based on this reasoning that we speak of a misrepresentation of the discourse in question and its concerns in academic literature.

Certain indications can be found in the writings of medieval Islamic theologians and philosophers that allow us an answer to the question of why they were *not* concerned with the proof of God's existence. The answer to this question has to do with audiences and the origins of certain theologico-philosophical debates in the Qur'ān, to name but two examples. This thesis will attempt to identify them. At the same time, we need to be aware of the difficulties in answering the question of why something does *not* appear in these works: when a certain question is not discussed, we are generally not told why it is not discussed, which would otherwise allow us to infer that the discourse participants were aware of the question, but chose, for whatever reasons, not to expound upon it. When it comes to proofs for God's existence, which are, as this thesis argues, absent from medieval Islamic works of theology and philosophy, it seems to be the case that a positive answer as to why they are absent poses a difficulty and would lead us into the realm of speculation, as will become clear.

As indicated, the discourse we are concerned with properly belongs to the two disciplines of speculative theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*) and the metaphysical branch of philosophy (*falsafā*) respectively.¹⁹ Our analysis of it shall therefore rest on an examination of works of *kalām* and *falsafā*, to the exclusion of works belonging to other Islamic disciplines, such as Qur'ānic exegesis, which might in places contain certain references to the discourse in question. Only in one instance, we shall take into consideration a *Tafsīr* work, for reasons that will be explained. This thesis will cover a time period of five centuries, from the beginnings of our discourse in the 3rd century Hijri/9th century CE to its advancements and finally what can be described as its culminating point in terms of intellectual and argumentative rigour in the 7th/13th century. Since we seek not only to establish what it is these theologians and philosophers sought to prove, but also to examine the development of the discourse with regards to

¹⁹ *Kalām* discourses are characterised by their resort to dialectical methods and rational frameworks in order to explain theological doctrine. The term *kalām* seems, initially, to have been used to refer to the method of employing dialogues to flesh out theological propositions, identifying through a sequence of questions and corresponding answers certain logical contradictions in the doctrines held by an opponent. See Shah 2014.

the use of arguments, concepts and terminology – the former would, obviously, not be possible without the latter –, we shall approach our sources in a chronological order. Eight chapters will be dedicated to some of the most influential proponents of *kalām* and *falsafa* who shaped the discourse in question. We shall begin our investigation with one of the earliest *mutakallimūn*, al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 225/860), and with the – arguably – first Arabic philosopher, al-Kindī (d. 256/873). We shall then turn to the eponym of the Maturidite school of thought, the theologian al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944). The subsequent chapter will be dedicated to al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/936), whose name would come to designate another school of thought, and to al-Bāqillānī (d. 402/1013), an adherent of it. This shall be followed by a chapter on Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037), conceivably the greatest philosopher in the Islamic tradition, as well as on al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), one of Ash‘arism’s leading figures. We shall then turn to one of the greatest defenders of the theological tradition and harshest critic of philosophy, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), followed by a chapter on Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) who for his part took up the defence of philosophy after al-Ghazālī’s attack. We shall conclude our investigation with one of the most significant theologians of the later Ash‘arite tradition, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209). Besides these scholars, we will also take into consideration, in different chapters, the works of a number of theologians belonging to the Mu‘tazilite school of thought, such as al-Fuwatī (d. 209/825), al-Nazzām (d. 230/845), Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā‘ī (d. 321/933), ‘Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) and al-Malāḥimī (d. 536/1141). The works of the Maturidite Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī (d. 507/1114) and of Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī (d. 511/1118), one of al-Juwaynī’s disciples, shall also be adduced in our quest. Our selection of scholars is not meant to convey the idea that other thinkers, contemporary with the ones selected or coming after them, did not also contribute to developing the discourse in question; rather, we have chosen these individuals primarily on the basis that most of them are the ones who have been identified by previous research as participants of the medieval discourse which has the proof of God’s existence as its subject-matter. Since this thesis argues that the discourse these scholars were engaged in was not concerned with the proof of God’s existence, it makes sense to focus primarily on the abovementioned thinkers so as to show

where a different reading of their arguments allows different conclusions about their objectives. A more comprehensive study of arguments for God's existence in Islamic theological and philosophical thought would surely benefit from taking into consideration also less studied scholars as well as those coming after al-Rāzī, with whom our study ends, but this would be beyond the scope of this thesis.

Even if this thesis argues that the discourse in question has been mistaken as being concerned with the proof that God exists, it is undisputed that the discourse itself has rightly been identified as a significant aspect of the intellectual history of medieval Islamic theology and philosophy. This is evident from the important position it assumes and the depth of argumentation in these works. The theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, for example, points out how this particular aspect of theology – that is, the proof of the creator, usually inferred from creation – forms the basis of other major Islamic disciplines, such as Qur'ānic exegesis (*Tafsīr*), the study of the *Ḥadīth* literature as well as jurisprudence (*Fiqh*).²⁰ It is due to the significance belonging to this particular discourse that the indications to be found in the relevant philosophico-theological works should be further investigated – indications which suggest that their authors might have sought to prove something different than God's existence.

²⁰ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*; vol. 2, p. 95.

Chapter One: al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 225/860) and al-Kindī (d. 256/873)

Al-Qāsim

‘The main subject of our epistle is the argument from design,’ Binyamin Abrahamov writes in the introduction to his translation and edition of al-Qāsim’s *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr*. ‘This argument,’ he continues, stating its purpose, ‘proves the existence of God through the wonderful design observed all over the universe.’²¹ This class of argument, which is based on the notion of design and which can occur with different foci,²² can be found, according to Abrahamov, in the writings of the earliest as well as later *mutakallimūn*,²³ and primarily of those belonging to the Mu‘tazilite school of thought as the other schools mostly gave preference to different sorts of arguments.²⁴ Generally speaking, the argument from design in al-Qāsim’s *al-Dalīl al-kabīr* consists, in Abrahamov’s eyes, in his pointing to the existence of a plenitude of signs in this world which reveal its being made and created. Wilferd Madelung, too, identifies al-Qāsim’s arguments as proofs for God’s existence on the basis of the order observed in this world.²⁵ Creation requires a creator, and the perfection, order and wisdom behind the signs point to God whose existence is consequentially proven.²⁶ Al-Qāsim also makes use of a number of other concepts to make his point, such as the notions of change and particularisation (*takhṣīṣ*).²⁷ We shall see that these are early instances of concepts which should later come to play an important

²¹ Abrahamov’s introduction to al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, p. 1. See also p. 7: ‘*K. al-dalīl al-kabīr*...deal[s] with the argument for the existence of God and the creation of the world.’ See also Daiber 1975 who briefly mentions al-Qāsim among those who prove ‘Gott aus der Weltordnung’ (p. 160). See Horten 1912, p. 13 et seqq. (‘Das Gottesproblem’) for a general outlook on – what he identifies as – the theological arguments for God’s existence (‘Gottesbeweise’).

²² Abrahamov states for instance with reference to al-Maḳḍisī that his ‘argument from chance [and] argument from composition...are in effect arguments from design in other terms’ (ibid., p. 3).

²³ Besides the Mu‘tazilites al-Fuwaṭī and al-Nazzām, Abrahamov mentions such scholars as al-Bāqillānī, Ibn Ḥazm, al-Ghazālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī whom he believes to have made recourse to this argument (ibid., pp. 2-6).

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 1-2. Madelung (1965, p. 106) believes that the argument from design is not the ‘traditional argument’ employed by Mu‘tazilite theologians, giving preference to the argument from the createdness of the world instead.

²⁵ Madelung 1965, p. 106.

²⁶ Abrahamov’s introduction to al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, pp. 7-8.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

role in the arguments theologians employed to ‘affirm the creator,’ as it often appears, and this is particularly true for the concept of particularisation.

Contrary to Abrahamov and Madelung’s view that the proofs in al-Qāsim’s *al-Dalīl al-kabīr* are arguments from designs with the purpose of proving that God exists, we shall argue that the proof of God’s existence is in fact absent from al-Qāsim’s work. As opposed to Abrahamov’s view that the argument from design for God’s existence constitutes the ‘main theme’ of the *Dalīl kabīr*, it shall be seen that the main theme running through the entire book is the following: Creation insofar as it contains the signs of making and arrangement allows us to infer that it must be *ascribed* to none other than God as His work. Furthermore, the characteristics of created things allow us to gain knowledge about God’s nature. The purpose these signs serve in al-Qāsim’s reasoning is, hence, different from the purpose they serve in the traditional argument from design for God’s existence, as we shall clarify in more detail.

The ‘Proof of God’ and al-Qāsim’s Concern in the *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr*

Al-Qāsim himself indicates at the very beginning of his work that it will be concerned with giving an answer to the question posed by those he refers to as *zanādiqa* and *mulḥidūn*²⁸ who ‘ask about the proof for God (*al-dalīl* ‘an *Allāh*) the Lord of the worlds.’²⁹ It is certainly the case that such expressions as ‘the proof for God’ do not immediately intimidate their ultimate objective or aim, and Abrahamov and Madelung in fact believe that it refers to ‘the proof of the existence of God,’ as we have pointed out above. The same difficulty exists when al-Qāsim speaks of ‘God’s proofs (*ḥujaj*) for the people to gain knowledge about Him (*fī l-‘ilm bihi*)...and pieces of evidence to attain knowledge of Him

²⁸ Note that both terms were usually used for individuals who were considered to deviate from the orthodox tenets of Islam, be they adherents of dualistic beliefs, Sufis, Shi‘ites, philosophers or even other *mutakallimūn* (Abrahamov in al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, pp. 180-182, f. 1 and 2). Al-Kindī labels those who uphold the reality of the divine attributes as *mulḥidūn* (al-Kindī (1950), *Risāla fī waḥdāniyya Allāh wa-tanāhī jirm al-‘ālam*, p. 207). For Abrahamov’s remark that ‘[a]l-Ghazālī regards as *zanādiqa* the philosophers who...deny the existence of a creator,’ (Abrahamov in al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, p. 181, f. 1) which implies atheism on their part, see our Chapter Six on al-Ghazālī.

²⁹ Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, p. 62. All translations from al-Qāsim’s *al-Dalīl* are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

(*ma'rifatihi*)³⁰ which are clear and established or when he introduces 'the clearest traces of (His) wisdom in the things' as the method which 'brings about knowledge of Him (*al-'ilm bihi*).'³¹

It is nevertheless possible to gain an idea of what such expressions as 'the proof for God' and attaining 'knowledge of Him' refer to when we consider the following: After a discussion of different ways of perceiving God where al-Qāsim singles out the one based on the manifold signs contained in creation as the one prepared by God Himself, he adduces a great number of Qur'ānic verses which are seen to exemplify this approach. God Himself, al-Qāsim states, tells us 'through the established signs (*a'lām*)...which are always present in the heavens and the earth and what is in between them' how we can know Him (*annahū yu'raf*).³² One such instance al-Qāsim refers to is Q. 10.31-32. In these two verses God poses the rhetorical question who provides for humans, who brings forth life from death and in general who directs all affairs. The answer is given immediately: It is God, and a further question is posed: '{So why do you not take heed for Him?}'³³ Al-Qāsim comments on these verses that everything God mentions points to its being 'created (*makhlūq*) and not a creator itself,'³⁴ its being 'arranged (*mudabbbar*) and not an arranger'³⁵ and in general contains 'evidence of influence from one who exerts influence (*mu'aththir*).'³⁶ Al-Qāsim's train of thought is at the outset, admittedly, reminiscent of the traditional arguments from design, yet his statement at the end of it that 'there must hence be one who arranges (*mudabbir*) all affairs, and there exists none such other than God (*wa-lan yūjad illā'llāh*)'³⁷ indicates a different reading: Bringing together the Qur'ānic reasoning with terminology and concepts characteristic of dialectical discourses, al-Qāsim seeks to *identify* God as the one who brings about everything. 'God is the creator,'³⁸ al-Qāsim concludes his discussion of the

³⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

³¹ Ibid., pp. 62/64.

³² Ibid., p. 76.

³³ Ibid., p. 80. All translations of the Qur'ān are taken from Abdel Haleem 2004.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 80.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 80.

³⁶ Ibid., pp. 80/82.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 82.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 82.

above verses. In this endeavour, it is not God's existence which al-Qāsim seeks to prove on the basis of the need of design for some designer.

All Qur'ānic verses adduced by al-Qāsim indeed serve the purpose of proving this very point. With reference to Q. 57.17 which reminds humans that {God revives the earth after it dies}, al-Qāsim reasons that everyone has to admit that there is no human being 'who exerts influence (and) arranges' and that the 'trace of...arrangement' is 'from God, not from humans.'³⁹ Even Jesus, who according to the Qur'ān revived the dead, did so, al-Qāsim emphasises, only by a capacity given to him by God.⁴⁰ This reasoning, which establishes God alone as creator and director of all affairs following certain Qur'ānic verses, reappears in later Mu'tazilite works with the same function. In his *Kitāb al-Majmū' fī'l-muḥīṭ bi'l-taklīf*, 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), for instance, clearly states his objective of showing that 'there is no originator for the bodies except for God'⁴¹ and that 'the Eternal (Most-High!) is the originator of the bodies.'⁴² To achieve this, he explains that 'originated things (*ḥawāḍith*) must be affirmed which do not come from us in order that we are led to God through them.'⁴³ As a Mu'tazilite, 'Abd al-Jabbār of course affirms human causal efficacy besides God's authorship.⁴⁴ In order to prove God as the being who brought about the world, he therefore makes recourse to events 'the servants (*al-'ibād*) are not able to bring about...such as an earth quake.'⁴⁵

Al-Qasim for his part follows certain Qur'ānic dicta. Q. 75.36-40, which refer to God's creation of humans from a drop of sperm as well as of His ability to bring the dead back to life, is made the foundation of the proof that God alone is creator. 'This does not occur, unless due to God,'⁴⁶ al-Qāsim states, pointing to God's exclusive role in prolonging or shortening the span of human life. In the same vein, Q. 6.97 states: {It is He who made the stars, so that they can guide you when land and sea are dark}. Al-Qāsim eagerly emphasises that the

³⁹ Ibid., p. 84.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 84/86.

⁴¹ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Majmū'*, p. 88.

⁴² Ibid., p. 90.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 79.

⁴⁴ See De Cillis 2014, pp. 10-16 on the Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite positions on causality.

⁴⁵ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Majmū'*, p. 28.

⁴⁶ Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, p. 92.

alternation of night and day is from God alone.⁴⁷ 'To God (Praised!) belongs dominion (*li'llāh subḥānahu min mulk*) over every star and celestial body,'⁴⁸ he explains, and 'from Him is the wondrous arrangement (*minhu 'ajīb al-tadbīr*).'⁴⁹ Following the Qur'ān's mention of the purposeful and wise creation of the camel, the mountains, the heavens and the earth in Q. 88.17-22, al-Qāsim stresses that 'the creation (*ṣan'*) of all these things has been established...through the signs (*dalā'il*) in creation and its arrangement (*tadbīrihi*).'⁵⁰ Asking about the creator of all these things, he remarks: 'That is God, the Lord (*rabb*) of the worlds and creator (*ṣāni'*) of creators.'⁵¹ Then al-Qāsim refers to the reminder in Q. 26.77-82 that God is the one {who created me [and it] is He who guides me; He who gives me food and drink...} and explains it in the same way: 'It is God, the creator besides whom there is no creator.'⁵² To 'the signs for Him,'⁵³ al-Qāsim explains, also belongs God's 'enlightening proof (*ḥujja*)'⁵⁴ given in Q. 14.32-34. These verses declare: {It is God who created the heavens and the earth, who has sent down water from the sky...}. Al-Qāsim's comment on this passage clarifies his understanding of what the Qur'ān seeks to establish: 'Thus speaks God who created (*khalaqa*) all this and made it (*ṣana'a*); there is no creator in it [i.e., the world] other than Him and no creator for it together with Him. This is the case even if they deny it.'⁵⁵ Likewise, Q. 31.11 admonishes humans, stating that the creation of the heavens and the bringing forth of plants from rain is '{God's creation}'⁵⁶ only and demands: '{Now, show Me what these others have created.}'⁵⁷ Al-Qāsim weaves into the fabric of his argument the intention of this verse, arguing it shows that 'all this is making and creation from Him' and characterises ignorance of this fact as 'the most evident aberrance (*abyan al-dalāl*).'⁵⁸ He furthermore expresses his disbelief how humans can have doubts

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 94.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 96.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 98.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 110.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 110.

⁵² Ibid., p. 118.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 130.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 130.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 130.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 132.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 132.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 132.

concerning God or associate partners with God (*shirk*) when He made clear that ‘{It is God who created the heavens and the earth}.’⁵⁹

All these passages, which are only a selection of the many references al-Qāsim makes to the Qur’ān, but which all follow the same train of thought, have made it abundantly clear that the signs in creation are not understood by al-Qāsim to point to the existence of another entity – God – in addition to the world; rather, his endeavour is to establish on the basis of wise arrangement in this world that it is, firstly, created, and, secondly, comes from God who is the sole creator.

There is a number of other passages in al-Qāsim’s work which are of twofold importance for us: These passages not only shed further light on the question of what it is that al-Qāsim is seeking to establish, but support our contention that it is not the proof of God’s existence in the traditional sense; they also give an indication of the reason why to prove God’s being sole creator is a matter of such significance in al-Qāsim’s thought. ‘Among the signs for Him (*al-dalā’il ‘alayhi*) is Abraham’s speech,’⁶⁰ al-Qāsim writes with reference to the Qur’ānic account in Q. 21.52-56. The prophet was sent by God with a clear mission: ‘A dispute and quarrel took place between him [i.e., Abraham] and his people about God (*fī’llāh*),’ al-Qāsim explains, because he found them worshipping idols (*al-tamāthīl*)⁶¹ as well as the stars alongside their worship of God (*kānū ya’budūna min al-nujūm ma’ahu*).⁶² Al-Qāsim states that Abraham admonished his people that ‘{Your true Lord is the Lord of the heavens and the earth, He who created them}’⁶³ and he ‘reasoned on the basis of God’s signs in His heavens and His earth that God is the creator of all this (*fa-istadalla...bi-dalā’il Allāh min samawātihi wa-arḍihi ‘alā anna Allāh ṣāni’ li-dhālika kullihi*).’⁶⁴ As opposed to Abrahamov’s suggestion – and translation – that Abraham’s dispute with his people was ‘about the [existence] [sic] of God,’⁶⁵ al-Qāsim’s own remarks make clear that Abraham sought to dissuade them from *shirk* when

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 132. This is from Q. 32.4.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 112.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 112.

⁶² Ibid., p. 114.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 114. This is Q. 21.56.

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 116.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 113.

they worshipped other things alongside God (*ma'ahu*) 'even though they are God's creation, made by Him.'⁶⁶ It is evident that Abraham's pointing to signs in creation does not, in al-Qāsim's understanding of his mission, serve the purpose of proving to his people that God exists, as they believed in God's existence anyway. Rather, he uses the signs as evidence that God alone is creator and everything else is His creation. It is ultimately on the basis of God's role as creator that His right to worship is explained, while worship of other things is rejected due to their being part of what is created. The numerous instances in Abrahamov's translation which suggest that Abraham's mission entailed that he 'brought proof of the existence of God,'⁶⁷ while al-Qāsim speaks of '*dalla... 'alā rabb al-'ālamīn*,'⁶⁸ as it appears in one instance, hence misunderstand the wider context and intend of the discussion.⁶⁹

Al-Qāsim adduces the story of yet another prophet, and it proves the same point. 'To the signs (*dalā'il*) of those messengers and prophets who came after Abraham...belongs the speech of Joseph,'⁷⁰ he states. When in prison, Joseph addressed his two fellow inmates and 'presented proof to them that God is alone in terms of *al-rubūbiyya* (*mā tafarrada Allāh bihi min al-rubūbiyya*).'⁷¹ So what does the term *al-rubūbiyya* denote? Abrahamov suggests its translation as 'divinity.'⁷² Al-Qāsim's own words, however, scattered over a few passages, indicate something different. In one passage, for instance, al-Qāsim mentions Q. 23.86 which orders the Prophet to pose the question: '{Say, 'Who is the Lord

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 114.

⁶⁷ Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, p. 119.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 118.

⁶⁹ Compare the following passages: *ibid.*, pp. 112/113 Abrahamov's 'Among the proofs [of the existence] [sic] of God is the statement of Abraham' and Arabic '*wa-min al-dalā'il 'alayhi qawl Ibrāhīm*'; pp. 116/117 Abrahamov's 'As to the proof (*dalāla*) of God[is existence] [sic] by His indications' and Arabic '*wa-fī'l-dalāla 'alā'llāh bi-dalā'ilihī*'; pp. 118/119 Abrahamov's 'Then he began to argue against them on behalf of God about knowing that God [exists] [sic]' and Arabic '*thumma ibtada' ihtijājan 'alayhim li'llāh fī-ma'rifatihī*' as well as Abrahamov's '[Abraham]...brought proof of the existence of God and proved the existence of the Lord' and Arabic '*fa-istadalla ṣalawāt Allāh 'alayhi wa-dalla bi-mā 'addada min hādihā kullihī 'alā rabb al-'ālamīn*'; pp. 120/121 Abrahamov's 'Every piece of evidence...that Abraham brought, only proves the existence of God' and Arabic '*wa-laysa mim mā dalla bihi...yadullu abadan mustadillan illā 'alā'llāh*' as well as Abrahamov's 'Praise be to God for the argument for His [existence] [sic] which He manifested to Abraham' and Arabic '*wa'l-ḥamd li'llāh 'alā mā abāna min ḥujjatihi li-Ibrāhīm*'.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 122/124.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 124.

⁷² Ibid., p. 125.

[*rabb*] of the seven heavens? Who is the Lord [*rabb*] of the Mighty Throne?’⁷³ Al-Qāsim explains this verse as pointing to the fact that the things God mentions are clearly subjected to His control (*marbūb*), and that what is evidence for their being creation is evidence for God’s *rubūbiyya*.⁷⁴ It can therefore be inferred from this passage that the term *al-rubūbiyya* refers to God’s role as the one who brought creation into existence. The same is confirmed when al-Qāsim states, referring to Q. 35.11 which talks about God’s creation of humans, that ‘God proved through it [i.e., this verse] on the basis of the clearest sign (*dalīl*) His *rubūbiyya* and that He is alone with regards to the creation of the things (*wa-mā tafarrada bihi min ṣan‘ al-badā’i*).’⁷⁵ Closely related to the concept and term *al-rubūbiyya* is, in al-Qāsim’s reasoning, the term *rabb*. This is the case in the aforementioned Qur’ānic verse Q. 23.86 where God is identified as *rabb* on the basis that He is creator and has *al-rubūbiyya*. It also becomes apparent when al-Qāsim mentions the terms *rabb* and *khāliq* in one breath, stating that ‘God is their *rabb* and their creator.’⁷⁶ Referring to Q. 45.7-13 which culminates in God saying ‘{It is God who subjected the sea for you...He has subjected all that is in the heavens and the earth for your benefit, as a gift from Him. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect},’ al-Qāsim explains the following: No human being ever claimed that he, not God, is the one who subjugated the things mentioned. This would have been an evident lie, and not even Pharaoh maintained this despite his utter ignorance when he said: ‘{I am your supreme lord [*rabb*]}.’⁷⁷ Pharaoh, of course, did not intend to say ‘I am *rabb* and creator (*khālāq*) for you’⁷⁸ and he did not mean by it ‘I am god and provider (*ilāh razāq*)’⁷⁹ either. Al-Qāsim’s explanation makes clear that God’s being called *rabb* denotes His role as creator. It is unthinkable, al-Qāsim stresses elsewhere, that God should share the title of *rabb* with another entity: ‘The *rubūbiyya* of one *rabb* is more excellent...than of two...since, if it belonged to two, each *rabb*

⁷³ Ibid., p. 86.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 86: *wa-shahada lahu bi’l-rubūbiyya mā shahada bi’l-ṣan‘ ‘alayhā min shuhūdihā*.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 86.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 154.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 174. This is Q. 79.24.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 174.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp.174/176. Rather, what Pharaoh meant is: ‘I am your *sayyid* and *malik*...because in the language of the Arabs every *rabb* is *sayyid* and *malik*.’ It is interesting that al-Qāsim maintains that Pharaoh did not claim to be *ilāh* considering that he does so in Q. 28.38.

would be lacking (*manqūṣ*)...but how should the one who lacks be a god (*ilāh*) or be affirmed as *rabb*?⁸⁰ God who is perfect is hence the only *rabb* and the only one who can claim *al-rubūbiyya* for Himself – ‘the proof for His oneness (*al-tawḥīd*) has been established’⁸¹ – which entitles Him, in His perfection, to demand obedience and be honoured.⁸²

Our consideration of these passages allows us to conclude the following: The main theme running through the whole of the *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr* is the endeavour to ascribe the whole of creation to God alone and to deny any other entity’s sharing in the creative act. This is particularly evident where al-Qāsim speaks of ‘the proof that God is alone in terms of *al-rubūbiyya*,’ a term which stands for God’s role as creator. The stories of the various prophets al-Qāsim adduces further support this point and show that the proof that God exists does not constitute part of how al-Qāsim understands their missions. Yet, their stories also illustrate that the significance of establishing God’s being sole creator lies in the fact that it is made the basis for justifying and explaining God’s worthiness of worship alone and the repudiation of *shirk*. It follows that al-Qāsim’s allusion to the manifold signs in creation does not serve the purpose they serve in the traditional design arguments. Such things as the heavens and earth and their arrangement are pointed to in order to prove that their creation must be *ascribed* to God alone; in the design argument, however, the arrangement perceived in the world serves to show that *there must be* a divine entity.⁸³

This is one aspect of the ‘knowledge of God’ attained through signs in creation al-Qāsim spoke of at the very beginning of the *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr*. Another aspect concerns what we could term God’s nature as well as His otherness from creation, which al-Qāsim emphasises adducing the Qur’ānic pronouncement:

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 124.

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 124.

⁸² Ibid., p. 124.

⁸³ Compare *ibid.*, p. 120: ‘The creation and arrangement we see can only be due to the *rabb*, just as the creation of the earth and the heavens and what is between them...is not from any maker (*ṣāniʿ*) or creator (*khāliq*), (but) only from God. Likewise, what Abraham mentioned is only from God. ... Abraham referred to His making (*ṣanʿihi*) and His creation (*khalqihī*)...when he called (his people) to God, (the same things) which God’s prophets before and after him did not cease to refer to.’

{‘There is nothing like Him (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay*)’}⁸⁴ We recall that at the beginning of the *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr* al-Qāsim spoke about different ways in which humans attempt to conceive of God, and he singled out conception of God insofar as He is completely different from everything else as the right way. All existent things, al-Qāsim explains, are different from each other in certain respects, but will be similar in others. God’s difference (*khilāfuhu*) from created things, however, is something that describes, and appertains to, Him only and solely exists between Him and creation.⁸⁵ After having shown that God is sole creator, al-Qāsim then goes on to discuss ‘God’s signs (*dalā’il*) for us that He is different (*khilāf*) from the (other) things.’⁸⁶ God’s otherness from everything lies in His being the most exalted, solely worshipped being; He is beyond time, without before and after; and in general, ‘His names are infinite..., united in Him, not separated.’⁸⁷ The right perception of God, based on His otherness from creation and the signs in creation, also entails not imagining (*tawahhama*) Him as a body (*jism*) – a sin committed by the scholars of the masses (*khashw al-‘āmma*) who lack ‘certain knowledge (*al-yaqīn*)’ of God and who ‘did not believe in Him (*lam yu’minū bihi*).’⁸⁸ The common people (*al-‘āmma*) themselves are likewise ignorant of God (*jahl bi’llāh*) and of the signs God brought forth for them to know Him (*jahalat mā qulnā mim mā kathura Allāh ‘alā ma’rifatihi al-adlā’*). They hold contradictory, reprehensible beliefs about God (*qawluhā ‘alā’llāh*), but believe them to be right.⁸⁹ These remarks made by al-Qāsim show clearly that the common people and their scholars’ lack of ‘knowledge about God’ or their ‘ignorance of Him’ concern God’s nature, but not God’s existence. Even the failure to ‘believe in Him’ on the part of the aforementioned scholars is not the same as the absence of belief that He actually exists.⁹⁰

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 139. This is Q. 42.11.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 66.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 139.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 141.

⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 142.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 154.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 143. *Āmana* is not used in the sense of believing in God’s existence but in the sense of believing and obeying what God has said or shown through signs to be true, as is clear when al-Qāsim says: ‘But God is above what they say about Him!’ Al-Qāsim defines belief (*īmān*) as ‘safety (*aman*) from the transgressions of the transgressors’ (compare Abrahamov’s comments on this, *ibid.*, p. 194, f. 118).

All the aforementioned allows us to conclude that, when al-Qāsim speaks of 'knowledge of God' which is attained by pondering over the signs of arrangement in creation, he means the following: These signs teach humans that God, none other, is the sole creator of the whole word and everything in it, as we repeatedly made clear, the knowledge of which should induce the wise person to worship none but God. They also teach humans, if properly understood, what the right perception of God is. The notion that design in creation is evidence that God exists, is however not what we find in the words and thought of al-Qāsim. This specific argument is missing, and God's existence appears to be considered apodictic.⁹¹

Other Early Mu'tazilites and the Proof of God's Existence: al-Fuwatī and al-Nazzām

Abrahamov argues that, besides al-Qāsim, other Mu'tazilite theologians and contemporaries of his also made use of the design argument to prove God's existence.⁹² Abrahamov bases his claim on the remarks made by al-Khayyāt (d.

⁹¹ In his discussion of the different ways of perceiving God, al-Qāsim mentions supposition (*al-ẓann*) as the fourth kind and states: 'The right supposition about His existence (*annihi*) might be right about Him and the wrong supposition about Him is a deviation from Him' (ibid., p. 74). Furthermore, he says with reference to the eighth kind, which is knowledge of God in terms of His difference from all things: 'Perception of Him and His existence (*wujūdihi*) takes place when they [i.e., the things] are perceived and their existence (*wujūdihā*) because He is different from every existent thing from among them' (ibid., p. 74). Since it has become clear what it is that al-Qāsim seeks to establish, we argue that his mentioning God's existence – *ann* and *wujūd* respectively – in the context of perception of God does not refer to the dichotomy of existence and non-existence, much less that made by classical arguments for God's existence. Rather, since God is counted among the entirety of existents, al-Qāsim endeavours to attain knowledge of God's type of existence, as it were, which he declares to be different from the types of existence of all other things. We shall come across this point repeatedly in the chapters to follow, and it shall be seen, in particular in the works of Ash'arite theologians, that God was seen to have in common with creation that they all are existents (*mawjūdāt*), while His type of existence was viewed as different from the types of created existence in that He is neither body, nor atom, nor accident.

⁹² Abrahamov's introduction to al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, pp. 2-3. Hans Daiber (1975, pp. 155-162), in a section entitled 'Der Gottesbeweis bei Mu'ammār und in der übrigen islamischen Theologie', states about the Mu'tazilite contemporary of al-Fuwatī and al-Nazzām, Mu'ammār (d. 215/830), that he did not attempt a proof of God's existence because of his conception of God as beyond description: 'Mu'ammār's Annahme, daß Gott durch keinerlei Begriffe des Verstandes erfaßt werden kann, impliziert die Absage an jede Möglichkeit eines ontologischen Gottesbeweises' (p. 155). And: 'Die Existenz Gottes ist für Mu'ammār ein nicht beweisbares Postulat... [und] ist somit für Mu'ammār auch nicht aus der Schöpfung ableitbar' (pp. 158-159). Daiber then quotes from al-Khayyāt, who quotes Ibn al-Rāwandī, who ascribes the view to Mu'ammār that 'Im Himmel und in der Erde sowie im Unterschied von Nacht und Tag liegt kein Hinweis (*dalīl*) auf Gott und kein Beweis (*ṣāhid*) für seine Einzigkeit (*waḥdānīya*)' (p. 159). When comparing this statement with those ascribed, in al-Khayyāt, to al-Fuwatī and al-Nazzām (see our discussion),

300/913) in his *Kitāb al-Intiṣār* about the 3rd/9th century Basrian Mu‘tazilites Hishām al-Fuwatī (d. 209/825) and Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 230/845). The former, Abrahamov argues, ‘employs the argument from design,’ or more specifically a variant of it: the ‘argument from composition.’⁹³ ‘Bodies prove God’s existence,’⁹⁴ thus Abrahamov’s understanding of al-Fuwatī’s words. Van Ess has also argued that al-Fuwatī based his proof of God’s existence on his ontology, that is, the view that the world is made up of bodies and accidents.⁹⁵ In al-Khayyāt, however, we read the following:

Hishām believed that the signs pointing to God (*al-adilla ‘alā’llāh*) must be known necessarily in terms of their existence. The accidents, however, are known, in terms of their existence, due to inference and speculation (*al-istidlāl wa’l-nazar*). ... So he assumed that the bodies together with their colours, their tastes,...their composition and separation are signs for God (*dalā’il ‘alā’llāh*) that He created them and arranged them (*annahū khalaqahā wa-dabbarahā*).⁹⁶

By maintaining that ‘combination and separation prove that God is their Creator and Director,’⁹⁷ Abrahamov correctly refers to the conclusion made by al-Fuwatī; yet, Abrahamov does not seem to be right in assuming that al-Fuwatī’s reasoning and objective are those of the traditional argument from design for the existence of God. What al-Fuwatī in fact seeks to establish is not different at all from al-Qāsim’s endeavour, discussed above: God is the one to whom the creation of the world must be ascribed.⁹⁸ The previously mentioned ‘signs for God’ are, as al-Fuwatī uses them, not evidence that there must be a God; rather, they are pointing towards God and His role as creator.

The same is the case with al-Nazzām about whom Abrahamov writes that he ‘uses the argument from composition...infer[ring] from the composition

the conclusion can be drawn that Mu‘ammar did not think of a proof of God’s existence at all, but was referring to a different theological question.

⁹³ Ibid., p. 2.

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

⁹⁵ Van Ess 1991, Band IV, p. 7. See also Rudolph 2012, p. XXX who refers to van Ess’s view that the Mu‘tazilites attempted a ‘Gottesbeweis *e contingentia mundi*’.

⁹⁶ Al-Khayyāt, *al-Intiṣār*, p. 59.

⁹⁷ Abrahamov’s introduction to al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, p. 2.

⁹⁸ The context of al-Khayyāt’s presentation of al-Fuwatī and al-Nazzām’s arguments makes clear that they are ultimately concerned with the question of the origination of the world through God. For example, al-Khayyāt mentions Ibn al-Rawandī’s interpretation of al-Fuwatī’s argument as that ‘the accidents of the bodies in their entirety do not point to their creator (*lā tadullu ‘alā khāliqihā*)’ (*al-Intiṣār*, pp. 58-59). Al-Nazzām’s argument is introduced by al-Khayyāt as ‘a proof of his regarding the originatedness (*dalīl lahu fī’l-ḥudūth*)’ (ibid., p. 45).

observed in the world the coming of the world into being...[then] deduc[ing] God's existence from the coming of the world into being.'⁹⁹ It is true that al-Nazzām first proves the originatedness of bodies (i.e., the world), arguing that opposing accidents, such as coldness and hotness, do not exist together in one body due to themselves as this would go against their nature, but due to 'one who combined them (*jāmi'*) and subjugated them (*qāhir*).'¹⁰⁰ That which is subjugated is weak (*ḍa'īf*), and weakness as well as arrangement (*tadbīr*) are 'a sign for its originatedness (*dalīl 'alā ḥadathihi*).'¹⁰¹ Yet, what reveals that al-Nazzām's final objective is not the proof of God's existence, but rather, as in the case of both al-Qāsim and al-Fuwatī, the proof that God is creator is the following:

As for the composition of fire, water, soil and air through another than God (*man siwā'llāh*), it is also a sign for their originatedness, however, their originator (*muḥdith*) is no human being who brings the two together as humans also belong to what is subjugated. Therefore, the creator (*mukhtari'*) of these things and the creator of humans, who are similar to them, is God whom nothing resembles – nothing is like Him (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay'*).¹⁰²

This passage clearly attempts to answer the question of whether it can be shown that God is the creator of the whole of creation if it is humans who are responsible for the combination of certain elements and if, as previously stated, combination points to a thing's originatedness and its coming to be at the hands of the one who combined it.¹⁰³ In this context, it should also be kept in mind that, when al-Nazzām arrives at the conclusion that the bodies *have a creator* – like in his remark about the sign based on opposing accidents in one single body for 'its originatedness and that it has an originator (*muḥdith*)...and a creator (*mukhtari'*)'¹⁰⁴ – he does not refer to the proof of the existence of an entity, but means to clarify the following point: Origination does not occur without originator. It would be false to assume that something can come to be due to

⁹⁹ Abrahamov's introduction to al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Khayyāt, *al-Intiṣār*, p. 46.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁰² Ibid., pp. 46-47.

¹⁰³ Compare al-Khayyāt's mention of what Ibn al-Rawandī said about al-Nazzām's argument: 'The one who joined them [i.e., opposing accidents like hotness and coldness] is the one who created (*ikhtara'*) them as combined... Their combination despite their (inherent) opposition points to the fact that the one who combined them is their creator (*mukhtari' lahumā*)' (*al-Intiṣār*, p. 45).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 46.

itself or as the product of chance, for instance – two alternatives the refutation of which would later become a standard part of the theologians' proof that origination occurs due to another. This concern is reflected in al-Khayyāṭ's comments on al-Nazzām's argument: 'Ibrāhīm [al-Nazzām] meant that...their originatedness makes it necessary that they have an originator who originated them since it is absurd that there is origination without originator.'¹⁰⁵ God can only be affirmed as the creator of what has come to be if it is clear that origination occurs due to another. Even though not much attention is given to proving the correctness of this claim in al-Khayyāṭ's presentation of al-Nazzām's argument, it was, as we shall see, in fact an issue which many later theologians discussed as the origination of a thing due to another, not due to itself or chance, was deemed to require proof.

It has therefore become clear that not only al-Qāsim, but also his contemporaries al-Nazzām and al-Fuwatī had a common objective: to affirm God alone as the creator of the world. In al-Qāsim, the proof of God as sole creator is evidently addressed to all sorts of *mushrikūn*. This shall also be seen to be of relevance when we consider al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* in the next chapter. In al-Qāsim's *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr*, we found that this proof also plays a decisive role with regards to the correct understanding of God's nature which was based on the difference between creation and God *as* creator and addressed to al-Qāsim's peers. Finally, the importance cannot be overstated of understanding that, when arguing that the proof of God's existence is absent from al-Qāsim's work, we mean by it the question of the purpose of his proofs: What does al-Qāsim want to establish? Abrahamov's account of al-Qāsim's arguments does not sound so much different from what we have argued – namely that al-Qāsim seeks to ascribe the creation of the world to none but God – when he states: 'The signs in the world attest not only to the createdness of the world but also that it is conducted and ruled. This conduct and rule...are only God's conduct and rule.'¹⁰⁶ This is also true for Abrahamov's remark that al-Qāsim attempts to 'support his view that God is the creator of the world, its

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 47.

¹⁰⁶ Abrahamov 1986, p. 261.

conductor and ruler.’¹⁰⁷ Yet, Abrahamov’s presentation of al-Qāsim’s arguments differs significantly from ours in that he regards them as serving a different purpose since they belong, in his view, to the class of design arguments, ‘one of the main arguments for the existence of God.’¹⁰⁸ It evidently sheds an entirely different light on the nature of the discourse al-Qāsim is said to be part of, depending on whether he treats God’s existence as apodictic, which goes hand in hand with the absence of any proof of it – or whether the proof of God’s existence is a characterising feature of the *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr*.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 262.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 260.

Al-Kindī

It is well-known that al-Kindī (d. 256/873) was part of the so-called translation movement which took place in the early 3rd/9th century under the patronage of the ‘Abbāsid caliphs al-Ma’mūn (813-833) and al-Mu’taṣim (833-842) and where the writings of Greek philosophy and science were made available in Arabic.¹⁰⁹ It is also established that these two caliphs favoured the Mu’tazilite school of thought, and al-Ma’mūn even declared Mu’tazilism the official state doctrine.¹¹⁰ Considering the environment in which al-Kindī produced his own writings, it is therefore not surprising that his relationship with Mu’tazilism has been somewhat of a debated question. On the one hand, there is the view that al-Kindī was closely affiliated with this school of *kalām*. This has been suggested by Richard Walzer who argued so on the basis of certain similarities between Mu’tazilite doctrines and methodologies and al-Kindī’s.¹¹¹ On the other hand, there is the view that, despite certain similarities between the doctrines held by al-Kindī and Mu’tazilite theologians, al-Kindī had no special affiliation with any particular group and ‘was not a *mutakallim*.’¹¹² This position is held by Peter Adamson and Alfred Ivry. In general, it has, however, been agreed that al-Kindī’s originality lies in his endeavour to present solutions to theological problems of his time by making recourse to ideas and methods of proof taken from philosophy.¹¹³

The question of al-Kindī’s affiliation is of interest for us insofar as it can shed light on the question of whether he took part in the discussions which in secondary literature have been identified as integral to the discourse on arguments for God’s existence. If it is true that al-Kindī was influenced, to whatever extent, by the discussions characteristic of his Mu’tazilite contemporaries, it could be argued that the absence of arguments for God’s existence from their writings, as we have shown previously, is also reflected in

¹⁰⁹ See §3 *Die Wiedergeburt der Philosophie und die Übersetzungen* by Dimitri Gutas in Rudolph 2012 and Gutas 1998 on the translation movement.

¹¹⁰ On the *mihna* and related politics see De Gifis 2014; Turner 2013; Nawas 1994; Madelung 1974; van Ess 1965/1966.

¹¹¹ Walzer 1962, p. 180.

¹¹² Adamson 2003, p. 76. Also Ivry 1974, pp. 32-33.

¹¹³ Adamson 2003, p. 48 and 2005, p. 33; Gutas 1998, p. 120.

al-Kindi's writings. This is in fact what we shall propose. Our discussion of al-Kindi's philosophico-theological thought shall show why we reject the commonly held view that al-Kindi, like his Mu'tazilite contemporaries, seeks to prove that God exists,¹¹⁴ and we shall reflect upon the questions he seeks to answer.

The Objectives of First Philosophy

Chapter One of al-Kindi's *Kitāb Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* (*On First Philosophy*), which can be regarded as a preface to his actual elaborations, contains some crucial remarks for our endeavour. Al-Kindi begins by praising philosophy as the noblest of all sciences as it seeks knowledge of all things as they really are or in terms of their true natures (*'ilm al-ashyā' bi-ḥaqā'iqihā*). This equals the attempt on the part of the philosopher of attaining the truth (*al-ḥaqq*). Truth, however, can only be found when seeking a cause (*'illa*) as the True One (*al-ḥaqq*) – by which al-Kindi refers to God – is the cause of the existence and subsistence of all things and as every existent thing has a true nature (*ḥaqīqa*), which to understand means knowing the truth.¹¹⁵ The best part of the discipline of philosophy is therefore First Philosophy – which al-Kindi is concerned with in the present work – as it establishes knowledge about the First True One (*al-ḥaqq al-awwal*) who causes all other truth – that is, all other existent things – to exist. The focus of First Philosophy is hence on attaining knowledge about the True One, God.¹¹⁶ Adamson has noted that al-Kindi, by maintaining that First Philosophy is first and foremost concerned with God, misunderstood Aristotle who named being *qua* being as its subject matter.¹¹⁷ While this may be true, it should be stressed that al-Kindi's identification of First Philosophy with the study of God and His nature can also be seen as part of his endeavour to show that philosophy is able to answer the questions posed by theology and that the two disciplines are in fact compatible, in that they cogitate the same problems.

¹¹⁴ Endress and Adamson in Rudolph 2012, p. 130; Druart 2005, pp. 329-330; Rist 2005, p. 337; Adamson 2003, p. 50; Ivry 1974, p. 9; Abū Rīda 1950, pp. 75-80.

¹¹⁵ In other words, knowing the true nature of things means knowing the truth. All existent things have a true nature (*ḥaqīqa*). True natures (i.e., truth) are known through knowing their cause: the True One.

¹¹⁶ Al-Kindi (1950), *Fī al-Falsafa al-ūlā*, pp. 97-101.

¹¹⁷ Adamson 2005, p. 34.

Kalām, it is well-known, seeks knowledge of God through His creation, and so does First Philosophy for al-Kindī, as shall become clear in more detail. First Philosophy, it is important to note, also considers God or the True One insofar as He is cause of all other existent things, as al-Kindī pointed out earlier when he said that truth cannot be attained without the knowledge of a cause. God's role as cause is one of the major themes of *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, and certain remarks on the part of al-Kindī undoubtedly remind us of al-Qāsim's own remarks about the proof of God's role as creator which is the main theme of his *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr*, as we have pointed out.

In the same chapter, al-Kindī also states that 'in the knowledge of the things in terms of their true natures,' which is what First Philosophy is about, 'lies the knowledge of *al-rubūbiyya* and the knowledge of oneness (*al-waḥdāniyya*).'¹¹⁸ Like al-Qāsim who describes the prophet Joseph's mission as to 'present proof...that God is alone in terms of *al-rubūbiyya*,'¹¹⁹ al-Kindī states that 'the truthful messengers, God's blessings upon them, only brought the affirmation of God's sole *rubūbiyya* (*al-iqrār bi-rubūbiyya Allāh waḥdahu*).'¹²⁰ Al-Kindī then ends the preface in Chapter One by asking God for help who knows of 'our striving to establish the proof for His *rubūbiyya* (*ijtihādānā fī-tathbīt al-ḥujja 'alā rubūbiyyatihi*) and to make clear His oneness.'¹²¹ All three instances where al-Kindī speaks of *al-rubūbiyya* appear as 'divinity' in Ivry's translation of *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*.¹²² This seems to be a misconception on the part of Ivry, who assumes that al-Kindī refers to the proof of God's existence, of both the meaning of the term and what al-Kindī declares to be his aim.¹²³ It is far more convincing that al-Qāsim and al-Kindī, being contemporaries, use this particular term to denote the same concept, namely God's role as creator. This is further supported by the fact that this term retained the same meaning, and continued to denote the same concept, some decades after al-Kindī's death as is evident

¹¹⁸ Al-Kindī (1950), *Fī al-Falsafa al-ūlā*, p. 104.

¹¹⁹ Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, p. 124.

¹²⁰ Al-Kindī (1950), *Fī al-Falsafa al-ūlā*, p. 104.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 105.

¹²² Ivry 1974, p. 59: The first instance is rendered 'includes knowledge of Divinity [and] unity'; the second is 'an affirmation of the Divinity of God alone'; and the third is 'in establishing the proof of His Divinity and the explanation of His Unity.'

¹²³ Ivry states: 'The chapter concludes with an invocation of Divine assistance in the task of establishing proof of the Divinity (i.e., existence) [sic] and unity of God' (Ivry 1974, p. 9).

from al-Māturīdī's (d. 333/944) *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. There, al-Māturīdī argues that what creation points to is that 'there is no creator other than God and no *rabb* other than Him.'¹²⁴ God's being the only *rabb* is, for al-Māturīdī, closely linked to the term and concept of *al-rubūbiyya*. In the section on the proof of God's oneness, he explains that, if another godhead was assumed besides God and if only God was able to enact His will, then this would show that 'God...is alone (*mutafarrid*) with regards to *al-rubūbiyya*.'¹²⁵ The term *al-rubūbiyya* therefore stands, according to al-Māturīdī, for God's ability to act as He pleases, and His acting directly refers to the act of creation.¹²⁶ All this allows us to conclude the following: When al-Kindī states that knowing the true nature of things also implies knowledge of *al-rubūbiyya*, he essentially expresses the same idea as al-Qāsim, al-Fuwatī and al-Nazzām which would become the standard method followed by all theologians after him: Creation contains evidence that the world must be ascribed to God as His work. In his quest as a philosopher to understand the true nature of things, al-Kindī focuses in the first place on the *cause* of the existence of things, and this is exactly what the *mutakallimūn* associate with the term *al-rubūbiyya*.

These are the indications al-Kindī himself gives as to the objectives of First Philosophy. Let us now turn to the remaining chapters of *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* and see what it is al-Kindī discusses there. Chapter Two is dedicated to the proof that 'it is impossible that there is an eternal body,'¹²⁷ which al-Kindī also applies

¹²⁴ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 230.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 21.

¹²⁶ In his *Kitāb al-Bad' wa'l-ta'rikh*, al-Maqdisī (d. 355/966) also makes use of the term *al-rubūbiyya*. He seems to use it in the exact same sense as al-Kindī, al-Qāsim and al-Māturīdī. He states that 'the signs (*dalā'il*) which point to the affirmation of God are not numbered nor finite...because everything, howsoever small..., contains a number of indications (*dalā'il*) which express His *rubūbiyya*' (ibid., p. 15) and that '*tawḥīd* includes four things: knowledge of oneness (*waḥdāniyya*), affirmation of *rubūbiyya*, purity of divinity (*ikhlāṣ al-ilāhiyya*) and persistence in worship (*al-ijtihād fī'l-'ubūdiyya*)' (ibid., p. 22). Note that the meaning of the term *al-rubūbiyya* is still the same in the 13th/18th century in the writings of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792). G. R. Hawting states in his *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999): 'In a commentary upon the first part of the *shahāda* ("there is no god but God") [i.e., *Fī tafsīr kalmia al-tawḥīd* in his *Majmū'a al-tawḥīd al-najdiyya*], the founder of the Wahhābī school argued that the *kuffār* against whom the Prophet fought were monotheists but imperfect ones. Their monotheism was only *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* whereas proper monotheism consists of *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya*. *Tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* he defines as accepting that God is the sole creator, giver of life and sustainer' (p. 63).

¹²⁷ Al-Kindī (1950), *Fī al-Falsafa al-ūlā*, p. 122.

to the universe, ‘the body of it all (*jirm al-kull*).’¹²⁸ He proves this, on the one hand, by pointing to his definition of the eternal as that which has no genus, which allows him to conclude that ‘inasmuch as body has genus...body is not eternal.’¹²⁹ On the other hand, he shows that a body cannot in actuality be infinite in terms of quantity and quality, which means that its time and duration also have a beginning.¹³⁰

Chapter Three begins with the proof that nothing can actualise its own existence: ‘The thing cannot be the cause of the being of its essence (*‘illa kawn dhātihi*).’¹³¹ Al-Kindī means by this that whatever comes to be does so due to a cause other than itself. It is furthermore established in Chapter Three that unity is said of everything that can be said in some way, referring to genus, species, property, accident and the like, however this unity belongs to it only in an accidental way and it is not essential for it. This means, al-Kindī explains, that its unity is caused by another who must have unity essentially – ‘a true one’ or ‘one who is truly one’ (*wāhid ḥaqq*)^{132,133} It is moreover shown that the nature of sensible things involves that unity and multiplicity always occur together in them. Their association is not due to chance (*bi’l-bakht ay al-ittifāq*), which would imply its occurrence without cause (*bi-lā ‘illa*).¹³⁴ Rather, it requires a cause which is not part of the association of unity and multiplicity and truly one, containing no multiplicity whatsoever in itself.¹³⁵

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 120.

¹²⁹ Ibid., pp. 113-114.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 116.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 123.

¹³² Ibid., p. 132.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 123-132.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 141.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 140-143. It should be noted that al-Kindī proves the coming to be of the association of unity and multiplicity in all sensible things due to an outside cause by denying the possibility of an infinite regress of causes from within this association based on the general denial of an actual infinite (*lā yumkin an yakūna shay’ bi’l-fi’l bi-lā nihāya*) (ibid., p. 142). It is evident that, if al-Kindī was to allow for the existence of an actual infinite, a past infinite chain of causes could not be denied and it would be difficult for him to argue that it is God who ultimately caused the world to be. His denial of an infinite regress of existents which are causes of other existents can be seen in the context of the belief of a group who are commonly referred to as *dahriyya*. One of the many instances of *kalām* works mentioning the *dahriyya* is Ibn Ḥazm’s (d. 456/1064) *al-Fiṣal*. According to his account, they maintained that ‘the world is eternal, and that it does not have an originator, nor an arranger’ (ibid., p. 37). We shall refer to them again in later chapters.

In the last chapter, Chapter Four, al-Kindī finally states that the emanation (*fayḍ*) of oneness from the True One on things and their attributes equals their entering existence. They are hence created and caused and the True One is their cause (*ʿilla*), maker (*fāʿil*) and creator (*mubdiʿ*).¹³⁶

Why Proving the World's Beginning?

In order to understand al-Kindī's arguments and to gauge how he seeks to affirm God's *rubūbiyya* alone, we have to take a closer look at a few issues. There is, for instance, the noticeable issue that, even though the proof of the temporal beginning of the world appears at the very beginning of his discussion, in Chapter Two, al-Kindī does not make it the basis of the affirmation of God as creator. This is so since the proof that the world owes its existence to another does not rest on the premise that the world actually has come into existence from prior non-existence; rather, al-Kindī establishes the link between God and the world – which is what the affirmation of God's *rubūbiyya* refers to – by arguing in Chapter Three, firstly, that unity in all sensible things is not essential to them and hence caused, and, secondly, that the association of multiplicity and unity which exists in all things only comes from one who is 'outside' all this. The link between God and the world is established on this basis. The temporal origin of the world is, in al-Kindī's reasoning, not relevant to this point. Contrary to this, George Atiyeh has argued that in *Fī al-falsafā al-ūlā* al-Kindī uses the proof that the world has come to be (Chapter Two) as well as the proof that nothing causes its own existence (Chapter Three) as arguments for God's existence.¹³⁷ Besides having argued that the proof of God's existence is not part of the concerns of *Fī al-falsafā al-ūlā*, but even if it was admitted, for the sake of argument, that it is, it just does not hold true that al-Kindī draws the conclusion Atiyeh ascribes to him, that is: 'The...proof is based upon the premise that the universe was created in time. ...everything created in time must have a creator.'¹³⁸ The conclusion that the world insofar as it is originated exists due to

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 162.

¹³⁷ Atiyeh 1966, pp. 58-59.

¹³⁸ Ibid., p. 58.

an outside cause is in fact also left implicit and not stated explicitly.¹³⁹ It could, however, be inferred from al-Kindī's definition of the eternal as constituting that which does not have a cause – the originated, consequently, has a cause, one could pose – as well as from his proof that nothing can give itself existence; but al-Kindī in fact never explicitly says that the world insofar as it is originated has an outside cause of its existence.

Also at variance with our above suggestion that what al-Kindī seeks to affirm in Chapter Three is God's role as sole creator, Atiyeh furthermore maintains that al-Kindī's argument based on unity and multiplicity which are found together in every thing is meant to be a cosmological proof for God's existence.¹⁴⁰ Adamson argues the same: al-Kindī 'first establishes the existence of God via an analysis of types of utterance...[which] fall under two main classes: the substantial and the accidental.'¹⁴¹ He continues: 'This distinction between the substantial or "essential" and the accidental is crucial to al-Kindī's first, brief argument for the existence of God.'¹⁴² We submit, however, that what al-Kindī intends to point to in his discussion of unity and multiplicity in things is that such phenomena underpin God's role as creator. 'The emanation (*fayḍ*) of oneness from the True One, the First,' al-Kindī clarifies, 'is the bringing about (*tahawwī*) of every sensible thing and what applies to it.'¹⁴³ God is creator insofar as He emanates oneness. Al-Kindī's concluding remark, after having explained the need of the aforementioned association for a cause, that 'there is, hence, necessarily a true one whose oneness is not caused,'¹⁴⁴ should not be construed as showing that al-Kindī claims to have established the existence of an entity besides the world. Rather, what he seeks to show is that God, being the cause of this association (that is, the cause of the world as a whole), must have true unity, in number and

¹³⁹ The implicit character of this point has been acknowledged by Endress and Adamson in Rudolph 2012, p. 130 (despite arguing that al-Kindī seeks to prove that God exists with this argument): 'Was Gott betrifft, so wird seine Existenz in <Fī l-Falsafa al-ūlā> nicht nur implizit aus der Tatsache bewiesen, dass die Welt geschaffen ist...'.
¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁴¹ Adamson 2003, p. 50.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 50. See also Endress and Adamson in Rudolph 2012, p. 130: 'Was Gott betrifft, so wird seine Existenz in <Fī l-Falsafa al-ūlā>...explizit aus dem Grundsatz [bewiesen], dass geschaffene Dinge stets sowohl vieles als auch eines sind und daher notwendigerweise eine externe Ursache für ihre Einheit haben müssen.'

¹⁴³ Al-Kindī (1950), *Fī al-Falsafa al-ūlā*, p. 162.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 132.

in essence, which is only known by considering His creation. One needs to bear in mind that in Chapter One of his work *al-Kindī* declared ‘knowledge of oneness (*al-waḥdāniyya*),’ just like ‘knowledge of *al-rubūbiyya*,’ a part of the knowledge of the true natures of things.¹⁴⁵ Also, we recall that he asked God for assistance not only with regards to ‘establishing the proof for His *rubūbiyya*,’ but also ‘for the clarification of His oneness.’¹⁴⁶ Like in *al-Qāsim*, and in fact in the majority of later theologians, as shall be seen, creation is conceived as pointing to God insofar as it reveals what God’s nature is like.

The role the proof of the world’s beginning in time plays in *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* is, however, notably different from *al-Kindī*’s *Risāla fī waḥdāniyya Allāh wa-tanāhī jirm al-‘ālam* (*On God’s Oneness and the Finitude of the Body of the World*). In this epistle, *al-Kindī* states: ‘Therefore, the body must be originated, and the originated comes from the originator because the originator and the originated belong together. Hence, the whole has an originator who brought it about from non-existence.’¹⁴⁷ Majid Fakhry and Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Hādī Abū Rīda both identify this reasoning as an argument for God’s existence on *al-Kindī*’s part.¹⁴⁸ Fakhry even credits *al-Kindī* with having formulated ‘the earliest statement of the argument *a novitate mundi*.’¹⁴⁹ Just as in the case of *al-Kindī*’s *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, it can be argued that in the *Risāla*, too, the affirmation of the originator for the world serves the simple purpose of justifying the link between God and the world. The world’s finiteness is made the foundation of, and explanation for, the fact that it exists due to another, which we can term the principle of causation: A thing’s entering existence is its being *brought* into existence by another, not its coming to be uncaused or due to itself, which seems to come close to *a priori* certainty for *al-Kindī*. If – and only if – the world is originated, it is immediately evident that it must have been brought into existence by God.

Returning to the reasoning we find in *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* where the originatedness of the world is not made the foundation of the link between God and the world, it needs to be pointed out that this reasoning is not specific to *al-*

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 104.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁴⁷ *Al-Kindī* (1950), *Risāla fī waḥdāniyya Allāh wa-tanāhī jirm al-‘ālam*, p. 207.

¹⁴⁸ Abū Rīda 1950, p. 76.

¹⁴⁹ Fakhry 1957, p. 140, f. 34.

Kindī. We have seen that al-Qāsim, too, showed that the world and everything contained in it is only due to God without always previously stating whether the world has come to be in time or is eternal. This was the case, for instance, where he referred to Abraham's mention of things 'which make clear that they are from God alone,' such as the provision of food and the healing of illnesses.¹⁵⁰ The same is true for al-Ash'arī, as we shall see in more detail in the next chapter, who answers the question 'What is the proof that there is for creation a creator...?' before dealing with the question of whether the world is eternal or not.¹⁵¹ Likewise, the philosopher Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198) is a proponent of the doctrine of the world's eternity, but he nevertheless ascribes its existence to God, using a proof based on the notion of providence (*ināya*) contained in all things which he believes to be the proof favoured by the Qur'ān itself and which dispenses with the premise of a world that began to exist.¹⁵²

The question therefore arises of why al-Kindī dedicates such a considerable part of *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* to proving that the world is not eternal, but originated if this has no direct bearing on his objective of establishing the link between God and the world – that is, the affirmation of God's *rubūbiyya*. Adamson has suggested that the proof of the world's beginning in time is closely related to al-Kindī's effort to defend God's uniqueness or *tawḥīd*.¹⁵³ It is true that an eternal world would share God's special characteristic of eternity. An eternal world also means an uncreated world since al-Kindī defines the eternal at the beginning of Chapter Two as 'that which does not subsist due to another...which has no maker (*fā'il*) and no cause (*sabab*).'¹⁵⁴ In his *Risāla fī waḥdāniyya Allāh wa-tanāhī jirm al-ālam* al-Kindī puts it this way: 'He does not resemble His creation...because He is creator (*mubdi'*) and they are created, and because He is eternal and they are not eternal.'¹⁵⁵ Harry A. Wolfson has pointed out that

¹⁵⁰ Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, p. 118.

¹⁵¹ Al-Ash'arī, *al-Luma'*, p. 17 and p. 19.

¹⁵² Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 118.

¹⁵³ Adamson 2003, p. 53: 'To hold that the world is coeternal with God is to violate *tawḥīd*'; Adamson 2005, p. 48: 'Thus proving that the world is not eternal is closely related to showing the absolute uniqueness and oneness of God.'

¹⁵⁴ Al-Kindī (1950), *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, p. 113.

¹⁵⁵ Al-Kindī (1950), *Risāla fī waḥdāniyya Allāh wa-tanāhī jirm al-ālam*, p. 207.

some early Mu‘tazilites equated the eternal with the divine.¹⁵⁶ With regards to the debate about the reality of the divine attributes, he refers to Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’ (d. 131/748) who declared: ‘He who posits a thing and an attribute as eternal posits two gods.’¹⁵⁷ The question of whether the eternal is synonymous with the divine could easily also be applied to the issue of the world’s eternity contra its createdness, even though it seems to have been relevant primarily for God’s attributes. This becomes evident, for instance, in Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī’s (d. 507/1114) account of this debate in his *Tabṣīrat al-adilla fī uṣūl al-dīn*. There he states that ‘al-Iskāfī, al-Ṣāliḥī and al-Jubbā’ī from the leaders of the Qadariyya said that the eternal is God (*al-qadīm huwa Allāh*).’¹⁵⁸ Al-Nasafī dismisses this equation as ‘utterly false’¹⁵⁹ and argues: ‘The *dahriyya* assume the eternity of every single part of the world, but they do not assume their [i.e., of every single part] divinity.’¹⁶⁰ With regards to al-Kindī, however, it cannot be maintained that he upheld the createdness of the world because to do otherwise would have entailed the affirmation of more than one deity and a violation of *tawḥīd* in the sense of monotheism; the aspect of divinity is missing in his definition of the eternal in *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*. Al-Kindī seems to intend the defence of two different notions of *tawḥīd*, namely God’s uniqueness and complete difference from creation – as expressed in his remark in the *Risāla* referred to above – as well as His essential oneness which precludes any multiplicity that might arise from predicating a number of attributes of Him.¹⁶¹ With regards to the latter notion of *tawḥīd*, however, it needs to be pointed out that its affirmation again does not depend on having shown previously that the world has an origin in time. Al-Kindī proves God’s essential oneness and His being free from any multiplicity, firstly, on the premise that all sensible things are ‘one’ only in an accidental way and due to a cause and, secondly, on the basis that multiplicity and oneness always occur together in these things and that their association is

¹⁵⁶ Wolfson 1976, p. 133.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 133. Thus stated by al-Shahrastānī in his *Kitāb al-Milal wa’l-niḥal* (1923), p. 31: ‘*man athbata ma’nā wa-ṣifa qadīma fa-qad athbata ilāhayn*.’ See also Daiber 1988 on Wāṣil.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, p. 302.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 302.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁶¹ Al-Kindī (1950), *Fī al-Falsafa al-ūlā*, p. 160: ‘The True One therefore has neither matter, nor form, quantity, quality, relation... He is therefore simply and purely unity.’ For an analysis of Mu‘tazilite influences on al-Kindī with regards to this latter point see Adamson 2003.

caused. We hence have to conclude that the proof of the world's coming into existence is relevant only where al-Kindī seeks to distinguish God as eternal from the world as past-finite.

Yet, there is in fact another reason why to establish the world as not eternal is of significance for al-Kindī, and this concerns the concepts of creation and the creator he puts forward. We have pointed out above that for Ibn Rushd the createdness of the world in time is not a prerequisite for calling God its creator. Yet, for al-Kindī this view would not be valid. He holds the view, in agreement with later theologians, as we shall see, that only that which enters existence after not having existed previously is creation when he states: "That which is brought about (*yuhawwā*) is not eternal, and that which is not eternal is created (*mubda'*), that is, it comes to be from a cause (*'illa*)."¹⁶² In his *Risāla Fī al-fā'il al-ḥaqq al-awwal al-tāmm wa'l-fā'il al-nāqiṣ alladhī huwa bi'l-majāz* (*On the Perfect First True Agent and the Imperfect Agent Who is Such Metaphorically*) al-Kindī is eager to stress that God's creative act, specific to Him, consists in His 'bringing into existence the existing thing from non-existence'¹⁶³ which he calls *ibdā'*, while distinguishing it from the acts performed by other entities and restricted to exerting influence (*athr al-mu'aththir*) on existing things.¹⁶⁴ When al-Kindī, therefore, states at the beginning of *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* that he seeks to affirm God's *rubūbiyya* alone, then this does not only refer to the fact that the world owes its existence to God and that God is its cause in some way. Rather, the proof of God's *rubūbiyya* also includes that the world has a beginning in time and is created from prior non-existence. It follows that, while it is true that in *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* the link between God and the world is established without the premise of the world's being past-finite, as pointed out before, the mode of God's creative act does depend on proving that the world is in fact a temporal thing.

It is this aspect where al-Kindī's affiliation with certain *kalām* doctrines and his rejection of certain philosophical tenets, but not the philosophers' methods,

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 162.

¹⁶³ Al-Kindī (1950), *Risāla Fī al-fā'il al-ḥaqq al-awwal al-tāmm wa'l-fā'il al-nāqiṣ alladhī huwa bi'l-majāz*, p. 182.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 183.

however, become evident. Adamson has asserted that in *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* al-Kindī ‘gives no sign that his position on the eternity of the world departs from that of Aristotle.’¹⁶⁵ This assessment seems incorrect when we take into account a number of other remarks al-Kindī makes in Chapter One. There he expresses his praise of all those who contributed to the quest for truth. Referring to the ancient Greek philosophers, among whom al-Kindī singles out Aristotle as ‘the most outstanding,’¹⁶⁶ he stresses that they are the ones who ‘facilitated for us the hidden, true enquiries by teaching us the premises which eased for us the path to the truth.’¹⁶⁷ Yet, while emphasising his own and his contemporaries’ indebtedness to their ‘ways and instruments which lead to much knowledge,’¹⁶⁸ al-Kindī makes the point that this knowledge also includes things regarding which ‘they failed to attain (the) true nature (*ḥaqīqa*).’¹⁶⁹ When asking which aspects of knowledge al-Kindī might be referring to, we need to bear in mind that the one issue fundamentally distinguishing al-Kindī’s position from that of the Greek philosophers is the question of whether the world has a beginning in time or is eternal. This question in turn is directly linked with the varying notions of God as creator, as explained. It must be conceded to Adamson that al-Kindī does not explicitly state his critique of the belief in eternal time, matter and motion held by Aristotle; at the same time, it is certainly not the case either that al-Kindī avoids expressing any critique of what he perceives to be shortcomings in the philosophical theories about the world and God. Despite this subliminal criticism, al-Kindī eagerly stresses the harmony between philosophy and theology by employing philosophical terminology alongside *kalām* terminology with regards to the description of God as creator and the world as His creation.¹⁷⁰ The Neoplatonic conception of God as the bestower of eternal motion as well as the idea of the world’s eternal emanation from God are in fact only rejected insofar as they appear as processes without beginning; the terminology, however, is incorporated by al-Kindī into his own account of

¹⁶⁵ Adamson 2014, pp. 3-4.

¹⁶⁶ Al-Kindī (1950), *Fī al-Falsafa al-ūlā*, p. 103.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁷⁰ See Adamson 2005, p. 38 on al-Kindī’s incorporating Aristotelian and Neoplatonic notions of God.

God's creative act.¹⁷¹ Also, in his *Risāla Fī al-fā'il al-ḥaqq*, al-Kindī describes God, on the one hand, as 'the true agent (*al-fā'il al-ḥaqq*)' and 'creator (*al-bāri*)' and, on the other hand, as 'ultimate cause (*ghāya kull 'illa*)' and 'the first cause (*al-'illa al-ūlā*).'¹⁷² The first two terms, *al-fā'il* and *al-bāri*, are terms very much characteristic of *kalām*. We shall see in the chapters to follow that certain *mutakallimūn* went to great lengths to show that God's relation to the world is comparable to that between an agent (*fā'il*) and his act (*fi'l*) and that the concept of the agent was the same for them as that of the creator, for which they employed an array of terms, among them al-Kindī's *al-bāri*.¹⁷³ Crucially, however, we shall also see that these same theologians generally agreed that the term *'illa* represents a different concept than the term *fā'il*, and both were considered contraries. They therefore refrained from applying the term *'illa* to God in His role as 'cause' of the world. Al-Kindī seems to want to stress the unifying aspect underlying the different notions of God as conveyed by these terms, rather than emphasising their differences, when he employs them interchangeably to describe God as the one who gives existence to the world. Nevertheless, he is very clear that it is the concept of the *fā'il* as propounded by the theologians, rather than that of the *'illa* associated with philosophy which he defends when using these terms. The same is true with regards to the term *al-rubūbiyya* which, as we have seen above, assumes a central position in al-Kindī's *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*. It has become evident how this term can very much be associated with works in the tradition of *kalām*. Yet, al-Kindī signals through his employment of this term in a philosophical treatise that the discipline of theology and the discipline of philosophy both pursue the same objectives and are hence compatible. This therefore confirms what has often been argued, namely that al-Kindī's project is to show how philosophy can solve the very problems theology deals with.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 162: 'The True One, the First, is the cause from which comes the principle of motion (*ḥaraka*), I mean: the mover is the principle of motion'; ibid., p. 162: 'The emanation (*fayḍ*) of oneness from the True One, the First, is the coming to be of every sensible thing.'

¹⁷² Al-Kindī (1950), *Risāla Fī al-fā'il al-ḥaqq al-awwal al-tāmm wa'l-fā'il al-nāqish alladhī huwa bi'l-majāz*, p. 183.

¹⁷³ Adamson 2003, p. 48 and 2005, p. 33; Gutas 1998, p. 120.

Conclusions

Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm's *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr* and al-Kindī's *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* mark the beginnings of theological and philosophical enquiries in Islam in the 2nd-3rd/9th centuries. It is said that the proof of God's existence constitutes one important aspect of these enquiries. It is the underlying theme of al-Qāsim's *al-Dalīl al-kabīr* and it is what al-Kindī is concerned with in *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* as well as the *Risāla fī waḥdāniyya Allāh wa-tanāhī jirm al-ʿālam*, this being the prevailing view. It is also said to be what characterises the arguments of a number of other early Muʿtazilite *mutakallimūn*, such as al-Fuwatī and al-Nazzām. Contrary to this view, we have argued that the goal of these thinkers has been misunderstood. Far from intending to prove God's existence, in the sense of the word used in arguments for God's existence known from western philosophy, these early scholars sought to prove, firstly, that the world began to exist which is how they understood creation, and, secondly, that none other than God is its creator. Any similarity to traditional design or cosmological arguments pertains only to their structure, and not to their purpose. Al-Qāsim made creation the basis for the proof of God's *rubūbiyya* – God's attribute of being creator – and an indication of what God's nature is like. This is, according to him, the method the Qurʾān itself advocates. The stories of such prophets as Abraham clarified in particular that al-Qāsim's concern lies with the proof of God's oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*),¹⁷⁴ not however, His existence.

Al-Kindī shared all these concerns with al-Qāsim. He likewise sought to show that the world came to be and is creation, and that God is its creator, which he phrased as 'the proof for His *rubūbiyya* alone.' In al-Kindī's *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, God's attribute of being creator – rather than His existence, as has been claimed – is not established on the basis of the world's origin in time, as it is in the *Risāla*, but on the basis that God is the bestower of oneness on things, which is identified with His creative act. The world's finiteness in the past is, however, important for al-Kindī's understanding of God's uniqueness. Neither in al-Qāsim, nor in al-Kindī, does the proof of God's existence play any role.

¹⁷⁴ Oneness as creator and in terms of being deserving of worship alone, as well as in terms of His complete difference from creation.

Chapter Two: Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)

Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī's theological thought came to play an important role in the intellectual history of Islam. Alongside the Ash'ariyya, he is considered the founder of the second major orthodox school of *kalām* and a proponent of the middle path between the camp of the traditionalists and their rationalist antagonists.¹⁷⁵ Al-Māturīdī's only surviving *kalām* work (besides his Qur'ānic commentary *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*¹⁷⁶), the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, it has been said, 'überragt...alle älteren theologischen Texte aus Transoxanien an Umfang, an gedanklichem Reichtum und in der Methode.'¹⁷⁷

It is based on this work that we shall put forward our arguments that the proof of God's existence was of no concern for al-Māturīdī, contrary to the view expressed in secondary literature on his thought. According to this view, the proof of God's existence is an essential part of al-Māturīdī's theological considerations, just as it is believed to be integral to the works of most other Islamic theologians. Generally, al-Māturīdī is seen to follow the same reasoning as the traditional cosmological arguments. David Thomas has described al-Māturīdī's argument this way: in the *Tawḥīd*, 'the discussion about the existence of the world...is effectively a demonstration of its contingent nature and is thus prefatory to the long discussion about the existence and characteristics of God.'¹⁷⁸ Fathalla Kholeif has, similarly, explained al-Māturīdī's approach as that '[b]y means of reason, we know the divine wisdom in creation and the evidence therein of the existence of the Creator.'¹⁷⁹ Mustafa Cerić's reading of al-Māturīdī's reasoning in the *Tawḥīd* likewise is that 'through its [i.e., the world's] nature and function [we] find indisputable proof of the existence of its Creator, i.e., God.'¹⁸⁰ Finally, Ulrich Rudolph has also taken up this reading, arguing in a

¹⁷⁵ Rippin states that al-Māturīdī's 'influence at the time seems to have been significant in the emergence of Sunnī Islam. ...al-Māturīdī followed a middle path between Traditionalism and Rationalism' (2005, p. 85). See also Thomas 2008, p. 79.

¹⁷⁶ Al-Māturīdī, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*. Edited by Ahmed Vanlıoğlu and Bekir Topaloğlu. Istanbul: Dār al-Mizān, 2005.

¹⁷⁷ Rudolph 1997, p. 221.

¹⁷⁸ Thomas 2008, pp. 80-81.

¹⁷⁹ Kholeif's introduction to al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. xix.

¹⁸⁰ Cerić 1995, p. 108. Cerić furthermore poses the question: 'We know that the world exists because we see it with our eyes... However, we do not see God. So the question is: Does God

section entitled “Die Existenz Gottes” that al-Māturīdī seeks ‘den Nachweis, daß tatsächlich ein Schöpfer...existiere’¹⁸¹ by way of emphasising ‘ihre [i.e., materielle Dinge – material things] Unselbständigkeit und ihre offenkundige Kontingenz.’¹⁸² Initially, this view seems to not be baseless; after all, it is al-Māturīdī himself who speaks of ‘the proofs for the one who brought it [i.e., creation] about (*al-dalāla ‘alā man ansha’ahu*)’¹⁸³ and declares that ‘there is no way to knowledge of it except for through speculation (*al-naẓar*).’¹⁸⁴ It is furthermore indeed the case that ‘the proof for the originatedness (*ḥadath*) of the atoms’¹⁸⁵ – that is, the world as a whole – is made the basis of ‘the proof that there is for the world an originator (*muḥdith*).’¹⁸⁶ Yet, while it is true for classical cosmological arguments for God’s existence that the proof that the world has a cause seeks to establish the existence of God, this does not appear to be al-Māturīdī’s intention when he infers the cause from the effect. We shall argue that his concern ultimately lies with confirming Scripture in its claim that the world constitutes creation and that God alone is its creator. In this endeavour, the proof of God’s existence does not play any role. Al-Māturīdī’s proof of the creator for the world is hence part of an entirely different discourse than the discourse on arguments for God’s existence, whatever different the arguments may have been, so significant in western philosophy.

The Proof of the Originatedness of the World¹⁸⁷

The truth of religion and what it entails can be known, al-Māturīdī states, through Revelation (*al-sam‘*) and reason (*al-‘aql*).¹⁸⁸ One aspect this pertains to

exist? “Yes, God does exist,” al-Māturīdī would answer, and, he would prove that by the fact of the world’s existence which must have been created by an agent’ (ibid., pp. 141-142). Also: ‘Al-Māturīdī’s arguments for the existence of God are by and large Cosmological [sic]’ (ibid., p. 144).

¹⁸¹ Rudolph 1997, p. 291.

¹⁸² Ibid., p. 291.

¹⁸³ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 10.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 11. ‘Atom’ – or one could also translate ‘corporeal substance’ – is here designated by the term ‘*‘ayn*, pl. *‘ayān*. Al-Māturīdī often uses this term interchangeably with *jawhar* (*wāḥid*), pl. *jawāhir*. See Rudolph 1997, pp. 271-272 on al-Māturīdī’s use of terminology.

¹⁸⁶ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 17.

¹⁸⁷ See Rudolph 1997, pp. 257-268 and Cerić 1995, pp. 108-141 for a discussion of al-Māturīdī’s arguments. See also Daiber 1975 who comments briefly on al-Māturīdī ‘welcher in seinem Gottesbeweis...Elemente des kosmologischen und teleologischen Gottesbeweises verwertet hat’ (p. 156).

¹⁸⁸ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 4.

is the question of whether the world has a beginning for its existence or whether it has existed from all eternity.¹⁸⁹ The truth of this matter, and ‘the knowledge of the true natures (*ḥaqā’iq*) of the things’ which it entails, can be established by recourse to sensory observation of the world around us (*al-ḥawās*), to Revelation (*al-akhbār*) and to speculation (*al-naẓar*).¹⁹⁰

Among the proofs falling under the category of Revelation, al-Māturīdī refers to Qur’ānic pronouncements in which God Himself ‘informed that He is the creator (*khāliq*) of everything, and the maker (*badī‘*) of the heavens and the earth.’¹⁹¹ It should be noted that al-Māturīdī here argues for the originatedness (*ḥadath*) of the world based on its having a creator; he does not simply state that the Qur’ān refers to the world as creation. Yet, this makes sense when we bear in mind that, according to al-Māturīdī, originatedness implies existence due to another, while eternal existence is uncaused, self-subsistent existence, as he has alluded to previously: ‘proofs for the one who originated it [i.e., creation] as opposed to for its being self-subsistent (*kawn bi-nafsihi*), as well as for (its) originatedness as opposed to (its) eternity.’¹⁹² It follows that, if God is the cause, as it were, of the existence of everything, then it means that this world has a beginning for its existence. The same reasoning becomes apparent elsewhere where al-Māturīdī states that the fact that ‘God created creation as creation (*khalāqa al-khalq khalqan*) proves its originatedness.’¹⁹³

Al-Māturīdī’s endeavour to prove the world’s originatedness, we must note, involves of course a particular understanding of the Qur’ānic declaration that the world is creation (*khalq*). Characteristic of the position of the *mutakallimūn*, and at variance with the understanding of these terms by the philosophers, as we shall discuss in the chapters to come, al-Māturīdī here defends a conception of creation as being *ex nihilo*. Origination means ‘being after not having been (*al-kawn ba‘da an lam yakun*)’¹⁹⁴ and denotes ‘being brought into existence

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., p. 11. Al-Māturīdī gives no reference to particular verses but such statements can be found, for instance, in Q. 39.62 and Q. 2.117 respectively.

¹⁹² Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

from non-existence (*al-ikhrāj min al-‘adam ilā’l-wujūd*).¹⁹⁵ Even though one could argue that some Qur’ānic verses might give the impression that the world’s being *khalq* does not necessarily imply that it came to be from absolutely nothing¹⁹⁶ – as it is the case in such verses as Q. 23.12 saying {We created (*khalaqnā*) man from an essence of clay}¹⁹⁷ where the same root *kh-l-q* appears –, al-Māturīdī is eager to reject the idea that God’s creation simply consists in the formation of the world from some prime matter.

Among al-Māturīdī’s numerous arguments for the world’s originatedness based on sense observation we encounter again the reasoning mentioned above that originatedness and dependence on another go hand in hand. He argues: ‘Every single body is observed to be bound by necessity and based on need, but to the eternal applies the condition of self-sufficiency since it does not need another due to its eternity, but necessity and need mean being in need of another, which proves its [i.e., the body’s] originatedness.’¹⁹⁸ Al-Māturīdī furthermore adduces an argument which is reminiscent of the particularisation arguments later frequently employed by the *mutakallimūn*.¹⁹⁹ Even though he does not use the terms *ikhtiṣāṣ* or *takḥṣīṣ* commonly associated with this type of argument, he makes use of the same notion: Different and contrary natures (*ṭabā‘ī’*), such as being small or big, good or evil, are conjoined in every observable thing, despite their natural repulsion, which proves not only their being conjoined due to another, but also their originatedness. These contrary natures also bear the sign of change (*al-taghayyur*) and perishableness (*al-fanā’*) in them which proves that ‘they do not exist self-sufficiently,’²⁰⁰ which means the same as their being originated.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 235. See also p. 45: ‘the origination of the world not from anything (*ḥadath al-‘ālam lā min shay’*).’

¹⁹⁶ See Chapter V “Creation of the World” in Wolfson 1976, p. 355 et seqq.

¹⁹⁷ All translations of the Qur’ān are from Abdel Haleem 2004.

¹⁹⁸ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 11.

¹⁹⁹ See Davidson 1987, Chapter VI “Arguments from the Concept of Particularization” (p. 154 et seqq.) and Davidson 1968 on the *mutakallimūn*’s argument from particularisation.

²⁰⁰ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 12.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 12.

Al-Māturīdī's argument from the notion of change is not new to *kalām*. Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm already referred to it in his *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr*,²⁰² and so does al-Māturīdī's contemporary al-Ash'arī in his own proof of the world's originatedness. In al-Māturīdī, the notion of change which is observable by the senses appears almost as a forerunner of the idea of accidents associated with the atomistic worldview²⁰³ of many *mutakallimūn* and which al-Māturīdī expounds upon where he presents his proofs for the world's beginning in time based on reasoning. The aforementioned changes occurring to a body 'are not the body,'²⁰⁴ we are told, and they are identified as accidents (*'araḍ*, pl. *a'rāḍ*) and attributes (*ṣifa*, pl. *ṣifāt*) respectively.²⁰⁵ Motion and change, which should later become standard examples of accidents inhering in bodies, cannot coexist at the same time, al-Māturīdī's argument runs. This indicates their finiteness (*mutanāhin*) and originatedness. Following the famous statement we will encounter numerous times in the works of other *mutakallimūn* that that which is not free from something originated is also originated,²⁰⁶ al-Māturīdī concludes through reasoning that the world has a beginning.

We should lastly note that in affirming the originatedness of the world, al-Māturīdī makes recourse to the contentious, yet wide-spread idea among the *mutakallimūn* that 'the realm of the observable (*al-shāhid*) serves as the basis for knowledge of the realm of the unobservable (*al-ghā'ib*).'²⁰⁷ Just as it is true for the *shāhid* that something written (*kitāba*) does not come about unless due to an author, al-Māturīdī argues, this must also be true for the *ghā'ib*: the

²⁰² Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, p. 90: 'All these changes (*al-taṣārīf*) must have a changer (*muṣarrīf*).'

²⁰³ See the following works for an outline of Islamic atomism: Pines 1997; Sabra 2009, pp. 68-78; Wolfson 1976.

²⁰⁴ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 16.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 16. See the section "Die ontologische Struktur der Welt" in Rudolph 1997, pp. 268-291 for an account of al-Māturīdī's atomistic worldview as well as influences on him by earlier, especially Mu'tazilite, *mutakallimūn*.

²⁰⁶ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 12: 'In this lies the originatedness of what is not free from it [i.e., accidents such as motion and rest] (*wa-fī dhālika ḥadath mā lā yakhlū 'anhu*).'

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 45. Al-Māturīdī has a chapter dedicated to this analogy entitled 'On the proofs of the *shāhid* for the *ghā'ib*' (ibid., pp. 27-29). There, he mentions that disagreement existed even among those who made use of this analogy with regards to its proper use and what it implies. Some held that what is true for the *shāhid* is true for the *ghā'ib* in exactly the same way. Al-Māturīdī himself objects that certain parallels can be drawn, but that a difference must be made in other aspects (e.g., the view that the whole world must be eternal (*ghā'ib*) because there is never a moment which is not preceded by another moment (*shāhid*) vs. the view that the world has a beginning for its existence (*ghā'ib*) since every observable thing enters existence (*shāhid*)).

writing and the world have in common that they are composed things (*ta'lif*) which depend on another. This indicates their originatedness.²⁰⁸

To affirm the originatedness of the world and in particular its creation from nothing is, for al-Māturīdī, a crucial teaching to defend on rational grounds not only because this is how the *mutakallimūn* understood Scripture's account of it, but also because the failure to do so has for him some other unwanted implications. Against his fellow Mu'tazilite theologians and their teaching that the non-existent is a reality and thing (*shay'*), rather than complete denial,²⁰⁹ he argues that this leads to 'the corruption of God's oneness and uniqueness (*fasād al-tawḥīd*).'²¹⁰ This is so since they believe that 'its [i.e., the world's] essence was existent, but not the world (itself), and nothing else than the being (*kawn*) of the world came about,'²¹¹ which means 'they made alongside God other things eternal.'²¹² This aspect of the affirmation of the world's originatedness which is linked to the defence of God's *tawḥīd* already appeared in a work as early as al-Kindī's *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, as we recall. Yet, while in al-Kindī's reasoning the originatedness of the world has no direct bearing on the proof of its creator, in al-Māturīdī it is indeed made the basis for the inference 'that there is for the world an originator.'²¹³

The Proof of the Originator for the World²¹⁴

'The proof that there is for the world an originator (*muḥdith*),' al-Māturīdī states in this chapter, 'is that its originatedness has been established on the basis of what we (previously) mentioned...(and) it has been established that this is due to another than it.'²¹⁵ What al-Māturīdī here refers to is the

²⁰⁸ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 15.

²⁰⁹ On this doctrine see, for instance, 'Abd al-Jabbār's *Firaq wa-ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazila*, p. 169 and al-Māturīdī's own account in the chapter "The non-existent's being a thing according to the Mu'tazila and a reply to them" (*al-Tawḥīd*, p. 86 et seqq.). See Frank 2007 ("Al-ma'dūm wal-mawjūd: the non-existent, the existent, and the possible in the teachings of Abū Ḥāshim and his followers").

²¹⁰ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 17.

²¹¹ Ibid., p. 17.

²¹² Ibid., p. 86.

²¹³ Ibid., p. 17.

²¹⁴ Discussed by Rudolph (1997, p. 291 et seqq.) in the section "Die Existenz Gottes" and by Cerić (1995, p. 141 et seqq.) as arguments for God's existence.

²¹⁵ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 17.

dichotomy introduced earlier between the eternal which is self-subsistent and the originated which is linked in terms of its existence to another. Since the world has a beginning for its existence, it necessarily follows that it exists due to another. It is precisely this reasoning which in secondary literature has been identified as al-Māturīdī's argument for God's existence, along the lines of a cosmological argument where it is proven that God does exist because the world has a cause for its existence. Yet, what al-Māturīdī has in mind rather seems to be the defence of the doctrine of God's being the one who brought the world into existence, thus confirming what Scripture teaches. We shall argue this primarily based on certain statements we find in sections of the *Tawḥīd* other than the chapter on the proof of the creator itself, in which al-Māturīdī is rather silent as to what purpose exactly this proof is meant to serve. Elsewhere, however, we read the following: in his discussion of human action (*afʿāl al-khalq*), al-Māturīdī speaks of 'the testimony contained in creation (*khalq*) that there is no creator (*khāliq*) other than God and no *rabb* except for Him.'²¹⁶ While it is the case that al-Māturīdī here uses the testimony contained in creation to argue that human actions also belong to God's creation, it must nevertheless be acknowledged that, according to him, creation does prove *that* God – and no other – is the one who brought the world into existence. Creation proves God's attribute of being creator as well as His attribute of being *rabb*. What does the term *rabb* refer to, then? In our previous chapter we have shown that al-Kindī, alongside some other early *mutakallimūn*, makes use of this term to denote God's role as creator of the world, and we have indicated that al-Māturīdī employs it in the same sense. It is in al-Māturīdī's discussion of the oneness of the world's originator where he reveals what the term *rabb* denotes. There he states that, under the assumption of another god (*ilāh*) besides God, each of them should have power (*yaqdiru*) over the other one to hinder him from doing what he wishes. Consequentially, if both were unable to act, then this would be 'the demise of *al-rubūbiyya*,' and if only one of them had the power to hinder the other one, 'then he would be *al-rabb*.'²¹⁷ From this we can infer that what the term *rabb* implies is the power to act according to one's wish

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 230.

²¹⁷ Ibid., p. 21. This reasoning has of course become well-known as *dalīl al-tamānu* 'or proof from mutual hindrance.

and will, and *rubūbiyya* is ascribed only to the one from whom an act (*fi'l*) emerges. We should here bear in mind that al-Māturīdī speaks of 'God's act (*fi'l Allāh*)'²¹⁸ when referring to God's creation *ex nihilo*. Creation therefore serves al-Māturīdī to affirm the role of creator for God, and this evidently has the purpose – even if this is not spelled out by al-Māturīdī in clear words – of giving a rational foundation to certain pronouncements in Scripture, such as the admonition in Q. 3.64 that {none of us takes others beside God as lords (*arbāban*)}. In the *Tawḥīd*, al-Māturīdī is ultimately concerned with affirming God's *tawḥīd*, and this involves, first and foremost, the recognition of God's being sole creator, sometimes referred to as *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*, as well as of His divinity and worthiness of worship alone, known as *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya*.²¹⁹ The latter aspect becomes apparent where al-Māturīdī explains: 'If there was with God (another) god (*ilāh*)...and if he did not act, then it would be clear that God is one with regards to divinity (*al-mutawaḥḥid bi'l-ilāhiyya*) and one with regards to *al-rubūbiyya* (*al-mutafarrid bi'l-rubūbiyya*).'²²⁰ Creation therefore proves not only that God alone is creator, but also that divinity must not be ascribed to another than Him. This ultimate purpose of 'the proof that there is for the world an originator' has been overlooked by Thomas, Kholeif, Cerić and Rudolph alike when they argue that it is intended to show that God exists. The immediate purpose of al-Māturīdī's 'proof that there is for the world an originator' is, we submit, nothing else than to affirm the principle of causation, which is known from the *shāhid*, for the *ghā'ib*. Unless it is proven that the origination of the world, which belongs to the realm of the unobservable, occurred due to a cause other than itself, al-Māturīdī has no basis to claim that the world is God's product.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 235.

²¹⁹ As noted in the previous chapter, al-Maqdisī lists the 'affirmation of *rubūbiyya*' among what defines God's *tawḥīd* in his *Kitāb al-Bad' wa'l-ta'rikh* (ibid., p. 22). Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb explicitly distinguishes between *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* and *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* in his *Majmū'a al-tawḥīd al-najdiyya* (see Hawting 1999, p. 63). Nafi (2006, p. 218), referring to Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb, offers 'the oneness of God as the Creator and Lord of the universe' for *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* and 'the master and ultimate sovereign of life' for *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya*.

²²⁰ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 20-21.

The Argument from Evil for the Originator

Al-Māturīdī presents a number of arguments to achieve this objective, yet it is one in particular that has attracted some attention in secondary sources. Kholeif has described this particular argument as rather ‘strange’²²¹ considering that ‘al-Māturīdī chooses to base his proof of the existence of God on the concept of evil, for philosophers usually prefer to base their proofs of God’s existence on more exalted concepts.’²²² Al-Māturīdī’s argument is the following:

The proof that there is for the world an originator is....: If the world was due to itself, then no time would be truer for it than any other, and no state (*ḥāl*) would be more appropriate for it than any other, and no characteristic (*ṣifa*) would be more suitable for it than any other. But since it has different times, states and characteristics, it has been established that it is not due to itself, because if it was, it would be permissible (*jāza*) that every thing gives itself states which are most beautiful and the best, and therewith moral and physical evils would be wrong, but their existence proves that it [i.e., the world] is due to another.²²³

Kholeif and Pessagno both maintain that al-Māturīdī stands rather alone with his choice of argument among other theologians, both before and after him.²²⁴ No other thinker, Pessagno states, has ‘picked up the threat and the style’²²⁵ of it. This is, however, not entirely correct. It is, admittedly, true that thinkers of the classical period do not seem to employ the notions of evil and good in their arguments from particularisation – among which al-Māturīdī’s argument is to be counted – to prove that creation has a creator at all, that is, in those sections of their works which are equivalents to al-Māturīdī’s ‘proof that there is for the world an originator.’ Yet, both notions do appear in sections seeking to establish that there is for creation only one creator. In doing so, they, like al-Māturīdī, accept the underlying idea that the existence of good and the existence of evil point to an agent who brought them about. Whether their existence then points

²²¹ Kholeif’s introduction to al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. xxv.

²²² Ibid., p. xxv.

²²³ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 17.

²²⁴ Kholeif’s introduction to al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. xxiv: ‘Then al-Māturīdī advances a proof which we do not find in the works of any of the philosophers or theologians who preceded him.’ Pessagno 1984, p. 73: ‘The extent of my own research has not revealed any thinker after him who picks up the threat and the style of this arguments [sic].’

²²⁵ Pessagno 1984, p. 73.

to one agent or to two agents – one bringing about good, the other one evil, for example – is a separate question. This reasoning can, for instance, be found in al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm's *Kitāb al-Radd 'alā al-mulīd*²²⁶ and in al-Shahrastānī's *Nihāya al-iqdām fī 'ilm al-kalām*.²²⁷

In any case, Pessagno, like Kholeif, explains al-Māturīdī's argument as that 'the existence of evils, moral and physical, is made the explicit basis for coming to know that there is a God.'²²⁸ They both maintain that al-Māturīdī proves God's existence based upon the notion that the world, had it come into existence due to itself, would have been 'satisfied only with the best of conditions'²²⁹ and hence 'evil would not have existed,'²³⁰ but the factual existence of evil proves that God exists. There are two points we need to take into consideration. Firstly, al-Māturīdī's phrasing indeed suggests that he wants to make the point that evil would not to be found in the world if the world was not creation, but caused its own existence; after all, he only presents the option where no evil exists, but not where no good exists. Yet, one could object to this reading of al-Māturīdī's words that he never actually states that, were things to give themselves existence and bring about their own attributes, they would *necessarily* be free of all evil. 'If it [i.e., the world] was due to itself,' al-Māturīdī states, 'it would be *possible (jāza)* that...'.²³¹ Good and evil, we must bear in mind, were mentioned previously by al-Māturīdī alongside any other pair of opposing characteristics to be found in creation,²³² and his particular reference to evil has in fact no other purpose than the general mention of all kinds of states in things. What

²²⁶ Abrahamov mentions al-Qāsim's argument that '[t]he existence of good and evil proves that the Creator of the universe is one' (Abrahamov's introduction to al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, p. 16. The *Kitāb al-Radd 'alā al-mulīd* is currently unpublished, but al-Qāsim's argument appears in Ms. Berlin, fol. 61a, ll. 1-4).

²²⁷ Al-Shahrastānī discusses the following view: 'The act (*al-fi'l*) proves the existence of a creator of the world... We find among the existents good and evil (*khayran wa-sharran*), order and disorder, and what good proves is different from what evil proves. The existence of good proves one who wants good and the existence of evil proves one who wants evil' (*Nihāya*, pp. 97-98 (of the Arabic text)). We have to concede to Pessagno and Kholeif that al-Qāsim's *Dalīl al-kabīr* was published by Binyamin Abrahamov only in 1990, while their publications are from 1984 and 1970 respectively. Al-Shahrastānī's *Nihāya*, however, was published by Alfred Guillaume in 1931 and was hence available to them.

²²⁸ Pessagno 1984, p. 74.

²²⁹ Kholeif's introduction to al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. xxiv.

²³⁰ Ibid., p. xxiv.

²³¹ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 17.

²³² Ibid., p. 12.

applies to any such pair, like motion and rest, light and darkness, composition and separation, likewise applies to good and evil: if the world existed due to itself, it would be *possible* that there is only motion, but no rest, only light, but no darkness. One should not overlook the fact that, according to al-Māturīdī, change is impossible for something that exists due to itself. ‘If it [i.e., the world] existed due to itself,’ he also stresses, ‘then it would remain as it is and in one state (*ḥadd wāḥid*).’²³³ If the world did not exist due to an outside cause, we would not encounter motion in it if it was in rest and no darkness if it is was illuminated, just as we would not find evil if it chose to bring about only goodness.

The second point we need to consider concerns Kholeif and Pessagno’s claim that this particular argument has the purpose of proving God’s existence. We have shown above how al-Māturīdī makes the general point that creation contains proofs for God’s being creator, conveyed in the term *rubūbiyya*. Unsurprisingly, the existence of good and evil in creation is presented in the exact same way. In a much later section of the *Tawḥīd*, entitled ‘The wisdom in the creation of harmful elements (*al-jawāhir al-dārra*),’²³⁴ al-Māturīdī states:

In this [i.e., in creation’s consisting of harmful and beneficial elements] lies the clarification of the marvel of His wisdom, that is, the conjoining of what is harmful and what is beneficial as well as of what is good and what is evil (*al-khayr wa’l-sharr*), even though they are opposed to each other, in (what functions as) proofs for His oneness (*waḥdāniyyatihi*) and in the testimony of His *rubūbiyya* alone.²³⁵

This confirm that the purpose of the argument from evil (and good) is to establish, firstly, that the world exists due to an outside cause²³⁶ and, secondly, that this points to God’s attribute of being creator, just as Scripture says.

Having shown that the arguments presented by al-Māturīdī as evidence that ‘there is for the world an originator,’ including the argument from evil, are not intended as arguments for God’s existence, but rather for His being creator, we

²³³ Ibid., p. 18.

²³⁴ Ibid., p. 108 et seqq.

²³⁵ Ibid., p. 109.

²³⁶ See also ibid., p. 230: ‘If it was permissible that good and evil exist without (coming from) one who brings them about, then this would also be permissible for everything (else), but this means abandoning Islam.’

can nevertheless ask the question of why al-Māturīdī chose the – admittedly – rarely used notions of evil and good in particular to make the point that creation only exist because it has a creator, who is none other than God. One reason for his choice to put special emphasis on these two notions, out of all other possible pairs of opposing characteristics within the world, might have to do with the intention to criticise subliminally two of the groups whose beliefs he repeatedly attacks throughout the *Tawḥīd*: the Dualists (*al-ṭhanawīyya*) and the Muʿtazilites. It is known that Dualist groups, such as Manichaeans and Zoroastrians, were present in Samarqand when al-Māturīdī lived there,²³⁷ and the same is true for a number of Muʿtazilite theologians, such as Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Kaʿbī (d. 319/931) whom al-Māturīdī debated and about whom it has been said that he ‘zählte ohne Zweifel zu den herausragenden Theologen der Epoche.’²³⁸ The theologian’s concern, we must bear in mind, is not only to give a rational defence to the teachings found in Scripture, as we have seen, but also to point out inconsistencies in beliefs held by either adherents of other faiths or by fellow Muslims. This is certainly the case in al-Māturīdī’s *Tawḥīd*, as will become clear.²³⁹ With regards to the Muʿtazila, it is quite apparent where al-Māturīdī’s criticism would lie. ‘It is their belief,’ he states, ‘that there is no evil in God’s creation, and they speak of evil only in a metaphorical sense (*biʾl-majāz*),’²⁴⁰ thus ascribing evil actions entirely to the authorship of humans.²⁴¹ Māturīdī rejects this view and upholds that ‘God is the creator of the body of evil as well as good, and He is the creator of evil and good acts done by creation.’²⁴² If, according to al-Māturīdī’s previously discussed argument from evil, God’s

²³⁷ Rudolph 1997, p. 183 et seqq.; Paket-Chy and Gilliot 2000, p. 130.

²³⁸ Rudolph 1997, p. 174. See also the section “Die muʿtazilitische Herausforderung” in Rudolph 1997, p. 171 et seqq. Galli has emphasised al-Māturīdī’s very apparent critique of the Muʿtazila throughout his Qurʾānic commentary: ‘al-Māturīdī took every opportunity to demonstrate the inconsistency of the Muʿtazilitie’ [sic] views, the invalidity of their arguments, and the erroneousness of their doctrines’ (1982, p. 18).

²³⁹ Thomas states: ‘many of al-Māturīdī’s theological concerns, similar to those of other theologians in his day, consisted in refutations of methods and ideas different from his own’ (2008, p. 79). Leaman and Rizvi state: ‘theology [sought] to confront the arguments of non-Muslims in the vastly expanding Islamic empire, and to deal with the early polemics between the Ashʿarites, the Muʿtazilites and the Qadarites’ (2008, p. 81). Rudolph (1997, pp. 163-165) lists the names of all opponents (individuals and groups) referred to, and refuted, by al-Māturīdī in the *Tawḥīd*.

²⁴⁰ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 169.

²⁴¹ Compare De Cillis 2014, p. 12 and Hourani 1976. See Rudolph 1997, p. 339 et seqq. for al-Māturīdī’s contribution to, and position on, the question of God’s action and human action.

²⁴² Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 170.

being sole originator is known because of good *and* evil, then the Mu‘tazilites’ exclusion of evil from God’s creation and their denial of its reality must violate for al-Māturīdī the very foundation for the proof of *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*: both in the sense that God can be affirmed as the creator of the world as well as in the sense that every single thing truly is God’s creation.

In the same vein, al-Māturīdī’s argument from evil poses a criticism of the position of the Dualists. They hold, according to him, that the world exists eternally due to the mixing of two principles, light and darkness or good and evil.²⁴³ We have seen how al-Māturīdī uses such opposite pairs as smallness and bigness, but also goodness and evil as well as light and darkness to prove that the world has a beginning in time. He furthermore employs them, as just discussed, to show that the world is the creation of a creator, that is, God. Bearing this function of good and evil in mind, al-Māturīdī’s argument must contain an intended hint at the absurdity of the belief of the Dualists that a world, being exclusively made of these very opposite principles, could be eternal as well as that these two contraries could be the originators of the world, rather than being themselves originated. For al-Māturīdī, we have to conclude, the existence of good and evil is proof of God’s oneness as creator – and so it is for al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm and al-Shahrastānī, as indicated – and he seeks to defend this position against two varying positions he repeatedly attacks in the *Tawḥīd*.

The Importance of the Proof of the World’s Originatedness and Its Having an Originator

Al-Māturīdī’s implicit, yet rather subtle attack against the Dualists and the Mu‘tazilite *mutakallimūn* through the use of the concepts of evil and good in fact runs like a thread through the whole of the *Tawḥīd* and extends to the beliefs held by a variety of groups. It has been noted by Charles Genequand and Ulrich Rudolph that al-Māturīdī certainly did not have direct contact with every single group he refutes in the *Tawḥīd*. Rather, the view has to be taken that he ‘partizpiert nur an der allgemeinen Auseinandersetzung mit bestimmten

²⁴³ Ibid., p. 34.

notorischen Gegnern, die im islamischen *kalām* allerorts geführt wurden'²⁴⁴ and which we will encounter over and over again in the works of other *mutakallimūn* after him. Yet, it is through an examination of the refutations he presents that we can gain some further insight as to which issues the proof of the world's beginning in time and its existing due to a creator seeks to address.

The chapter on 'the proofs that there is for the world an originator' is followed by a chapter which deals with 'the beliefs of those who assume the eternity of the world.'²⁴⁵ In this section, al-Māturīdī states that those who uphold the world's eternal existence, and who are hence evidently in major disagreement with the *mutakallimūn's* understanding of Scripture as referring to the world's coming to be in time, assume that things derive their existence from preceding things, without this state having a first beginning. Some of the proponents of this belief hold, al-Māturīdī points out, that the generation of existents constituting this world takes place 'without one who brings them about (*bi-lā munshi*).'²⁴⁶ There is no indication that al-Māturīdī means to say that the denial of an originator for the world on the part of this group denotes their denying God's existence. The issue at stake rather is whether the world simply exists, by its own nature, or whether it is creation as the Qur'ān states. In the context of the traditional arguments for God's existence, such as the cosmological one, it could rightly be argued that the denial of a creator implies the denial of God's existence; yet, we have to acknowledge that this is not what al-Māturīdī means to say when he speaks of the denial of a creator for the world. The question of whether the group referred to by him assumes that God exists is different from the question of whether they agree with al-Māturīdī and his fellow theologians that God plays any role in bringing about the world (or whether the explanation of a thing's existence can be found in the thing that precedes it). The latter question is tackled, while the former simply is absent.

Another position al-Māturīdī mentions is that the world exists eternally 'due to one who brings it about, but they make him the *ʿilla* of the being of the world,

²⁴⁴ Rudolph 1997, pp. 164-165. See also Genequand 1999, p. 198.

²⁴⁵ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 30 et seqq.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 30.

and the *‘illa* cannot be without the *ma‘ūl*.²⁴⁷ The cause referred to by al-Māturīdī as *‘illa* is a kind of cause which brings about its effect necessarily (*ṭarīq al-idṭirār*) due to its nature (*bi’l-ṭab’*).²⁴⁸ It follows that, if this cause exists, its effect must exist as well. Besides the belief in the eternity of the world held by its adherents (which obviously results from their particular notion of God as cause), al-Māturīdī’s criticism is directed towards their very conception of God as a *‘illa*: ‘His [i.e., *al-bāri*] being called an *‘illa* is false!’²⁴⁹ For al-Māturīdī, defending a particular conception of God as creator, it is evidently not enough to acknowledge that the world is God’s work – it must be affirmed as God’s creation, which means existence after non-existence,²⁵⁰ as we remember. Likewise, to acknowledge God as *some* cause of the world is not sufficient, and indeed not what Scripture states: God is creator, not a necessary cause.

Lastly, al-Māturīdī makes explicit mention of the Dualists and presents their view regarding the creation of the world from the two eternal principles of light and darkness.²⁵¹ The Dualists believe in agreement with the *ahl al-tawḥīd*, as al-Māturīdī states elsewhere, in one godhead.²⁵² Al-Māturīdī’s criticism therefore does once more not concern the question of God’s existence, but has to do with the Dualists’ belief that the world could possibly be eternal even though it exists due to two opposing principles.²⁵³ Furthermore, al-Māturīdī must reject their belief that not *all* of creation comes from the one principle they identify as the godhead,²⁵⁴ as alluded to above, since some of them hold that evil is not God’s creation, but the devil’s, who is the product of an evil thought that occurred to God.²⁵⁵

What al-Māturīdī’s mention of these beliefs and positions highlights is that neither the doctrine of the world’s creation in time, nor the belief in God as its

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 30.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 33.

²⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 45 and p. 235.

²⁵¹ Ibid., p. 35.

²⁵² Ibid., p. 235.

²⁵³ Ibid., p. 34.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 169 (‘the belief of the Dualists that the one from whom the creation of evil stems is in reality not the one from whom the creation of good stems’) and pp. 235-236 (‘they declare it wrong that the godhead, in whose worthiness of worship (*ulūhiyyatihi*) creation believes, is able to create most of the world’).

²⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 88.

creator, defended by al-Māturīdī at the very beginning of the *Tawḥīd*, were without controversy when the Muslims came into contact with other faiths and when differences in doctrine started to crystallise among the Muslims themselves. Yet, they also highlight that the issue of God's existence and the proof thereof do not play any role, even where the question is discussed of whether the world exists due to a creator or not. Rather, al-Māturīdī's concerns in these refutations reflect his concerns as we explained them in the chapter 'that there is for the world a creator.'

Conclusions

The overarching concern and purpose of al-Māturīdī's *Tawḥīd* is to defend certain religious doctrines by giving them a rational justification. This is most evidently true for the proof of the world's originatedness and its having a creator, which al-Māturīdī discusses at the very beginning of his work. We have shown that 'the proof that there is for the world an originator' does for al-Māturīdī not serve the purpose of proving God's existence, along the lines of a cosmological argument, as suggested in secondary literature. It rather is the case that, on the one hand, al-Māturīdī seeks to establish the principle of causation for the unobservable realm (*al-ghā'ib*) in analogy to the observable realm (*al-shāhid*) in order to be able to defend the doctrine that it is God due to whom the world exists (i.e., the world is not the cause of its own existence); on the other hand, al-Māturīdī intends to defend a particular conception of God as creator in accordance with how he and indeed the majority of his fellow theologians understood the Qur'ānic teachings on this matter. This conception involves the createdness of the world *ex nihilo* and the notion that *all* of creation is God's product. Both the affirmation of a beginning for the world and its creation from absolutely nothing as well as the affirmation of God's being the sole creator of everything ultimately constitute two crucial aspects of the declaration of God's oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*), which the *Tawḥīd* is – '*nomen est omen*' – dedicated to.²⁵⁶ While al-Māturīdī's refutations of a variety

²⁵⁶ Rudolph states in agreement with this: 'Er verteidigt den Islam gegen eine fundamentale Herausforderung und kämpft dafür, daß der Glaube an den Einen Gott, der *tauḥīd* also, über seine Gegner triumphiert' (1997, p. 196).

of beliefs contrary to his understanding of the Islamic account of creation and God's role in it highlight the significance of the defence of these two doctrines, it also became clear that the question of *whether* God actually exists and *how* His existence can be proven is of no relevance within the overall conceptual thrust of the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.

Chapter Three: Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/936) and the Qāḍī Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013)

Al-Ash‘arī

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī must be regarded as one of the most significant *mutakallimūn* in the history of Islamic theology. He was one of those early scholars who sought to give their faith a rational, reason-based foundation and who defended the emerging discipline of theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*) against its critics.²⁵⁷ Al-Ash‘arī’s significance is reflected in the fact that his name would later be associated with one of Islam’s major theological schools of thought, the Ash‘ariyya, from which a great number of *mutakallimūn* emerged whose contribution to – what has been seen as – the Islamic discourse on proofs of God’s existence we will consider in the following chapters.²⁵⁸

The Objectives of Theology

In his *Risāla istiḥṣān al-khawḍ fī ‘ilm al-kalām*, al-Ash‘arī argues in defence of the discipline of *kalām* that the *mutakallim*, who engages in ‘speculation and enquiry into religious matters (*al-naẓar wa’l-baḥṭh ‘an al-dīn*)’ and who ‘investigates the principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*)’,²⁵⁹ dedicates himself to vindicating the very same matters of faith which the Qur’ān makes incumbent upon the believer. Whether it is the affirmation of God’s oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*)²⁶⁰ or the defence of the doctrine of resurrection²⁶¹ or finally God’s otherness from creation and the rejection of anthropomorphism it implies,²⁶² al-Ash‘arī stresses that it is the verses of the Qur’ān which form the basis of the rational arguments employed by the theologians.²⁶³ The science of

²⁵⁷ See al-Ash‘arī’s *Risāla istiḥṣān al-khawḍ fī ‘ilm al-kalām* (n.p.: Dār al-Mashārīf, 1995) which is dedicated to defending *kalām* against the charge of innovation (*bid‘a*).

²⁵⁸ See Richard M. Frank’s *Classical Islamic Theology: The Ash‘arites* (edited by Dimitri Gutas. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), *Early Islamic Theology: The Mu‘tazilites and al-Ash‘arī* (edited by Dimitri Gutas. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007) and *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash‘arite School* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994).

²⁵⁹ Al-Ash‘arī, *Risāla*, p. 38.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 40-41.

²⁶¹ Ibid., p. 41 et seqq.

²⁶² Ibid., p. 44 et seqq.

²⁶³ Al-Ash‘arī makes the point that the *mutakallimūn*’s defence of the doctrine of God’s oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*), which they base on the world’s originatedness and the notions of

kalām, we are told in secondary literature, however, also seeks to defend by rational means another item of belief: the existence of God, and the proof of it is said to have its place in al-Ash‘arī’s works. Majid Fakhry, for instance, lists al-Ash‘arī’s discussion of the question ‘What is the proof that there is a creator for creation who made it and an arranger who arranged it?’ in the *Kitāb al-Luma‘* among what he calls ‘the classical Islamic arguments for the existence of God.’²⁶⁴ According to Fakhry, in the *Kitāb al-Luma‘*, the proof that the world exists due to a creator therefore serves the purpose of showing that God exists, which would then be a proof along the lines of the traditional cosmological arguments we know from western philosophy and theology. Eric Ormsby has described al-Ash‘arī’s argument this way: al-Ash‘arī ‘proceeds from the glaring fact of the world’s contingency – the fact that it is not self-caused but depends on something outside itself for its existence’²⁶⁵ on which his argument for God’s existence supposedly rests. In the same vein, Muḥammad Ramaḍān ‘Abd Allāh has described the proof of the creator in the *Kitāb al-Luma‘* as seeking ‘the affirmation of the existence of God on the basis of the proof the *mutakallimūn* called the proof from the originatedness of the accidents.’²⁶⁶

This reading of what al-Ash‘arī seeks to establish in his theological works shall be contested in the following. We shall argue that the proof of the creator, in al-Ash‘arī’s *Kitāb al-Luma‘*, has the purpose of establishing God *as* the creator of the world. Al-Ash‘arī does not seek to answer the question ‘Is there a God and how can His existence be proven?’; rather, he seeks to defend the Qur’ānic doctrine – as he understands it – that the world, including every single thing and occurrence, is God’s product and that God is the world’s creator in a specific way. In doing so, God’s existence, as understood in the traditional arguments for

motion and rest, is borrowed from the Qur’ānic story of Abraham and the setting of the star. The theologians’ *dalīl al-tamānu‘* (proof from mutual hindrance) for God’s being the only deity (*ilāh*) is inspired by Q. 21.22 {If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods but Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruin...}. The theologians’ attempt to defend the doctrine of resurrection by rational means is not so different from the Qur’ānic approach which also gives arguments in support of it.

²⁶⁴ See Majid Fakhry, “The Classical Islamic Arguments for the Existence of God”, *The Muslim World*, Volume 47, Issue 2, pp. 133-145, April 1957.

²⁶⁵ Ormsby 2007, p. 53. Ormsby makes this statement with reference to al-Ghazālī’s proof of God’s existence in his *al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm* in particular, but sees his argument in the tradition of al-Ash‘arī’s reasoning for God’s existence.

²⁶⁶ Muḥammad Ramaḍān ‘Abd Allāh 1986, p. 402.

God's existence, is never a matter of doubt or seen to require proof. Our reading of what the proof 'that there is a creator for creation' seeks to show in fact follows al-Ash'arī's own words when he states in a later section,²⁶⁷ referring to his discussion of this very matter: 'the proofs have shown that God (Most-High!) is the creator of every originated thing (*anna Allāh ta'ālā khāliq kull shay' ḥādith*)'²⁶⁸ as well as 'the proofs have established that all originated things are creation by God (Most-High!) (*anna kull al-muḥdathāt makhḷūqāt li'llāh ta'ālā*).'²⁶⁹

The Proof of the Creator

The reasoning al-Ash'arī puts forward to prove 'that there is for creation a creator' is strikingly Qur'ānic,²⁷⁰ and hence seems to give support to his statement in the *Risāla* that the arguments employed by the *mutakallimūn* follow the reasoning to be found in Scripture. Al-Ash'arī rests his proof on the transformation of humans from state to state (*ḥāl*), which he describes as 'the greatest miracle' and 'first in proving a creator.'²⁷¹ Humans were once not more than a drop of sperm, al-Ash'arī argues, then became a blood clot, then flesh. We begin our existence as children, then grow into young adults, elderly people and finally grow old.²⁷² Everybody knows, al-Ash'arī then concludes his argument, that humans cannot bring about this transformation from state to state by themselves which indicates that 'there is one who transforms them...and who arranges them in the way they are.'²⁷³ This is the proof of the creator.

Al-Ash'arī's argument is very reminiscent of such verses as Q. 75.37-38 which read {Was he not just a drop of spilt-out sperm, which became a clinging form, which God shaped in due proportion}²⁷⁴ as well as Q. 23.14 saying {then We

²⁶⁷ In the section entitled 'On the will (*al-irāda*) and that it encompasses all originated things (*al-muḥdathāt*)' (al-Ash'arī, *al-Luma'*, p. 47 et seqq.).

²⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 47.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 49.

²⁷⁰ Fakhrī has made this point before: 'The argument of Al-Ash'arī in this treatise has a distinct Quranic ring. It...rests on the observation of the 'phases' of man's growth from "a drop of water, to a leech to an embryo," which the Qur'ān has rendered classical' (1957, p. 140). So has Muḥammad Ramaḍān 'Abd Allāh: 'this is the Qur'ānic path' (1986, p. 403).

²⁷¹ Al-Ash'arī, *al-Luma'*, p. 19.

²⁷² Ibid., p. 18.

²⁷³ Ibid., p. 18.

²⁷⁴ All translations of the Qur'ān are from Abdel Haleem 2004.

developed that clot into a clinging form, and We developed that form into a lump of flesh, and We developed that lump into bones, and We clothed those bones with flesh, and later We developed him into other forms – glory be to God, the best of creators!}.²⁷⁵ It must be noted that al-Ash‘arī is not the first, much less the only theologian to make use of this Qur’ānic reasoning to prove ‘that there is for creation a creator.’ Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, who died more than 70 years before al-Ash‘arī, also referred to the aforementioned verses (i.e., Q. 75.37-38) in his *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr*.²⁷⁶ We recall that al-Qāsim used these two verses, alongside a great many other Qur’ānic verses, in order to establish that everything contained in this world exhibits the signs of being created and that God alone is the one who brought it about. ‘There must hence be one who arranges (*mudabbir*) all affairs, and there exists none such other than God (*wal-lan yūjad illā’llāh*),’²⁷⁷ al-Qāsim stated. With particular reference to the abovementioned two verses and the transformation of humans, al-Qāsim made the point that ‘this is not found except for coming from God.’²⁷⁸ It became clear that in al-Qāsim’s *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr* the notion of change in general, and humans’ transformation from state to state as a particular example,²⁷⁹ are used as an argument to prove that the role of creator must be ascribed to God, not however as an argument for God’s existence.²⁸⁰ It seems that, ultimately, al-Ash‘arī does not have in mind anything different than al-Qāsim and that his proof that there is for creation a creator does not serve the purpose of proving God’s existence.

This becomes evident when we take a closer look at the discussion surrounding – what we could term – the principle of causation, which plays a crucial role in al-Ash‘arī’s proof of the creator. Al-Ash‘arī would not be able to arrive at the conclusion that the changes witnessed in humans only come about due to a

²⁷⁵ The terms employed by al-Ash‘arī are the same as in the Qur’ān; both speak of the *nuṭfa* (sperm) developing into the *‘alaqa* (blood clot, clinging form).

²⁷⁶ Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, p. 92.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 82.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 92.

²⁷⁹ Abrahamov 1986, p. 264.

²⁸⁰ In his *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya*, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209) dedicates a separate chapter to the reasoning based on ‘how humans develop from sperm’ (vol. 1, part 1, p. 216) to prove the creator, by which he means the proof that God is the creator of the world, as we shall see Chapter Eight.

creator and arranger if it was not for his affirmation of this very principle, which entails that nothing can enter existence due to itself, chance or without cause. Al-Ash‘arī himself phrases it this way: ‘They [i.e., humans] are, in their state of weakness and imperfection, unable to effect (*fī’l*) this [i.e., to bring about these transformations]... (However,) their transformation...is not possible without a transformer and arranger.’²⁸¹ The affirmation of this principle forms the cornerstone of all the arguments employed by theologians and philosophers²⁸² alike to prove that God is the world’s creator. It is therefore not surprising that some theologians, such as al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), would go to great length to establish that an effect needs a cause, as it were.²⁸³ In the *Kitāb al-Luma’*, al-Ash‘arī also presents an argument in defence of the principle of causation. He states:

What makes this clear is that cotton cannot become a spun thread, then a woven garment without a weaver or maker (*ṣāni’*) or arranger (*mudabbir*), and whoever takes cotton and waits for it to become a spun thread, then a woven garment without a maker or weaver is out of his mind and undoubtedly ignorant! The same is true for him who faces the wilderness where there is no firm castle and he expects clay to transform into the state of bricks and to staple themselves one on top of the other, without a maker or builder.²⁸⁴

Al-Ash‘arī evidently derives the principle of causation from observation of this world, and seeks to affirm its general validity based on an analogy between the *shāhid*, the seen world, and the *ghā’ib*, the unseen world. Nothing comes into existence in the *shāhid* unless due to an agent, and the same must be true for

²⁸¹ Al-Ash‘arī, *al-Luma’*, p. 17.

²⁸² The main difference between the theologians and philosophers is of course that the former regard the world as being *ḥādith/muḥdath* insofar as there was once a state of affairs where the world did not exist and then entered existence; while the latter hold that there was never such a state of affairs where the world was not, yet it is *ḥādith/muḥdath* insofar as its existence is possible in itself (*mumkin bi’l-dhāt*). In any case, both groups have to show that what is *ḥādith/muḥdath* or *mumkin* requires an outside cause to give it existence. Compare the discussions in Ibn Sīnā’s *Metaphysics (al-Ilāhiyyāt)* of the *Shifā’*, in al-Ghazālī’s *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (especially the Third Discussion) as well as in Ibn Rushd’s *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* (also the Third Discussion). Also see Kogan 1985.

²⁸³ Compare al-Juwaynī’s *Kitāb al-Shāmil* where most of the discussion in the chapter on the affirmation of the creator is in fact dedicated to establishing the principle of causation. Al-Juwaynī affirms the *mukhaṣṣiṣ* (one who particularises) who gave the world existence only after a lengthy discussion about whether the actualisation of existence instead of non-existence, which are both possible for the world, is ‘due to itself (*li-nafsihi*) or due to an entity (*ma’nā*) in addition to it and subsisting in it or due to permissibility or due to the particularisation of one who particularises’ or not due to any of them, which is equated with chance (*ittifāq*) (*al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 147).

²⁸⁴ Al-Ash‘arī, *al-Luma’*, p. 14.

the *ghā'ib*, to which the example of the transformation of humans can be counted since its agent is not observable.

Now, in our quest to understand which purpose the argument based on humans' transformation serves, we are able to gain clarity when turning to al-Juwaynī's discussion of al-Ash'arī's analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghā'ib* in his *Kitāb al-Shāmil*. In this work, al-Juwaynī makes mention of al-Ash'arī's use of this analogy based on a building's need for a builder in a chapter which deals with the issue of 'the need of origination for the originator'²⁸⁵ which discusses the principle of causation. There, al-Juwaynī also refers to certain criticisms brought forward by – unnamed – Mu'tazilite theologians, which take their starting point from al-Ash'arī's own position that humans are not the agents of their actions, rather God alone is agent, and humans only acquire (*kasb, iktisāb*) their actions.²⁸⁶ The implications of this position are twofold, according to the Mu'tazilites' criticism: firstly, since al-Ash'arī does not affirm the principle of causation for the *shāhid* (since human action does not come about due to humans as agents, that is, there is no agent for acts in the *shāhid*), he cannot make an analogy to the *ghā'ib* (that is, he cannot affirm that acts which are counted among the realm of the *ghā'ib*, like the origination of the world, must come about due to an agent). He has failed to affirm the principle of causation altogether. Secondly, even if al-Ash'arī's analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghā'ib* was granted, it would necessarily follow that God is the agent and creator of the world in the same way as humans are linked to their actions – not in a truly creative way, but only through acquisition. This is, however, not how God as creator has to be understood.²⁸⁷

What the aforementioned shows is the following: the issue at stake is not the provability or proof of God's existence. The Mu'tazilites' criticism does not concern the question of whether al-Ash'arī's allegedly flawed analogy to affirm

²⁸⁵ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 153.

²⁸⁶ Compare al-Ash'arī's exposition of this view in the *Kitāb al-Luma'*: 'If someone was to say: Why does the occurrence of the act (*al-fi'l*) which is acquisition (*kasb*) not prove that there is no agent (*fā'il*) for it other than God, just as it proves that there is no creator (*khāliq*) for it other than God (Most-High!)? We would say: This is what we believe' (p. 72). See Frank 1966 and Abrahamov 1989 on al-Ash'arī's theory of acquisition.

²⁸⁷ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 157 et seqq.

the creator for creation means the failure to prove that God exists. Yet, this is precisely what David Norcliffe has argued: ‘There is a problem... This comes into greater focus when one considers the impact of the denial of causality on the Ash‘arite proofs of God’s existence. If causality is denied, then the argument that a contingent world must point beyond itself to God must come into question.’²⁸⁸ In reality, however, the problem the Mu‘tazilites highlight, according to al-Juwaynī’s account, pertains to the question on what grounds one could claim that the world came into existence due to God if one does not assume that actions have an agent in the seen world which is the basis of the principle of causation.²⁸⁹ It also pertains to the question of how al-Ash‘arī can uphold a specific conception of God as agent in view of his denial of human efficient causality. These considerations clarify the concerns underlying al-Ash‘arī’s attempt to affirm the creator for creation, and it has become clear that God’s existence does not play a role.

The Proof of the World’s Beginning

Since it has become clear that it is al-Ash‘arī’s concern in the *Kitāb al-Luma‘* to establish God as creator of the world, we must note that the concept of the creator held by the *mutakallimūn* is by far more specific than what al-Ash‘arī has defended so far. God is not simply the cause of the states this world exhibits (which is exemplified by al-Ash‘arī’s reference to the transformation of humans); rather, He is the cause and creator of the world’s very existence. It is therefore that al-Ash‘arī then turns to the proof that the world has an origin in time. He addresses the following question: ‘so you do not believe that sperm never ceases and is eternal (*lam tazal qadīma*)?’²⁹⁰ It seems evident that the questioner does not intend that every particular sperm is eternal (as its occurrence in time is rather self-evident, one could pose); rather, it seems that his question is to be understood as being representative of the position that matter, from which the things in this world arise (and humans’ being formed

²⁸⁸ Norcliffe 1999, p. 90.

²⁸⁹ Compare ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Majmū‘*, p. 357: ‘Don’t you see that it is necessary to affirm one of us as originator in order to affirm the connection between the originatedness of the bodies and God Almighty and Exalted?’

²⁹⁰ Al-Ash‘arī, *al-Luma‘*, p. 19.

from sperm is only one such example), is eternal. A proponent of this view would then counter al-Ash'arī's claim that the changes in this world are due to God by maintaining either that the assumed eternity of sperm (or matter) precludes it from being the product of God, or that, while the transformation of matter due to God is conceded, the originatedness of matter itself is not. Both positions can in fact be identified with the *dahriyya*, a label we shall find mentioned numerous times by other later *mutakallimūn*. Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) refers to the *dahriyya* in his *al-Fiṣal* and describes them as those who assume that the world is eternal.²⁹¹ Some *dahriyyūn* hold that the world simply is, without depending on any originator; others believe that it has existed eternally with and through an arranger.²⁹² Their argument for the world's eternity is, according to Ibn Ḥazm, this: 'We have not witnessed the occurrence (*ḥadatha*) of anything except for from something or in something. He who claims anything else claims something he does not witness and never witnessed.'²⁹³ This is exactly the position we find described in the question al-Ash'arī addresses: 'So you do not believe that sperm is never ceasing and eternal?' Al-Ash'arī replies that change (*taghayyur*) is a sign of temporality and non-eternity: 'the eternal cannot be transformed or changed and the signs of originatedness (*al-ḥadath*) do not apply to it.'²⁹⁴ Making recourse to what should later become an essential element of the theologians' proof for the originatedness of the world, al-Ash'arī remarks that 'that which does not precede the originated is (itself) originated and produced (*muḥdathan maṣnū'an*).'²⁹⁵ From this it follows for al-Ash'arī that not only sperm, but also all other bodies (i.e., the world which is 'the entirety of created things'²⁹⁶) have a beginning in time.²⁹⁷ What al-Ash'arī has hence shown is the following: contrary to the claim, ascribed to individuals labelled by the theologians as *dahriyyūn*,

²⁹¹ Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, part 1, p. 47.

²⁹² Ibid., p. 37.

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 48.

²⁹⁴ Al-Ash'arī, *al-Luma'*, p. 19.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 19. Al-Ash'arī does not mention the crucial premise of the impossibility of an infinite regress of originated things yet which al-Juwaynī should make an essential part of the proof of the originatedness of the world and which later theologians took over. The body insofar as it is the substrate of accidents which originate in time is also originated since the assumption of an infinite regress of accidents in an eternal substrate is absurd. Compare al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, p. 17 and *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 67.

²⁹⁶ Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt*, p. 36.

²⁹⁷ Al-Ash'arī, *al-Luma'*, p. 19.

that the world has no beginning for its existence, the Qur'ānic tenet has been defended on rational grounds, as understood by the *mutakallimūn*, that there was once a state of affairs where only God existed, but not the world. The world is not a self-sufficient thing, but creation. God is not the creator of the world only insofar as He transforms eternally existing prime matter or brings about events, but insofar as He brought the whole of creation into existence from non-existence, thus the theologians' understanding of the Qur'ān.²⁹⁸

God's Oneness and Uniqueness

Lastly, we should direct our attention to a statement we find in al-Ash'arī's *Risāla*. There he writes, in defence of the science of *kalām*:

As for movement and rest and the *kalām* about them, their principles can be found in the Qur'ān where they prove God's oneness and uniqueness (*al-tawḥīd*)... God (Most-High!) mentioned, reporting about His friend Abraham in the story of the setting of the star and the sun and the moon and their moving from place to place, what proves that his Lord (*rabbahu*) cannot possibly be any of those [i.e., the aforementioned celestial bodies], and that he who can sink and move from place to place is not a godhead (*ilāh*).²⁹⁹

This statement of al-Ash'arī's is of interest to us insofar as it mentions the notions of motion (*al-ḥaraka*) and rest (*al-sukūn*) which should become an important aspect of what could be called the standard *kalām* proof to affirm the creator which is based on the originatedness of accidents, as shall be seen in the following chapters. Contrary to the view propounded in secondary literature that the theologians' reasoning on the basis of the accidents of motion and rest have the purpose of proving that God really does exist,³⁰⁰ al-Ash'arī makes clear that they serve to prove God's oneness and uniqueness and in particular His being the only *rabb*. We recall from our discussion of al-Qāsim and al-Kindī's works in a previous chapter that they used the term *rabb* to refer to God's role

²⁹⁸ In the section of the *Kitāb al-Luma'* where al-Ash'arī sets forth his theory of acquisition (*kash*, *iktisāb*), he supports his claim that 'there is no originated thing and action (*muḥdath maf'ūl*) but God is its originator, agent and creator (*muḥdith lahu fā'il khāliq*)' (p. 88) by the Qur'ānic statement {He created all things} (e.g., Q. 6.101). The discussion whether human actions do or do not fall under God's efficacy is part of the wider discussion about the scope of God's being creator.

²⁹⁹ Al-Ash'arī, *Risāla*, p. 40.

³⁰⁰ See, for example, van Ess who states: 'Abū al-Hudhayl based his proof of God's existence on his ontology, especially his teachings on the accidents' (1997, Band IV, p. 7). Generally, this view is held where it is said that God's existence is inferred from the world's originatedness, which in turn is proven on the basis of accidents inhering in bodies (i.e., the cosmological argument).

as creator and that they both made the proof of God's *rubūbiyya* an essential part of their philosophico-theological enquiries. The same is true for al-Ash'arī's claim that God's being the only *ilāh* is proven on the basis that the things in this world are moving objects, or at least have the capacity to move. In his *Maqālāt al-shaykh Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī*, Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015) explains that al-Ash'arī 'chose (the view) that what is meant when we describe Him as *ilāh* is that He has *ilāhiyya*, and what *ilāhiyya* denotes is His ability to create (*qudra 'alā iktirā'*) the atoms and accidents.'³⁰¹ Motion and rest hence serve to prove God's *tawḥīd* insofar as He alone is creator and all other existents creation, and insofar as the names of *rabb* and *ilāh* may only be ascribed to God based on His being creator. Speaking of God's oneness and *tawḥīd* means, according to al-Ash'arī, '(His) uniqueness and the denial of association with Him (*al-tafarrud al-nāfi li'l-ishtirāk*) as well as of ascribing a partner to Him in terms of...His act...and His arrangement (*al-izdiwāj fī...al-fī'l...wa-tadbīrihi*) – He has no partner,'³⁰² thus Ibn Fūrak's explanation and words.³⁰³

In al-Ash'arī, the proof that God is the one who brought about the world serves the purpose not only of defending this key Islamic doctrine on rational grounds, which is one particular aspect of God's *tawḥīd*, but also of establishing, at the same time, another aspect of God's oneness and uniqueness, which likewise has its basis in the Qur'ān and such verses as Q. 42.11 {There is nothing like Him}. Ibn Fūrak explains that, according to al-Ash'arī, God's *tawḥīd* also includes 'the denial...of ascribing an associate to Him in terms of His essence (*al-nafs*)...and His attribute(s) (*al-ṣifa*) since He is not divisible in terms of His essence and has no equal in terms of His description.'³⁰⁴ God's *tawḥīd* therefore also means showing that His essence and attributes are unique and without comparison to creation.³⁰⁵ How is it then, we must ask, that al-Ash'arī establishes what God's essence and attributes are like? He does so on the basis of God's being the

³⁰¹ Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt*, p. 48.

³⁰² Ibid., p. 55.

³⁰³ In a chapter entitled 'On the clarification of his [i.e., al-Ash'arī's] position (*madhhab*) regarding the meaning of the names of the Lord (Most-High!) and His attributes according to the Book and the Sunna and the consensus of the *umma'* (ibid., p. 43 et seqq.).

³⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 55.

³⁰⁵ Ibn Fūrak's mention of the non-divisibility of God's essence is of course accounted for by the Ash'arite position that all of created existence consists of bodies which are made up of atoms and hence divisible. This can, consequentially, not apply to God. Compare Pines 1997.

creator of the world, following the reasoning, which we will come across over and over again in the works of other theologians, that the characteristics of an act point to the characteristics of its agent. This reasoning can be exemplified by reference to al-Ash‘arī’s *al-Ibāna ‘an uṣūl al-diyāna*. There, we encounter an argument from design, as it were, which however does not have the purpose of proving that God does exist, as usually understood when we speak of arguments from design we know it from the Western philosophical tradition; rather, it serves to establish certain divine attributes, which are ascribed to God in the Qur’ān.³⁰⁶ ‘The existence of produced things (*al-ṣanā’i*) according to arrangement and system (*tadbīr wa-niẓām*) is only possible due to one who is knowing, powerful and living,’³⁰⁷ al-Ash‘arī explains. God’s knowledge, power and life are evidently proven on the basis of His being the creator of creation and due to the design apparent in His creation, and this is part of the affirmation of His *tawḥīd*.

Conclusions

Our investigation of al-Ash‘arī’s theological writings has shown that the proof of the creator for creation does not have the purpose of proving the existence of God. Its objective rather is to defend the Qur’ānic promulgation, based on the Qur’ān’s own reasoning which addresses itself to human reason, that the world is creation and God is its creator. The defence of this doctrine evidently appears in response to individuals who held opposing beliefs, such as in the eternity of the world. For al-Ash‘arī, to establish this is part of the affirmation of God’s *tawḥīd*: God is one and unique in His role as creator. Another aspect of the affirmation of *tawḥīd* includes God’s otherness from creation, which al-Ash‘arī establishes on the basis of God’s being creator: the characteristics of creation, such as their being bodies, proves that God is of a different nature.

³⁰⁶ This argument from design appears in a section entitled ‘On the refutation of the Jahmiyya and their denial of God’s knowledge and power and all other attributes’ (p. 87) which indicates what audience it addresses. Note that there is no proof of God’s existence to be found in the *Ibāna*, nor is there any proof that God in fact is the creator of the world. All discussions take their starting point from the acknowledged principle that it is God who created the world. The only question al-Ash‘arī discusses which is related to God’s role as creator is that of the authorship of human actions and where evil stems from (e.g., p. 17 et seqq. and p. 115).

³⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 94.

Al-Bāqillānī

It is said that Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī's (d. 403/1013) significance as a *mutakallim* lies in his contribution to systemising the theological thought he inherited from his Ash'arite predecessors.³⁰⁸ This is most evidently true in his modification of the atomistic theory,³⁰⁹ which became the cornerstone of a number of Ash'arite doctrines, including the proof of the originatedness of the world and the inference of the creator from it.³¹⁰ In his *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, we are told, al-Bāqillānī makes this atomistic worldview the basis of his proof for the existence of God. Herbert Davidson writes that 'Al-Bāqillānī states the proof of creation from accidents...and then infers the existence of the creator in three ways.'³¹¹ Muḥammad Ramaḍān 'Abd Allāh likewise counts al-Bāqillānī among those theologians who 'were concerned with the issue of proving His existence through their *kalām* proofs which take their starting point from the originatedness of atoms and accidents or their possibility.'³¹²

The Affirmation of the Creator

It is indeed the case that, in the *Tamhīd*, al-Bāqillānī proceeds from the proof that the world has a beginning for its existence to 'the affirmation of the creator (*ithbāt al-ṣāni'*).'³¹³ That the world must be originated (*muḥdath*), he argues, is established when considering that the accidents (*a'rāḍ*, sg. *'araḍ*), which necessarily inhere in bodies (*ajsām*, sg. *jism*), come about in time as well as that 'that which does not precede something originated is (itself) originated.'³¹⁴ Both

³⁰⁸ Fakhry 1958, p. 40; Wolfson 1976, p. 41 who refers to Ibn Khaldūn's *Muqaddima* in which he describes al-Bāqillānī as having 'perfected' what he inherited from al-Ash'arī; Collins 2000, p. 414.

³⁰⁹ On this aspect see Tabbaa 1985, p. 68.

³¹⁰ See Sabra 2009, Pines 1997 and Wolfson 1976 for an outline of the (Ash'arite) atomistic theory. Not only the doctrine of the temporal beginning of the world is proven based on atoms and accidents, but also such doctrines as God's non-corporeality (since corporeality implies originatedness).

³¹¹ Davidson 1986, p. 300.

³¹² 'Abd Allāh 1986, p. 415. Majid Fakhry mentions al-Bāqillānī in his article entitled "The Classical Islamic Arguments for the Existence of God" (*The Muslim World* 47:1957, pp. 133-145).

³¹³ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (1947), p. 44.

³¹⁴ Ibid., p. 44. Al-Bāqillānī's argument for the world's originatedness involves a difficulty which we do not encounter when recalling, for instance, al-Māturīdī's argument for the world's finiteness. He argued that the eternal is characterised as not changing, and that the world cannot be eternal because of changes taking place in it. Al-Bāqillānī's argument hinges on the

bodies and their accidents therefore have a beginning in time, and since ‘the world (*al-‘ālam*)’ is an expression for nothing else than the entirety of bodies (or atoms (*jawāhir*, sg. *jawhar*), of which they consist) and accidents, the world has been shown to be originated.³¹⁵ From this it follows, so al-Bāqillānī, that ‘this originated and formed (*al-muḥdath al-muṣawwar*) world must have an originator and former.’³¹⁶ It is this reasoning which Davidson and ‘Abd Allāh have identified with the endeavour on al-Bāqillānī’s part to prove God’s existence. Let us therefore investigate what al-Bāqillānī seeks to prove when he speaks of ‘the affirmation of the creator’ as a close reading of his statements suggests a different intention.

The First Argument Based on the Analogy Between the *shāhid* and the *ghā’ib*

Davidson correctly states that al-Bāqillānī presents three ways of proving the creator for the originated world.³¹⁷ The first argument involves the following reasoning: ‘The proof for this is that for the writing (*al-kitāba*) there necessarily is a writer, for the form (*al-ṣūra*) a fashioner, and for the building (*al-binā*) a builder.’³¹⁸ Al-Bāqillānī then continues: ‘We would not doubt the ignorance of him who told us that something written came about – but without a writer... It is, hence, (also) necessary that the forms of the world and the

claim that the finiteness of accidents proves bodies to be finite, too. One wonders why al-Bāqillānī did not consider the question (or deem it important) of what the possibility of an infinite chain of accidents in bodies would mean for the proof that the world has a beginning for its existence. Al-Māturīdī (*al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 13-14) and al-Kindī (*On First Philosophy*, pp. 92-95), for instance, obviously considered it of importance to address this point as both of them prove the impossibility of an infinite chain of existent things, which otherwise would negate a beginning for the world’s existence. The only instance where al-Bāqillānī actually rejects the possibility of an infinite regress is where this regress pertains to the maker (*fā’il*) of the originated world. He argues that this maker cannot himself be originated as he would be in need of an originator, and the same would then apply to that second originator. Consequentially, the existence of all originated things would be impossible if their existence was dependent on the existence of other originated things when there is no end to this chain (*lā ghāya lahu*) (al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (1947), p. 46. Compare also *ibid.*, p. 53 which contains a similar argument in refutation of those who call nature the creator).

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

³¹⁷ Davidson 1986, p. 300.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

movements of the planets are connected with a creator (*ṣāniʿ*) who created them.’³¹⁹

Al-Bāqillānī’s use of this analogy is not new to *kalām* works. We recall that al-Ashʿarī, in whose tradition al-Bāqillānī saw himself, already referred to the connection between the occurrence of a building and its builder to prove the general validity of what we termed the principle of causation.³²⁰ Al-Māturīdī, too, employed this analogy, making use of the very same example of the writing and its author as al-Bāqillānī, yet he used it as an argument for the origination of the world, not the inference of a creator for creation.³²¹ Al-Bāqillānī seems to employ this analogy with the exact same objective in mind as al-Ashʿarī: its purpose is to affirm the principle of causation for the *ghāʾib* in analogy to the *shāhid*. This implies that it is true for the *ghāʾib*, the realm of the unobservable (to which the origination of the world belongs), that effects have causes, as it were, just as it is true for the *shāhid*, the observable world.³²² For al-Ashʿarī, the general affirmation of the principle of causation was an essential step in affirming God to be the creator of the world: the world has a beginning in time, and it is not possible that it entered existence by chance and uncaused; rather, it does have a cause.

Which purpose does the affirmation of the principle of causation, then, serve for al-Bāqillānī? Ultimately, he appears to share with al-Ashʿarī the same objective when he seeks to affirm the creator for creation: the world is creation and God alone is its creator; God’s existence and the proof thereof play no role. Not only the *Tamhīd*, but also, and particularly, the *Inṣāf* give us an insight into the importance al-Bāqillānī assigns to the proof of God’s being sole creator of the world and everything therein, which has to do with the unequivocal proclamation of this in the Qurʾān. In the *Tamhīd*, he states that God described Himself with the words ‘I am creator (*innī khāliq*).’³²³ In the *Inṣāf*, al-Bāqillānī

³¹⁹ Ibid., p. 45.

³²⁰ Al-Ashʿarī, *al-Lumaʿ*, p. 14.

³²¹ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawhīd*, p. 14.

³²² This is, of course, not to say that the Ashʿarites affirm efficient causality for beings in the *shāhid* in the same manner as for the *ghāʾib*, as discussed previously with regards to al-Ashʿarī.

³²³ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (1957), p. 215. The editor remarks in a footnote (p. 215, f. 364.3) that this self-description on the part of God is not taken literally from the Qurʾān, but its meaning can obviously be found there.

repeats this and says: 'He called Himself creator (*khāliq*) and everything besides Him created.'³²⁴ He furthermore mentions Q. 13.16 which reads {Have the partners (*shurakā'*) they assign to God created anything like His creation? Is their creation indistinguishable from His? Say, 'God is the Creator (*khāliq*) of all things...}³²⁵ and comments that in it 'God refuted the unbelievers when they associated partners with Him in creation (*shurakā' fī'l-ikhtirā'*).'³²⁶ A number of other Qur'ānic verses are adduced by al-Bāqillānī in support of the claim that 'there is no creator (*khāliq*) other than Him,'³²⁷ such as Q. 16.20 saying {Those they invoke beside God create nothing; they are themselves created}. Al-Bāqillānī, finally, also notes that God has made 'belief in Him (*al-īmān bihi*)' obligatory upon all humans. Belief in God, he explains, means 'assent (*al-taṣdīq*) by the heart that He is God, the One, the Unique, the Pre-Eternal, the Eternal, the Creator (*al-khāliq*), the All-Knowing – {There is nothing like Him...}³²⁸.³²⁹ While it is the case that all of these statements appear in sections other than that on the proof of the creator and that they concern different aspects related to God's role as sole creator,³³⁰ they nevertheless highlight how al-Bāqillānī's proof of the originatedness of the world and the affirmation that it has a creator seek to give a rational foundation to the Qur'ānic claim that the world and everything contained in it is creation and that God alone is its creator.

Returning to al-Bāqillānī's affirmation of the principle of causation in the first argument he presents as proof of the creator, which is an essential step in affirming God as the creator of the world, we must note the following: al-Bāqillānī was evidently aware that to establish *some* cause which brought about the existence of the world is not sufficient to prove that this cause is none other

³²⁴ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, p. 70.

³²⁵ All translations from the Qur'ān are taken from Abdel Haleem 2004.

³²⁶ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, p. 41.

³²⁷ Ibid., p. 27.

³²⁸ This is Q. 42.11.

³²⁹ Ibid., p. 22.

³³⁰ The statement 'I am creator' in the *Tamhīd* appears as part of a discussion about God's attributes of action (*ṣifāt al-aʿāl*) and attributes of essence (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) and it serves as an example of the former category of attributes. The statement 'He called Himself creator...' in the *Inṣāf* is part of a discussion about the createdness vs. uncreatedness of the Qur'ān. Q. 13.16 is mentioned in the context of the defence of the doctrine that God creates human actions, including belief and unbelief (doctrine of *kasb*/acquisition). Q. 16.20 appears in support of the claim that God alone provides for humans. These examples are all different aspects of God's being sole creator.

than God, as he addresses the issue whether the world could be its own cause. Only if this is denied, it can be established that the world depends on a cause other than itself and outside itself. This issue is not actually tackled in al-Bāqillānī's first proof based on the analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghā'ib*³³¹ – he does, however, discuss it in the second and third proof for the creator, as we shall see –, yet the section immediately following al-Bāqillānī's three proofs is dedicated to showing 'that the originated thing is not its own maker (*fā'il li-nafsihi*)'³³² and 'that there is for the whole world a creator other than it (*khāliq ghayrahu*) who is not part of it (*laysa minhu*).'³³³ It should not be forgotten that theologians and philosophers alike before and after al-Bāqillānī dealt with this particular question and were keen to refute the possibility that something can cause its own existence. Ibn Ḥazm, for example, presents three options in his *Fiṣal* as to what the cause of the origination of the world is: either it originated itself; or it came about independent of another who originated it; or another originated it.³³⁴ Ibn Ḥazm concludes the discussion of these three options with the words: 'So if it is wrong that the world originated itself, and if it is wrong that it independently came about, without another who originated it, then the third option must be correct...and this is that another brought about the world, from non-existence into existence.'³³⁵

The Second Argument Based on the Earlier and Later Occurrence of Things in Time

Besides the proof based on the analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghā'ib*, al-Bāqillānī presents another argument to support the claim that the originated world exists due to a cause outside it. This argument focuses on 'the earlier occurrence (*taqaddum*) of some originated things than others as well as the

³³¹ In the *Inṣāf*, however, al-Bāqillānī uses the analogy to argue that the originator must necessarily be another than the originated. He states: 'We do not doubt the ignorance of the one who informed us about a writing which came about on its own/due to itself (*bi-nafsihā*), not due to a writer' (pp. 29-30).

³³² Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (1947), p. 45.

³³³ Ibid., p. 45. The proof of this is based on the postulate that any agent (*fā'il*) must be living, powerful and knowing, but the world contains death and is ignorant of its own essence and arrangement.

³³⁴ Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, part 1, p. 66.

³³⁵ Ibid., p. 67.

later occurrence (*ta'akhkhur*) of some of them than others.³³⁶ Their occurrence at a specific time cannot be due to the thing itself or dependent on its kind (*li-nafsihi wa-jinsihi*), al-Bāqillānī argues, as this would mean that all things of the same kind would have to occur simultaneously. This proves, he then concludes, 'that there is for it one who makes it occur earlier and who brings it into existence according to his will (*maqṣūran 'alā mashī'atihi*).'³³⁷ It is interesting to note that in the *Inṣāf*, where al-Bāqillānī presents the exact same argument, concluding that it 'proves an agent who effected it [i.e., the earlier or later occurrence] and who brings it into existence according to his will (*irādatihi*) and makes it according to his wishing (*mashī'atihi*),'³³⁸ he establishes a link between this conclusion and the Qur'ānic verses Q. 11.107 and Q. 16.40. The former verse states about God that {[your Lord] carries out whatever He wills (*fa'āl li-mā yurīdu*)}; the latter describes God in His role as creator this way: {When We will (*aradnā*) something to happen, all that We say is, 'Be,' and it is.} Al-Bāqillānī comments that God points in these verses to our knowledge that an act is connected with an agent.³³⁹ This indicates that, contrary to Davidson's view that al-Bāqillānī employs the argument in question to 'infer the existence of God'³⁴⁰ from it, he rather uses it to establish the following three things: firstly, the world came into existence due to another; secondly, it is God to whom the world owes its existence; and finally, all this confirms on rational grounds what the Qur'ān says about God in His role as creator.

The Third Argument Based on the Different Forms and Shapes of Things

The chapter on 'the affirmation of the creator' contains a third argument which also serves the purpose of proving that the originated world came into existence due to a cause which is not part of the world. Al-Bāqillānī argues that 'every body contained in this world could have received a structure (*tarkīb*)

³³⁶ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (1947), p. 45.

³³⁷ Ibid., p. 23.

³³⁸ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, p. 18.

³³⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

³⁴⁰ Davidson 1986, p. 303: 'To infer the existence of God, Bāqillānī contended that the appearance of a thing at a certain time and also its "composition" (*tarkīb*) and shape cannot be due to "itself" but must be due to another factor.'

different from the one it has.’³⁴¹ As in the aforementioned case of the earlier and later occurrence of things, al-Bāqillānī now argues that the realisation of a particular shape or form ‘cannot be due to (the thing) itself or due to its (mere) receptiveness to it’³⁴² as in this case all possible shapes would have to occur in a body together, which he declares an absurdity. This proves that ‘whatever has a form only receives it from one who composes (*mu’allif*) and intends (*qāsid*) it this way.’³⁴³

Davidson has rightly pointed out that al-Bāqillānī’s arguments for the creator fall into the category of arguments from particularisation (*takhṣiṣ*),³⁴⁴ which would later be employed by a great number of theologians.³⁴⁵ Al-Bāqillānī himself makes use of the term *ikhtaṣṣa* when he speaks of the impossibility ‘that the bodies which are particularised (*ikhtaṣṣa*) with a specific, particular (*makhṣūṣ*) shape are particularised with it’³⁴⁶ due to anything else than an outside cause. Davidson’s description of al-Bāqillānī’s work as containing the ‘earliest explicit use of the concept of particularization’³⁴⁷ needs to be reviewed: al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, who died some 150 years before al-Bāqillānī, already made use of the notion of particularisation when he argued: ‘One can infer from the differences...visible in them [i.e., things in this world] that they have a creator who particularised (*khaṣṣahā*) them with their differences and characteristics (*al-khaṣā’is*).’³⁴⁸ It must furthermore be noted that we have also shown, on the basis of some explicit statements in the *Inṣāf*, in particular, that the notion of particularisation is employed by al-Bāqillānī to prove that God is the world’s

³⁴¹ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (1947), p. 45.

³⁴² Ibid., p. 45.

³⁴³ Ibid., p. 45. The same argument appears in the *Inṣāf*: ‘There are existent forms which are squares, others round, and there are persons who are taller than others... It must hence be the case that there is one for them who forms them...according to his will (*irāditi*) and wishing (*mashī’atihi*)’ (p. 30).

³⁴⁴ Davidson 1986 p. 300

³⁴⁵ Such as by al-Juwaynī (*al-Irshād*, p. 28), al-Ghazālī (*al-Risāla*, p. 385 and p. 386) as well as al-Rāzī (*al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, p. 121). Davidson (1986, p. 300) has rightly noted that arguments from particularisation for the creator have the occasionalistic worldview as their underlying assumption as otherwise the determinant of particular occurrences in this world would have to be sought in the events preceding them.

³⁴⁶ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (1947), p. 45.

³⁴⁷ Davidson 1986, p. 300.

³⁴⁸ Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, p. 114. Note that Davidson’s article in which he ascribes the earliest explicit instance of the argument from particularisation to al-Bāqillānī appeared in the same year – 1986 – as Abrahamov’s article in which he mentions al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm’s explicit use of the same argument.

creator, in defence of statements of this nature in the Qur'ān. Davidson's claim that in the *Tamhīd* 'the concept of particularization [is]...used to infer the existence of God from creation,'³⁴⁹ and that in the third proof in particular 'a direct proof of the existence of God from the presence in things of particular characteristics'³⁵⁰ is given, does therefore not do justice to al-Bāqillānī's use of, and intention behind, it.

The Conception of God as an Agent Endowed with Will

The second and third arguments presented by al-Bāqillānī in the *Tamhīd* – and this is also true of the *Inṣāf* – to affirm the creator in fact introduce an aspect of the conception of God as creator which is absent from the first argument. While all three arguments have the purpose of establishing the principle of causation for the *ghā'ib* (that is, pertaining to the issue of the originatedness of the world), it is only in the last two arguments that al-Bāqillānī stresses the role will and intention play in the notion of God as agent.³⁵¹ The proofs al-Bāqillānī presents establish not only that it is God who brought the world into existence, in accordance with the teachings of Scripture, but also that God is the cause of the world in a specific way: He is an agent possessed of will. We have seen above how in the *Inṣāf* al-Bāqillānī connects these two aspects to those Qur'ānic verses which ascribe creation to God in a way that involves that 'He wills (*yurīdu*).'³⁵²

Volition should come to be regarded by the theologians as an important aspect of their conception of the creator, for a host of reasons, as we will see in the

³⁴⁹ Davidson 1986, p. 304.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 301. A *direct* proof of the creator (even if not for God's existence), Davidson rightly notes, because the inference of the creator from particular shapes does, at the end of the day, not depend on the premise of an originated world. We in fact notice that al-Bāqillānī reverses the order al-Ash'arī followed in his *Lum'*. Al-Ash'arī proved the creator for creation first, based on the notion of change, and then answered the question of whether the world itself has a beginning in time or whether its matter is eternal (al-Ash'arī phrased this differently though), as previously discussed.

³⁵¹ This is also the case in the *Inṣāf*. The second proof mentions an agent who brings into existence 'according to his wishing (*mashī'atihi*),' the third proof mentions 'his will (*irādatihi*) and wishing (*mashī'atihi*)' (pp. 29-30). It should be noted that al-Bāqillānī uses the exact same argument from the earlier and later occurrence of actions (*af'āl*), as he has it there, in a later section where he presents it as proof that the creator is 'a willing one (*murīd*)' (*al-Tamhīd* (1947), p. 27).

³⁵² Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, p. 18. This is from Q. 11.107. See also Q. 16.40 which says 'if We want it (*aradnāhu*).'

following chapters. For the theologians preceding al-Bāqillānī, such as al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, al-Māturīdī and al-Ash‘arī, but also for the philosopher al-Kindī, whose works we have discussed previously, the notion of will did not play an equally crucial role in their defence of God as cause of the world. Al-Kindī and al-Qāsim were not concerned with it. Al-Ash‘arī also paid more attention to the notion of creation *ex nihilo*, and will plays a role only in his proof that ‘the creator of the things is one’ in which the idea is put forward that being creator and not being able to realise what one wills (*murād*) are mutually exclusive.³⁵³ In al-Māturīdī, on the other hand, it is the notion of power (*qudra*), rather than will, which characterises the creator of the world.³⁵⁴

The reason why al-Bāqillānī places such great importance on the notion of the creator’s will can be found not only in the fact that the Qur’ān mentions this attribute of God numerous times, as alluded to, but also in that it enables him to declare any alternative position of what the cause of the existence of the world is invalid. This latter aspect becomes apparent when we turn to al-Bāqillānī’s refutation of a number of beliefs he considers contrary to what Scripture teaches. Al-Bāqillānī’s first refutation concerns the belief of those who claim that ‘the creator (*ṣāni‘*) of the world is a nature from among the natures (*ṭabī‘a min al-ṭabā‘i*), from the existence of which the origination of the world became necessary (*wajaba*).’³⁵⁵ In the course of his refutation, al-Bāqillānī suggests that, if his opponents were to hold that nature is eternal, the following would have to be inferred: ‘If it was eternal, then it would be necessary that the originated things which exist due to it are (also) eternal, since nature is eternally existent, and there is nothing that hinders the originated things from existing, being necessitated by it (*al-mūjaba ‘anhā*)...like (it is the case with)...fire which necessitates burning.’³⁵⁶ The example given by al-Bāqillānī of fire necessarily causing burning brings to mind al-Ghazālī’s (d. 505/1111) refutation of the position held by the philosophers in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* where he mentions the exact same example. The philosophers maintained, at variance with the occasionalistic worldview of al-Bāqillānī, al-Ghazālī and their fellow Ash‘arite

³⁵³ Al-Ash‘arī, *al-Luma‘*, p. 20.

³⁵⁴ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, pp. 19-21.

³⁵⁵ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (1947), p. 52.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

theologians, that things are created by God with certain natures, and that these natures account for necessary causal connections between things.³⁵⁷ Even though ascribing causal efficacy to nature, the philosophers, however, agreed with the theologians that it is ultimately God who is the creator of the world, which the above mentioned position seems to oppose. It therefore appears that al-Bāqillānī might be addressing those groups which, in *kalām* works, we often find referred to as the *dahriyya*. They represent the view that the world is eternal and does not depend for its existence on God, and that the natures of things sufficiently explain how things come about. Al-Juwaynī, for example, ascribes the following statement to them in his *Shāmīk*: ‘We do not observe a hen unless it originates from an egg, and no human unless he originates from a drop of sperm.’³⁵⁸ Al-Bāqillānī himself mentions them by name in his *Inṣāf* and speaks of ‘the belief of those among the *ahl al-dahr* who assume that the originated things have no beginning for their existence.’³⁵⁹ The adherents of the position referred to by al-Bāqillānī in his first refutation evidently commit the error of attributing the role of creator to these natures, while according to al-Bāqillānī and his fellow theologians this role appertains to God alone. The crucial point in al-Bāqillānī’s response to them, however, is that nature cannot possibly be given the attribute of being creator of the world since the notion of the creator involves the beginning in time of creation (i.e., the world), as pointed out by him before, as well as the creator’s will – all of which is contrary to the assumption of an eternal world, existing due to eternal natures, which cause necessarily, not due to an act of will.

Al-Bāqillānī here introduces two different conceptions of a cause: one which causes by virtue its nature and from which the effect follows necessarily; and one which causes due to will and which has the ability to act and abstain from it. This is made explicit by al-Bāqillānī in the following when he states: ‘According

³⁵⁷ In the seventeenth discussion of the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, al-Ghazālī describes the philosophers’ position as this: ‘the agent of the burning is only fire, and it is an agent due to (its) nature (*bi’l-ṭabʿ*), not due to choice, thus incapable of abstaining from (enacting) what is its nature after it has come into contact with a substrate receptive to it’ (*Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (2000), p. 167). His own (Ashʿarite occasionalistic) position, in contrast, is the following: ‘The agent of the burning...is God, either through the mediation of the angels or without mediation. Fire, which is inanimate, has no act’ (ibid., p. 167).

³⁵⁸ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmīk* (1960/1961), p. 115.

³⁵⁹ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, p. 32.

to us, (the divine will) is a will for the occurrence of the act in a way that it is delayed (*‘alā’l-tarākhī*)³⁶⁰ and...it is not an *‘illa* for the existence of what is willed.’³⁶¹ The cause referred to by al-Bāqillānī as *‘illa* denotes ‘something that necessitates the act (*mūjib li’l-fi’l*),’³⁶² as opposed to one that ‘acts according to power and choice.’³⁶³ What al-Bāqillānī means to say is that for him God caused the world to exist after it had not existed, and this occurred due to the eternal divine will. The divine will is, however, not a cause in the same way as a necessitating cause. Since the world has an origin in time, it has been proven that it must exist due to God as its creator who is endowed with will and choice.

To conceive of the cause of the world as an *‘illa* which necessitates the world, as opposed to the concept of the creator (*ṣāni’*) who decides upon creation, involves another absurdity for al-Bāqillānī which, as we will see, should later become a key aspect of the arguments put forward by none other than the great philosopher Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037) in his defence of the teaching of a world existing eternally through and with God. Al-Bāqillānī continues his argumentation in response to his opponent: ‘So if nature was eternal, and what exists from it was also eternal, then why is it that one of them necessitates (*mūjib*) and causes (*sabab*) the other, rather than that the caused one (*musabbab*) is cause (*sabab wa-‘illa*)?’³⁶⁴ What this statement highlights is that, for al-Bāqillānī, the relationship between the world as effect and God as cause must be seen as one characterised by temporal priority. If the effect is believed to be eternal, just as its cause is, then one has no grounds to claim that one of

³⁶⁰ Al-Bāqillānī evidently makes this point in response to such views as that held by the philosopher al-Fārābī who defended the eternity of the world as well as a certain conception of God as cause on the following grounds: ‘Any maker of anything knows that his making that thing at a particular time is better or best, or it is worse or worst. What delays his making it is the obstacle to his making it... If there is no cause of non-success, its non-existence is not preferable to its existence, and why did it not happen? At the same time, has the maker power to stop the non-success...? If he has the power, then...(the thing’s) coming into existence at some time is not impossible for its maker. But if he has not power to stop the non-success, then the cause of the non-success is stronger... In any case then not he [the maker] alone is sufficient to complete the action... For if he were personally the sole cause of the success, the success of the action should not be retarded in time...it follows that the existence of the thing is not later than the existence of the agent’ (al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl al-madānī*, p. 66). See also Chapter One “How did God create the world?” (esp. pp. 58-59) in Leaman 2002.

³⁶¹ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (1947), p. 53.

³⁶² Ibid., p. 53.

³⁶³ Ibid., p. 53.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 54-55.

them exists due to the other, and not the other way round. This is, of course, how al-Bāqillānī, the *mutakallim*, conceives of the relation between God and the world. Yet, what he leaves unmentioned here is that he himself did accept that cause and effect can coexist eternally without this compromising identifying one as cause and the other as effect. In the section on the divine attributes (*bāb al-kalām fī'l-ṣifāt*) in the *Tamhīd*, al-Bāqillānī seeks to defend the Ash'arite position that God's descriptions, such as His being knowing, point to hypostatic entities (*ma'ānin*), such as knowledge, subsisting in Him.³⁶⁵ In this context he states: 'The one from among us who is alive cannot be alive...if life is non-existent... It is hence necessary that they [i.e., the entities] are the *'illa* for his being such [i.e., alive, knowing etc.]'.³⁶⁶ Since these entities subsist eternally in God, they must eternally be the cause (*'illa*) of His being described as such. Ibn Sīnā should later argue, maybe with a view to such arguments as the above one brought forward by al-Bāqillānī and his fellow theologians, that there is no contradiction between the assumption of the world's eternal coexistence with God, on the one hand, and the claim that God is its cause, on the other. The world is essentially an effect and therefore essentially dependent on a cause. God's priority to the world is essential, not temporal.³⁶⁷ Al-Bāqillānī, however, does not allow for essential priority when it comes to the world and its cause.

After his refutation of those who 'believe that nature can act (*fī'l al-ṭabā'*)',³⁶⁸ al-Bāqillānī turns to the refutation of another group whom he labels the *munajjimūn*, and it is again the creator's special characteristics of will and choice he focuses on. The *munajjimūn* are described as believing that the planets, such as the sun and the moon, are the creator, fashioner and arranger (*ṣāni', muṣawwir, mudabbir*) of the world.³⁶⁹ Al-Bāqillānī seeks to expose the invalidity of their belief on the basis that these planets are originated in time

³⁶⁵ On the Ash'arite conception of the divine attributes see Wolfson 1959 and Frank 1967.

³⁶⁶ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (1947), p. 152.

³⁶⁷ See Chapter Four on Ibn Sīnā. Kogan has argued that Ibn Sīnā's defense of essential priority between cause and effect is in answer to the upholders of occasionalism: 'For in attacking the notion of ontological priority which is both necessary and necessitating, he [i.e., the occasionalist *per se* referred to by Ibn Sīnā] clearly indicates his rejection of essential efficient causation itself' (1985, pp. 100-101). Compare al-Bāqillānī's rejection of essential priority in the *Tamhīd* (1947), pp. 54-55.

³⁶⁸ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (1947), p. 52.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 48.

(proven through the notion of movement), and he infers from this that they are in need of an originator of their own. This originator, he carries on, 'must have originated them either according to nature (*bi'l-ṭab'*) or through power and choice (*bi'l-qudra wa'l-ikhtiyār*).'³⁷⁰ The first option is ruled out following similar considerations as in the aforementioned discussion, and al-Bāqillānī concludes: 'It has been established that all this is the act of a powerful, choosing agent (*fā'il qādir mukhtār*) who originates if he wishes so (*shā'a*) and who abstains from it if he wishes so.'³⁷¹ Once more, al-Bāqillānī's reasoning involves that what the fact of the temporal origination of the world tells us is, firstly, that it must come from an entity who is its originator – it has not popped into existence uncaused or caused its own existence – and, secondly, that this entity must have will and choice. Having established this, al-Bāqillānī is able to counter the *munajjimūn* and present the Islamic view of God as creator (not simply as cause) of the world, which he defended at the beginning of the *Tamhīd*, as more reasonable. Al-Bāqillānī's refutation of the *munajjimūn* brings to mind al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm's discussion of Q. 21.52-56 which relates Abraham's attempts to dissuade his people from worshipping the stars besides God. Al-Qāsim also made the originatedness of the stars the basis of their not being creators (while leaving the aspect of will and choice unmentioned), and it became clear that he sought to defend God in His role as creator against the ascription of this attribute to any other entity.

Finally, al-Bāqillānī turns to the refutation of the Dualists (*ahl al-tathniyya*) who are described by him as believing that 'the world came from two eternal principles, one of them light, the other one darkness.'³⁷² Their refutation likewise centres around the premise that any agent (*fā'il*) must be able to choose (*mukhtār*), and that this does not apply to these two principles.³⁷³ Furthermore, al-Bāqillānī stresses, light and darkness are themselves originated,

³⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 62.

³⁷¹ Ibid., p. 62.

³⁷² Ibid., p. 68.

³⁷³ Ibid., p. 69.

not eternal, which he proves on the basis of an argument from particularisation.³⁷⁴

What these refutations shed light on is the reason why al-Bāqillānī includes the creator's will, intention and choice³⁷⁵ in his proof that the world exists due to a cause other than itself (i.e., the affirmation of the principle of causation for the *ghā'ib*) in the chapter on 'the affirmation of the creator': the endeavour to establish God as the creator includes not only that the world exists due to God; it also includes that it has come about in time, after not having existed, in accordance with the theologians' reading of the Qur'ān.³⁷⁶ Furthermore, God is not some cause, much less in the way fire causes burning, which is due to its nature; rather, God is creator, endowed with will, intention and choice. Our examination of al-Bāqillānī's arguments in the chapter on 'the affirmation of the creator' in the *Tamhīd* alongside other sections in both the *Tamhīd* and the *Inṣāf* has therefore shown that they do not serve the purpose of proving God's existence. It is entirely different aspects al-Bāqillānī is concerned with, as became clear.

Creation as Proof of God's Existence

How does the following statement made by al-Bāqillānī in his *Inṣāf* then fit in with our findings, which at first seems to contradict them? 'The first thing God has made obligatory upon his servants,' al-Bāqillānī states, 'is speculation (*al-naẓar*) about His signs...because He is not known necessarily and not observable by the senses; His existence and being (*wujūduhu wa-kawnuhu*) are only known through the compelling proofs contained in His deeds.'³⁷⁷ Al-Bāqillānī here unequivocally states that it is God's existence which is proven on the basis of creation – so how does this go together with our claim that, in the

³⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 69: 'As for what proves that the two of them are not eternal, it is the proofs we presented earlier that they are contraries and that something can sometimes be luminous and sometimes obscure.'

³⁷⁵ Note that these terms all eventually refer to God's volition: 'Note that there is no difference between the (divine) will (*al-irāda*), the wishing (*al-mashī'a*) (and) the choosing (*al-ikhtiyār*)' (al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, p. 43).

³⁷⁶ In the *Inṣāf* al-Bāqillānī clarifies this point: 'The meaning of *muḥadth* is: what was not, then was' (p. 16). This is seen to be in accordance with such Prophetic traditions as the one saying: 'When they said to him: O Messenger of God, inform us about the beginning of this matter! He said: Yes. God was and nothing else was, then God created (all) things' (p. 29).

³⁷⁷ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, p. 21.

chapter on ‘the affirmation of the creator,’ God’s existence is not under discussion, but taken for granted, and that all al-Bāqillānī seeks to prove on the basis of the createdness of the world is God’s being sole creator? We shall see that there is in fact no contradiction involved and that al-Bāqillānī’s reference to God’s existence which is known only through pondering over His signs must not be understood the way it is used in the traditional arguments for God’s existence. Al-Bāqillānī does not refer to a proof of God’s existence along the lines of a cosmological argument. Rather, it turns out that the knowledge of God’s existence is mentioned by al-Bāqillānī as part of the declaration that God is completely different from creation. To declare God’s oneness and uniqueness (*al-tawḥīd lahu*), we are told, is one aspect of belief in God (*al-īmān bi’llāh*).³⁷⁸ The affirmation of God’s *tawḥīd* likewise includes a number of aspects. Al-Bāqillānī refers to the Sufi by the name of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Būshanjī (d. 348/960) who was reportedly once asked what *tawḥīd* means, to which he replied: ‘It is that you know that He has no similarity to the essences (*dhawāt*) (of created things) and that the (divine) attributes must not be denied.’³⁷⁹ Al-Bāqillānī further presents the opinion of some theologians that ‘it [i.e., *al-tawḥīd*] is that one knows that He is different from them [i.e., humans] through His eternity, just like they are different from Him through their originatedness.’³⁸⁰ Finally, we are given the following definition: ‘Declaring Him one and unique is the affirmation that He is real (*thābit*) and existent (*mawjūd*), one unique godhead (*ilāh*) and the object of worship – nothing is like Him [i.e., Q. 42.11].’³⁸¹ We can infer from these definitions of God’s *tawḥīd* the following: it is the theologian’s task, who defends the principles of religion, to establish God’s essence as being different from the essences of created things. This means that God is affirmed as eternal, while creation is originated. Another aspect, which is not explicitly mentioned in al-Bāqillānī, but upon which most theologians agreed, is that God is neither atom, nor body, nor accident, which the world (i.e., creation) is composed of.³⁸² We must here bear in mind that according to the Ash‘arite

³⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 32.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 31.

³⁸¹ Ibid., p. 22.

³⁸² Al-Shahrastānī gives this position in his *Nihāya* (p. 103 of the Arabic text): ‘The *ahl al-ḥaqq* maintain that God does not resemble the created things and they do not resemble Him in any

doctrine, essence and existence are one and the same thing.³⁸³ Classifying God's essence means characterising His existence. Just as God's essence is known only in contradistinction to creation, it is true for an Ash'arite such as al-Bāqillānī that God's existence is known – as being eternal, non-corporeal, etc. – 'through the compelling proofs contained in His deeds,' as it appears in al-Bāqillānī's above statement. That al-Bāqillānī speaks of God's existence where he means God's essence is in fact confirmed in the *Tamhīd*. There he states, seeking to defend the Ash'arite conception of certain divine attributes as hypostatic entities subsisting in God's essence: 'It has been shown that the act which proves the agent's being knowing and powerful must be connected with an object (*madlūl*). This object cannot be the essence (*nafs*) of the agent or his existence (*wujūdahu*), nor an attribute which has to do with his essence (*nafsihi*) since it has been established that saying that He is knowing and powerful is more (*zā'id 'alā*) than saying that He is a thing (*shay'*) and existent (*mawjūd*).'³⁸⁴

What, however, about the statement that the affirmation of God's *tawhīd* comprises 'that He is real (*thābit*) and existent (*mawjūd*)'? Al-Bāqillānī explains elsewhere in the *Inṣāf* that being existent belongs to the attributes of God just as being eternal, one, living and others.³⁸⁵ To affirm God as existent is therefore related to the aspect of God's *tawhīd* phrased by al-Būshanjī as that 'the (divine) attributes must not be denied.' Yet, there is more to it. For the Ash'arites, saying that something is existent – or we should rather say: *an* existent – is the same as saying that it is a 'thing (*shay'*), being (*kā'in*) and established (*thābit*).'³⁸⁶ Al-

respect – nothing is like Him... The Creator is not an atom (*jawhar*), nor a body (*jism*), nor an accident (*'araḍ*). He is not in a place, nor in time. He is not receptive to accidents and is not the substrate of originated things.'

³⁸³ Al-Ash'arī reports in his *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn (al-juz' al-awwal*, p. 250) on the views of several theologians and schools, such as Ibn Kullāb and the Mu'tazilites, the Khawārij and the Murji'ites, that they all held that 'His essence (*dhātahu*) is He and His self (*nafsahu*) is He, and He is an existent not due to (the *ma'nā* of) existence.' See Frank 1982, pp. 268-271 for the Ash'arite position on essence and existence.

³⁸⁴ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (1947), p. 153. In this particular section, al-Bāqillānī does evidently not use the term *dhāt* to refer to God's essence, which would later become the most widely-used term among theologians. Yet, he does employ it elsewhere where he divides God's attributes in two qualitatively different types: *ṣifāt dhātihi*, the attributes of essence, and *ṣifāt af'ālihi*, the attributes of deed (*al-Tamhīd* (1957), p. 215. Compare also the *Inṣāf*, p. 25).

³⁸⁵ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, p. 18.

³⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 15. Compare al-Ash'arī's *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn (al-juz' al-thānī*, p. 202) on the disagreement between the early *mutakallimūn* about the meaning of 'thing (*shay'*): 'The

Bāqillānī evidently relates the issue of God's being an existent to one of the *mutakallimūn's* debated issues, that is, the question of whether it is legitimate to speak of God as a 'thing'.³⁸⁷ Does the Qur'ān not say about God {There is nothing like Him (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay'*)},³⁸⁸ hence seemingly implying that no 'thing' is like God? And does it not at the same time state: {Say, 'What (*ayy shay'*) counts most as a witness?' Say, 'God...'},³⁸⁹ giving the impression that God is a 'thing'? Al-Bāqillānī himself adduces both verses where he states that God is an existent.³⁹⁰ He must also arrive at the conclusion that 'He (Praised!) is an existent, not a non-existent (*ma'dūm*)' since according to the Ash'arites 'the things that can be known are two: non-existent and existent; there is no third (option) in addition to them and no middle between them.'³⁹¹ Even though it is part of the affirmation of God's *tawḥīd* that He is entirely different from creation, He must nevertheless be acknowledged as an existent, an essence, a thing, a being and something established, just like this is true of created things. To deny this would mean to deny a divine attribute and to violate God's *tawḥīd*, hence al-Bāqillānī.

God has provided the theologian, who endeavours to establish these points, with one method which is 'speculation and pondering over the things God has created (*makhlūqāt Allāh*).'³⁹² Speculation about God's essence (*dhāt Allāh*) itself is forbidden, even though it is the object of the theologian's enquiry, since God Himself mentions in the Qur'ān those {who reflect on the creation of the

mushabbihā say: God is a *shay'* means He is a body (*jism*). Some people say it means He is an existent (*mawjūd*)... Al-Ṣāliḥī said: God is a *shay'* unlike (created) things means that He is eternal... Al-Jubbā'ī said: The word *shay'* denotes everything that can be known...and since God is known...it is necessary that He is a *shay'*.' Similar disagreement existed about the question of what it means to say that God is an existent (*mawjūd*) (ibid., *al-juz' al-thānī*, pp. 203-204): 'Al-Jubbā'ī said speaking of the Creator's being an existent means that He is known... Hishām b. al-Ḥakam said it means that He is a body... Some say: it means that He is a thing (*shay'*).' See Wisnovsky 2000, pp. 182-200 for the discussion surrounding the terms *mawjūd* and *shay'* in early *kalām*.

³⁸⁷ Compare al-Ash'arī's *Maqālāt al-islāmiyīn (al-juz' al-awwal*, p. 259) on this: 'The *mutakallimūn* are in disagreement whether the Creator (*al-bārī*) is to be called a 'thing (*shay'an*)' or not. There are two opinions: Jahm [b. Ṣafwān] and some Zaydis said that the Creator must not be called a 'thing' as the 'thing' is that which is created and has a likeness (*mithl*). All Muslims say that the Creator is a 'thing,' but unlike the (created) things.'

³⁸⁸ This is Q. 42.11.

³⁸⁹ This is Q. 6 19.

³⁹⁰ The former verse on p. 18, the latter on p. 15 of the *Inṣāf*.

³⁹¹ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, p. 15.

³⁹² Ibid., p. 28.

heavens and the earth}.³⁹³ ‘He did not say: on the creator,’³⁹⁴ al-Bāqillānī points out. The same is confirmed by the Qur’ānic story of Pharaoh and Abraham, al-Bāqillānī states, where the king asked the prophet ‘about God’s essence’ and received an answer alluding to ‘the created things which point to knowledge of Him.’³⁹⁵ Furthermore, creation is the proof ‘that He is...*rabb*’³⁹⁶ and ‘bears witness to His *rubūbiyya*.’³⁹⁷ We have discussed previously that a number of early theologians, such as al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm and al-Māturīdī, as well as the philosopher al-Kindī used this term to denote God’s role as creator. Al-Bāqillānī’s statements in the *Inṣāf* and the *Tamhīd* make clear that he, too, uses the createdness of the world as the foundation of the proof that God is the world’s creator, in accordance with what Scripture teaches.³⁹⁸

Conclusions

Al-Bāqillānī’s concern as a *mutakallim* consists in defending religious principles and doctrines by recourse to reason. This is also – and maybe especially – true for what the Qur’ān says about God’s role as creator of the world. Al-Bāqillānī’s ‘affirmation of the originatedness of the world’ and his ‘affirmation of the creator’ deal with the defence of precisely this issue. The proof from accidents establishes that the world is not eternal, but has a beginning of its existence, which is how al-Bāqillānī and his fellow theologians understood the Qur’ānic

³⁹³ This is Q. 3.191.

³⁹⁴ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, p. 28.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 28.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 28.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 21.

³⁹⁸ ‘Abd Allāh poses the following question: ‘These are the proofs al-Bāqillānī presented to affirm the existence of God, but it is natural that we ask: Is belief in the existence of God not inherent (*fiṭrī*) in the souls of humans...? So why were the *mutakallimūn*, and among them al-Bāqillānī, then concerned with proving His existence?’ (‘Abd Allāh 1986, p. 414) His attempt at an answer follows very much al-Bāqillānī’s own words where he speaks of God’s existence not being known necessarily, but only through reasoning, as discussed above. ‘Abd Allāh also relates al-Bāqillānī’s proofs to the concern of ‘refuting the *dahriyyūn*...who deny the creator and arranger for the world’ (ibid., p. 414). Since ‘Abd Allāh, however, identifies the objective of al-Bāqillānī’s proofs with that of classical arguments for God’s existence, it is evident where his understanding of al-Bāqillānī’s mentioning God’s existence diverges from the understanding of it proposed above by us. Also, the context in which ‘Abd Allāh mentions the *dahriyyūn* shows that he identifies them with atheists – the denial of the creator for the world means the denial of God’s existence, according to this view (this being a theme we will encounter further times in our chapters to come) –, while it has become clear that al-Bāqillānī rather focuses on the position that the world is eternal and a self-sufficient thing, but not on the question of whether this implies the denial of God altogether (it shall also become clear in the following chapters that the identification of the *dahriyyūn* with atheists is unconvincing).

description of the world as creation. The affirmation of the principle of causation for the *ghā'ib* in analogy to the *shāhid* allows the conclusion that the originated world did not come to exist by itself or due to chance; rather, a cause other than itself brought it about. The world must hence be God's creation, as God Himself states in the Qur'ān. The argument from particularisation proves that God is the cause of the world in a specific way: He is a creator endowed with will, not a necessary cause bereft of choice. The characteristic of will, which must be ascribed to the creator of the world, proves that a number of other beliefs al-Bāqillānī discusses erroneously give the attribute of being creator to entities other than God. To acknowledge God as sole creator is part of the affirmation of His oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*). Another aspect of the affirmation of *tawḥīd* is, according to al-Bāqillānī, to affirm all divine attributes, of which God's being (an) existent is one. This does, however, not relate to the question of God's existence in the traditional sense, but to the inherently Islamic debate, sparked by certain Qur'ānic statements, whether God is a thing and an existent just as creation consists of things and existents. This ties in with another aspect of the affirmation of God's *tawḥīd* which concerns the proof that His essence is unlike the essences of created things, in line with the Qur'ānic dictum that nothing exists like God. Al-Bāqillānī seeks to characterise God's essence through, and in contradistinction to, the characteristics of creation. Since according to the Ash'arite view essence and existence are one and the same, 'His existence and being are only known through the compelling proofs contained in His deeds':³⁹⁹ created existence is originated and consists of atoms and accidents – God's existence is eternal and of a wholly different kind. In all this, the objective to prove God's existence, in the sense of the term associated with it in western philosophy, is absent from al-Bāqillānī's works, despite the claim to the contrary we find in secondary sources.

³⁹⁹ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, p. 21.

Chapter Four: Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037)

Inniyya Allāh and *wujūd al-ilāh* as Things Sought in Metaphysics

In book 1, chapter 1 of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā'*, Ibn Sīnā is concerned with establishing the subject matter of metaphysics. He discusses several things which could be thought to be its subject matter, and he rules out all of them to establish finally the existent qua existent (*al-mawjūd bi-mā huwa mawjūd*) as metaphysics' true subject matter.⁴⁰⁰ In the course of this discussion, Ibn Sīnā asks: 'Is the subject matter of this science *inniyya Allāh* or is it not, this rather being something from among the things this science seeks (*maṭālib*)?'⁴⁰¹ In his translation of the *Metaphysics*, Michael E. Marmura suggests 'the existence of God'⁴⁰² for *inniyya Allāh* and remarks in a footnote that 'the term in Avicenna's writings often refers also to individual existence – hence the distinction between essence and existence is expressed as the distinction between *al-māhiyya* and *al-inniyya/anniyya*. In certain contexts it is best to translate *inniyya/anniyya* as 'existence.'⁴⁰³ Ibn Sīnā then explains why 'it is not possible that that (*dhālika*) is the subject matter'⁴⁰⁴: The subject matter of every science is something whose existence is accepted (*musallam al-wujūd*). The existence of the godhead (*wujūd al-ilāh*), however, cannot be accepted so that it could be made metaphysics' subject matter for the following reason: If it was the subject matter, it would follow that it [i.e. *wujūd al-ilāh*] would have to be accepted in metaphysics and sought in another science; or it would have to be accepted in metaphysics and not sought in any other science. Both options are wrong, Ibn Sīnā states. As for the first one, it cannot be sought in any other science because no science other than metaphysics has anything to do with 'affirming the godhead (*ithbāt al-ilāh*).'⁴⁰⁵ The second option is rejected as it would follow that 'it is either self-evident (*bayyinān bi-naḥsihi*) or cannot be shown through

⁴⁰⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 1, ch. 1, p. 6. All translations of the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifā'* are mine and the references refer to the Arabic text of Marmura's edition of it.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁰² Ibid., p. 3, lines 21-22.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., p. 383, f. 1.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 4.

rational speculation (*ma'yūsan 'an bayyānihi bi'l-naẓar*),⁴⁰⁶ which is denied. Rather, Ibn Sīnā states, 'there is proof for it (*'alayhi dalīlan*).'⁴⁰⁷ Having established that the existence of the subject matter of every science is accepted in it, and that *wujūd al-ilāh* cannot be accepted in metaphysics in this way, he concludes that 'the investigation of it (*al-baḥth 'anhu*) belongs in this science.'⁴⁰⁸ This investigation includes the following two aspects: 'one of them is the investigation of it (*baḥth 'anhu*) under the aspect of His existence (*wujūdihi*), and the other under the aspect of His attributes (*ṣifātihi*).'⁴⁰⁹ As for the aspect of 'His existence,' Ibn Sīnā gives an explanation of why this enquiry can only take place in metaphysics and no other science:

We will soon also make clear to you that the investigation of His existence (*wujūdihi*) can only take place in this science, because it has become clear to you already from the state of this science that it investigates the things that are essentially (*aṣḥlān*) separated from matter. You have glimpsed in the *Physics* that the godhead (*al-ilāh*) is not a body, and not the power of a body, rather He is one, free from matter and free from mixture with motion in every respect. Therefore, the investigation of it (*baḥth 'anhu*) belongs to this science.⁴¹⁰

Previously, Ibn Sīnā focused on explaining why the investigation of God's existence has to be undertaken at all and he named its not being self-evident as the reason. Now, Ibn Sīnā focuses on the question of why it is metaphysics, and no other science, that has to fulfil this task: God is not corporeal, as already alluded to by Ibn Sīnā in his works on physics. Only metaphysics deals with this kind of existents. In the *Dānish-nāma*, for instance, Ibn Sīnā explains that 'things are classified only into three kinds'⁴¹¹ with respect to their being,⁴¹² which is reflected in the threefold division of the speculative science:

Either (1) their being [i.e., that of the subject matter of these sciences] is in no way connected to sensible matter, mixture and motion... Or (2) there are other kinds of subjects whose beings are not separated from sensible matter and things in motion. The imagination can separate these, however, because, by definition, they are not necessarily connected to a body of sensible matter nor to what is

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., p. 4.

⁴¹¹ Ibn Sīnā, *Dānish-nāma*, ch. 1, p. 12.

⁴¹² Note that in the *Dānish-nāma*, written in Persian, Ibn Sīnā makes use of the term *hastī*, translated as 'being,' where in his Arabic works he would refer to *wujūd*, translated as 'existence.' On the subtle differences see Morewedge's explanation in the glossary (pp. 300-302) to the *Dānish-nāma*.

susceptible of motion. ... Or (3) other kinds of subject are such that their being is in materials, and defining and imagining them are related to matter and to the nature of motion.⁴¹³

The first division poses the kind of being metaphysics deals with.

The Meaning of *wujūd al-ilāh* – What Does Metaphysics Investigate?

A number of questions arise from this. When Ibn Sīnā speaks of metaphysics' task of investigating God's existence, and when he states that God's existence is neither self-evident, nor unprovable – what exactly does he refer to? The view we encounter in the secondary literature is that Ibn Sīnā's reference to the investigation of God's existence denotes his endeavour to prove that God exists, as it is understood in the classical arguments for God's existence.⁴¹⁴ Yet, when we take into consideration a passage from Ibn Sīnā's *Ta'liqāt* a somewhat different picture emerges. There we read the following:

The natural science has a subject-matter...and that subject-matter is the body insofar as it is moving and resting... As for the enquiry about whether the body is made up of atoms, whether it is finite or not, whether every body has extension and form or not, this relates to the science that is after nature [i.e., metaphysics]... And this is the enquiry about *the kind of its existence* (*baḥṭh 'an naḥw wujūdihi*) which is characteristic of it (*alladhī yakhaṣṣuhu*).⁴¹⁵

Furthermore, Ibn Sīnā explains:

The speech about whether the body is made up of atoms is the speech about *the kind of its existence* (*fī-naḥw wujūdihi*). And likewise, the speech about whether it is made up of matter and form. This is not related to physics. ... Movement belongs to the accidents of the subject matter of physics, which is the body insofar as it is moving or resting, therefore to establish movement has to take place in physics. But movement does not belong to the parts of the body insofar as it is made up of form and matter, therefore establishing them (*ithbātuhā*) belongs to metaphysics.⁴¹⁶

In these passages, Ibn Sīnā touches upon the aforementioned issue that the subject matter of every science is accepted in it in terms of its existence, but needs to be established in another science. The subject matter of physics is the body, yet only insofar as the accidents of movement and rest occur to it. The

⁴¹³ Ibn Sīnā, *Dānish-nāma*, ch. 1, p. 12.

⁴¹⁴ See, for example, Mayer 2001; Marmura 2005, p. 131 et seqq.; Bertolacci 2006, p. 120 et seqq.; Netton 1994, p. 172 et seqq.; Goodman 1992, p. 63 et seqq.; Fakhry 1986, p. 8 et seqq.; Verbeke 1983, p. 14.

⁴¹⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, pp. 171-172.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., p. 172.

existence of physics' subject matter, that is, body, however, firstly, is established in metaphysics and, secondly, relates to the body's consisting of atoms, form and matter, as well as its being finite and extended. A look at Ibn Sīnā's various books on metaphysics indeed reveals that a great deal of attention is dedicated to establishing this: The entire book 4 of the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifā'*, for instance, deals with 'substance and its division' (ch. 1), with 'ascertaining corporeal substance and what is composed from it' (ch. 2), with establishing that 'corporeal matter is not devoid of form' (ch. 3), and, finally, that 'form is prior to matter in rank of existence' (ch. 4). The importance of this discussion for our question lies in the fact that Ibn Sīnā does not seem to mean by 'establishing the existence of the subject matter of physics' that he intends to prove that there is such thing as 'body' in this world, thus disproving its non-existence. Rather, Ibn Sīnā himself explicitly states that establishing the existence of 'body' means 'the enquiry about the *kind* of existence which is characteristic of it,⁴¹⁷ so that this particular kind of existence can be accepted in another science. In analogy to this, it therefore appears that what Ibn Sīnā means when he speaks of the investigation of God's existence is not what is meant when we speak of the proof of God's existence in the traditional sense. The investigation of God's existence in metaphysics refers to its task of establishing what type of existence God's existence is. The existence characteristic of body is corporeal existence; God's existence is characterised as not being corporeal, as Ibn Sīnā indicated in the *Physics*, and it is metaphysics task to investigate this. Yet, *that* God is, that He belongs to the entirety of existents, is not the issue in question.

Another point requiring clarification concerns Ibn Sīnā's statement that God's existence is not self-evident (*bayyin bi-nafsihi*). Does he mean by this that the knowledge that God (the object of a believer's worship, one might say) actually exists is not self-evident, as secondary literature has it? Or might he not rather intend to say that God's existence *as* being free from matter and motion, this being the existence 'which is characteristic for'⁴¹⁸ Him, is not a self-evident matter? After all, why should one not maintain that God is material just as

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., p. 172.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 171-172.

creation is? To answer this question, let us consider the following passage from the *Shifā'*, which follows shortly after the discussion of metaphysics' subject matter:

Also, the knowledge of the absolute causes comes about after the knowledge of the affirmation of the causes for the things that have causes. ... As for sensation, it only leads to concomitance. ... This is not something primary and (self-)evident (*bayyinan awwaliyyan*)... And it is not necessarily self-evident (*bayyinan bi-nafsihi*), even if close to being self-evident (*min al-bayyin bi-nafsihi*) to the mind, that originated things have some kind of principle for them.⁴¹⁹

This passage clarifies Ibn Sīnā's use of the term *bayyin (bi-nafsihi)*/(self-)evident in line with how he uses it in his discussion whether *inniyya Allāh* can be the subject matter of metaphysics: Something is self-evident when it is beyond the need of being established through proof. Neither God's existence (*wujūd al-ilāh*) nor the truth of causal relations, mentioned here, qualify for this.

Ibn Sīnā furthermore links the idea of being self-evident to being primary (*awwalī*). The meaning of *awwalī* becomes evident in the *Kitāb al-Burhān* of the *Najāt* where Ibn Sīnā explains: 'The *awwaliyyāt* are issues (*qaḍāyā*) and premises (*muqaddimāt*) that occur to humans, through their mental power (*'aqliyya*), without any cause (*sabab*) which makes necessary their confirmation (*taṣdīq*) except for their essences (*illā dhawātihā*).'⁴²⁰ The *awwaliyyāt* are, therefore, tantamount to *a priori* knowledge as they are known, and their truth confirmed, without recourse to experience. In the *Ta'liqāt* Ibn Sīnā draws the same picture when he characterises primary knowledge (*ma'rifa awwaliyya*) as not acquired (*min ghayr iktisāb*).⁴²¹ In the *Shifā'*, Ibn Sīnā likewise confirms the *a priori* nature of knowledge that falls under the category of being primary:

The ideas of the existent, the thing and the necessary are impressed in the soul in a primary way (*irtisāman awwaliyyan*). This impression does not need to be brought about by (other) things to be known from them. Hence, it is similar to primary principles (*mabādi' awwaliyya*) in the category of confirmation (*al-taṣdīq*). ... Similarly, in terms of things conceived, there are things which are

⁴¹⁹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 1, ch. 1, pp. 5-6.

⁴²⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, *al-Burhān*, p. 101. See also Deborah L. Black in Adamson 2012, p. 124 et seqq. on the *awwaliyyāt*.

⁴²¹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, p. 35.

principles for conception (*taṣawwur*), while they are conceived by their essences (*li-dhawātihā*).⁴²²

Having understood the sense in which Ibn Sīnā employs the notions of 'being primary' and 'being self-evident,' we need to return to our question of how they relate to the issue of God's existence.

In all his works on metaphysics, Ibn Sīnā presents a particular twofold division of existence. In the *Ishārāt*, he states: 'Every existent, when you consider it in terms of its essence, not considering anything else, existence is either necessary (*yajibu*) for it in itself (*fī-nafsihi*) or not.'⁴²³ Turning to that for which existence is not necessary, he specifies:

If it is not necessary, it cannot be said: it is impossible (*mumtani'*) in itself after it has been assumed to be existent; rather, if a condition is coupled with it considering its essence, like the condition of the non-existence of its cause, then it becomes impossible, or like the condition of the existence of its cause, then it becomes necessary (*wājib*). But if there is no condition coupled with it, neither its having a cause nor the cause's non-existence, then the third case remains for its essence, namely possibility (*imkān*): therefore, it is considering its essence the thing which is not necessary and not impossible.⁴²⁴

Ibn Sīnā explains concerning that for which existence is necessary (*wājib*) that this implies 'the assuredness of existence (*ta'akkud al-wujūd*).'⁴²⁵ It seems rather obvious, one could argue, that Ibn Sīnā would ascribe necessary existence, rather than possible existence, to God, even if this is not stated explicitly in the *Shifā'*. In the *Ta'liqāt*, on the other hand, Ibn Sīnā is very clear about this. There he states: 'We know about the First [i.e., God] that He is necessarily existent by virtue of His essence, which is primary knowledge, not acquired.'⁴²⁶ This leaves no doubt that it is God to whom the necessity of existence must be ascribed, and moreover that our knowledge of this belongs in the category of primary intelligibles or *awwalīyyāt*. One could, therefore, argue that it seems questionable how God's existence (as opposed to there not being a God) could not be regarded as self-evident by Ibn Sīnā, considering the *a priori* nature of our knowledge that existence contains necessary existence and that

⁴²² Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 1, ch. 5, pp. 22-23.

⁴²³ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 447.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., p. 447.

⁴²⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 1, ch. 5, p. 28.

⁴²⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, p. 35.

this describes God's existence. Contrary to this, Herbert Davidson has, however, argued that Ibn Sīnā's twofold division of existence 'has been conducted exclusively in the realm of concepts, and he has not committed himself to the existence of anything. He has merely stated that whatever might be assumed to exist would have to be classified as either necessarily existent by virtue of itself or necessarily existent by virtue of another.'⁴²⁷ Davidson's remark implies that, even if it is granted that necessary existence represents God, God's being existent cannot be self-evident since it depends on showing that there really is *something* existent and that it is necessary in itself. This objection seems to contradict Ibn Sīnā's own statements in two ways: Firstly, he holds that existence itself cannot possibly be denied – 'there is no doubt that there is existence,'⁴²⁸ as the *Najāt* has it. In the *Shifā'*, the reality of existence is ever inscribed on the human mind.⁴²⁹ Secondly, 'necessity' is likewise counted among those things whose reality is known immediately and it applies to existence as part of the twofold division: Ibn Sīnā refers to 'the state of necessity, that is, necessary existence...and the state of possibility and its true nature,'⁴³⁰ among a number of other things, as being 'the sequels of existence insofar as it is existence.'⁴³¹ This leaves no doubt that Ibn Sīnā's twofold division of existence must not be understood as belong in the world of concepts only without corresponding to reality. The picture that emerges from all this is that God's being an existent constitutes, according to Ibn Sīnā, primary, *a priori* knowledge and is consequentially a self-evident matter.

From this, something else of importance follows: With regards to Ibn Sīnā's enquiry about metaphysics' subject matter, where he maintains that *wujūd al-ilāh* is not a self-evident matter and can hence not be taken for granted (*musallam*) in metaphysics so that *inniyya* Allāh could be its subject matter – it is simply not possible that he means by it God's being an existent. *Wujūd al-ilāh* must be understood in a different sense, and the passage quoted above from the *Ta'liqāt*, referring to 'body' being the subject matter of physics, suggest that this

⁴²⁷ Davidson 1987, p. 293.

⁴²⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt, al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 271.

⁴²⁹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā', al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 1, ch. 5, pp. 22-23.

⁴³⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā', al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 1, ch. 4, p. 19.

⁴³¹ Ibid., p. 21.

is the *kind* of existence which must be ascribed to God. It would be a mistake to assume that Ibn Sīnā's mentioning existence with regards to God can only refer to the dichotomy between being *existent* and being *non-existent*. He clearly uses the term *wujūd* where he introduces three different types of existence, such as in the following statement: 'The existence of every existent is due to the First because it emanates (*fā'id*) from Him, but His existence is due to Himself, hence His existence is different from the existence of the other existents and nothing is of the *kind* of His existence (*min jins wujūdihi*).'⁴³² Ibn Sīnā writes in the same manner that 'the existence of the creator is an intellectually perceived existence (*wujūd ma'qūl*), that is, pure existence (*wujūd mujarrad*),'⁴³³ thus distinguishing it from the corporeal existence of creation. We should also note that, as opposed to the self-evident character of God's being an existent, it is the *kind* of God's existence which Ibn Sīnā himself identifies as a rather obscure and certainly not self-evident issue. Towards the very end of the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifā'*, Ibn Sīnā deals with 'the manner of the Prophet's call to God (Most-High!)' and he explains that it does not belong to the duties of the prophet to

involve them [i.e., the common people] in anything pertaining to knowledge of God (Most-High!) beyond knowledge that He is one, truth, and has no comparison. Hence, to go beyond this and obligate them to assert His existence (*wujūdahu*) as not being referred to in place, and as not being classified by words, and as not being outside the world and not inside it, nor anything of this kind, this is too much for them... Only very few of them can conceive the true nature (*ḥaqīqa*) of this *tawḥīd* and transcendence (*al-tanzīh*), hence they would not hesitate to deny such an existence (*mithl hādhā al-wujūd*).⁴³⁴

The Meaning of the Term *inniyya Allāh* – What does Metaphysics Seek?

Let us now turn our attention once more to Ibn Sīnā's discussion at the beginning of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā'* whether *inniyya Allāh* could be metaphysics' subject matter. We recall that Marmura translates the expression as 'the existence of God,'⁴³⁵ thus rendering *inniyya* the same as *wujūd* where Ibn Sīnā speaks of the investigation of *wujūd al-ilāh*. The reason why *inniyya Allāh*

⁴³² Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, pp. 157-158.

⁴³³ Ibid., p. 60.

⁴³⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 10, ch. 2, pp. 365-366.

⁴³⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 1, ch. 1, p. 3.

is not metaphysics' subject matter, thus Ibn Sīnā's explanation runs, is that *wujūd al-ilāh* needs to be established by metaphysics. Since we have shown that *wujūd al-ilāh* does not refer to God's existence (in the traditional sense), the question arises of what *inniyya Allāh* really stands for. A number of passages in the *Shifā'* allow us to infer what Ibn Sīnā means by it. He explains: 'There is no *māhiyya* for the necessarily existent other than that He is necessarily existent, and this is the *inniyya*.'⁴³⁶ He carries on: 'Every possessor of a *māhiyya* is caused. All other things besides the necessarily existent have *māhiyyāt*.'⁴³⁷ This clarifies that *inniyya* is contrasted with *māhiyya*, and that the former denotes the necessity of existence which has no cause, whereas the latter refers to something possibly existent which requires a cause it to exist. Elsewhere in the *Shifā'* Ibn Sīnā speaks of 'the true nature (*ḥaqīqa*) of necessary existence,' which is conveyed by the term *inniyya*, and explains that it is 'only the assuredness of existence.'⁴³⁸ In this case, existence, he carries on, is 'a necessary concomitant (*lāzim*) for the true nature.'⁴³⁹ This reference to the true nature of the necessarily existent is of importance for our quest to understand what *inniyya Allāh* denotes and what metaphysics seeks with regards to it. A look at the *Ta'liqāt* helps clarify this. There, too, Ibn Sīnā speaks about true natures and we learn: 'Humans cannot grasp the true nature of things...but they grasp one of the necessary concomitants (*lawāzim*) or one of the specifics (*khawāṣṣ*).'⁴⁴⁰ God, whom Ibn Sīnā usually refers to as the First (*al-awwal*) in the *Ta'liqāt*, has a true nature just like everything else in this world, yet humans do not know this true nature, they only know that existence is necessary for Him. Ibn Sīnā clarifies that the necessity of existence in God belongs to His necessary concomitants or *lawāzim*.⁴⁴¹ It should be recalled at this point that our knowledge of this particular concomitant of God constitutes, according to Ibn Sīnā himself, 'primary knowledge, not acquired.'⁴⁴² The necessity of existence poses only one among a number of God's necessary concomitants, to which 'creation (*al-*

⁴³⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā', al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 8, ch. 4, p. 276.

⁴³⁷ Ibid., p. 276.

⁴³⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā', al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 1, ch. 7, p. 36.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, p. 34.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., p. 35.

⁴⁴² Ibid., p. 35.

khalq)...just as oneness (*waḥdāniyya*) and knowledge (*‘ilm*)⁴⁴³ belong. What singles out God’s *lāzim* of necessary existence is that it is ‘the most specific of the concomitants of the true nature and the first of them, because the necessity of existence belongs to the true nature without being through other concomitants (*huwa lahā bi-lā wāsiṭa lāzim ākhir*).’⁴⁴⁴ Thanks to this particular necessary concomitant we are able to learn about others of God’s necessary concomitants (or specifics/*khawāṣṣ* which Ibn Sīnā uses interchangeably): ‘We establish something that is specific and we know it is from among its *khāṣṣa* or *khawāṣṣ*, then we know that this thing has other *khawāṣṣ* thanks to what we knew first.’⁴⁴⁵ Finally, we are told that ‘the true nature of the First is His *anniyya*’⁴⁴⁶ and that ‘the true nature of the necessarily existent is the *anniyya*.’⁴⁴⁷ We have already seen that Ibn Sīnā applies the name ‘necessarily existent’ to God. Elsewhere, he speaks of our knowledge ‘that the necessarily existent due to Himself is the name (*ism*) of the First.’⁴⁴⁸ This leaves no doubt that, when Ibn Sīnā speaks about the true nature of the First and the true nature of the necessarily existent due to Himself, he refers to God. It is important to note that *anniyya* is not the proper name of the true nature of God. Ibn Sīnā remarks: ‘The human minds do not realise the essence (*kanh*) and true nature of the First and the First has a true nature which has no name (*ism*) in our view.’⁴⁴⁹ So how does *anniyya* relate to God’s true nature and what does the term *anniyya* denote? We are told the following: ‘Existence belongs to the concomitants of the essences (*māhiyyāt*), not to their constituents (*muqawwimāt*), but regarding the First, who has no essence (*māhiyya*) other than the *anniyya*...’⁴⁵⁰ Furthermore: ‘He is not caused because He has no essence (*māhiyya*), rather He has *al-anniyya* since every possessor of an essence is caused because this possessor’s existence is not due to his essence but from another.’⁴⁵¹ We can infer from these passages that *anniyya*, as used in

⁴⁴³ Ibid., p. 157.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 185.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 35.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 184.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 186.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 161.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 185.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., p. 70.

the *Ta'liqāt*, conveys the exact same meaning as *inniyya* which Ibn Sīnā employs in the *Shifā'*.

It might appear as if a contradiction arises from all this: Ibn Sīnā initially said that God's true nature is not known, only His necessary concomitants, which follow from His true nature, and in particular the most specific of them, this being the necessity of His existence as denoted by *anniyya*. So how is it possible that he equates *anniyya* with God's true nature when *anniyya* denotes the first of what is only one of God's necessary concomitants? Ibn Sīnā clarifies this issue when he states: 'If the true nature of the First was known, then the necessity of existence would be the explanation (*sharḥ*) of the name of that true nature.'⁴⁵² This passage shows that God's true nature, which in itself has no name, is called *anniyya* because it takes its name from the most specific of God's concomitants, which serves as an explanation of the otherwise obscure true nature.⁴⁵³

We may infer from this discussion the following: It is certainly wrong to translate *inniyya Allāh* in the context of the discussion of metaphysics' subject matter as 'the existence of God,' as Marmura does. It would be equally mistaken to render this expression 'the necessity of God's existence,' as this is clearly something that belongs to the self-evident truths of metaphysics and does not need to be established first. It is much more convincing that Ibn Sīnā uses *inniyya Allah* in the present context to denote God's true nature, which to investigate indeed belongs to the things sought by metaphysics. God's true nature or *inniyya* cannot be metaphysics' subject matter for the sole reason that the kind of God's existence (*wujūd*) cannot be taken for granted in this science. Our conclusion is further supported when we take into account that Ibn Sīnā declares the purpose of philosophy (i.e., metaphysics)⁴⁵⁴ as to 'determine the true natures of all things (*ḥaqā'iq al-ashyā' kullihā*) inasmuch as it is possible for humans.'⁴⁵⁵ We should also bear in mind that according to Ibn Sīnā, the

⁴⁵² Ibid., p. 36.

⁴⁵³ The same logic applies to the true natures of all other things besides God: 'That whose true nature is its *anniyya*, has no *māhiyya*. In the case of other things, meant by *māhiyya* is the true nature. ... The true nature of substance (*jawhar*) [as an example of things other than God] is the *māhiyya*' (Ibid., p. 186).

⁴⁵⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *Dānish-nāma*, ch. 1, p. 12.

⁴⁵⁵ Quoted in Inati 1996, p. 233 from Ibn Sīnā's *al-Madkhal*.

investigation of *inniyya Allāh* includes the aspect of His existence (*wujūd*) as well as the aspect of His attributes.⁴⁵⁶

An Ontological Proof of God's Existence?

Contrary to the picture that has emerged, it has been argued by Toby Mayer that Ibn Sīnā's aforementioned twofold division of existence hints at an ontological proof of God's existence.⁴⁵⁷ The ontological nature of Ibn Sīnā's proof becomes most apparent, thus Mayer's claim, in the *Ishārāt*. There, after having presented his division of existence, Ibn Sīnā turns to that for which existence is necessary due to itself and states: 'If it is necessary, then it is the Truth in Himself (*al-ḥaqq bi-dhātihi*), the Necessarily Existent due to His essence (*al-wājib al-wujūd min dhātihi*), namely the Self-Subsistent (*al-qayyūm*).'⁴⁵⁸ Mayer assumes: 'Ibn Sīnā seems immediately to proceed to infer the actual, *extra-mental*, reality of God. ... In this, the *shaykh* makes the crucial ontological move from the idea of a 'necessary' division in the dichotomy of existence...to the affirmation of a particular instance of it in reality, a divinity.'⁴⁵⁹ This reading of Ibn Sīnā can be questioned in two ways: Firstly, one could pose that all he establishes is that one division of existence, this being existence which is necessary considering the essence, not the other division he mentions, represents God. This is in accordance with the *Ta'liqāt* where Ibn Sīnā declares our knowledge that God's existence is necessary an *a priori* insight. To make the point that it is God who is necessarily existent, is part of Ibn Sīnā's endeavour to investigate God's particular existence – which also means distinguishing it from the kind of existence characteristic of creation – and His true nature. This concern, however, is different from the concern of ontological arguments for God's existence. Secondly, while it is true that Ibn Sīnā does apply the name *al-ḥaqq* (the Truth) elsewhere to God,⁴⁶⁰ not least because it is a Qur'ānic term, as is the name *al-qayyūm* (the Self-Subsistent),⁴⁶¹ it could be argued that he does not use them as proper names of God in the above passage from the *Ishārāt*.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā', al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 1, ch. 1, p. 4.

⁴⁵⁷ Mayer 2001, p. 22 et seqq.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt, al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 447.

⁴⁵⁹ Mayer 2001, p. 23.

⁴⁶⁰ For example, Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā', al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 9, ch. 1, p. 304.

⁴⁶¹ Q. 22.6 has: *Allāh huwa al-ḥaqq*. Q. 3.2 has: *Allāh lā ilāh illā huwa al-ḥayy al-qayyūm*.

Rather, he offers further explanation of what *al-wājib al-wujūd min dhātihi* means. It is, of course, no coincidence that these alternative terms are God's very names, since Ibn Sīnā's ultimate objective is, we submit, to confirm Scripture. Rather than attempting to prove that God really exists, Ibn Sīnā intends to show that necessary existence, expressed through whatever term, only belongs to God, while all other existents are different from Him in their being possibly existent. At this stage, however, one has to bear in mind, Ibn Sīnā has not yet clarified that the terms *al-ḥaqq*, *al-qayyūm* and *al-wājib al-wujūd min dhātihi* do not apply to the world. We have seen previously that the *mutakallimūn* in fact dealt with the claim that the world simply is, from all eternity, independent of any outside cause.⁴⁶² Ibn Sīnā seems to have in mind the very same issue which poses a problem to the claims of Scripture.

Mayer, who evidently conceives of the purpose of the twofold division of existence as being a different one, then asserts that it is in fact a passage from Ibn Sīnā's *Najāt* which 'better brings out the ontological character of Ibn Sīnā's reasoning in this part of the proof.'⁴⁶³ After having made the famous utterance that 'there is no doubt that there is existence,'⁴⁶⁴ Ibn Sīnā states: 'Every existence is either necessary or possible. If it is necessary, then the existence of the necessary is certain (*fa-qad ṣaḥḥa wujūd al-wājib*)...and if it is possible, then we will make clear that the existence of the possible ends in the necessarily existent.'⁴⁶⁵ According to Mayer's reading of this passage, Ibn Sīnā intends to show that God exists, and he does so by focusing on the *certainty* of God's necessary. Yet, a close look at Ibn Sīnā's statement rather suggests that his intention is to compare the necessarily existent with the possibly existent in terms of their respective *claim* to existence, as it were. That for which existence is possible has existence only thanks to the necessarily existent, in contrast to that for which existence is a necessity: Its being an existent is a certainty, without the need for, or reference to, another. In the *Shifā'* we find the same thought as expressed in the above passage from the *Najāt*: 'As for the truth (*al-ḥaqq*), it is understood as existence in external things (*a'yān*) absolutely, and as

⁴⁶² See, for example, Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, part 1, p. 37.

⁴⁶³ Mayer 2001, p. 24.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 271.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 271.

perpetual existence (*al-wujūd al-dā'im*)... Hence, the necessarily existent is the truth in itself permanently, and the possibly existent is truth due to another.'⁴⁶⁶ Here, too, the focus is on the fact that necessary existence means eternal and uncaused existence, while possible existence depends on another for its actualisation. It can be argued that to read Ibn Sīnā's division of existence into essentially necessary and essentially possible as pointing to an ontological argument for God's existence is erroneous on two accounts: Firstly, it stems from the mistaken assumption that Ibn Sīnā's speaking of the investigation of God's existence refers to a traditional argument for God's existence. Secondly, it seems to misunderstand Ibn Sīnā's real concern, which is a comparison of two types of existence.

A Cosmological Proof of God's Existence?

The most common view we encounter in secondary literature, however, is that Ibn Sīnā does not present an ontological proof, but rather a cosmological one – or that his cosmological argument dominates. Herbert Davidson has expressed this view, arguing that Ibn Sīnā 'does not...wish to offer an a priori or ontological proof of the existence of God, but rather a new form of the cosmological proof.'⁴⁶⁷ Lenn Goodman agrees on this and states: 'The core of the new metaphysics is Avicenna's argument for the existence of God, a cosmological argument.'⁴⁶⁸ Majid Fakhry, too, ascribes 'the cosmological mode of reasoning to prove His existence'⁴⁶⁹ to Ibn Sīnā. Even Mayer, who defended the ontological character of Ibn Sīnā's proof, admits that the 'treatment of the overall proof as cosmological may turn out to be far from misleading, insofar as the greater part of it does not reason on the basis of the first division in the dichotomy of existence, the necessary, but on the basis of the second, the contingent.'⁴⁷⁰ The parallels between Ibn Sīnā's proof and the proofs employed by previous *mutakallimūn* are obvious, Goodman argues, as the 'appeal to contingency' is

⁴⁶⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā', al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 1, ch. 8, p. 38. Compare also the *Dānish-nāma* (ch. 18-19, pp. 47-48) where Ibn Sīnā makes the same point.

⁴⁶⁷ Davidson 1987, p. 298.

⁴⁶⁸ Goodman 1992, p. 63.

⁴⁶⁹ Fakhry 1986, p. 15.

⁴⁷⁰ Mayer 2001, p. 25. See also Netton (1994, pp. 172-174) who mentions 'the ontological proof alongside '[t]he proof from necessity,' 'the proof from movement' and 'the proof from causality.'

something that characterises the *kalām* method to establish God's existence.⁴⁷¹ It is indeed the case that Ibn Sīnā presents a proof which is very much reminiscent of a cosmological argument and which takes into account the notions of causality and contingency.⁴⁷² Yet, just as in the case of the theologians before him, we argue that Ibn Sīnā's cosmological argument, as it were, does not serve the purpose of proving God's existence, as it is understood in secondary literature. Rather, just like them, he is concerned with vindicating Scripture's declaration that the world is creation by God. While it may therefore be true that he employs an argument, the character of which could be called cosmological (since it starts from an effect), it is important to note that it is not intended to prove that God (conceived of as the necessarily existent due to Himself) exists, but with the purpose of establishing a causal connection between God and creation, which are in the realm of metaphysics conceived of in terms of their types of existence: necessary or possible.⁴⁷³

Before explaining the details of this, let us turn to Ibn Sīnā's proof itself. After having divided existence into the necessary and the possible, he turns his attention to an assumed existent which is possible in itself. It requires, *per definitionem*, a cause which gives precedence to its existence over its non-existence.⁴⁷⁴ This cause in turn is either necessarily or possibly existent in itself. By demonstrating that an infinite regress of causes is impossible, there must

⁴⁷¹ Goodman 1992, p. 63. Fakhry (1986, p. 8) similarly characterises Ibn Sīnā's proof as an argument from the contingency or possibility of the world.

⁴⁷² Sabine Schmidtke (2000, p. 39) likewise speaks of 'de[m] von Ibn Sīnā formulierten Beweis..., der von der Kontingenz der Welt ausgeht.' Egbert Meyer (1980, pp. 227-228), who analysed Ibn Sīnā's *Risāla 'arshiyya*, ascribes the same kind of proof for God's existence to him: 'Ibn Sīnā unterscheidet hier unter ausschließlicher Verwendung des Gottesbeweises a contingentia mundi zunächst zwischen dem Seienden (*mawǧūd*), das eine Ursache (*sabab*) seines Seins (*wuǧūd*), und solchem, das keine Ursache seines Seins hat.'

⁴⁷³ Peter Adamson ("From the necessary existent to God" in Adamson 2013, pp. 170-189), however, has argued: 'If one were asked to name Avicenna's greatest contribution to the history of philosophy, one might reasonably choose his proof of God's existence. The proof shows that there must be a 'necessary existent'...' (p. 170). He therefore identifies the intention behind Ibn Sīnā's proof as an entirely different one: 'God' is conceived in a certain way (i.e., as the necessary existent) and the task is to show that 'God' really does exist. This is different from our suggestion that the intention is to show that created existence (i.e., possible existence) is ultimately dependent on God (i.e., the necessarily existent). Mind you, metaphysics does not speak of God and creation unless in terms of their being part of all of existence, necessary or possible respectively.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt, al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 447.

hence be a final cause which is only cause, but not effect:⁴⁷⁵ ‘Every regress ends in the necessarily existent in itself.’⁴⁷⁶ It is here where Ibn Sīnā’s proof of God’s existence is said to culminate: ‘there is a necessary being, QED,’⁴⁷⁷ as Goodman puts it.

Davidson has argued that Ibn Sīnā’s ‘cosmological argument’⁴⁷⁸ follows the structure of a particular form of proof called *dalīl*. Amos Bertolacci has suggested the same.⁴⁷⁹ We recall that in his discussion of metaphysics’ subject matter at the beginning of the *Shifā’*, Ibn Sīnā stated that God’s existence is neither self-evident, nor unprovable, but ‘there is a proof (*dalīl*) for it.’⁴⁸⁰ Based on this statement, Davidson maintains that ‘according to Avicenna, ...a ‘proof’ (*dalīl*)...of the existence of God...will...reason from the existence of a *possibly existent being* to the existence of *necessarily existent being* [sic].’⁴⁸¹ The *dalīl*, Davidson then informs us, ‘is a syllogism wherein the middle term is the *effect*...of the presence of the major term in the minor term; it is a chain of reasoning that moves...from the posterior to the prior, from the presence of the effect to the existence of the cause.’⁴⁸² It is important to note that, according to this view, the *dalīl* has the function of inferring the *existence* of the cause – God – from the existence of the effect – the contingent world. Let us then consider whether this view is in accordance with what Ibn Sīnā himself has to say about the *dalīl*.

The *Kitāb al-Burhān* of the *Najāt* as well as the *Kitāb al-Burhān* of the *Shifā’* can help resolve this question. Ibn Sīnā explains that every knowledge falls either into the category of conception (*taṣawwūr*) or into the category of confirmation (*taṣdīq*). Confirmation is acquired through syllogisms (*qiyās*)⁴⁸³ which establish

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., pp. 448-455.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 455.

⁴⁷⁷ Goodman 1992, p. 64.

⁴⁷⁸ Davidson 1987, p. 298.

⁴⁷⁹ Bertolacci 2006, p. 225: ‘In I, 1, [Ibn Sīnā] admits that there is a ‘sign’ (*dalīl*), namely a ‘demonstration *quod*, of God’s existence.’

⁴⁸⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā’, al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 1, ch. 1, p. 4.

⁴⁸¹ Davidson 1987, p. 299.

⁴⁸² Davidson 1987, p. 299. See also Goodman 1992, p. 75: ‘the syllogisms leading to the recognition of God’s existence...are evidentiary, arguing...from effect to cause.’

⁴⁸³ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt, al-Burhān*, p. 97. Compare, for example, Tony Street’s “Avicenna on the Syllogism” and Deborah L. Black’s “Certitude, justification, and the principle of knowledge in Avicenna’s epistemology”, both in Adamson 2013.

a truth and that something is such and cannot be other.⁴⁸⁴ A syllogism of this kind is the *burhān*.⁴⁸⁵ The *burhān* comprises two different types, 'one of which is the *burhān limā* and the other the *burhān anna*, which is called *dalīl*.'⁴⁸⁶ Turning to the *burhān anna*, which we are interested in, Ibn Sīnā clarifies that it is divided into two different types:

It is agreed that the middle term *is not*, regarding the existence, a cause for the existence of the major term in the minor term and *not* an effect of it, rather something additional for it⁴⁸⁷... And it is agreed that the middle term *is*, regarding the existence, an effect of the existence of the major term in the minor term. The first is called *burhān al-anna* '*alā al-ītlāq*, and the second is called *dalīl*.⁴⁸⁸

One of the examples Ibn Sīnā gives for the *dalīl* is the following: This tree is burnt; everything burnt was touched by fire; therefore, this tree was touched by fire. He explains that 'the burning is an effect of the existence of the major term in the minor term'⁴⁸⁹ – in other words: The fact that this tree (major term) belongs to what was touched by fire (minor term) explains the effect of being burnt (middle term). Or to turn it around: This particular syllogism allows us to infer that it was fire (cause) which led to the tree's being burnt (effect) (see Appendix, Figure 1). The *dalīl* 'clarifies the cause from the effect.'⁴⁹⁰

Retuning to our question about the purpose of the *dalīl*, one crucial thing became evident: As opposed to Davidson and Bertolacci's claim that it is God's existence which is established by the *dalīl*, Ibn Sīnā nowhere indicates that it is the existence of a certain entity or thing which the *dalīl* is meant to prove. All his examples show that the *dalīl* allows *identifying* something as cause based on a given effect. In the above example, it is not the existence of fire which the *dalīl* proves or seeks to prove; rather, it has the purpose of establishing that it is fire which caused a particular effect.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Burhān*, pp. 30-31.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, *al-Burhān*, p. 102 and *al-Shifā'*, *al-Burhān*, p. 31.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Burhān*, p. 30.

⁴⁸⁷ One example Ibn Sīnā gives for this type of the *burhān anna* is the following: This person who suffers from fever has white urine; everybody who has this is feared to have a tumour in the head; therefore, this person who suffers from fever is feared to have a tumour in the head. He then explains that the white urine and the tumour are both effects of one single cause. The middle term (white urine) is therefore neither cause nor effect of the fact that this person who suffers from fever (major term) has a tumour (minor term), but something additional (*al-Shifā'*, *al-Burhān*, p. 32).

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt*, *al-Burhān*, p. 103.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'*, *al-Burhān*, p. 33.

Nevertheless, Davidson has attempted to extract a syllogism along the lines of the *dalīl* from Ibn Sīnā's alleged cosmological proof (see Appendix, Figure 2). His proof is said to contain the following two premises: Firstly, '[p]ossibly existent beings are traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself,'⁴⁹¹ which Ibn Sīnā establishes on the basis of the principle of causality as well as the impossibility of an infinite or circular regress of causes.⁴⁹² Secondly, '[s]omething exists which is...possibly existent by virtue of itself.'⁴⁹³ These two premises lead to the conclusion that 'something exists which is traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself; and the latter also exists.'⁴⁹⁴ The first thing we notice is that Davidson's arrangement of the premises does not follow the prescribed structure of the *dalīl* as given by Ibn Sīnā in a number of examples (see Appendix, Figure 3). Davidson's first premise should be the minor (i.e., second) premise, since it contains the minor term, and the second premise should be the major (i.e., first) premise, containing the major term. More crucially, however, Davidson's *dalīl* does in fact not fulfil its prescribed purpose. We recall that in the *dalīl* the minor term provides the cause for the effect which is contained in the major premise. Applied to Davidson's *dalīl* this means the following: Being 'traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself' (minor term) is the cause that explains the effect 'possibly existent by virtue of itself' which is contained in the major premise and which applies to '[s]omething exists' (major term). In other words: The fact that this something which exists is traceable to a being necessarily existent is the cause of this something's being possibly existent by virtue of itself. Davidson's mistake is obvious: According to Ibn Sīnā, an existent is certainly not possibly existent due to itself *because* it ends in the necessarily existent due to itself. Rather, its being traceable to the necessarily existent is something that *goes hand in hand* with its nature of being possibly existent. Considering all this, we submit that Ibn Sīnā's mention of the *dalīl* in connection with *wujūd al-ilāh* at the beginning of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā'* should therefore be understood as simply denoting a

⁴⁹¹ Davidson 1987, p. 304.

⁴⁹² Ibid., p. 299.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., p. 304.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 304.

proof for – or better: indication of – God’s kind of existence, rather than referring to its other, more specific meaning of a certain type of syllogism.⁴⁹⁵

The Proof of God’s Being Creator

Yet, it is in fact the aspect of establishing the causal connection between the necessarily existent and the possibly existent, we argue, which Ibn Sīnā seeks to establish in the aforementioned passage from the *Ishārāt*. This is of course not an end in itself, but has the purpose of showing that everything besides God only exists due to God. It is not God’s existence which Ibn Sīnā seeks to prove by linking the possibly existent to the necessarily existent; instead, it is God’s attribute of being creator. This objective becomes apparent in some passages of the *Ta’liqāt*. There we read:

The path followed to knowledge of the Creator (*al-bārī’*) is that we divide existence into the necessary and the non-necessary. Then we divide the necessary into what is due to essence and into what is not due to essence. And we divide the non-necessary into what is not necessary due to essence, which is the impossible, and into what is not necessary not due to essence, which is the possible. So we know the special characteristics (*khawāṣṣ*) of every one of them, some of them thanks to others, like that we know the knowledge the necessarily existent due to Himself possesses thanks to the negation of quantities for Him, that is, that which is not a body necessarily intellectually apprehends His essence... And after that we know the special characteristics of every remaining division, *until we know from this that what is other than the necessarily existent due to Himself, who is one, is related regarding (its) existence with the necessarily existent.*⁴⁹⁶

Ibn Sīnā furthermore explains:

When we find two things...together in existence, but one of them is essentially necessarily existent and the other essentially possibly existent, and when we know the true nature of each of them thanks to the special characteristics, *then we know that what has the nature of possibility is an effect and the other a cause.* So if we know the necessity of existence (*annīyya*) of the necessarily existent due to Himself and His true nature according to what we know from the *Metaphysics* (*al-ilāhiyyāt*)..., *then we know that what is other than Him from among the existents is necessary due to Him and possible due to essence*, and the priority of the necessarily existent over it is the priority of sufficiency (*istighnā’*), and the posteriority of it after Him is the posteriority of need (*hājja*). Between the cause and the effect lie sufficiency and need.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁵ Compare *al-Shifā’*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 8, ch. 5, p. 283 where Ibn Sīnā speaks of there being ‘clear indications (*al-dalā’il al-wāḍiḥa*)’ for God.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta’liqāt*, pp. 162-163.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 163.

Both the investigation of the necessarily existent and its true nature as well as the possibly existent and its true nature, based on their respective necessary concomitants, makes possible the conclusion that the existence of the possible in itself is due to the necessary in itself – this ultimately implying that the cause we seek for the effect which is the existence of the world is God.

In order to appreciate the significance of this discussion, we need to bear in mind two things: Firstly, neither for a great number of *mutakallimūn*, as we have seen, nor for Ibn Sīnā was the reality of causal connections between things a self-evident matter. Yet, the defence of the Qur’ānic declaration that the world is God’s product depends for both theologians and philosophers on the affirmation of the principle of causation. Secondly, even where this principle was acknowledged, both *mutakallimūn* and philosophers had to face opposing views about the ultimate explanation of the fact that the contingent world exists. They understood, as we have previously seen and as Ibn Sīnā’s own account makes clear, that it does not immediately follow from the fact that things have causes that it is ultimately God who causes the whole to exist. All these considerations play a crucial role in the *Shifā’*. Already in book 1, chapter 1, Ibn Sīnā himself emphasises the necessity for metaphysics of affirming the principle of causation, ‘for if we have not established the existence of causes for things which are effects (*wujūd al-asbāb li’l-musabbabāt*) by establishing that the latter are connected with what precedes them in existence, it is not necessary for the mind that there should be an absolute cause or some cause.’⁴⁹⁸ Crucially, when Ibn Sīnā speaks here of the *existence* of causes for effects, he means the same as when he asks whether ‘there is for originated things (*ḥādithāt*) some principle’⁴⁹⁹: Is it true that things come about due to causes or do they enter existence uncaused? It is then in book 8 of the *Metaphysics* that Ibn Sīnā tackles the issue of showing that the principle of causation also involves that something must be a first cause which gives existence to all causes after it. He states: ‘Now that we have reached this state in our book, it is apt that we conclude it with the knowledge of the first principle of the whole of existence.’⁵⁰⁰ This knowledge

⁴⁹⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā’*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 1, ch. 1, p. 5.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā’*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 8, ch. 1, p. 257.

pertains to the questions of ‘whether it is existent (*mawjūd*), one and without equal.’⁵⁰¹ Again, Ibn Sīnā’s mentioning the *existence* of this first cause solely refers to the question of whether it is the case that all causes end in a final cause – or whether this is not the case and no entity can be said to be this final cause. In order to accomplish his task, Ibn Sīnā states that it is necessary to prove, firstly, ‘that the causes are in all respects finite,’ secondly, ‘that there is a first principle in each of their classes,’ thirdly, ‘that the principle of all of them is one,’ and finally, ‘that it alone is necessarily existent and that the existence of every existent comes from it.’⁵⁰² The all-important proof of the finiteness of causes also poses a refutation of those individuals and groups we have encountered in the previous chapters who are described as believing that the world is its own cause, eternally generating its existence from itself. Ibn Sīnā therefore presents a refutation of the position that an infinite regress of causes is a possibility, where every single cause is also effect of a preceding cause.⁵⁰³ In the *Dānish-nāma* and the *Najāṭ*, Ibn Sīnā furthermore deals with, and refutes, what he calls ‘the argument for the circularity of causes’⁵⁰⁴ which poses that ‘every (member of a sequence of causes) is possibly existent in itself, but necessary due to another (member) in which it ends in a circular way (*dawran*).’⁵⁰⁵ Since God is the necessarily existent due to His essence, and since the final cause of all of existence is none other than this necessarily existent, Ibn Sīnā has achieved his objective of showing that God is the creator of the world.

Yet, we should not forget that Ibn Sīnā indicated at the beginning of the *Shifā’* that metaphysics seeks to investigate the true nature of the godhead, which includes His particular type of existence as well as His attributes, as explained. In this regard, it is a statement we find in the *Ishārāt* which makes clear how it is once more the twofold division of existence into the necessary and the possible which enables Ibn Sīnā to achieve this aim. There he states:

Consider how our explanation of the affirmation of the First and His oneness as well as His being free from the attributes does not require the consideration of

⁵⁰¹ Ibid., p. 257.

⁵⁰² Ibid., p. 257.

⁵⁰³ Ibid., p. 258.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *Dānish-nāma*, p. 59.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāṭ*, *al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 272.

anything else than existence itself. It does not require the consideration of His creation and act (*khalqihī wa-fi'lihi*), even if this can be an indication (*dalīl*), but (what we explained) is truer and more exalted, for if we consider the state (*ḥāl*) of existence, existence bears witness insofar as it is existence, and it also bears witness for everything that is after it in existence.⁵⁰⁶

God is known not only to be the principle of all other existents – He is the First⁵⁰⁷ – based on the twofold division of existence and the examination of their respective natures, but also to be one and unique – which is the essence of His *tawḥīd*. As opposed to the *mutakallimūn* – implicitly referred to⁵⁰⁸ – who prove God's role as creator and infer His attributes from the consideration of His acts, that is, creation, Ibn Sīnā makes the point that his approach is more exalted in that he investigates God's nature without considering only one aspect of existence, that is, created existence. The *mutakallimūn*'s method, even if effective, is 'a rule for the common people (*ḥukm li-qawm*).'⁵⁰⁹ They need creation to understand, an approach the Qur'ān itself offers in Q. 41.53: {We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth.} The more exalted approach, however, is what Ibn Sīnā declares 'a rule for the veracious (*ḥukm li'l-ṣiddīqīn*)'⁵¹⁰ and which follows the above statement in Q. 41.53: {Is it not enough that your Lord witnesses everything?} The veracious make God the basis of their judgements about reality, while the *mutakallimūn* use creation to arrive at their verdicts about God.⁵¹¹

The kind of existence which is characteristic of God can be known, according to Ibn Sīnā, as a consequence of His being necessarily existent due to essence. God's true nature is nothing else than necessary existence. This implies that everything that is said of entities having a quiddity (*māhiyya*) in terms of their existence, such as their being composed or corporeal, their belonging to a genus (*jins*) or having differentia (*faṣl*), cannot be said of God. God is 'pure intellect

⁵⁰⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt, al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 482. Compare Meyer 1980, p. 245 et seqq. on Ibn Sīnā on God's attributes in the section 'Die Eigenschaften Gottes gemäß den beigebrachten Grundlagen'.

⁵⁰⁷ Being the First means being the principle of existence: 'If the existence of everything other than Him derives from His existence, then He is the First' (Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā', al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 8, ch. 4, p. 273).

⁵⁰⁸ Al-Ṭūsī identifies '*al-mutakallimūn*' as the ones this passage speaks about (see al-Ṭūsī's commentary on p. 482 of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Ishārāt*).

⁵⁰⁹ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt, al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 483.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., p. 483.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., p. 483: 'the veracious who bear witness through Him (*bihi*), not for Him (*alayhi*).'

(*‘aql maḥḍ*).⁵¹² In the same manner, the divine attributes can be known through the mere consideration of what God’s necessary existence entails. In being pure intellect, the necessarily existent intellectually apprehends Himself⁵¹³ and His essence as being the principle of every other existent.⁵¹⁴ This self-apprehension is an ‘act of knowing (*‘ālimiyya*)’ about the emanation (*yufīd*) of existence from Him.⁵¹⁵ His knowledge is also His life (*ḥayāt*)⁵¹⁶ and the emanation represents His power (*qudra*).⁵¹⁷ The necessarily existent is ‘a lover (*‘āshiq*)’ of His essence, and the existence emanating from it ‘becomes loved’ by Him and ‘this is His will (*irādatuhu*).’⁵¹⁸ This account exemplifies Ibn Sīnā’s method of deriving knowledge about God’s true nature (*inniya Allāh*), which includes the investigation of His particular existence and the affirmation of the divine attributes, evidently following the Qur’ānic utterances about them, through the mere consideration of existence qua existence, as he declared it to be his aim. The *mutakallimūn*, too, derive their knowledge of God’s particular existence and His attributes on the basis of His being the creator of creation, as is known, yet, in Ibn Sīnā’s view, they must commit a few grave errors: One of these errors has to do with the Ash‘arites’ conception of the divine attributes as real entities (*ma‘nā*, pl. *ma‘ānin*) subsisting in God’s essence, which for Ibn Sīnā introduces plurality into the simple divine essence.⁵¹⁹ For him, the aforementioned divine attributes are but expressions, as it were, denoting the only and ‘primary attribute (*al-ṣifa al-ūlā*)’⁵²⁰ God has: His being ‘that-ness (*inn*) and an existent.’⁵²¹ Ibn Sīnā explains: ‘As for the other attributes, some of them include the meaning (*ma‘nā*) of this existence with an addition (*iḍāfa*), others the meaning of this existence with a negation (*salb*).’⁵²² God’s attribute of being willing (*murīd*), for example, means nothing else than ‘the being of the

⁵¹² Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā’, al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 8, ch. 6, p. 284.

⁵¹³ Ibid., p. 285.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., p. 288.

⁵¹⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā’, al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 8, ch. 7, p. 291.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., p. 295.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., p. 295.

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., p. 292.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., p. 294. Ibn Sīnā’s conception of the divine attributes is, of course, much closer to that of the Mu‘tazilite *mutakallimūn* who maintain that God is, say, knowing by virtue of His essence, not due to the *ma‘nā* of knowledge (compare El-Bizri 2008).

⁵²⁰ Ibid., p. 296.

⁵²¹ Ibid., p. 296.

⁵²² Ibid., p. 296.

necessarily existent with His being an intellect – that is, the negation of matter of Him – as a principle for the whole system of the good by Him intellectually apprehending it.’⁵²³ Had the Ash‘arites followed the path of the veracious and considered ‘the state (*ḥāl*) of existence,’⁵²⁴ as Ibn Sīnā does, instead of having made creation their foundation,⁵²⁵ they would have understood that they profess a flawed conception of God’s true nature.⁵²⁶

The other grave error the *mutakallimūn* commit has to do with their understanding of creation as having a first beginning. Ibn Sīnā, on the other hand, presents a notion of creation as an eternal, beginningless act on the part of God, which is, as his account described above made clear, a direct consequence of God’s being necessarily existent. In the *Ta‘liqāt*, he explains that not only God’s existence is a necessity, but also everything else that is true of Him: ‘The meaning of ‘the necessarily existent in Himself’ is that He is necessity itself (*nafs al-wājibiyya*).’⁵²⁷ Necessity means actuality and impossibility of becoming or change: ‘If non-existence was possible for Him, then there would be receptiveness (*qubūl*) for non-existence in Him. ... Everything which has receptiveness for something in it, has potentiality in it, hence the necessarily existent is pure actuality.’⁵²⁸ On this basis, Ibn Sīnā concludes that God’s

⁵²³ Ibid., p. 296.

⁵²⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt, al-Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 482.

⁵²⁵ The Ash‘arites, like other *mutakallimūn*, formulated their conception of the divine attributes in comparison to how they conceived of the attributes of corporeal beings. For the Ash‘arites, this meant that God is, say, knowing due to the *ma‘nā* of knowledge, just as humans are knowing due to the accident of knowledge. The Mu‘tazilites of course denied this analogy. Compare Wolfson 1959. See also Ibn Rushd’s critique of the Ash‘arite conception of God’s attributes in analogy to corporeal things in his *Kashf*, p. 139.

⁵²⁶ Note that Peter Adamson (“From the necessary existent to God” in Adamson 2013, pp. 170-189) has argued that the inference of all these divine attributes constitutes part of Ibn Sīnā’s attempt to prove that God exists, of whom he conceives as the necessary existent: ‘proving the existence of a necessary existent is different from proving the existence of God. Avicenna was fully aware of this... So what would it take to show that the necessary existent is God? For Avicenna, it means showing that a range of traditional divine attributes are implied by the fundamental trait of necessity’ (pp. 170-171). This is at variance with our suggestion of what Ibn Sīnā is intending to do: Like the theologians before him, he seeks to show on rational grounds that the Qur’ānic descriptions of God are true. At the same time, he also seeks to defend the philosophers’ conception of God against the theologians’, which differs in certain respects. And finally, he proposes a way of doing so which he considers nobler than the method of the theologians. In doing so, the proof and provability that God, the entity believed to have created the world, actually exists is not at stake; rather, this is part of a debate about what God really is like and what method establishes this.

⁵²⁷ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ta‘liqāt*, p. 50.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., p. 151.

attributes must be actual and necessary as well, and that God ‘never ceases to be such.’⁵²⁹ Since God’s will, knowledge, power and so on are nothing else than the emanation coming from Him, as explained before, it means that creation exists eternally with and through God as its cause (*‘illa*).⁵³⁰

Ibn Sīnā’s description of God as *‘illa* is worth noticing when we bear in mind what such *mutakallimūn* as al-Bāqillānī had to say about this term. Al-Bāqillānī, we recall, drew a clear line between the notion of the creator or *ṣāni‘* who brings about the world in time according to his will, on the one hand, and the *‘illa* which necessitates its effect unwillingly and due to its nature, on the other.⁵³¹ For al-Bāqillānī, it followed from the world’s having entered existence after not having been that only an entity possessed of will could be its cause, and this excluded this entity’s description as *‘illa*. Ibn Sīnā’s notion of the *‘illa* is an entirely different one when applied to God. We have seen that will and knowledge play an essential part in his account of God’s creation. He also stresses that ‘the existence of the whole from Him is not due to nature (*bi’l-ṭab’*).’⁵³² And while it is true that for him creation is necessitated – ‘the existence of the whole from Him is a necessary consequence (*yalzamuhu*)’⁵³³ –, it is not blind necessity, but rather the necessity with which cause and effect coexist when there is no obstacle, whether external or internal, to the fulfilment of the agent’s will.⁵³⁴ Al-Bāqillānī’s objection that it is not possible to distinguish between cause and effect unless the cause is temporally prior to the effect does not pose a problem for Ibn Sīnā as it is the world’s true nature of being possibly

⁵²⁹ Ibid., p. 50.

⁵³⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā’, al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 8, ch. 3, p. 271.

⁵³¹ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd* (1947), p. 53.

⁵³² Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā’, al-Ilāhiyyāt*, b. 9, ch. 4, p. 327.

⁵³³ Ibid., p. 327.

⁵³⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *Dānish-nāma*, ch. 15/pp. 41-44 and ch. 33/pp. 66-68. Morewedge holds, contrary to Ibn Sīnā’s own illustration, that ‘[f]or Ibn Sīnā emanation is an involuntary process which follows from God’s nature’ (1976, p. 419). He is right in maintaining that emanation follows from God’s nature (or essence), but he fails to see that it is willed by God. Zedler’s evaluation also seems to be misleading when she argues that ‘the only kind of causality Avicenna seems to know’ is *ex necessitate naturae* which implies the non-voluntary creation of the world by God and which she contrasts with creation *ex voluntate* (1948, p. 113). See also Chapter Three “The Nature of Creative Action” (pp. 131-168), especially sections “God Creates by Will not by Nature” and “Good Freely and Necessarily Creates the Universe,” in Acar 2005.

existent and God's true nature of being necessarily existent which define their causal relation.⁵³⁵

Conclusions

Metaphysics and theology are not that far apart. Both ask and answer many similar questions, despite making use of sometimes different concepts and terminology. In Ibn Sīnā's eyes, it is, however, metaphysics which follows an approach more exalted than that of the theologians and which is closer to the truth than them. One issue which plays an important role in the thought of both theologians and philosophers is the question of God's being the cause of the world and the world's being creation. God's attribute of being creator, first ascribed to Him by Scripture, is proven through a conceptual analysis of His true nature – insofar as He is the necessarily existent due to essence – and the true nature of everything else in existence. The way in which God is creator as well as the mode of His creative act, however, is known solely on the basis of God's true nature itself; it is not creation which determines the correct understanding of this divine attribute. This is where the *mutakallimūn* went wrong: Creation is an eternal act, due to the divine attributes of power, knowledge, will and so on. The proof and provability that God exists is of no concern for Ibn Sīnā. His investigation of God's existence is part of the endeavour to make known God's true nature, which pertains to distinguishing the type of existence which is characteristic of God from the kind of existence which defines creation as well as so to the examination of the divine attributes. This endeavour on the part of Ibn Sīnā is ultimately the defence of God's oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*), so essential to the Qur'ānic message.

⁵³⁵ It should be kept in mind that, like the *mutakallimūn*, Ibn Sīnā also employs the term *muḥdath* for the world, yet he includes the aspect of essential priority in its definition in addition to the aspect of temporal priority exclusively espoused by the *mutakallimūn*. In the *Ilāhiyyat* of the *Najāt* he states: 'The *muḥdath* has two aspects: Firstly, it is that which has a principle for its essence through which it is existent. Secondly, it is that which has a beginning for its (existence in) time' (ibid., p. 254; see also p. 259 on *al-ḥudūth al-dhātī*).

Chapter Five: al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085)

The Method to Affirm the Knowledge of the World's Originatedness and the Creator

It has rightly been said that al-Juwaynī's contribution to two of the most fundamental issues of *kalām*, that is, the proof of the world's originatedness and the affirmation of the creator, is not the most innovative.⁵³⁶ This is true for the order in which he presents these two discussions in all three major theological works of his – the *Irshād*, the *Shāmil* as well as the *'Aqīda Niẓāmiyya* – where the knowledge of the creator is inferred from the createdness of the world. With this order, al-Juwaynī follows in the footsteps of several theologians who preceded him: those, like al-Bāqillānī, affiliated with the Ash'arite school of thought, but also those of a different affiliation, such as al-Māturīdī and even al-Kindī in one of his works. Al-Juwaynī himself describes this particular order in the *Shāmil* as the one 'we recommend,'⁵³⁷ while being aware that none other than the founder of his school, al-Ash'arī, 'had turned over the known arrangement and opposed the established structure' – a criticism uttered by the Mu'tazilites – 'where he presented the affirmation of the creator before the affirmation of the creation and the act.'⁵³⁸

Al-Juwaynī's following the established method of his predecessors also becomes apparent in his making recourse to the concepts of permissibility (*jawāz*) and necessity (*wujūb*) when discussing the question of the originatedness of the world and its having an originator. These concepts can be found already in Mu'tazilite discussions of the same questions, as al-Juwaynī himself acknowledges.⁵³⁹ Likewise, in al-Juwaynī, these two concepts are brought together with the argument from particularisation (*takhṣīs*), a common argument among the theologians, as indicated, the roots of which can be found already in the works of such individuals as al-Ash'arī and al-Māturīdī. Furthermore, al-Juwaynī follows a common pattern in the *Irshād* and the *Shāmil*

⁵³⁶ Davidson 1968, p. 299.

⁵³⁷ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 33.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., p. 156.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., p. 162.

when basing his conclusion that the world has an origin in time on the following four principles: 'the affirmation of accidents; the affirmation of their originatedness; the affirmation of the impossibility that atoms are free from accidents; and the affirmation of the impossibility of originated things which have no beginning.'⁵⁴⁰ 'When these principles are affirmed,' al-Juwaynī explains, 'we know that what is not free from the originated does not precede it, and what does not precede it is originated.'⁵⁴¹ Besides the fourth principle, which in fact constitutes an important contribution to the whole reasoning on the part of al-Juwaynī, we encounter the same method in the works of earlier theologians.⁵⁴² It is only in al-Juwaynī's later work, the *'Aqīda Niẓāmiyya*, that an approach somewhat different from that of the *Shāmil* and the *Irshād* and indeed that of previous theologians is chosen to prove the originatedness of the world, as we shall see later.

Considering that al-Juwaynī's own approach to the discussion of the originatedness of the world and its having an originator very much resembles those we find in earlier theological writings, it is not surprising that al-Juwaynī's objective has been compared to the alleged endeavour on the part of theologians and philosophers before him of proving that God exists. It is in particular the cosmological argument – the *mutakallimūn*'s 'favourite argument,'⁵⁴³ as Majid Fakhry believes – which al-Juwaynī is seen to make use of.⁵⁴⁴ In this context, Fakhry has also highlighted the importance of 'the concept of contingency upon which...al-Juwaynī...has based [his] proof for the existence of God.'⁵⁴⁵ Herbert Davidson has likewise pointed to the aforementioned argument from particularisation which, he believes, al-Juwaynī's uses with the objective to 'infer the existence of a creator from creation.'⁵⁴⁶ Frank Griffel credits al-Juwaynī with having been 'the first Ash'arite who developed a stringent argument for God's existence based on the principle of

⁵⁴⁰ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, p. 17. Compare al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 67.

⁵⁴¹ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 67.

⁵⁴² See Shihadeh 2008, pp. 205-206 on al-Juwaynī's contribution.

⁵⁴³ Fakhry 1957, p. 137.

⁵⁴⁴ This is to the exception of the *'Aqīda niẓāmiyya* where al-Juwaynī is believed to follow a different method, as we shall discuss.

⁵⁴⁵ Fakhry 1986, p. 9. Compare Shihadeh 2008, pp. 210-211.

⁵⁴⁶ Davidson 1968, p. 306.

particularization.⁵⁴⁷ Tilman Nagel has expressed the same view when he speaks of al-Juwaynī's endeavour to infer 'the existence of the one Creator...from postulating the world's createdness.'⁵⁴⁸

We shall contest this reading of the purpose which the discussion about the originatedness of the world as well as the proof of the creator are said to have in al-Juwaynī's works. The createdness of the world, we shall argue, is not made the basis of the inference that God exists. Rather, the nature of al-Juwaynī's arguments as well as their similarity to the arguments and discussions we have encountered in the works of theologians preceding him give an indication of his true concerns: Scripture and its claim that none other than God has caused the world to exist is sought to be confirmed. For al-Juwaynī, this involves the defence of a particular manner in which God is creator and the world creation. Furthermore, it shall become apparent that the significance of establishing a causal connection between God and the world lies, for al-Juwaynī, in that it is the characteristics of creation which say something about the characteristics of its creator. God's nature is known only through His role as creator. This approach and objective of al-Juwaynī is not unique to him and can, for instance, already be found in the *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa* by the Mu'tazilite *mutakallim* 'Abd al-Jabbār who died more than half a century before al-Juwaynī. There, he explains:

It is necessary to speculate about these originated things in the bodies...so that it is known that they have an originator... Then he reasons that this originator cannot be he himself or one like him, so he knows that he has an originator different from us and this is God (Most-High!)... Then he reasons that it is true that the act comes from Him, and he gains the knowledge of His being powerful...and he comes to know that He is knowing. Then he speculates about His being powerful and knowing and he knows that He is living. ... Thanks to these methods he acquires everything the knowledge about *tawḥīd* involves.⁵⁴⁹

It should be noted that 'Abd al-Jabbār makes a distinction between what we termed the affirmation of the principle of causation and the conclusion that it is God who is creator. This shows that the principle of causation serves the only purpose of establishing that origination occurs but due to an outside cause,

⁵⁴⁷ Griffel 2009, p. 170.

⁵⁴⁸ Nagel 2000, p. 169.

⁵⁴⁹ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ*, pp. 65-66. Compare also *ibid.*, p. 151: 'The proofs that He (Most-High!) is the originator of the world also prove directly...that He (Most-High!) is powerful.'

which is then made the basis of the inference that none but God – not humans or any other entity – is the cause we seek for its occurrence. It is furthermore on the basis of the principle that the characteristics of the act say something about the nature of the agent that God's nature is revealed. This endeavour is ultimately linked to the task, so crucial in *kalām*, of defending God's oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*). Al-Juwaynī, we argue, pursues a very similar objective.

The Affirmation of the Knowledge of the Creator in the *Shāmil* and the *Irshād*

As mentioned, in the *Irshād* and the *Shāmil*, al-Juwaynī establishes the originatedness of the world on the basis of four principles. In the *Irshād*, he concludes his discussion with the statement that 'this explanation is sufficient to affirm the originatedness of the atoms and accidents',⁵⁵⁰ which constitute 'the world.'⁵⁵¹ 'After this,' he continues, 'we will explain the method which leads to the knowledge of the creator.'⁵⁵² This method is the same in both works, except for some slight differences: In the *Irshād*, al-Juwaynī declares that the originated world is 'possible (*jā'iz*) in terms of its existence and its annihilation.'⁵⁵³ Likewise, the moment of the world's coming into existence belongs to 'the possible things (*mumkināt*).'⁵⁵⁴ In the *Shāmil*, al-Juwaynī explains that, even though there might be different versions of the proof of the creator, they all focus on the same idea: Whatever is originated has been particularised (*ikhtaṣṣa*) in terms of the moment it entered existence since its existence in this particular moment is only possible (*jā'iz*), not necessary (*wājib*), as al-Juwaynī establishes on the basis of several subordinate proofs.⁵⁵⁵ The next step in al-Juwaynī's reasoning for the creator differs in the *Irshād* and

⁵⁵⁰ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, p. 27.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁵² Ibid., p. 27.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁵⁵ One method al-Juwaynī declares to be 'the best and first' (*al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 146) is this: If the originated thing exists necessarily at a certain time, after not having existed, then this implies that it is impossible for it to remain non-existent at that time. It is, however, absurd to think that at a previous time non-existence was possible and at the time of its coming to be non-existence is impossible, despite the equality of both times.

the *Shāmīl*. In the *Irshād*, al-Juwaynī argues that, if the world's existence, but also the endurance of its being non-existent are both equally possible, then 'reason decides *a priori* (*bi-badāha*) that it is in need for one who particularised (*mukhaṣṣiṣ*) it with its actual occurrence. This is evident and necessary, and there is no need for the investigation of postulates and to follow the path of speculation (*al-naẓar*).'⁵⁵⁶ In the *Shāmīl*, however, which al-Juwaynī wrote before the *Irshād*, the knowledge of the *mukhaṣṣiṣ* is far from being *a priori* and self-evident.⁵⁵⁷ The only knowledge described as self-evident by al-Juwaynī in this discussion concerns the rejection of the belief that 'origination is affirmed not due to a necessitator (*muqtaḍin*) and not due to a cause (*'illa*)'⁵⁵⁸ and 'without a particulariser (*mukhaṣṣiṣ*) or one who brings about out of necessity (*mūjib*) or the influence of an influential one (*mu'aththir*)',⁵⁵⁹ which is the belief that things come about due to chance (*ittifāq*).⁵⁶⁰ Chance, evidently, stands for the denial of the principle of causation. To hold this belief, al-Juwaynī states, means 'the denial of *a priori* premises (*al-badā'a*) and what is necessary.'⁵⁶¹ As opposed to the *Irshād*, al-Juwaynī only affirms the particularising agent after a lengthy discussion about whether the realisation of possible existence instead of possible non-existence is 'due to itself (*li-nafsihi*); or due to an entity (*ma'nā*) in addition to it and subsisting in it; or due to (its) possibility; or due to the particularisation of a particulariser.'⁵⁶² It is evident that the affirmation of the principle of causation involves not only that origination occurs due to a cause, but a cause which is different from the originated thing itself. Furthermore, this outside cause is not just *some* cause for the existence of the world, but a cause in a particular way. Al-Juwaynī's mentioning the *'illa* and the *mūjib* alongside

⁵⁵⁶ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, p. 28.

⁵⁵⁷ Davidson overlooked this difference between the argument in the *Irshād* and that in the *Shāmīl*. He states with reference to these two works: 'But, Juwaynī recognizes, the step from the selection between equal possibilities to a particularizing agent who makes the selection must itself ultimately be taken as self-evident' (1987, p. 161, f. 34).

⁵⁵⁸ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmīl* (1960-61), p. 148.

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 149.

⁵⁶⁰ Compare *ibid.*, p. 149: 'Their being occurred due to chance (*ittifāq*) at a certain time without the requirement of a necessitator (*muqtaḍin*) or the specification of a particulariser (*mukhaṣṣiṣ*).'

⁵⁶¹ Ibid., p. 149. Compare *ibid.*, p. 91: 'If the opponent were to say that non-existence and existence are both possible and existence is affirmed without a necessitator, then this would go against what can be conceived by reason and it would be denial of necessity and *a priori* knowledge (*khurūjan 'an al-ma'qūl wa-jahdan li'l-ḍarūra wa'l-badihiyya*).'

⁵⁶² Ibid., p. 147.

the *muqtaḍī*, the *mukhaṣṣiṣ* and the *mu'aththir* in the above passage is revealing: It shows that, when he reaches the conclusion that only a *mukhaṣṣiṣ* is responsible for the origination of the world, he intends to get across a certain conception of this cause – namely the very concept associated with the term *ṣāni'* or creator. That this is the case becomes clear when we bear in mind that the *mūjib* and the *'illa*, mentioned above, represent a particular kind of cause which is incompatible with the notion of the creator who brings the world into existence from non-existence.

In the chapter on the affirmation of the creator in the *Shāmil*, al-Juwaynī does not say much about the difference between the concepts of the *mūjib* and the *'illa*, on the one hand, and the *mukhaṣṣiṣ*, on the other; yet, we can infer from a number of other passages the following: The concept of the *mukhaṣṣiṣ* involves intention (*qaṣd*),⁵⁶³ will (*irāda*)⁵⁶⁴ and wishing (*mashī'a*)⁵⁶⁵ and the *mukhaṣṣiṣ* is hence described as an agent (*fā'il*).⁵⁶⁶ In contrast, the *'illa* is something which causes out of necessity (*mūjib*).⁵⁶⁷ Al-Juwaynī's definition of these different kinds of causes therefore follows the tradition of his predecessors, such as al-Bāqillānī.⁵⁶⁸ Like them, al-Juwaynī is evidently also concerned with defending a particular understanding of the descriptions of God as creator to be found in the Qur'ān. His intention is not to prove that God exists because the created world points to the existence of an entity of whose existence we only know because this entity is the world's creator. Rather, the world's nature of being creation from non-existence allows the inference that the entity who brought it about – God – has a specific nature: He is creator, originator, particulariser and agent possessed of will, but He is certainly not to be characterised as an *'illa* which causes out of necessity and without choice.

Al-Juwaynī's treatment of this question in the *Irshād* makes this point even more evident. The *mukhaṣṣiṣ*, whom al-Juwaynī had affirmed 'in general (*'alā'l-jumla*)'⁵⁶⁹ and the knowledge of whom he characterised as self-evident, is at this

⁵⁶³ Ibid., p. 149 and p. 152.

⁵⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 151.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 152.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 150.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 150.

⁵⁶⁸ See Chapter Three on al-Bāqillānī.

⁵⁶⁹ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, p. 28.

stage a far cry from the creator or *ṣāniʿ*, the knowledge of whom al-Juwaynī seeks to establish. He then presents three options of what nature this *mukhaṣṣiṣ* could be: Either the *mukhaṣṣiṣ* is ‘one who necessitates (*mūjib*) the realisation of the origination in the same manner as the *ʿilla* which necessitates (*mūjiba*) its effect;’ or the *mukhaṣṣiṣ* is like ‘a nature (*ṭabīʿa*) as the naturalists (*ṭabāʾiʿiyyūn*) assume;’ or he is ‘a choosing agent (*fāʿil mukhtār*).’⁵⁷⁰ Al-Juwaynī then rules out the first two options, in order to establish that the *mukhaṣṣiṣ*, from whom the world derived its existence, is nothing other than an agent or *fāʿil*. It is impossible, al-Juwaynī reasons, that the *mukhaṣṣiṣ* can be an *ʿilla* since the *ʿilla* coexists with its effect: If the *ʿilla* is eternal, its effect is eternal, too, but this contradicts the proven originatedness of the world. If the *ʿilla* is originated, this contradiction does not arise, yet, it leads to the absurdity of an infinite regress of causes. It is for the same reason that the *mukhaṣṣiṣ* cannot be a nature which likewise ‘necessitates its influences if impediments are removed’ and which brings into being ‘not due to choice.’⁵⁷¹ The similarity between al-Bāqillānī’s *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* and al-Juwaynī’s discussion is obvious, both in terms of the terminology which is used and the objectives which are pursued. Considering, however, that Ibn Sīnā died almost half a century before al-Juwaynī one might regard it as surprising that al-Juwaynī does not seem to take into account at all the definitions of these terms offered by the philosopher. He simply ignores Ibn Sīnā’s account of God’s being the *ʿilla* of the world’s existence according to knowledge, will and power.

The Affirmation of the Knowledge of the Creator in the *ʿAqīda Niẓāmiyya*

Al-Juwaynī’s last work of *kalām*, *al-ʿAqīda al-niẓāmiyya* is somewhat dissimilar from his own earlier writings as well as works by other *mutakallimūn* in terms of its reasoning to establish the creator. While in the *Shāmil* and the *Irshād* al-Juwaynī is said to have based his proof of God’s existence on the premise of the createdness of the world, in the *ʿAqīda*, Davidson has argued, al-Juwaynī appears as ‘the originator of...a combined proof of creation and the existence of

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 28.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid., p. 29.

God'⁵⁷² when 'infer[ring] both...directly from the fact that the universe has particular characteristics.'⁵⁷³ Mohammad Saflo has argued the same, noting that 'al-Juwaynī proves both the contingency of the world and the existence of God with a single argument.'⁵⁷⁴ This is, however, not accurate: Firstly, the originatedness of the world is not proven directly on the basis of its particularised characteristics, but is inferred from the specific nature of the entity it comes from, which, in turn, is inferred from the world's particularisation. It is hence an indirect proof. Secondly, just as in his two previous works, it is not al-Juwaynī's aim to prove the existence of God, we argue, but rather to show that none but God brought the world into existence and that He is but a creator, which again represents a very specific concept. Thirdly and lastly, even though it is true that the concept of the creator plays an important role already in the chapter on the originatedness of the world, it is in the next chapter that 'the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator who choses (*ṣāni' mukhtār*)'⁵⁷⁵ follows the realisation that the world is originated.⁵⁷⁶ Both Davidson and Saflo leave this rather striking fact unmentioned.

In the *'Aqīda*, the chapter on the originatedness of the world begins with the definition of the world as 'every existent other than God'⁵⁷⁷ which denotes bodies (or atoms) (*ajsām maḥdūda mutanāhiya*) and their accidents. Like in the *Shāmil* and the *Irshād*, al-Juwaynī makes use of the notion of the world's possibility, but while in his earlier works he applies this notion to the world's existence and non-existence and to the time of its coming to be, in the *'Aqīda* the focus lies on the possibility of its attributes,⁵⁷⁸ such as the accidents of colour, shape, and motion. If the world is possible in this respect, al-Juwaynī reasons, then 'it is in need of one who necessitates (*muqtaḍin*) it as it is'⁵⁷⁹ since 'it is

⁵⁷² Davidson 1968, p. 299. Also *ibid.*, p. 307 and Davidson 1987, p. 190.

⁵⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 306.

⁵⁷⁴ Saflo 2000, p. 204.

⁵⁷⁵ Al-Juwaynī, *al-'Aqīda*, p. 20.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁵⁷⁸ Al-Juwaynī himself does not speak of attributes or *ṣifāt*, he only speaks of accidents (*a'rāḍ*), but he makes clear elsewhere that accidents are attributes: 'Know that substance (*jawhar*) has necessary attributes and possible attributes (*ṣifāt wājiba wa-ṣifāt jā'iza*). ... As for what is possible for substance, it is the existence of various accidents (*a'rāḍ*) in it' (al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 67).

⁵⁷⁹ Al-Juwaynī, *al-'Aqīda*, p. 16.

absurd that the possible is realised due to chance (*ittifāqan*) and without one who necessitates.⁵⁸⁰ Interestingly, in the *‘Aqīda* al-Juwaynī seems to have abandoned the view he expressed in the *Irshād* and the *Shāmil* that the knowledge about the impossibility that something possible is realised without any cause is self-evident (*badīha al-‘aql*).⁵⁸¹ In the *‘Aqīda*, the affirmation of the principle of causation is said to require speculation (*naẓar*), consideration (*i‘tibār*), searching (*ṭalb*), and contemplation (*iftikār*).⁵⁸² It should be noted that so far, al-Juwaynī has not yet affirmed the world’s originatedness; all he has established is that the world receives its accidental forms and so on from an outside cause. This is very reminiscent of al-Ash‘arī’s approach in his *Kitāb al-Luma‘* where the world’s dependence on God is proven before it is ruled out that God simply transforms eternally existing prime matter.⁵⁸³

Al-Juwaynī then moves on to a discussion of the nature of this cause which particularises the world’s accidents: The *muqtaḍī* might be like an eternal *‘illa*, and the connection between it and the world is like that of cause and effect (*fi ḥukm al-‘illa wa’l-ma’lūl*) which are concomitant (*yatalāzimān*),⁵⁸⁴ defined by necessity (*mūjib*); or the *muqtaḍī* might be one who prefers and chooses (*mu’tḥir mukhtār*).⁵⁸⁵ These two options are very reminiscent of those presented in the *Irshād*.⁵⁸⁶ It is the particularisation of the world with possible attributes which leads al-Juwaynī to conclude that the *muqtaḍī* is one possessed of will (*irāda*) and wishing (*mashī’a*), and not an *‘illa* which cannot choose between equals. He then dismisses the assumption that the world could eternally coexist with its cause, but nevertheless be due to will and choice.⁵⁸⁷ This reasoning shows that, contrary to Davidson and Saflo’s claim, it is the particular nature associated with the *muqtaḍī* from which it is inferred that the world as a whole has entered existence: The world with its possibility is

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 16.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵⁸² Ibid., pp. 13-14.

⁵⁸³ See Chapter Three on al-Ash‘arī.

⁵⁸⁴ Al-Juwaynī, *al-‘Aqīda*, p. 16.

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 17.

⁵⁸⁶ Saflo thinks that in the *‘Aqīda* al-Juwaynī does not prove that the particulariser is a free agent as he did in the *Irshād* (2000, p. 204), meaning by free agent a *fā’il mukhtār* (ibid., p. 197). This is obviously wrong.

⁵⁸⁷ Al-Juwaynī, *al-‘Aqīda*, p. 17.

something willed (*murād*) as it is the object of the *muqtaḍī's* will. 'That which occurs due to will,' al-Juwaynī postulates, 'is an act (*fi'l*)'⁵⁸⁸ and 'that which is eternal is not an act.'⁵⁸⁹ It is hence in fact the *muqtaḍī's* will on the basis of which the world is declared to be originated; particularisation itself is only an indirect indication of this.

Al-Juwaynī's method to decide the question about the eternity versus originatedness of the world on the basis of the nature of its cause is not common among the *mutakallimūn*, as our previous chapters have also shown. At the same time, al-Juwaynī is certainly not the first Islamic thinker to do so: We should not forget that it was none other than Ibn Sīnā who argued that the world must have existed in pre-eternity with God because of God's very nature as the necessarily existent due to essence.⁵⁹⁰ It seems questionable that al-Juwaynī developed his argument with a refutation of Ibn Sīnā in mind, even though Davidson has argued – rather unconvincingly⁵⁹¹ – that the notion of an agent choosing existence for a thing over non-existence 'must have been suggested to Juwaynī by Avicenna's analysis of the concepts of *possibly existent* and *necessarily existent*.'⁵⁹² One could have expected a more elaborate and thorough refutation of Ibn Sīnā's reasoning if al-Juwaynī had had his refutation in mind. Nevertheless, it shows how the notion of God's willing the world's existence, which unites Ibn Sīnā and al-Juwaynī, also contains one of their biggest points of disagreement.

Having thus proved the originatedness of the world through a method al-Juwaynī praises as 'the best and truest (*anjaḥ wa-awqa*)',⁵⁹³ he turns to the actual affirmation of 'the knowledge of the creator (*ṣāni'*)'.⁵⁹⁴ His reasoning in

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁹⁰ Compare Chapter Four on Ibn Sīnā.

⁵⁹¹ Al-Juwaynī himself, however, states in the *Shāmil* that this concept was already in use among the Mu'tazilites, such as Abū Hāshim b. al-Jubbā'ī (d. 321/933), who died more than one hundred years before Ibn Sīnā: '...he knows that they [i.e., things in this world] were not, then were, and he considers the possibility of their being and the possibility of the endurance of non-existence. When he affirms these principles, he knows necessarily that these originated things were not due to themselves and without a necessitator or particulariser. Ibn al-Jubbā'ī said this and others of the Mu'tazila' (*al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 162).

⁵⁹² Davidson 1987, p. 161.

⁵⁹³ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Aqīda*, p. 18.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 20.

this chapter is somewhat surprising: The proof of the creator turns out to involve the exact same discussion we encountered in the previous chapter: Is the entity who brought about the world (*mūqi'*) one who causes out of necessity (*mūjib*) and who has no preference (*ithār*)? Or is this entity one who chooses (*mukhtār*), wills (*murīd*) and acts according to his wishing (*mashī'a*)? This reasoning seems even more surprising since al-Juwaynī explicitly states that the creator is to be affirmed after and following the proof of the world's origin in time as well as the insight that it originated due to one who made it occur (*mūqi'*), not due to itself (*bi-nafsihi*).⁵⁹⁵ As indicated above, this fact has, for some reason, remained unmentioned in secondary literature⁵⁹⁶ when al-Juwaynī is credited with having presented a direct proof of God's existence which does not rest on the premise of the world's createdness.

With regards to the question about the purpose of the arguments leading to the affirmation of the creator in the *'Aqīda*, it is evidently the same as in the *Shāmil* and the *Irshād*: Al-Juwaynī's intention is to prove that the world is creation as the Qur'ān states, understood by him as creation *ex nihilo*, and that God is the one who brought it about, which makes Him nothing other than the world's creator (*ṣāni'*), endowed with will.

Like in 'Abd al-Jabbār's account quoted above, the connection between God and the world is then made the basis on which knowledge about God becomes possible. 'What is necessary for God (Blessed and exalted be He!)' can be known by 'the one who understands the possible attributes of the created things' as he 'will be lead to what is necessary for their creator.'⁵⁹⁷ The divine attributes can be known, al-Juwaynī explains this method, as

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵⁹⁶ Nagel simply states that 'al-Juwaynī would finally abandon the conventional method of deriving the existence of the Creator...from postulating the world's createdness' (2000, p. 196), thus ignoring al-Juwaynī's own representation of things. Davidson nowhere mentions that al-Juwaynī explicitly states that the proof of the creator follows the originatedness of the world, he only knows of his 'combined proof of the existence of God and creation' (1987, p. 190) and his inferring 'the existence of God directly from the fact that the universe has particular characteristics' (1986, p. 306). Saflo likewise ignores the latter part of al-Juwaynī's argument and maintains that he 'proves both the contingency of the world and the existence of God with a single argument' (2000, p. 204) and 'simultaneously' (ibid., p. 205).

⁵⁹⁷ Al-Juwaynī, *al-'Aqīda*, p. 24.

the possibility of the originated things proves their creator's (*bārī'*) being powerful because we know that the one who exerts influence and the agent (*al-mu'aththir al-fu'āl*) must have power over his act (*fī'l*), and he must will it (*murīd lahu*) because power alone does not bring about the act, rather it is the acting of the powerful one due to power when he wills so. It is also absurd that he wants what he does not know... It became clear that the possibility of the attributes established for the originated things proves the necessity of these attributes for the creator.⁵⁹⁸

It is evident that the inference of God's attributes on the basis of His act and creation has the purpose of confirming Scripture's ascription of these names to God. Saflo has rightly highlighted the importance of this task for al-Juwaynī when stating that 'proving that the world was created does not necessarily imply that it was created by God as we understand it. It could well be an agent which has no will or choice at all.'⁵⁹⁹ Yet, he considers this part of the proof of God's existence, rather than the endeavour to establish a certain nature for God which can be known through the consideration of creation.

The Role of the Analogy between Writing and Author as well as Origination and Originator

One famous argument which we encountered in the writings of a number of *mutakallimūn* before al-Juwaynī, such as al-Ash'arī, al-Māturīdī and al-Bāqillānī, is notably missing in al-Juwaynī's discussions pertaining to the affirmation of the creator. This is the analogy between the realm of the observable, the *shāhid*, and the realm of the unobservable, the *ghā'ib*, in particular based on the common examples of a building and its builder or a writing and its author.⁶⁰⁰ Even though al-Juwaynī himself does not employ this analogy as an argument to prove God's attribute as creator, he does refer to it several times in the *Shāmil*. There, al-Juwaynī sets out to defend the arguments put forward by the founder of his school, al-Ash'arī, relating to the question of 'the need of origination for the originator'⁶⁰¹ against numerous criticisms on the part of Mu'tazilite *mutakallimūn*. This discussion also sheds light on the reasons why al-Juwaynī

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

⁵⁹⁹ Saflo 2000, p. 206.

⁶⁰⁰ Davidson (1987, pp. 154-156) states in Chapter VI.1 entitled "Inferring the existence of God from creation" that this analogy serves in al-Māturīdī and in al-Bāqillānī to prove the existence of God. Fakhry (1957, p. 139) also mentions this analogy with reference to al-Bāqillānī's alleged argument for God's existence.

⁶⁰¹ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 154.

seems to have chosen not to include this often referred to analogy among his own arguments.

Al-Juwaynī reports that the Mu‘tazilites criticised al-Ash‘arī’s use of the analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghā’ib* as ineffective.⁶⁰² ‘There is no connection between the building and the builder according to his [i.e., al-Ash‘arī’s] principle, neither in an acquired way (*iktisāban*), nor in a creative way (*ikhtirā’an*),’⁶⁰³ the Mu‘tazilites criticised, and ‘the building does not occur, according to him, as something the servants have power over.’⁶⁰⁴ The Mu‘tazilites obviously have a point as it is well-known that al-Ash‘arī declared only God to be ‘creator (*khāliq*),’ ‘agent (*fā’il*)’ and ‘capable of (*qādir ‘alayhi*)’ (the act which is acquisition (*al-fi’l alladhī huwa kasb*)).’⁶⁰⁵ Their criticism evidently involves that, unless one acknowledges the principle of causation for the *shāhid*, one cannot claim its validity for the *ghā’ib*. Al-Juwaynī then presents a number of attempts on the part of – unnamed – fellow Ash‘arites to refute these charges. Al-Ash‘arī intended, thus one argument goes, to establish a general rule about the connection between building and builder, and in doing so the question of whether this connection is characterised as acquisition (*kasb*), creation (*ikhtirā’*) or just the continuity of habit (*iṭṭirād al-‘āda*) is subordinate and may be figured out later.⁶⁰⁶ Interestingly, al-Juwaynī himself dismisses the analogy as ‘unsatisfactory (*ghayr marḍia*).’⁶⁰⁷ The problem lies in the fact, he explains, that ‘there is no connection between the building and the builder whatsoever (*aṣlan*),’⁶⁰⁸ thus very much agreeing with the Mu‘tazilites. Pointing to habit does not help either, al-Juwaynī states, as ‘the continuation of habits does not pose a connection between two things, and the principle of the connection is therefore

⁶⁰² Ibid., p. 157: ‘There is no point (*ma’nā*) to testify with something which is opposed to his [i.e., al-Ash‘arī’s] principle.’

⁶⁰³ Ibid., p. 157.

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 157.

⁶⁰⁵ Al-Ash‘arī, *al-Luma’*, p. 72. See Frank 1966 for al-Ash‘arī’s position on human efficient causality and Frank 1971, p. 7 and p. 10 for the Mu‘tazilite position. See Abrahamov 1989 on al-Ash‘arī’s doctrine of acquisition (*kasb, iktisāb*).

⁶⁰⁶ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 163: ‘If something is connected with something else and if the objective is to oppose the affirmation of the connection in general without detail, then it does not do harm that this connection might go back to acquisition or creation or the continuity of habit. This is the case because the reasonable person knows about the connection first and then knows about the details of it thanks to reasoning.’

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 163.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 163.

denied for us.’⁶⁰⁹ In al-Juwaynī’s occasionalistic worldview, it only makes sense to speak of a causal connection between building and builder if one means God by the builder and the world by the building, and this is in fact a view he does defend.⁶¹⁰ In general, however, he makes clear that the affirmation of the principle of causation for the *ghā’ib* has to happen without recourse to observation of the *shāhid*: ‘The connection between the originated thing and the originator...is established without reference to the *shāhid* and the *ghā’ib*,’⁶¹¹ he declares, and we recall that it is in fact the inherent *possibility* of a thing’s origination (in the *‘Aqīda* its attributes) which points to its connection with an outside cause.⁶¹²

The Difference between the Affirmation of the Originator and the Proof of God’s Existence

Al-Juwaynī’s discussion of the Mu‘tazilites’ aforementioned criticisms also allows us to establish with clarity what the affirmation of the creator for creation is all about. One of their points of critique, al-Juwaynī reports, is that al-Ash‘arī was not successful in presenting ‘the affirmation of the originator’⁶¹³ because he denied that humans truly are the creators of their deeds, as indicated above. The Mu‘tazilite ‘Abd al-Jabbār makes this point very clear when he explains regarding ‘the method through which it is known that the Eternal (Most-High!) is the originator of an act from among the acts’⁶¹⁴:

If we declare it wrong for the *shāhid*, then we cannot affirm the creator and relate the acts to Him (*iḍāfa al-af‘āl ilayhi*). Do you not see that it is necessary to

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 163. See Kogan’s discussion of al-Ghazālī’s position on ‘the habitual course of things in nature’ (1985, p. 137 et seqq.).

⁶¹⁰ See ibid., p. 161 where al-Juwaynī defends the terminology used in the analogy and aims to show that it is permissible to ascribe the world to God when represented as a building and a writing: ‘If someone were to say: Your mentioning the building and the writing proves that he [i.e., al-Ash‘arī] intended to speak about the created things, but the Lord (Most-High!) is described as creator (*khāliq*) and inventor (*mubdi‘*) and He is not characterised with the building and the writing. This is inattentiveness on the part of the one who asks. The Lord (Most-High!) ascribed the building to Himself as an act (*fi‘lan*) in verses of His book, such as: {by the sky and how He built it (*banāhā*)} [Q. 91.5; translation from Abdel Haleem 2004]. It is hence not forbidden to ascribe the building and the writing to God (Most-High!) as creation (*khalqan*) and act (*fi‘lan*).’

⁶¹¹ Ibid., p. 164.

⁶¹² Compare ibid., p. 164: ‘The possible origination needs in view of its possibility a particulariser.’

⁶¹³ Ibid., p. 157.

⁶¹⁴ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Majmū‘*, p. 357.

affirm one of us as originator of his actions so that the connection (*ta'alluq*) of the origination of the bodies with God (Almighty and Exalted!) can be declared correct?⁶¹⁵

It is important to note that 'Abd al-Jabbār explicitly states that the analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghā'ib* serves for nothing else than to affirm God's being the creator of the world; it is not God's existence which the affirmation of the creator denotes. Al-Ash'arī's position that humans acquire their power to act from God is problematic, according to the Mu'tazilites, since this would imply that God is connected with His act in an acquired way, too, but 'the Lord is high above this.'⁶¹⁶ God's connection with His act is in a truly creative way (*al-ikhtirā' wa'l-khālq*) – this being something al-Ash'arī himself was eager to point out as well. Al-Ash'arī commits the mistake, the Mu'tazilites maintain, that he affirms one thing for the *shāhid*, but wants to affirm another for the *ghā'ib*, hence he cannot use the *shāhid* as testimony for the *ghā'ib*. Crucially, however, this discussion shows that al-Juwaynī, just like 'Abd al-Jabbār, presents the question of 'the affirmation of the originator'⁶¹⁷ as pertaining to the objective of proving God's role as creator. This involves not only the proof that it is God who brought about the world, but also the proof that God is creator in a certain way. In al-Juwaynī's account, the dispute about the success or failure to affirm the originator has nothing to do with the question of whether God exists, despite claims to the contrary we find in secondary literature.⁶¹⁸

The Existence of the Creator

In addition to what has become evident about the true purpose of al-Juwaynī's arguments for the creator, it is worth taking into account another discussion in his writings as it highlights where certain aspects characteristic of the traditional arguments for God's existence do not match how the *mutakallimūn* approached them. The discussion in question is part of al-Juwaynī's treatment of the divine attributes, which in all three works of his follows the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator. In the *Irshād* we read:

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., p. 357.

⁶¹⁶ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 157: It is the Mu'tazilites who utter this.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., p. 157.

⁶¹⁸ Shihadeh (2008, p. 207) believes that the analogy serves to prove God's existence, rather than His being creator. Davidson (1987, p. 159) argues the same.

Our method in this treatise is to turn to the affirmation of the knowledge of the essential attributes that are affirmed of the creator (*al-bāri*) (Most-High!), and we begin with the reasoning about the affirmation of His existence (*thubūt wujūdihi*). So if someone were to say: You proved previously the knowledge of the creator, but how do you refute someone who considers the creator non-existent (*‘adam*)? We would say...⁶¹⁹

In the *Shāmīl*, al-Juwaynī states in a similar fashion: ‘The first (aspect) with which the attributes have to be introduced is the clarification of the proofs for the existence of the Eternal (*wujūd al-qadīm*) (Most-High!).’⁶²⁰ For some reason, these chapters ‘on the proof of the existence of the Eternal (Most-High!),’⁶²¹ as the heading appears in the *Shāmīl*, have found no mention in secondary literature where al-Juwaynī’s – and others’ – alleged arguments for God’s existence are discussed.⁶²² In the *Shāmīl*, al-Juwaynī then adds:

Those who affirm the creator are in agreement about the necessity of His existence (*wujūb wujūdihi*). None of them disputes this except for the *bāṭiniyya* and the heretics. They prohibit the description of the creator with existence and non-existence.⁶²³ ... We will now clarify the favoured paths that lead to the knowledge of the existence of the creator (*wujūd al-ṣāni*).⁶²⁴

Elsewhere, al-Juwaynī explains the reason why the *bāṭiniyya*, and even some of the ‘philosophers who affirm the creator,’⁶²⁵ avoid speaking of God’s attribute of existence. According to al-Juwaynī, ‘they said: If we describe the Lord with something belonging to the attributes of the originated things, this means likening Him to creation (*tashbīh*).’⁶²⁶ These passages contain some striking points: The question of whether it can be said about the creator of the world –

⁶¹⁹ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, p. 30.

⁶²⁰ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmīl* (1969), p. 609.

⁶²¹ Ibid., p. 609.

⁶²² This is to the exception of Saflo (2000, pp. 201-202) who states with reference to the *Irshād* and the discussion of the divine attributes that al-Juwaynī attempts to deny the assumption ‘that the creator is non-existent’ (ibid., p. 201). Saflo himself hence allows for a distinction between the affirmation of the creator and the question of whether the creator is existent or non-existent, yet he nowhere discusses what this means for the claim that the affirmation of the creator is the same as the affirmation of the existence of God.

⁶²³ Compare al-Shahrastānī’s *Nihāya* where he reports about those who deny God His attributes (*ta’īl*): ‘Some of the learned people are reported to have said: He is He and we do not call Him existent and not non-existent...and this belief is ascribed to the *ghālīyya* of the Shī’a and the *bāṭiniyya*’ (ibid., p. 128 (of the Arabic text)). Walker states about the Ismaili conception of God: ‘He is totally outside of comprehension. We can only say what He is not and also add that He is not not. The affirmation of God is outside the realm of negation altogether’ (1947, p. 83).

⁶²⁴ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmīl* (1969), p. 609.

⁶²⁵ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmīl* (1960-61), p. 166.

⁶²⁶ Ibid., p. 166. Compare Williams 2009, p. 30.

that is, God: 'the Eternal (Most-High!)'⁶²⁷ – that He is existent or non-existent is different from the issue of the affirmation of the creator for creation and in fact follows it. With regards to the *bāṭiniyya* and certain philosophers who do affirm the creator, but who do not believe that He can be described as existent (nor as non-existent), this means that they do affirm that God is creator of the world, hence agreeing with al-Juwaynī on the relation between God as choosing, willing agent and the world as His act brought into existence from non-existence, but this affirmation is not the same as the affirmation of God's existence, which is obviously a point of disagreement. For al-Juwaynī, there is no doubt that the affirmation of the creator leads to certainty about His being (described as) existent. Following the Ash'arite teachings on what 'existence' and 'non-existence' denote,⁶²⁸ he states that 'the existent has no other meaning than being a thing (*shay'*) and affirmed (*thābit*). When the opponent understands the affirmation of the creator, he understands what we mean by existence.'⁶²⁹ Yet, this issue is in fact not that clear-cut, and al-Juwaynī himself has his opponent come up with a rather valid objection: The affirmation of 'something,' so to say, does not mean that this 'something' is necessarily described with existence. Those who follow the theory of states or *aḥwāl*, first introduced by the Mu'tazilite Abū Hāshim b. al-Jubbā'ī (d. 321/933),⁶³⁰ the opponent points out, say that 'they are something affirmed (*thābita*) but they do not describe them with existence.'⁶³¹ Al-Juwaynī himself actually was an adherent of this theory when he wrote the *Shāmil*,⁶³² and in the *Irshād* he

⁶²⁷ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1969), p. 609.

⁶²⁸ Compare Frank 1980: 'For the major schools of *kalām* in its classical period, viz., the "orthodox" schools of Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī...and the Mo'tazilite traditions that follow Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī...the divergence of doctrine on the question of the non-existent is often defined in terms of the question of whether the "non-existent"...is or is not posited as a real, not merely mental, object, an entity ("something": *shay'*) and one finds the Mo'tazila for the most part affirming the proposition and the Ash'arites on the whole...denying it' (p. 186).

⁶²⁹ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1969), p. 610.

⁶³⁰ See al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, p. 131 (of the Arabic text), chapter 6 on the states (*al-aḥwāl*): 'Note that the *mutakallimūn* were in disagreement about the states, denying them and affirming them, after Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī originated his theory of them and this question was not heard of at all before him.' See Frank 1971 on Abū Hāshim b. al-Jubbā'ī's theory of states.

⁶³¹ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1969), p. 610. Compare al-Shahrastānī, *al-Milal*, p. 67: 'Thus he [i.e., Abū Hāshim b. al-Jubbā'ī] maintained that there are modes [i.e., *aḥwāl*] which are attributes neither existing nor non-existing' and his *Nihāya*, p. 133 (of the Arabic text): 'The states are for those who affirm them neither existent nor non-existent.'

⁶³² Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, p. 131 (of the Arabic text): 'The Imām al-Ḥaramayn belonged to those who affirmed them first but then denied them.'

likewise speaks of 'the affirmation of the states,'⁶³³ while denying their description as being existent or non-existent.⁶³⁴ In the *Shāmil*, al-Juwaynī seeks to avert his opponent's objection by stating that those who affirm the states do in fact not mean that *they* are affirmed, and they do not regard *them* as denied or non-existent or existent either. Their affirmation simply means 'the knowledge of them.'⁶³⁵ In order to defend his claim that the affirmation of the creator must imply that God is described as existent, al-Juwaynī poses that 'affirmation, generally taken, means general knowledge of the thing known'⁶³⁶ and 'we mean by affirmation knowledge itself.'⁶³⁷ Still, this does not solve al-Juwaynī's dilemma, as becomes apparent when we take into consideration what he says at the very beginning of the *Shāmil* about things known and their relation to existence.

In a section entitled 'What the originatedness of the world points to is knowledge (*madlūl ḥadath al-ʿālam al-ʿilm*),'⁶³⁸ al-Juwaynī discusses the question of whether the thing proven (*madlūl*) by a proof (*dalīl*) for the originatedness of the world is the originatedness itself or the knowledge of it. In the course of this discussion, he states that proof (*dalīl*) and thing proven (*madlūl*) are connected (*yataʿallaqu*) with each other. The one who understands the connection between what functions as a *dalīl* and its *madlūl* necessarily gains knowledge of the *madlūl*.⁶³⁹ It is therefore that al-Juwaynī speaks of 'the affirmation of the *knowledge* of the creator,' not the affirmation of the creator, as it is the *knowledge* of the *madlūl* (i.e., the creator) one gains when understanding its connection with the *dalīl* (i.e., the created world). Every item of knowledge (*ʿilm*), al-Juwaynī explains, is connected with its object of knowledge (*maʿlūm*).⁶⁴⁰ Something known can be an existent, a non-existent and even, as we have seen in his discussion of the *aḥwāl*, something which is described neither with existence nor with non-existence. This threefold division

⁶³³ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, p. 80.

⁶³⁴ Ibid., p. 80: 'The state (*al-ḥāl*) is an attribute for an existent, not described with existence and not with non-existence.'

⁶³⁵ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1969), p. 610.

⁶³⁶ Ibid., p. 610.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., p. 610.

⁶³⁸ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), pp. 19-21.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

⁶⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

applied to the object of knowledge makes clear that the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator must be a far cry from what we mean when we speak of a traditional proof of God's existence: The affirmation of the knowledge of the creator, which is said to be where God's existence is proven, says nothing about whether the object of this knowledge, namely the creator – God Himself – is existent, non-existent or neither. For instance, al-Juwaynī refers to God's knowledge in pre-eternity 'that the world will exist.'⁶⁴¹ The pre-eternal knowledge of this is something affirmed, whereas the object of this knowledge is something non-existent, as the world is then in the state of non-existence.⁶⁴²

Returning to the discussion between al-Juwaynī and his opponent, the former admits that the same division also applies to the question about the creator. Yet, God's attribute of existence can be established by ruling out the absurdity of His being non-existent and His being an attribute for existence (*ṣifa wujūd*), which is the definition of the *ḥāl*.⁶⁴³ Arguing again on the basis of the Ash'arite teachings on the definition of existence and non-existence, al-Juwaynī reasons that non-existence is universal denial (*naḥī maḥḍ*), and something denied in every respect cannot possibly be a creator, when this has been established previously.⁶⁴⁴ Al-Juwaynī furthermore presents the following reasoning: The originatedness of the world proves God to be its originator, and the nature of His act, which is the world, proves His being wise and powerful. These entities or *ma'ānī* of power and wisdom subsisting in God prove His existence and negate His non-existence 'because that which is described with non-existence and absence cannot be specified with entities (*ma'ānī*) which subsist in it. The one who has specification has existence.'⁶⁴⁵ What is important about this argument is that the attribute of existence can only be established for God once

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., p. 46.

⁶⁴² Ibid., p. 46.

⁶⁴³ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, p. 80: 'The *ḥāl* is an attribute for an existent.'

⁶⁴⁴ See al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1969), p. 609.

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 612. Note the very Ash'arite nature of this argument: The Mu'tazilite 'Abd al-Jabbār, for instance, declares this kind of reasoning invalid. He states that it is not possible to reason this way on the basis of God's being powerful and knowing due to power and knowledge – which al-Juwaynī terms *ma'ānī* – which require the existence of their substrate to subsist in it, since God is described as such by virtue of His essence, not due to entities subsisting in His essence. 'This is not the case for the Eternal (Most-High!) because He is knowing by virtue of His essence (*li-dhātihī*) and powerful by virtue of His essence, hence His existence is not a necessity even if He is knowing and powerful' (*Sharḥ*, p. 177).

His attributes of knowledge, power and life among others have been affirmed, and this in turn depends on showing that God is the creator of the world because knowledge of God is gained only on the basis of the nature of His acts.⁶⁴⁶

'This is correct,' al-Juwaynī avers, 'but according to the principles of the Mu'tazila it is wrong.'⁶⁴⁷ Al-Juwaynī evidently aims to excoriate the Mu'tazilite teaching that the non-existent is a thing and an essence (*shay'an wa-dhātān*) and described with certain characteristics (*khaṣā'is*),⁶⁴⁸ which is at odds with that of the Ash'arites. He hence points to what appears as an absurdity to him that 'it is not far from their principles that the creator is non-existent while being specified with the attributes of affirmation.'⁶⁴⁹ What these two attacks aim at is of course the defence of God's essential attribute of existence, this being al-Juwaynī's original aim, since an agent – which God is in His role as creator – cannot be anything else than existent. The crucial point for our discussion, however, is that, even when the *bāṭiniyya* refuse to describe God with existence and even if the Mu'tazilites had gone so far as to regard God as a non-existent, they nevertheless agree on God's being the creator of the world. This shows that the concepts of existence and non-existence as discussed above are somewhat different from the existence/non-existence dichotomy we find in the classical arguments for God's existence. According to the latter, the conclusion that the world has a cause means nothing else than that this cause – God – is existent, and this is in fact what this argument aims for. The option that God is proven, while being considered non-existent is simply not part of the traditional arguments for God's existence, nor is it discussed. According to the former, however, the conclusion that the world comes from God and that He is hence creator does not immediately mean that God is existent. This is even true, as we have seen, for an Ash'arite like al-Juwaynī himself. The notion and use of the term 'existence' in the traditional arguments for God's existence hence fails

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 611.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 617.

⁶⁴⁸ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 34. Compare al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, p. 31.

⁶⁴⁹ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1969), p. 611.

to convey the subtle differences associated with it by the *mutakallimūn* discussed here.⁶⁵⁰

Conclusions

The objectives al-Juwaynī pursues in all three works of his we have considered here – the *Shāmil*, the *Irshād* and the *‘Aqīda* – are the very same we find discussed in *kalām* works before him: The proof of the originatedness of the world seeks to confirm Scripture in its claim that the world is creation, which means for a *mutakallim* like al-Juwaynī that it has a beginning for its existence. The proof of the originator for creation intends to establish a number of things: Firstly, it affirms the principle of causation for the unobservable realm, which means that things entering existence do so due to an outside cause; they do not pop into existence uncaused and by chance. Secondly, this is made the basis for the defence of the Qur’ānic declaration that it is God who brought about creation. God is, for al-Juwaynī, the creator of the world in a particular way: He willed it and chose its creation; He did not cause it necessarily, a belief the *mutakallimūn* commonly ascribe to the philosophers and such individuals they label the naturalists. God’s being the creator of the world is then made the basis for the confirmation of the divine attributes and names Scripture ascribes to God. This method rests on the idea that the characteristics of creation point to the characteristics of their creator – God. In many respects, al-Juwaynī follows into the footsteps of his predecessors, such as when he makes use of the concepts of possibility/necessity and particularisation. This is also true where he makes the atomistic worldview the basis of the proof that the world has a beginning in time. Only in the *‘Aqīda*, however, does his method to prove this doctrine come strikingly close to that of the philosopher Ibn Sīnā. It, therefore, seems to be misleading to assume that al-Juwaynī intends to prove God’s existence along the lines of the traditional cosmological arguments.

⁶⁵⁰ In the *‘Aqīda*, al-Juwaynī does not discuss the question of God’s existence at length as he does in the *Shāmil* and also to some degree in the *Irshād*. He only points out that ‘the permissibility (*jawāz*) of the existence of the originated things proves the necessity (*wujūb*) of the existence of their creator because the permissible does not come to be due to itself...and the existence of the creator is not described with permissibility’ (*al-‘Aqīda*, p. 24).

Chapter Six: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)

The *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*

It is known that al-Ghazālī was a very multifaceted scholar. Some works of his reflect his initial training in Ash‘arite *kalām*, others reveal his later inclination to Sufism. Some works of his also make evident the influence the study of philosophy had on him.⁶⁵¹ One of al-Ghazālī’s earliest works, which he wrote when he was still teaching Ash‘arite *kalām* at the Nizāmiyya college in Baghdad before his first nervous breakdown in 488/1095, is the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. Al-Ghazālī intended this work – as its title indicates – as a refutation of Aristotle’s philosophy as presented in the works and commentaries of al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Ibn Sīnā.⁶⁵² The *Tahāfut* is essentially a work of *kalām* – not of a particular school though, as al-Ghazālī himself stresses⁶⁵³ –, which is apparent not only in the views defended, but also in the terms and concepts used, as shall be seen.

One of the many criticisms al-Ghazālī presents in the *Tahāfut* concerns, we are told in secondary literature, the proof of God’s existence. The main issue dividing philosophers and *mutakallimūn*, al-Ghazālī states, is the question of whether the world is eternal or originated, the latter clearly taking up the view that the world has a beginning.⁶⁵⁴ Al-Ghazālī’s critique of the philosophers therefore is, Herbert Davidson argues, that they have no grounds to prove that God exists as ‘the existence of God cannot be demonstrated on the assumption of the eternity of the world. It can be demonstrated only by those who subscribe to the Kalam arguments for creation.’⁶⁵⁵ Lenn E. Goodman has likewise maintained that al-Ghazālī ‘argues extensively...that the eternity of the world is

⁶⁵¹ For al-Ghazālī’s life and works see his autobiography *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (*Deliverance from Error: An Annotated Translation of al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazālī* by Richard Joseph McCarthy (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, [1999])); Griffel 2009, chapter 1 on his biography; Frank 1994, pp. 1-3; Hourani 1984, pp. 292-293 on dating his works.

⁶⁵² Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut* (1927), p. 6 and pp. 8-9. See Griffel 2009, chapter 5 which analyses how differing positions in cosmology (issues of creation and causation) gave rise to the *Tahāfut*.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., pp. 13-14.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 12-13.

⁶⁵⁵ Davidson 1987, p. 370.

incompatible with the existence of God'⁶⁵⁶ and Majid Fakhry holds that, according to al-Ghazālī, 'the Neo-Platonists are unable to prove the existence of God'⁶⁵⁷ as they uphold the eternity of bodies. It appears then that al-Ghazālī defends the *mutakallimūn's* use of the cosmological argument in order to prove the existence of God since 'creation is the only binding, reasoned proof of God's existence,'⁶⁵⁸ as Goodman has it. William Lane Craig has gone even further, perceiving al-Ghazālī's criticism as not solely related to the provability of God's existence, but as also pertaining to the charge of atheism: 'to his mind the thesis of an eternal universe was quite simply equivalent to atheism.'⁶⁵⁹

The Proof of the Creator Based on the World's Originatedness

The critical question is: Where in the *Tahāfut* is it that al-Ghazālī does say so? We will in fact not encounter him speaking of the philosophers' inability to prove 'the existence of God,' and it seems that what Davidson, Goodman and Fakhry have in mind is al-Ghazālī's concluding remark in Chapter Ten of the *Tahāfut* that 'he who does not assume the originatedness of the bodies has no ground at all for his assumption of the creator (*ṣāniʿ*).'⁶⁶⁰ The reading of this statement on the part of the aforementioned three scholars as referring to a cosmological argument is not surprising as it resembles its notion that the existence of God is proven on the basis of His being the cause of the world. Yet, we have previously argued that this is not the *mutakallimūn's* objective and reasoning, and this is also true for al-Ghazālī: Creation is not meant to prove that God exists; rather, the affirmation of the creator seeks to show, firstly, that the world, being creation, came to be due to another, following the principle of causation; secondly, that it must therefore be linked to God as its cause, just as Scripture says; and thirdly, that God is creator in a specific way. In the following it shall become clear that in the *Tahāfut* al-Ghazālī follows the tradition of his predecessors who were not concerned with the proof of God's existence as we know it from the cosmological and other arguments. When al-Ghazālī states that

⁶⁵⁶ Goodman 1971 (II), p. 184.

⁶⁵⁷ Fakhry 2004, p. 231.

⁶⁵⁸ Goodman 1971 (II), p. 168.

⁶⁵⁹ Craig 1980, p. 99.

⁶⁶⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut* (1927), p. 209.

the creator cannot be affirmed unless on the basis of the world's originatedness, we submit, he intends to say the following: The philosophers fail to show that there is a causal connection between God and the world, and they cannot justify their calling God creator since they assume the eternity of the world. For al-Ghazālī, the dispute is not about the reconcilability of the doctrine of an eternal world with the issue of the provability of God's existence; a contradiction arises when seeking to ascribe the world to God as His creation, while upholding the tenet of an eternal world.

This becomes clear when we consider a number of chapters from among the 20 chapters of the *Tahāfut*. It is the discussion in Chapter Three that gives us a first glimpse of what al-Ghazālī intends when he speaks of the contradictoriness of an eternal world and the creator. He states that most philosophers maintain that 'there is for the world a creator (*ṣāni'*) and God is the creator of the world and its maker (*fā'iluhu*).'⁶⁶¹ Like the theologians, they also say that the world is 'His act and His creation (*fi'luhu wa-ṣan'uhu*).'⁶⁶² Yet, al-Ghazālī has an issue with this statement of theirs which concerns their use of terminology. Their calling God *ṣāni'* and *fā'il* and the world His *fi'l* and *ṣan'* is in contradiction to their own principles, which pertains, on the one hand, to the concepts these terms convey and, on the other, to the way the philosophers perceive the relation between God and the world.⁶⁶³ His intention, al-Ghazālī states, is nothing but 'to reveal that you [i.e., the philosophers] make up names without verification (*taḥqīq*) of them'⁶⁶⁴ which means that 'God is not truly a *fā'il* for you and the world is not truly His *fi'l*.'⁶⁶⁵

Why is it then that the philosophers call God falsely, according to al-Ghazālī, an agent and the world His act? An agent, he explains, is defined as one who is 'willing, choosing and knowing.'⁶⁶⁶ This definition is of course very reminiscent of what certain previous *mutakallimūn* have said, as we have seen. The philosophers' conception of God, however, comes closer to that of an *illa*

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., p. 95.

⁶⁶² Ibid., p. 95.

⁶⁶³ Ibid., p. 95.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 109.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 109.

⁶⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 96.

causing out of necessity as they deny the divine attributes (as real entities), in particular God's will, which al-Ghazālī considers tantamount to depriving Him of these very characteristics.⁶⁶⁷ The philosophers' affirmation that the world exists due to God is hence not enough in al-Ghazālī's eyes to call God an agent or creator: 'The agent is not called *fā'il* and *ṣāni'* because he is a cause (*sabab*), only, rather because he is a cause in a specific way, namely due to will and choice.'⁶⁶⁸ Similarly, the philosophers are mistaken in labelling the world God's act since the term *fī'l* conveys a certain concept which is incompatible with their belief in the world's eternity. *Fī'l*, al-Ghazālī states, is an expression for origination (*al-iḥdāth*). Origination means a thing's coming into existence from non-existence.⁶⁶⁹ It follows with regards to the eternal world that 'existence which is not preceded by non-existence, rather which is eternal (*dā'im*), is not the act of the agent.'⁶⁷⁰ If God's relation to the world is like that between *'illa* and *ma'lūl*, God cannot be called *ṣāni'* and the world His *fī'l*.⁶⁷¹

This discussion gives us an idea why al-Ghazālī maintains that the belief in an eternal world cannot possibly be compatible with the belief in the *ṣāni'*. They represent two mutually exclusive notions. Furthermore, it should be noted that the relation between God and an eternal world, if characterised as that between *'illa* and *ma'lūl* (as opposed to the one discussed above), does, in principal, not pose a logical problem for al-Ghazālī. He states that he does not dispute the eternal coexistence of *'illa* and *ma'lūl* – this being the philosophers' view on God and the world – as God's eternal knowledge is the *'illa* of His being knowing in eternity. What he disputes is the use of the terms *fī'l* for the *ma'lūl*.⁶⁷² Goodman's statement that '[h]e explicitly affirms his willingness to part with the conception that God exists if it can be shown that the world has not come to be'⁶⁷³ seems to overlook the aforementioned. This shows that the interpretation

⁶⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 96: 'God (Most-High!) is not willing according to you as He has no attribute at all, and what comes from Him does so necessarily.' Also ibid., pp. 96-97: 'According to you, the world comes from God like the *ma'lūl* from the *'illa* in the manner of necessary causation.'

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 97.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 103.

⁶⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

⁶⁷¹ See Fakhry (2004, p. 231) on al-Ghazālī's critique of the philosophers' use of terminology in Chapter Three of the *Tahāfut*.

⁶⁷² Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut* (1927), p. 108.

⁶⁷³ Goodman 1971 (II), p. 184.

of al-Ghazālī's aforementioned statement at the end of Chapter Ten as saying that God's existence can only be proven when the world is affirmed to be originated misses the point. It is God's attribute of being creator which requires the premise of a created world, and this is where the philosophers fail. Davidson leaves this aspect of terminology, which hints at al-Ghazālī's objectives, unmentioned.⁶⁷⁴

Yet, there is more to al-Ghazālī's remark. He not only stresses the philosophers' incoherence with regards to terminology. He also emphasises that they cannot even maintain their claim that there is *any* relation between God and the world. In Chapter Four, al-Ghazālī states that two views exist about the world, which both make sense.⁶⁷⁵ The first is that of 'the people of the truth (*ahl al-ḥaqq*)'⁶⁷⁶ who regard the world as something originated (*ḥādith*) with a beginning, the origination of which is due to an originator or creator (*ṣāniʿ*). This is of course the standard *kalām* view on this matter: Things enter existence due to an outside cause, not by chance or due to themselves. The other view is, al-Ghazālī explains, that the world is eternal (*qadīm*) and does not depend for its existence on an originator.⁶⁷⁷ Both views unsurprisingly seem reasonable to al-Ghazālī, even though he himself of course does not subscribe to the latter, as they are in line with what he had expounded upon earlier with regards to the relation between agent and act. The philosophers, however, hold a third view which is completely incomprehensible: They believe that the world is eternal, but they nevertheless want to ascribe it in terms of its existence to an originator.⁶⁷⁸ We have seen how the mere terminology used has to be a thorn in al-Ghazālī's eye, and he hence has his opponents throw in that in this context *ṣāniʿ* 'does not stand for 'an agent (*fāʿil*) who is choosing and acts after not having acted,' rather 'we mean the *ʿilla*.'⁶⁷⁹ The issue at stake therefore becomes whether the

⁶⁷⁴ Interestingly, Davidson does acknowledge elsewhere (1987, pp. 2-3) that the (alleged) proofs of God's existence presented by theologians and philosophers respectively also involve different concepts of God, but he fails to see that certain discussions between them are hence concerned with God's nature as cause only (such as in the *Tahāfut*), where His existence is of no concern.

⁶⁷⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut* (1927), p. 133.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 133.

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 133.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 133-134.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 134.

eternal world depends on God who caused it necessarily, not willingly. Al-Ghazālī has his opponents argue, in a manner reminiscent of Ibn Sīnā,⁶⁸⁰ that an infinite regress of causes is impossible and that the world, despite its eternity, owes its existence to another who is described as *‘illa*.⁶⁸¹ In his endeavour to invalidate the philosophers’ conception of the relation between God and the world (note that al-Ghazālī states in his introduction that he wants to show that the world is God’s act (*fi’l*)!⁶⁸²), he now attacks the crucial tenet of the impossibility of an infinite causal chain. Al-Ghazālī’s strategy is to show that the philosophers cannot defend this tenet, so that their belief in an eternal world and their claim that it is due to another become irreconcilable. His aim is to refute the possibility that God and the world could stand to each other like *‘illa* and *ma’lūl* – a belief on the part of the philosophers which is completely contrary to the theologians’ understanding of the Qur’ānic pronouncements on this. Al-Ghazālī then concludes this discussion by stating that the philosophers fail to prove that the whole series of causes, being essentially possible, cannot in its entirety be necessary, based on their own principle that an aggregate of originated events, that is, of effects, can be eternal.⁶⁸³ It must follow, according to al-Ghazālī, that the philosophers cannot maintain their claim that the world is eternal and nevertheless God’s product, be it as His *fi’l* or His *ma’lūl*. We have seen that it escaped Goodman, Davidson and Fakhry that this is the point al-Ghazālī want to make.⁶⁸⁴

Interestingly, Chapter Ten, where the statement about the necessity of affirming the createdness of bodies for the assumption of the creator is made, discusses essentially the same issue. Al-Ghazālī states that it is correct to assume that

⁶⁸⁰ See, for example, Ibn Sīnā, *Dānish-nāma*, chapter 16, p. 45.

⁶⁸¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut* (1927), pp. 134-135.

⁶⁸² Ibid., p. 13.

⁶⁸³ Ibid., p. 139.

⁶⁸⁴ Arabic editions of the *Tahāfut* as well as translations of it usually provide a heading for each of its 20 chapters. For Chapter Four, Bouyges’ Arabic edition (1927) gives *‘fi bayān ‘ajzihim ‘an al-istidlāl ‘alā wujūd al-ṣāni’ li’l-‘ālam’* and *‘...‘alā ithbāt al-ṣāni’ li’l-‘ālam.’* Kamali’s translation (1963) offers the title ‘To show their inability to prove the existence of the creator of the world.’ It should be noted that both versions in the Arabic edition are taken from manuscripts of Ibn Rushd’s *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* where he quotes al-Ghazālī, which can be inferred from footnotes mentioning the manuscripts (p. 133, IV f. 4 and pp. XXI-XXII). Al-Ghazālī himself names Chapter Four in his own list of contents as *‘fi ta’jīzihim ‘an (min) ithbāt al-ṣāni’*. The mention of ‘existence/*wujūd*’ with reference to the creator is hence missing in al-Ghazālī, and it in fact reflects Ibn Rushd’s choice of terminology, as will be seen.

something originated exists due to a *ṣāniʿ* or *ʿilla*, but he asks how the philosophers come to assume that the eternal bodies of the world are also due to such an *ʿilla*. They could say like the *dahriyya*, he maintains, that the matter⁶⁸⁵ these bodies are made of is eternal and without cause and that it is only the forms and accidents (*al-ṣuwar waʾl-aʿrāḍ*) which originate in time. He has the philosophers reply that these eternal bodies in the world cannot be necessarily existent as they, being composed, carry the signs of making in them. This shows that the world, even though eternal, depends on an outside cause, which is the issue at stake here. Al-Ghazālī counters them, arguing that he has shown previously that they are not able to justify their claim that something corporeal cannot be necessary in itself and independent of a cause for its existence. Furthermore, he states the only thing that can be proven by rational demonstration is – but the philosophers failed again – that an infinite regress is impossible. Yet, this does not constitute a problem for the *dahriyya*’s claim that the bodies of the world are eternal and uncaused in their existence: All causal series terminate in the endless rotary motion of the spheres of the heavens which are without cause. On the contrary, it constitutes a problem for the philosophers as they have no grounds for their assumption of an eternal, yet caused world. According to Kamali’s translation, al-Ghazālī concludes: ‘So he who reflects over the points we have mentioned will see the inability of all those who believe in the eternity of bodies to claim that they have a cause. These people are in consistency bound to accept Materialism [*al-ilhād*] and Atheism [*al-dahr*].’⁶⁸⁶ Kamali’s rendering of *al-dahr* as atheism – with which he is not alone⁶⁸⁷ – is just as misplaced as Davidson, Goodman and Fakhry’s reading of al-Ghazālī’s statement that only the assertion of the createdness of the bodies justifies asserting the creator as referring to a proof of God’s existence. Firstly, with regards to the term *al-dahr* and the group referred to as

⁶⁸⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut* (1927), p. 206: ‘The bodies, which are the heavens, which are eternal, and the four elements (*al-ʿanāṣir al-arbaʿa*), which are the stuff (*ḥaṣw*) of the sphere of the moon, and their bodies and their matter (*mawāduha*) are eternal.’

⁶⁸⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut* (1963), p. 141.

⁶⁸⁷ Wisnovsky speaks of ‘atheist Materialists (*dahriyya*), who believed in the eternity of the world’ (2004, p. 69). Goodman states: ‘It is against the Peripatetics’ seeming unwillingness to assign concrete implications to the existence of God that Ghazālī’s rancor toward eternalism and his charges of atheism are directed’ (1971 (I), p. 68). Najjar has: ‘*Al-Dahriyah*. In the Arabic sources, this term refers to an undetermined group of naturalists and materialists who denied the existence of God’ (2001, p. 38, f. 57).

dahriyya, we have encountered them several times in the works of theologians before al-Ghazālī. The unanimous picture that emerged is that their equation with atheists who deny that there is a divine being, as Kamali's translation suggest, is not tenable. They rather represent the view that the matter of the world exists independent of a cause, which poses a problem for philosophers as well as *mutakallimūn*.⁶⁸⁸ Secondly, the mention of atheism in this context completely misses the point. Al-Ghazālī intends to show, in ways not different from his treatment in Chapter Four, that the only way for the philosophers to maintain that the world in its eternity is God's creation is to show that the bodies of the world do not exist necessarily and uncaused, yet they fail in this endeavour. Consequentially, they fail to prove the creator, whether this is understood as the concept of the *ṣānīʿ* and *fāʿil* or that of the *ʿilla*. Al-Ghazālī, the *mutakallim*, accuses the philosophers of being inconsistent when they describe the connection between the world and God as characterised by eternal coexistence, while at the same time claiming to adhere to the Qurʾānic descriptions of God as creator and the world as creation. With this endeavour of his, al-Ghazālī does not differ at all from the many theologians of various affiliations who came before him.⁶⁸⁹ The concepts of the *ṣānīʿ*, the *fāʿil* and the *ʿilla* he employs are exactly the same his teacher al-Juwaynī and before him al-Bāqillānī already expounded upon when they attempted to show that God is to be called the creator of the world. The objective al-Ghazālī pursues in his discussion about the affirmation of the creator does not differ either from what we find in *kalām* works written before al-Ghazālī's time, such as in ʿAbd al-Jabbār's *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa*, as well as after him, for instance in al-Malāḥimī's (d. 536/1141) *al-Muʿtamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*. Both authors speak in this context unmistakably about 'the proofs that He (Most-High!) is the creator of the world'⁶⁹⁰ as well as that 'there is no proof to be found in reason and revelation that the originator of the world...is something other than God (Most-

⁶⁸⁸ See Stroumsa 1999.

⁶⁸⁹ Clayton rightly states that the theologians' 'over-riding concern...was by means of rational argument to protect the Qurʾānic doctrine of God as creator and sustainer of all that is,' yet he nevertheless assumes that the proof of God as creator was part of the argument for God's existence which he believes to be based upon the *ḥudūth* argument which '[the theologians] were favourably disposed toward' (1987, p. 10).

⁶⁹⁰ ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ*, p. 151.

High!)..., rather revelation proves that He (Most-High!) is the originator...for the world.'⁶⁹¹

The *Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād* and the *Risāla qudsiyya*

Shortly after al-Ghazālī finished the *Tahāfut* in 1095 and around the time of his first crisis in the same year, he completed another work of *kalām*, *al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād*.⁶⁹² Al-Ghazālī himself describes *al-Iqtisād* as an exposition of the fundamental doctrines of the Muslim belief and their defence against heretical objections. The same can be said of *al-Risāla al-qudsiyya*, another manual of *kalām* expounding upon Islam's basic tenets, which al-Ghazālī describes in very similar terms.⁶⁹³ *Al-Risāla*, which became part of one of al-Ghazālī's most famous works, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, was written shortly after *al-Iqtisād*⁶⁹⁴ and both works resemble each other in a number of respects, as will be seen.

God's Existence and the Affirmation of the Creator

There is something noticeable about the *Iqtisād* and the *Risāla*, not only when compared to al-Ghazālī's previous work, the *Tahāfut*, but also in comparison to the works of the *mutakallimūn* before him we considered previously, when it comes to the sections which concern the affirmation of the creator. What is striking about the *Iqtisād* and the *Risāla* is that the 'existence' of the creator and the proof thereof is mentioned explicitly by al-Ghazālī. This is not encountered in the works of other *mutakallimūn* before al-Ghazālī. To name but a few, al-Ash'arī asked in his *Kitāb al-Luma'* 'What is the proof that there is a creator for creation...?'⁶⁹⁵ Al-Bāqillānī argued in his *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* that 'for this originated, formed world there must be an originator, a former'⁶⁹⁶ and al-Māturīdī spoke of 'the proof that the world has an originator'⁶⁹⁷ in his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. None of them mentioned the 'existence' of the originator, much less God's existence in this context. The same is true for al-Juwaynī who in his *Kitāb*

⁶⁹¹ Al-Malāḥimī, *al-Mu'tamad*, p. 184.

⁶⁹² See Hourani 1984, p. 293 and Griffel 2009, p. 35 on its dating.

⁶⁹³ See Frank 1994, pp. 30-31 for an analysis of traditionally Ash'arite elements in the *Iqtisād* and instances where al-Ghazālī seems to somewhat diverge from this school in other works.

⁶⁹⁴ See Hourani 1994, p. 295 and Griffel 2009, p. 45.

⁶⁹⁵ Al-Ash'arī, *al-Luma'*, p. 17.

⁶⁹⁶ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd*, p. 23.

⁶⁹⁷ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 17.

al-Irshād and in *al-‘Aqīda al-nizāmiyya* sought to make known ‘the method which leads to the knowledge of the creator.’⁶⁹⁸ In sharp contrast to these theologians, al-Ghazālī does speak, in the first introduction of the *Iqtīṣād*, of the endeavour ‘to establish the proof of the existence of the Lord (*wujūd al-rabb*) (Most-High!)’⁶⁹⁹ as one of the aims of the science of *kalām* and he makes the proof of ‘the existence of the creator’⁷⁰⁰ the first point of his enquiry about God. Likewise, in the *Risāla*, the first task al-Ghazālī undertakes with regards to God is to establish ‘the knowledge of the existence of God.’⁷⁰¹

The method al-Ghazālī employs to prove this is the same in the *Iqtīṣād* and the *Risāla* and it is very reminiscent of the method used by earlier *mutakallimūn* to affirm the creator on the basis of the world’s originatedness. Al-Ghazālī reasons, presenting the argument in the form of a syllogism,⁷⁰² that ‘the world necessarily has a cause (*sabab*)’ based upon the two premises that ‘every originated thing has a cause for its origination’ and that ‘the world is originated.’⁷⁰³ Yet, despite this similarity between al-Ghazālī’s reasoning and the reasoning we find in the works of the aforementioned *mutakallimūn*, it seems that the former has a different objective in mind than the latter who sought to prove God’s role as creator, not His existence. This is not the only aspect distinguishing al-Ghazālī’s reasoning from the arguments employed by his predecessors. We recall that in the works of his predecessors, God’s being creator involved that He is the cause of the world in a specific way. Whether

⁶⁹⁸ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, p. 27. See also *al-‘Aqīda*, p. 20.

⁶⁹⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtīṣād*, p. 8.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

⁷⁰¹ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla*, p. 382.

⁷⁰² See Ulrich Rudolph’s “Die Neubewertung der Logik durch al-Ġazālī” (in Perler and Rudolph 2005, pp. 73-97) for al-Ghazālī’s views on logic and, particularly, the syllogism; especially p. 90 for the syllogism employed to prove the originatedness of the world.

⁷⁰³ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtīṣād*, p. 24. See also the *Risāla*, p. 384: ‘In view of its origination, the originated thing needs a cause (*sabab*) which originates it, and the world is originated, hence it needs a cause in view of its origination.’ In the *Iqtīṣād*, al-Ghazālī defends both premises thus (similarly in the *Risāla*): The major premise is defended in the manner of al-Juwaynī: A thing’s existence before its origination is possible (*mumkin*), not necessary (*wājib*), nor impossible (*muḥāl*). The cause (*sabab*) tips the scales in favour of existence. The minor premise is defended on the basis of the old *kalām* argument that bodies are never free from accidents (i.e., motion and rest), which are originated in time, and what is not free from the originated is itself originated. Al-Ghazālī’s syllogism follows hence very much the tradition of previous *mutakallimūn*. See Goodman 1971 (I), in particular pp. 73-75, on the details of al-Ghazālī’s argument.

these *mutakallimūn* called God *ṣāni*,⁷⁰⁴ *muḥdith*⁷⁰⁵ or *muṣawwir*,⁷⁰⁶ the crucial point was that these terms represented a single concept, namely that of the *fāʿil* or agent who is endowed with will, knowledge and power. In the *Tahāfut*, al-Ghazālī himself had gone to great lengths to stress this very point against the philosophers' conception of God. His word choice in the aforementioned syllogism in both the *Iqtisād* and the *Risāla* is therefore rather astonishing: He does not conclude that the world has an originator or the like, rather its having a *sabab* must be affirmed. The *mutakallimūn* before al-Ghazālī would not have opted for this term to describe God in His role as creator. Just like the *ʿilla*, the *sabab* denotes something which produces its effect necessarily, not due to will, and this term would hence have been completely at odds with the *mutakallimūn*'s conception of God as a willing agent. Al-Bāqillānī, for instance, used this term in his refutation of the view that nature could have been the cause that brought about the world. Nature is here described as a *sabab* and the world as its *musabbab*, being necessitated by it (*mūjaba ʿanhā*).⁷⁰⁷ This concept was evidently still associated with the term *sabab* after al-Ghazālī's death. The Muʿtazilite al-Malāḥimī, who died 30 years after al-Ghazālī, makes a clear distinction between 'an influence coming from one who acts (*muʾaththir*) according to choice (*ikhtiyār*), and this is the act (*al-fīʿl*)' and 'an influence from one who acts necessarily (*mūjib*), and this is...the *musabbab* of the *sabab*'.⁷⁰⁸ He then states that it is his endeavour to clarify that 'God's essence is not one which necessitates (*mūjib*), so that it would be...a *sabab*'.⁷⁰⁹ In the context of God's description as cause of the world, the term *sabab* is in fact very reminiscent of the terminology used by such philosophers as Ibn Sīnā who equated the *sabab* with the *ʿilla*.⁷¹⁰ This is in accordance with how al-Malāḥimī uses both terms.⁷¹¹ In view of all this, and given that al-Ghazālī portrays God in both the *Iqtisād* and the *Risāla* in typical *kalām* manner as one who has the attributes of power,

⁷⁰⁴ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, p. 23.

⁷⁰⁵ Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, p. 17.

⁷⁰⁶ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd*, p. 23.

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid., pp. 34-35 and p. 38.

⁷⁰⁸ Al-Malāḥimī, *al-Muʿtamad*, p. 83.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 83.

⁷¹⁰ See Craig 1980, p. 114, f. 35.

⁷¹¹ Al-Malāḥimī, *al-Muʿtamad*, p. 83: The influence of the necessitating cause is 'the *ḥukm* of the *ʿilla* or the *musabbab* of the *sabab*' and God's essence is not 'like an *ʿilla* or a *sabab*'.

knowledge and will,⁷¹² it seems rather surprising that he would opt for the term *sabab*. It is only later in the *Iqtisād* that al-Ghazālī adds, without much explanation, that ‘by the *sabab* we mean nothing other than the *murajjih*,’⁷¹³ who represents ‘one who gives preponderance to the existence (of what originated) over (its) non-existence so that non-existence changes into existence.’⁷¹⁴ In the *Risāla*, he equates the *sabab* with the *muḥdith* and the *mukhaṣṣiṣ* who particularises the time of a thing’s coming into existence, but again without much explanation.⁷¹⁵ These terms are employed by earlier *mutakallimūn*, and al-Ghazālī also follows in their footsteps by making use of the argument from particularisation. At the same time, the term *murajjih* is in fact borrowed from Ibn Sīnā.⁷¹⁶ However, it should not be forgotten that al-Ghazālī did seemingly distance himself not only from the occasionalistic worldview of his Ash‘arite predecessors,⁷¹⁷ but also from their rather strict and determined terminology which is reflected in his calling God the ‘*musabbib al-asbāb*.’⁷¹⁸ What all this indicates, and what can further be confirmed when one examines the whole of al-Ghazālī’s discussions surrounding his syllogism, is that he, unlike his predecessors, did not see the need of engaging in a lengthy and detailed exposition of which term applies to God in His role as the cause of the world and which term does not. This fact, taken together with the aforementioned fact that al-Ghazālī explicitly speaks of the proof of God’s existence, might indicate that we witness a change in the discourse during al-Ghazālī’s lifetime. His predecessors’ focus on establishing on the basis of the originatedness of the world that God is nothing else than its *ṣāni‘* seems to have

⁷¹² Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād*, p. 79: ‘The second section on the attributes...we assume that He is powerful, knowing...willing’ and *al-Risāla*, p. 382: ‘The second section on His attributes...the knowledge of His being knowing, powerful, willing.’

⁷¹³ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād*, p. 26.

⁷¹⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

⁷¹⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla*, p. 385 and p. 386.

⁷¹⁶ See Frank 1994, p. 34 and Griffel 2009, p. 170 on this term. Interestingly, al-Malāḥimī uses the term ‘*murajjih*’ in the same sense as al-Ghazālī (*al-Mu‘tamad*, p. 168).

⁷¹⁷ See Frank 1994, pp. 36-39 and Frank 1992, p. 18 on al-Ghazālī’s distancing himself from certain aspects of classical Ash‘arite occasionalism and his adoption of concepts and terminology closer to Ibn Sīnā. See also Abrahamov 1988 on al-Ghazālī’s theory of causality. See Griffel 2009, chapter 6 who shows that al-Ghazālī accepts causality in nature, which is at odds with classical Ash‘arite occasionalism, but he rejects the necessity of any causal relation advocated by Ibn Sīnā.

⁷¹⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla*, p. 275: ‘*Al-tawḥīd* means that one regards all things as coming from the *musabbib al-asbāb* (i.e., the one who makes the causes function as causes).’

shifted in al-Ghazālī, it appears, and he now uses the same premise in order to prove something else, namely the existence of the godhead.

In secondary literature, at least, we encounter the view that al-Ghazālī's aforementioned syllogism in the *Iqtiṣād* and the *Risāla* is a clear case of a traditional argument for God's existence. Davidson identifies al-Ghazālī's argument in the *Risāla* as 'the proof from creation, the proof that first establishes the creation of the world and then infers the existence of a creator.'⁷¹⁹ Richard M. Frank likewise states concerning 'the proof given in *Iqtiṣād*' that it is an argument for 'the existence of God' following the traditional method 'based on bodies and accidents.'⁷²⁰ Frank Griffel ascribes 'versions of [the] (argument for God's existence based on the principle of particularization)'⁷²¹ to al-Ghazālī in his *Risāla*. Let us therefore investigate whether the aforementioned shift in discourse, as it were, really took place as it appears from al-Ghazālī's works. Was the endeavour to prove God's role as creator been replaced by the attempt to prove His existence?

In order to attempt an answer to this question, we shall take into consideration the works written by two contemporaries of al-Ghazālī. Their treatment of the much debated issue of the affirmation of the creator can help shed light on the meaning and purpose of al-Ghazālī's dubious reference to the proof of the existence of God. The first text we will investigate is Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī's *al-Ghunya fī al-kalām*. Al-Anṣārī was, like al-Ghazālī, a disciple of al-Juwaynī and he died only a few years after al-Ghazālī in the year 511/1118. The other one is a work by Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī entitled *Tabṣīrat al-adilla fī uṣūl al-dīn*. Al-Nasafī belonged to the Maturidite school of *kalām* and died in 507/1114.

Al-Anṣārī – Continuation or Change of the Discourse?

It is immediately apparent that al-Anṣārī's *al-Ghunya* is a traditional *kalām* work and that he very much follows in the footsteps of his teacher al-Juwaynī, whom he cites repeatedly. Al-Anṣārī uses the premise of the originatedness of

⁷¹⁹ Davidson 1987, p. 227.

⁷²⁰ Frank 1994, p. 72. See also Frank 1992, p. 29: 'In the beginning of *al-Iqtiṣād*, where he wishes to prove the existence of the Creator as the cause (*sabab*) of the existence of the universe...'

⁷²¹ Griffel 2009, p. 170.

the world, which he defends against ‘the view of many early ones that the world has always been as it is now,’⁷²² as the foundation of ‘the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator (*ithbāt al-‘ilm bi’l-ṣāni*).’⁷²³ Al-Anṣārī’s reasoning is essentially the same as that of his teacher: All originated things are only possible (*jā’iz, mumkin*) in terms of existence and non-existence and with regards to the time of their coming to be. If they enter existence, rather than remaining non-existent, this points to ‘(their) need for a particulariser (*mukhaṣṣis*)’⁷²⁴ and ‘one who necessitates (*muqtaḍin*) one aspect of possibility.’⁷²⁵ Al-Anṣārī then turns to a discussion whether this *muqtaḍī* could be ‘something that necessitates (*mūjib*) like the ‘illa and nature (*al-ṭab*),’⁷²⁶ where cause and effect coexist. Both options are of course rejected and the conclusion is reached that the *muqtaḍī* is ‘an agent who brings into existence (*fā’il mūjid*), as the *ahl al-ḥaqq* say’⁷²⁷ and who is ‘one who chooses, (being) living, knowing and powerful.’⁷²⁸

When we compare al-Anṣārī’s discussion surrounding the affirmation of the creator with al-Ghazālī’s we immediately notice differences. There is no talk of the *existence* of the creator, much less of God. Instead, we find that al-Anṣārī focuses on ascertaining the nature of the cause of the existence of the world, and he refers to the very three alternatives – the *fā’il*, the ‘illa and nature – which we know from previous *kalām* works. In fact, the only instance where al-Anṣārī is concerned with God’s existence and the proof thereof is in the section on ‘what is necessary for God in terms of the attributes’⁷²⁹ where he confirms the tenet that ‘God is (an) existent (*Allāh mawjūd*).’⁷³⁰ Again, this section is very reminiscent of al-Juwaynī’s chapter on ‘the proofs for the existence of the Eternal (Most-High!)’⁷³¹ as both theologians are concerned with affirming that God has to be called an existent. Similar to his teacher’s concern in the *Shāmīl*,

⁷²² Al-Anṣārī, *al-Ghunya*, p. 316.

⁷²³ Ibid., p. 333.

⁷²⁴ Ibid., p. 333.

⁷²⁵ Ibid., p. 337.

⁷²⁶ Ibid., p. 338.

⁷²⁷ Ibid., p. 338.

⁷²⁸ Ibid., p. 338.

⁷²⁹ Ibid., p. 347.

⁷³⁰ Ibid., p. 345.

⁷³¹ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmīl* (1969), p. 609.

al-Anṣārī first and foremost has in mind to point out the absurd consequences of the belief held by some Muʿtazilites that the non-existent is something real described with ‘the attributes of affirmation and...specific attributes’⁷³²: It forces them to assume ‘a non-existent creator.’⁷³³ It does not require further explanation that this debate surrounding God’s being an existent in al-Anṣārī has nothing to do with the traditional proof of God’s existence.

With regards to our initial question whether it might be possible that al-Ghazālī’s approach to the affirmation of the creator – or rather the existence of God, as he has it – bears witness to a fundamental, broader change in the discourse among theologians, it can be inferred from al-Anṣārī’s discussion of these questions that this is not the case. For all the points discussed by al-Anṣārī we can find instances in earlier theological writings. It therefore remains to be seen whether al-Nasafī’s treatment of this question reveals any fundamental changes.

Al-Nasafī – Continuation or Change of the Discourse?

An examination of the relevant passages in al-Nasafī in fact reveals that there exists a rather conspicuous similarity between his discussion surrounding the affirmation of the creator and al-Ghazālī’s. Even though the section affirming that the world has an originator (*muḥdith*) follows, as it is tradition, the affirmation of the originatedness of the world, al-Nasafī does not show much concern with the question of whether the cause of the world is an *ʿilla*, a nature, a *fāʿil* or the like. The concept of the originator, which involves the notions of will and choice, is not expounded upon by al-Nasafī. The only instance where he discusses whether the cause of the world could be an *ʿilla* is in the section on the originatedness of the world, not on the affirmation of the creator. There he refutes the belief in an eternal world based on the conception of God as *ʿilla*, which necessitates the co-existence of its effect. The aim of this discussion is,

⁷³² Al-Anṣārī, *al-Ghunya*, p. 348.

⁷³³ Ibid., p. 348.

however, not to show that God is not an *'illa*, but that it is false to assume that the world is eternal.⁷³⁴

A greater similarity also exists between al-Nasafī and al-Ghazālī than between al-Anṣārī and the latter in that he does speak of ‘a proof for the existence of a creator for them’⁷³⁵ in the context of the affirmation of the creator. He does not speak of *God’s* existence though. He, for instance, draws the famous analogy between the world and its originator and a building and its builder. The world, like the building, can be existent or non-existent and ‘its particularisation (*ikhtiṣāṣuhu*) with this state [i.e., existence] will not take place unless due to the particularisation of a particulariser, and this proves the existence of the builder for every building we observe in this world.’⁷³⁶ Al-Nasafī’s argument – the argument invoking a thing’s particularisation (*ikhtiṣāṣ*) – is not new; his mentioning ‘existence’ in this context, however, is. Nevertheless, it appears that al-Nasafī seeks to establish the same in this section as all theologians before him, namely that the world could not have come into existence without another who is its originator. He hence says that one has to be declared ignorant when one ‘allows for the existence of it by chance without a creator’⁷³⁷ and that the assumption that ‘it originated itself’⁷³⁸ is likewise absurd.

Even though al-Nasafī’s argument might look like a traditional argument for God’s existence, there are hints that can be discerned to suggest that his affirmation of the creator serves a different purpose. In the chapter on the affirmation of the divine attributes, al-Nasafī states: ‘If it has been established that He is the maker (*mukhtari’*) of this world with its different kinds and that He is the creator (*khāliq*) of it as it is in terms of the characteristics...then it has been established that He is living, powerful (and) knowing.’⁷³⁹ Al-Nasafī here describes the gist of the affirmation of the creator in exactly the same terms as his predecessors: It has been shown that God is the one who brought about the world.

⁷³⁴ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, p. 97.

⁷³⁵ Ibid., p. 107.

⁷³⁶ Ibid., p. 105.

⁷³⁷ Ibid., p. 105.

⁷³⁸ Ibid., p. 105.

⁷³⁹ Ibid., p. 246.

Furthermore, another passage provides greater clarity regarding the question of what al-Nasafī means when he speaks of the existence of the creator. In a later section where al-Nasafī is concerned with the refutation of the anthropomorphists or the *mujassima*, he presents their argument that God must be a body since ‘He is living, hearing, seeing and an agent, and every living, hearing and seeing one and every agent in the *shāhid* is a body, and it is impossible to describe what is not a body with these attributes, and what is impossible for the *shāhid* is also impossible for the *ghā’ib*.’⁷⁴⁰ To regard God as a body is of course a belief the majority of theologians, and likewise philosophers, rejected.⁷⁴¹ This is also true for al-Nasafī and he hence states that in the view of the *ahl al-ḥaqq* this doctrine leads to a number of absurdities, namely ‘the belief in the eternity of the world or the originatedness of the creator (*al-bāri*)’ (Most-High!) and the non-existence of the creator (*‘adam al-ṣāni*) for the world.’⁷⁴² If it is true that al-Nasafī’s reference to the ‘proof of the existence of a creator for them’⁷⁴³ denotes his attempt at proving God’s existence in the traditional sense, then it must be the case that his aforementioned reference to ‘the non-existence of the creator’ implies that there is no God. Al-Nasafī’s reasoning is the following:⁷⁴⁴ If God were a body, He would have a specific shape, such as being round or a triangle. If He were of a particular shape to the exclusion of all others, then this would either be due to the particularisation of a particulariser or not. In the first case, this would imply that God is originated because He is receptive to the influence of another. This is an absurdity as it leads to an infinite regress of originators. This is what al-Nasafī means when he says that the belief in God’s being a body leads to ‘the originatedness of the creator.’ On the other hand, if God’s having a particular shape was not due to the particularisation by another, it follows, al-Nasafī states, that this must also hold true for the world. The world’s having a particular shape cannot longer be used as ‘proof for its

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 160.

⁷⁴¹ Al-Shahrastānī reports: ‘The *ahl al-ḥaqq* uphold that God...is not an atom (*jawhar*), nor a body (*jism*), nor an accident (*‘araḍ*). He is not in a place, not in time, not receptive to accidents and not a substrate for originated events. ... But the *mughīriyya*, the *bayāniyya*, the *hāshimiyya* and those who followed them believed that the godhead has a form like humans’ (*Nihāya*, p. 103 (of the Arabic text)). See Williams 2009 on the question of anthropomorphism.

⁷⁴² Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, p. 161.

⁷⁴³ Ibid., p. 107.

⁷⁴⁴ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, pp. 161-163.

originatedness and its need for an originator who brought it about.’⁷⁴⁵ It is therefore that al-Nasafī concludes that the belief in God’s being a body leads to ‘the belief in the eternity of the world and the *ta’tīl* of the creator’⁷⁴⁶ or, as he phrased it earlier, ‘the non-existence of the creator for the world.’ Crucially, what this discussion makes clear is that ‘the non-existence of the creator for the world’ does not denote God’s non-existence or the denial of a divine being altogether. After all, the assumption of the non-existence of the creator follows from the claim that God is a body – how could it, therefore, refer to God’s non-existence? Rather, al-Nasafī simply expresses the old idea, characteristic of the *mutakallimūn*, that an eternal world is a world independent of another. It, hence, follows in analogy that, when al-Nasafī speaks of ‘the existence of a creator’ for the originated world, he does not mean anything else than that the world is due to another.

The above provides important insights germane to the initial quest to understand whether al-Ghazālī’s mention of God’s existence in connection with his syllogism points to a change of the theological discourse on the proof of the creator. It became clear that al-Nasafī, even though speaking, similarly to al-Ghazālī, of the creator’s existence in his affirmation of the originator, is far from seeking to prove God’s existence. Neither al-Nasafī, nor al-Anṣārī, being al-Ghazālī’s contemporaries, hence indicates that such a fundamental change of the discourse occurred and it appears that the *mutakallimūn* continued to be concerned with the proof that the world is creation and God its creator, just as Scripture states.⁷⁴⁷ In view of this, we might pose the question of whether it is not possible and indeed likely that al-Ghazālī is concerned with the same questions which have nothing to do with a cosmological or other proof for God’s existence? This is in fact what we will argue.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 162.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 163.

⁷⁴⁷ The differences between al-Anṣārī’s treatment of the proof of the creator, on the one hand, and al-Nasafī and al-Ghazālī’s, on the other, of course represent certain changes that took place in Ash‘arite *kalām* and which led scholars, such as Ayman Shihadeh, to distinguish between ‘classical Ash‘arism’ and ‘neo-Ash‘arism,’ taking shape post-al-Juwaynī and around the time of al-Ghazālī under the influence of Avicennan philosophy. Shihadeh mentions al-Anṣārī among the classical Ash‘arites, and al-Nasafī among the neo-Ash‘arites (2012, p. 434).

The Meaning of ‘God’s Existence’

There is something striking about the place where al-Ghazālī’s discussion and proof of God’s existence appear in both the *Iqtisād* and the *Risāla*: It is the first point of the investigation of God’s essence (*dhāt*). In the *Risāla*, al-Ghazālī repeatedly describes the purpose of the science of *kalām* as to make known ‘the essence of God and His attributes.’⁷⁴⁸ ‘The investigation of God’s essence and His attributes’⁷⁴⁹ is something *kalām* and the metaphysical branch of philosophy (*al-ilāhiyyāt*) have in common, according to al-Ghazālī. In the *Iqtisād*, al-Ghazālī likewise undertakes the investigation of God’s essence, followed by the investigation of His attributes.⁷⁵⁰ Yet, it is striking that in the introduction he substitutes the term ‘essence’ for ‘existence’ when he states that ‘the aim of this science is to establish the proof for the existence of the Lord (Most-High!) and His attributes.’⁷⁵¹ How does this fit together? It appears less perplexing when we bear in mind that in Ash‘arite *kalām* – this being the *kalām* of the *Iqtisād* and the *Risāla* –, but even according to some *mutakallimūn* of other affiliations, ‘the existence of the thing is its essence.’⁷⁵² When speaking of the existence of an atom, for instance, what is meant is that it has extension in space, and this is its essence.⁷⁵³ In the case of God, this is not different and ‘His existence is nothing other than His specific essence.’⁷⁵⁴ This allows us to conclude that, when al-Ghazālī speaks of the investigation of God’s essence or existence respectively, which denote for him the same thing, he refers to the question about the *kind* of

⁷⁴⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla*, p. 54. Similarly *ibid.*, p. 381: ‘...the two words of the *shahāda* include the affirmation of the essence (*dhāt*) of the godhead and the affirmation of His attributes.’

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁷⁵⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād*, p. 24 and p. 79: ‘The first section on speculation about the essence of God (Most-High!) containing ten points’ and ‘The second section on the attributes containing seven points.’

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷⁵² Al-Malāḥimī, *al-Mu‘tamad*, p. 254. Al-Malāḥimī reports that the Mu‘tazilites Abū Ishāq al-Naṣībī and Abū al-Ḥusayn also held this view. Rather than seeing al-Ghazālī’s equation of *dhāt* and *wujūd* in this context as reflective of the view held by the Ash‘arite *mutakallimūn*, Abrahamov supposes that it ‘echo[es] Ibn Sīnā’s thesis that states, unlike created beings, in God there is no difference between essence and existence’ (2002, p. 207). This seems unconvincing since for the Ash‘arites, essence and existence are the same even in created beings, unlike for Ibn Sīnā.

⁷⁵³ Al-Malāḥimī, *al-Mu‘tamad*, p. 256: ‘The existence of the atom is its essence.’ Compare the discussion whether the atom’s being extended in space (*mutaḥayyiz*) and having volume (*ḥajm*) is different from its existence or the same (*ibid.*, p. 254).

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

God's existence/essence, that is: Which existence/essence is characteristic of God?

In the *Iqtisād*, al-Ghazālī states that all existents comprise God, on the one hand, and the world, on the other, which denotes bodies and their accidents. All existents are divided into spatial ones (*mutaḥayyiz*) and non-spatial ones (*ghayr mutaḥayyiz*). The former division includes atoms and bodies, while the latter comprises accidents, which inhere in bodies, and God, who is self-subsisting.⁷⁵⁵ This division basically illustrates the four kinds of existence/essences Ash'arite *kalām* proposes. The issue with God's specific existence or essence is, according to al-Ghazālī, however, the following: 'As for the existent which is not a body, nor a spatial atom, nor an accident, it is not perceived through observation, but we maintain its existence and that the world is existent through it and its power, and this is conceived through proof.'⁷⁵⁶ What al-Ghazālī means to say is not that God's existence as understood in the traditional arguments requires proof to be known of, but that God's specific existence, which is completely different from everything observed in this world (i.e., atoms, bodies and accidents), requires proof as it cannot be determined by the senses – why should God's existence, one could ask, be different from the existents surrounding us? Furthermore, it should not be overlooked that al-Ghazālī here establishes a link between his syllogism⁷⁵⁷ and the aforementioned declaration that 'the world is existent through it': He states that the latter is known through proof, and 'the proof is what we mentioned, so let us investigate it,'⁷⁵⁸ which refers to nothing else than the syllogism. All these objectives of al-Ghazālī – that is, to show that the world comes from God and that God has a specific essence/existence which is different from creation – are exactly the same as those we encountered in the works of theologians and philosophers before him. We recall that Ibn Sīnā, for instance, spoke of the proof of God's existence in the sense of establishing that God's specific existence is

⁷⁵⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād*, p. 24.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 25.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 24: 'every originated thing has a cause for its origination'; 'the world is originated'; therefore, 'the world necessarily has a cause.'

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 25.

different from that of a body or accident.⁷⁵⁹ Theologians such as al-Bāqillānī were eager to stress that ‘the creator of the originated things cannot resemble them...neither in genus (*jins*) nor in form (*ṣūra*).’⁷⁶⁰

Now that it has become clear what the investigation and proof of God’s essence or existence refer to, it might seem somewhat puzzling that al-Ghazālī mentions the proof of ‘His existence’ as one, specifically the first, of ten points constituting this broader investigation of the divine essence (see Appendix, Figure 4). Yet, we should once more bear in mind that the Ash‘arite equation of essence and existence, which al-Ghazālī evidently upholds, was not an uncontested matter. The Mu‘tazilite al-Malāḥimī, who shares with al-Ghazālī the tenet that essence and existence are the same, reports on the following dispute taking place among the *mutakallimūn* concerning the question of how existence relates to essence in God: Some *mutakallimūn* maintained that ‘the existence of the thing is its essence’ and they said: ‘When we prove that there is for the world an originator, then we have also proven that He is an essence... It has hence been proven that He (Most-High!) is an existent.’⁷⁶¹ Other *mutakallimūn*, al-Malāḥimī reports, disagreed on this:

When the followers of Abū Hāshim assumed that the non-existent is an essence in the state of its non-existence...and that existence is an attribute in addition to (*zā’ida ‘alā*) the essence⁷⁶²...they allowed with that after the affirmation of the creator for the world who is powerful and knowing...that he is non-existent. Hence they need to prove that He (Most-High!) is an existent.⁷⁶³

The first position clearly reflects al-Ghazālī’s own view on this matter and al-Ghazālī’s method to prove ‘His existence’ is indeed the one described by al-

⁷⁵⁹ See Chapter Four on Ibn Sīnā.

⁷⁶⁰ Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd*, p. 23.

⁷⁶¹ Al-Malāḥimī, *al-Mu‘tamad*, p. 261.

⁷⁶² With regards to the proper translation of the expression that existence is *zā’id ‘alā* the essence see Morewedge 1972 who discusses it with reference to Ibn Sīnā. He suggests: ‘Instead of saying, “existence is an addition to an essence”, we should say that the justification of the existence of an instance of an essence requires more than the mere conceptual analysis of that essence’ (ibid., p. 432, f. 35). This phrasing is better, he argues, because ‘[t]he order in which essence and existence are arranged as being “prior” or “posterior” to each other is a problem that is not encountered in Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy.’ While this might be true for Ibn Sīnā, we should bear in mind that from the perspective of those, like al-Malāḥimī, who upheld that essence and existence are the same, the Mu‘tazilite view implied that God’s creative act only consisted in giving the eternal non-existent essences existence. From their perspective it therefore makes sense to speak of existence being an attribute (or a description) *added to* the essence which contains already all other attributes of a thing.

⁷⁶³ Ibid., pp. 261-262.

Malāḥimī which has God's being the cause (*sabab*) of the world as its starting point.

Al-Malāḥimī's report on this debate also sheds light on another significant aspect of al-Ghazālī's mentioning God's existence in the section discussing the divine essence. Unlike Abū Hāshim b. al-Jubbā'ī and his followers, al-Ghazālī did not maintain that existence is an attribute in addition to the essence, as such attributes as power and knowledge are, which he consequently discusses in the section on the divine attributes. To include God's existence in the section on His essence is hence also a clear statement on the part of al-Ghazālī which marks his position in a debate with a long history.⁷⁶⁴ The same concern becomes apparent where al-Ghazālī includes God's being eternal (*qadīm*) and enduring (*bāqin*) as the second and third points of his discussion of His essence.⁷⁶⁵ The relation between God's essence and His endurance was a debated matter just like the relation between His essence and His existence, as we know.⁷⁶⁶

Furthermore, al-Ghazālī's emphasis of God's existence as the first point of the investigation of His essence might also have been directed at those groups like the *bāṭiniyya* whose refusal to call God an existent was frequently criticised by theologians before al-Ghazālī, as we have seen. It is known that al-Ghazālī had dedicated himself to the study of their doctrines just after he wrote the *Tahāfut* and he produced a work by the title *Faḍā'ih al-bāṭiniyya* (*The Infamities of the Bāṭiniyya*) in refutation of them just before the *Iqtiṣād* and the *Risāla*.⁷⁶⁷ In this work, he also reports on their view that God – or more precisely: one of the two gods they believe in, according to al-Ghazālī – 'is described neither by existence nor by non-existence' and 'they maintain that all the names are to be denied of Him.'⁷⁶⁸

⁷⁶⁴ We recall, as mentioned previously, that al-Ash'arī already reports on this debate in his *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn* (*al-juz' al-awwal*, p. 250): 'His essence is He...and He is existent not due to (the *ma'nā* of) existence.' See Wisnovsky 2000, pp. 182-200 for the discussion surrounding the terms *mawjūd* and *shay'* in early *kalām*.

⁷⁶⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, p. 35: 'Do not think that eternity (*al-qidam*) is a *ma'nā* in addition to the essence of the eternal.'

⁷⁶⁶ Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, *al-juz' al-awwal*, p. 250: 'The followers of Ibn Kullāb disagreed whether God is eternal due to (the *ma'nā* of) eternity or not.'

⁷⁶⁷ Hourani 1984, p. 293 and Goldziher 1916.

⁷⁶⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'ih*, p. 39.

Lastly, the emphasis placed by al-Ghazālī on the equation of God’s essence with existence might also appear in answer to those who maintained that ‘the existents are divided into three: accidents, atoms and bodies, and no existent is conceivable which is outside these divisions,’⁷⁶⁹ as al-Nasafī reports on those who upheld God’s corporeality. Al-Ghazālī reports on the same view that some maintained regarding God: ‘If He is an agent and an existent...then He is not free from the six directions because no existent is known which is not such.’⁷⁷⁰ Al-Nasafī replies to those who uphold God’s corporeality and who seek to declare God’s otherness from creation absurd by arguing that this would imply ‘His non-existence’⁷⁷¹ the following: ‘The existent’s being body or accident or atom are aspects after (its) mere existence (*ma‘ānin warā’ muṭlaq al-wujūd*) and belong to the signs of originatedness, not existence. Therefore, the denial of originatedness does not mean the denial of existence.’⁷⁷² The aim of the whole discussion in al-Nasafī is to establish that ‘He is an existent (but) unlike the (other) existents’⁷⁷³ with the emphasis that ‘there is no equal to Him, even if He is an existent.’⁷⁷⁴ In al-Ghazālī’s *Iqtiṣād*, we find a very similar discussion, emphasising the point that upholding God’s otherness from created existents does not entail His not being an existent. In answer to the question of how God can be seen in the hereafter, al-Ghazālī states that this question is absurd as the interrogative ‘how (*kayfa*)’ demands a comparison with something known, but ‘what he asks about is not like anything we know.’⁷⁷⁵ Al-Ghazālī admonishes the notion that this does not imply ‘the non-existence of the essence of God (Most-High!).’⁷⁷⁶ Rather, it must be concluded that ‘His essence is an eternal essence and nothing is like it.’⁷⁷⁷ This discussion makes clear that, while al-Ghazālī himself maintains that essence and existence are the same thing, he also takes into account to stress that God and creation’s being counted among the entirety

⁷⁶⁹ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, p. 161.

⁷⁷⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, p. 63.

⁷⁷¹ Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, p. 161: ‘...then no way to affirm Him remains and His not belonging to these (three) divisions [i.e., atom, body, accident] means His non-existence.’ See also *ibid.*, p. 168: ‘If He (Most-High!) is not accident, nor atom, nor body, He is described with non-existence.’

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

⁷⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁷⁷⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, p. 123.

⁷⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁷⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124. Note the similarity between al-Ghazālī’s expression ‘*laysa ka-mithliḥā shay*’ and Q. 42.11 ‘*laysa ka-mithliḥi shay*’.

of existents does not entail any similarity between God's specific existence and the originated existence of atoms, bodies and accidents. In the *Risāla*, al-Ghazālī likewise stresses that 'He is known, thanks to reason, in terms of existence when it comes to His essence'⁷⁷⁸ while emphasising that 'He does not resemble an(other) existent and no existent resembles Him – nothing is like Him [i.e., Q. 42.11].'⁷⁷⁹

Conclusions

That al-Ghazālī was concerned with the proof of God's existence, more precisely in the form of a cosmological argument, seems, at first glance, out of question. Does he not himself speak, in the *Iqtīṣād* and the *Risāla*, of the proof of God's existence as part of what the science of *kalām* seeks to establish? And does he not himself infer the existence of the creator from the previously affirmed origination of the world? A second glance, however, teaches us better. Whether al-Ghazālī speaks of the proof of God's existence or the proof of God's essence, alongside the proof of His attributes, this sort of position is replicated in Ash'arite *kalām* where essence and existence are posited as one and the same thing. It is al-Ghazālī's stated aim to show, on the basis of rational proofs, that God's specific existence (essence) is different from the kinds of existence (essences) of created things, that is, accidents, atoms and bodies. This endeavour of al-Ghazālī's is directed against those who assumed, invoking the analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghā'ib*, that God must be corporeal. Furthermore, al-Ghazālī's stressing that God is an existent is in response to those groups like the *bāṭiniyya* who objected to applying the names of created beings to God. Lastly, by including His existence in the discussion of God's essence, al-Ghazālī makes clear his standpoint on how certain attributes, including His being eternal, knowing or indeed an existent, relate in different ways to the divine essence. What all this shows is that al-Ghazālī's proof of God's existence has nothing to do with the concern of traditional arguments for

⁷⁷⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla*, p. 333.

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 332. Note that the beginning of al-Ghazālī's *Kitāb al-Arba'īn* (i.e., *al-aṣl al-awwal fī al-dhāt* and *al-aṣl al-thānī fī al-taqdīs*, pp. 7-8), where he expounds upon God's otherness from creation while stressing His being a *mawjūd*, contains the exact same wording as the beginning of the *Risāla*/the *Kitāb qawā'id al-'aqā'id* of the *Ihyā'* (i.e., *al-tawhīd* and *al-tanzih*, pp. 331-333).

God's existence. It is rather the case that al-Ghazālī's treatment of these questions poses a continuation of the issues long discussed in *kalām* and even in philosophy. Therefore, while it is true that in some matters, such as the use of terminology appropriate to describe God the creator, al-Ghazālī's focus shifted somewhat, he nevertheless follows the same method as his predecessors to establish God's nature by linking Him to the world in an agent-act relationship. Ultimately, it is al-Ghazālī's aim to defend on rational grounds what Scripture says – more precisely: the way he understands Scripture – about God and His relation to the world.

Chapter Seven: Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198)

The *Kashf 'an manāhij al-adilla*

It is evident that Ibn Rushd's *Kashf*, even though written by a philosopher, comes much closer to the genre of *kalām* works.⁷⁸⁰ This is manifest in the structure and arrangement of its chapters, the topics and problems it discusses as well as the language and terminology it uses. Ibn Rushd presents his discussions pertaining to God divided in four sections, and his approach is more reminiscent of the *mutakallimūn*'s approach to their investigation of God and related questions than that to be found in the works of the philosophers. The *Kashf*'s first section is entitled 'on the essence,' followed – rather unsurprisingly – by a section on the seven divine attributes, then a section on God's transcendence and otherness from creation (*al-tanzīh*) and finally a section on His acts. Ibn Rushd's approach does not seem so surprising when bearing in mind that the *Kashf* is intended as a critique of the *mutakallimūn*, in particular the Ash'arites, whom Ibn Rushd repeatedly charges with engaging in speculative discussions which are not based on sound arguments and with exerting a bad influence on the common people.⁷⁸¹ Besides pointing to flaws in their arguments, Ibn Rushd also sets forth his own position in these matters and how they should be presented to the common people.

The Affirmation of the Creator

It is then also not surprising that Ibn Rushd should begin his remarks on God with 'the affirmation of the creator (*ithbāt al-ṣāni'*),'⁷⁸² which, as we recall, was also the starting point for the *mutakallimūn*'s investigation of God's nature after having shown that the world has a beginning for its existence and was hence caused by another, that is, by none but God. In Ibn Rushd's *Kashf*, however, the question about the originatedness of the world (*ḥudūth al-'ālam*) follows the affirmation of the creator, to be precise in the fourth section dealing with God's acts, and is not made its foundation. The reason for this is, of course, well-

⁷⁸⁰ Kukkonen characterises it as 'a work of rational theology' (2002, p. 406).

⁷⁸¹ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 103 and p. 107.

⁷⁸² Ibid., p. 101.

known: Ibn Rushd, the philosopher, does not share the *mutakallimūn*'s understanding of the Qur'ānic account of creation as denoting its past-finiteness. He holds, inspired by the position of such philosophers as Aristotle and Ibn Sīnā, that the world is co-eternal with and through God. Even though Ibn Rushd makes use of the same terminology as the *mutakallimūn*, such as when he describes the world as being 'created by God (*maṣnū' li'llāh*),'⁷⁸³ he gives it a different meaning, which he indicates in the *Kashf*⁷⁸⁴ and more fully expounds upon in his *Faṣl al-maqāl* and the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*,⁷⁸⁵ written in the same year as the *Kashf*,⁷⁸⁶ as shall become clear. This then explains why Ibn Rushd would not follow the *mutakallimūn* in their approach of making the originatedness of the world – in particular in their understanding of the term *ḥudūth* which Ibn Rushd clearly contrasts with the notion of *maṣnū'* or being produced in the *Kashf* – the basis of the affirmation of the creator. Ibn Rushd's position prevents him from arguing in the way the Mu'tazilite 'Abd al-Jabbār, for instance, did that 'the first knowledge of God is the knowledge that these *originated* things (*ḥawādith*), that is, the bodies, colours and so on, are in need of some originator,'⁷⁸⁷ and it is in fact this very reasoning to which Ibn Rushd draws attention when castigating the *mutakallimūn*.⁷⁸⁸ Nevertheless, it shall be seen that Ibn Rushd essentially follows the same idea as the *mutakallimūn* when he bases the knowledge about God on His role as creator of the world – which, however, involves a different understanding of the terminology involved: It is not the temporal aspect of creation maintained by the *mutakallimūn* which points to the creator. He, thus, states that the starting point of all theological

⁷⁸³ Ibid., p. 161.

⁷⁸⁴ In the *Kashf*, Ibn Rushd states that the notion of creation *ex nihilo* and outside time is not conceivable for the common people and that Revelation values terminology more easily accessible over revealing the true mode of creation (ibid., pp. 171-172).

⁷⁸⁵ In his *Faṣl al-maqāl*, Ibn Rushd states that bodies (e.g., water, air) come about in time. The whole world is existent due to another (i.e., God), but it is not preceded by time as time accompanies motion and bodies. It is neither really originated, nor really eternal. The philosophers stress more its resemblance to the eternal and hence call it eternal, while the theologians emphasise more its originated aspect and hence call it originated (ibid., pp. 55-56). See Leaman 1988, pp. 42-45 and Kogan 1985, pp. 205-207 on Ibn Rushd's rejection of the theologians' notion of a temporal beginning of the world as a whole and his insistence that the world is, in one sense, eternal and, in another, originated.

⁷⁸⁶ Urvoy dates all three works to the years 575/1179-80 (1991, p. 71).

⁷⁸⁷ 'Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Majmū'*, p. 68.

⁷⁸⁸ See Ibn Rushd's critique of the Ash'arites' method to affirm the creator (*al-Kashf*, p. 103 et seqq.).

enquiry about God is ‘the knowledge of the method which leads to the existence of the creator (*wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*), as this is the first knowledge which the believer (*al-mukallaf*) has to have.’⁷⁸⁹ But what does this method entail? Different groups of Muslims have, according to Ibn Rushd, argued different things. The arch-traditionalists or *ḥashwiyya*, as Ibn Rushd refers to them, maintain that ‘revelation, not reason’ is the prescribed way to knowledge of God, but Ibn Rushd argues that ‘this group does not understand the intention of Scripture’ which urges people to revert to ‘rational proofs.’⁷⁹⁰ The Sufis who believe that ‘knowledge of God and other existents is something cast in the soul’ are met with the same criticism on the part of Ibn Rushd who holds against them that revelation ‘calls to speculation and reasoning.’⁷⁹¹ Ibn Rushd furthermore compares the Sufi’s method with that employed by the *mutakallimūn* in that their arguments are not suitable for the masses and rather produce more uncertainties.⁷⁹² It is hence only the *mutakallimūn*’s insistence on the principle of reasoning vis-à-vis questions of a theological nature on which Ibn Rushd agrees with them.

In any case, the position to be found in secondary literature is that what Ibn Rushd intends to say at the outset of the section on the affirmation of the creator is that all theological enquiry about God has to start with the proof of God’s existence.⁷⁹³ After all, does not Ibn Rushd clearly say that it is the *existence* of the creator which has to be known first? The arguments Ibn Rushd presents ‘with which Revelation has called all people, despite their different natures, to affirm the existence of the creator (*al-iqrār bi-wujūd al-bāriʿ*)’⁷⁹⁴ have been studied and discussed extensively.⁷⁹⁵ It is well known that Ibn Rushd singles out two methods in particular in the *Kashf*, which he calls the *dalīl al-ʿināya* and the *dalīl al-ikhtirāʿ* and which he believes to be the arguments

⁷⁸⁹ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 101.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid., pp. 101-102.

⁷⁹¹ Ibid., p. 117.

⁷⁹² Ibid., p. 107 and p. 117.

⁷⁹³ Kukkonen states: ‘the book is a work of rational theology... As is the norm in such works, the first chapter deals with the existence of God. Averroes takes this to be equivalent to the task of proving the existence of a creator’ (2002, p. 406). Fakhry writes: ‘[The *Kashf*] opens with a chapter on the demonstration of God’s existence’ (Fakhry’s introduction in Najjar 2001, p. 4).

⁷⁹⁴ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 118.

⁷⁹⁵ See for instance Kukkonen 2002; Najjar 1996, pp. 204-207; Davidson 1987, pp. 229-231; Nirenstein 1924, pp. 440-441.

favoured by Scripture itself. The *dalīl al-ʿināya* takes its starting point from the notion of providence found in this world, as its name indicates. It rests on two principles, one of which entails that ‘all existents in this world are beneficial for the existence of humans’ and the other that ‘this benefit necessarily comes from an agent who intended and willed it.’⁷⁹⁶ The *dalīl al-ikhtirāʿ*, in turn, invokes the notion of the createdness of all existents. It, too, rests on two principles which are that ‘these existents are created,’ an item of knowledge Ibn Rushd interestingly considers to be self-evident (*maʿrūf bi-nafsihi*), and that ‘everything created has a creator.’ It then follows from these two principles that ‘the existent has an agent who created it.’⁷⁹⁷

The view to be found in secondary literature is, as alluded to, that ‘Averroes proposes two...proofs for the existence of God, that of providence and that of invention,’⁷⁹⁸ to cite Majid Fakhry’s words. Taneli Kukkonen has argued that, more precisely, ‘the substance of both arguments put forward in the *Kitāb al-kashf* is teleological’⁷⁹⁹ and that they exhibit the characteristics of ‘an argument from design.’⁸⁰⁰ Anke von Kügelgen has suggested that ‘[d]er erste Gottesbeweis, den Ibn Rušd in al Kašf unter Heranziehung von Koranversen aufstellt, der Providenzbeweis (*dalīl al-ʿināya*), ist ein teleologischer Gottesbeweis, ein Beweis aus der Zweckmäßigkeit...in der Welt... Der zweite Gottesbeweis, der der “substantiellen Schöpfung” (*dalīl al-ikhtirāʿ*), ist ein vereinfachter, mit dem ersten Argument verzahnter kosmologischer Beweis.’⁸⁰¹ Ibn Rushd’s two proofs are hence of a nature distinct from the traditional ‘cosmological arguments of

⁷⁹⁶ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 118. Note that Ibn Rushd does not actually state the conclusion which follows from both principles, which would be that these existents are due to an agent.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 118-119.

⁷⁹⁸ Fakhry’s introduction in Najjar 2001, p. 6.

⁷⁹⁹ Kukkonen 2002, p. 408. See also Davidson 1987, p. 229: ‘Another writer who makes use of teleological reasoning is Averroes’ and Fakhry 1986, p. 9: ‘Ibn Rushd opted for a version of the teleological argument.’

⁸⁰⁰ Kukkonen 2001, p. 405.

⁸⁰¹ Von Kügelgen 1994, p. 403. See also Daiber 1975 who briefly refers to Ibn Rushd: ‘Auch Ibn Rušd benutzt den teleologischen Gottesbeweis (neben dem kosmologischen): Die Zweckmäßigkeit der Natur beweist für ihn die Existenz der göttlichen Vorsehung’ (p. 160).

Ibn Sīnā and the theologians in general,⁸⁰² as Fakhry stresses, whose evaluation is shared by Kukkonen.⁸⁰³

In the section on ‘the affirmation of the creator,’ Ibn Rushd not only speaks of ‘the proofs for the existence of the creator (which) are confined to these two kinds, that is, the proofs from providence and the proofs from creation’⁸⁰⁴; he also mentions ‘the existence of God,’ even though less often than the former phrase. The existence of God is mentioned where Ibn Rushd refers to the *ḥashwiyya* who ‘say that the method to know the existence of *God (wujūd Allāh)* is revelation’ and for whom ‘belief (*īmān*) in *His* existence...is enough,’ without the requirement of proof.⁸⁰⁵ It is also with a view to ‘the existence of *God*’ that Ibn Rushd condemns the arch-traditionalists’ approach as being inconsistent with that intended by Scripture.⁸⁰⁶ ‘The existence of *God*’ is once more mentioned in relation to the Ash‘arite position that reason (*al-‘aql*) is the sole basis of its affirmation.⁸⁰⁷ Lastly, Ibn Rushd speaks of God’s existence near the end of the section on the affirmation of the creator, after having presented the two – as he sees it – Qur’ānic methods which he describes as ‘the straight path by which God called the people to knowledge of *His* existence.’⁸⁰⁸

Besides his mentioning the existence of the creator and of God respectively, we also encounter in a few places the more general ‘knowledge of God.’ As part of his debate about the appropriate method leading to the affirmation of the creator, Ibn Rushd states that ‘the famous methods of the Ash‘arites to arrive at *knowledge of God (ma‘rifa Allāh)* are not based on speculation and not certain’⁸⁰⁹ and that ‘it is hence necessary that this is not made the principle for *knowledge of God.*’⁸¹⁰ Rather, ‘the method (leading) to *knowledge of God,*’ that

⁸⁰² Fakhry 1986, p. 10.

⁸⁰³ Kukkonen states: ‘In the modern classification of the proofs for God’s existence, all this puts us more in mind of a teleological argument than any cosmological proof’ (2001, p. 408). Davidson does speak with regards to Ibn Rushd’s two proofs of cosmological arguments, but in a ‘simplified’ form and not without stressing their teleological nature (1987, p. 229).

⁸⁰⁴ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 122.

⁸⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 101.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 102.

⁸⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 103.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

⁸⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 116.

⁸¹⁰ Ibid., p. 107.

is, the Qur'ānic method, 'is much clearer' than theirs.⁸¹¹ With regards to the Sufis' method of attaining '*knowledge of God (al-ma'rifa bi'llāh)*,' Ibn Rushd deems it, as we have seen above, not suitable for the common people.⁸¹²

Despite this variety of formulations employed by Ibn Rushd, it is hardly surprising that in secondary literature 'the existence of the creator' and 'the existence of God' are regarded to denote the same thing.⁸¹³ This also applies to his use of the phrase that the world 'has a creator,' which likewise appears in a number of instances in the section in question.⁸¹⁴ The reason for this lies, of course, in the interpretation of Ibn Rushd's proofs as teleological arguments which means that the '[p]roof of the existence of God [is] undertaken by stating the necessity of the existence of a creator,'⁸¹⁵ in Dominique Urvoy's words. The unquestioned equation of these phrases has let scholars on Ibn Rushd to state that, in certain instances, he speaks of the proof of *God's* existence when he himself in fact makes mention of the existence of the *creator*. This is the case in Fakhry's introduction to Najjar's translation of the *Kashf*. There, Fakhry refers to Ibn Rushd's criticism of al-Juwaynī's proof that the world has a creator based on the notion of possibility (*jawāz*).⁸¹⁶ Fakhry correctly describes Ibn Rushd's position as being that the Ash'arites' denial of arrangement (or design) in creation and of causality in nature poses a repudiation of God's wisdom apparent in creation; yet, Fakhry fails to do justice to Ibn Rushd's intention when he has him conclude that the Ash'arites are hence 'unable in fact to offer a coherent proof of God's existence.'⁸¹⁷ A glance at Ibn Rushd's own words, however, reveals that 'the existence of *God*' which the Ash'arites allegedly fail to prove is absent. What Ibn Rushd says is that 'he who denies the existence of

⁸¹¹ Ibid., p. 107.

⁸¹² Ibid., p. 117.

⁸¹³ Urvoy, for instance, speaks of the 'Proof of the existence of God' (1991, p. 71) and 'the idea of Providence which he used in his proof of the existence of God' (p. 75), and describes Ibn Rushd's method as the 'inference from the existence of created things of the existence of a Creator' (p. 72).

⁸¹⁴ Najjar, for instance, translates Ibn Rushd's '*wa-ammā mithāl al-dahriyya, fī hādihā, al-ladhīna jahadū al-ṣānī' subhānahu...*' as 'As for the materialists, those who deny **the existence of the Almighty Artisan...**' (2001, p. 38) and comments on the term *al-dahriyya* that '[i]n the Arabic sources, this term refers to an undetermined group of naturalists and materialists who denied **the existence of God**' (p. 38, f. 57).

⁸¹⁵ Urvoy 1991, p. 71.

⁸¹⁶ See Fakhry's introduction in Najjar 2001, p. 9 on Ibn Rushd's criticism of this argument.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

arrangement of effects and causes in this world also denies the wise *creator* (*al-ṣāniʿ al-ḥakīm*).⁸¹⁸ Furthermore, he adds that ‘the belief in possibility (*jawāz*) comes closer to pointing to the denial of the *creator* than to pointing to his existence.’⁸¹⁹ According to Ibn Rushd himself, it is not the existence of *God* which the Ashʿarites fail to prove, but that the world comes from a ‘wise creator,’ and this is tantamount to ‘the denial of the creator’ or ‘his existence.’

Any accusation of pettiness for pointing out the difference between the expression used by Ibn Rushd and that ascribed to him by Fakhry would, however, only be warranted if there really was no difference in their meaning and use in Ibn Rushd, and in particular if all these formulations ultimately denoted nothing else than the traditional proof for God’s existence. The importance of being accurate about their meaning and use is hence ultimately a prerequisite for understanding what it is that Ibn Rushd discusses. This problem can be clarified on the example of the expressions ‘the existence of the creator’ and ‘has a creator,’ which are understood to be used in the same way by Ibn Rushd, namely to denote an argument for God’s existence.⁸²⁰ We recall Ibn Rushd’s statement that ‘the existence of the creator’ is ‘the first knowledge which the believer has to acquire.’ This appears to be in line with statements we encounter in the writings of other *mutakallimūn* – with the only difference that they did not speak of the *existence* of the creator. ‘Abd al-Jabbār stated before Ibn Rushd in his *Majmūʿ* that ‘the first knowledge of God is the knowledge that the bodies *have an originator*.’⁸²¹ We also recall that ‘Abd al-Jabbār and his fellow *mutakallimūn* did not mean by the world’s having an originator what the

⁸¹⁸ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 167.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid., p. 169.

⁸²⁰ There is a great number of instances in the *Kashf* where Ibn Rushd uses the expression ‘has a creator’ in connection with what is considered his proof of God’s/the creator’s existence. For example, in his description of the *dalīl al-ikhtirāʿ* Ibn Rushd states: ‘This method rests on two principles... Firstly, these existents are created... We see inanimate bodies, then life appears in them, and we know that there is one who brings about life (*mūjidan liʾl-ḥayāt*)... Secondly, every created thing has a creator (*lahu mukhtariʿ*). It follows from both principles that the existent has an agent who created it (*liʾl-mawjūd fāʾilan mukhtariʿan lahu*).’

⁸²¹ ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *al-Majmūʿ*, p. 17 and p. 21. Note that, even though some disagreement existed among earlier theologians as to what exactly constitutes the first item of knowledge pertaining to God, we do not find one of them explicitly stating that it is whether there God exists. Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī, for instance, is said to have characterised the first item of knowledge pertaining to God as ‘that He is known in terms of one essential attribute, like His being powerful due to Himself,’ which obviously presupposes that God actually exists, but leaves open room for debate about His nature (ibid., p. 68).

traditional cosmological argument means by it. This shows that, ultimately, the difference between our interpretation and that to be found in secondary sources of these arguments comes down to the question of their purpose. This became most evident in our chapter on al-Ghazālī who distinguished himself from earlier generations of *mutakallimūn* only insofar as he did speak of the existence of the creator and even of God's existence, not, however, with regards to what he sought to prove.

Since it has been suggested in secondary literature that in Ibn Rushd the proof of 'the existence of the creator' refers to a traditional argument for God, and that the affirmation of the world's 'having a creator' does so too, while this is not the case for the *mutakallimūn* before him, we have to ask the following questions: Does Ibn Rushd pursue a somewhat different objective with regards to what he attempts to prove, and is this reflected in his speaking of the *existence* of the creator, which he then uses as an equivalent of the expression that the world 'has a creator'? Or is his objective not different from that of earlier generations of *mutakallimūn*? However, in this case, it seems, his explicit mention of the word 'existence' in connection with the creator has to be accounted for. What we hence need to figure out is the following three points: Firstly, what does Ibn Rushd mean when he speaks of 'the existence of the creator'? Secondly, does he use this phrase as an equivalent of 'the existence of God'? And lastly, do these expressions denote a traditional argument for God's existence, which – admittedly – seems plausible at first glance.

The Meaning of 'the Existence of the Creator'

As we have seen before, there is a number of passages in the section on 'the affirmation of the creator' where Ibn Rushd speaks of 'the existence of the creator'. A number of other passages indicate that the mention of existence in this expression does not, as one could expect, refer to the dichotomy of existence and non-existence as it is used in the traditional proof: here 'the existence of the creator' has nothing to do with proving, along the lines of what we refer to by cosmological arguments, that God exists. One such instance is the following: At the beginning of the section entitled 'the affirmation of the creator,'

where Ibn Rushd discusses and criticises the Ash‘arite method of attaining knowledge of God, he presents their position in the following way: ‘If we assume that the world is originated, then it is necessary, they say, that it has a maker and originator.’⁸²² Ibn Rushd then comments on their method, expressing his disapproval of its validity: ‘But regarding the *existence* of this originator (*wujūd hādhā al-muḥdith*), doubt arises which the science of *kalām* cannot dispel: We cannot say whether this originator is eternal or originated.’⁸²³ This passage contains an instance where the ‘existence’ of the creator (or as it appears here: the originator) clearly does not denote the opposite of ‘non-existence’ and the denial of an entity altogether – and mind you, this expression appears in direct relation to, and in the context of, the Ash‘arites’ method of proving ‘the existence of the creator.’ Here, the ‘existence’ of the originator refers to the question of what *kind* of existence the originator is as there are two kinds of existence: eternal and originated.

There is another passage where Ibn Rushd also speaks of ‘the existence of the creator,’ but means by it neither the question about the existence versus non-existence of an entity (as in the traditional arguments for God), nor the aforementioned sense of eternal versus originated existence. This passage appears in the section discussing God’s non-corporeality. There, Ibn Rushd states that most people affirm for the *ghā’ib*, the invisible realm, what they know from the *shāhid*, the visible realm. He then gives an example which clarifies this point, and it is this example which is of relevance for us. With regards to God’s attribute of knowledge, they argue: ‘If it [i.e., knowledge] is a condition for the existence of the creator in the *shāhid*, then it is a condition for the existence of the creator in the *ghā’ib*.’⁸²⁴ It is beyond doubt that when Ibn Rushd states that knowledge is the condition for the existence of the creator in this world, he does not intend to say that the existence versus non-existence of an entity – in the case of the *shāhid* obviously humans – is decided on the basis of the existence of knowledge. Rather, what this statement is meant to express is that it would not be correct to say *about* an entity – whether humans or God –

⁸²² Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 103.

⁸²³ Ibid., p. 103.

⁸²⁴ Ibid., p. 147.

that they are creator unless this entity is assumed to have knowledge – knowledge is part of what defines an entity *as* creator, and this is true for both the *shāhid* and the *ghā'ib*.

Yet another passage confirms the same point. It shows that even in the case where the expression ‘the existence of the creator’ appears together with the all-important question of its affirmation or denial, Ibn Rushd does not use it as it is used in the traditional arguments for God. In a section belonging to the chapter on God’s acts, where Ibn Rushd attacks the Ash‘arite notion of occasionalism and their rejection of efficient causality other than through God,⁸²⁵ he states the following: ‘From the belief in the denial of causes in the *shāhid* follows that an efficient cause cannot be affirmed (*ithbāt sabab fā'il*) for the *ghā'ib*.’⁸²⁶ This is the case if the *shāhid* is made the basis of knowledge about the *ghā'ib*. If the principle of causation is denied for the *shāhid* and if, therefore, ‘they cannot acknowledge that every act has an agent,’ it follows that ‘they have no way to know God,’ as the very basis of knowledge about Him is removed.⁸²⁷ Ibn Rushd then concludes that ‘the denial of the existence of the agent (*nafl wujūd al-fā'il*) in the *shāhid* presents the adherents of occasionalism with a serious problem ‘since the existence of the agent (*wujūd al-fā'il*) in the *shāhid* is the basis for the inference of the existence of the agent (*wujūd al-fā'il*) in the *ghā'ib*.’⁸²⁸ It should be kept in mind that for our aim of investigating the sense in which Ibn Rushd uses the word ‘existence’ in such expressions as ‘the existence of the creator’ it makes no difference that in the above example he speaks of the existence of the *agent*, rather than that of the *creator*: God’s being the cause of the existence of the world and all occurrences in it is described by Ibn Rushd no less by the term *fā'il* than it is by the terms *ṣāni'*, *bāri'* and the like as they all represent equal concepts.⁸²⁹ There is no doubt what Ibn Rushd’s above argument is concerned with: It deals with the question of how God can be

⁸²⁵ See Kogan 1985, Chapter Three “Averroes on Necessary Connection: Causes, Effects, and the Missing Link” (p. 71 et seqq.) for the different positions as represented by Ibn Rushd and al-Ghazālī.

⁸²⁶ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 193.

⁸²⁷ Ibid., p. 193.

⁸²⁸ Ibid., p. 193.

⁸²⁹ Ibn Rushd says about those who believe that the world came to be due to chance (*ittifāq*) that they deny a creator (*ṣāni'*) for this world and likewise a choosing agent (*fā'il mukhtār*) (ibid., p. 167).

shown to be an agent if agency is rejected for humans. In particular, Ibn Rushd wishes to point out the irreconcilability of the claim that God alone is an agent with the endeavour to affirm the principle of agency for the *ghā'ib* in the first place. It is therefore evident that the mention of 'existence' in Ibn Rushd's aforementioned statement has nothing to do with how existence and non-existence are understood in traditional arguments for God's existence. It is solely about the question of whether certain entities can be described as agents or not.

Lastly, there are a few passages which reveal yet another meaning and use of the expression 'the existence of the creator.' One of them is the section, we already touched upon earlier, where Ibn Rushd criticises the Ash'arites' use of the proof from possibility which he ascribes in particular to al-Juwaynī in his *al-Aqīda al-Niẓāmiyya*.⁸³⁰ We recall Ibn Rushd's utterance that 'the belief in possibility comes closer to pointing to the denial of the creator than to pointing to his existence.'⁸³¹ He then continues to explain that if system and arrangement exhibited in things are denied since, according to the proof from possibility, everything could have been different from what it actually is, then the very foundation of the 'proofs that these existents have a willing, knowing agent (*fā'il murīd 'ālim*)'⁸³² is removed. To assume that the existents in this world with their particularities constitute nothing more than one actualised possibility out of a number of equally possible alternatives is, according to Ibn Rushd, tantamount to assuming that they could be 'due to an agent who is not wise (*fā'il ghayr ḥakīm*) and due to chance from him (*'an ittifāq 'anhu*)',⁸³³ in the manner of a stone which happens to fall on the ground. This passage allows us

⁸³⁰ Ibid., p. 111. It is noticeable that Ibn Rushd only refers to the *'Aqīda Niẓāmiyya*, without mentioning the *Kitāb al-Shāmil* and the *Kitāb al-Irshād* in which al-Juwaynī likewise makes use of the concept of permissibility. The reason for this might be sought in the fact that it is only in the *'Aqīda* that al-Juwaynī applies the notion of possibility to the world's attributes, whereas in the other two works he speaks of the possibility of the world's existence and non-existence as well as the time of its coming to be. In the *Kashf*, it is only the aspect of the possibility of the world's attributes which has to conflict with Ibn Rushd's assumption of God's wisdom and arrangement behind creation, which characterises his *dalīl al-'ināya*.

⁸³¹ Ibid., p. 169.

⁸³² Ibid., p. 169.

⁸³³ Ibid., p. 169. Compare the same reasoning in the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* (1954, pp. 627-628): 'according to the philosophers, there is no quantity nor quality in an existent which does not have a purpose based on wisdom... Why did the creator of this work chose this quantity and this quality and no other? If it was said: ...not because of wisdom and consideration in the work, as all quantities and qualities are equal in terms of the purpose of the work...'

to infer the following: Acknowledging wisdom in creation is, for Ibn Rushd, the basis of the affirmation that the world has ‘a willing knowing agent,’ whereas the denial of arrangement and system necessitates to uphold the world’s existence by chance, and this is essentially the same as ‘the denial of the creator’ and the opposite of affirming ‘his existence.’ To bring it to the point: All the affirmation of the existence of the creator means is, hence, that the world owes its existence not to chance, but to an outside cause (a wise creator, more specifically). Crucially, it has to be noted that this is in answer to the question of where the world stems from – as, mind you, this discussion in fact appears in the chapter on God’s acts which is ultimately concerned with establishing that, and in which way, ‘the world is produced by God.’⁸³⁴ The above remarks by Ibn Rushd do not intend to answer the question of whether there is an entity other than the world, even though this is clearly how such expressions as ‘the affirmation of the existence of the creator’ or ‘the denial of the creator’ have been understood in secondary literature. Fakhry, for instance, who refers to this very discussion presented here, seems to overlook the context of Ibn Rushd’s argument and believes it to be concerned with ‘the demonstration of the existence of God.’⁸³⁵ To negate causal determination of things, thus Fakhry’s description of Ibn Rushd’s reasoning, ‘leaves us with no clue to the existence of God’ and the ‘consequence of this position is...to repudiate the existence of the author of the universe altogether.’⁸³⁶ If Fakhry meant by the repudiation of ‘the author of the universe’ that one could not establish the universe’s coming from another, rather than its being self-subsistent or the product of chance, he would state Ibn Rushd’s position correctly; since this is, however, not what Fakhry intends to say, extending the denial that the world exists due to another entity to the denial of God Himself, it must be pointed out that this is not in line with Ibn Rushd’s exposition.

All this is confirmed by a second passage which can also be found in the chapter on God’s acts, more precisely in the section that deals with the proof that the world is God’s creation. In the course of this discussion, Ibn Rushd explains that

⁸³⁴ Ibid., p. 161.

⁸³⁵ Fakhry 1958, p. 128, f. 17.

⁸³⁶ Ibid., p. 128, f. 17.

it is, once more, the *dalīl al-ʿināya* which is ‘the method Revelation follows to teach people that the world is God’s creation.’⁸³⁷ This time, however, the *dalīl al-ʿināya* appears in a slightly different form from its version in the section on the affirmation of the creator. The first principle still refers to the world’s beneficial⁸³⁸ nature, yet the second principle now states that ‘everything beneficial...is necessarily produced,’⁸³⁹ while it previously appeared as that ‘this benefit necessarily comes from an agent.’⁸⁴⁰ The conclusion following from these two principles is of course precisely what Ibn Rushd intends to establish in the present section; however, this is not where Ibn Rushd ends and he therefore adds: ‘From these two principles it follows that the world is created *and* that it has a creator (*ṣāniʿ*).’⁸⁴¹ This is the case as ‘the proofs from providence (*dalāla al-ʿināya*) prove both things together and they are therefore the noblest proofs for the existence of the creator (*wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*).’⁸⁴² Just as in the passage quoted before, the expression that the world ‘has a creator’ and the formulation ‘the existence of the creator’ appear here in one breath and in one and the same meaning, and both formulations denote an antithesis to the world’s being due to chance,⁸⁴³ which is crucial for Ibn Rushd’s present endeavour to show that the world’s existence is to be ascribed to God. Therefore, the reason why Ibn Rushd calls the proofs based on providence ‘the noblest proofs for the existence of the creator’ is because this method refers to a single characteristic about the world – its beneficial nature – to prove that the world is created and not self-sufficient in its existence as well as that its being created precludes its being a product of chance, but rather points to its being due to another who is a creator, endowed with will and knowledge. We have to keep in mind that for many *mutakallimūn* the conviction that a created thing exists due to a creator was not an item of knowledge considered self-evident,

⁸³⁷ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 162.

⁸³⁸ See Hourani 1962 and Leaman 1988, pp. 155-156 on the question of how Ibn Rushd reconciles the occurrence of evil with the claim that the world as a whole is of a beneficial nature.

⁸³⁹ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 163.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 118.

⁸⁴¹ Ibid., p. 163.

⁸⁴² Ibid., p. 163.

⁸⁴³ Ibn Rushd states that contemplation about the world and its parts makes humans recognise the benefit contained in them and ‘they know for sure that it is impossible that this benefit...is due to chance, rather it is due to one who intended it (*qāṣid qaṣadahu*) and one who willed it (*murīd arādahu*)’ (ibid., p. 163).

even though some did believe so.⁸⁴⁴ In Ibn Rushd's view, the proofs of the Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites alike cannot claim this simplicity and in order to establish the same point, they need to go through several complicated, dubious steps, as he emphasises repeatedly.

There are in fact several other indications that the section on the affirmation of the creator in general, and Ibn Rushd's talking about the proofs for the existence of the creator and that the world has a creator in particular, do not deal with establishing that another entity, in addition to the world, exists as the traditional arguments for God's existence do. For instance, there is Ibn Rushd's remark that the *dalīl al-ʿināya* serves to establish 'one who intended and willed it [i.e., the world] (*qāṣid qaṣadahu wa-murīd arādahu*)'⁸⁴⁵ to which he adds: 'and this is God.' Likewise, the *dalīl al-ikhtirā'*, the other of the two Qur'ānic methods, Ibn Rushd explains, involves reflection about 'the inanimate bodies' in which 'life appears' and from which humans know that 'there is one who causes (*mūjib*) life, and this is God.'⁸⁴⁶ In secondary literature we do not encounter the view proposed here that the annex 'and this is God' indicates that Ibn Rushd seeks to identify God, whose existence is not at issue, as the one from whom the world comes, this being in answer to the question: Who is the creator of the world? Fakhry, once more, correctly reproduces the way Ibn Rushd presents the *dalīl al-ikhtirā'* when he explains that it 'rests on the premise that everything in the world is "invented" or made by an Inventor or Maker, who is God,'⁸⁴⁷ but he nevertheless interprets the whole argument, and thus also the reference to God in 'who is God,' as being indicative of a traditional proof for the existence of God. Similarly, Kukkonen argues that 'the fact of God's fashioning the world...discloses His existence as God: that we have a...maker...means that we have a God.'⁸⁴⁸ According to this view, the addition 'and this is God' does not pose an identification of the world's creator with God but implies that, because

⁸⁴⁴ Al-Juwaynī, to name only one scholar, maintained in his *Kitāb al-Shāmil* (1960-61, p. 148) that the knowledge about the impossibility that something permissible is realised without any kind of necessitator is self-evident (*badiha al-ʿaql*), while later arguing in his *al-ʿAqīda al-Nizāmiyya* (pp. 13-14) that the realisation of this fact is dependent on speculation (*naẓar*).

⁸⁴⁵ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 163.

⁸⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 119.

⁸⁴⁷ Fakhry's introduction in Najjar 2001, p. 6.

⁸⁴⁸ Kukkonen 2002, pp. 406-407.

the world has a creator, that is, because the existence of an entity other than the world has been proven, God must exist. As argued before, what this comes down to is first and foremost a difference in opinion concerning the purpose of Ibn Rushd's proof and the question regarding what is it that he seeks to establish.

Yet, even the all-important phrase 'the existence of the creator' is used by Ibn Rushd in the context of answering this very question about the identification of God as the creator of the world. At the beginning of the section on the affirmation of the creator, where Ibn Rushd defends reasoning and speculation as a necessary prerequisite for knowledge of God, he relates the position of the *hashwiyya* who want to make the point that reason cannot be made the basis of correct belief. They argue that 'all the Arabs accepted the existence of the creator'⁸⁴⁹ before the Prophet presented any rational proof to them, and reasoning can, consequently, not be made a condition for belief. In support of this position they refer to the Qur'ān, as Ibn Rushd relates, where 'God said: If you ask them: Who created the heavens and the earth? They will say: God.'⁸⁵⁰ As argued before, the point of focus is again the question of who is to be acknowledged as having brought the world into existence, and since the Arabs, according to the *hashwiyya*, believed God to be the creator of the world anyway, there was no need for the Prophet to produce a proof for 'the existence of the creator,' that is, to establish that the world in fact does owe its existence to another and that its cause is only God. The present debate, and therefore also the phrase 'the existence of the creator,' has clearly nothing to do with the question of whether God exists. But yet again, the way this passage is understood in secondary literature is at odds with Ibn Rushd's own words: Samuel Nirenstein, for example, who takes the proof of 'the existence of the creator' to denote a traditional proof for God, interprets the aforementioned Qur'ānic words as that the 'Arabs believe in God instinctively,'⁸⁵¹ that is, in His existence.

⁸⁴⁹ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 102.

⁸⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 102. This is Q. 31.25.

⁸⁵¹ Nirenstein 1924, p. 432.

Our analysis of the instances in the *Kashf* where Ibn Rushd speaks of ‘the existence of the creator’ or closely related terms has highlighted the importance of being cautious with any possible preconceived opinion about the meaning and use of this phrase as it in fact denotes different things. It became clear that what Ibn Rushd seems to have in mind when he speaks about the method leading to ‘the existence of the creator’ and the like in the context of the chapter on the affirmation of the creator is nothing else than to say that the world comes from another entity who is its creator, just as its opposite, that is, the denial of the creator simply denotes the belief that the world either is self-sufficient in terms of its existence or came about by chance. This particular relation has been represented correctly in secondary literature, but the claim that this includes and denotes the question about God’s existence is not substantiated. We can, therefore, conclude that in the section on the affirmation of the creator, Ibn Rushd is concerned with the exact same issues as the *mutakallimūn* who came before him. At the same time it is also true for Ibn Rushd, just as it is for al-Ghazālī and al-Nasafī, that the terminology he uses in these discussions has changed, and this is in particular evident in his speaking of the ‘existence’ of the creator.

The Meaning of ‘the Existence of God’

Now that it has become clear what Ibn Rushd means to denote by the expression ‘the existence of the creator’ in the context of ‘the affirmation of the creator,’ the question still remains of whether in this section Ibn Rushd is at all concerned with the proof of God’s existence, in particular since the fact remains that he speaks of the method leading to ‘knowledge of the existence of God’⁸⁵² and ‘the affirmation of the existence of God.’⁸⁵³ We recall that Ibn Rushd speaks of the ‘existence of God’ in those instances where he presents his critique of the various methods pursued by Muslim scholars to attain knowledge of God, but that much more often he refers to ‘the existence of the creator,’ in particular when engaging with the details of these different methods. The reason for this

⁸⁵² Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 101 and 102. See also *ibid.*, p. 121: ‘This method is the straight path with which God called people to knowledge of His existence (*maʿrifa wujūdihi*).’

⁸⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

becomes clear when we keep in mind that according to Ibn Rushd, just as for the majority of *mutakallimūn*, the only way to attain any knowledge about God is the one that links Him to creation in an act-agent relationship.⁸⁵⁴ It is through God's role as creator that God's nature can be known. However, what is it that Ibn Rushd wants to denote by the expression 'the existence of God'? Does he mean the question of whether God actually exists or not? Or does he mean something different by it?

We are able to gain an idea of what Ibn Rushd means when we take into account that the discussion surrounding 'the affirmation of the creator' takes place in the very first section of the *Kashf* which is entitled 'on the essence (*fī'l-dhāt*).⁸⁵⁵ For some reason, this fact receives no mention or attention whatsoever in the secondary literature. Ibn Rushd presents the knowledge gained about God divided in several sections, headed by a section dealing with God's essence; then His attributes; His deeds and a number of other aspects. This approach is of course not uncharacteristic of other *kalām* works written before Ibn Rushd's time, as we have seen.⁸⁵⁵ The section on God's essence contains, besides the affirmation of the creator, one more subsection which deals with 'God's oneness,' this being the first thing Ibn Rushd demonstrates after he has established a link between the produced world and God as its producer. The knowledge about God's oneness, we must bear in mind, does in fact pertain to nothing else than God's essence itself. This fact is emphasised by Ibn Rushd in the following section on God's attributes which he begins with a discussion of how God's attributes relate to God's essence. There he points out that God's attribute of being one, just like His being eternal, constitutes a so-called *ṣifa nafsīyya* or essential attribute as opposed to another class of attributes, the *ṣifāt ma'nawīyya* or hypostatic attributes. 'By the essential attribute,' Ibn Rushd explains, 'I mean that with which the essence is described due to itself, not due

⁸⁵⁴ Compare Ibn Rushd's criticism of those who deny the notion of agency for the *shāhid*, arguing that 'they have no way to know God because they cannot acknowledge that every act has an agent' (ibid., p. 193).

⁸⁵⁵ To name only two examples, al-Ghazālī's *al-Iqtisād* begins with a section 'on God's essence', followed by one 'on God's attributes' and one 'on God's acts.' In al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, the section 'on God's attributes' is preceded by remarks about His being one and the question of whether He is to be called a 'body' and a 'thing,' which all concern God's essence, and finally there is a section on 'God's acts.'

to the subsistence of a hypostatic entity (*ma'nā*) in it, in addition to the essence, like when we say: one and eternal.⁸⁵⁶ As for the other seven divine attributes of knowledge, power, will, life, speech, hearing and sight, it is interesting to observe that Ibn Rushd discusses them in a separate section entitled 'on the attributes,' thus in a way following the approach of the Ash'arite *mutakallimūn* for whom these attributes are distinct from God's essence. Ibn Rushd in fact presents their position that these seven attributes are to be regarded as 'in addition to the essence,' that is, as *ṣifāt ma'nawīyya*, yet in the *Kashf* Ibn Rushd hints at his own conviction, spelled out more clearly in the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, that this view is not correct.⁸⁵⁷ There, he speaks of the 'absurdities which arise from the doctrine that the First Principle possesses attributes additional to His essence.'⁸⁵⁸ What this means is that, even though in the *Kashf* Ibn Rushd dedicates a separate section to the attributes, for him they truly belong to the consideration of God's essence.⁸⁵⁹ Returning to God's attribute of being one in particular, we need to keep in mind that this characteristic does not only say something about God's essence, as Ibn Rushd made clear when counting it among the *ṣifāt nafsīyya*, but also about His existence. This is the case as for Ibn Rushd – and in this he actually agreed with his arch opponents, the Ash'arites – a thing's essence and its existence are one and the same. The same is true for God's other essential attribute, His being eternal, which likewise describes – and classifies – His existence. As a matter of fact, we have already come across Ibn Rushd using the word 'existence,' not 'essence' in relation to the question of whether God is eternal or not when he criticised the Ash'arites' use of speculative proofs, saying: 'But regarding the existence of this originator, doubt arises which the science of *kalām* cannot dispel: We cannot say that this

⁸⁵⁶ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 134.

⁸⁵⁷ In the *Kashf*, Ibn Rushd criticises the view of the Ash'arites on the divine attributes and points out its flaws, stating: 'When these people said that He is an essence and attributes in addition to it, they more implied that He is a body than that they denied it' (p. 139). Generally, however, he holds in the *Kashf* that the question of whether these attributes describe the essence itself or are hypostatic attributes is one that does not need to be discussed as it is not of interest for the masses. Revelation 'acknowledges their existence without going into detail,' and this has to suffice (p. 135).

⁸⁵⁸ Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut* (1964), p. 179.

⁸⁵⁹ In the *Tahāfut* Ibn Rushd explains that God's different attributes are in reality only aspects or ways of considering the one eternal essence: 'The one identical entity, when considered insofar as something else proceeds from it, is called powerful and agent, and, when considered under the aspect of its particularising one of two opposite acts, it is called willing...' (1964, p. 497).

originator is eternal or originated.’⁸⁶⁰ The equation of essence and existence is a tenet which is not expounded upon in the *Kashf*⁸⁶¹ and once more we have to turn to the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* where Ibn Rushd expounds on it. There he states in a number of instances that essence and existence are one and the same. With the subtle aim of criticising Ibn Sīnā,⁸⁶² Ibn Rushd explains: ‘He believed that the thing’s existence refers to an attribute in addition to its essence... But all this is based on a mistake which is that the existence of a thing is one of its attributes.’⁸⁶³ For Ibn Rushd the correct view is that ‘existence is an attribute which is the essence itself, and whoever maintains something different is mistaken.’⁸⁶⁴ With regards to God, everything the examination of His essence pertains to, also concerns the examination of His existence – the *kind* of existence that is specific to Him – and vice versa. We shall hence submit that Ibn Rushd’s mentioning ‘God’s existence,’ about which knowledge is to be gained, does not refer to the question of whether there God actually exists or not. This might at first seem perplexing, in particular when the whole discussion is approached with the expectation that this expression cannot refer to anything else than the dichotomy between existence and non-existence as it is assumed in the traditional arguments for God’s existence. Yet, we should also keep in mind that in places Ibn Rushd speaks of ‘the knowledge of the existence of God’ alongside ‘the knowledge of God’ which certain methods are able or unable to establish. For instance, with regards to the Ash‘arites, he says that ‘they believe that the affirmation of *the existence of God* is only due to reason’⁸⁶⁵ and then ends his discussion about the validity of their proofs with the statement that ‘in the science of dialectics there is no solution to these doubts [i.e., doubts Ibn

⁸⁶⁰ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 103.

⁸⁶¹ Except for a concise remark in the discussion of the visibility of God where Ibn Rushd states: ‘The senses perceive only the essence, and the essence is the existent itself (*al-dhāt hiya nafs al-mawjūd*) shared by all existents’ (ibid., pp. 156-157).

⁸⁶² See Leaman 1988, pp. 104-106 for Ibn Rushd’s position on essence and existence and his critique of Ibn Sīnā in particular. See also Shehadi 1982, pp. 87-100 for a discussion of Ibn Rushd’s equation of essence and existence with regards to ontological questions (such as in the present discussion of God’s – or any other thing’s – essence and existence) and his acceptance that existence can be accidental when predicated of a thing in logical analyses (e.g., ‘X exists’) where the focus is, however, merely on propositions in the mind and not on real instances of things in this world.

⁸⁶³ Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut* (1964), pp. 597-598. Literally, the text has ‘one of its necessary concomitants (*lāzim min lawāzimihi*)’ which are a thing’s attributes.

⁸⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 516.

⁸⁶⁵ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 103.

Rushd expressed about their proofs], accordingly, it is necessary that this is not made the principle for *the knowledge of God*, in particular not for the masses.’⁸⁶⁶ Likewise, he states, still in the context of the question of which method leads to knowledge of *the existence of God*, that ‘from all this it becomes clear to you that the famous methods of the Ash‘arites to arrive at *the knowledge of God* are not...certain methods.’⁸⁶⁷ This indicates that, when Ibn Rushd speaks of methods which permit knowledge about ‘God’s existence,’ he does not refer to the question whether God does exist, but rather expresses nothing else than the more general ‘knowledge of God.’ Attaining knowledge of God pertains to establishing what His essence and existence are like, how they are described. And moreover, since Ibn Rushd rejects the idea that God is anything else than one simple essence, it is entirely plausible that he should speak of ‘God’s existence’ which the believer is required to know. We must therefore conclude that in this overarching quest to gain knowledge about God, the question asked by traditional proofs for God’s existence is not to be found in Ibn Rushd’s *Kashf* – in the same way they were absent from the writings of the theologians and philosophers before Ibn Rushd whom we considered previously. With regards to al-Ghazālī, who can be singled out, besides Ibn Rushd, for having made explicit mention of ‘the existence of God,’ we recall that he used the two words ‘existence’ and ‘essence’ interchangeably when he said about the purpose of the science of *kalām* that it makes known ‘the essence of God and His attributes’⁸⁶⁸ and ‘the existence of the Lord (Most-High!) and His attributes’⁸⁶⁹ respectively. Ibn Rushd’s use of these two terms seems to be entirely in line with that.

Other Instances of ‘God’s Existence’ in the *Kashf*

It should be pointed out that there are other instances in the *Kashf* which contain considerations about God’s existence. Yet, just as in the case of the consideration of God’s existence in the section on the affirmation of the creator, they do not pertain to the question of whether God exists; rather, they have to

⁸⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 107.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 116.

⁸⁶⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla*, p. 54.

⁸⁶⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād*, p. 8.

do with classifying the existence that is God's, usually by distinguishing it from created existence, which is an important theme and objective in the *Kashf* as pointed out. It is interesting to note that in the *Kashf* Ibn Rushd does not make any contribution to the discussion whether God has to be counted among the entirety of existents or whether His being called an existent implies likening him to creation. We have come across this issue in a number of *kalām* works, among them al-Malāhimī's *al-Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*,⁸⁷⁰ 'Abd al-Jabbār's *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamṣa*⁸⁷¹ and al-Nasafī's *Tabṣirat al-adilla*⁸⁷² who related that numerous *mutakallimūn* dealt with the question of how God, who had previously been acknowledged as the world's originator, can be shown to be an existent (*mawjūd*) rather than a non-existent (*ma'dūm*) or neither of the two. What their discussions made clear was that when these *mutakallimūn* asked whether God is (an) existent (*hal Allāh mawjūd*, as it were) they did not mean by it the same as when traditional arguments for God's existence seek to answer the question of whether God exists. However, the issue that actually concerned Ibn Rushd is the question of whether God's existence is different from that of created existence. Like a great many *mutakallimūn* preceding him, Ibn Rushd is eager to stress God's otherness from creation, and he quotes the famous Qur'ānic declaration, we have come across before in the writings of such individuals as al-Ghazālī⁸⁷³ and al-Shahrastānī,⁸⁷⁴ that {There is nothing like Him (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay*)}.⁸⁷⁵ Ibn Rushd discusses the question of God's incorporeality in particular with a view to what the common people should be told about it for whom 'it is too difficult to establish proof for the existence of an existent (*wujūd mawjūd*) which is self-subsisting (but) not a body.'⁸⁷⁶ It would be too much to ask of them to think of God as an existent which is completely different from all existents they know, that is, the bodies of this world, insofar as He is supposed to be incorporeal and without extension in space. The common people rely on their knowledge of this world, the *shāhid*, which they make the

⁸⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 254: 'The section on His being existent.'

⁸⁷¹ Ibid., p. 177: 'He is knowing and powerful, and the knowing and powerful one must be existent.'

⁸⁷² Ibid., p. 195: 'His description is that He is existent.'

⁸⁷³ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla*, p. 332.

⁸⁷⁴ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, p. 103 (of the Arabic text).

⁸⁷⁵ Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, p. 139. This is Q. 42.11.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 141.

basis of their judgement about the *ghā'ib*,⁸⁷⁷ and they believe 'that the existent is what is perceived, and that what is not perceived, is non-existence.'⁸⁷⁸ When they are told by the theologians that 'there is such a thing as an existent (*hāhunā mawjūdan*) which is not a body,' they are not able to comprehend it and to affirm God's incorporeality and otherness from created existence since 'the aspect of perception is taken away from them and it becomes the non-existent for them.'⁸⁷⁹ Crucially, the point Ibn Rushd makes, when mentioning the non-existent, is not that the discussion of God's incorporeality would lead the common people into atheism and the denial of God altogether. This point is never made. Rather, the point Ibn Rushd stresses is the difficulty that, if God is an existent (which He undoubtedly is), and if the existent is what is perceived and corporeal, then it must follow for the common people that God necessarily is perceptible and a body. The problem the *mutakallimūn* face is, hence, to maintain that God is an existent like all of created existence, but that His existence is different from created existence insofar as He is not a body and not observable by the senses.

The *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* and the Terminology of Creation

We have observed that in the *Kashf* Ibn Rushd makes use of the very same terminology as the *mutakallimūn* when describing God as the creator of the world. It is such terms as *ṣānī*,⁸⁸⁰ *bārī*,⁸⁸¹ *fā'il*,⁸⁸² *muḥdith*⁸⁸³ as well as *khāliq*⁸⁸⁴ that appear in relation with 'the affirmation of the creator' and Ibn Rushd's *dalīl al-īnāya* and *dalīl al-ikhtirā'*. At the same time, it is well-known that Ibn Rushd's understanding of the mode of creation is quite different from that of the *mutakallimūn* – even though Ibn Rushd himself seems to want to stress, at least in his *Faṣl al-maqāl*, that the difference in views is in reality only minor and in fact 'comes down to a disagreement about naming.'⁸⁸⁵ It is, however, not in the

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 147.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 139.

⁸⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 139.

⁸⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 101, p. 117 and p. 120.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid., p. 102, p. 103 and p. 118.

⁸⁸² Ibid., p. 118, p. 167 and p. 169.

⁸⁸³ Ibid., p. 103.

⁸⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 162.

⁸⁸⁵ Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-maqāl*, pp. 40-41.

Kashf that Ibn Rushd expounds upon the difference in the way the *mutakallimūn* and philosophers understand the terminology of creation;⁸⁸⁶ rather, one has to turn to the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*. Like al-Ghazālī in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, Ibn Rushd discusses the notion of God as agent who brought about the world in Chapter Three. This discussion makes clear how, from the *mutakallimūn*'s perspective, the philosophers – including Ibn Rushd – use the terminology of creation in a way that deprives it of its true meaning when they apply it to concepts which, for the *mutakallimūn*, have nothing to do with the true nature of God's creation of the world. It also reveals, in turn, that from the perspective of the philosophers, the theologians claim to know the true meaning of these terms and concepts, while they in fact misunderstand Scripture's teachings in these matters. Both camps essentially accuse each other of committing the same error.

In both works, Chapter Three addresses the philosophers' alleged 'confusion in saying that God is the agent (*fā'il*) and creator (*ṣāni'*) of the world and that the world is His creation and act.'⁸⁸⁷ Al-Ghazālī based his critique of the philosophers' calling God an agent and creator – both of which denote the same concept in this context – on the definition of 'agent' as 'someone from whom the act proceeds with the will to act, according to choice, and with the knowledge of the thing willed.'⁸⁸⁸ For the philosophers, he then argues, God causes the world necessarily (*luzūman ḍarūriyyan*) as they deny His attributes, in particular that of will, and therefore He cannot be called an agent.⁸⁸⁹ Ibn Rushd for his part now reverses the critique, arguing that the *mutakallimūn*'s definition of 'agent' is flawed as they exclude natural agents (*al-fā'il bi'l-ṭab'*) from it, such are fire, wanting to affirm voluntary agents (*bi-ru'ya wa-ikhtiyār*) only. The real definition of 'agent' is 'what causes another to pass from potentiality into

⁸⁸⁶ We have to bear in mind that the *Kashf* is essentially a basic exposition of religious doctrines for the common people, eschewing all sophisticated argumentation which could confuse the minds of laypeople.

⁸⁸⁷ Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut* (1964), p. 250. In al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* the heading appears as 'The illustration of their confusion in saying that God is the creator (*ṣāni'*) of the world and that the world is His creation' (1927, p. 18). See Leaman 1988, the chapter entitled "Is God really an agent?" (p. 46 et seqq.) on this discussion.

⁸⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 254.

⁸⁸⁹ Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut* (1954), p. 87 (In the 1964 Arabic edition, the passage containing al-Ghazālī's words is almost entirely missing, see p. 250).

actuality and from non-existence into existence.’⁸⁹⁰ Will is not part of this definition and the term therefore applies to both natural and voluntary agents. Al-Ghazālī is mistaken not only when it comes to the definition of ‘agent,’ but also when maintaining that the philosophers’ God acts out of necessity. Ibn Rushd clarifies that God is not like the agents in the *shāhid*, neither like humans who are a voluntary agents, nor like any agent acting necessarily. His knowledge, will and bounty from which the world proceeds are more perfect than in the agents of the *shāhid*.⁸⁹¹ The *mutakallimūn*’s concept of the agent is, according to Ibn Rushd, too narrow, and God is in fact the most perfect of agents.

The discussion of the terms ‘act (*fiʿl*)’ and ‘creation (*ṣanʿ*)’ to describe the world as God’s product concerns similar terminological disagreement. Al-Ghazālī defined ‘act’ and ‘creation’ as ‘that which truly proceeds from the will’⁸⁹² – which is for Ibn Rushd, as we have seen, too narrow an understanding – and as that which is ‘an expression for temporal origination (*iḥdāth*)’⁸⁹³ – which Ibn Rushd denies as he acknowledges ‘everlasting origination (*ḥudūth dāʾim*)’⁸⁹⁴ which has no first beginning. Contrary to al-Ghazālī’s claim that an eternal act is a contradiction in terms, Ibn Rushd maintains that the eternity of the world does not preclude it from being the act of an agent.

Based on the above remarks, al-Ghazālī had accused the philosophers of using the terms agent and act only metaphorically (*bi-ṭarīq al-majāz*) and deprived of their real meaning.⁸⁹⁵ Ibn Rushd now reverses the charge and argues that, if at all, it is al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarites who call God an agent in a metaphorical sense.⁸⁹⁶ His argument is rather interesting as it comes close to an argument the Muʿtazilites had brought up against al-Ashʿarī at least a century before Ibn Rushd, as is reported by al-Juwaynī in his *Kitāb al-Shāmīl*. As discussed in a

⁸⁹⁰ Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut* (1964), p. 255. See Kogan 1985, p. 216 on the three kinds of non-existence in Ibn Rushd and the one he singles out as the one God’s creative act pertains to. See also Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut* (1964), p. 274: ‘The act of the agent is only connected with existence in a state of non-existence, that is, existence which is in potentiality, and it is not connected with actualised existence...nor with non-existence, in so far as it is non-existence.’

⁸⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 255-257.

⁸⁹² Ibid., p. 270.

⁸⁹³ Ibid., p. 271.

⁸⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 271.

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 268.

⁸⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 267.

previous chapter, al-Juwaynī reports that the Muʿtazilites criticised al-Ashʿarī for his arguments relating to the question about ‘the need of origination for the originator’⁸⁹⁷ and in particular for his use of the famous *kitāba-kātib* and *bināʾ-bānīn* analogy to affirm the principle of causation for the realm of the unobservable. Since ‘the building does not occur, according to him [i.e., al-Ashʿarī], as something the servants have power over,’ as al-Ashʿarī rejected real human causal efficacy,⁸⁹⁸ he has no basis to establish that God is indeed an agent and the creator of the world in the truest sense of the word, thus their argument.⁸⁹⁹

When Ibn Rushd now attempts to reverse al-Ghazālī’s charge that the philosophers speak of God as agent only in a metaphorical sense, he focuses on the same analogy between the agent in the *shāhid* and the agent in the *ghāʾib* which posed the focal point of the Muʿtazilites’ critique of al-Ashʿarī’s argument. Al-Ghazālī maintained, Ibn Rushd argues, that the only kind of agent is the voluntary agent on the basis of which he rejected the philosophers’ notion of God as agent. Yet, it is precisely due to the analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghāʾib* that the Ashʿarites render God’s being called a voluntary agent a metaphor as they ‘do not acknowledge a free will in man and a power to exercise an influence on reality.’⁹⁰⁰ It follows that ‘if this is the case with the agent in the *shāhid*, how can it be said that the true agent in the *ghāʾib* is to be described as acting through knowledge and will?’⁹⁰¹

Even though Ibn Rushd seemed to have been of the opinion – or at least he argued so – that the philosophers’ understanding of what God’s creation of the world exactly means is not that different from that of the theologians, the above discussions show that disagreement about the correct use of terminology primarily stems from different views of the world and indeed reflects them: The concept of the agent, for instance, must vary depending on whether one believes that to acknowledge efficient causality outside God violates the notion

⁸⁹⁷ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 154.

⁸⁹⁸ In the *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, al-Ashʿarī explains that only God is ‘one who has power over (*qādir ʿalayhi*) [i.e., the act which is acquisition (*al-fiʿl alladhī huwa kasb*)]’ (p. 72).

⁸⁹⁹ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 157.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut* (1954), p. 94. Compare Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut* (1964), p. 267.

⁹⁰¹ Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut* (1964), p. 267.

of His omnipotence or whether one thinks that the very existence of the world can only be explained when maintaining causes other than God.

The *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* and the Proof of the Creator

It is rather surprising that the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* is almost entirely excluded from considerations of Ibn Rushd's arguments for God's existence in secondary literature. This is even more astonishing since al-Ghazālī's alleged proof that God exists in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* is a much discussed and often referred to matter and since Ibn Rushd deals with the exact same questions al-Ghazālī pored over. In al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut*, it is in particular Chapters Four and Ten in which his proof for God's existence is presumably found, based on his charge against the philosophers that they are unable to show that the world has a creator and cause external to it.⁹⁰² Similarly, Ibn Rushd speaks of – and ultimately denies – the philosophers' alleged 'inability to prove the existence of the creator of the world (*wujūd ṣāni' al-ʿālam*)' or 'to affirm (*ithbāt*) the creator of the world,' as the heading of Chapter Four appears in different manuscripts,⁹⁰³ as well as 'their incapacity to establish the proof that the world has a creator and cause (*li'l-ʿālam ṣāni'an wa-illa*)' in Chapter Ten.⁹⁰⁴ Yet, it appears that all we find is a comment in Sulaymān Dunyā's Arabic edition of the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* that in Chapter Four 'Ibn Rushd responds to al-Ghazālī and states that the philosophers are closer to reason in their affirmation of the existence of God (*ithbāt wujūd Allāh*) than the *ahl al-sunna* and the *dahriyya*'⁹⁰⁵ as well as the remark by van den Bergh in the introduction to his translation of the same work that Ibn Rushd follows al-Ghazālī's arrangement of his discussions among which there is also the question of the proof of God's existence.⁹⁰⁶

Far from pointing out the philosophers' failure to prove that God really does exist, we recall, it was al-Ghazālī's general aim in Chapter Four to show that

⁹⁰² Chapter Four is entitled 'On their inability to affirm the creator (*ithbāt al-ṣāni'*) and Chapter Ten 'On the illustration that belief in *al-dahr* and in the denial of the creator (*naḥī al-ṣāni'*) is necessary for them.'

⁹⁰³ Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut* (1964), p. 427.

⁹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 630.

⁹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 983 (section *nuṣūṣ wa-mawḍū'āt*).

⁹⁰⁶ Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut* (1954), p. xv.

they are unable to prove the world's being due to another since they do not succeed in proving the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes. The philosophers, in consequence, come close to committing the grave sin to contradict Scripture which clearly states that the world is God's work. To assume that an eternal world owes its existence to another seemed like a contradiction in terms and like a sheer absurdity to al-Ghazālī. Ibn Rushd deals with no other question. His argument focuses on stressing that it is not absurd at all that an eternal world should come from another since the most perfect agent (*fā'il*) is the one on whom the act depends always and where this connection does not cease after the act has come to be (mind you, the world is regarded by the philosophers as God's act, just as by the theologians). Therefore, when Ibn Rushd speaks of the philosophers' endeavour to prove 'the existence of the creator of the world,' he uses this phrase in the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* in the very same sense as in the *Kashf*: simply to denote the idea that the world is not a self-sufficient thing, but that its existence, despite having no beginning, is dependent on another. It is this very notion which al-Ghazālī attempted to attack; the question of whether the philosophers have grounds for their belief in God's existence if they start from the assumption of an eternal world was not the point.

Chapter Ten of al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* contains the famous statement that 'the one who does not assume the originatedness of the bodies has no ground at all for his assumption of the creator.'⁹⁰⁷ The common interpretation in secondary literature of this remark was, we recall, that al-Ghazālī means to defend the cosmological argument as the only valid, and possible, proof that God exists.⁹⁰⁸ Yet, it became clear that this statement of his essentially expresses the same thought and reasoning as in Chapter Four: To assume that the world is the product of another, generally speaking, and of God, to be exact, when upholding its eternity, not its originatedness, is absurd. In particular, al-Ghazālī made the point that the philosophers should follow the *dahriyya* in their belief in the eternal and uncaused heavens – that is, a world without an (external)

⁹⁰⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut* (1927), p. 209.

⁹⁰⁸ See, for instance, Davidson 1987, p. 370 and Fakhry 2004, p. 231.

creator – as the former cannot prove that the heavens are not necessarily existent and therefore in need of a cause.

Ibn Rushd attempts to defend the philosophers' belief that the eternal world is God's product by arguing that al-Ghazālī's criticism is valid only for Ibn Sīnā's – as Ibn Rushd thinks: flawed and innovative – arguments, but that it is of no concern for the ancient philosophers who were able to show that the heavens in their corporeality are necessary, but possible in their motion and must have a necessary, incorporeal mover.⁹⁰⁹ Again, it is important to bear in mind the

⁹⁰⁹ Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut* (1964), pp. 637-642. Motion also plays an important role in Ibn Rushd's commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (Book *Lām*) where he states that 'there is no way to demonstrate the existence of the separate substance (*wujūd jawhar mufāriq*) except for through motion, and all methods other than the method based on motion, which are believed to lead to the existence of the first mover (*wujūd al-muḥarrik al-awwal*), are only persuasive' (Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr mā ba'd al-ṭabī'at*, commentary 5, p. 1423). This statement on the part of Ibn Rushd is yet another instance where he is understood to discuss the correct method of proving that God exists: Kukkonen speaks of 'the proof from motion, touted in Averroes' commentary works as the one and only scientific method of proving God's existence' (2002, p. 408). Davidson points out that 'Averroes furthermore understands that the proof of the existence of God has to take its departure from a physical phenomenon,' that is, motion (1987, p. 317). Evidently, it is when Ibn Rushd speaks of the aim to prove the existence of the first mover (as in the above statement) or when he concludes that 'there is then something which imparts motion, but which is not moved' (ibid., commentary 35, p. 1588) that this is taken to express his intention to show that God exists. The same is the case when he states that 'there is necessarily a substance eternal and not moved' (ibid., commentary 29, p. 1558). As in the case of the *Kashf* and the *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, a different reading of what Ibn Rushd discusses can be suggested: Aristotle said about the enquiry in Book *Lām* that 'it is about substance and what it seeks are the causes and principles of substance' (ibid., text 1, p. 1406). It follows: To prove the existence of the first mover hence solely refers to the investigation of the causes of substance (as the first mover is the ultimate cause). A distinction has, therefore, to be made between the idea that God Himself (that is, His existence, in the sense of traditional arguments) is sought to be proven and the idea that it is God's role as the final cause which is at stake (as part of the broader investigation of causation). In the cosmological argument for God's existence, the proof of the creator indeed means nothing else than the proof that God really does exist – the *existence* of some entity, endowed with certain inferable attributes, has been established and this entity is then named 'God'. In the arguments presented by classical Islamic theologians and philosophers, however, the proof of the creator (or related terms) is *not* the same as the proof that God really does exist, as we have seen many times. Likewise, Ibn Rushd's conclusion (following Aristotle) that the proof from motion allows to establish 'the existence of the separate substance' is, firstly, only one aspect of the wider enquiry into substance in general and the three types of substance postulated in the *Physics* and, secondly, does not seek to establish that God exists, but that God, the first mover, is of a substance different from the substances of the heavens and the sublunary world (constituting the remaining two types of substance). It should also be added that the same kind of enquiry as that relating to God also applies to the heavens and the sublunary world respectively: With regards to God, His status as cause and His particular type substance is enquired into, and with regards to the heavens and the sublunary world, their being effects/causes and their type of substance is enquired into as well. No one would, however, suggest that when Aristotle (or Ibn Rushd) speaks of proving a substance which is movable, but eternal and not corruptible, as well as of establishing that the movable and corruptible substance (i.e., the sublunary world) has a cause, that he actually intends to prove that *the heavens, to which all of this refers, exist*. The proof that there is a particular type of substance (i.e., that of the heavens) is not a proof for *the existence of the heavens* – and this holds true as

actual context of this discussion to avoid the mistake of assuming that al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd's concern is which method does or does not prove that God exists. Therefore, when van den Bergh translates al-Ghazālī's charge against the philosophers that '*al-qawl bi'l-dahr lāzim lahum*'⁹¹⁰ as 'they are forced to admit atheism,'⁹¹¹ he reads a meaning into the term *dahr* as well as the debate as a whole which fails to appreciate the nuances inherent in the arguments of both al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd.

Conclusions

It seems almost obvious that we are dealing with a proof for God's existence, a teleological argument, to be precise, in Ibn Rushd's *al-Kashf* in view of the many instances where he speaks of methods proving the existence of the creator of the world as well as God's existence. A careful analysis of the way Ibn Rushd uses the expression 'the existence of the creator' and related terms, however, illustrated a number of important points: Firstly, this expression denotes different things in different passages and, in particular, one would be too quick to assume that 'the existence of the creator' refers to nothing else in Ibn Rushd than the question about the existence versus non-existence of an entity, in the way this expression is used in the traditional arguments for God's existence. Secondly, what Ibn Rushd in fact means to denote by it is nothing else than what all theologians and philosophers before him sought to demonstrate: that the world owes its existence to another, namely God, rather than existing due to itself or being the product of chance. This is the purpose of the proof for the existence of the creator as well as the affirmation of the creator and it has nothing to do with showing that another entity, God, exists besides the world. Ultimately, the proof of the existence of the creator, which establishes a link between God and the world, serves the purpose of gaining knowledge about God as Ibn Rushd is agreed with the majority of his predecessors that it is only through God's role as creator that He can be known. Knowledge of God pertains,

well for the proof that there is yet another type of substance (i.e., that of God), which is not a proof for *God's existence* either.

⁹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 630. See also al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut* (1927), p. 19: '*al-qawl bi'l-dahr wa-naḥī al-ṣānī' lāzim lahum.*'

⁹¹¹ Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut* (1954), p. 250.

for Ibn Rushd, to His essence and attributes (which in Ibn Rushd's view refer to the very essence itself), besides a few other aspects. Knowledge of God's essence is the same as knowledge of His existence: His essence is His existence, which is specific to Him, and the theologians' and philosophers' aim alike is to establish what His essence and existence are like. It is this aim which is expressed by Ibn Rushd in the words 'the method which leads to knowledge of God's existence'. With a view to terminology, Ibn Rushd follows such later theologians as al-Ghazālī and al-Nasafī who also speak of 'existence' with regards to the creator and God respectively. Subject matter-wise, however, Ibn Rushd follows in the exact same steps as all his predecessors for whom God's existence was an unquestioned fact, while God's nature and His relation to the world were seen as matters requiring rational investigation and justification. This is true for both Ibn Rushd's *al-Kashf* as well as his *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, where the issue at stake is not whether the philosophers succeed in proving that God actually exists, but whether they can show that the eternal world is God's creation and act.

Chapter Eight: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209)

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī is considered an immensely significant and highly original Islamic theologian. Despite his Ash‘arite credentials, his writings reveal the profound influence philosophical thinking had on him. While arguing against certain doctrines associated with the philosophers of Islam, such as the belief in the eternity of the world, al-Rāzī nevertheless borrowed a number of their most characteristic methods and concepts, such as the notions of possibility (*jawāz*) and necessity (*wujūb*) with regards to the world and God, and incorporated them into the methods and concepts characteristic of the theologians. This is most evident in those discussions in al-Rāzī’s works which are concerned with what in secondary literature has always been seen as arguments for God’s existence. Like the many theologians and philosophers who preceded him, al-Rāzī is believed to have devoted a considerable part of his theological works to the question of how the existence of God can be proven. The view proposed by a number of scholars devoted to the study of al-Rāzī⁹¹² is, as shall be seen in more detail, that, generally speaking, he can be seen as an adherent to ‘the standard Kalam procedure of proving the existence of God, which consisted in demonstrating the creation of the world and inferring the existence of God from creation,’⁹¹³ as Herbert Davidson puts it. Contrary to this view, we shall argue that al-Rāzī’s works, just like the philosophical and theological works of his predecessors, contain no arguments which have the purpose of proving the existence of God in the traditional sense. We do find in his writings arguments for the affirmation of the creator, or similar expressions, and these are the ones associated with the endeavour of proving God’s existence, but they in fact serve an entirely different purpose, as shall be seen. In explaining what this purpose is and what al-Rāzī seeks to establish, if it is not the existence of God as understood in secondary literature, we shall consider four theological writings

⁹¹² It will be seen where we refer to relevant secondary sources that not much (comprehensive) research has been done on al-Rāzī’s role in the development of Islamic arguments for God’s existence.

⁹¹³ Davidson 1987, p. 75. See also Mahdi, p. 299 in Burrell and McGinn 1990: ‘His general argument is that creation proves the existence of God... This is of course the standard argument of kalām-theology.’

of his in their chronological order:⁹¹⁴ *al-Ishāra fī 'ilm al-kalām* which is one of al-Rāzī's earliest works of a distinctly Ash'arite nature; *al-Arba'īn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, another influential *kalām* work; *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* or *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, al-Rāzī's celebrated commentary on the Qur'ān; as well as *al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*, being the lengthiest and most detailed of al-Rāzī's theological writings.

The *Ishāra fī 'ilm al-kalām* – The Concern and Method of Theology

The *Ishāra* opens with a chapter in which al-Rāzī explains why theology (*'ilm al-kalām*) is the noblest of all sciences. It has the noblest of all subject-matters, which makes it the most formidable science, and this is 'the essence of the creator and His attributes, and what is necessary for Him and what is not permissible for Him.'⁹¹⁵ Al-Rāzī's characterisation of what theology is concerned with provides the very same line of arguments one encounters in the writings of his Ash'arite predecessors such as al-Ghazālī who described theology's endeavour as 'the investigation of God's essence and His attributes.'⁹¹⁶

Not everybody, al-Rāzī remarks, has shared this view of theology and there are people who consider engagement with it to be a baleful innovation (*bid'a*). In relation to the aforementioned endeavour to attain knowledge about God's essence and attributes, these people have pointed to the Prophetic saying 'ponder over creation, do not ponder over the creator'⁹¹⁷ and expressed their view that certain discussions conducted in theology are forbidden. 'Pondering over whether He is knowing by virtue of His essence or due to knowledge...all this is pondering over the creator,' they have said, 'and this is forbidden.'⁹¹⁸ Al-Rāzī responds to this criticism by pointing out that, admittedly, pondering over the creator is prohibited, however, he does not seek to defend speculation about God's essence, that is, God Himself, but rather about 'what is necessary for Him and what is permissible for Him and what is absurd for Him.'⁹¹⁹ Therefore, the theologian is in fact ordered to 'speculate about the created things insofar as

⁹¹⁴ For a chronology of al-Rāzī's works see Shihadeh 2006, pp. 7-11.

⁹¹⁵ Al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, p. 29.

⁹¹⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla*, p. 85.

⁹¹⁷ Al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, p. 38.

⁹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 38.

⁹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 38. This statement seems, of course, not entirely correct since al-Rāzī does deal with the question of whether certain attributes of God are essential or in addition to the essence, e.g. with regards to the attribute of endurance (ibid., pp. 244-253).

they are proofs for the existence of the creator (*wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*) and His attributes.⁹²⁰ With this statement, al-Rāzī establishes that the method to gain knowledge about God, that is, His essence and attributes, cannot be by pondering over God Himself, but rather by considering Him in His role as creator. This method is of course the one all theologians before al-Rāzī advocated and it entails the idea that the characteristics of creation point to the characteristics of the one who is their creator. Yet, one cannot but wonder: If theology has God as its subject-matter and seeks nothing else than to make known His essence and attributes, does it then take God's existence for granted and only enquires into what this entity is like? Or does al-Rāzī's reference to the 'proofs for the existence of the creator' point to that theology's first task entails the proof that God exists, as secondary literature indeed has it? Once more, and as in the case of such scholars as al-Ghazālī and Ibn Rushd, we must ask the question of what al-Rāzī might mean when he states that the created things are proofs for 'the existence of the creator' and what this method is meant to establish.

The Purpose of the Proof of the Existence of the Creator

Some clarification about what the proof of the existence of the creator denotes can be gained from one of the last chapters of the *Ishāra* which deals with the issue of prophesy. There al-Rāzī refers to the prophet Noah and states:

Do you not see that the first thing Noah said to his people was: {serve [*uʿbudū*] God, for He is your only god [*ilāh*]},⁹²¹ so he pointed out to them the proof for the creator (*al-dalīl ʿalāʾl-ṣāniʿ*)... The Qurʾān, which is the miracle of our master, begins with proofs of *tawḥīd*, and He says: {People, worship your Lord [*rabb*] who created you and those before you...}⁹²² – what the verse denotes is a proof for the existence of the creator (*dalīl ʿalā wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*).⁹²³

A look at the answer given to Noah by his people shows us that his mission was not to call them to acknowledge God's existence and that his 'proof for the creator' did not denote an argument for God's existence either. They replied: 'He is merely a mortal like you, trying to gain some superiority over you. God would have sent down angels if He had wished; besides, we never heard of

⁹²⁰ Ibid., p. 38.

⁹²¹ This is Q. 23.23. All translations of the Qurʾān are from Abdel Haleem 2004.

⁹²² This is Q. 2.21.

⁹²³ Al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, pp. 324-325.

anything like this from our forefathers.}’⁹²⁴ Evidently, Noah’s people did believe in God’s existence, and his mission was nothing else than to call them to the worship of God alone and to promulgate God’s uniqueness and oneness (*tawḥīd*). We have explained in previous chapters that the Qur’ānic argument – which was later taken over by the theologians – for God’s sole worthiness of worship is based on His being the sole creator of the world.⁹²⁵ Al-Rāzī, too, establishes a connection between Noah’s attempt to convince his people to abandon *shirk* (associating partners with God) and his declaration that God is the only creator – expressed by the term *ilāh*. We shall come across the term *ilāh* repeatedly in al-Rāzī’s later writings, such as in his *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* and *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya*, where it takes up a prominent position. In the *Ishāra*, al-Rāzī links God’s being the only *ilāh* to His being the only creator when he writes: ‘If someone were to say: What is the specific characteristic of the godhead (*khāṣṣiyya al-ilāh*)? We would say: His specific characteristic is His ability to create (*iqtidāruhu ‘alā’l-ikhtirā’*).’⁹²⁶ Yet, it is in the *Tafsīr kabīr* that al-Rāzī provides a clear explanation of this term. There we read the following: ‘What is meant by...*al-ilāh* is: he who is our creator and maker of our essences and attributes’⁹²⁷ and ‘*al-ilāh* is an expression for the one who is able to create (*al-qādir ‘alā’l-khalq wa’l-ibdā’ wa’l-ījād wa’l-ikhtirā’*).’⁹²⁸ With special reference to God, al-Rāzī states: ‘God is the *ilāh* of the worlds insofar as He is the one who brought them about, from non-existence into existence.’⁹²⁹ It follows that, according to al-Rāzī, Noah explained to his people that only God is creator, which al-Rāzī phrases in the words: ‘he pointed out to them the proof for the creator.’ With reference to the Prophet of Islam, al-Rāzī describes the same idea as ‘denot[ing] a proof for the existence of the creator.’ We must infer from this, firstly, that al-Rāzī uses the expressions ‘proof for the creator’ and ‘proof for the existence of the creator’ interchangeably – something which shall be confirmed in his later works as well – and, secondly, that the proof for the (existence of the) creator has nothing to do with what the traditional arguments for God’s

⁹²⁴ This is Q. 23.24. Their reply does not appear in the *Ishāra* though.

⁹²⁵ Compare, for example, Chapter One on al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm.

⁹²⁶ Al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, p. 272.

⁹²⁷ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 13, p. 56. Exegesis of Q. 6.74.

⁹²⁸ Ibid., vol. 13, p. 102. Exegesis of Q. 6.74.

⁹²⁹ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 234. Exegesis of Q. 1.2.

existence seek when they conclude that the world has a cause or creator. The proof of the creator in al-Rāzī's *al-Ishāra* serves an entirely different purpose.⁹³⁰

What Theology Seeks Through the Proof of the Existence of the Creator

After it has hence become clear that 'the proof for the (existence of the) creator' refers to the proof that God is the one thanks to whom the world exists, we can return to the question of which purpose the method described by al-Rāzī as 'speculat(ion) about the created things insofar as they are proofs for the existence of the creator and His attributes' serves. A passage in one of the latest sections can help us answer the question about the purpose of this method. There, al-Rāzī discusses whether the philosophers are right in maintaining that God's *ḥaqīqa* cannot be known. The term *ḥaqīqa* denotes nothing else than God's essence, and *ḥaqīqa* and the more common *dhāt* are used by al-Rāzī as

⁹³⁰ Note that, in this context, when al-Rāzī speaks of the creator, he does not use it as an equivalent of God; rather, he means to denote a certain role of God. That this is the case is evident when considering the following statement in al-Rāzī's *Ma'ālim uṣūl al-dīn*: "The non-existence of the effect (*'adam al-ma'lūl*) must be due to the non-existence of the cause (*'adam al-'illa*)" (p. 56). Crucially, al-Rāzī utters these words in relation to God, the cause, and His creation of the world, the effect. In this particular context, it is obvious that by the non-existence of the cause al-Rāzī does not mean the non-existence of an entity, namely God: According to the theologians, there was initially a state of affairs where only God existed, but not the world. It would be absurd to assume that, then, the non-existence of the world was due to the non-existence of its cause, that is God. Yet, it is correct to assume that the world did not exist, because God was not yet acting *as* its cause. The question of whether and in which way God could *become* a cause and whether this implied change in the divine essence was of course a hotly debated issue, but it shall suffice to note that the theologians generally made the point that God's eternal will could decide on a particular moment from among equal moments to actualise His creative activity. On this question, see, for example, al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* who presents the philosophers' objection to the theologians' doctrine of a temporally created world as being: "He did not will its [i.e., the world's] existence before this," from which it follows that one must say: "Its existence occurred because He became a willer of its existence after not having been a willer," ... Thus, it is now ascertained...that the proceeding of the temporal from the Eternal without a change of state of affairs in the Eternal...is impossible.' To which al-Ghazālī replies: 'With what [argument] would you deny one who says, "The world was temporally created by an eternal will that decreed its existence at the time in which it came to be.'" (al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut* (2000), pp. 14-15). Compare also al-Rāzī's *al-Arba'in* where he states: 'This is the famous discussion which posits that the cause of non-existence is the non-existence of the cause (*'illa al-'adam hiya 'adam al-'illa*)' (vol. 1, p. 115). He says this with reference to the equal possibility of the world's existence and non-existence. Existence takes precedence 'due to the existence of what has an influence (*yu'aththiru*) on existence' and non-existence 'due to the non-existence of what has an influence on existence' (vol. 1, p. 115). The statement that 'the cause of non-existence is the non-existence of the cause' does obviously not imply that, before its creation, the world was in a state of non-existence because *God* did not exist. Rather, it was non-existent because God was not a *cause* giving it existence.

equivalents.⁹³¹ Al-Rāzī holds against this view ascribed to the philosophers that revelation obligates humans to know God's essence and that therefore there must be a way of attaining knowledge about it. Reason (*al-ʿaql*) discovers this method: 'We know the necessity that the possible things (*al-mumkināt*) end in an existent which does not need another, and we have shown that its existence is its essence (*ḥaqīqa*) itself, and that it is not permissible that they are different. Hence, if we know its existence and its necessity, we know His essence.'⁹³² As al-Rāzī states here, in a previous section he defended the view that in God, essence and existence are one and the same thing.⁹³³ This is also al-Rāzī's position when it comes to created existents, and he mentions the example of an atom where its particular essence and existence are the same thing and that existence is not an entity (*ma'nā*) subsisting in the divine essence.⁹³⁴ Yet, it is important to bear in mind the fundamental difference between God and creation when it comes to their kinds of existence: God is necessary in terms of His existence (*wājib al-wujūd li-dhātihī*), while creation is possibly existent (*mumkin al-wujūd li-dhātihī*). This is in fact what al-Rāzī establishes as the very first item of knowledge with regards to God's essence. In the section entitled 'On the affirmation of the attribute of existence'⁹³⁵ al-Rāzī writes:

We explained that the world is possible, and every possible thing must have one who makes necessary (*muqtaḍin*). Therefore, either it is the case that the possible things end in one who makes necessary and who is necessarily existent by virtue of his essence, and this is the creator, the worshipped one (Most-High and Hallowed!) – or it is the case that they do not end in a cause (*sabab*) necessarily existent by virtue of his essence, but rather everyone who necessitates (from among them) needs another, without end, but this is absurd.⁹³⁶

Al-Rāzī here establishes two things: Firstly, created existence insofar as it is possible in itself points to its need for a creator; creation did not simply pop into

⁹³¹ See al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, p. 76: 'We say: It is not permissible to say that the existence of the creator is other than His *ḥaqīqa*' and *ibid.*, p. 83: 'Existence is, according to us, the *dhāt* itself.'

⁹³² *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁹³³ See *ibid.*, p. 76: 'The necessity of existence must be inherent in (*dākhil*) the essence of the necessarily existent [i.e., God] because if it was not inherent in the essence, it would occur to it...but that which occurs to something is possible in itself.' God's existence would hence need a cause to render it necessary, and this cause would be His essence, which al-Rāzī rejects as an absurdity.

⁹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁹³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75. See also p. 75: 'It has hence been established that the possible things depend in their entirety on an existent which is necessarily existent by virtue of its essence.'

existence uncaused. Secondly, this creator is then identified with the only other existent besides the world, that is, God, 'Most-High and Hollowed.'⁹³⁷ This is the very meaning of the statement that 'the possibility in the world...points to the existence of the creator (*al-ḥimkān fī'l-ʿālam al-dāll ʿalā wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*)'⁹³⁸ as well as of 'the affirmation of the creator (*ithbāt al-ṣāniʿ*)',⁹³⁹ as explained above, which is also the heading of the chapter in which the present discussion appears. In the same section, al-Rāzī is then also able to conclude that God's existence is necessary, precisely because it has been established previously that the world is of possible existence. To conclude, what is important for us is the following: al-Rāzī establishes that, in order to gain knowledge about God's essence – which is, as we remember, one aspect of what theology is concerned with – one simply needs to know about God's existence, since both are the same. Knowledge about God's existence, however, means knowing that His specific existence – which distinguishes Him from created existence – is necessary. This follows from the fact that the existence of created things is possible. Besides the necessity of God's existence, knowledge of the divine essence also involves, according to al-Rāzī, the question of whether God can be seen. This is so because, according to al-Rāzī, it is a thing's existence which is the ground for the possibility that it can be seen. With this view, al-Rāzī opposes such groups as the Muʿtazilites who argued that visual perception of a thing depends on our senses, and since God is said to be neither atom, nor body, nor accident, He is removed from what humans can see.⁹⁴⁰ The question of God's visibility is therefore related to certain assumptions about His essence and type of existence. These two aspects pertaining to knowledge of God's essence are subsumed by al-Rāzī under the heading 'what is necessary for Him regarding the essential attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-naḥsiyya*).'⁹⁴¹ Knowledge of God's essence, however, also involves 'what is impossible for God regarding the essential attributes.'⁹⁴² These negative attributes referring to God's essence again pertain to classifying God's particular existence. Al-Rāzī firstly establishes that God is not a body or a

⁹³⁷ Ibid., p. 75.

⁹³⁸ Ibid., p. 45.

⁹³⁹ Ibid., p. 73.

⁹⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 79-80.

⁹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 73.

⁹⁴² Ibid., p. 93.

corporeal entity. This means that His existence, unlike the spatial existence of atoms and bodies, is not specified by place or extension in space. Al-Rāzī then shows that God is not an accident either. In this context, we need to keep in mind that, according to the Ash‘arite position, there are four types of essences or existents: The essences belonging to the created world are either atoms or bodies or accidents, and al-Rāzī seeks to establish God’s essence, and thereby His existence, as being of a different kind.

These two sections on what is necessary for God and what is impossible for Him in terms of the essential attributes then establish everything that is there to know about the divine essence.⁹⁴³ This is achieved by analysing God’s particular existence which is known through contrasting it with the existence that is specific to created things. Following the admonition not to ponder over God Himself, al-Rāzī instead focuses on God in His role as creator since created things with their characteristics point to the characteristics of their creator – the traditional analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghā’ib*.⁹⁴⁴ It should finally be noted that the entire aforementioned discussion, including the proof that the world has an origin in time and exists due to God as its creator, appears under the heading ‘On the affirmation of His essence.’⁹⁴⁵

The second aspect al-Rāzī mentioned as the objective of theology at the beginning of the *Ishāra*, that is, attaining knowledge of God’s attributes, then completes the endeavour to know God.⁹⁴⁶ This involves the proofs that God

⁹⁴³ Note that what al-Rāzī establishes as knowledge of God’s essence is very much the same as his predecessor al-Ghazālī established with regards to the divine essence in his *al-Iqtisād fī al-ī‘tiqād*: Knowledge of God’s essence contains ten aspects: His existence is His essence; He is eternal; enduring; not an atom; not a body; not an accident; not extended in any of the six directions; not to be described as being placed upon the throne; visible; and finally one.

⁹⁴⁴ It should be noted that this is also true for humans insofar as they are seen as agents of their deeds (the discussion about the reality of human causal efficiency left aside. For the discussion, see, for example, the Mu‘tazilites’ criticism of al-Ash‘arī as reported by al-Juwaynī in his *al-Shāmil* (1960-61), p. 157.)

⁹⁴⁵ Al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, p. 47.

⁹⁴⁶ Davidson states with regards to al-Rāzī and a number of other *mutakallimūn* that they ‘append to their proofs of the existence of God a teleological argument showing the creator to be “knowing,” and hence possessed of the attribute of knowledge’ (1987, p. 235). His characterisation of the proof of God’s being knowing as an appendix to what Davidson regards as a proof that God exists seems to go right against al-Rāzī’s own explanations. To show that God is knowing is not simply an appendix (and this holds true for all other divine attributes), but it part of what theology seeks to establish through the method which declares God the creator of the world.

indeed is powerful, living, knowing, willing, speaking, hearing and seeing, which are the seven hypostatic attributes commonly ascribed to God. Besides them, al-Rāzī discusses God's endurance and whether He is of perpetual existence by virtue of His essence or due to an attribute in addition to His essence. We have seen in previous chapters that this was in fact an issue of disagreement among the *mutakallimūn*, and al-Rāzī here opts for the second alternative. He then concludes the section on these hypostatic attributes by noting the impossibility of there being any other attributes for God besides the ones just proven. He presents the following reasoning: There cannot be unlimited other attributes which we may not know of 'because we are obligated to know God's uniqueness (*waḥdāniyya Allāh*): {bear in mind that there is no god [*ilāh*] but God}⁹⁴⁷ but the knowledge of a thing's being unique is part of the knowledge of its essence. If, therefore, we do not know the thing, we do not know whether it is unique, and we only know the godhead if we know all His attributes. This is so because the godhead is the essence which is described with all attributes subsisting in Him. Therefore, if this is the case, there has to be a proof for them.'⁹⁴⁸ What al-Rāzī is arguing here is that ultimately, the believer has to acknowledge *tawḥīd* and 'that God is one and unique, without partner.'⁹⁴⁹ Yet, in order to do so he has to come to know that the essence which is God's is a unique essence and that the essences of created things do not resemble His. The believer, therefore, also has to know the divine attributes as the knowledge of them is part of knowing God and His uniqueness.

Conclusions

Contrary to the assumption to be found in secondary literature, as mentioned before, that the proof of the existence of the creator has the same purpose as the traditional arguments for God's existence, in al-Rāzī's *al-Ishāra* the following picture emerges: 'The proof of the creator' or similar expressions refers to the endeavour to show that the world is God's product and that God is its sole creator. For al-Rāzī, this is an important tenet to defend for two reasons: on the

⁹⁴⁷ This is Q. 47.19.

⁹⁴⁸ Al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, p. 269.

⁹⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 256.

one hand, because he argues, in line with the Qur'ānic reasoning, that God's sole worthiness of worship depends on knowing that He is the only creator. On the other hand, because al-Rāzī argues that human can only fulfil their order to acknowledge God's uniqueness (*tawḥīd*) when they know that God's essence, together with the divine attributes, is unique. The only way of attaining this knowledge, however, which is the concern of theology, is by pondering over the characteristics of creation since they reveal the characteristics of their creator, God.

The *Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn* – The Concern and Method of Theology

Al-Rāzī's *al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn* resembles the *Ishāra* in many respects – since it, too, is a book of theology – and this is also true of the sections on 'the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator,'⁹⁵⁰ as al-Rāzī has it in the *Arbaʿīn*. Nevertheless, one fundamental difference between the *Ishāra* and the *Arbaʿīn* is that in the latter work a preface stating the concerns of theology and what it seeks to establish, as we find it in the *Ishāra*, is entirely missing. Al-Rāzī immediately begins the *Arbaʿīn* with the question of the eternity vs. originatedness of the world. Yet, despite the absence of a clear statement as to the subject-matter of theology, it seems justified to assume that in the *Arbaʿīn* al-Rāzī conceives of it as being nothing different than in the *Ishāra*. This can be inferred from the questions he discusses, but more importantly, this seems likely since in the works al-Rāzī wrote after the *Arbaʿīn*, such as the *Tafsīr* and the *Maṭālib*, he describes the concerns of theology in the very same words as in the *Ishāra*. Theology seeks 'God's essence and attributes and deeds,'⁹⁵¹ as the *Tafsīr* has it, and investigates 'God's essence and attributes,'⁹⁵² as stated in the *Maṭālib*. It therefore appears that we have to view the discussions in the *Arbaʿīn* against this background.

Let us then turn to the question of what al-Rāzī has to say in the *Arbaʿīn* about the endeavour of gaining knowledge about God's essence and His attributes. We recall that in the *Ishāra*, al-Rāzī argued that God's essence and His existence are one and the same thing, and that by knowing God's specific kind of existence – that is, its necessity, that it can be seen as well as its not being corporeal or an accident – we can know His essence. The method to attain this knowledge was to contrast God's existence with created existence. In the *Arbaʿīn*, al-Rāzī takes a different stance with regards to the relation between God's essence and His existence. He now rejects the view held by the founder of his school, al-Ashʿarī, that 'the existence of every thing is the same as its essence (*māhiyya*)'⁹⁵³ and opts instead for the view which, as he says, many *mutakallimūn* and most

⁹⁵⁰ Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, p. 101.

⁹⁵¹ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 96.

⁹⁵² Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 37.

⁹⁵³ Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, p. 82.

philosophers subscribed to that ‘the existence of the thing is a description (*waṣf*) different (*mughāyir*) from its essence’⁹⁵⁴ or ‘existence is in addition (*zā'id*) to the essence.’⁹⁵⁵ This is also the case with God, as al-Rāzī states: ‘Our view is that the existence of God is in addition to His essence.’⁹⁵⁶ This of course raises the question of what al-Rāzī now has to say about the statement made in the *Ishāra* that God’s essence can be known since it is the same as His existence.

In the *Arbaʿīn*, al-Rāzī reveals his position that the method put forward in the *Ishāra* to attain complete knowledge of God, insofar as His essence and attributes are concerned, does no longer achieve this goal. Al-Rāzī grants, following the philosophers (*al-ḥukamāʾ*), that existence is something which can be grasped intuitively (*badihī al-taṣawwur*) and understood (*maʿlūm al-taṣawwur*), but ‘the reality (*kunh*) of the essence (*māhiyya*) of the True One (Glorified!),’⁹⁵⁷ he points out, cannot be grasped by humans. ‘The essence (*ḥaqīqa*) of the True One (Glorified!) is different from the existence,’ al-Rāzī stresses, and as a consequence ‘the essence of the True One (Glorified and Most-High!) cannot be grasped.’⁹⁵⁸ Elsewhere,⁹⁵⁹ al-Rāzī further elaborates on this and explains that many *mutakallimūn* held that God’s essence can be known – a view al-Rāzī himself obviously shared previously.⁹⁶⁰ Now, however, he intends to prove its falseness. In doing so, al-Rāzī argues that ‘what is known about Him is only the existence, the negative attributes and the positive attributes, but the knowledge of these things is different from the knowledge of the specific

⁹⁵⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 82.

⁹⁵⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 85. In the *Ishāra*, al-Rāzī argued that essence and existence must be the same because ‘if the existence of the atom (*jawhar*) was different from its essence, then it would be the case that we know that its essence is described with extension and has directions even though it might not be existent. Both intelligibles would not be contradictory, and the knowledge of one of them would be possible without the other, but this is an absurdity’ (p. 83). In the *Arbaʿīn*, al-Rāzī argues, for instance, that while a body and an accident are different kinds of essences, they are the same in their being existent, hence existence must be something else than the particular essences (vol. 1, p. 83).

⁹⁵⁶ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 86.

⁹⁵⁷ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 145.

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 145-146.

⁹⁵⁹ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 308: ‘Exposition (of the question of whether) the reality (*kunh*) of the essence of God (Most-High!) is knowable for humans or not.’

⁹⁶⁰ In the *Ishāra*, al-Rāzī did not speak of God’s *kunh* in addition to His essence and existence though.

essence (*al-dhāt al-makhṣūṣa wa'l-ḥaqīqa al-makhṣūṣa*). Hence, the knowledge of the specific essence is not possible.⁹⁶¹

In any case, even if humans can never grasp what God's specific essence is like, al-Rāzī stresses that they can nevertheless know 'the existence and the negative and positive attributes.'⁹⁶² It is these very attributes which al-Rāzī seeks to make known following the affirmation of the creator for the originated world. Yet, what does al-Rāzī mean by the negative and positive divine attributes? The former are descriptions of God in terms of what He is not or what needs to be negated of Him. Al-Rāzī states: 'We say: He is necessarily existent. This means: He is the existent which cannot receive non-existence. We say: He is eternal. This means: He was existent from pre-eternity until now. ... We say: He is not a body or an atom or in a place... - all this is negation.'⁹⁶³ The divine attributes al-Rāzī refers to as positive are the usual seven hypostatic attributes, that is, God's being powerful, knowing, willing, alive, speaking, hearing and seeing.

It is crucial to note that everything al-Rāzī mentions here as God's negative attributes is established as a consequence of 'the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator' which constitutes the Third Question. It is also in the Third Question that God's being necessarily existent is proven. The Fourth Question until the Tenth Question then establish the remaining negative attributes mentioned above. The positive attributes are established in the subsequent Questions. As in the case of the *Ishāra*, it seems plausible that in his quest to gain knowledge about God in terms of His essence and (hypostatic) attributes – even if al-Rāzī states that what God's essence really is like cannot be known –, he follows the method which allows attaining this knowledge on the basis of God's role as creator. Once more, God's characteristics can be known when one considers the characteristics of created things. It therefore appears that 'the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator' in the *Arbaʿīn* is not intended by al-Rāzī to prove that God exists; rather, it is where al-Rāzī establishes a connection between the world and God since the world is shown to be in need of another

⁹⁶¹ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 308. See also p. 310: 'We say: The essence (*ḥaqīqa*) of God and the reality (*kunh*) of His essence (*māhiyya*) cannot be grasped...and it follows that it cannot be understood by the minds.'

⁹⁶² Ibid., vol. 1, p. 310.

⁹⁶³ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 308.

for its existence. This means that the proof of the creator seeks to affirm a certain *role* for God, namely that of being creator. It does not, however, seek to establish the existence of an entity in addition to the world, as it were.

Investigation of the Methods to Affirm the Creator

Let us therefore have a closer look at the methods which are said to establish just this. In the *Arbaʿīn*, al-Rāzī presents four methods, making use of the concept of permissibility (*imkān*) associated with the philosophers as well as the notion of originatedness (*ḥudūth*) characteristic of the *mutakallimūn*. The first two methods al-Rāzī presents focus on the possibility of the essences of things in this world and their attributes respectively, and they lead to the affirmation of ‘the (existence of the) necessarily existent.’⁹⁶⁴ The remaining two methods focus on the originatedness of atoms and bodies as well as their attributes, and affirm ‘the knowledge of the creator.’⁹⁶⁵ Since all four methods appear in the Third Question under the heading ‘the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator,’ this indicates that whether al-Rāzī focuses on the affirmation of the necessarily existent or the creator, he pursues the same objective: The *mutakallimūn* who focused on the originatedness of the world argued that nothing originates by chance or emerges into existence without cause, and since an infinite regress of causes which are all originated is impossible, they were able to conclude that the world not just is, but exists due to an outside cause. Thus, they ascribed creation to God and proved Him to be creator. The philosophers, on the other hand, stressed the inherent possibility of the existents in this world, but likewise argued that the actualisation of something possible (*mumkin*) cannot occur due to chance or due to an infinite regress of possible causes or even due to circular causation where each member is possibly existent and the cause of another member. When they hence affirmed that the world exists due to an existent which is outside the aggregate of possible existents making up this world, they declared the world to be a created thing and God to be its creator. Be this as it may, the real focus of the Third Question is not so much an affirmation that the world exists due to a

⁹⁶⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 103 (mentions *wujūd*) and p. 121.

⁹⁶⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 124 and p. 129.

cause and that this cause is no other than God;⁹⁶⁶ al-Rāzī's main concern is to show that God is necessarily existent by virtue of His essence. With the only exception of the fourth method,⁹⁶⁷ all other methods involve the proof of God's necessary existence, which al-Rāzī seems to consider an integral part of them. In the first method, which is the one focusing on the possibility of the essences, al-Rāzī reaches this conclusion, firstly, by showing that *something* from among the entirety of existents is necessarily existent by virtue of its essence⁹⁶⁸ and, secondly, by showing that whatever is, however, possibly existent – which is the world – depends on the necessarily existent.⁹⁶⁹ In the second method, which focuses on the possibility of the attributes of creation, al-Rāzī first establishes the dependence of all bodies on God,⁹⁷⁰ then argues that the creator of these

⁹⁶⁶ However, not in the sense that since it has a cause, God must exist; rather, in the sense of answering the question: Who is the cause due to which the world exists?

⁹⁶⁷ Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 129-131: The fourth method consists of the *dalā'il al-anfus* and the *dalā'il al-āfāq*. The former is reasoning on the basis of the formation of humans from a drop of sperm, which al-Rāzī ascribes to the Qur'ān (e.g., Q. 40.67). Sperm is a body whose parts are equal, yet different body-parts are formed from it. The assumption that the planets could be sufficient in explaining the influence on sperm and humans' development is rejected. This makes it necessary, al-Rāzī says, that 'the one who influences (*mu'aththir*) the formation of (the different parts) is not nature or the power of the planets, but a wise creator, an arranger through power and choice' (p. 130). He then moves on to the *dalā'il al-āfāq* which focus on reasoning on the basis of the states of animals, plants, metals, planets and others. Al-Rāzī concludes this method by stating that this sort of reasoning stems from the Qur'ān.

⁹⁶⁸ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 103: 'There is no doubt that the essences (*al-ḥaqā'iq wa'l-māhiyyat*) are existents, and it is true of every existent either that its essence is receptive to non-existence or that it is not. If its essence, insofar as it is an essence, is not receptive to non-existence, then this existent is necessarily existent by virtue of its essence, and this is what is sought (*wa-huwa al-maṭlūb*).'

⁹⁶⁹ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 103: 'but if its essence is receptive to non-existence, we say: ...its existence has no precedence over its non-existence, if it was not for one who gives precedence (*murajjih*). Then (we say): If this *murajjih* was possible, we would have to repeat ourselves, and either circular causation (*al-dawr*) or an infinite regress (*al-tasalsul*) would be necessary, but they are absurd. Therefore, their ending in the necessarily existent by virtue of its essence is unavoidable.' Note that in the *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī stresses that this method, which he ascribes to Ibn Sīnā, does not establish that the world is not the necessarily existent, unless a further proof is presented that it is possibly existent. This does not seem to be too much of a concern for al-Rāzī, however, since he starts from the assumption that the observable world is possibly existent, as established in the First Question ('On the originatedness of the world', vol. 1, p. 19). This is also indicated by the fact that al-Rāzī presents this method as being 'reasoning...on the basis of the possibility of the essences.'

⁹⁷⁰ The argument runs like this: Bodies are equal in terms of their essences and different in terms of their attributes, but bodies could have different attributes as well. Their having specific attributes is therefore due to one who decides on the specification (*mukhaṣṣis*) and who gives preponderance to one of two equal alternatives (*murajjih*). This applies therefore to all bodies (ibid., pp. 121-124).

bodies cannot Himself be corporeal⁹⁷¹ in order to state finally: 'If we want to make clear that this existent is necessarily existent by virtue of its essence, we return to some parts of what we mentioned in the first proof.'⁹⁷² Likewise, the third method first establishes that all bodies, which have previously been proven to be originated, exist due to an originator. Al-Rāzī explains their need for an originator only indirectly with the fact of their being originated, and names their inherent possibility, which requires one who exerts influence (*mu'aththir*), as the true ground. He then has an imaginary opponent pose the question of whether this originator who has just been affirmed for the world could not Himself be possibly existent, to which al-Rāzī replies: 'Now in order to explain His (Most-High!) being necessarily existent by virtue of His essence we need to return to what we said in the first proof.'⁹⁷³

We can therefore conclude that in the *Arbaʿīn*, al-Rāzī seems to be pursuing the very same objective as in the *Ishāra*, which is to attain knowledge of God in terms of His essence and (hypostatic) attributes, and this is achieved through the method which affirms God as the creator of the world since this role allows the inference of certain characteristics for God. Yet, one important point remains to be made: We recall that when al-Rāzī discussed the question of what knowledge of God humans are able to attain, he maintained that 'what is known about Him is only the existence, the negative attributes and the positive attributes.'⁹⁷⁴ We have explained what al-Rāzī means by the negative and positive divine attributes and have shown how their affirmation follows from the proof that the world is God's product. What, however, does al-Rāzī mean when he states that God's existence is known? Firstly, it should be noted that when al-Rāzī here mentions our knowledge of 'the existence,' he does not mean by it the characterisation of God's existence as being necessary or eternal or incorporeal or anything like that; rather, he really does mean by it the mere fact

⁹⁷¹ Namely: If this *murajjih* was himself a body, his specification with possible attributes would also require a *murajjih*, which would lead to the absurdity of an infinite regress (*al-tasalsul*). He can therefore not be a body and not corporeal (ibid., p. 124).

⁹⁷² Ibid., vol. 1, p. 124.

⁹⁷³ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 128. Al-Rāzī mentions another way of proving the same point: Bodies are originated, and every originated thing needs an originator. After stating this, al-Rāzī immediately turns to the question of whether this originator is possible or necessary (ibid., pp. 128-129).

⁹⁷⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 308.

of God's being an existent thing. This is most evident in al-Rāzī's *Ma'ālim uṣūl al-dīn* where he states, discussing the same question of whether humans can attain knowledge of God's essence: 'What humans know is: the existence; the qualities (*kayfiyyāt*) of the existence, that is, (His) pre-eternity, eternity and necessity; the negations, that is, He is not a body nor an atom nor an accident...' ⁹⁷⁵ In the *Maṭālib*, for instance, al-Rāzī refers to God's being an existent thing in the same context as 'the absolute/pure existence (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*)' ⁹⁷⁶ and distinguishes it from the negative and positive attributes. It therefore appears that what al-Rāzī maintains is that we know of God's being existent thanks to the method we have discussed above. Does this then not involve a contradiction since we argued that the affirmation of the creator never serves the purpose to prove God's existence as the traditional arguments for God's existence do? This question can be negated. We need to keep in mind that the task of theology is to make God known in His entirety, that is, to establish everything that is to be known about God's essence and (hypostatic) attributes. One aspect this involves is to state that God is an existent thing. To provide an analogy to this, it would be the same as when someone said to another about a third person: 'Tell me everything that is to be known about person X!' In order to provide complete knowledge of this third person, the person asked would have to mention person X's being an existent thing, in addition to a great number of other descriptions pertaining to her essence and attributes. Yet, it is evident that this complete description of person X, and in particular the mention of her being an existent, is different from the proof that there really is an instance, so to say, of this assumed person X in reality – which is precisely what arguments for God's existence seek to establish. ⁹⁷⁷ The importance of making the point that God belongs to the existent things in the context of discussions between Ash'arite and Mu'tazilite theologians about the relation between essence and existence should also not be forgotten. We recall that such theologians as al-Juwaynī launched a vigorous attack against Mu'tazilite theologians for

⁹⁷⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Ma'ālim uṣūl al-dīn*, p. 79.

⁹⁷⁶ Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 2, p. 82.

⁹⁷⁷ It should also be kept in mind that, according to the *mutakallimūn*, these descriptions of God cannot be used as an analogue for describing humans. God cannot be perceived as other humans can, and the only way of justifying one's descriptions of God is by reference to His acts, as these acts allow inferences as to the characteristics of their agent.

maintaining that there are non-existent essences. This belief, he argued, leads to the absurdity that God who is an essence described with certain attributes could be non-existent but nevertheless is able to act as the creator and sustainer of this world. The Mu‘tazilites, he maintained, therefore need to present further proof that God is in fact an existent essence.⁹⁷⁸ This debate also shows that the assumption of God’s being non-existent, as discussed by the theologians, is not the same as the assumption of God’s non-existence in the traditional arguments for God’s existence (this being what they seek to prove false).

Conclusions

Unlike in the case of the *Ishāra* where al-Rāzī’s reference to Noah’s mission provided particularly clear evidence as to the meaning and purpose of the proof of the creator, in the *Arba‘īn* we did not come across such unequivocal statements. Yet, in analogy to al-Rāzī’s explanation in the *Ishāra* of what theology seeks and the methods it employs to accomplish it, we showed that arguments for God’s existence (in the traditional sense) are absent from the *Arba‘īn* as well. This finding is further supported when we take into account what al-Rāzī has to say in the *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, his commentary on the Qur’ān.

⁹⁷⁸ Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil* (1969), p. 617 et seqq.

Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr

Nominally, al-Rāzī's *al-Tafsīr* belongs to a different category of writings and discipline than the works of *kalām* and *falsafa* which we made the object of our enquiry. Yet, it shall be included among al-Rāzī's works taken into consideration in this chapter for the following reason: Despite the fact that we are dealing with a *tafsīr* work, the *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* is an abundant source of inherently philosophico-theological discussions. The affirmation and proof of the creator, too, plays a major role in al-Rāzī's commentary and it is therefore an important source for our enquiry whether arguments for God's existence have a place in al-Rāzī's thought. Furthermore, the *Tafsīr* provides us with an understanding of certain terms, concepts and methods which are explained in less detail in al-Rāzī's proper *kalām* works.

The Purpose of the Proof of the Existence of the Creator

One such instance allowing us to establish what al-Rāzī means by the affirmation of the creator is his commentary on the story of Pharaoh and Moses told in *Sūra al-Qaṣas*. In Q. 28.38 Pharaoh says to his people, after Moses has called them to submit to God's guidance: {you have no other [*ilāh*]⁹⁷⁹ that I know of except me.} Al-Rāzī comments on this verse that Pharaoh's statement comprises two aspects: firstly, the denial of an *ilāh* other than him and, secondly, the affirmation of *ilāhiyya* for himself.⁹⁸⁰ We have explained above that in the *Tafsīr* al-Rāzī defines the term *ilāh* as denoting him 'who is creator (*khāliq*).'⁹⁸¹ Yet, he also explains the term as referring to 'the one who is the object of worship (*al-ma'būd*).'⁹⁸² With this in mind, al-Rāzī then turns to the first aspect and states that Pharaoh thought that the celestial bodies (*al-kawākib wa'l-aflāk*) are sufficient to explain the different states the sublunar world exhibits and that therefore 'there is no need to affirm a creator (*ithbāt ṣāniʿ*).'⁹⁸³ Pharaoh

⁹⁷⁹ Abdel Haleem's translation of the verse has 'god' for *ilāh*. I choose not to adopt this translation as al-Rāzī's commentary makes clear that the English term 'god' does not seem to do justice to the subtleties of how he understands Pharaoh's statement, as will be seen.

⁹⁸⁰ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 24, p. 252.

⁹⁸¹ Ibid., vol. 13, p. 56.

⁹⁸² Ibid., vol. 13, p. 43. Note how this distinction reflects the old dichotomy between *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*, referring to God's oneness as creator, and *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya*, His sole worthiness of worship, we have come across numerous times.

⁹⁸³ Ibid., vol. 24, p. 252.

followed the principle that ‘that for which there is no proof cannot be affirmed,’⁹⁸⁴ also known as the argument from ignorance.⁹⁸⁵ Al-Rāzī, unsurprisingly, rejects this position attributed to Pharaoh and argues that there is in fact ‘proof for the existence of the creator.’⁹⁸⁶ When we know of the originatedness of the bodies in general, we know that the celestial bodies, too, must be originated, and since every originated thing is in need of an originator, it follows that the whole world has a creator. Regarding the second aspect mentioned above, that is, Pharaoh’s claiming *ilāhiyya* for himself, al-Rāzī comments that he certainly did not claim to be ‘creator of the heavens and the earth and the seas and the mountains as well as creator of the essences and attributes of humans,’⁹⁸⁷ this being one of the meanings of the term. Rather, Pharaoh’s claim to be *al-ilāh* refers to his demand to be *al-ma’būd*.⁹⁸⁸ Here, the latter term appears in a slightly different meaning than usual where it denoted ‘the one who deserves worship’ as becomes clear when al-Rāzī states about Pharaoh: ‘The man denied the creator (*kāna yanfī al-ṣāni*) and said: There is no obligation (*taklīf*) for the people except for that they have to obey their king and comply with his order.’⁹⁸⁹ Lastly, and crucially for our endeavour to understand what the affirmation of the creator refers to, al-Rāzī points out the following: Pharaoh’s question addressed to Moses in *Sūra Ṭa Ha* {Moses, who is this Lord of yours?}⁹⁹⁰ shows clearly that ‘he had knowledge of God (Most-High!) (*kāna ‘ārifan bi’llāh*) and that he only said this so it would spread among the simple-minded people (*al-aghmār min al-nās*).’⁹⁹¹

This whole passage is most enlightening. It is clear that in al-Rāzī’s view Pharaoh was not an atheist who denied the existence of God (Allāh); after all, ‘he had knowledge of God (Most-High!).’⁹⁹² At the same time, however, Pharaoh ‘denied the creator’ and thought that there is no evidence making it necessary

⁹⁸⁴ Ibid., vol. 24, p. 252.

⁹⁸⁵ See also Shihadeh 2013 in which he focuses on al-Rāzī’s *Nihāyat al-‘uqūl*.

⁹⁸⁶ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 24, p. 252.

⁹⁸⁷ Ibid., vol. 24, p. 252.

⁹⁸⁸ Ibid., vol. 24, p. 252.

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid., vol. 24, p. 252.

⁹⁹⁰ This is Q. 20.49.

⁹⁹¹ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 24, p. 252.

⁹⁹² Consider also ibid., vol. 24, p. 254: ‘As for His saying {they thought that they would not be brought back to Us} (i.e., Q. 28.39), this proves that they had knowledge of God (*kānū ‘ārifina bi’llāh*), but denied the resurrection.’

to ‘affirm a creator.’ All this is clear evidence that the denial of the *creator* does not refer to the denial of *God’s* existence.⁹⁹³ Rather, Pharaoh’s opposition to affirming the creator must be understood as that he saw no need to postulate God as the one who brings about all events in this world, arguing that these can be explained otherwise. The passage also indicates that Pharaoh’s denial of an *ilāh* other than himself does not denote his denial of God’s existence; rather, following the Qur’ānic reasoning that God’s deserving worship, gratefulness and obedience is based on His being the only *ilāh* which in turn is based on His being the only creator,⁹⁹⁴ Pharaoh’s sin consisted in demanding exclusive obedience to himself and in denying God what only He deserves.⁹⁹⁵ This passage is finally also relevant insofar as the context of Pharaoh’s error shows that al-Rāzī’s mentioning the proof for ‘the existence of the creator’ and that ‘the world has a creator’ based on the originatedness of the bodies does not have the purpose of proving that God exists – despite the claim to the contrary we encounter in secondary literature. Its real purpose in the present discussion is to show that the *whole* world, including the celestial bodies, is part of creation and that this points to God’s being their creator.

At this point, it might be worth adding that, even if it appears curious to speak of ‘the proof of the existence of the creator’ when intending to prove that this world came about through God’s fiat, that is, when assigning the role of creator to God, this is nevertheless the language al-Rāzī – and other theologians, as we

⁹⁹³ An example of how this distinction has been overlooked in secondary literature is Kholeif 1969. He has a section (pp. 74-78) explaining al-Rāzī’s proofs for God’s existence (*wujūd Allāh*). Kholeif correctly reproduces al-Rāzī’s methods based on the concepts of originatedness and permissibility with regards to essences and attributes, but it becomes evident that he interprets them as having the same purpose as classical arguments for God’s existence. For instance, he uses the expressions ‘God’s existence (*wujūd Allāh*)’, ‘the existence of the necessarily existent (*wujūd wājib al-wujūd*)’ and ‘the existence of the creator (*wujūd al-ṣāni*)’ entirely interchangeably, without pointing out the nuances we have stressed.

⁹⁹⁴ See, for example: ‘There is no way to declare false the **worship** of the idols except for through declaring false that the sun, the moon and the other celestial bodies are *āliha* and arrangers (*mudabirra*) for this world’ (ibid., vol. 13, p. 39) and ‘*al-ilāhiyya* is based upon the faculty of creation (*al-khāliqiyya*) and it has been established that he who does not create is not an *ilāh*’ (ibid., vol. 32, p. 15).

⁹⁹⁵ Compare ibid., vol. 22, p. 64 (exegesis of *Sūra Ṭaha*): ‘As for his [i.e., Pharaoh’s] claim to *al-rubūbiyya*, it means that he declared it an obligation for them to obey him and to subjugate to him and not to be obedient to anybody else.’ Note that al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (*Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr*; p. 86), al-Kindī (*Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, p. 104), al-Baḳillānī (*al-Inṣāf*, p. 21) and al-Māturīdī (*al-Tawḥīd*, p. 21) used the term *al-rubūbiyya* in the context of the proof that God is the sole creator of everything, not so much with reference to God’s role as the one who can demand obedience from humans.

have seen in previous chapters – uses. Another instance where al-Rāzī opts for this kind of expression is when he speaks of certain things in this world proving ‘the existence of the prophet (*wujūd al-nabī*).’⁹⁹⁶ This statement appears in the context of his commentary on Q. 14.9-10 which al-Rāzī interprets as mentioning individuals who doubted that God really would make certain humans His messengers. Al-Rāzī’s mention of proofs for ‘the existence of the prophet’ therefore refers to proofs that allow ascribing a particular *role* to certain individuals.

There is a further instance in al-Rāzī’s *al-Tafsīr* which sheds light on the meaning and purpose of the proof for the existence of the creator. This is his commentary on Q. 2.164 which reads: {In the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of night and day; in the ships that sail the seas with goods for people; in the water which God sends down from the sky to give life to the earth...; in the changing of the winds and clouds...: there are signs in all these for those who use their minds.} Ayman Shihadeh refers to this very verse as an example of how al-Rāzī makes use of a teleological argument for God’s existence inspired by the Qur’ān.⁹⁹⁷ A different picture, however, emerges with regards to al-Rāzī’s understanding of what this verse is meant to prove. Referring to ‘the ships that sail the seas,’ al-Rāzī explains that they represent the ‘reasoning...for the existence of the creator.’⁹⁹⁸ Yet, unlike the objective of traditional arguments for God’s existence, al-Rāzī identifies the objective in this verse as the following: ‘Even if the ships have been assembled by humans, it is nevertheless He (Most-High!) who created the devices through which the assembly of the ships is possible, and if it was not for His creation of them, this would not be possible.’⁹⁹⁹ As argued before, the proof of ‘the existence of the creator’ evidently denotes the proof that God is creator. In the case of this particular verse, an allusion seems to be made by al-Rāzī, even if this is not spelled out, to the contentious notion of human efficient causality which, some theologians felt, was in conflict with the notion of God’s absolute efficacy of, and

⁹⁹⁶ Ibid., vol. 19, p. 93.

⁹⁹⁷ Shihadeh 2008, p. 201. He refers to al-Rāzī’s *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya* though where al-Rāzī mentions the very same verse as an argument from design (*tadbīr*).

⁹⁹⁸ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 4, p. 218.

⁹⁹⁹ Ibid., vol. 4, p. 218.

power over, everything.¹⁰⁰⁰ In the same manner, God's sending down rain from the sky to give life to the earth, which the same verse mentions, is referred to by al-Rāzī as among 'His proofs for the creator'¹⁰⁰¹ and he clearly seeks to make the point that God is to be identified as the agent responsible for this. Rain, al-Rāzī states, belongs to what 'no one can create except for God (Most-High!)'.¹⁰⁰² The colours, tastes and smells caused by rain falling on the earth all equally belong to 'what no one is capable of except for God.'¹⁰⁰³

Since the purpose of the proof for the existence of the creator has hence been clarified, based on al-Rāzī's exegesis of Q. 28.38 as well as Q. 2.164, it should be noted that he uses the following expressions in one breath and entirely interchangeably: He speaks of 'the proofs...for the affirmation of the creator (*al-dalā'il... 'alā ithbāt al-ṣāni'*)'¹⁰⁰⁴ alongside the proof 'which points to the existence of the creator (*al-dāll 'alā wujūd al-ṣāni'*)',¹⁰⁰⁵ while likewise mentioning certain things in this world which are 'in need...of the creator (*muftaqira...ilā'l-ṣāni'*)'¹⁰⁰⁶ and speaking of 'their need...for a wise and eternal arranger (Praised and Most-High!)'.¹⁰⁰⁷

Theological Methodologies and Objectives

Following the contours of the *Ishāra*, in his *al-Tafsīr* al-Rāzī also reveals that he considers reasoning on the basis of creation for the creator the one and only method to gain knowledge about God's nature. In his commentary on Q. 2.21, al-Rāzī restates his view that theology (*ilm al-uṣūl*) is the noblest of all sciences. This is so, on the one hand, because all other sciences depend on it and are subsequent to it¹⁰⁰⁸ and, on the other hand, because theology's subject-matter is

¹⁰⁰⁰ See, for instance, Burrell's chapter on "Creation" in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology* (Edited by Tim Winter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 141-160).

¹⁰⁰¹ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*; vol. 4, p. 219.

¹⁰⁰² Ibid., vol. 4, p. 219.

¹⁰⁰³ Ibid., vol. 4, p. 219.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Ibid., vol. 4, p. 209.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Ibid., vol. 4, p. 209.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Ibid., vol. 4, p. 209.

¹⁰⁰⁷ Ibid., vol. 4, p. 209.

¹⁰⁰⁸ The discipline of Qur'ānic exegesis (*tafsīr*) depends on the affirmation of 'the existence of the creator who is choosing and speaking' (ibid., vol. 2, p. 95) since the Qur'ān is considered God's speech (*kalām Allāh*). The investigation of the Prophetic traditions (*kalām rasūl Allāh*) depends on the affirmation of his prophethood. Jurisprudence (*fiqh*), which investigates God's

the noblest of all. ‘As for theology,’ al-Rāzī states, ‘what it seeks is God’s essence and His attributes and His deeds, and (it seeks) all classes of things known, whether non-existent or existent.’¹⁰⁰⁹ The definition given in the *Tafsīr* of what theology is concerned with is hence the same al-Rāzī gave in the *Ishāra* and shall proffer in the *Maṭālib*. Equally in line with his previous works, and indeed with the works of all theologians before him, al-Rāzī notes that knowledge of God can only be attained through speculation and reasoning (*al-naẓar wa’l-istidlāl*). Speculation leads to the intuition that this world, which is originated, must depend on one who exerts influence on it (*mu’aththir*) and that this ‘can only be God (Most-High!).’¹⁰¹⁰ Knowledge of God, which means, to be precise, knowledge about His essence and attributes, is therefore once more described as being dependent on showing that God has to be credited with having brought about the world.

The same is affirmed elsewhere in al-Rāzī’s *al-Tafsīr*: In his exegesis of Q. 43.9 which reads {If you [Prophet] ask them, ‘Who created the heavens and the earth?’ they are sure to say, ‘They were created by the Almighty, the All Knowing.’}, al-Rāzī states that according to the *mutakallimūn* ‘the first knowledge about God is the knowledge of His being [i.e., *that* He is!] originator for the world and its maker (*al-‘ilm bi-kawnihi muḥdithan li’l-‘ālam fā‘ilan lahu*).’¹⁰¹¹

That the knowledge of God’s agency is declared the basis of, and method leading to, the knowledge about His essence, attributes and acts, which are the subject-matter of theology, becomes even more evident in al-Rāzī’s commentary on Q. 26.23. In this verse, Pharaoh poses the question to Moses {What is this “Lord of the Worlds”?}. Al-Rāzī explains that the question about the ‘what’ demands that ‘the essence of the thing should be made known (*ta’rīf ḥaqīqa al-shay*).’¹⁰¹² A thing’s essence may be known through a number of ways,¹⁰¹³ but ‘making

laws (*aḥkām Allāh*), follows the affirmation of God’s oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*) as well as prophethood, which are both established by theology.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 96.

¹⁰¹⁰ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 104.

¹⁰¹¹ Ibid., vol. 27, p. 197.

¹⁰¹² Ibid., vol. 24, p. 128.

¹⁰¹³ They are: ‘either through that essence itself; or through a part of it; or through something outside it; or through something combined from inside and outside it’ (ibid., vol. 24, p. 128).

known the essence (*māhiyya*) of the necessarily existent is only possible through His necessary concomitants and His traces (*bi-lawāzimihi wa-āthārihi*), among which al-Rāzī names ‘this observable world, that is, the heavens and the earth and what is between them’¹⁰¹⁴ as the most evident one. In particular, this means, al-Rāzī notes, that, once humans have grasped that the things observed in this world end in the necessarily existent by virtue of its essence, they understand that God is ‘absolutely unique (*farad muṭlaq*).’¹⁰¹⁵ Returning to Pharaoh’s question to Moses, al-Rāzī then states that Pharaoh dismisses Moses’ reply {the Lord of the heavens and the earth and everything between them} because the latter referred to God’s role as creator – *al-fā’iliyya wa’l-mu’aththiriyya* –, without actually speaking about what makes God’s essence specific (*khuṣūṣiyya al-ḥaqīqa*). Al-Rāzī finally comments, in line with the *Arbaʿīn*, that knowing about a thing’s necessary concomitants or traces – such as the world in the case of God – does not result in knowing the essence itself. For our enquiry, however, it is important to note that here the world’s being God’s product is presented as serving the purpose to allow humans to gain knowledge about God’s essential and hypostatic attributes, even if complete knowledge of God’s specific essence can never be attained. The world with its characteristics points to God, its creator, in terms of His essence, attributes and deeds – it is, however, not used to prove that God exists, as the traditional proofs of God’s existence aspire to do.

The Proof for God’s Existence – Methods and Meaning

Considering these findings, it must now seem somewhat astonishing that, still in his commentary on Q. 2.21-22,¹⁰¹⁶ al-Rāzī utters the following words:

Note that He (Praised!) decreed that He be worshipped, and the order to worship Him depends on knowledge of His existence (*maʿrifa wujūdihi*). Since the knowledge of His existence is not necessary, rather it is based on reasoning, He reports here what proves His existence. Note that we explained in the reason-based books (*al-kutub al-ʿaqliyya*) [i.e., *kalām* works] that the method to affirm

¹⁰¹⁴ Ibid., vol. 24, p. 128.

¹⁰¹⁵ Ibid., vol. 24, p. 128.

¹⁰¹⁶ Which reads: {People, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that you may be mindful [of Him] who spread out the earth for you and built the sky; who sent water down from it and with that water produced things for your sustenance. Do not, knowing this, set up rivals to God.}

Him (Praised and Most-High!) (*ithbātīhi*) is either possibility or originatedness or both together, and all this with regards to atoms and accidents.¹⁰¹⁷

As opposed to all aforementioned instances where al-Rāzī spoke of the affirmation of the existence of the *creator* and the like, he now speaks of *God's* existence and that the knowledge of it depends on speculation. The methods which are said to prove this are four, and they are the very same methods al-Rāzī already discussed in his *al-Arbaʿīn* where they served to prove that God is creator: reasoning based on the possibility of the essences, followed by the possibility of the attributes, then the originatedness of the essences and finally the originatedness of the attributes.¹⁰¹⁸ In this part of his commentary, al-Rāzī does not provide much detailed explanation of these methods associated with the theologians and philosophers as he had done in the *Arbaʿīn*. He does, however, mention a number of Qurʾānic verses which, according to Him, contain and represent the same reasoning.¹⁰¹⁹

Let us now have a closer look at the verse al-Rāzī adduces as an example of the reasoning on the basis of the originatedness of the bodies as his commentary of this verse sheds some light on the question of what these four methods are meant to establish. The verse in question is Q. 6.76 in which Abraham says {I do not like things that set} when he sees the star set about which he previously said that it is his Lord (*rabb*).¹⁰²⁰ Al-Rāzī explains the context of the verse as that Abraham's people were worshippers of the heavenly bodies and called them *āliha* and *arbāb*.¹⁰²¹ They believed that the stars are part of God's creation,

¹⁰¹⁷ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, p. 106. Note that Mahdi (in D. Burrell and B. McGinn 1990), referring to al-Rāzī's enumeration of these methods where he speaks of his reason-based books in the *Tafsīr*, sees them in the light of proving 'God's existence' (p. 301).

¹⁰¹⁸ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 107.

¹⁰¹⁹ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 107: For example, for the reasoning based on the possibility of the essences, he mentions Q. 47.38 {God is the source of wealth [*al-ghanī*] and you are the needy ones [*al-fuqarā*]}. For the reasoning based on the possibility of the attributes, he mentions {who created the heavens and the earth} which can be found in Q. 6.1 and Q. 11.7.

¹⁰²⁰ Ibid., vol. 13, p. 52. Al-Rāzī is eager to stress that Abraham did not utter these words in affirmation of *al-rubūbiyya* for the star, rather he might have reflected about what his people believed concerning them. This appears clearly in defence of the doctrine of the prophets' immunity to sin (compare Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Fatāwā* (37 vols., al-Malik Fahd li-Ṭabāʿa al-Muṣḥaf al-Sharīf, 2004), vol. 4, p. 319: "The belief that prophets are free (*maʿṣūmūna*) from all major sins, but not the minor ones is what the majority of Muslim scholars hold and all sects and even the majority of theologians...and most exegetes and *Ḥadīth* scholars and jurists.').

¹⁰²¹ Note that al-Rāzī explains the term *rabb* in the same way as the term *ilāh*: 'What is meant by *al-rabb* and *al-ilāh* is: he who is creator for us and maker of our essences and attributes' (ibid., vol. 13, p. 43). See also this explanation: 'God is the *ilāh* of the worlds insofar as He is the one

whom they considered to be the supreme *ilāh* (*al-ilāh al-akbar*),¹⁰²² but that these celestial bodies are responsible for the creation (*takhluqu*) of plants and animals in this lower world.¹⁰²³ Al-Rāzī rejects this belief as absurd arguing that the setting of the stars indicates their originatedness and their need for another to give them existence, yet that which is in need of another does not deserve to be called *rabb* and *ilāh*.¹⁰²⁴ This, according to al-Rāzī, is the reasoning contained in Abraham's utterance {I do not like things that set} in Q. 6.76. Al-Rāzī then proceeds to explain that Abraham 'called (his people) away from the worship of the stars and to *tawḥīd*.'¹⁰²⁵ Concretely, this means that al-Rāzī views Abraham's mission was to convince his people to give up their worship of any entity besides God, whom they already acknowledged as the main creator, and by abandoning to associate any partners with God (*naḥī al-sharīk*) to affirm His uniqueness (*ithbāth al-tawḥīd*).¹⁰²⁶ Al-Rāzī's commentary on this verse therefore clarifies two things: Firstly, he adduces this verse as an example of reasoning on the basis of the originatedness of the bodies since the corollary of the setting of the stars is that they are originated and hence depend for their existence on a creator. Secondly, following al-Rāzī's own account, Abraham does not make use of this insight in order to achieve what traditional arguments for God's existence seek to show; rather, the realisation that all bodies in this world, including the stars, are originated makes it necessary to acknowledge that only God is *rabb* and *ilāh* – He is not the *ilāh al-āliha*, but the *only ilāh* – and that He alone is therefore worthy of worship. We can thus conclude that the reasoning on the basis of the originatedness of the world, which al-Rāzī sees exemplified in Q. 6.67, has no other purpose than to establish what al-Rāzī elsewhere referred to as 'the first knowledge about God is the knowledge about His being originator for the world and its maker.'¹⁰²⁷

who brought them about from non-existence into existence, and He is the *rabb* of the worlds insofar as He keeps them in existence' (ibid., vol. 1, p. 234).

¹⁰²² See also ibid., vol. 2, p. 52: 'He (Most-High!) is the *ilāh al-āliha* in their opinion.'

¹⁰²³ Ibid., vol. 13, p. 56.

¹⁰²⁴ Ibid., vol. 13, p. 56.

¹⁰²⁵ Ibid., vol. 13, p. 58.

¹⁰²⁶ Ibid., vol. 13, p. 61.

¹⁰²⁷ Ibid., vol. 27, p. 197.

If this is the case, it follows that this must also hold true for the other three methods al-Rāzī enumerated alongside the one just discussed.¹⁰²⁸ This finding is further confirmed by the fact that al-Rāzī characterises the fourth method which is based upon the originatedness of accidents as ‘establishing the knowledge about the existence of the creator,’¹⁰²⁹ the meaning of which was previously discussed. Furthermore, al-Rāzī states that the pious ancestors (*al-salaf*) knew of other methods to prove the same point, and he mentions among them a conversation between the Prophet and ‘Imrān b. Ḥuṣayn, one of his companions: “The Prophet said to him: How many *āliha*¹⁰³⁰ do you have? He said: ten. The Prophet said: but what when a calamity and difficult times hit you? He said: God (Allāh). The Prophet said: so which *ilāh* do you have besides God?”¹⁰³¹ This episode is a further confirmation that al-Rāzī views the aforementioned four methods in the light of establishing that God alone deserves to be called the creator of the world and to be obeyed.

Having clarified this, we now need to return to our initial question what al-Rāzī has in mind when he states that it is ‘God’s existence’ which needs to be known before worship of Him can become obligatory, and that it is the aforementioned four methods which prove just this. On the face of it, it seems to be contradictory that, on the one hand, al-Rāzī presents these methods as having the purpose to prove God’s role as creator and, conversely, as serving to prove His existence. An answer to our question may be found when considering the following: Towards the very end of his commentary on Q. 2.21-22 – which is precisely where al-Rāzī introduced the aforementioned four methods – al-Rāzī gives an explanation of God’s saying {[He] who sent water down from it and with that water produced things for your sustenance}. He points out that God mentions rain and provisions from Him so that human ‘may ponder about themselves and about the states of what is above them and what is beneath

¹⁰²⁸ McAuliffe (in D. Burrell and B. McGinn 1990) speaks of the five kinds of creation mentioned in Q. 2.21-22, which al-Rāzī makes the basis of his explanation of the four methods, as containing ‘evidence for God’s existence’ (p. 283). Shihadeh (2008, p. 198) presents al-Rāzī’s four methods as different types of arguments for God’s existence, and so does Ceylan (1996, pp. 81-85).

¹⁰²⁹ Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*; vol. 2, p. 108.

¹⁰³⁰ Literally singular: *kam ilāh*.

¹⁰³¹ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 108.

them, and they shall know that nothing from among these things can bring them [i.e., the provisions] about...except for one who is different from them in terms of the essence and the attributes, and this is the wise creator (Praised and Most-High!).'¹⁰³² The idea al-Rāzī puts forward is that by considering what the essences and attributes of created things are like, one reaches the conclusion that their creator must be one who is completely different from them. This reasoning is spelled out where al-Rāzī focuses on the method based on the originatedness of the accidents: Everyone necessarily knows, he argues, that he was once non-existent and that he therefore depends on one who brought him about (*mūjid*). This entity is not a human being pondering over this question, nor is it his parents, nor any other human. This entity is not one of the planets or stars either as they are subject to change – a sign of their own originatedness. It must be something (*amr*) which is not a body or corporeal like the created bodies and it must have choice (*mukhtār*) in what it brings about as well as power over it (*qādir*).¹⁰³³ Al-Rāzī's mentioning the aspect of incorporeality with regards to the being who deserves to be called the creator of humans and the world as a whole is telling. We recall from al-Rāzī's account in the *Arbaʿīn*, for instance, that corporeality is what characterises one type of essence/existence, namely atoms/bodies. Accidents are a different type of essence/existence, and God in His incorporeality (as well as His non-subsistence in a substrate, unlike the accident) is yet another type of essence/existence. Furthermore, it is due to the classification of the existence of created things as originated that God's existence can be classified as eternal. If God was not of eternal existence, it would not be justified to call Him creator and to distinguish Him from creation (as He Himself would need a cause); yet, the originated existence of everything other than God is the very basis for the justification of His exclusive worthiness of worship, as discussed previously. The same is obviously true of those two methods which focus on the classification of created existence as being possible and the classification of God's existence as being necessary. Existence which is necessary by virtue of the essence is nothing else than eternal existence (i.e., beginningless and uncaused), and the fact that God is the necessarily existent

¹⁰³² Ibid., vol. 2, p. 120.

¹⁰³³ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 107.

goes hand in hand with His being the creator of the world. We can therefore conclude: The reason why al-Rāzī maintains that worship of God depends on knowing His existence is that, only when humans know that God is of eternal, necessary and incorporeal existence which does not subsist in a substrate, they appreciate God's uniqueness and difference from creation and that God Himself is without cause. All this, however, can only be established on the basis of speculation about God's traces, as al-Rāzī has it elsewhere,¹⁰³⁴ which are the very four methods introduced above. Contrary to the common understanding in secondary literature, it appears that al-Rāzī does not have in mind a proof of God's existence in the traditional sense when he states: 'Every existent other than God points to the existence of God.'¹⁰³⁵ It is, in this context, important to bear in mind that, when al-Rāzī speaks of the existence of a thing, he might refer to more than the mere fact that this thing is not non-existent. This is confirmed by the following statement of his, made elsewhere: 'We have mentioned in this book [i.e., the *Tafsīr*] how the existence of the heavens and the earth proves their need for the choosing creator.'¹⁰³⁶ It is evident that it is not the mere fact that the heavens and the earth are existents which indicates their createdness; the fact that something exists says nothing about whether it exists due to another or uncaused. What al-Rāzī means is that the *kind* of existence specific to the heavens and the earth *insofar* as they are originated and possible points to their dependence on God as their creator. Let us therefore repeat once more, this is what al-Rāzī means when he says: 'Everything besides God proves God's existence.'¹⁰³⁷ It should be noted that this reading of al-Rāzī's statement, which emerged from all the forgoing considerations, proffers a different understanding of his objectives than encountered in the works of certain academics. This is evident when Shihadeh, for example, poses and answers the

¹⁰³⁴ Ibid., vol. 24, p. 128.

¹⁰³⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 223. Compare *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 180: 'The proof for His existence is the existence of His creation, and His saying {Lord of the Worlds} (i.e., Q. 1.2) alludes to that there is no way to know His existence except for on the basis of His being the Lord (*rabb*) of the worlds.' Note that al-Rāzī explains the term *rabb* as 'the one who keeps them [i.e. the worlds] in existence' (*ibid.* vol. 1, p. 234) and equates it with *ilāh*: 'What is meant by *al-rabb* and *al-ilāh* is: he who is creator for us and maker of our essences and attributes' (*ibid.*, vol. 13, p. 43).

¹⁰³⁶ Ibid., vol. 19, p. 93.

¹⁰³⁷ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 223. This account in the *Tafsīr* clearly ties in with the discussion in the *Ishāra* where al-Rāzī made the point that knowledge of God's oneness and uniqueness (*waḥdāniyya Allāh*) is directly linked to knowing that His essence – and thereby existence – has no comparison.

question: 'How does he [i.e., al-Rāzī] then view the relation between the subject-matter of theology and its objectives? ... Knowing the natures of created things has no soteriological value, except in their being signs for the existence of God.'¹⁰³⁸ Since Shihadeh utters these words against the background of the assumption that al-Rāzī's concern is exactly the same as that of traditional arguments for God's existence, it is clear that he views the method and idea expressed by al-Rāzī in the above statement in an entirely different light than proposed by us.

Conclusions

In line with al-Rāzī's two earlier works, the *Ishāra* and the *Arbaʿīn*, it became clear that the traditional proof for God's existence seems to be entirely absent from the *Tafsīr*, and that the purpose which the proof of the existence of the creator (or similar expressions) serves has been misunderstood in some of secondary literature. We have shown that al-Rāzī means by the proof for the existence of the creator the proof that it is God who brought about the entire world.¹⁰³⁹ Al-Rāzī then makes this insight the foundation of God's exclusive right to be worshipped as well as declares it the single method which allows

¹⁰³⁸ Shihadeh 2005, pp. 174-175.

¹⁰³⁹ Al-Rāzī's *Tafsīr* contains an argument which, at first glance, seems to resemble Pascal's famous wager about God's existence. In his *Pensées* (*Blaise Pascal's Pensées*, English translation by W. F. Trotter, Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Tech, 2001, pp. 45-46), Pascal (d. 1623-1662) writes: 'If there is a God, He is infinitely incomprehensible... We are then incapable of knowing either what He is or if He is. ... Let us then examine this point, and say, "God is, or He is not." But to which side shall we incline? ... Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is.' Al-Rāzī states: 'Acknowledging the existence of the *ilāh* who chooses and who obligates...is very wise (*aḥūt*), hence it must be done. ... Affirming the existence of the *ilāh* is very wise because, if he was not existent, there would be no harm in the affirmation of his existence. But if he is existent, then the greatest harm lies in his denial' (vol. 19, p. 94 (exegesis of Q. 14.10)). Al-Rāzī and Pascal's arguments have one thing in common: They stress the benefit weighed against the harm of affirming the existence of the creator (al-Rāzī) and the existence of God (Pascal) respectively. However, the fundamental difference between them is: Firstly, al-Rāzī deals with the question of whether one should affirm that this world is something that came about due to another who is its creator, and that this creator is none but God who must be obeyed (this being what the phrase 'affirmation of the (existence of the) creator' refers to, as argued in this chapter). Pascal, on the other hands, deals with the question of whether in a situation where neither God's existence nor His non-existence are conclusive, one has good reason to wager for His existence. These are fundamentally different questions. Also, while Pascal maintains that there is no conclusive evidence for what his wager is concerned with – that is, God's existence –, al-Rāzī stresses that there is conclusive proof for what he enquires into (see, for example *ibid.*, vol. 24, p. 252 (exegesis of Q. 28.38) where al-Rāzī rejects Pharaoh's position which he presents as that the affirmation of an *ilāh* other than himself cannot be undertaken since 'that for which there is no proof cannot be affirmed.' Al-Rāzī counters: 'We do not concede that there is no proof for the existence of the creator.').

humans to gain knowledge about God in terms of His essence and attributes, which is what theology seeks.

***Al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya* – Theological Methodologies and Objectives**

The final work written by al-Rāzī we shall take into consideration is his celebrated *al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya*. It is in most respects very similar to his three previous works in respect of those passages that are relevant for our enquiry. As in the *Ishāra*, the opening chapter of the *Maṭālib* contains an explanation of why the science of theology (*al-‘ilm al-ilāhī*) is the noblest of all sciences. This is the case because the object of its investigation is ‘the essence (*dhāt*) of God (Most-High!) and His attributes’¹⁰⁴⁰ and because He is the noblest of all existents. ‘God’s (Most-High!) essence and the attributes of His lordliness’¹⁰⁴¹ belong to the greatest and holiest things known. In the *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī then also restates his view that, even if theology is concerned with attaining knowledge of God in terms of His essence and attributes, the human mind falls short of really knowing God. Its ability to conceive of a thing in terms of its essence is confined to four ways,¹⁰⁴² yet since God’s essence is unlike everything humans have ever known, it cannot be conceived in the same way as the observable existents around us.¹⁰⁴³ The only method available to humans to know God is therefore ‘reasoning on the basis of the effect (*al-ma‘lūl*) to the cause (*al-‘illa*)...which is moving from the created thing (*al-makhlūq*) to the creator (*al-khāliq*).’¹⁰⁴⁴

So far, al-Rāzī’s description of the subject-matter of theology and of what it seeks as well as of the method it employs to achieve this is entirely in line with his previous works. The similarity between the method presented in the *Maṭālib* and the methods introduced in al-Rāzī’s earlier works is even more evident in one of the subsequent chapters where he explains ‘the method of the theological philosophers (*al-ḥukamā’ al-ilāhiyyīna*)’ this way:

It is reasoning on the basis of the states of the possible things for the affirmation of an existent which is necessarily existent by virtue of its essence. This is so because, when it has been established that these observable existents are possible and originated, and that the possible thing needs the one who gives

¹⁰⁴⁰ Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 37.

¹⁰⁴¹ Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁰⁴² These are: conceiving (*taṣawwur*) of essences through the five senses; physical perception as in the case of pain or hunger; conceiving of ‘inborn ideas’ (*bi-ḥukm fiṭra ‘uqūlinā*) like the meaning of existence and non-existence; conceiving of ideas which have no actualisation in reality like an associate (*sharīk*) for God (ibid., pp. 49-50).

¹⁰⁴³ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

preference (to one of two possible alternatives) (*al-murajjih*), and that the originated thing needs the originator, and that the infinite regress (of causes) (*al-tasalsul*) and circularity (*al-dawr*) are absurd, then it is necessary that these existents end in an existent which is eternal and necessarily existent by virtue its essence.¹⁰⁴⁵

Once more, knowledge of God is attained on the basis of the classification of the existence which belongs to observable things in this world as being possible and originated since this points to the characterisation of God's existence, and thereby essence, as eternal and necessary. It is also important to note that al-Rāzī's detailed discussion of all the different methods leading to this knowledge appears as part of the overarching section entitled 'On the proofs for the affirmation of the creator (*al-ilāh*) for this observable world *and* the affirmation of His being necessarily existent by virtue of His essence.'¹⁰⁴⁶ This confirms what has become evident numerous times before, namely that the proof of God's being creator of the world serves the immediate purpose of establishing His essential and hypostatic attributes. Like in the *Tafsīr*, al-Rāzī describes this method as being 'reasoning on the basis of the existence of what is other than God to the existence of God (Most-High!),'¹⁰⁴⁷ which, as we have stressed, has nothing to do with the aims of traditional arguments for God's existence.

Investigation of the Methods and Purpose of the Proof of the Creator

Al-Rāzī's detailed account of the methods on the basis of which knowledge of God's essence and attributes can be attained reveals that they are the very same methods he mentioned, and explained, in the *Arbaʿīn* and the *Tafsīr*. In the *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī lists 'the affirmation of the creator (*al-ilāh*) of the world based upon the possibility of the attributes,'¹⁰⁴⁸ followed by 'the affirmation of the knowledge of the existence of the creator (*al-ilāh*) based upon the originatedness of the essences,'¹⁰⁴⁹ and finally 'the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator (*al-ṣāniʿ*) based upon the originatedness of the attributes.'¹⁰⁵⁰

¹⁰⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 65.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁰⁴⁸ In three chapters, *ibid.*, pp. 177-199.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁰⁵⁰ In three chapters, *ibid.*, pp. 215-232. It should be noted that in the *Maṭālib*, the term *ilāh* appears simply as an equivalent of the term *ṣāniʿ* and denotes nothing else than the creator, as evident from the chapter headings. The aspect of worship, contained in the term *al-maʿbūd*, which al-Rāzī associated with *al-ilāh* in the *Tafsīr*, alongside the aforementioned aspect of

Exactly like in the *Arbaʿīn*, the method focusing on the inherent possibility of the attributes of things in this observable world involves that all bodies are equal in terms of their 'body-ness' or corporeality (*al-jismiyya*), but different when it comes to their specification with certain attributes. The attributes must hence be possible. This specification must be due to a cause (*sabab*), since otherwise one would admit that something possible can occur without one who makes it preponderate over the alternative, which al-Rāzī has already proven wrong. Turning to the cause, al-Rāzī then establishes that it must be 'a separate existent which is neither a body nor corporeal.'¹⁰⁵¹ Following the reasoning that 'the existence of what is other than God (points) to the existence of God,' al-Rāzī has established that God's existence is different from created existence insofar as the former is incorporeal. It should once more be kept in mind that corporeality and incorporeality are what distinguishes different types of essences from each other, according to the theologians. As for the knowledge that God is of necessary existence, al-Rāzī notes that this is only established once it has been ruled out that He is possibly existent through reference to the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes or their circularity.¹⁰⁵²

The next proof for 'the affirmation of the knowledge of the existence of the creator (*al-ilāh*) (Most-High!)'¹⁰⁵³ al-Rāzī presents is the one based upon the originatedness of the essences. Its reasoning is the very same as in the *Arbaʿīn*,

creation, is now missing. (This is not to say, however, that the reasoning that only the creator is deserving of worship does not hold any longer.) It can therefore be questioned whether the common translation of *ilāh* as 'god' (e.g., in the all-important profession of faith, for instance in Q. 2.255: 'God [*Allāh*]: there is no god [*ilāh*] but Him' or when Davidson, referring to the so-called *dalīl al-tamānu* (the proof for God's oneness based on the notion of mutual hindrance, derived from Q. 21.22: {If there had been in the heavens and the earth any gods [*āliha*] but Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruins}), states: 'in the most popular proof for unity, the pivotal thought is that the hypothesis of two deities cannot be squared with what is meant by 'God' (1987, p. 165).) is adequate for the *Maṭālib*, while it may work for certain discussions in the *Tafsīr* (that is, if one argues that the English term 'god' means nothing else than 'the creator' and 'the one who is worthy of worship.' Al-Rāzī's approach to Pharaoh's claim to be the only *ilāh*, however, revealed the further difficulty that in this particular context, al-Rāzī did not understand this term as to denote 'the creator' or 'the one worthy of worship,' but rather as 'the one who must be obeyed.' This is another instance where the English term 'god' does not seem to do justice to how al-Rāzī understands the term *ilāh*). One could also wonder whether the frequent occurrence of the term *ilāh* (and in particular of 'the existence of the *ilāh*') in the *Maṭālib* taken together with the common translation of it as 'god' or 'godhead' might further have contributed to the conviction expressed in secondary literature that al-Rāzī indeed is concerned with the proof of God's existence in the traditional sense.

¹⁰⁵¹ Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁰⁵² Ibid., pp. 186-187.

¹⁰⁵³ Ibid., p. 200.

and al-Rāzī describes this method as that preferred by the majority of *mutakallimūn* who argued that all bodies are originated and that everything originated is in need of a creator.¹⁰⁵⁴ The proof is complete (*al-dalīl innamā yatimmu*), al-Rāzī carries on, once it has been shown that this creator is eternal – since his being originated would lead to the absurdity of an infinite regress – and thereby necessarily existent by virtue of his essence. ‘This is what is sought,’¹⁰⁵⁵ al-Rāzī concludes, pointing to the purpose of this method which consists in establishing the kind of existence that is God’s.

Thirdly, al-Rāzī turns to ‘the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator (*al-ṣāniʿ*)’ based on the originatedness of the attributes.’¹⁰⁵⁶ In al-Rāzī’s view, this method is somewhat more straightforward than the two previous ones since ‘before the knowledge of the possibility of the essences of the bodies and before the knowledge of their originatedness, we witness the originatedness of states (*aḥwāl*) and attributes over which humans have no power.’¹⁰⁵⁷ In line with his account in the *Arbaʿīn*, this argument focuses on such observable events in the upper world as the movements of the planets as well as the alternation of night and day, alongside changes in plants and animals in the lower world. A special status and separate chapter is once more assigned to the reasoning based on ‘how humans develop from sperm’¹⁰⁵⁸ where al-Rāzī notes: ‘This kind of proof is closest to the heart and has the greatest impact on the minds.’¹⁰⁵⁹ Like in his account of the previous two methods, al-Rāzī then concludes this chapter by pointing out that the creator to whom all existents can be traced must be necessarily existent by virtue of his essence, and this is what God Himself intended when He said in the Qurʾān {that the final goal [*al-muntahī*] is your Lord}.¹⁰⁶⁰

¹⁰⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 200. Like in the *Arbaʿīn*, the need of the originated for an originator is explained on the basis that the originated thing is possibly existent by virtue of its essence.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 200.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 215.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 215.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 216. Note that this is an argument with a long tradition which al-Ashʿarī already used in his proof of the creator: ‘What is the proof that creation has a creator? ... The proof for this is that humans...were a drop of sperm, then a clinging clot, then flesh, then blood, and we know that they cannot transform themselves from state to state...’ (*al-Lumaʿ*, pp. 17-18).

¹⁰⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 216.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 227. This is Q. 53.42.

According to al-Rāzī, the early philosophers (*qudamā' al-falāsifa*) employed a different reasoning which, however, also takes into consideration the originatedness of the attributes found in creation. They focused on the endless rotations (*adwār*) this world goes through, concluding from them 'the affirmation of the creator (*al-ilāh*),'¹⁰⁶¹ following the Qur'ānic statement that {The creation of the heavens and the earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind}.¹⁰⁶² They arrived at the conclusion that the agent who brings about these rotations 'cannot be a body or corporeal, therefore one needs to acknowledge an existent which is not a body nor corporeal and who is the mover (*al-muḥarriq*) of...the spheres. This existent is God (Most-High!).'¹⁰⁶³ This account makes evident the purpose attributed to the reasoning in question, which is on the one hand to identify none but God as the sole creator and on the other hand to show that He is of a kind of existence which is different from the corporeal existence characteristic of creation.

In the *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī finally introduces yet another method to 'affirm the creator (*al-ilāh*) (Most-High!) for this creation'¹⁰⁶⁴ which Shihadeh has identified as an 'argument from design' or 'teleological argument.'¹⁰⁶⁵ Al-Rāzī states:

Note that whoever reflects about the various parts in the higher and lower world will understand that this world is built in the most advantageous and best way and according to the most excellent and perfect arrangement (*tartīb*). The sound mind hence bears witness that things can only occur in this way through the arrangement of one who is wise and knowing. This method therefore points to the existence of the creator (*al-ilāh*) for this world.¹⁰⁶⁶

In al-Rāzī's discussion of this proof we find one unequivocal indication that Shihadeh, even though rightly characterising this reasoning as an argument from design, is nevertheless mistaken in describing it as an argument for God's existence: No book, al-Rāzī states, provides a better explanation of this kind of proof than the Qur'ān, and this is most evident in God's words in Q. 2.164.¹⁰⁶⁷

¹⁰⁶¹ Ibid., p. 228.

¹⁰⁶² This is Q. 40.57.

¹⁰⁶³ Ibid., p. 228.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 233.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Shihadeh 2008, p. 201.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 233.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 235.

We have come across this very verse, which speaks of signs contained in the heavens and the earth, in the alternation of night and day and so forth, in the *Tafsīr*; and it became clear that al-Rāzī understands it as being concerned with the proof that God, none other, is the one who brought about the world. It therefore follows that al-Rāzī's invocation of the notion of arrangement (*tadbīr*) in this world is indeed an argument from design – yet, not for the existence of God, but rather for God's being sole creator.

Further Indication of the Purpose of the Proof of the Creator and Reference to the Existence of God

What al-Rāzī's detailed account of these four methods reveals is also confirmed by a subsequent chapter with the title 'On the words spoken by the greatest of all people regarding this issue.'¹⁰⁶⁸ This chapter appears as part of a section of the *Maṭālib* which deals with 'the proofs, contained in the higher and lower world, which point to the existence of the eternal creator (*al-ilāh*).'¹⁰⁶⁹ In this chapter, al-Rāzī mentions the tradition we have already come across in his *al-Tafsīr* according to which the Prophet asked 'Imran b. al-Huṣayn how many *āliha* he has besides God (Allāh).¹⁰⁷⁰ We recall that this tradition is evidently concerned with stressing that only God is the true creator, from which it follows that only He deserves worship. These two aspects are contained in the term *ilāh*. Al-Rāzī then mentions a tradition about certain heretics (*zanādiqa*) who 'denied the creator'¹⁰⁷¹ and whom the sixth Shiite Imām Ja'far b. Muḥammad al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) tried to convince that 'your *ilāh* is the one you turn to'¹⁰⁷² in times of hardship. Al-Rāzī comments on this tradition that it contains the same reasoning as Q. 29.65 where God speaks: {Whenever they go on board a ship they call on God, and dedicate their faith to Him alone}.¹⁰⁷³ Once more, it becomes clear that the denial of the creator mentioned in the tradition has nothing to do with the denial of God's existence; the heretics' belief in God's existence is out of question, but they are neglectful when it comes to their

¹⁰⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 240.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 240.

¹⁰⁷¹ Ibid., p. 240.

¹⁰⁷² Ibid., p. 240.

¹⁰⁷³ Ibid., p. 241.

acknowledging God as their *ilāh* to whom they should be grateful as He brings about everything. Furthermore, al-Rāzī mentions that al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) was once asked about ‘the proof for the creator.’¹⁰⁷⁴ He replied by mentioning the existence of certain things in this world which are beneficial for humans and concluded: ‘So the one who arranges all these bodies according to this marvellous system is God (Praised!).’¹⁰⁷⁵ The proof of the creator here clearly denotes the proof that God is the one who brings into existence and arranges all things. The same chapter on the proof of the creator contains yet another argument brought forward by al-Rāzī which appears in the form of a poem by Abū Nuwās (d. ca. 199/813). It reads: ‘ponder over the plants of the earth and look / at the traces of what the Sovereign produced / ...which bear witness / that God has no associate (*sharīk*).’¹⁰⁷⁶ Al-Rāzī does not comment on this poem at all, but the content of the poem as well as the fact that he mentions it in the context of the proof of the creator shows in the clearest way that the existence of God is not at stake at all, but rather the defence of God’s unique role as creator. Finally, one account al-Rāzī mentions in the same section is worth further consideration as al-Rāzī begins it with the words: ‘Doubt about the existence of God (Most-High!) (*shakk fī wujūd Allāh*) occurred to the heart of a certain king.’¹⁰⁷⁷ It is not the (existence of the) *creator* which is denied or doubted in this account, but *God’s* existence. What does al-Rāzī mean by it and how does it fit in with the overarching theme of this chapter? The story itself told by al-Rāzī seems to tie in with all the previous accounts seeking to prove that the world exists due to another and that this other is none but God. The story runs that this doubting king had a wise vizier who, at the honour of his king, transformed ruins into beautiful cities. Upon the king’s question how these splendid cities came about, the vizier replied: ‘We found these things had come about (*ḥadathat*) spontaneously due to themselves without a builder.’¹⁰⁷⁸ The king realised the obvious absurdity of this, to which the vizier replied: ‘If the occurrence (*ḥudūth*) of these buildings is impossible without an architect...,

¹⁰⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 242.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 246.

¹⁰⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 246.

then the originatedness (*ḥudūth*) of the lower and higher world with all the wondrous and strange things in them without one who brings them about and an arranger is even more impossible.’¹⁰⁷⁹ Thereupon, the king returned to ‘the true religion.’¹⁰⁸⁰ Why is it then that al-Rāzī speaks of God’s existence which the king doubted, not the existence of the creator? An indication of what he means by it can be found when we return to al-Rāzī’s *al-Taḥṣīn*. In Q. 14.9-10, God speaks of previous nations who rejected the messengers sent to them saying: {We do not believe the message with which you were sent. We have serious doubts about what you are asking us to do}. The messengers are said to have replied: {Can there be any doubt about God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth?} It is important to note that al-Rāzī describes the conflict between these nations and their messengers as being about the veracity of their prophethood which the former doubted, yet it is evident that the existence of God itself was not at stake: {‘We do not believe the message with which you were sent’} – its meaning is: We disbelieve in what you claim that God sent you with, (and this is) because they did not acknowledge that they were (indeed) sent (by God).’¹⁰⁸¹ The doubt expressed by these people solely refers to the messengers’ call to *tawḥīd*, but not to belief in God’s existence, as becomes clear when al-Rāzī states: ‘When those unbelievers said to the messengers: {We have serious doubts about what you are asking us to do}, their messengers said: Are you doubting God...while all we call you to is worship of this *ilāh*, the Benefactor, and all we forbid you is worship of another than Him?’¹⁰⁸² Having hence identified the nature of the conflict taking place, we must then read the following statement made by al-Rāzī against this very background:

The author of the *Kashshāf* [i.e., al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1143)] said: the *hamza* of negation (*hamza al-inkār*) was introduced [i.e., in {*a-fī’l-lāh shakk*}] because the speech does not focus on the doubt, rather it focuses on that the existence of God (Most-High!) does not include doubt (*wujūd Allāh ta’ālā lā yaḥtamilu al-shakk*). I [i.e., al-Rāzī] say: There are people who say that before the arrival of clear proofs, human nature (*fiṭra*) bears witness to the existence of the choosing creator.¹⁰⁸³

¹⁰⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 246.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 246.

¹⁰⁸¹ Al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥṣīn*; vol. 19, p. 92.

¹⁰⁸² Ibid., pp. 92-93.

¹⁰⁸³ Ibid., p. 93.

We can infer from the aforementioned that expressing doubts about God is not intended by al-Rāzī as referring to doubts that God, the object of worship, actually exists and is real, so to say, as the context provided by al-Rāzī himself clarifies. The same must be true for the expression ‘doubt about God’s existence.’ It is noteworthy that al-Rāzī sees al-Zamakhsharī’s statement that ‘the existence of God (Most-High!) does not include doubt’ as being related to the almost self-evident nature of the knowledge that the world is God’s creation. ‘Doubting God’ and ‘doubt about God’s existence,’ it hence appears, has to do with expressing doubt about what cannot reasonably be declared untrue of God: that He alone is creator, that He sends messengers and that none but He is worthy of worship. Returning to the account of the king whose heart felt ‘doubt about the existence of God,’ we may now draw a parallel to al-Rāzī’s explanation in the *Tafsīr*: The king doubted that the world is God’s creation as is evident from the conversation between him and his vizier, and it is because of this theme that al-Rāzī mentions it in the section dealing with proofs for the creator. The story of the doubting king is not concerned with the question of whether God actually exists or how His existence can be proven, and just as in the account in the *Tafsīr*, the mention of doubt about God’s existence means doubting God in what should be evident about Him.

The chapter entitled ‘On the words spoken by the greatest of all people regarding this issue’ where the story of the doubting king appears is, however, not the only chapter where al-Rāzī’s mentioning God’s existence makes us sit up and take notice. It is followed by a chapter with the title ‘On the enumeration of the proofs which the different classes of people in this world mentioned.’¹⁰⁸⁴ It begins with al-Rāzī noting that throughout history different people followed different methods ‘to affirm the knowledge of God (Most-High!).’¹⁰⁸⁵ They can be divided in three classes: those who enquire into the beliefs of nations long gone;¹⁰⁸⁶ those associated with Sufi practices;¹⁰⁸⁷ and finally the ordinary people in this world.¹⁰⁸⁸

¹⁰⁸⁴ Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 249.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 249.

¹⁰⁸⁶ ‘*al-‘ulamā’ al-bāḥithūna ‘an tawārīkh ahl al-dunyā wa-ma‘rifa al-aḥwāl al-māḍiya min aḥwāl hādha al-‘ālam*’ (p. 249).

In their endeavour to 'affirm the creator (*al-ilāh*) for this world,'¹⁰⁸⁹ the first group holds that 'enquiry into the history of the people of this world shows that there was never a group worth mentioning who denied the existence of God (Most-High!) (*yankirūna wujūd Allāh*) and all their disagreement concerned was the [divine] attributes.'¹⁰⁹⁰ All people, al-Rāzī carries on, acknowledged an arranger (*shay' yudabbiru*) for this world. This is true for Muslims, Christians and Jews who obviously 'acknowledge (*mu'tarifūna*) the existence of God (Most-High!),'¹⁰⁹¹ but also for the Zoroastrians (*al-majūs*).¹⁰⁹² All these groups, who have in common that they affirm prophecy, agree upon 'the affirmation of the existence of God (Most-High!).'¹⁰⁹³ Those people, on the other hand, who did not believe that God sends messengers, nevertheless were unanimous about 'the affirmation of the existence of the creator'¹⁰⁹⁴ as well. Al-Rāzī mentions the Arabs who lived before the arrival of Islam (*ahl al-jāhiliyya*) and explains that their affirmation of it is evident from the Qur'ānic verses {If you [Prophet] ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they are sure to answer, 'God,'}¹⁰⁹⁵ and {Can there be any doubt about God, the Creator of the heavens and the earth?}¹⁰⁹⁶ which is the very same verse we discussed previously in connection with al-Rāzī's account of the doubting king. Al-Rāzī furthermore mentions the Indians among those who 'affirm the existence of the creator'¹⁰⁹⁷ as well as Negroes (*al-zanūj*), the Turks, the Chinese, the Byzantines, the Berbers and the Greeks.¹⁰⁹⁸ This investigation leads al-Rāzī to conclude that, 'if one human should have a suspicion or doubt about the existence of the creator, then it has

¹⁰⁸⁷ 'aṣḥāb al-riyāḍāt wa-arbāb al-mukāshafāt' (p. 254).

¹⁰⁸⁸ 'ṭawā'if ahl al-'ālam al-ladhīna ḥaṣalat lahum 'uqūl kāmila...illā annahum lam yashtaghilū bi-ṭalb al-'ulūm al-daḳīqa' (p. 272).

¹⁰⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 249.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 249.

¹⁰⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 249-250.

¹⁰⁹² Ibid., pp. 250-251.

¹⁰⁹³ Ibid., p. 251.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 251.

¹⁰⁹⁵ This is Q. 39.38.

¹⁰⁹⁶ This is Q. 14.10.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 251.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 251-252.

to be that this doubt and suspicion occur due to the insufficiency of his reason and understanding, but not due to the non-existence of what is sought.’¹⁰⁹⁹

With regards the second class of people, those who are associated with Sufism, as well as the third class, the ordinary people who have sound minds but do not engage with sciences, it shall suffice to point out that al-Rāzī solely mentions their ways of affirming the creator, but leaves the existence of God entirely unmentioned.¹¹⁰⁰

If we now want to answer the question of which role al-Rāzī’s mentioning ‘the existence of God’ plays in this context, we need to bear a few points in mind: Firstly, it is notable that al-Rāzī introduces the whole passage as being concerned with the methods of each of the three groups to gain ‘knowledge of God.’ We have come across this phrase multiple times and have seen that in every single instance, it referred to attaining knowledge about God’s essence, attributes and acts. It is safe to assume that here al-Rāzī does not mean anything else. Secondly, it should be kept in mind that the chapter appears as part of the main section entitled ‘On detailing the proofs for the existence of the eternal creator’¹¹⁰¹ and must hence be concerned with precisely this question. Except for the three instances in the section on the first class of people, and among them those who affirm prophecy, al-Rāzī nowhere mentions ‘the existence of God.’ And in the instance he mentions ‘the existence of God,’ this appears under the heading, so to speak, of their approach to ‘affirming the creator for this world.’ Thirdly, as for the instances where he mentions God’s existence, they

¹⁰⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 252. Note that al-Rāzī ends the whole section by concluding: ‘So this is what points to the proofs, derived from the knowledge about history, for the existence of the creator for this world’ (p. 254).

¹¹⁰⁰ With regards to the second group, al-Rāzī once more refers to Q. 29.65 which reads: {Whenever they go on board a ship they call on God, and dedicate their faith to Him alone, but once He has delivered them safely back to land, see how they ascribe partners to Him.} We have seen before how al-Rāzī associates this verse in his *Tafsīr* with people’s failure to acknowledge only God as creator and to offer gratitude to Him alone. In the *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī now mentions this very verse in connection with the second group who maintain that some people are persistent in their ‘denial of the creator, the arranger (*naḥī al-ilāh al-mudabbir*),’ yet in times of hardship they become aware of their ‘subordination to the creator of the world,’ only to eventually return to their doubts (p. 271). As for the third group, al-Rāzī states that their affirmation of the choosing creator comes close to being a precaution (*aqrab ilā al-iḥtiyāt*) against denying him. Affirming the creator is wiser than not to. Al-Rāzī thereby restates his ‘wager’ which we have discussed (in a footnote) at the end of the section on the *Tafsīr* (p. 272).

¹¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 237.

pertain to the general remark attributed by al-Rāzī to the historians that all people throughout history affirmed God's existence and that this is particularly and obviously true of those groups who affirmed prophecy. It now appears that what al-Rāzī here means by 'the existence of God' is really nothing else than the belief that God exists. He seems to want to stress that all nations believed in divinity, their disagreement as to God's nature (i.e., attributes) left aside. A reading of al-Rāzī's mentioning 'God's existence' in this context in analogy to the way he used it in the *Tafsīr* – where 'God's existence does not comprise doubt' meant that God cannot be doubted in what He reveals or what the messengers say about Him – does not seem convincing here: It would be contradictory if al-Rāzī counted those who deny prophecy among those who affirm God's existence in the sense that they do not doubt Him and His words. In general, however, we have to keep in mind that al-Rāzī is concerned with the enquiry into different *methods* to gain knowledge of God. The method according to all three groups appears as reasoning which establishes God as creator. Therefore, even if it should be true that in this chapter al-Rāzī for the first time mentions the issue of God's existence, it still has to be distinguished from what the proof of the creator seeks to establish and the proof of God's existence (in the traditional sense) remains absent from al-Rāzī's endeavour. Very much in line with the *mutakallimūn's* own approach in their theological works, al-Rāzī here presents God's existence as a fact undisputed among all people and nations, and solely focuses on how different groups throughout history sought to gain knowledge about God in terms of His attributes.

God the Creator – An Agent or Necessary Cause?

Our examination of al-Rāzī's discussions pertaining to the affirmation of the creator in four of his works shed light on the essential role the proof of God's being originator of the entire world played in his thought. In this respect, al-Rāzī's works are not distinct from the *kalām* works of his predecessors; yet, we recall that many *mutakallimūn*, with a view to the philosophers' conception of God, were eager to stress that God is cause of the world in a specific way. The major part of al-Juwaynī's affirmation of the creator in his *al-Irshād*, for example, is not so much concerned with establishing the link between the world and God

as its *mukhaṣṣiṣ* as with clarifying the nature of this *mukhaṣṣiṣ*. Al-Juwaynī presented the three alternatives that God could be ‘one who necessitates (*mūjib*) the realisation of the origination in the same manner as the ‘illa which necessitates (*mūjiba*) its effect’ or ‘a nature (*ṭabī‘a*) as the naturalists (*ṭabā‘i‘iyyūn*) assume’ or finally ‘a choosing agent (*fā‘il mukhtār*).’¹¹⁰² Other *mutakallimūn*, such as al-Malāḥimī in his *al-Mu‘tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn*¹¹⁰³ and al-Ghazālī in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*,¹¹⁰⁴ likewise made choice and will an essential part of their notion of God as creator. How, then, does al-Rāzī approach this aspect of the proof of the creator? Unlike in the case of al-Juwaynī, to clearly define the concept of the creator, and in particular to distinguish it from the philosophers’ notion (as viewed by the theologians) of God as necessitating cause bereft of will, does not seem to play a major role for al-Rāzī in his proof of the creator. In the section on the affirmation of the creator in the *Ishāra*, al-Rāzī uses the terms *ṣānī‘*, *sabab* and *muqtaḍin*¹¹⁰⁵ interchangeably without further defining them or stating in which way God is a cause. The first time the distinction made by al-Juwaynī between a willing agent and a necessitating cause seems to come into play is where al-Rāzī begins his discussion of the hypostatic divine attributes. There, the idea of God being a necessary, essential cause is rejected and made the basis of the affirmation of the attribute of power.¹¹⁰⁶ The same discussion also contains a much later section entitled ‘On the impossibility that He (Most-High!) causes essentially (*mūjib bi’l-dhāt*)’¹¹⁰⁷ which constitutes a proper refutation of the philosophers. In the *Arba‘īn*, al-Rāzī also employs a host of terms to describe God in His role as creator, such as *ṣānī‘*,¹¹⁰⁸ *mu‘aththir*,¹¹⁰⁹ *mukhaṣṣiṣ*,¹¹¹⁰ *murajjiḥ*¹¹¹¹ and *muḥdith*,¹¹¹² but only

¹¹⁰² Al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, p. 28.

¹¹⁰³ Al-Malāḥimī, *al-Mu‘tamad*, p. 83: ‘(Firstly,) the influence coming from an influencer according to choice, and this is the act (*fī‘l*), (and secondly,) an influence coming from a necessitating influencer, which is the *ḥukm* of the ‘illa or the *musabbab* of the *sabab*. We will now clarify that His essence is not one that necessitates, like an ‘illa or *sabab*.’

¹¹⁰⁴ See Chapter Three which deals with the philosophers and theologians’ respective notions of the terms *fā‘il*/agent and *ṣānī‘*/creator. Al-Ghazālī maintains: ‘The agent is not called *fā‘il* and *ṣānī‘* because he is a cause (*sabab*), only, rather because he is a cause in a specific way, namely due to will and choice’ (*Tahāfut* 1927, p. 97).

¹¹⁰⁵ Al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, p. 75.

¹¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 108 and p. 110: ‘*lam takun mūjidiyyatuhu li-dhātihi*’.

¹¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 161.

¹¹⁰⁸ Al-Rāzī, *al-Arba‘īn*, vol. 1, p. 101.

¹¹⁰⁹ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 101.

¹¹¹⁰ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 121.

deals with the concepts of a necessary cause (*al-'illa al-mūjiba*¹¹¹³ and *mūjib bi'l-dhāt*¹¹¹⁴) and a powerful, choosing agent (*qādir fā'il mukhtar*)¹¹¹⁵ in his discussion of the first of God's hypostatic attributes, His being powerful. The many chapters in the *Maṭālib* concerned with the proof of the creator are no real exception from this rule. Whether al-Rāzī makes use of the term *ilāh* or *fā'il* or *ṣāni'*, he does not engage in defining them – except for in two instances, as it appears: One of them is where he presents the reasoning on the basis of the possibility of the attributes.¹¹¹⁶ There he states, after having affirmed a *mu'aththir* for the world, that the *mutakallimūn* would continue asking whether this *mu'aththir* is one who causes necessarily due to the nature of his essence (*mūjib bi'l-dhāt*) or an agent endowed with choice (*fā'il bi'l-ikhtiyār*). Ruling out the first option, al-Rāzī is led to conclude 'that the creator (*ilāh*) of the world is...a choosing agent and not a necessitating cause.'¹¹¹⁷ The other instance is in the section discussed above where al-Rāzī divides those who seek knowledge about God into three classes.¹¹¹⁸ There, he presents the 'wager' we already encountered in the *Tafsīr* which states: 'Either this world has a creator (*ilāh*) or not... Then we say: Either the creator of this world is a choosing agent (*fā'ilan mukhtāran*) or not...'¹¹¹⁹ Other than these two instances, it is once more only in his discussion of the hypostatic divine attributes, and the attribute of power in particular, that al-Rāzī objects to the notion of God being a necessary cause (*mūjib bi'l-dhāt*)¹¹²⁰ and defends His being a choosing agent (*fā'il mukhtār*).¹¹²¹

It would surely be wrong to conclude that to specify the way in which God is the world's cause is not of importance to al-Rāzī since it does not play an essential role in the sections on the affirmation of the creator. After all, in all of his works

¹¹¹¹ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 121.

¹¹¹² Ibid., vol. 1, p. 124.

¹¹¹³ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 180.

¹¹¹⁴ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 182.

¹¹¹⁵ Ibid., vol. 1, p. 183.

¹¹¹⁶ Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, p. 184.

¹¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 186.

¹¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 249 et seqq.: 'On the enumeration of the proofs mentioned by different classes of people.'

¹¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. 272. Compare the 'wager' in the *Tafsīr*: 'Firstly, the affirmation of the existence of the creator (*al-ilāh*) is very wise... Secondly, the affirmation of his being a choosing agent (*fā'ilan mukhtār*) (is very wise) because if he was a necessary cause (*mūjiban*)...' (vol. 19, p. 75).

¹¹²⁰ Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 2, part 3, p. 86.

¹¹²¹ Ibid., p. 89.

he does make the point elsewhere that God is an agent endowed with will, power and choice. Nevertheless, it seems justified to conclude that the focus of al-Rāzī's proof for the creator has shifted – away from what was al-Juwaynī's major concern, that is, God's nature as cause, to the more underlying proof that the world actually depends on another, namely God, for its existence.

Conclusions

It is evident from the four works written by al-Rāzī we considered in this chapter that he understands the message of Islam and the Qur'ān as being addressed to people who were very much embedded in a world where divinity had its established place, yet who failed when it comes to the correct way of approaching the divine. It is in this very context that al-Rāzī introduces his discussions of the proofs for the (existence of the) creator, which in secondary literature is portrayed as being concerned with proving that God exists. Al-Rāzī's many references to the prophets sent by God revealed that he links the proof of the creator to the endeavour to show that only Allah (God) is creator and that only He is therefore deserving of worship. Neither the celestial bodies worshipped by Abraham's people nor the many associates ascribed to Allah by the people of Muḥammad's time are creators and hence are not deserving of worship. In this context, the proof of the creator has the function of a proof for *tawḥīd*, not however for the existence of God. The endeavour of theology is presented by al-Rāzī in essentially the same light and with the same purpose: It seeks to make God know in terms of His essence and attributes, yet it does so because the knowledge of God's uniqueness is a prerequisite for worship of Him. Only once humans know that God's essence is unique – and this means that God's essence is completely different from the essences that belong to created things – they know that only God is worthy of worship, obedience and gratitude. Al-Rāzī also made the point that a number of other disciplines, such as jurisprudence and Qur'ānic exegesis, rest and depend on the knowledge of God's being creator. In order to achieve this, the theologian makes use of the very same method already employed by the prophets referred to in the Qur'ān, which al-Rāzī refers to as the proof of the creator: Knowledge of God's essence and attributes is attained on the basis of His role as creator of the world, since

the characteristics of creation point to the characteristics of the entity which is its creator. Theology seeks nothing else than what all prophets sought, and in this particular quest, the proof of God's existence in its traditional form is simply of no concern.

Since it became evident that al-Rāzī's concerns resemble those of the very first theologians, such as al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, and philosophers, such as al-Kindī, as well as of those who came after them, we must therefore conclude the following: The philosophico-theological discourse which is concerned with the proof of God's being sole creator and a unique entity did not change in essence, even if it is the case, as we have seen, that the terminology as well as arguments and methods employed changed and were developed over time.¹¹²²

¹¹²² Hassan Wassouf (2005, p. 123) has also pointed out, with reference to the *Arbaʿīn*, how al-Rāzī makes use of philosophical terminology in his proofs of the originatedness of the world and his discussion of God's nature (by Wassouf understood as al-Rāzī's proof of the existence of God ('Gottesbeweis', p. 120): 'Er ist schließlich aber auch der Versuch einer Harmonisierung zweier eigentlich inkompatibler Weltkonzepte: Das Konzept der islamischen Philosophen von einem Gott, der reiner *wuġūd* ist...und das Konzept des *kalām*, in dem ein personaler Schöpfergott [angenommen wird]... Er zeigt somit, wie verlockend das philosophische Vokabular für einen *mutakallim* des 12. Jahrhunderts war'.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this thesis, we posed the question of whether it really is the case, as often argued in the secondary academic literature, that medieval Islamic theologians and philosophers sought to prove God's existence. Having investigated a number of important *mutakallimūn* and philosophers of the classical era, we have alluded to certain indications that suggest that the discourse these scholars participated in has indeed been misconstrued: Their discussions surrounding the originatedness versus eternity of the world and the affirmation of the creator were not concerned, as it has been argued, with the proof and provability of God's existence, in the sense traditionally associated with arguments for God's existence. The proof of God's existence, in this sense, is in fact absent from their works. Rather, the discourse these scholars participated in was a discourse on the question of in which way the world is creation and God its creator, inspired by the manifold Qur'ānic verses stating {God is the Creator of all things}¹¹²³ and the like. Their main concern was, therefore, to defend the truth of Scripture. This pursuit did not only involve the refutation of those who assumed that the world simply is, independent of another, or came about by chance, thus clearly contradicting the Qur'ān. It also meant that each group would defend their particular understanding of what Scripture meant when it states that God created everything. This latter aspect became most apparent in the different accounts *mutakallimūn* and philosophers presented of the mode of God's creation of the world: The *mutakallimūn* understood the Qur'ānic account of creation as denoting that the world was created *ex nihilo* (rather than formed from pre-eternal prime matter) and after a state of affairs where only God existed, but not the world. The philosophers interpreted the Qur'ānic pronouncements as indicating that creation itself has no first beginning and that the world existed eternally with and through God.

Medieval Islamic scholars sought to prove that God really is the one who brought the world into existence not only in order to confirm Scripture's position in this regard, but also because they argued, following the Qur'ānic

¹¹²³ This is Q. 39.62.

reasoning, that it is through God's role as creator that His sole worthiness of worship is explained. They sometimes expressed this as *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya* (God's oneness as creator) and *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* (God's uniqueness in being deserving of worship). The affirmation of God's oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*), so central to the Qur'ānic message, also includes, in the eyes of the *mutakallimūn* and philosophers, God's nature. As in the case of their discussion of the mode of creation, their investigation of God's nature was precipitated by certain Qur'ānic pronouncements, in particular the declaration that {There is nothing like Him (*laysa ka-mithlihi shay'*)}.¹¹²⁴ To the exclusion of Ibn Sīnā, all scholars we discussed held that the only method of gaining knowledge of God's nature (so as to confirm what the Qur'ān says about Him) is through His role as creator. The characteristics of creation, they argued, are indicative of the characteristics of its agent – this being the so-called analogy between the *shāhid*, the observable realm, and the *ghā'ib*, the unobservable realm. Ibn Sīnā for his part argued that true knowledge of God's nature is attained by considering God alone (i.e., insofar as He is pure existence and the necessarily existent due to essence). This is where the later theologians and philosophers – Ibn Sīnā, al-Juwaynī, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd and al-Rāzī – began to speak of affirming or proving 'God's existence'; the difference between God and creation became now expressed in terms of the difference between His type of existence and their existence, clearly under the influence of Ibn Sīnā's identification of metaphysics' subject matter as existence qua existence and its consequences. We showed that they did not mean by this phrase what is meant by it when speaking about classical cosmological, teleological or ontological arguments for God's existence, despite the claim to the contrary in much of the secondary academic literature; rather, their proof and affirmation of God's existence always referred to the classification of God's particular kind of existence, a sense in which it does not appear primarily in the aforementioned classical arguments. If God is unlike creation, as the Qur'ān states, He must be transcendent and incorporeal, these scholars argued, even if the anthropomorphists (*mujassima*) maintained the opposite. Yet, is God to be considered an existent at all, if He does not resemble created existents in any way, certain philosophers and the *bāṭiniyya* demanded.

¹¹²⁴ This is Q. 42.11.

And how does existence in God relate to His essence, especially in comparison to the other divine attributes?

Our discussion of the earliest Islamic theologians and philosophers, such as al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm and al-Kindī, as well as of their successors of later generations, up until Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, showed that it is these aspects and questions which inexorably characterise the discourse in which they participated. The all-important aspect of confirming Scripture was most evident in al-Qāsim whose *Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr* is almost entirely based on Qur'ānic verses speaking about God's role as creator. Al-Qāsim already employed the Qur'ānic reasoning that creation points to God's being creator and allows the inference of the divine attributes and characteristics from the attributes and characteristics of creation. Al-Kindī, Islam's first philosopher, shared these concerns, but he very much drew on methods and ideas associated with Greek philosophy. For example, his proof of God's being creator did not require the premise of the world's origin in time, so characteristic of the *mutakallimūn*; instead he interpreted God's role as creator in terms of His being the bestower of oneness. Certain notions, which should come to underlie the arguments used by later theologians and philosophers in this discourse, can already be found in al-Qāsim and his fellow Mu'tazilites. This includes the notions of particularisation (*ikhtiṣāṣ*, *takhṣīs*) and change (*taghayyur*) (this forming the basis of the atomistic worldview of the Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite *mutakallimūn*), which all have a Qur'ānic origin. The treatment of these very same questions on the part of later *mutakallimūn*, starting with al-Māturīdī, appeared in a much more systematised way, so characteristic of *kalām*. Unlike in al-Qāsim, their discussions are mainly based on rational argumentation without much direct reference to the Qur'ān. Yet, the spirit of the Qur'ān is still discernable, for example, in the arrangement of chapters, later having become the standard, where the originatedness of the world is made the premise for the inference that God is its creator. These later scholars, such as Ibn Rushd and al-Rāzī, would present a synthesis of speculative arguments, often based on atomism and employing the aforementioned notions of particularisation as well as permissibility (*imkān*, *jawāz*) and necessity (*wujūb*), and the Qur'ānic arguments pointing to God's

role as creator, such as the argument from the development of humans from sperm.

Already in al-Māturīdī and in al-Bāqillānī it became apparent that the confirmation of Scripture meant more than just the proof that God brought about the world at all. It also meant to disprove the validity of beliefs considered contrary to the way each scholar understood the mode of creation. Al-Māturīdī represents one of the earliest instances of a theologian discussing the issue of the notion of God as cause. He was eager to refute the view that God is a necessary cause due to His nature, often ascribed to the philosophers, which should become a standard element in the theologians' defence of the notion of the creator who brings into existence due to will and choice. In al-Juwaynī, the affirmation of the way in which God is the cause of the world took precedence over the all-important affirmation of the principle of causation itself. Under the influence of philosophy, al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī later adopted certain terminology, originally rejected by the *mutakallimūn* as not apt to describe God in His role as creator. Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd exemplified how the philosophers employed the very same terminology used by the theologians, which was of course oftentimes of a Qur'ānic origin, but how they associated their very own interpretation of the mode of creation and God's being creator with these terms. Ibn Sīnā criticised the *mutakallimūn* for their method of inferring God's attribute of being creator from the premise that the world has a first beginning for its existence. Had they considered God Himself, rather than creation, they would have been able to grasp the true meaning of Scripture's account of creation, which is eternal emanation. Interestingly, al-Juwaynī has to be singled out among the *mutakallimūn* as he, too, presented an argument establishing the way in which the world is creation (i.e., temporally originated) based on the consideration of God's nature as a willing, choosing agent.

Why is it then that the proof of God's existence, in the traditional sense, is absent from the works of medieval Islamic theologians and philosophers? As noted in the Introduction, the answer to this question is a difficult one, and one needs to be careful not to slip into assumptions. From the textual evidence we can infer two things: firstly, not only are proofs for God's existence not to be

found in the works we examined, but their authors do not provide us with any explicit statement either, explaining why, or acknowledging that, these arguments are not part of their discourses. They are simply silent on this point. Secondly, from the issues they actually do discuss we can infer what questions concerned them and why. We have seen how all theologians and philosophers alike, whom we included in our survey, shared the primary concern of proving one of the key tenets of the Qur'ān: it is God who has created everything. This point, as well as all other related discussion, do therefore have their starting point in the Qur'ān, something both theologians and philosophers variously noted. This tells us that they did not conceive of the Qur'ān itself as being concerned with the proof of God's existence, nor that their discussions of the proof of the creator and the like actually deviated from what they identified as the Qur'ān's concern in this respect. Furthermore, we have pointed out that the way in which these scholars perceived the audiences for whom they wrote indicates that the question of the provability and proof of God's existence was not considered in need of discussion. This statement, however, already seems to assume too much: the textual evidence does in fact not even allow us the conclusion that they thought there was no need to discuss this question; this seems to imply that they were aware of it in the first place. Yet, how can this be established if the texts we examined are completely silent on this issue?! All we can say, based on the textual evidence considered, is that classical Islamic theology and metaphysics do not include the proof and provability of God's existence.

Let us then conclude with the following remark: It is in fact not that astonishing that the purpose of the arguments employed by the aforementioned theologians and philosophers has been misunderstood, as it seems, in the secondary academic literature. After all, not only the reasoning these arguments follow, but also the terminology employed seems to clearly indicate that their concern is the proof of God's existence – God's existence in the sense in which it is used in classical cosmological or other arguments for God's existence. Who would deny that such phrases as 'the proof that the world has a creator,' 'the affirmation of the creator for creation' or 'the proof of the existence of the

creator' immediately bring to mind a cosmological argument for God's existence? This impression is even more reinforced when we read about the endeavour on the part of theologians and philosophers to prove 'God's existence' or when al-Rāzī speaks of 'the affirmation of the knowledge of the *ilāh* (Most-High!),' considering that the term *ilāh* is commonly taken to denote the deity. Moreover, if one does not take into account the broader context in which these discussions take place and if one is not careful to investigate the sense in which certain terminology was used, it is easy to be misled and to fail to see the purpose of these discussions. This became most evident in the use and meaning of the two phrases 'the proof for the creator' and 'the proof for God's existence', which turned out to denote entirely different things depending on whether they are used in the context of a traditional proof of God's existence (in particular cosmological arguments) or whether they were part of a discourse about God's role as creator and His nature. In particular when approaching these Islamic arguments with the workings of traditional cosmological arguments for God's existence in mind, it is difficult not to be lead somewhat astray. In cosmological arguments, as is known, the proof that God exists is the proof that there is a cause or creator for this world. In Kukkonen's words: 'that we have a...maker...means that we have a God.'¹¹²⁵ Yet, in the Islamic arguments this is not the case, as we have shown, and it is definitely not intended by their proponents. We recall al-Rāzī, to name only one example, who stated that 'the non-existence of the effect must be due to the non-existence of the cause'.¹¹²⁶ We noted that al-Rāzī uttered these words in reference to the non-existent world before God brought it about, and we explained that, in this context, 'the non-existence of the cause' does, of course, not mean God's non-existence but His not being a cause. Therefore, unlike in traditional cosmological arguments, our theologians and philosophers did not extend the question of whether the created world exists due to a creator to the question of whether this does or could prove that God really does exist. They had a different concern, as we have shown.

¹¹²⁵ Kukkonen 2002, pp. 406-407.

¹¹²⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Ma'ālim uṣūl al-dīn*, p. 56.

It should lastly be noted that all the arguments we have encountered in the works of medieval Islamic theologians and philosophers, spanning from the range of constructs in al-Qāsim to al-Rāzī, could, of course, be utilised by someone seeking to prove God's existence. It has become clear on multiple occasions that these classical Islamic arguments resemble traditional arguments for God's existence in many ways in terms of their structure. Also, as stressed in the Introduction, one and the same argument can be used to prove two separate things: on the one hand, that God has the attribute of being creator, as our theologians and philosophers intended to show, when they used a particular effect (the created world) so as to be pointed to the one entity that is identified as its cause (God); on the other hand, that God must exist since the world has a cause, as argued in the traditional arguments for God's existence, where the existence of the cause is inferred from the existence of the effect and its need for a cause. It would surely be worth dedicating further research to the question at what point Islamic theologians and philosophers entered into a new discourse, this being the discourse on arguments for the existence of God. It would particularly be interesting to investigate the reasons for a possible change of discourse, whether they lie within the Muslim tradition itself or whether any influences from the outside, that is, Muslim scholars' engagement with other faiths, for instance, can be pointed to. Moreover, our findings have further implications for the way academic scholarship has viewed arguments for God's existence in western philosophy. For example, our suggestion that neither al-Kindī, nor Ibn Sīnā, nor Ibn Rushd attempted to formulate a proof for God's existence, in the sense used in traditional arguments for God's existence, but that they at the same time saw themselves, to some extent, in the tradition of Greek philosophy raises questions about the role of these proofs in Greek philosophy itself. If our findings are accepted, one may ask: does al-Kindī, Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd's understanding of philosophers such as Aristotle indicate to us how their arguments should be read? Or does their understanding simply represent how classical Islamic scholars adopted certain aspects from Greek philosophy for their own purposes, while neglecting others – for instance, the endeavour to prove on rational grounds that God exists.

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Appendix

Figure 1

Ibn Sīnā's own example of the *dalīl*:

Major premise	This tree (Major term)	is burnt.	← Effect
Minor premise	Everything burnt (Middle term)	was touched by fire. (Minor term)	← Cause
Conclusion	This tree	was touched by fire.	

Figure 2

Davidson's own version of the *dalīl*:

Major premise	Possibly existent beings (Major term)	are traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself.	← Effect
Minor premise	Something exists (Middle term)	which is possibly existent by virtue of itself. (Minor term)	← Cause
Conclusion	Something exists	which is traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself.	

Figure 3

Davidson's *dalīl* rearranged according to Ibn Sīnā's structure:

Major premise	Something exists (Major term)	which is possibly existent by virtue of itself.	← Effect
Minor premise	Possibly existent beings (Middle term)	are traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself. (Minor term)	← Cause
Conclusion	Something exists	which is traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself.	

Figure 4

The ten points of the investigation of God's essence in al-Ghazālī's *Iqtiṣād*, the first one being His existence:

القطب الأول: النظر في ذات الله تعالى.

الدعوى الأولى: وجوده تعالى وتقدس

الدعوى الثانية: ندعي أن السبب الذي أثبتناه لوجود العالم قديم

الدعوى الثالثة: ندعي أن صانع العالم مع كونه موجوداً لم يزل

الدعوى الرابعة: ندعي أن صانع العالم ليس بجوهر متحيز

الدعوى الخامسة: ندعي أن صانع العالم ليس بجسم

الدعوى السادسة: ندعي أن صانع العالم ليس بعرض

الدعوى السابعة: ندعي أنه ليس في جهة مخصوصة من الجهات الست

الدعوى الثامنة: ندعي أن الله تعالى منزّه

الدعوى التاسعة: ندعي أن الله سبحانه وتعالى مرئي

الدعوى العاشرة: ندعي أنه سبحانه واحد.