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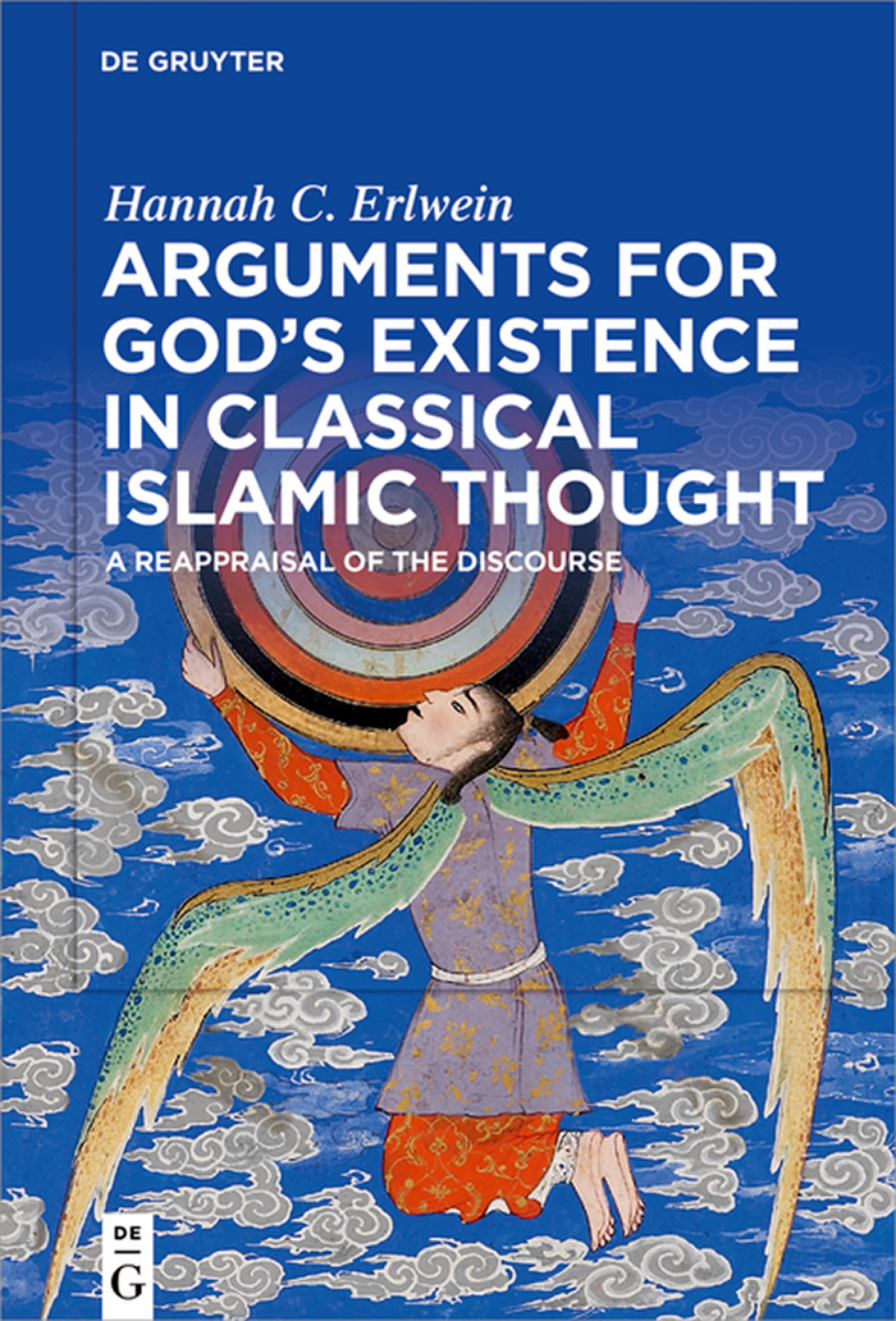
Hannah C. Erlwein

ARGUMENTS FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE IN CLASSICAL ISLAMIC THOUGHT

A REAPPRAISAL OF THE DISCOURSE



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ISBN 978-3-11-061764-1
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-061956-0
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-061791-7

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019937687.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.

Cover image: EA1978.2573 Zakariya ibn Muhammad al-Qazwini, 'The angel Ruh holding the celestial spheres'.
Image © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.
Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

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Acknowledgements

This book grew out of my doctoral research on arguments for God's existence in the classical Islamic tradition conducted at SOAS University of London. First and foremost I am indebted to express my gratitude to my main supervisor Dr Mustafa Shah. With encouragement and probing questions he pointed me in the right direction and taught me what academic work means. His scholarly advice remains a guide to me. Gratitude is owed also to my other two supervisors, Prof Muhammad Abdel Haleem and Prof Stephan Sperl, who—during and after my PhD—did a lot to encourage me in my academic work.

Dr Tony Street and Dr Jan-Peter Hartung, the examiners of my PhD thesis, shall be thanked as well. Their comments and suggestions were insightful and helped me improve the presentation of my ideas.

I also wish to thank the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council) for the scholarship I received, which helped facilitate my doctoral research.

Thanks are due to Prof Peter Adamson who encouraged me to turn my PhD thesis into a book during my time as a postdoctoral researcher at LMU Munich. Being invited to present a paper on the research topic of this book at a workshop organised by him was a welcome opportunity and allowed me to flesh out my argument.

I wish to express my thanks also to Dorothea Köhler, Sophie Wagenhofer, and especially Alice Meroz of De Gruyter whose very friendly and professional manner facilitated the publication of this book.

There have been numerous people along the way leading to the publication of this book whose support and presence in my life means a lot to me. Some of them had to endure months and years of my thinking out loud about Islamic theologians and philosophers. I wish to thank them.

Above all, I am grateful to my parents. In so many ways. To them I dedicate this book.

ولواهب العقل والحكمة الحمد كثيرا دائما

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-001

1 Introduction

The endeavour to prove the existence of God through reason and rational argumentation was an integral part of medieval Islamic theology (*kalām*) and philosophy (*falsafa*), it has often been argued in the secondary academic literature. "Both *kalām* exponents and philosophers showed a keen interest in advancing arguments for the existence of God [...] to respond to physicalist atheism [among other motives],"[1] Ayman Shihadeh notes in his chapter "The existence of God" in the *Cambridge Companion to Islamic Theology*. In her monograph *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam*, Sarah Stroumsa notes, in similar fashion, that "[a] significant part of *kalām* works, written by Muslim [...] theologians, is dedicated to the attempt to prove that God does exist," adding that "[i]n theological *summae* this discussion [is] presented as the cornerstone of religious thought."[2] In past decades, numerous academic articles have been published which identify and analyse arguments for God's existence in the works of medieval Islamic thinkers. After Majid Fakhry's 1957 introductory article "The Classical Islamic Arguments for the Existence of God,"[3] Lenn E. Goodman discussed "Al-Ghazālī's Argument from Creation. (I) & (II)" (1971),[4] while Michael E. Marmura examined "Avicenna's Proof from Contingency for God's Existence" (1980).[5] In 1986, Binyamin Abrahamov proffered an analysis of "al-Kāsim ibn Ibrāhīm's Argument from Design,"[6] and Taneli Kukkonen discussed "Averroes and the Teleological Argument" in 2002.[7] A plenitude of other similar article titles could be mentioned. Mention should finally be made of Herbert A. Davidson's 1987 monograph, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jew-*

1 Ayman Shihadeh, "The Existence of God," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. T. Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 197–217, at 197.

2 Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 1999), 1.

3 Majid Fakhry, "The Classical Islamic Arguments for the Existence of God," *The Muslim World* 47/2 (1957): 133–145.

4 Lenn E. Goodman, "Al-Ghazālī's Argument from Creation. (I)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2/1 (1971): 67–85; "Al-Ghazālī's Argument from Creation. (II)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2/2 (1971): 168–188.

5 Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's Proof from Contingency for God's Existence in the Metaphysics of the *Shifāʾ*," *Mediaeval Studies* 42/1 (1980): 337–352.

6 Binyamin Abrahamov, "al-Kāsim ibn Ibrāhīm's Argument from Design," *Oriens* 29/30 (1986): 259–284.

7 Taneli Kukkonen, "Averroes and the Teleological Argument," *Religious Studies* 38/4 (2002): 405–428.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-002

ish Philosophy, the only monograph dedicated to this subject.[8] His detailed discussion opens with the remark that "[v]arious procedures for proving the existence of God are [...] discernible in medieval Islamic [...] philosophy,"[9] thus underscoring the role these proofs played in Muslim intellectual history.

* * *

In the secondary academic literature, the medieval Islamic discourse[10] on arguments for God's existence is then frequently linked to the discourse on arguments for God's existence found in the Western tradition.[11] These two discourses with their evident similarities did not merely happen to exist side by side, rather, it has been emphasised, they had a mutual influence on each other: the Islamic discourse first took its inspiration from Greek philosophical thinking and later came to shape the European philosophical tradition in turn. Davidson observes in this regard that "[t]he starting point both for the history of the [Islamic] proofs and the history of their components is, with rare exceptions, Aristotle. [...] The direction in which the Aristotelian conceptions developed in the Middle Ages was, however, often determined by the late Greek philosophers [...] [such as] Proclus (5th century) and, in greater measure, John Philoponus (6th century)."[12] With a view to the *mutakallimūn* in particular, Davidson observes that they "followed what has been called the Platonic procedure [for proving God's existence],

8 Herbert A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

9 Davidson, *Proofs*, 5.

10 As Sara Mills has shown in her *Discourse*, the term "discourse" has a variety of different meanings in different disciplines; Sara Mills, *Discourse*, The New Critical Idiom (London, New York: Routledge, 2004), 1–25. I use it here to express the simple notion that numerous Islamic thinkers were engaged in discussing a certain subject matter, and in contributing their own views responded to the views put forward by others, by way of the production of writings belonging to the disciplines of *kalām* and *falsafa*.

11 When speaking in the following of the Islamic "tradition" and the Western "tradition," this is not done without acknowledging the difficulty of "lumping together," as it were, varying systems of thought, forms of argumentation, and assumptions in one single "tradition." Speaking of Islamic "traditions" and Western "traditions" would arguably do more justice. Yet, in order to distinguish one discourse (namely the one Islamic theologians and philosophers engaged in) from another (namely the one associated with philosophy in the Western world), this classification is employed. See Jan-Peter Hartung, "Schulen, Netze, Traditionen: Zur Institutionalisierung von Wissen in der persophonen Welt der Frühen Neuzeit," in *Stifter und Mäzene und ihre Rolle in der Religion: Von Königen, Mönchen, Vordenkern und Laien in Indien, China und anderen Kulturen*, ed. Barbara Schuler (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2013), 135–147, on the question of what constitutes a "school of thought."

12 Davidson, *Proofs*, 7.

that is, the procedure of first proving the creation of the world and then inferring therefrom the existence of a creator,"[13] thus taking their inspiration from Plato's (427–347) *Timaeus*.[14] Davidson has also drawn attention to the influence Islamic arguments for God's existence had on the same class of arguments in the Western philosophical tradition. He remarks:[15]

> [f]rom the time of Descartes, there appears a series of both cosmological and ontological proofs of the existence of God as a necessarily existent being. Although precise filiation cannot be traced, inspiration undoubtably came from the medieval cosmological proofs, initiated by Avicenna, of the existence of a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself. Descartes and, to a greater extent, Spinoza and Leibniz were after all familiar with the medieval discussions.

William Lane Craig has likewise stated that the so-called "*kalām* argument as a proof for God's existence [this being a particular version of the cosmological argument] originated in the minds of medieval Arabic theologians, who bequeathed it to the West, where it became the centre of a hotly debated controversy."[16]

Not only is the medieval Islamic discourse on arguments for God's existence frequently linked to the discourse on arguments for God's existence in the Western tradition in terms of their shared objective and mutual influences. The secondary academic literature also establishes a link between the two discourses when applying the classification of arguments primarily associated with the Western tradition to the Islamic arguments. Following Immanuel Kant's (1724–1804) classification of arguments for God's existence as cosmological, teleological, or ontological,[17] Islamic arguments are likewise placed in these categories. This has been seen in the article titles mentioned above, and becomes further evident in Davidson's evaluation that "medieval Islamic [...] arguments for the existence of God are, in the main, cosmological; teleological arguments are also found; and no argument is ontological."[18] While there is some disagreement among scholars whether ontological argument for God's existence do or do not

13 Davidson, *Proofs*, 2.

14 In particular with regards to the cosmological and the teleological arguments for God's existence it has been said that their roots lie in Greek philosophy. See C. Stephen Evans and R. Zachary Manis, *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking about Faith* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2009), 68 and 77.

15 Davidson, *Proofs*, 388.

16 William Lane Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1979), ix.

17 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, vol. 4, part 2 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1983), 526.

18 Davidson, *Proofs*, 6.

exist in the Islamic tradition,[19] the Kantian terminology to classify such arguments is unanimously accepted.

* * *

Contrary to the widely held view, described above, that medieval Islamic theologians and philosophers sought to prove that God exists, this book argues that proofs for God's existence are absent from their works. By this, I do *not* mean that there existed the endeavour to prove God's existence, yet the arguments employed are either flawed or unconvincing so that they fail in their endeavour; this book is not concerned with evaluating strengths or weaknesses of arguments, which has been the concern of many existing publications. Rather, when arguing that arguments for God's existence are absent from the works of medieval Islamic thinkers, I am referring to the *objective* of these arguments—"objective" in the sense of the conclusion they seek: what are they meant to prove? What do they seek to establish? (There is, of course, another sense of the "objective" of arguments, such as that they may be meant to convince an opponent, to baffle, or to invite to reflection; this is not the sense this book is primarily concerned with.) The central thesis of this book is that medieval Islamic theologians and philosophers did not *intend* or *seek* to prove that God exists. This implies that to identify certain arguments in their works as arguments for God's existence, as frequently done in the secondary academic literature, seems to pose a misunderstanding of what their arguments are meant to establish. This book, therefore, proffers a reappraisal of the discourse which, in the scholarly meta-discourse, has been regarded as the medieval Islamic discourse on the proof of God's existence. The chapters to follow will examine and explain what participants in this discourse sought to prove, if it is not the existence of God. In doing so, this book does not attempt a thorough comparison between the Islamic discourse in question and the Western philosophical discourse on arguments for God's existence; while such a comparative approach would certainly be interesting as well as insightful,[20] it is not the concern proper of this book, which is concerned with the

19 Toby Mayer ("Ibn Sīnā's '*Burhān al-Ṣiddīqīn*'," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12/1 (2001): 18–39, at 23) has argued that Ibn Sīnā's argument may have the characteristics of an ontological proof. So has Ian R. Netton (*Allāh Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1994), 172). The cosmological aspects of it have been stressed by Herbert A. Davidson (*Proofs*, 298), Majid Fakhry ("The Ontological Argument in the Arabic Tradition: The Case of al-Fārābi [*sic*]," *Studia Islamica* 64 (1986): 5–17, at 15), and Lenn E. Goodman (*Avicenna* (London: Routledge, 1992), 63).

20 For such a comparative approach to arguments found in the Western and the Islamic traditions, see Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroës and Aquinas* (London:

intellectual tradition of Islam exclusively. Yet, it seems appropriate, in order to put forward the thesis that arguments for God's existence are absent from the works of medieval Islamic thinkers, to clarify first what arguments for God's existence in general try to do and how the different kinds of arguments go about it. In clarifying this terminological and conceptual issue, reference needs to be made to arguments for God's existence put forward by thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition, who were undoubtedly concerned with this problem. This clarification shall serve to highlight the way in which the *objective* of their arguments differs from that of the Islamic arguments, which explains why the latter arguments are not to be identified as arguments for God's existence.

* * *

While especially in recent decades a number of different classes of arguments for God's existence have been proposed,[21] I shall limit myself to discussing the three main classes identified by Kant—the cosmological, teleological, and ontological arguments—since the Islamic arguments this book is concerned with have been, in the secondary academic literature, classified making recourse to these labels.

Notwithstanding differences in detail, the way a cosmological argument for God's existence works can be summarised as follows:[22]

> 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* [*sic*] because they attempt to infer that God must exist as the first cause or ultimate cause of the universe.

Many thinkers in the Western philosophical tradition have been credited with attempting to prove God's existence through a cosmological argument, among them Plato and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716). One much discussed ex-

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Allen & Unwin, 1958); Rahim Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation: Avicenna's and Thomas Aquina's Positions* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005); Parviz Morewedge, "Ibn Sina and Malcolm and the Ontological Argument," *The Monist* 54/2 (1970): 234–249; Samuel Nirenstein, "The Problem of the Existence of God in Maimonides, Alanus and Averroes: A Study in the Religious Philosophy of the Twelfth Century," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 14/4 (1924): 395–454.

21 Such as the moral argument for the existence of God and the argument from religious experience. See John Hick, *The Existence of God: A Reader Edited with an Introduction by John Hick* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company), 137–164.

22 Evans and Manis, *Philosophy*, 67.

ample is Thomas Aquinas' (1224/5 – 1274) famous "Five Ways" put forward in his *Summa Theologica*. There, Aquinas answers to the objection that "[i]t seems that God does not exist" and that "everything we see in this world can be accounted for by another principle, supposing God did not exist" by noting: "The existence of God can be proved in five ways." The second way, to mention but one example, starts, in a manner characteristic of cosmological arguments, from the observation that "[i]n the world of sensible things we find that there is an order of efficient causes." By ruling out that things can be their own efficient cause, and that there could be an infinite chain of efficient causes, he reaches the conclusion that "it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause [outside and in addition to the world], to which everyone gives the name of God."[23]

A teleological argument, a subcategory of the cosmological argument, aspires to prove God's existence 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* [*sic*]."[24] A famous proponents of this class of argument is William Paley (1743 – 1805). The title of his work, *Natural Theology or Evidence of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature*, indicates the nature of his argument: suppose someone were to stumble across a watch. Observing the intricate design of said watch, "the inference," Paley argues, "is inevitable; that the watch must have had a maker, that there must have existed, at some time and at some place or other, an artificer or artificers who formed it for the purpose which we find it actually to answer, who comprehended its construction, and designed its use."[25] The watch and its design serve Paley as an analogy to the world and nature, which likewise manifest evidence of design: "every indication of contrivance, every manifestation of design, which existed in the watch, exists in the world of nature."[26] This insight, Paley continues, necessitates the "immense conclusion, that there is a God; a perceiving, intelligent, designing Being; at the head of creation, and from whose will it proceeded."[27]

Finally, an ontological argument for God's existence is one which "takes its departure from a given concept of the nature of God. Through nothing more than

23 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, quoted in Hick, *Existence*, 82 – 85.

24 Evans and Manis, *Philosophy*, 77.

25 William Paley, *Natural Theology or Evidence of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity, Collected from the Appearances of Nature*, ed. with an introduction and notes by Matthew D. Eddy and David Knight (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 8.

26 Paley, *Natural Theology*, 16.

27 Paley, *Natural Theology*, 230.

an analysis of the concept, it undertakes [...] to deduce the actual existence of the corresponding object."[28] Famous in this regard is Anselm of Canterbury's (*c.* 1033 – 1109) ontological argument for God's existence put forward in his *Proslogion*, and after him René Descartes' (1596 – 1650) version of the argument in his *Meditations*. Anselm, for instance, conceived of God as "a being than which none greater can be conceived"[29] and argued that God actually exists by maintaining that existence is a "great-making property," which must be affirmed of God. God, thus conceived, cannot not exist, nor even be thought not to exist, Anselm claimed.[30]

There is one thing all the different classes of arguments for God's existence have in common, and it is this I want to draw attention to for reasons that will become evident in what follows: all arguments for God's existence seek to *introduce into* reality the existence of an entity. To clarify what I mean by this, let us consider the following: a cosmological or teleological argument may start of by assuming the existence of, say, 100 "items" or "entities" comprising the whole of reality, or the world—whichever expression one prefers. What a cosmological argument for God's existence seeks to show is that, in addition to the 100 items (that is, the world) assumed at the outset of the proof, a 101st item actually exists as part of reality. The existence of this 101st item is inferred from the fact that—to reproduce, as an example, Aquinas' line of reasoning—the world requires for its existence an efficient cause. At the beginning of the proof, this 101st item was not assumed to be part of reality, rather its existence is the *conclusion* sought by the proof. It is in this sense that arguments for God's existence seek to *introduce into* reality the existence of an entity.

This is an indispensable characteristic of arguments for God's existence. It also becomes evident when taking into account that in cosmological and teleological arguments a distinction is made between the step that concerns introducing the existence of an entity (that is, the 101st item, as it were) and the step that, thereafter, addresses this entity's nature or attributes. Paley, for instance, drew attention to this distinction when he fittingly called his book *Natural Theology or Evidence for the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*, and when concluding that "[i]t is only by the display of contrivance, that the existence, [as well as] the agency, [and] the wisdom of the Deity, could be testified to."[31] For Paley,

28 Davidson, *Proofs*, 390.
29 Anselm, *Proslogion*, quoted in Evans and Manis, *Philosophy*, 63.
30 Evans and Manis, *Philosophy*, 63 and 65.
31 Paley, *Natural Theology*, 27.

this entity, whose existence and thereafter nature he seeks to prove, is introduced into reality insofar as it is known that nature and the world, which pose the starting point of his teleological argument, cannot be all that there is.[32]

The objective, shared by all arguments for God's existence, to *introduce into* reality the existence of an entity, is also evident in ontological arguments: these arguments attempt the move from a mere concept to the affirmation of a real entity existing in actuality. Anselm's statement, in the context of his own ontological argument for God's existence, that "it is one thing for an object to be in the understanding, and another thing to understand that it exists"[33] draws attention to this point.[34]

It is of course the case that the various arguments for God's existence put forward, over the centuries, by different thinkers may have involved sometimes very different concepts of "God," and in general arguments for God's existence cannot dispense with defining what is meant by "God." Aquinas' "Five Ways" could therefore, if one wanted to be precise, be referred to as arguments for the existence of God-as-first mover (his first way) or God-as-efficient-cause (his second way) and so on. The same would be true of all other arguments for God's existence, which are always arguments for the existence of God-as-so-and-so. Yet, no matter how "God" is conceived of, they all have in common the indispensable characteristic of seeking to *introduce into* reality the existence of an entity, a 101st item in addition to the already assumed 100 items, so to speak. Crucially, this means that arguments for God's existence do certainly *not* already assume the existence of some 101st entity in addition to the world so as to only be concerned with showing that said entity is to be characterised, and conceived of, in this or that way. When Aquinas, for instance, addresses the objection that "God does not exist" as the world is sufficient in itself, it would be mistaken to say that, in his argument, an entity in addition to the world is already assumed to exist and his concern is merely to show that said entity has certain attributes, such as being the efficient cause of the world, which warrant calling it "God." Rather, Aquinas is concerned with showing that reality in fact comprises of more than just the world.

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32 Compare Paley's (*Natural Theology*, 214 – 215) statement: "[o]f this however we are certain, that, whatever the Deity be, neither the *universe*, nor any part of it which we see, can be he [my emphasis]."

33 Anselm, *Proslogion*, quoted in Hick, *Existence*, 26.

34 Compare the following statement made by William B. Murphy (*God and His Creation* (Dubuque, Iowa: Priory Press, 1958), 74): "[t]he Meaning of 'Existence'. [...] It signifies actuality [...]. It is described *as that by which a thing is placed outside of nothing and outside of the state of mere possibility*; or, in other words, that which makes a thing *to be* [*sic*]."

The reason I put such emphasis on highlighting that it is an indispensable feature of arguments for God's existence to introduce into reality an entity (in addition to the world) is that it is precisely here where the Islamic arguments in question are different. This book argues that the Islamic arguments take God's very existence for granted, they assume God to be part of reality from the outset. In this respect, they differ fundamentally from arguments for God's existence, which introduce God into reality as their conclusion. It is this aspect of the Islamic arguments in question, and its consequences, which, this book argues, have not been recognised in the secondary academic literature. To be clear, this is not to say that Islamic thinkers *believed* in God before they presented their arguments, and Christian thinkers who presented their arguments for God's existence *did not*. On the level of *belief*, it is certainly correct to assume that the thinkers in both the Islamic and the Christian traditions took God's existence for granted and assumed Him to be part of reality. The point I have been making simply concerns assumptions and premises on the level of *argumentation*, as well as the objectives of arguments, which follow from these.

As illustrated above, it has often been said that the standard argument to prove God's existence in the works of Islamic thinkers is the cosmological argument. This impression can be explained by the fact that classical *kalām* works frequently present arguments which first prove the temporal origination or createdness of the world and then proceed to prove that the world has an originator and creator. Examples of this line of argument are ʿAbd al-Jabbār's (d. 415/1025) *Sharḥ uṣūl al-khamsa* where he remarks that "it is necessary to speculate about these originated things [...] so that it is known that they have an originator"[35] and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1210) *al-Ishāra fī ʿilm al-kalām* where he comments on the *mutakallim*'s requirement to "speculate about the created things insofar as they are proofs for the existence and attributes of the creator."[36] It is due to the similarities between arguments for God's existence known from the Western tradition and the Islamic arguments in terms of the terminology they employ and the line of argument presented that the secondary academic literature proposes that the arguments in both traditions have the same objective and must be labelled as arguments for God's existence. Yet, the fundamental difference, which this book seeks to highlight, is this: while cosmological arguments for God's existence start off with the 100 items making up the world and seek to prove that there is in fact a 101st item in addition to the world, the Islamic "proofs for the

35 ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa*, ed. ʿAbd al-Karīm ʿUthmān (al-Qāhira: Maktabat Wahba, 1996), 65–66.

36 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra fī ʿilm al-kalām*, ed. Hānī Muḥammad Ḥāmid (n.p.: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li'l-Turāth, al-Jazīra li'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzīʿ, 2009), 38.

creator" take the 101 items, that is, the world *and* God, for granted right from the beginning. The conclusion they seek is not that the existence of yet another entity needs to be affirmed, in addition to the world, as cosmological arguments do. The Islamic "proofs of the creator" seek to prove certain issues related to God's nature and attributes, not, however, His very existence. It seems to be a categorical mistake to label an argument which takes God Himself to be part of reality and seeks to establish a certain nature and attributes for Him, as an argument for God's existence.[37]

This latter point needs some further discussion and clarification. There is some disagreement in the academic literature how the debate about God's attributes relates to the affirmation, or denial, of God's very existence, and different positions have been advanced. For instance, in discussing the question of whether Muslims and Christians worship the same God, Craig argued that "[t]he conceptions of God in Christianity and Islam are so fundamentally different that they are not the same God," for Christians believe God to be triune and Muslims unitarian. He concluded that "'Allah' has no referent in the real world; what they worship simply does not exist." In reaching this conclusion, Craig rejected the view that Muslims refer to God just as much as Christians do, yet they hold a flawed conception of God's nature (from a certain Christian perspective, that is). This implies that for Craig Muslims do not believe in, or acknowledge, God's existence. What this example illustrates is how, according to some thinkers, a debate about God's attributes can amount to a debate about God's very existence. Another example of this position, which is worth being cited in this context, is the line of argument employed by some proponents of the so-called "argument from evil." This argument poses a challenge to the position that God is "a being perfect in power, knowledge and goodness." The aim of this sort of argument has been described as to show that "the presence of evil in the world inductively supports or makes likely the claim that God [...] does not exist." Importantly, ac-

37 This could also be illustrated by the following analogy: imagine someone thinks herself to be alone on an island. One day she observes that the only palm tree on the island has been chopped off. She knows that she did not cause this effect. Based on the assumption that the palm tree did not do this to itself, she infers that yet another entity must exist on the island since *someone* chopped off the tree. This is analogous to the reasoning in arguments for God's existence. In the Islamic arguments, however, the reasoning is as follows: imagine someone on an island who knows that, in addition to herself, there is some other entity. One day she notes the only palm tree to be chopped off. She knows it was not herself who caused this effect. Since she also knows that the palm tree did not bring about this state for itself, she concludes that that other entity must be the one who chopped off the palm tree. This exemplifies the fundamental difference between *introducing* into reality the existence of yet another entity, for a cause is required—and *describing* an entity, who is assumed to exist, as cause.

cording to this line of argument, proving that God is not likely characterised as good amounts to proving that God Himself does not exists. Thus conceived, the argument does not claim to have shown that God's moral character needs to be reconsidered, rather God's very existence is irreconcilable with evidential evil.[38]

The same issue arises in cases where "atheism" is defined in narrow terms, such as when "a-theism" is understood as the breaking away from a traditional *theistic* conception of God as "an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent, personal God who created the universe, takes active interest in the world, and has given a special revelation to humans."[39] On such a narrow definition, a deist, who holds "the view that God created the world and then had no further interaction with it,"[40] could be labelled an atheist insofar as she denies the existence of God *as* conceived of by theism. The consequence of this narrow definition of atheism is that, once more, a debate about the attributes and characteristics of God is tantamount to a debate about whether God exists at all. In the case of deism, this is especially curious since the deist affirms the existence of God and regards Him as the creator of the world, yet since her conception of God falls short of the theistic conception in a number of respects, she is charged with denying God's very existence and erasing Him from reality altogether.

The difficulties with holding such a view have been recognised in the academic literature as it renders everyone who does not agree with a *particular* conception of God an atheist and leaves little room for debates about God's nature as apart from the question of His existence. This raises the general question of whether this notion of atheism, and its relation to the issue of proving God's existence, is useful in certain contexts, such as when trying to understand the debate between, say, two Christian or two Muslim theologians about God's attributes. But apart from a personal preference in defining terms, it is necessary to ask, when studying a given discourse, such as the one this book is concerned with, how the participants in this discourse actually understood and defined these terms. For instance, even if one were to hold the view that a debate about God's attributes amounts to a debate about God's very existence, one still has to ask whether the Islamic thinkers this book considers also held this opinion, in order to understand their objectives. Consider the example of al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, which I will discuss more extensively in Chapter Eight. There, al-Ghazālī criticises the Islamic philosophers for their be-

38 Nick Trakakis, "The Evidential Problem of Evil," in *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, https://www.iep.utm.edu/evil-evi/ (accessed October 2018).

39 Glossary in Michael Martin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), xix.

40 Glossary in Martin, *Atheism*, xvi.

lief in the pre-eternity of the world and their rejection of the *mutakallimūn*'s belief in a temporally originated world. He then goes on to point out what he believes to be the consequences of their belief: they cannot call God "creator" (*ṣāniʿ*) and "maker" (*fāʿil*),[41] for these terms presuppose the notion of temporal origination. Al-Ghazālī's quarrel with the philosophers is about an important divine attribute (that is, God's being the creator of the world), which both the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophers eagerly upheld, not least because the Qur'an invokes this divine attribute time and again. Crucially, while charging the philosophers with a flawed conception not only of creation but also of God as creator, al-Ghazālī never charges them with denying God's very existence as a consequence; quite the opposite is the case, he presents them as regarding God as part of reality (that is, like himself, he presents them as assuming that reality comprises of the world *and* God). For him, a debate about God's nature, even if related to the most essential divine attributes, does not amount to a debate about whether God exist. (The same point can, moreover, be made when it comes to al-Ghazālī's charge that the philosophers believe that "God has no attribute at all."[42] This charge does not cause him to say that the philosophers reject God Himself.) Consequently, his own arguments, directed at the philosophers, seeking to prove that God is to be described as creator of a temporally originated world cannot be considered, and labelled, as "arguments for God's existence"; God's existence is, for him, out of question in the present debate, yet it is a particular divine attribute that is at stake.

In the secondary academic literature, however, al-Ghazālī's critique of the philosophers in the *Tahāfut* is linked to the subject of arguments for God's existence, and al-Ghazālī is described as charging the philosophers with "atheism."[43] It appears questionable, first, how this would be an accurate description of al-Ghazālī's concerns and, second, whether this particular definition of "atheism," which leads to a rather unusual conception of what an argument for God's existence does, is a useful one, given the context of the debate. It has certainly been acknowledged in the academic literature that the term "atheism" has been sub-

41 Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (Beyrouth: Imprimeri Catholique, 1927), 95.

42 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (1927), 96.

43 Davidson (*Proofs*, 370) paraphrases al-Ghazālī as maintaining that "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." Goodman ("Al-Ghazālī's Argument (II)," 184*)* writes: "[al-Ghazālī] argues extensively [...] that the eternity of the world is incompatible with the existence of God." William Lane Craig (*The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz* (London: MacMillan, 1980), 99) writes: "to his [i.e. al-Ghazālī's] mind the thesis of an eternal universe was quite simply equivalent to atheism."

ject to a multitude of different definitions throughout the centuries,[44] and the need of defining this term by taking into account the context in which it appears has been pointed to.[45] In the context of the Islamic arguments, which this book is interested in and which have been identified as arguments for God's existence in the secondary academic literature, I suggest that Kerry Walters' definition of atheism as a "worldview [...] whose deepest core belief is that the natural world is all that there is"[46] is most useful. Only if Islamic thinkers accuse their opponents of denying God's very existence in the sense that they completely remove Him from reality and claim that all there is, is the world, it makes sense to say that they accuse them of atheism. If they, however, present their opponents as acknowledging God's existence, in addition to the world, yet disagree with them about God's nature, it seems fallacious to claim that they accuse their opponents of atheism. This in turn means that if all that is under discussion is God's specific nature and attributes, it does not seem appropriate to assume that we are dealing with the objective to prove God's existence. Sarah Stroumsa, in her 1999 monograph *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam*, has already drawn attention to the need to be precise in defining terms when studying and describing aspects of Islam's intellectual history. She notes that "[i]n modern scholarship these intellectuals [who are the subjects of her study] are sometimes referred to as 'atheists.' This, however, is certainly incorrect, since their criticism of religion never included the negation of God's existence. What they did deny was the scriptural religions' idea of God, His epithets, and His interference in the world through revelation."[47] She then adds: "[t]he insistence on the precise meaning of the term is essential if we wish to use it for historical research in any meaningful

44 *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* therefore points out that "[t]he precise definition of 'atheism' is both a vexed and vexatious issue. [...] Even from its earliest beginnings in Greek and English [...] atheism/*atheotēs* admitted of a variety of competing, and confusing, definitions" (Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11).

45 *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism* notes: "'[...] [Theism] as that from which [atheism] is breaking away remains inscribed into the very word with which [atheists] describe [their] distance from [theism].' [*sic*] Consequently, our understanding of atheism can be straightforward and unambiguous only if our definition of theism is straightforward and unambiguous. For atheism defines itself in terms of that which it is denying. From this it follows that if definitions and understandings of God change and vary, so too our definitions and understandings of atheism will change and vary. This further means that there will be as many varieties of atheism as there are varieties of theism. For atheism will always be a rejection, negation, or denial of a *particular* form of theism" (Martin, *Atheism*, 28–29).

46 Stephen Bullivant, "Defining Atheism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Atheism*, ed. Stephen Bullivant and Michael Ruse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11–21, at 19.

47 Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 8.

way. [...] A strict definition of freethinking is thus a necessary prerequisite for the study of the extent and nature of free thought in medieval Islam."[48]

* * *

I have so far explained the thesis of this book, which can be summarised as that arguments for God's existence are absent from the works of medieval Islamic thinkers, for all arguments for God's existence have in common that they seek to introduce the existence of an entity, in addition to the world, into reality, yet the Islamic arguments in question already take it for granted that God is part of reality and their concern instead lies with establishing things such as God's nature and attributes. This thesis is based, to a great extent, on discussing what precisely Islamic thinkers sought to establish when they put forward their "proofs for the existence of the creator." For, as noted above, the secondary academic literature has correctly observed that *kalām* manuals are replete with such proofs. For instance, in al-Māturīdī's (d. 333/944) *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* we encounter a "proof that there is for the world an originator";[49] in al-Ashʿarī's (d. 324/936) *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* the proof "that there is for creation a creator";[50] in al-Bāqillānī's (d. 403/1013) *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* "the affirmation of the creator";[51] and in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* the "proof for the existence of the creator."[52] It is true that these arguments, in the way they are presented in the *kalām* manuals, resemble cosmological arguments for God's existence both in the terminology they employ and the line of reasoning they present. For instance, when comparing Craig's cosmological argument with al-Rāzī's proof for the creator, this resemblance becomes evident: Craig's argument for God's existence takes the form of a syllogism, and concludes, based on the premises that (1) everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence and (2) the universe began to exist, that (3) the universe has a cause of its existence.[53] Al-Rāzī likewise presents his proof of the creator in the form of a syllogism: "[(1)] it has been established

48 Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 10.

49 Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, ed. and introduced by Fathalla Kholeif (Beyrouth: Dar El-Machreq Éditeurs, 1970), 17.

50 Abū l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ fī al-radd ʿalā ahl al-zīgh wa'l-bidʿ*, ed. Ḥammūda Ghurāba (al-Qāhira: Maṭbaʿat Miṣr, 1955), 17.

51 Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd fī al-radd ʿalā al-mulḥida wa'l-muʿaṭṭila wa'l-rāfiḍa wa'l-khawārij wa'l-muʿtazila*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Khaḍīrī and Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Hādī Abū Rīda (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1947), 44.

52 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (*Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*), 32 vols (Bayrūt: Dār al-Fikr li'l-Ṭabāʿa wa'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzīʿ, 1981), vol. 24, 252.

53 Craig, *Kalām*, 63.

that the bodies [making up this world] are originated, and [(2)] everything that is originated has an originator, [(3)] hence the bodies require the originator."[54] Yet, despite these apparent similarities, it is mistaken to label the Islamic arguments in question arguments for God's existence, as this book seeks to show, for they have a different objective than to prove that God actually exists as His existence is taken for granted. Taking into account the literary context in which Islamic thinkers present their proofs of the creator can shed light on their objectives as context shapes and reveals meaning, yet it is precisely this context which has often been neglected in the secondary academic literature. One illuminating example for this is al-Rāzī's aforementioned *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter Ten. In several instances in his Qur'anic commentary, al-Rāzī provides his readers with information about the context in which the proofs of the creator appear, which in his (and other *mutakallimūn*'s) *kalām* works proper is oftentimes somewhat sparse. For instance, in an early *kalām* work of al-Rāzī's, *al-Ishārā fī ʿilm al-kalām*, he notes, referring to Q. 23:23 ({serve God, for He is your only god (*ilāh*)}[55]—uttered by Noah), that the prophet presented his people with "the proof of the creator"[56] (*al-dalīl ʿalā al-ṣāniʿ*), but here he does not explicate what it is that Noah sought to prove. In the *Tafsīr*, in commenting on the very same verse, however, he explains that Noah's people rejected the prophet claiming that God would not have chosen a mere human being for this task, rather He would have sent an angel. Moreover, they rejected Noah's admonition to worship God alone and to abandon their idolatrous practice of associating partners with God. The context given by al-Rāzī clarifies that Noah's "proof of the creator" cannot be an argument for God's existence: Noah's people are presented as acknowledging God's existence even before the prophet is sent to them, and it is other issues that are at stake, according to al-Rāzī's presentation. To claim that Noah wanted to convince his people that God actually exists seems to be missing the point of what al-Rāzī understood the prophet's concern to be.[57] When additionally taking into account

54 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, 2 vols (al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Kulliyyāt al-Azhariyya, 1986), vol. 1, 124.

55 English quotes from the Qur'an are taken from Muhammad A.S. Abdel Haleem, *The Qurʾan: A new translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) and appear in curly brackets in this book.

56 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra fī ʿilm al-kalām*, ed. Hānī Muḥammad Ḥāmid (n. p.: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li'l-Turāth, al-Jazīra li'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzīʿ, 2009), 324.

57 I have made this point, referring to al-Rāzī's comments on Noah, in my "Proving God's Existence? A Reassessment of al-Rāzī's Arguments for the Existence of the Creator," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19/2 (2017): 31–63, at 36–37.

al-Rāzī's commentary on Q. 6:76 (where Abraham says, {I do not like those who set}, after having called the setting star above him his lord (*rabb*)), it becomes clear, based on the literary context provided, what the proof of the creator seeks to prove: it is concerned with showing that God, whose existence is taken for granted, is to be described as the creator of everything in this world. The corollary of this is, as al-Rāzī explicates, that no other entity in this world has a share in God's attribute of being a creator (thus addressing the vexed question of causality). The significance of establishing this, on the basis of the proof of the creator, is, to name but one aspect, that al-Rāzī justifies God's sole right to be worshipped by recourse to His sole claim to this particular attribute. The proof of the creator is, hence, concerned with establishing a particular attribute for God, which requires the premise that the world is indeed created. Yet, the proof of the creator is *not* concerned with showing that the world is not all there is and that the existence of yet another entity, in addition to the world, needs to be affirmed, as cosmological arguments do. This difference in objective is what distinguishes the Islamic arguments from arguments for God's existence. This illustrates how, without taking into account the context, the objective of the proof of the creator can easily be misunderstood.

The significance of context also becomes apparent when considering that both the Islamic arguments and cosmological arguments for God's existence do indeed ask, and are concerned with, the question of whether there is for the world a creator or cause. Take as an example the quotes from al-Ashʿarī and al-Māturīdī given above, who discuss the proof "that there is for creation a creator" and "that there is for the world an originator," respectively. Similarly, it has been said about the cosmological argument that it holds "that the world, and everything in it, depends on something for its existence."[58] But depending on the context in which this question is posed, it means entirely different things. As explained above, in the context of arguments for God's existence, the question about whether the world has a cause is ultimately concerned with the objective to introduce into reality the existence of an entity in addition to the world, thus proving God's very existence. In the context of the Islamic arguments, however, the very same question pertains to certain vigorously debated problems such as whether the world is a self-sufficient thing, not depending for its existence on God, while maybe receiving its form from Him; or whether God in His being the cause of the world is to be described as "creator," which involves a particular conception of the term, or whether any other term captures His role best. In the latter context, God's actual existence is, evidently, not at stake, rather it is

58 Matthew D. Eddy and David Knight's Introduction in Paley, *Natural Theology*, ix.

presupposed. To gauge correctly the intention behind a question, phrase, or proof, therefore, requires considering its context.

In the same way, we will find Islamic thinkers making statements which at first sight do not sound unlike the description given of teleological arguments for God's existence: "The *teleological argument* [*sic*] holds that the natural world appears to have been designed, or created, by a designer."[59] Al-Rāzī, for example, remarks that "this world is built in the most advantageous and best way and according to the most excellent and perfect arrangement."[60] But once more, while such a statement in the context of arguments for God's existence points to the objective of proving that there is more than just the natural world, Islamic thinkers make similar observations about the world in order to make the point that God (whose being part of reality is taken for granted) is a voluntary agent, possessing wisdom, rather than a necessitating cause or acting randomly without purpose, to give one example.[61]

This is all the more evident when considering that one and the same argument may be used in order to prove two different points. Take as an example Ibn Sīnā's Flying Man thought experiment. This argument (or "pointer," as he calls it) is introduced in the *Kitāb al-Nafs* of the *Shifāʾ* "[f]or the purposes of establishing the existence of the soul belonging to us." Ibn Sina famously calls upon his readers to imagine a human being created in an instance and flying in the air but deprived of all sensory data. Being in this state, the human being "considers whether he can assert the existence of his self." Ibn Sīnā thinks that "what [the reader] has been alerted to [through the thought experiment] is a way to be made alert to the existence of the soul as something that is not the body." In the secondary academic literature on the Ibn Sīnā's Flying Man, it has often been remarked that the purpose of this "pointer" is not simply to establish the mere *existence* of the human soul, but also to establish that the human soul is *incorporeal*. In mentioning the Flying Man argument and Ibn Sīnā's objective associated with it, I want to draw attention to the fact that this very same argument could also be used for the purposes of merely establishing the immateriality of the human soul, without at the same time seeking to establish that the human soul actually exists. This draws attention to the need to be precise

59 Matthew D. Eddy and David Knight's Introduction in Paley, *Natural Theology*, ix.

60 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, 5 vols (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987), vol. 1, part 1, 233.

61 This is not to say that teleological arguments for God's existence do not *also* use the notion of design to prove that God is wise; Paley (*Natural Theology*, 27) does so for he states: "[i]t is only by the display of contrivance, that the existence, [as well as] the agency, [and] the wisdom of the Deity, could be testified to."

about what any given argument *actually* seeks to establish, as opposed to the objective it *could* be used for.

In the secondary academic literature, the context of the arguments in question oftentimes appears to have been neglected, and this has led to a situation where phrases such as "*lā yuqirru bi-rabb*" are rendered "who denies the [existence of] God" (*sic*, square brackets in the original), thus conflating the denial of God's *attribute* "*rabb*," which refers to God in His role as ruler over the universe, with the denial of *God Himself*.[62] Similarly, in her monograph on freethinkers in medieval Islam, Stroumsa quotes Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015) who writes on al-Ashʿarī's views on certain groups, mentioning among them "any other person who denies the Creator." She then comments on this quote saying: "[a]nd yet we can search these texts in vain for a specific contemporaneous individual accused of denying the existence of God. [...] the notion of atheism seems to have been recognized and to have occupied an important place in medieval Arabic theological literature, but atheists themselves always remain faceless and nameless."[63] Here, too, the denial of God's *attribute* of creator (which, as we know from the example of al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, involves a particular conception of how the world came to be and of God as its cause) is understood as the denial of *God's very existence*, and it is equated with atheism. A plenitude of similar examples can be found in the secondary academic literature, and they will be addressed in detail in the chapters to follow.

The preceding remarks about the meaning and objective of the "proof of the creator" put forward by Islamic thinkers draw attention to an important point which needs to be recognised: for Islamic thinkers, there is a difference between what terms such as "creator" (*khāliq* or *ṣāniʿ*), "originator" (*muḥdith*), or "lord" (*rabb*) refer to and what the term "*Allāh*" denotes. The former are attributes of God which He could, theoretically, share with other entities, while the latter refers to God Himself, being His proper name, and cannot refer to any other entity.[64] This is why a proof seeking to establish "the creator" is not concerned with showing that God (that is, *Allāh*) is actually part of reality and exists, as just explained.

In arguments for God's existence, in particular in cosmological ones, however, it is not so clear-cut what "God" actually denotes and refers to. Richard M. Gale has drawn attention to this issue in *On the Nature and Existence of God*:[65]

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62 Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 123, n. 8.

63 Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 123.

64 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 32, 14.

65 Richard M. Gale, *On the Nature and Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 4 – 5.

> [s]ome have claimed that "God" is a title that applies to an individual in virtue of his playing the role of the absolutely perfect sovereign being [...]. If "God" is a title, it functions quite differently from the ordinary titles with which we are familiar, for instance, "the king of France," "the heavy-weight champion of the world," and so on. Being God, unlike having these titles, is both essential to and constitutive of the essence if its possessor, that is, this individual could not exist without being God, and no other individual could be God. The champion can lose his title to another, which shows that this title is neither essential nor necessarily possessed [...]. [...] there still remains the question of what qualifies an individual as the denotatum of "God." "God," no doubt, is a proper name, but this is not sufficiently helpful, since there are such widely divergent views of how proper names refer.

The view that "God" denotes a proper name was famously rejected by Aquinas who understood it as a common noun. Denys Turner explains his view this way:[66]

> [i]t would seem, Thomas says, that since we can know *whether* God exists (*an Deus sit*) but not *what* God is (*quid sit Deus*) [...] "God exists" bears the analysis, "Something or other is God." That is to say, in "God exists" in this sense we are not predicating existence of God, but rather we are predicating "God" of something or other. Of course, this analysis of "God exists" is defensible only if "God" is treated as functioning in "God exists" not as a proper name, such as "Daisy", but as a descriptive, predicable expression, such as "cow"—what Thomas calls a *nomen naturae*.

Other have maintained that "the name 'God' simply stands for the first cause of all things, the beginning and end of all created things. If God exists, that is the very minimum of what he is, that is what the very name 'God' signifies. [...] It is a description of him only as first cause, garnered from his supposed effects, which are actually existing creatures."[67] Jonathan Barnes has captured this conceptual disagreement about whether "God" is a proper name or a *nomen naturae* when noting that "'God', as the *Oxford Dictionary* recognises, is a word regularly used in both ways. We say both 'God heard his prayer' [...] and 'The Lord is a jealous God'."[68]

This disagreement about what "God" stands for in "arguments for God's existence" raises an important question: when labelling the Islamic arguments in question as arguments for God's existence, does one understand "God" as a proper name and, therefore, to correspond to "*Allāh*"? Or does one understand "God" as a shorthand for "creator of the world" and, thereby, to correspond to

66 Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 169 – 172.

67 Murphy, *God*, 74.

68 Jonathan Barnes, *The Ontological Argument* (London: MacMillan, 1972), 68.

terms such as "*ṣāniʿ*" and "*muḥdith*," which are *Allāh*'s attributes? If the former is the case, and an Islamic argument for God's existence is understood as an argument seeking to prove that *Allāh* exists, it needs to be emphasised, as alluded to above, that *Allāh* Himself is taken for granted by these thinkers when they discuss "the proof of the creator." If the latter is the case, and an Islamic argument for God's existence is understood as an argument seeking to prove that there is an entity who is the creator of the world, one might also want to point out that Islamic thinkers were eager to prove that *Allāh* indeed is the creator of the world —and after all, is this not what "God" is a shorthand for? Yet, it still remains to be said that, while it is true that Islamic thinkers seek to establish *Allāh as* creator (that is, to affirm an attribute for Him), the essential formal aspect of arguments for God's existence, repeatedly addresses above, of introducing into reality the existence of yet another entity in addition to the world is missing in the Islamic arguments. Furthermore, as clarified above, a mere discussion of this or that attribute of God, while He Himself is taken for granted, does not warrant to be called an argument for God's existence. This latter position also results in the rather paradoxical situation that "*Allāh*" cannot be translated as "God," or that one could not say that "*Allāh*" is God's name in Arabic, as long as it has not been shown that *Allāh* has the attribute of being creator of the world, for "God" is a shorthand for "creator of the world." All this illustrates that, no matter what one takes "God" to stand for in "arguments for God's existence," their reasoning and objective is not applicable to the Islamic arguments in question, which are concerned with other issues and start from different assumptions. Phil Zuckerman got to the heart of the difficulties associated with applying terms and concepts originating in one tradition to another tradition when noting that "[d]efinitions of specific words seldom translate well cross-culturally. Signifiers such as 'religious' or 'God' have different meanings in different cultures."[69]

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The thesis of this book that arguments for God's existence are absent from the works of medieval Islamic thinkers, gives rise to the following question: why is it that Islamic thinkers were not concerned with proving God's existence? This observation might appear all the more perplexing considering that in the Western philosophical tradition the discourse on arguments for God's existence did occupy an important place in philosophical thought throughout the centu-

69 Phil Zuckerman, "Atheism: Contemporary Numbers and Patterns," in *The Cambridge Companion to Atheism*, ed. Michael Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 47–66, at 47.

ries, so it might seem natural to expect the same in the Islamic tradition. Some have indeed gone so far as to suggest that the proof of God's existence *has to* be the logical, and is the natural, starting point of theological enquiries: "God is the principal concern of sacred theology. And God is considered in various ways by this divinely human wisdom [...]. Among all these various considerations, the question of God's existence is first, both in the order of thinking and in the order of divine things. There would be little point in making an inquiry into some being who might not even exist."[70] Admittedly, this statement has in mind the Christian tradition, yet it could well be extended to the theological and metaphysical enquiries undertaken by Islamic thinkers and it could be posed that in their case, too, any enquiry into God logically requires first the proof that He actually exists. Yet, this statement about the logical order of enquiries into God, while one might personally consider it convincing, does nevertheless not seem to apply to the medieval Islamic tradition. There, the starting point of such enquiries was precisely *not* the proof of God's existence, who was taken for granted. Instead, their starting point was the proof that God indeed is to be described as the creator of the world. This means that their starting point pertained to one of God's attributes. This observation is exemplified by al-Rāzī's remark that "the starting point of knowledge about God is the knowledge of His being [i.e. *that* He is!] originator and maker of the world" (*awwal al-ʿilm bi'llāh al-ʿilm bi-kawnihi muḥdithan li'l-ʿālam fāʿilan lahu*).[71]

Thus, attempting an answer to the question of why arguments for God's existence are absent from the works of medieval Islamic thinkers appears as somewhat of a difficult task. For one, as is frequently the case when a certain question is not discussed, Islamic thinkers do not tell us why they are not concerned with the proof, as well as the related question about the provability, of God's existence. Had they not remained silent on this issue, we would at least be able to establish that they were aware of these questions, but chose, for whatever reasons, not to expound upon them. Seeing the lack of such information, one has to be careful not to enter too far into the realm of speculation.

Pointing to audiences, who evidently shape the content of works, is similarly problematic. Stroumsa, for instance, infers from what is her interpretation that "[a] significant part of *kalām* works [...] is dedicated to the attempt to prove that God exists" that "the notion of atheism seems to have been recognized" by Islamic thinkers and that atheists were "actual opponents" of theirs.[72] Her

70 Murphy, *God*, 71.
71 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 27, 197.
72 Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*, 122–123.

reading of these texts is the basis on which she makes assumptions about audiences as well as the *mutakallimūn*'s opponents and their beliefs. Conversely, it could be argued that, *if* arguments for God's existence are not to be found in the works of Islamic thinkers, one must conclude that atheism was not part of their lived reality, which explains the absence of such proofs. This illustrates the difficulty of pointing to audiences as an explanatory principle for the absence of Islamic arguments for God's existence, if our assumptions about audiences and their beliefs *derive* from our readings of the relevant texts.

A possible answer—which this book in fact proposes—to the question of why medieval Islamic thinkers had no concern for the proof of God's existence takes into account the all-important role of the Qur'an for theological and philosophical enquiries. It is well-known and evident that a great number of these enquiries have their starting point in, and were shaped by, Qur'anic pronouncements, whose meaning was hotly debated.[73] It might beg the question to claim that the Qur'an itself is not concerned with presenting proofs of God's existence, which could serve as an explanation, even if only a partial one, why these proofs are not encountered in works of *kalām* and *falsafa*. Yet, what can certainly be said is that one of the greatest concerns, if not the greatest one, of the Qur'an is to emphasise God's absolute uniqueness and His sole worthiness of worship, which results from it (commonly expressed as the affirmation of *tawḥīd* and the rejection of *shirk*). One might, therefore, want to pose that Islamic thinkers remained faithful to the Qur'an's primary concern when they took God's very existence for granted and proceeded to prove God's uniqueness by showing that He, in being the creator of the world, is different from creation. This book in fact argues that it can positively be shown that this is exactly how Islamic thinkers viewed the Qur'an's concerns and that they saw their own enquiries to follow these concerns.

It is interesting to observe that the Bible, too, has been read as not being concerned with the proof of God's existence. In his 1939 monograph *Our Knowledge of God*, John Baillie notes, in "The Irrelevance of Proofs from the Biblical Point of View," that "[n]one of the Old Testament writers treats of the existence of deity as if it were an open question or in any sense problematic."[74] He then explains:[75]

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73 On the disciplines of *kalām* and *falsafa*, see Oliver Leaman and Sajjad Rizvi, "The developed *kalām* tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77–96; Hossein Ziai, "Islamic philosophy (falsafa)," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. Tim Winter (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 55–76.

74 John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, quoted in Hick, *Existence*, 205.

> [t]here are, indeed, three or four passages in the literature which look at first sight like exceptions to this statement, but a close examination of them shows that they are not so in reality. In the tenth psalm we read of murderous criminals who despise Jehovah and whose thoughts amount to the declaration that "There is no God." [...] most of the commentators are concerned to make the point that this is "not a denial of the divine existence, but of His presence and interposition." This is made clear enough by the rest of the psalm, where the thoughts in the criminals' minds are said rather to be "God does not punish," "God has forgotten, He has hidden His face, He never sees." Again in the fourteenth psalm [...] we read of fools or impious men who say in their heart "There is no God," but again the commentators make the point that it is God's effective presence rather than His existence that is being denied, so that we should perhaps translate "No God is here." [...] This being the case, the Old Testament naturally has no occasion to speculate in how this knowledge that God *is* arises in the mind. [...] It teaches how God who is, is known, and is known to be what He is. But it seems nowhere to contemplate men as ignorant of the existence of God, and therefore it nowhere depicts the rise or dawn of the idea of God's existence on men's minds [...].

The same was observed by Andrew Bruce Davidson in his 1904 monograph *The Theology of the Old Testament*:[76]

> [o]n the subject of *God* [*sic*] the ideas of the ancient world are in many respects different from our own. [...] One such point of difference is this, that it never occurred to any prophet or writer of the Old Testament to prove the existence of God. To do so might well have seemed an absurdity. For all Old Testament prophets and writers move among ideas that presuppose God's existence. [...] Even the phrase "there is no God" hardly means that God is not, but rather that He is not present, does not interfere in life [...].

It is interesting to observe that, while the Bible and the Qur'an can be seen to be on a par in that God's existence is taken for granted throughout and no argument for His existence is advanced, the later Christian and Islamic philosophico-theological traditions evolved in different directions: Christian thinkers did indeed discuss, and attempt, the proof of God's existence; medieval Islamic thinkers did not. What is more, there is a difference in how Christian and medieval Islamic thinkers thought of their respective holy scriptures when it comes to the question of whether these scriptures are concerned with the proof of God's existence. For instance, Aquinas precedes his five proofs of God's existence with a discussion of whether God's existence is or is not self-evident. In arguing that it is not self-evident, but requires proof, Aquinas makes explicit mention of Ps 52.1, "The fool said in his heart, There is no God."[77] He, thus, expresses his view that scrip-

75 John Baillie, *Our Knowledge of God*, quoted in Hick, *Existence*, 205 – 207.
76 Andrew Bruce Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1904), 30 – 31.
77 Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, quoted in Hick, *Existence*, 32.

ture addresses the phenomenon of atheism as well as the proof and provability of God's existence. In modern times, the Bible has also been presented as being concerned with these issues: "The possibility of demonstrating the existence of God is clearly taught in Sacred Scripture: 'For all men were by nature foolish who were in ignorance of God, and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing him who is, and from studying the works did not discern the artisan' (Wisd. 13:1, cf. Rom. 1:18 – 21)."[78]

When it comes to the medieval Islamic tradition, however, this book argues, as noted above, that theologians and philosophers saw their own discussions as following Qur'anic pronouncements, which includes that they did not consider the Qur'an as concerned with proving God's existence. This observation gives rise to an obviously interesting question, which to pursue, however, goes beyond the scope of this book which focuses on the classical period of Islam: it is the question of whether, or how, this understanding of the Qur'an and its concerns changed. For Sayyid Quṭb (1906 – 1966), to name but one modern Muslim thinker, argued in his 1964 publication *Maʿālim fī al-ṭarīq* (*Milestones*): "there were no people—except for some scattered in history—who denied the principle of divinity and rejected God's existence (*wujūd Allāh*) altogether. It was only the case that they were mistaken when it comes to true knowledge of their true lord (*rabb*), or that they associated other deities with God (*yashrikūna maʿa Allāh āliha ukhrā*). [...] people, thereby, leave the religion of God, which they learned of from each prophet."[79] One might be justified to infer from Quṭb's words that he did not consider the Qur'an to be concerned with proving God's existence, as its audience took God Himself for granted, but rather with establishing God's uniqueness. Yet, it is clear that Quṭb was aware of the problem of the proof of God's existence.

* * *

A few words should finally be said about the selection of thinkers considered in this book. As indicated, the discourse this book is concerned with properly belongs to the two Islamic disciplines of theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*) and philosophy (*falsafa*). The investigation into this discourse shall, therefore, rest on works of *kalām* and *falsafa*, to the exclusion of works belonging to other Islamic disciplines, such as law (*fiqh*) or mysticism (*taṣawwuf*), which might, however, in places turn out to contain references pertaining to the discourse in question. Only in one instance, in Chapter Ten, a work belonging to the discipline of Qur'anic ex-

78 Murphy, *God*, 79.

79 Sayyid Quṭb, *Maʿālim fī al-ṭarīq* (Bayrūt, al-Qāhira: Dār al-Shurūq, 1979), 46.

egesis (*tafsīr*) shall be considered, that is, al-Rāzī's aforementioned *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, for reasons that will be explained.

This book covers a time period of five centuries, from the beginnings of our discourse in the third/ninth century to what can be described as its culminating point in terms of intellectual and argumentative rigour in the seventh/thirteenth century. The authors and their works considered by this book shall be approached in chronological order, rather than organised along thematic lines (as, for instance, done by Davidson in his *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy*). The reason for this approach is that this book not only discusses the question of what Islamic thinkers sought to prove if it is not God's existence, but also aims to trace the development of the discourse with regards to the use of arguments, concepts, and terminology.

This book is divided into eleven chapters. After the Introduction, our enquiry begins with one of the earliest *mutakallimūn*, al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 225/860). It then turns to the—arguably—first Arabic philosopher, al-Kindī (d. 256/873). Thereafter, it turns to the eponym of the Māturīdī school of thought, the theologian al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944). The subsequent chapter is dedicated to al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936), whose name would come to designate yet another school of thought. This is followed by a chapter dedicated to al-Bāqillānī (d. 402/1013), who belonged to the Ashʿarī school. Next up is Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037), conceivably the greatest philosopher in the Islamic tradition. We then turn to one of the greatest defenders of the theological tradition and harshest critic of philosophy, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111). This is 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. Finally, we shall turn to one of the most influential theologians of the later Ashʿarī tradition, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), before presenting some concluding remarks. In addition to these thinkers and their works, a number of other theologians will find mention as well, such as al-Fuwatī (d. 209/825), al-Naẓẓām (d. 230/845), Abū Hāshim al-Jubbāʾī (d. 321/933), ʿAbd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025), al-Malāḥimī (d. 536/1141), Abū 'l-Muʿīn al-Nasafī (d. 507/1114), and of Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī (d. 511/1118).

The thinkers and their works dealt with in this book have been selected primarily on the basis that they were previously discussed in the secondary academic literature as participants of an Islamic discourse on arguments for God's existence. Since this book argues that the discourse these scholars were engaged in is not concerned with the proof of God's existence, the focus lies on the aforementioned thinkers so as to show how a different reading of their arguments allows different conclusions about their objectives. It goes without much explanation that this selection of thinkers is not meant to convey the idea that other Islamic theologians or philosophers, whether contemporaneous with the ones

selected or coming after them, did not contribute to, and shape, the discourse in question. More comprehensive research into the question of arguments for God's existence would certainly benefit from taking into consideration also less studied Islamic thinkers as well as those coming after al-Rāzī, with whom this book comes to an end. I also want to emphasise that when basing the thesis of this book, which is that arguments for God's existence are absent from the works of classical Islamic thinkers, on this selection of thinkers, it must be regarded as a cumulative case: a *cumulative* case insofar as, strictly speaking, what might be true of the thinkers considered in this book might not be true of *all* classical Islamic theologians and philosophers; yet, one might be justified in tending to think that if these thinkers can be shown not to have been concerned with the proof of God's existence, this applies to their peers as well who were engaged in the very same discourse, presenting very similar arguments.

* * *

It should finally be pointed out that, even if this book argues that, in the secondary academic literature, the discourse in question has falsely been identified as being concerned with the proof that God exists, it is undisputed that the discourse itself has rightly been described as a significant aspect of medieval Islamic intellectual history. This is evident from the important position it assumes in the works of Islamic theologians and philosophers and the intellectual depth their arguments exhibit. Yet, it is also evident from the following explanation given by al-Rāzī in the context of a defence of the discipline of *kalām* against its detractors:[80]

> knowledge either pertains to religion or not. There is no doubt that knowledge pertaining to religion is nobler than knowledge not pertaining to religion. As for knowledge pertaining to religion, it is either knowledge of the principles [of religion] (*ʿilm al-uṣūl*) or everything else. As for everything else, its correctness (*ṣiḥḥa*) rests on knowledge of the principles [of religion], for what the exegete (*mufassir*) does is investigating the meanings of God's speech, and this branches out (*faraʿa*) from [establishing] the existence of the creator who has choice and who speaks. As for the student of *ḥadīth* (*muḥaddith*), what he does is investigating the speech of God's Messenger, and this branches out from the affirmation of his prophethood. What the jurist (*al-faqīh*) does is investigating God's laws (*aḥkām*), and this branches out from [the affirmation of His] uniqueness (*tawḥīd*) and prophethood. This proves that [all] these sciences depend on knowledge of the principles [of religion].

80 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 95.

Al-Rāzī's statement draws attention to the significance of the "proof of the creator" in that it forms the logical basis for all other Islamic disciplines. This book, therefore, hopes to facilitate a better understanding of Islamic intellectual history by proffering a reappraisal of this significant discourse.

2 Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 225/860)

2.1 The Proof of God's Existence and al-Qāsim's *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr*

"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*.[81] "This argument," he continues to state its purpose, "proves the existence of God through the wonderful design observed all over the universe."[82] In an article dealing with the same work, Abrahamov adds in more detail:[83]

> [a]lready at the beginning of *Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr* he introduces one of the main arguments for the existence of God, namely the argument from design. In the world there are many signs attesting that the world and what is included in it are made and created. [...] Every produced thing must have a producer, and every created thing must have a creator. Since the signs are perfect, they must have a creator and producer, who does things wisely and well, and such a one can only be God. In the first part of the argument, then al-Ḳasim proves (or, rather, asserts) that according to evident signs of creation the world was created, and in the second part he proves that it is God who created the world, since the signs are perfect.

In his monograph *Der Imam al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen*, Wilferd Madelung identifies al-Qāsim's concern in *al-Dalīl al-kabīr* as being to prove God's existence on the basis of the order observed in this world ("Al-Qāsim verwendet hier den Gottesbeweis aus der Ordnung der Welt").[84]

Contrary to Abrahamov and Madelung's views that the arguments put forward by al-Qāsim in his *al-Dalīl al-kabīr* are arguments from designs with the objective of proving that God exists, I will argue that the proof of God's existence is

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81 Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, *Al-Ḳāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the Proof of God's Existence: The* Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr, ed. with translation, introduction, and notes by Binyamin Abrahamov (Leiden: Brill, 1990).

82 Abrahamov's introduction in al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, *al-Dalīl*, 1. Hans Daiber (*Das theologisch-philosophische System des Muʿammar ibn ʿAbbād as-Sulamī (gest. 830 n. Chr.)*, Beiruter Texte und Studien, herausgegeben vom Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Band 19 (Beirut, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1975), 160) briefly mentions al-Qāsim among those who prove "Gott aus der Weltordnung."

83 Binyamin Abrahamov, "al-Ḳāsim ibn Ibrāhīm's Argument from Design," *Oriens* 29/30 (1986): 259 – 284, at 260 – 261.

84 Wilferd Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1965), 106.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-003

in fact absent from al-Qāsim's work. At variance with Abrahamov's view that the argument from design for God's existence constitutes the "main subject" of *al-Dalīl al-kabīr*, it will be seen that the main theme of this work is the following: creation insofar as it contains the signs of making and arrangement allows humans to infer that it must be *ascribed* to none other than God as His work. This is not an insignificant point to make for al-Qāsim as it goes to the heart of the much debated question about secondary causality, as shall become clear, on which a number of other important tenets he puts forward depend. In dealing with these issues, however, al-Qāsim, takes God's existence for granted. The purpose the aforementioned signs serve in al-Qāsim's reasoning is, hence, different from the purpose they serve in arguments from design for God's existence, as will be clarified in more detail in what follows.

2.2 Al-Qāsim's Objective

Al-Qāsim opens his work with indicating its objective of giving an answer to the question posed by those he refers to as "*zanādiqa*" and "*mulḥidūn*" ("heretics")[85] who "ask about the proof for God, lord of the worlds" (*al-dalīl ʿalā Allāh rabb al-ʿālamīn*). At first glance, Abrahamov and Madelung's insistence that expressions such as "proof of God" clearly indicate al-Qāsim's concern in *al-Dalīl al-kabīr* to prove God's existence, does not seem too far-fetched. This insistence might be seen to find support in al-Qāsim speaking of "God's proofs (*ḥujaj*) for the people to gain knowledge about Him (*al-ʿilm bihi*) [...] and pieces of evidence to attain knowledge of Him (*maʿrifatihi*)" which are clear and established.[86] Likewise, at first blush, al-Qāsim may be read as explicating his method to prove God's existence when he states: "the proof to know God [...] are the clearest, perfect traces of [His] wisdom in the things."[87] Yet, this first intuition about what al-Qāsim means when he speaks of "the proof of God" and "knowl-

85 The *mutakallimūn* used both terms to refer to individuals whom they considered to deviate from—their particular understanding of—orthodoxy, be they adherents of dualistic beliefs, Ṣūfīs, Shīʿīs, philosophers, or other *mutakallimūn*. See Abrahamov's explanations in al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 180–182, n. 1 and 2; Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 1999), 5; Patricia Crone, "Excursus II: Ungodly Cosmologies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 103–129.

86 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 62. All translations from al-Qāsim's *al-Dalīl al-kabīr* are mine, unless indicated otherwise.

87 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 62 and 64.

edge of God" should not mislead us, for when in the following al-Qāsim discusses in detail the aforementioned "perfect traces of [His] wisdom in the things," which are the sure way to knowledge of God, a different picture emerges. In this endeavour of his, he adduces a great number of Qur'anic verses, which not only serve the purpose of explicating the signs, but also of stressing that his method is endorsed by, even originates in, Islam's most fundamental holy text: "praise be to God for the path He has prepared for us [...] to know Him [...] in the evident verses of the Qur'an [...]. God (Praised be He!) tells by what we can know Him and makes it clear for us that He can be known by [His] signs."[88]

One such instance of signs is Q. 10:31–32, according to al-Qāsim. In these two verses God has the Prophet pose the (rhetorical) question of who provides for humans, who brings forth life from death, and in general who directs all affairs, in order to follow with the swift answer: it is God (*Allāh*). Al-Qāsim comments on these verses that everything God mentions points to its being "created (*makhlūq*) and not a creator itself," its being "arranged (*mudabbar*) and not an arranger,"[89] and in general it contains "evidence of influence from one who exerts influence (*muʾaththir*)."[90] Once more, at first glance al-Qāsim's train of thought is reminiscent of the reasoning contained in design arguments for God's existence. Yet, the statement which follows these remarks indicates that al-Qāsim has in mind a different objective than to prove that God exists. He notes: "there must, hence, be one who arranges (*mudabbir*) all affairs, and there exists no such being other than God (*wa-lan yūjad illā Allāh*)." This remark points to al-Qāsim's objective to *identify* God, rather than any other entity in this world, as creator—not only of the world itself, but of every single thing and occurrence in it. It is with this objective in mind that al-Qāsim concludes his discussion of the aforementioned Qur'anic verses with the remark: "*God* is the creator [emphasis added]."[91] In this endeavour, it is not God's *existence* which al-Qāsim seeks to prove on the basis of the need of design for a designer.

The great number of other Qur'anic verses adduced by al-Qāsim serve the purpose of proving this very same point, and it should be noted that he evidently makes this point with a view to the Muʿtazila in particular. Abrahamov has asserted that "[al-Qāsim] was influenced to a large extent by Muʿtazilism," and this might be the case in certain respects, yet when it comes to his position on causality, he was clearly at variance with Muʿtazilism. In eagerly stressing that

88 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 76.
89 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 80.
90 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 80 and 82.
91 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 82.

all events must be ascribed to God's causal efficacy, al-Qāsim rejects the Muʿtazilī doctrine that humans are the creators of their own deeds.[92] His position, as well as his concern to correct the position held by his antagonists, become clear in his discussion of Q. 57:17. This verse 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 an influence [and] arranges" and that the "trace of [...] arrangement" to be found in things is "from God, not from humans."[93] Jesus is mentioned who, according to the Qur'an, revived the dead, but al-Qāsim stresses that this miracle was given to him by God, thus invalidating the Muʿtazilī doctrine.[94] Q. 75:36–40 is then invoked, which refers to God's creation of humans from a drop of sperm as well as of His ability to bring the dead back to life. Al-Qāsim reads these verses as supporting his view on God's exclusive causal efficacy, noting that "this does not occur, unless due to God."[95] In the same vein, Q. 6:97 is adduced which 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 alternation of night and day is from none but God.[96] "To *God* (Praised be He!) (*li'llāh*) belongs dominion over every star and celestial body,"[97] he explains, and "from *Him* is the wondrous arrangement (*minhu ʿajīb al-tadbīr*) [emphasis added]."[98] Following the Qur'an'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 (*ṣanʿ*) of all these things has been established [...] through the signs (*dalāʾil*) in creation and creation's being arranged (*tadbīrihi*)." Asking about the creator of all these things, he remarks: "this is God, the lord (*rabb*) of the worlds and creator (*ṣāniʿ*) of creators."[99] Al-Qāsim then quotes Q. 26:77–82, which speaks of God as the one {who created me [and it] is He who guides me; He who gives me food and drink [...]}, and he comments: "it is God,

92 On the different theories of causality proposed by Islamic thinkers and schools of thought, see Maria De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, al-Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī* (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2014), 10–16; Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Chapter 5 "Cosmology in Early Islam," 123–146; David Bennett, "The Muʿtazilite Movement (II): The Early Muʿtazilites," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 142–158.

93 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 84.

94 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 84 and 86.

95 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 92.

96 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 94.

97 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 96.

98 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 98.

99 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 110.

the creator besides whom there is no creator."[100] Among "the signs for Him" (*min dalāʾil ʿalayhi*), al-Qāsim lists "[God's] enlightening proof (*ḥujja*)" presented 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 what he understands the Qur'an to be concerned with: "thus speaks God who created (*khalaqa*) all this and made it (*ṣanaʿa*). There is no creator in it (*fīhi*) [i. e. the world] other than Him and no creator for it (*lahu*) together with Him. This is the case even if they deny it."[101] Al-Qāsim does not state whom he means by "they"—he does not have to, it is clear whom he has in mind. (This also clarifies whom he counts among the "*mulḥid*s" and "*zanādiqa*" mentioned at the beginning of *al-Dalīl al-kabīr*.) To mention a final example, al-Qāsim refers to Q. 31:11, which admonishes humans and states that the creation of the heavens and the growth of plants after the falling of rain is "{God's creation}" only. The verse continues to demand: "{Now, show Me what these others have created.}" Al-Qāsim reads the verse as arguing his own point, namely that "all this is making and creation from Him," and he subsequently declares ignorance of this fact (which, of course, characterises certain fellow theologians of his) as "the most evident aberrance" (*abyan al-ḍalāl*). This doctrinal aberrance is then linked with the—arguably—grave sin in Islam when al-Qāsim expresses his astonishment at how humans can have doubts concerning God and associate partners with Him (*shirk*) when He Himself made it clear that "{It is God who created the heavens and the earth}."[102]

All these passages, which are only a selection of the many references al-Qāsim makes to the Qur'an and which all follow the same train of thought, have made it clear that the signs in creation are not understood by al-Qāsim as pointing 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, first, that it is created and not self-sufficient and, secondly, that it owes its existence to God and, finally, that *all* occurrences in the world are God's, none other's, creation. Thus, when Abrahamov states (as already quoted above) that "at the beginning of *Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr* [al-Qāsim] introduces one of the main arguments for the existence of God, namely the argument from design [...] [through which] he proves that it is God who created the world, since the signs are perfect," the following needs to be remarked: Abrahamov is certainly right in stating that al-Qāsim seeks to prove "that it is God who

100 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 118.
101 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 130.
102 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 132. This is Q. 32:4.

created the world"—this is precisely what I have argued. Yet, Abrahamov seems to be mistaken when, in the same breath, he identifies al-Qāsim's proof, and invocation of design, as an argument for God's existence. Yes, al-Qāsim is indeed concerned with showing that the world must be ascribed to God, and he certainly makes this point against those who would maintain that the world is self-sufficient in its existence and therefore not dependent on God or that it may well derive its existence from God but not in the manner al-Qāsim understands the term "creation." The former position is, in *kalām* texts, often associated with individuals referred to as "*al-dahriyya*" or "*dahriyyūn*," and the latter with the Islamic philosophers (*al-falāsifa*), as shall be seen in the chapters to follow. Al-Qāsim certainly has these positions in mind, even if he does not name his opponents, besides calling them disparagingly "*mulḥid*s" and "*zanādiqa*," as is also his practice when it comes to the Muʿtazilīs. However, it is crucial to note that in seeking to clarify this particular issue, al-Qāsim is not concerned with asking whether God exists, that is, whether there actually is more than the world. In taking God to be part of reality from the outset of the proof, al-Qāsim cannot be said to be attempting to prove God's existence. This would appear to be a contradiction in terms.

One might wonder, then, whether when Abrahamov states that al-Qāsim wants to show "that it is God who created the world" and that this is an argument for God's existence, he simply means to say that our theologian seeks to show that *Allāh*, who is taken for granted, indeed is creator. This would imply that one cannot call *Allāh* "God" unless He is proven to be the creator of the world, thus making the proof of the divine attribute "creator" an argument for God's very existence. This would also mean that Abrahamov takes "God" in "arguments for God's existence" to be a shorthand for "creator of the world." Reading Abrahamov's statements this way, however, leads to the old problems discussed in the Introduction: a discussion of this or that attribute of God should not be taken to be tantamount to a discussion about whether *God Himself* actually exists. What is more, it raises the question what Abrahamov takes "*Allāh*" to be for al-Qāsim, if *Allāh* only *becomes* "God" once it is proven that *Allāh* indeed created the world.

In any case, even if one were to accept that we can speak of an argument for God's existence even if *Allāh* is taken for granted by al-Qāsim and if what is at stake is whether *Allāh* indeed is, or is not, the creator of the world, Abrahamov himself does not actually seem to think that this is what defines arguments for God's existence, for he notes:[103]

103 Abrahamov, "al-Ḳāsim," 275.

> [t]he argument from design [...] was ejected from its central position in the doctrine of the Muʿtazilites when they accepted the doctrine of accidents, which served them as proof of the creation of the universe. The Muʿtazilites seem to have realized that the argument from design was not sufficiently based, since according to it one can learn of God's existence but not of God's creation of the universe.

This quote shows that for Abrahamov "God" in "argument for God's existence" is not necessarily a shorthand for "creator of the world," for if this were the case he could not write that "one can learn of God's existence but not of God's creation of the universe."

It, therefore, seems justified to assume that when Abrahamov says that "[al-Qāsim] proves that God is their Creator," he intended to say: al-Qāsim infers from creation the existence of yet another entity, in addition to the world, who is the world's creator and whom—as Abrahamov understands al-Qāsim's reasoning—one cannot but call "God/*Allāh*." (Abrahamov's reading of al-Qāsim is, thus, reminiscent of Aquinas' reasoning who proves the existence of an entity in addition to the world by showing that the created world depends on a creator, in order to then note "and this we call God."[104]) Abrahamov does not seem to think that al-Qāsim takes *Allāh* for granted and simply wants to ascribe creation to Him, rather than any other entity. In contrast with this reading of al-Qāsim's argument, I have submitted that when our theologian states that "there must hence be one who arranges (*mudabbir*) all affairs, and there exists none such other than God (*wa-lan yūjad illā Allāh*),"[105] he means to say: since it has been shown that the world is not self-sufficient, but dependent on a cause, it follows that the creation of the world and every single occurrence in it can only be ascribed to God (*Allāh*), for it would be wrong to assume that any other entity in this world shares in His causal efficacy.

2.3 Design as Proof of God's *rubūbiyya*

There are a number of other passages in al-Qāsim's work which need to be discussed as they are of twofold importance for us: not only do these passages shed further light on the question of what it is that al-Qāsim seeks to prove (and they support the assertion that it is not God's existence). These passages also give an indication of the reason just why to prove that God, none other, is the creator of

104 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, quoted in John Hick, *The Existence of God: A Reader Edited with an Introduction by John Hick* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company), 85.
105 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 82.

the world, as well as of all occurrences in it, is a matter of such significance in al-Qāsim's thought.

One such passage is where al-Qāsim refers to Q. 21:52–56. There he writes: "among the signs for Him (*al-dalāʾil ʿalayhi*) is Abraham's speech." The prophet was sent by God with a clear mission: "a dispute and quarrel took place between him and his people about God (*fī Allāh*)," al-Qāsim explains, because he found them worshipping idols[106] as well as the stars alongside their worship of God (*kānū yaʿbudūna min al-nujūm maʿahu*). 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}"[107] and he "reasoned on the basis of God's signs in the heavens and the earth that belong to God that God is the creator of all this" (*fa-istadalla* [...] *bi-dalāʾil Allāh min samawātihi wa-arḍihi ʿalā anna Allāh ṣāniʿ li-dhālika kullihi*).[108]

Contrary to Abrahamov's suggestion, as conveyed by his translation, that Abraham's dispute with his people was "about the [existence] of God [*sic*],"[109] al-Qāsim's own remarks make it clear that Abraham sought to dissuade them from *shirk* and the worship of other beings alongside God (*maʿahu*)—an astonishing thing to do in al-Qāsim's eyes as "they are God's creation, made by Him."[110] The context provided by al-Qāsim clarifies that Abraham's pointing to signs in creation does not have the purpose of proving to his people that God actually exists; they believed in God's existence anyway as evident from their worshipping Him. Rather, Abraham presents the signs as evidence that God alone, none other, is creator and everything else is His creation. The reason al-Qāsim puts such emphasis on this insight is that it is made the foundation for the justification of God's sole deservedness of worship. The polytheism of Abraham's people (that is, their associating others in worship with God) is declared false on the basis that other entities belong to the realm of created things. Abrahamov, however, renders al-Qāsim's concern an entirely different one when he translates "*fa-istadalla ṣalawāt Allāh ʿalayhi wa-dalla* [...] *ʿalā rabb al-ʿālamīn*" as "[Abraham], [*sic*] may God bless him, brought proof of the existence of God and proved the existence of the Lord."[111] The same is the case when Abrahamov renders "*wa'l-ḥamd li'llāh ʿalā mā abāna min ḥujjatihi li-Ibrāhīm*" as "Praise be to God

106 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 112.
107 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 114. This is Q. 21:56.
108 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 116.
109 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 113.
110 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 114.
111 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 118 (Arabic) and 119 (translation).

for the argument for His [existence] [*sic*] which He manifested to Abraham."[112] Multiple similar instances can be found where Abrahamov has al-Qāsim speak of the proof of God's existence when these words, as well as the intention, are absent from his work.[113]

Another passage shedding light on al-Qāsim's concern in *al-Dalīl al-kabīr* is the following: "to the signs (*dalāʾil*) of the messengers and prophets who came after Abraham [...] belongs the speech of Joseph,"[114] al-Qāsim states. When in prison, Joseph addressed his two fellow inmates and "presented proof to them that God is unique in terms of *al-rubūbiyya*" (*mā tafarrada Allāh bihi min al-rubūbiyya*).[115] What is it, then, that distinguishes God from all other beings? What does the term *al-rubūbiyya* denote? Abrahamov translates it as "the divinity which God alone possesses."[116] Al-Qāsim's own words, scattered throughout his work, indicate the following: in one passage, for instance, al-Qāsim mentions Q. 23:86, which orders the Prophet to ask: "{Say, 'Who is the Lord [*rabb*] of the seven heavens? Who is the Lord [*rabb*] of the Mighty Throne?'}" Al-Qāsim explains this verse as pointing to the fact that the things mentioned by God are subjected to His control (*marbūb*), and what is evidence for their being made (*ṣanʿ*) is, in turn, evidence for God's *rubūbiyya*.[117] This passage, therefore, indicates that the term *al-rubūbiyya* refers to God's unique role as originator of creation.

This is confirmed when al-Qāsim states, referring to Q. 35:11's talking 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 unique when it

112 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 120 (Arabic) and 121 (translation).

113 Compare the following passages: 64/65 "*wa-min asbāb al-ʿilm bihi wa-dalāʾilihi*" = "Of the ways to know Him and proofs of His existence"; 112/113 "*wa-min al-dalāʾil ʿalayhi qawl Ibrāhīm*" = "Among the proofs [of the existence] [*sic*] of God is the statement of Abraham"; 116/117 "*wa-fī al-dalāla ʿalā Allāh bi-dalāʾilihi*" = "As to the proof (*dalāla*) of God['s existence] [*sic*] by His indications"; 118/119 "*thumma ibtadaʾ iḥtijājan ʿalayhim li'llāh fī maʿrifatihi*" = "Then he began to argue against them on behalf of God about knowing that God [exists] [*sic*]"; 118/119 "*fa-istadalla ṣalawāt Allāh ʿalayhi wa-dalla bi-mā ʿaddada min hadhā kullihi ʿalā rabb al-ʿālamīn*" = "[Abraham] [...] brought proof of the existence of God and proved the existence of the Lord"; 120/121 "*wa-laysa mimmā dalla bihi* [...] *yadullu abadan mustadillan illā ʿalā Allāh*" = "Every piece of evidence [...] that Abraham brought, only proves the existence of God."

114 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 122 and 124.

115 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 124.

116 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 125.

117 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 86.

comes to bringing about [these] things" (*wa-mā tafarrada bihi min ṣanʿ al-badāʾiʿ*).[118]

The term *al-rubūbiyya*, and the concept associated with the term, are, in al-Qāsim's reasoning, closely related to the term *rabb*. This is the case in the aforementioned Qur'anic verse Q. 23:86 where al-Qāsim explained that God is called "*rabb*" as 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."[119] Referring to Q. 45:7–13, which culminates in God's 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 comments: no human ever dared to claim that he, not God, is the one who subjugated the things mentioned in the verses. This would have been an evident lie. Not even Pharaoh, despite his utter ignorance in religious matters and arrogance, maintained to possess control over these things when he said, "{I am your supreme lord [*rabb*]}."[120] Pharaoh, al-Qāsim emphasises, of course did not intend to say "I am your *rabb* and creator (*khalāq*)"[121] when he uttered these words.[122] These explanation makes it clear that, in al-Qāsim's understanding, God is called "*rabb*" because He has the attribute "creator." It is unthinkable, al-Qāsim stresses elsewhere, that God should share the title "*rabb*" with another entity: "the *rubūbiyya* of one *rabb* is more excellent [...] than of two [...] since, if it belonged to two, each *rabb* would be lacking [something] (*manqūṣ*) [...] but how should the one who lacks [something] be [...] affirmed as *rabb?*" God, who is perfect, is hence the only *rabb* and the only one who can claim *al-rubūbiyya* for Himself. Al-Qāsim concludes: "the proof for His oneness (*al-tawḥīd*) has been established [...] against every *mulḥid*, and the dispute between him who declares God to be unique (*al-muwaḥḥid*) and the *mulḥid* concerning all this comes to an end!" God's uniqueness as creator and *rabb* entitles Him, al-Qāsim explains, to demand obedience and be honoured. This is similar to the reasoning already encountered in al-Qāsim's comments on the story of Abraham, where God's deservedness of worship was explained and justified by His unique role as creator and *rabb*.[123]

118 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 86.
119 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 154.
120 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 174. This is Q. 79:24.
121 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 174.
122 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 174 and 176. Rather, what Pharaoh meant is, "I am your *sayyid* and *malīk* [...] because in the language of the Arabs every *rabb* is a *sayyid* and *malīk*."
123 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 124.

Based on these considerations, the following may be concluded: the main subject of the *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr* is not, as Abrahamov suggested, the argument from design for God's existence. Rather, it 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 unique in terms of *al-rubūbiyya*," a term which is linked with God's role as creator. Al-Qāsim's reference to various Islamic prophets further supports this interpretation. Al-Qāsim's comments on these prophets and their missions 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 sole worthiness of worship, thereby repudiating the arch-sin of *shirk*. It follows that al-Qāsim's pointing to the manifold signs in creation does not serve the objective they serve in design arguments for God's existence. (Paley's argument from design for God's existence could here be mentioned, who, as discussed in the Introduction, used the notion of "contrivance" as "evidence of the existence and attributes of the deity.") Al-Qāsim for his part points to observable things, such as the heavens and the earth and their wise arrangement, but crucially also to human actions, in order to prove that they, in being made, must be *ascribed* to God alone, none other. In design arguments for God's existence, however, the arrangement perceived in the world serves to introduce into reality the existence of an entity in addition to, and outside, nature and the world, thus proving that God actually exists.

Al-Qāsim's endeavour to establish these points is one aspect of the "knowledge of God" which can be attained through the signs contained in creation he spoke of at the very beginning of the *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr*. Another aspect of knowledge of God concerns what could be termed His nature. This entails first and foremost, as al-Qāsim emphasises again and again, His otherness (*khilāf*) from creation, adducing as evidence the Qur'anic pronouncement, "{There is nothing like Him (*laysa ka-mithlihi shayʾ*)}."[124] God's otherness from everything lies, for instance, in His being the most exalted being, the only being deserving of worship, His being beyond time, without before and after, and not being corporeal (*jism*).[125] The last aspect is, as al-Qāsim admonishes, where the scholars of the masses (*khashw al-ʿāmma*) commit a major sin, who imagine God as a body, thus lacking "certain knowledge (*al-yaqīn*) of God" and "not believ[ing] in Him" (*lam yuʾminū bihi*).[126] The common people (*al-ʿāmma*) themselves are not spared

124 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 138. This is Q. 42:11.
125 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 138.
126 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 142.

al-Qāsim's reprimand. They are accused of "ignorance of God" (*jahl bi'llāh*) and of the signs God brought forth for them to know Him (*jahalat mā qulnā mimmā kathura Allāh ʿalā maʿrifatihi al-adlāʾ*). They hold contradictory, reprehensible beliefs about God (*qawluhā ʿalā Allāh*), but believe them to be true.[127] What is crucial about these remarks made by al-Qāsim is that they clearly illustrate that the common people and their scholars' lack of "knowledge about God" as well as their "ignorance of Him" concern God's nature and attributes only, but not God's existence, and al-Qāsim does not equate their false conception of God with the denial of God's very existence. Even the charge of "unbelief in God"[128] (*kufrahum bi'llāh*) is not a charge that they deny God's very existence, but simply refers to their erroneous beliefs about God, which do not do His grandeur justice. Al-Qāsim's statement that the certain knowledge of God he has established in his discussion "only a *mulḥid* can reject out of opposition to reason,"[129] gives us a further indication of his concern when, at the beginning of his work, he speaks of the *zanādiqa* and *mulḥid*s asking about the "proof for God," which leads to knowledge of Him.

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 I have made clear above. This knowledge should induce the wise person to worship none but God, this being the Qur'anic message itself. These signs also teach humans, if properly understood, what the right way of gaining knowledge about God and of conceiving of Him is. The notion that design in creation is evidence that God exists, is, however, not what we find in al-Qāsim's utterances. God's existence is simply taken for granted, and the question of the provability of His existence is not addressed.

One last consideration needs to be added to this. As noted above, al-Qāsim proposes that the correct method of gaining knowledge of God is the one based on the signs of design and divine wisdom in creation. In this context, he discusses a number of other conceivable ways of attempting to perceive (*idrāk*) God, which he, however, rejects. One of them is based on "supposition" (*al-ẓann*), and he notes: "correct supposition about His existence (*annihi*) might [sometimes] be correct, and wrong supposition about Him is [simply] a deviation from what He really is." The ways al-Qāsim considers flawed in perceiving God

127 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 154.
128 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 142.
129 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 140.

are, then, contrasted with the correct way, which entails knowing God insofar as He is different from all other things. (Al-Qāsim likens this way of conceiving of God to conceiving the difference between life and death, youth and old age.) He remarks: "He (Be He Praised!) and His existence (*wujūdihi*) are perceived when the things are perceived in their existence (*wujūdihā*), for He (Be He Praised!) is different from all these existent things."[130] These two statements made by al-Qāsim are interesting as here he does explicitly speak of *God's existence* which can be known. Are these statements, then, evidence that, after all, al-Qāsim does speaks of the proof and provability of God's existence? I submit that this is not the case. Al-Qāsim's mentioning "God's *existence*" (expressed by the terms "*ann*" and "*wujūd*," respectively) in the context of conceiving of God should not be understood as referring to the dichotomy between existence and non-existence, and in particular not as relating to the question of whether God Himself exists or not. Rather, it refers to the *type* or *kind* of existence predicated of God. In attempting to conceive of God, al-Qāsim accepts that God and created things share their being existents (something not all Islamic thinkers accepted),[131] yet, he emphasises, the way in which God is an existent should not be likened to the way in which other things are existents. When al-Qāsim, therefore, notes that "He (Be He Praised!) and His existence (*wujūdihi*) are perceived when the things are perceived in their existence (*wujūdihā*)," he means to say that humans may conclude that God is of incorporeal existence, for instance, when they observe that creation contains corporeal existents, or that God's existence has no beginning or end when they learn that the existence characteristic of created things has a beginning and comes to an end. (These are all points al-Qāsim makes, as alluded to above.) In the chapters to follow, we will repeatedly encounter Islamic thinkers discussing "God's existence" (*wujūd Allāh*), and it will be seen that, like al-Qāsim, they refer to the question of how one should classify the existence that belongs to God in view of their ontology that divides creation into three kinds of existence.[132]

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130 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 74.

131 Ismāʿīlīs often expressed a concern about describing God as "existent" as they saw this as likening God to creation (*tashbīh*). See Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-iqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām (The Summa Philosophiae of al-Shahrastānī)*, ed. with a translation from manuscripts in the libraries of Oxford, Paris, and Berlin by Alfred Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 128 (of the Arabic text); Paul E. Walker, "The Ismaili Vocabulary of Creation," *Studia Islamica* 40 (1974): 75–85, at 83.

132 Abrahamov (al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 184, n. 23) notes that "[t]he word *ann* occurs generally in Arabic philosophical texts in the meaning of *anniyya*, i.e. existence," but he does not make the crucial point that this refers to the question about *types* of existence, rather than the dichot-

2.4 Other Early Muʿtazilīs and the Proof of God's Existence: al-Fuwatī and al-Naẓẓām

Abrahamov has pointed out that "[al-Qāsim's] argument [from design for the existence of God] was not uncommon in the first centuries of Islam in theological circles in general and in Muʿtazilite circles in particular."[133] He bases this observation on certain remarks made by al-Khayyāṭ (d. 300/913) in his *Kitāb al-Intiṣār* about the 3rd/9th century Basrian Muʿtazilī theologians Hishām al-Fuwatī (d. 209/825) and Ibrāhīm al-Naẓẓām (d. 230/845). Al-Fuwatī, Abrahamov argues, "uses the argument from design saying that bodies (*ʾadjsām*) with their colours and their combination and separation prove that God is their Creator and Conductor."[134] Explaining al-Fuwatī's argument in more detail, Abrahamov states: "[i]n his opinion accidents alone do not prove God's existence, since the arguments for God's existence must necessarily (*bi-ʾiḍṭirār*) be known, whereas the existence of accidents is known through inference (*ʾistdlāl*) and speculation. Bodies prove God's existence, since their existence is known by the senses."[135] Josef van Ess likewise identifies al-Fuwatī as being concerned with the proof of God's existence, and notes that his argument is reflective of his ontology, that is, the position that the world is made up of bodies and accidents.[136]

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omy between being affirmed as part of reality or not (as in the question asked by arguments for God's existence, "Does God exist?").

133 Abrahamov, "al-Ḳāsim," 259 – 260. See also Abrahamov's introduction in al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 2 – 3. Madelung (*Der Imam*, 106) believes, contra Abrahamov, that the argument from design is *not* the "traditional argument" employed by Muʿtazilī theologians who instead gave preference to the argument from the createdness of the world. Daiber (*System*, 155 – 162), in a section entitled "Der Gottesbeweis bei Muʿammar und in der übrigen islamischen Theologie," states about the Muʿtazilī contemporary of al-Fuwatī and al-Naẓẓām, Muʿammar (d. 215/830), that he did not attempt a proof of God's existence because of his conception of God as beyond description: "Muʿammar's Annahme, daß Gott durch keinerlei Begriffe des Verstandes erfaßt werden kann, impliziert die Absage an jede Möglichkeit eines ontologischen Gottesbeweises." Further: "Die Existenz Gottes ist für Muʿammar ein nicht beweisbares Postulat [...] [Sie] ist somit für Muʿammar auch nicht aus der Schöpfung ableitbar." Daiber then quotes al-Khayyāṭ, who quotes Ibn al-Rāwandī, who ascribes the view to Muʿammar that "Im Himmel und in der Erde sowie im Unterschied von Nacht und Tag liegt kein Hinweis (*dalīl*) auf Gott und kein Beweis (*šāhid*) für seine Einzigkeit (*waḥdānīya*)."

134 Abrahamov, "al-Ḳāsim," 270.

135 Abrahamov, "al-Ḳāsim," 270 – 271.

136 Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: Eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 vols (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), Band IV, 7. Ulrich Rudolph (*Philosophie in der islamischen Welt*. Grundriss der Geschichte der Phi-

We may for the moment disregard the details of al-Fuwatī's epistemology and precisely what—accidents or bodies—may serve as proof, and instead turn to the question of what it is that al-Fuwatī seeks to prove. For Abrahamov and van Ess' insistence that it is God's existence does not seem to be supported when looking at the passage in question in al-Khayyāṭ's *al-Intiṣār*. He writes:[137]

> Hishām [al-Fuwatī] believed that the signs pointing to God (*al-adilla ʿalā Allāh*) must be known necessarily in terms of their existence. Accidents, however, are known, in terms of their existence, by inference and speculation (*al-istidlāl wa'l-naẓar*). [...] He, therefore, assumed that bodies together with their colours, their tastes, [...] their composition and separation are signs pointing to God [namely] that He created them and arranged them (*dalāʾil ʿalā Allāh annahu khalaqahā wa-dabbarahā*).

When maintaining that "combination and separation prove that God is their Creator and Director,"[138] Abrahamov correctly restates al-Fuwatī's conclusion. Yet, as in the case of al-Qāsim's arguments, Abrahamov seems to be mistaken when he states that al-Fuwatī's argument is an argument for God's existence. Al-Fuwatī's objective is in fact not different at all from al-Qāsim's: it is God, and no other entity, who is to be called creator of the world. The previously mentioned "signs pointing to God" are, in al-Fuwatī's use, not evidence that God is to be assumed as part of reality. Rather, they point to God, whose being part of reality is out of question, and indicate "that *He* created them and arranged them [emphasis added]."

The same is the case with al-Naẓẓām, about whom Abrahamov writes that he "uses the argument from composition [...] infer[ring] from the composition 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."[139] It is correct that al-Naẓẓām proves the originatedness of bodies (and thereby of the whole world), arguing that opposing accidents, such as coldness and hotness, cannot possibly exist together in one body due to themselves, as their natures would prevent this from happening. Their coexistence must, consequently, be due to "one who combined them (*jāmiʿ*) and subjugated them (*qāhir*)."[140] That which is subjugated is weak (*ḍaʿīf*), and weakness, as well as arrangement (*tadbīr*), are "a sign for its

losophie, Bd. 1: 8.–10. Jahrhundert. Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2012, XXX) accepts van Ess' view that the Muʿtazilīs attempted a "Gottesbeweis *e contingentia mundi*."

137 ʿAbd al-Raḥīm b. Muḥammad al-Khayyāṭ, *Kitāb al-Intiṣār wa'l-radd ʿalā Ibn al-Rawandī al-mulḥid* (al-Qāhira: Maktabat Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1925), 59.

138 Abrahamov's introduction in al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 2.

139 Abrahamov's introduction in al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 2.

140 Al-Khayyāṭ, *al-Intiṣār*, 46.

originatedness" (*dalīl ʿalā ḥadathihi*).[141] Yet, that al-Naẓẓām's ultimate objective is not the proof of God's existence, but rather, as is the case with both al-Qāsim and al-Fuwatī, the proof that God is to be called creator, is revealed by the following statement in al-Khayyāṭ's *al-Intiṣār:* "as for the composition of fire, water, soil, and air through another than God (*man siwā Allāh*), it is also a sign for their originatedness. However, their [true] originator (*muḥdith*) is not the human being [...] as humans also belong to what is subjugated. Therefore, the creator (*mukhtariʿ*) of these things and the creator of humans [...] is God."[142] Al-Naẓẓām's argument, as reproduced by al-Khayyāṭ, attempts to establish God's attribute "creator" in view of—or despite—the Muʿtazilī doctrine that humans, too, are agents and creators. Al-Naẓẓām is, like al-Qāsim, concerned with tracing all occurrences in this world back to God's creative activity, yet, unlike al-Qāsim, he sees himself faced with a difficulty since he maintains that it is humans who are responsible for combining certain elements and since combination points to a thing's coming to be at the hands of the one who combined it. Al-Naẓẓām solves this difficulty by stressing that humans, just like all other created things, are ultimately "subjugated" to God. He does, evidently, not spell out the details of his theory, but one may surmise that he wants to say that humans' ability to create ultimately depends on God having created them with this capacity (not, however, as the Ashʿarīs would understand it), which justifies calling Him "creator."

In this context, it should also be noted that, when al-Naẓẓām concludes that bodies *have a creator* or *maker*—for instance, in his remark that opposing accidents in one single body are signs "that they have one who combines and subjugates them"[143] (*anna lahumā jāmiʿan jamaʿahumā wa-qāhiran qaharahumā*)—, he does *not* mean to say that this proves the existence of some entity; this would rather describe what arguments for God's existence do: they seek to introduce into reality the existence of an entity by posing that the world *has a creator.* Al-Naẓẓām for his part intends to make a point about causality, namely that origination does not occur without originator, or that it would be false to assume that something can come to be due to itself or as the product of chance—these being two alternative theories whose refutation would later become a standard part of the theologians' proof that origination occurs due to another. That this was a concern for al-Naẓẓām is reflected in al-Khayyāṭ's remark that "what Ibrāhīm [al-Naẓẓām] intended was that [...] their originatedness

141 Al-Khayyāṭ, *al-Intiṣār*, 46.
142 Al-Khayyāṭ, *al-Intiṣār*, 46 – 47.
143 Al-Khayyāṭ, *al-Intiṣār*, 46.

makes it necessary that they have an originator who originated them since it is absurd that there is origination without originator for it."[144] It is impossible to affirm God *as* creator of originated things unless it has been shown that origination only occurs due to another. Even though not much attention is given to proving the correctness of this fundamental point in al-Khayyāṭ's presentation of al-Naẓẓām's argument, it was, as shall be seen in the following chapters, a hotly debated issue among many later theologians who deemed it to require rational proof. It shall also be seen in what follows that the arguments employed by al-Qāsim, al-Fuwatī, and al-Naẓẓām are early versions of proofs employed by generations of *mutakallimūn* to come, and that the terminology and concepts they make use of will still be encountered in later arguments.

144 Al-Khayyāṭ, *al-Intiṣār*, 47.

3 Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī (d. 256/873)

3.1 Al-Kindī's Objectives in *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*

Al-Kindī is famously known as "the first philosopher of Islam."[145] Among his works, *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*—concerned, as its title indicates, with metaphysics or "first philosophy"—arguably belongs to the most influential ones, and it is certainly the work that has received the greatest attention in academic scholarship on al-Kindī. Yet, al-Kindī was a prolific writer who penned works on a variety of other subjects as well, among them psychology, physics, cosmology, and mathematics, to name but a few.[146] Al-Kindī's broad interests and the sheer number of works he produced is certainly also explained by the fact that he was part of the famous so-called translation movement which took place in the 3rd/9th century under the patronage of the ruling caliphs at the time. This movement made a great number of Greek philosophical and scientific works available in Arabic and spurred the interest of Islamic thinkers in the writings and ideas they thus inherited. Al-Kindī's being part in the translation movement also meant that he found himself working in a climate which, under the pressure of the state, actively promoted ideas and tenets associated with the Muʿtazilī school of thought.[147] This observation is important for two reasons: on the one hand, it means that al-Kindī's audience and interlocutors often were *mutakalli-*

145 Kevin Staley, "Al-Kindi on Creation: Aristotle's Challenge to Islam," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50/3 (1989): 355–370, at 355.

146 On al-Kindī's life and works, see Gerhard Endress and Peter Adamson, "§ 4. Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī," in *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie, Philosophie in der islamischen Welt,* Band 1: 8.–10. Jahrhundert, ed. Ulrich Rudolph (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2012), 92–147.

147 On the translation movement, see Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Society (Second–Fourth/Eighth–Tenth Centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998); M.G. Balty-Guesdon, "Le Bayt al-Ḥikma de Bagdad," *Arabica* 39 (1992): 131–150. On the *miḥna* ("Inquisition") and the promotion of Muʿtazilism, see John P. Turner, *Inquisition in Early Islam: The Competition for Political and Religious Power in the Abbasid Empire* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013); John Nawas, "A Re-examination of Three Current Explanations for al-Maʾmūn's Introduction of the *Miḥna*," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26/4 (1994): 615–629. Peter Adamson (*Al-Kindī*, Great Medieval Thinkers (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23) has emphasised that it is somewhat "anachronistic" to speak of a Muʿtazilī *school* at the time of al-Kindī, for at the time we are rather witnessing "a number of competing figures within *kalām*, and it was only later that the differences between these figures seemed minor enough to group them under a single Muʿtazilite heading." It is not without taking this observation into account that I here speak of the promotion of "ideas and tenets associated with the Muʿtazilī school of thought."

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-004

mūn, which is reflected in the fact that his works frequently address issues discussed by proponents of the emerging discipline of *kalām*. Al-Kindī was evidently eager to make the point that philosophy with its methods and ideas inherited from the Greeks can give answers to problems posed by the *mutakallimūn* (this being as point I will return to in what follows). It might even be said that he considered philosophy a better tool in finding these answers for in the preface of *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* he warns of "the damage done by the interpretation (*taʾwīl*) of many who engage in speculation (*al-naẓar*) [i.e. the *mutakallimūn*] in our age [and] who are far from the truth [...] due to their lack of understanding the methods of truth."[148] On the other hand, the promotion of Muʿtazilī tenets in the circles al-Kindī worked in means that he was in fact to an extent influenced by, or at least shared, certain ideas characteristic of Muʿtazilism. The precise nature and extent of al-Kindī's relationship with Muʿtazilism has been subject to debate in the past decades,[149] yet what is evident from al-Kindī's works is that he espoused ideas and methods of proof from both the Greek philosophical tradition and the discipline of *kalām:* for instance, it has often been pointed out that in his philosophical *summa*, *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, al-Kindī dissociates himself from the position held by Aristotle and other philosophers that the world is eternal and instead adopts the *kalām* position that affirmed a temporally finite world. Fur-

148 Adamson (*Al-Kindī*, 23–24) discusses the question of who al-Kindī refers to in this statement. He himself proposes that it is not primarily Muʿtazilī *mutakallimūn*, as previously suggested by Alfred L. Ivry, but "traditionalists like Ibn Ḥanbal and his supporters." I interpret al-Kindī's statement as referring to practitioners of *kalām* since he mentions their engagement in "speculation," yet this is also the reason I tend to disagree with Adamson that al-Kindī has Ḥanbalīs in mind, for Ibn Ḥanbal and many of his early followers were known precisely for their rejection of the methods of *kalām*, which they considered "baleful innovation" (*bidʿa*). On the Ḥanbalī suspicion towards reason as a source of religious knowledge and their insistence on following authorities (*taqlīd*), see Tariq Jaffer, *Rāzī: Master of Qurʾānic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 58–80.

149 For instance, Richard Walzer ("New Studies on al-Kindī," in *Greek into Arabic: Essays on Islamic Philosophy*, Oriental Studies 1, vol. 1 (Oxford: Cassirer, 1962), 175–205) argued that certain doctrines held by al-Kindī and methods he employed reveal his affiliation with Muʿtazilism. Alfred L. Ivry ("Chapter Three: Al-Kindī and the Muʿtazilah: A Reevaluation," in Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī, *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics: A Translation of Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī's Treatise "On First Philosophy" (fī al-Falsafah al-Ūlā)*, with introduction and commentary by Alfred L. Ivry (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1974), 22–34), on the other hand, suggested that al-Kindī responded to Muʿtazilī *mutakallimūn*, but was not a *mutakallim* himself. Peter Adamson ("Al-Kindī and the Muʿtazila: Divine Attributes, Creation and Freedom," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 13 (2003): 45–77) gives an overview of the different positions on this question, as well as adds his own conclusion to them.

thermore, it has been noted that al-Kindī came to identify the subject matter of first philosophy with "the study of the first cause" (referring to God) rather than Aristotle's definition of it as the study of being qua being, thus equating first philosophy's concern with that of theology (*kalām*).[150]

In view of these considerations, it may, then, be little surprising that in the secondary academic literature it is frequently stated that in *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* al-Kindī sets out to prove God's existence. I will discuss this reading of al-Kindī's treatise shortly when dealing with the three main chapters *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* consists of, but first I want to draw attention to the preface that precedes them. In this preface, I believe, al-Kindī states in an *explicit* manner what he is concerned with in his work. This is, of course, not an entirely new observation; his preface has always been read as a programmatic introduction. Yet, in my view, it contains certain indications of his concerns which have been overlooked in existing studies. These indications, I argue, show that the assumption that al-Kindī attempts to prove God's existence in *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* is mistaken.

3.2 *Al-rubūbiyya* as First Philosophy's Concern

Al-Kindī begins the preface by praising philosophy as the noblest of all sciences as it seeks knowledge of all things as they truly are (*ʿilm al-ashyāʾ bi-ḥaqāʾiqihā*). This entails the philosopher's endeavour of attaining the truth (*al-ḥaqq*). Truth and the true natures of things, however, can only be discovered when finding their cause (*ʿilla*). The True One, or the Truth, (*al-ḥaqq*)—by which al-Kindī refers to God—is the cause of the existence of all things. This is why "the noblest part of philosophy and the highest in rank is first philosophy (*al-falsafa al-ūlā*), that is, knowledge of the Truth, the First (*al-ḥaqq al-awwal*) who is the cause of all truth. [...] for we only know every single thing that can be known in a complete way if we have complete knowledge of their cause."[151]

After having thus defined the subject matter of first philosophy, al-Kindī goes on to remark the following in the preface:[152]

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150 Peter Adamson, "Al-Kindi and the Reception of Greek Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 32–51, at 34.

151 Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī, "Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā" in *Rasāʾil al-Kindī al-falsafiyya*, ed. with introduction by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Hādī Abū Rīda (al-Qāhira: Maṭbaʿat al-Iʿtimād bi-Miṣr, 1950), 97–162, at 97–101.

152 Al-Kindī, "Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā," 104.

> knowledge of the true natures (*ḥaqāʾiq*) of things includes knowledge of *al-rubūbiyya* as well as knowledge of [God's] oneness and uniqueness (*al-waḥdāniyya*) [...]. The acquisition of all this is what the trustworthy messengers brought from God (*Allāh*). For the trustworthy messengers (God's blessings on them!) all came but to affirm God's sole *rubūbiyya* (*al-rusul* [...] *atat bi'l-iqrār bi-rubūbiyyat Allāh waḥdahu*).

This statement is striking. It immediately brings to mind al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm's insistence that the missions of the various Islamic prophets consisted in "present[ing] proof [...] that God is unique in terms of *al-rubūbiyya*."[153] We recall that al-Qāsim meant by this the affirmation that God/*Allāh* alone has the attribute "creator," which explains why none but He deserves the title "*rabb*." Al-Kindī, too, here insists that the prophets' missions were but concerned with the affirmation of "God's sole *rubūbiyya*." What is more, he links the knowledge that God alone possesses *rubūbiyya* to the knowledge of things as they really are ("knowledge of the true natures of things includes knowledge of *al-rubūbiyya*"). This is precisely the relationship between philosophy and first philosophy he explained previously: philosophy seeks knowledge of the things as they really are, but this is impossible without investigating their first, ultimate cause, which in turn is precisely what first philosophy is about. This leads to an important insight: the "knowledge of the Truth, the First who is the cause of all truth," which is what first philosophy seeks, is nothing else than "knowledge of *al-rubūbiyya*" and "the affirmation of God's sole *rubūbiyya*." To make it plain: first philosophy seeks to prove that God (that is, *Allāh*!) is to be *considered* creator of all existent things besides Him. This conclusion regarding the objective of first philosophy is, in my view, further confirmed by al-Kindī's statement, coming shortly after the above one: "so we appeal to Him who is aware of our secrets and who knows our striving to establish the proof of His *rubūbiyya* and to make plain His oneness and uniqueness (*waḥdāniyya*)!"[154] Al-Kindī here invokes God's help in achieving what he sets out to do in *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, which is precisely to prove God's *rubūbiyya*.

At this point, it might be appropriate to note that al-Kindī does not give as many indications as, for instance, al-Qāsim of what he takes the term "*rubūbiyya*" to denote. I, however, think that my linking it with the investigation of the first, ultimate cause of things (thus denoting God's role as creator) does follow from al-Kindī's own explanations, and it is further supported by the fact that

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153 Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, *Al-Ḳāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the Proof of God's Existence: The* Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr, ed. with translation, introduction, and notes by Binyamin Abrahamov (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 124.

154 Al-Kindī, "Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā," 105.

the term retained this meaning in its use by generations of Islamic thinkers to come. To give a few examples as evidence of this claim, al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), in his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, argues that what creation points to is that "there is no creator other than God and no *rabb* other than Him."[155] In discussing the possibility of there being another entity who, besides God Himself, deserves to be called "*rabb*," al-Māturīdī comes to conclude that, in fact, "God [...] is distinguished (*mutafarrid*) [from all other beings] in terms of *al-rubūbiyya*."[156] In the same way, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) explains in his Qur'anic commentary, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*: "what is meant by '*al-rabb*' [...] is 'he who is our creator and maker of our essences and attributes'."[157] Even centuries later, Ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb (d. 1206/1792) still used the term "*rubūbiyya*" to refer to God's role as creator. Thus, in explaining ʿAbd al-Wahhāb's differentiation of *tawḥīd* (the declaration that God is unique) into *tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya* and *tawḥīd al-rubūbiyya*, G.R. Hawting notes that "*[t]awḥīd al-rubūbiyya* he defines as accepting that God is the sole creator, giver of life and sustainer."[158] (*Tawḥīd al-ulūhiyya*, for ʿAbd al-Wahhāb, denotes God's sole right to be worshipped.) Considering this consistent use of the term "*rubūbiyya*" to denote God in His role as creator, it does not seem farfetched to assume that al-Kindī uses it in the same sense.

In any case, the significance, as I see it, of the term "*rubūbiyya*" in the context of al-Kindī's stating his objective in the preface of *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* has been overlooked in existing research and its implication has not been addressed. The implication is this: when in the following chapters of *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* al-Kindī seeks to prove that the world depends on another—and I shall discuss the details of his argument shortly—, he seeks to *ascribe* the world in being caused to God, so as to "affirm God's sole *rubūbiyya*," but he does not seek to prove God's existence, as frequently assumed in the secondary academic literature. These are two very different concerns, and the latter is not al-Kindī's. Alfred L. Ivry, however, in his translation of *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* renders "*rubūbiyya*" in all three instances as "divinity" (for instance, in "We ask Him Who examines our inner thoughts and who [*sic*] knows our diligence in establishing the proof of His Divinity").[159] In his introduction to the translation, Ivry then remarks:

155 Abū Manṣūr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Maḥmūd al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, edited and introduced by Fathalla Kholeif (Beyrouth: Dar El-Machreq Éditeurs, 1970), 230.

156 Al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, 21.

157 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (*Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*), 32 vols (Bayrūt: Dār al-Fikr li'l-Ṭabāʿa wa'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzīʿ, 1981), vol. 13, 43.

158 G.R. Hawting, *The Idea of Idolatry and the Emergence of Islam: From Polemic to History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 63.

159 Al-Kindī, *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics*, 59.

"[t]he chapter concludes with an invocation of Divine assistance in the task of establishing proof of the Divinity (i.e., existence) and unity of God."[160] Ivry, thus, evidently reads al-Kindī as announcing a proof of God's existence in what follows, and in his reading, al-Kindī's "affirmation of God's sole *rubūbiyya*" has an entirely different meaning than the one I have proposed. Similarly, Peter Adamson, in his monograph entitled *Al-Kindī*, comments on al-Kindī's invocation of God's help in his endeavour "to establish the proof of His *rubūbiyya* and to make plain His *waḥdāniyya*" that these are "the main tenets of Islam: God's oneness and divinity." Adamson then notes: "[t]his tells us a great deal about the project of *On First Philosophy* and al-Kindī's project in general. [...] *On First Philosophy* is an attempt to use philosophy to prove the central truth of Islamic theological dogma. And it is not only the uncontroversial claims that God exists, and that God is one, that are at issue here [rather, there are other issues, too]."[161] Adamson, thus, also reads al-Kindī's endeavour to ascribe *rubūbiyya* to God as the objective of proving God's very existence.

3.3 First Philosophy and the Proof of God's Existence

Let us now turn to the three chapters of *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, following the preface, and see what it is al-Kindī discusses there. The first chapter is concerned with the proof that "it is impossible that there is an eternal body,"[162] by which al-Kindī also means the universe, "the body of it all" (*jirm al-kull*).[163] Al-Kindī 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."[164] 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.[165]

Since the universe has hence been proven to have a beginning for its existence, in the next chapter al-Kindī turns to the proof that nothing can actualise its own existence: "the thing [that enters existence] cannot be the cause of the

160 Ivry's introduction in al-Kindī, *Al-Kindi's Metaphysics*, 9.
161 Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 24–25.
162 Al-Kindī, "Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā," 122.
163 Al-Kindī, "Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā," 120.
164 Al-Kindī, "Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā," 113–114.
165 Al-Kindī, "Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā," 116. Staley ("Al-Kindi on Creation") discusses al-Kindī's arguments for the originatedness of the world in detail.

actualisation of its [own] essence (*ʿillat kawn dhātihi*)."[166] The import of this proof is that whatever comes to be, does so due to a cause other than, and outside of, itself. Al-Kindī then discusses the notion of unity or oneness (*waḥda*). He holds that it can be said of all terms (*maqūlāt*) that they are "one" in some way, whether referring to genus, species, property, or accident. However, this oneness belongs to them only in an accidental way (*bi-nawʿ ʿaraḍī*) and it is not essential (*bi'l-dhāt*) to them, for this oneness is always connected with multiplicity (*kathra*) in some way. (Al-Kindī, for instance, remarks that "species" is one in the sense that it is one species, but multiple in the sense that it is made of many individuals.) He then concludes that unity and multiplicity, which always exist together in sensible things, are caused by an outside cause. (He, however, only puts forward this conclusion after rejecting the possibility that the association of unity and multiplicity comes about by chance (*bi'l-bakht ay al-ittifāq*), or that its cause is to be found in the thing itself.) "It has become clear," he states, "that all things have a first cause (*ʿilla ūlā*), which is not of their genus, does not resemble them, is not like them or associated with them. Rather, it is loftier and nobler than them and precedes them. It is the cause (*sabab*) of their existence and endurance. [...] [This] cause is one only, there is no multiplicity associated with it in any way."[167]

In the final chapter, al-Kindī further elaborates on the way in which sensible things are one, and contrasts this with the way in which "the True One" (*al-wāḥid al-ḥaqq*) is one. In this chapter, he also notes that the emanation (*fayḍ*) of oneness from the True One on things and their attributes *is* their entering existence. They are, hence, created and caused, and the True One is their cause (*ʿilla*), maker (*fāʿil*), and creator (*mubdiʿ*).[168]

After this summary of the three chapters of *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, I will now turn to the claim encountered in the secondary academic literature that al-Kindī is concerned with proving God's existence. Peter Adamson, who has extensively written on al-Kindī's thought, locates his proof of God's existence in the discussion of what caused the association of unity and multiplicity in sensible things. Referring to the conclusion al-Kindī reaches there that "[t]herefore, here is necessarily a true One, caused in unity," Adamson argues: "[a]l-Kindī first establishes the existence of God via an analysis of types of utterance. He [...] explain[s] that in fact all [...] fall under two main classes: the substantial and the accidental." He then adds: "[t]his distinction between the substantial

166 Al-Kindī, "Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā," 123.
167 Al-Kindī, "Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā," 143.
168 Al-Kindī, "Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā," 162.

or 'essential' and the accidental is crucial to al-Kindī's first, brief argument for the existence of God."[169] Elsewhere, Adamson remarks, in reference to the very same conclusion reached by al-Kindī, that "[s]ince it is God who is the 'true One' in question, this is nothing short of a proof for God's existence."[170] Finally, in a joint publication, Adamson and Gerhard Endress explain: "Was Gott selbst 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."[171]

Similarly, Thérèse-Anne Druart has noted, referring to al-Kindī's praise, in the preface, of first philosophy as the science that investigates "the Truth, the First" (*al-ḥaqq al-awwal*) as the cause of the world: "[t]his passage clearly shows how al-Kindī immediately moves from philosophy as knowledge of the true nature of things to knowledge of the cause of both the existence and the continuance of everything. [...] Philosophy aims at discovering the existence of God as cause and then at explaining how he creates and maintains everything in existence."[172] Druart's reading of al-Kindī's concern in *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* is, therefore, essentially the same as Adamson and Endress'. A last mention should be made of George N. Atiyeh, who has a section entitled "God: the Proofs of His Existence" in his monograph, *Al-Kindi: The Philosopher of the Arabs*. There he states with reference to *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* that the "proof of al-Kindī is based upon the highly cherished Islamic idea of God's unity coupled with the assumption that all earthly beings are composite and multiple. However, the proof is basically cosmological."[173]

For the sake of simplicity, I will focus on Adamson's as well as Endress' reading of al-Kindī's line of reasoning, but their reading can be taken to be representative of the way the other scholars cited above read his arguments, too. Adamson and Endress' reading seems to be the following: by establishing that the association of unity and multiplicity in sensible things requires an outside cause, it is also established that reality must include another entity, in addition to the world. This entity is truly one, and since al-Kindī's "true One" is taken as a

169 Adamson, "Al-Kindī and the Muʿtazila," 50.

170 Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 50.

171 Endress and Adamson, "§ 4. Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī," 130.

172 Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Metaphysics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 327–348, at 329.

173 George N. Atiyeh, *Al-Kindi: The Philosopher of the Arabs* (Rawalpindi: Islamic Research Institute, 1966), 52.

shorthand for "God," God's existence is proven. Adamson and Endress' reading of al-Kindī's line of thought, therefore, has to entail that they do not think that, at the outset of his proof, he takes God Himself, that is, *Allāh*, to be part of reality. For to assume that this is how Adamson and Endress read al-Kindī's argument would mean a contradiction in terms: God's existence cannot both be assumed already and be proven, nor is it possible to say that God/*Allāh* only *becomes* God once it is proven that He truly is one. Adamson and Endress, therefore, seem to want to say that al-Kindī *introduces* the existence of another entity, in addition to the world, into reality, an entity who was previously not counted among the entirety of existent things.

I want to proffer a different reading of al-Kindī's argument: he *does* take God Himself, that is, *Allāh*, for granted. God's existence is hence not at stake and even *cannot* be at stake. When al-Kindī concludes that there must be a "true One," he means to say this: it is known that the aforementioned association requires a cause. God/*Allāh*, thus, needs to be identified as this cause, that is, we need to say of Him that He is the cause. (This point is, as noted above, also made against the possible objection that the world has come about in other conceivable ways, for instance, by chance, which would prevent the conclusion al-Kindī seeks that it is God who must be credited with its creation.) If this is a correct description of al-Kindī's reasoning and objective, it follows in consequence that the proof of God's existence is absent from *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*. For to prove the *attribute* "creator" for God, whose existence is taken for granted, is not the same as actually proving His *existence*. This would be like saying that to prove that God indeed is powerful is the same as proving that God exists—which are certainly two different things. I do, then, not share Adamson's reading of al-Kindī that "true One" is a shorthand for "God," or put differently: that "true One" is precisely what "God" is. (Adamson's reading of al-Kindī's argument is once more reminiscent of Aquinas' proof of God's existence, who takes "God" to be nothing else than a shorthand for "cause of the world." By showing that reality comprises such an entity causing the world's existence, he has hence shown that "God" exists. Adamson seems to read al-Kindī as proposing the same kind of reasoning, with the only difference that "God" is understood as a shorthand for "true One," that is, "he who bestows oneness on other things.") Rather, I read al-Kindī as considering "true One" to be something that describes, or refers to, God in His role as cause and creator of the world. Thus, the expression "true One" denotes exactly the same as when, in the preface, al-Kindī speaks of God's "*rubūbiyya*." The emphasis al-Kindī places on the expression "true One" is of course of twofold significance and explained in two ways: on the one hand, creation is, as explained above, conceived of in terms of God's bestowing oneness on things. This means, as just noted, that calling God the "true One" is nothing else than saying that He

is creator and cause of the world. On the other hand, al-Kindī has a distinctive preference for the expression "true One" as, in the preface, he expressed his concern to attain "knowledge of [God's] oneness and uniqueness" (*al-waḥdāniyya*), in addition to "knowledge of *al-rubūbiyya*." Adamson has correctly identified this as one of "the main tenets of Islam." So, by focussing on the notion of oneness in discussing creation and its need for a cause, al-Kindī can argue that *waḥdāniyya* needs to be said of God. *Waḥdāniyya* here denotes the absence of multiplicity in any respect as well as God's absolute uniqueness and difference from creation, as al-Kindī indicates in the final chapter of *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*.

My reading of al-Kindī's train of thought, and the objective connected with it, of course entails that, at the outset of his proof, he conceives of reality as consisting of the world *and* God. This is a premise, so to speak, he takes for granted. Admittedly, he nowhere *explicitly* states that this is the premise he works from. Yet, he also nowhere spells it out that this should not be the case. In addition, I take his statement in the preface explaining his objective of proving that God/*Allāh* is to be considered to possess *rubūbiyya* alone, to be an indication that he takes the world *and* God for granted and as his starting point. (It will be seen in the chapters to come that this view of reality is also true of generations of other Muslim thinkers. This is indicated, among other things, by the fact that many *mutakallimūn* preface their proof of the world's origination and the subsequent proof that God is the world's creator with clarifying that—as Fakr al-Dīn al-Rāzī has it in his *al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*—"the world is every existent besides God (*Allāh*)"[174] or—in al-Ghazālī's words in *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād*—"we mean by 'the world' every existent besides God (*Allāh*)."[175] By defining the world in distinction from God, God and the world are taken to constitute the entirety of existence.)

Besides the claim, just discussed, that al-Kindī seeks to prove God's existence in the chapter where he discusses the requirement that there be for the association of unity and multiplicity in sensible thing a cause, we also encounter the claim in the secondary academic literature that in *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* al-Kindī proves God's existence in yet another way. Atiyeh writes, in the aforementioned section "God: the Proofs of His Existence" of his book on al-Kindī, the following:[176]

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174 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, edited by Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, 2 vols (al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Kulliyyāt al-Azhariyya, 1986), vol. 1, 19.

175 Abū Ḥāmid b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād*, ed. Muṣṭafā ʿUmrān (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Baṣāʾir, 2009), 202.

176 Atiyeh, *Al-Kindi*, 52.

> [t]he [...] proof is based upon the premise that the universe was created in time. It has been shown that the universe is finite in respect to body, time and motion, which means that it must have been created. According to the law of cau[s]ality everything created in time must have a creator. God, therefore, is its creator and He is consequently existent.

Adamson and Endress proffer a similar reading of al-Kindī's arguments, with the only difference that, unlike Atiyeh, they consider this second proof put forward by al-Kindī an *implicit* proof of God's existence. Yet, they also argue that his proof is based on the idea that the world, in being originated, requires a cause. This proof of God's existence is considered an implicit one only as al-Kindī does not actually state, after having proved the world's beginning in time, that this necessitates the existence of its creator. Adamson and Endress write:[177]

> Für al-Kindī ist Philosophie das Studium von Ursachen, daher ist die Erste Philosophie das Studium Gottes, der Ersten Ursache. Bevor er sich aber Gott zuwendet, beginnt er mit einer Argumentation gegen die Ewigkeit der Welt. Obwohl sie nirgends ausdrücklich mit der folgenden, eher theologischen Diskussion verknüpft ist, hat al-Kindī vermutlich im Sinn, dass die Endlichkeit der Welt die Notwendigkeit einer ersten und einzigen Ursache impliziert.

And a little later: "Was Gott selbst betrifft, so wird seine Existenz [...] implizit aus der Tatsache bewiesen, dass die Welt geschaffen ist."[178] It needs to be said that Adamson and Endress' observation is correct, against Atiyeh's, that al-Kindī does not use the proof that the world is originated as an opportunity to state that this points to its need for a creator. Both are, of course, justified in noting that this nevertheless follows, even if it is not spelled out, from al-Kindī's own words, for he defines the eternal as that which does not have a cause—the originated, consequently, has a cause, one could rightly pose.

It is, however, in another writing by al-Kindī, entitled *al-Risāla fī waḥdāniyyat Allāh wa-tanāhī jirm al-ʿālam* (*On God's Oneness and the Finitude of the Body of the World*), that the principle that creation requires a creator is made explicit. In this epistle, al-Kindī explains: "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."[179] The affirmation of a creator for creation in this *Risāla* has, unsurprisingly, been described as an argument for God's existence.

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177 Endress and Adamson, "§ 4. Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī," 129.

178 Endress and Adamson, "§ 4. Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī," 129–130.

179 Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī, "*Risāla fī waḥdāniyyat Allāh wa-tanāhī jirm al-ʿālam,*" in *Rasāʾil al-Kindī al-falsafiyya*, ed. with introduction by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Hādī Abū Rīda (al-Qāhira: Maṭbaʿat al-Iʿtimād bi-Miṣr, 1950), 201–207, at 207.

Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Hādī Abū Rīda, in the introduction of his edition of al-Kindī's writings, *Rasāʾil al-Kindī al-falsafiyya*, has a section entitled "proofs of God's existence" (*adillat wujūd Allāh*). In this section, he refers to the present epistle and the reasoning that origination requires an originator as an argument for God's existence.[180] Similarly, in his article "The Classical Islamic Arguments for the Existence of God," Majid Fakhry credits al-Kindī with having formulated "the earliest statement of the argument *a novitiate mundi* [*sic*]" in the *Risāla*.[181] At variance with this reading, I submit that al-Kindī's concern in *On God's Oneness and the Finitude of the Body of the World* is not to prove that God actually exists. Rather, the epistle's title should be read as a clear statement about his objective: it is to show that God/*Allāh*, who is taken for granted as much as the world is taken for granted at the outset of the proof, is one and unique (this being what "*waḥdāniyyat Allāh*" refers to). For al-Kindī, God's *waḥdāniyya* entails several things, but strikingly all things he enumerates encapsulate God's absolute difference from creation and, thus, His complete uniqueness, as the following statement indicates:[182]

> the creator is either one (*wāḥid*) or multiple (or: many, *kathīr*). [...] If he is one, he is the ultimate agent (*al-fāʿil al-awwal*). [...] He is, then, not multiple, rather he is one, containing no multiplicity—be He praised and high above the attributes the heretics (*al-mulḥidīn*) ascribe to Him!—, and His creation does not resemble Him, since multiplicity is existent in all created things, but it is not in Him at all, and since He is creator (*mubdiʿ*) and they are created, and since He is eternal and they are not eternal [...].

In my view, the affirmation of the originator for the originated world is nothing else than the affirmation and justification that there *is* a link between God and the world. For al-Kindī, this link can only be established if the world is affirmed as finite—for, to his mind, the eternal is uncaused by definition. Yet, God's *waḥdāniyya* requires that He is affirmed as creator, while the world is created. Once the link is, however, established, al-Kindī is able to affirm God's absolute uniqueness and difference from creation (His *waḥdāniyya*) in a variety of other respects as well, as detailed in the above quote. In all this, the assertion that the world in being finite requires a cause does *not* serve the purpose of introducing into reality the existence of another entity.

Let us now return to *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*. The fact left aside that al-Kindī does not explicitly make the point that the created word is in need of a creator, I sub-

180 Abū Rīda's introduction in al-Kindī, *Rasāʾil*, 57–80(4) [*sic*], esp. 77.

181 Majid Fakhry, "The Classical Islamic Arguments for the Existence of God," *The Muslim World* 47 (1957): 133–145, at 140, n. 34.

182 Al-Kindī, "*Risāla fī waḥdāniyyat Allāh*," 207.

mit that he also has no intention of presenting an *implicit* argument for God's existence. The assertion that creation depends on a creator, *if* it had been made, would expresses the same line of reasoning as in *On God's Oneness and the Finitude of the Body of the World*. In *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, however, the proof that the world owes its existence to another does *not* rest on the premise that the world has come into existence; rather, the link between God and the world (which is nothing else than the affirmation of "God's sole *rubūbiyya*") is established later based on the discussion of unity.

3.4 *Tawḥīd* as First Philosophy's Concern

This observation leads to the question 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 bearing on his objective of ascribing the creation of the world to God. 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 (*tawḥīd*).[183] It is true, an eternal world would share God's special characteristic of eternity. An eternal world would also be an uncreated world, as already noted, since al-Kindī defines the eternal as "that which does not subsist due to another [...] which has no maker (*fāʿil*) and no cause (*sabab*)."[184]

There is another reason why to establish the world as not eternal is of significance for al-Kindī. This reason concerns the concepts of creation and the creator he puts forward, as has also been noted by others.[185] Yet, the significance of the discussion of these conceptions in his philosophical *summa* is that it, too, relates to al-Kindī's stated objective of establishing God's *rubūbiyya*. To clarify this point, we might want to consider the examples of Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037) or Ibn Rushd's (d. 595/1198) conception of creation and the creator, for they both conceived of the world as "creation" and God as "creator" without, however, affirming the temporal originated of the world.[186] For al-Kindī, this would not be a valid view to hold. He maintains—in agreement with later theologians, as we shall see—that only that which enters existence after not having existed previously, is creation: "that which is brought about (*yuhawwā*) is not eternal, and that which is not eternal is created (*mubdaʿ*), that is, it comes to be from a

183 Adamson, "Al-Kindī and the Muʿtazila," 53; "Al-Kindi and the Reception of Greek Philosophy," 48.

184 Al-Kindī, "*Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*," 113.

185 See the chapter "Eternity: Infinite Creator and Finite World" in Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 74–105.

186 See Chapters Seven and Nine of this book.

cause (*ʿilla*)."[187] In his *Risāla fī al-fāʿil al-ḥaqq al-awwal al-tāmm wa'l-fāʿil 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"[188] which he calls "*ibdāʿ*," while distinguishing it from the acts performed by other entities, which are restricted to exerting an influence (*athr al-muʾaththir*) on existing things.[189] 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.[190] It follows that, while it is indeed the case 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 has come about.

It is this aspect where al-Kindī's acceptance of certain positions primarily associated with *kalām* and his rejection of certain philosophical tenets, not, however, of philosophical methods, become evident. In his preface, he expresses both praise and critique of the ancient philosophers, as whose heir he regarded himself. Praise is due to all those who contributed to the quest for truth, al-Kindī remarks. Aristotle, "the most outstanding"[191] of the ancient philosophers, and his followers deserve praise as 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."[192] Yet, while emphasising his own and his contemporaries' indebted-

187 Al-Kindī, "*Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*," 162.

188 Abū Yūsuf Yaʿqūb b. Isḥāq al-Kindī, "*Risāla fī al-fāʿil al-ḥaqq al-awwal al-tāmm wa'l-fāʿil al-nāqiṣ alladhī huwa bi'l-majāz,*" in *Rasāʾil al-Kindī al-falsafiyya*, ed. with introduction by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Hādī Abū Rīda (al-Qāhira: Maṭbaʿat al-Iʿtimād bi-Miṣr, 1950), 182–184, at 182.

189 Al-Kindī, "*Risāla fī al-fāʿil al-ḥaqq*," 183.

190 *Creatio ex nihilo* for al-Kindī is not creation from absolute nothingness, but from a prior substrate of possibility. See Peter Adamson, "Before Essence and Existence: al-Kindi's Conception of Being," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40/3 (2002): 297–312; chapter "Creation and Being" in Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 62–71; "Al-Kindī and the Muʿtazila," esp. 57–66, where Adamson shows that al-Kindī's conception of "nothing" and the "non-existent" (*maʿdūm*) is similar to that held by the Muʿtazila, who conceive of it as a "thing" (*shayʾ*). On the Muʿtazilī conception of the non-existent, see Richard M. Frank, "Al-maʿdūm wal-mawjūd: the non-existent, the existent, and the possible in the teachings of Abū Hāshim and his followers," MIDEO 14 (1980): 185–209. (Reprint in *Early Islamic Theology: The Muʿtazilites and al-Ashʿarī*, edited by Dimitri Gutas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)).

191 Al-Kindī, "*Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*," 103.

192 Al-Kindī, "*Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*," 102.

ness to the philosophers' "ways and instruments which lead to much knowledge,"[193] al-Kindī is not shy to point out that this knowledge also includes things regarding which "they failed to attain [the] true nature (*ḥaqīqa*)."[194] It seems plausible that al-Kindī here refers to the one issue where his own position fundamentally differs from that of the ancient philosophers he refers to: this 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. Despite his rather subliminal criticism, al-Kindī is evidently eager to stress the great extent to which philosophy and theology are in harmony with each other by employing philosophical terminology alongside *kalām* terminology with regards to the description of God as creator and the world as His creation. The Aristotelian conception of God as "prime mover" and bestower of eternal motion on the world as well as the Neoplatonic notion of the world as an eternal emanation from "the One" are in fact only rejected insofar as they do not acknowledge a first beginning of the world. The terminology, however, is incorporated by al-Kindī into his own account of God's creative act when he explains that "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" and "the emanation (*fayḍ*) of oneness from the True One, the First, is the coming to be of every sensible thing."[195] This can also be observed in other writings of al-Kindī, so for example in his *Risāla fī al-fāʿil al-ḥaqq* (*On the True Agent*), where al-Kindī describes God, on the one hand, as "creator" (*al-bāriʾ*) and, on the other, as "ultimate cause" (*ghāyat kull ʿilla*) and "the first cause" (*al-ʿilla al-ūlā*).[196] The first term, "*al-bāriʾ*," is a term very much characteristic of the (Islamic) *kalām* tradition. While al-Kindī was, thus, eager to emphasise similarities between philosophy and theology, many *mutakallimūn* who came after him showed, through their use of terminology, that they saw the two traditions as distinct. We shall see in the chapters to follow that the majority of *mutakallimūn* held that the term "*ʿilla*" represents a different concept than the term "*bāriʾ*," both being contraries. They, therefore, refrained from applying the term "*ʿilla*" 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

193 Al-Kindī, "*Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*," 102.

194 Al-Kindī, "*Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*," 102.

195 Al-Kindī, "*Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*," 162. On al-Kindī's inclusion of Aristotelian and Neoplatonic notions of God into his philosophy, see Adamson, "Al-Kindi and the Reception of Greek Philosophy," 38.

196 Al-Kindī, "*Risāla fī al-fāʿil al-ḥaqq al-awwal*," 183.

God as the one who gives existence to the world. Nevertheless, he is very clear that it is the concept of temporal creation as propounded by the theologians which he defends when using these terms. All these observations also apply to the term "*al-rubūbiyya*," which assumes the most central position in al-Kindī's *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, as has been seen. This term, too, is very much 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 have in common their objectives.[197]

197 Adamson, "Al-Kindī and the Muʿtazila," 48; "Al-Kindi and the Reception of Greek Philosophy," 33; Gutas, *Greek Thought*, 120.

4 Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)

4.1 Al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and the Proof of God's Existence

Al-Māturīdī's theological thought came to play an important role in the intellectual history of Islam. He is considered the founder of one of Islam's major schools of *kalām*, which followed a middle path between the camp of the proponents of reason-based argumentation and speculation and the camp of the traditionalists who rejected *kalām*.[198] The Māturīdiyya would later, after the death of its eponym and its subsequent consolidation, become the predominant school of thought in Transoxania and other regions.[199] Only two of al-Māturīdī's works have survived. One of them is his Qur'anic commentary, entitled *Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān*,[200] the other one his theological *summa* with the title *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Ulrich Rudolph has praised al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* for its intellectual rigour which surpasses earlier theological writings from the region: "[es] überragt [...] alle älteren theologischen Texte aus Transoxanien an Umfang, an gedanklichem Reichtum und in der Methode."[201]

The *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* has received some scholarly attention in the past, and it has frequently been said that the proof of God's existence is an essential part of al-Māturīdī's theological reflections in this work. For instance, David Thomas has suggested that, in the *Kitāb al-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."[202] Fathalla Kholeif, in his introduction to his edition of the Arabic text of the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, explains al-Māturīdī's approach in a similar way: "[b]y means of reason, we know the divine wisdom in creation and the evidence

198 Andrew Rippin (*Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2005), 85) 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." See also David Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2008), 79.

199 Philipp Bruckmayr, "The Spread and Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām and Underlying Dynamics," *Iran & the Caucasus* 13/1 (2009): 59 – 92.

200 Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān*, ed. Ahmed Vanlıoğlu and Bekir Topaloğlu (Istanbul: Dār al-Mīzān, 2005).

201 Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 221.

202 Thomas, *Christian Doctrines*, 80 – 81.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-005

therein of the existence of the Creator."[203] In his monograph, *Al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand*, Ulrich Rudolph has suggested the same reading. In a section entitled "Die Existenz Gottes," he discusses "[al-Māturīdīs] Nachweis, daß tatsächlich ein Schöpfer [...] existiere" and proposes that al-Māturīdī bases his proof of God's existence on "ihre [i. e. materielle Dinge] Unselbständigkeit und ihre offenkundige Kontingenz."[204] Mustafa Cerić has likewise argued that al-Māturīdī proves God's existence "through its [i. e. the world's] nature and function [in which we] find indisputable proof of the existence of its Creator, i. e., God."[205] Cerić furthermore writes: "[w]e know that the world exists because we see it with our eyes [...]. However, we do not see God. So the question is: Does God 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."[206] Finally, in his study of al-Māturīdī's work entitled *Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī: Ḥayātuhu wa-ārāʾuhu al-ʿaqdiyya*, Bilqāsim al-Ghālī dedicates a major section to "al-Māturīdī's proofs of the existence of God"[207] (*istidlāl al-Māturīdī ʿalā wujūd Allāh*). Introducing his discussion of several proofs he identifies in al-Māturīdī's work, al-Ghālī remarks: "the *kalām* schools of the Ashʿarīs and the Muʿtazilīs were well-versed in proving the existence of God (*wujūd Allāh*) [...] and we encounter this also in the Māturīdī school and in particular at the hands of its founder, Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī."[208] These quotes indicate that al-Māturīdī has been seen to have a particular preference for the cosmological argument, as also remarked by Cerić: "[a]l-Māturīdī's arguments for the existence of God are by and large Cosmological [*sic*]."[209]

At first glance, the view that al-Māturīdī attempts a cosmological proof of God's existence in his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* does not seem unfounded. After all, al-Māturīdī himself speaks of "proofs for him who brought it [i. e. creation]

203 Fathalla Kholeif's introduction in Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, ed. and introduced by Fathalla Kholeif (Beyrouth: Dar El-Machreq Éditeurs, 1970), xix.

204 Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, 291.

205 Mustafa Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islām: A Study of the Theology of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)* (Kuala Lumpur: Art Printing Works Sdn. Bhd., 1995), 108.

206 Cerić, *Roots*, 141–142.

207 Bilqāsim al-Ghālī, *Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī: Ḥayātuhu wa-ārāʾuhu al-ʿaqdiyya* (Tūnis: Dār al-Turkī li'l-Nashr, 1989), 102–134.

208 Al-Ghālī, *Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī*, 102.

209 Cerić, *Roots*, 144. Hans Daiber (*Das theologisch-philosophische System des Muʿammar ibn ʿAbbād as-Sulamī (gest. 830 n. Chr.)*, Beiruter Texte und Studien, herausgegeben vom Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Band 19 (Beirut, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1975), 156) comments briefly on al-Māturīdī "welcher in seinem Gottesbeweis [...] Elemente des kosmologischen und teleologischen Gottesbeweises verwertet hat."

about" (*al-dalāla ʿalā man anshaʾahu*) and declares that "there is no way to knowledge of this except by employing reason and speculation (*al-naẓar*) about the things [observed around us]."[210] In addition to this, it is a correct observation that al-Māturīdī makes "the proof for the originatedness (*ḥadath*) of the atoms"[211]—and implicitly the world as a whole—the basis of his "proof that there is for the world an originator (*muḥdith*)."[212] Yet, while it is true for cosmological arguments that they seek to prove God's existence by inferring the existence of an entity, in addition to the world, from the observation that the world requires as cause, this does not appear to be al-Māturīdī's reasoning or objective. I will argue that al-Māturīdī takes God's existence for granted and assumes Him to be part of reality from the outset of his proof. His concerns in the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* are, hence, of a different nature than to prove that God actually exists, as shall be discussed in what follows.

4.2 The Proof of the Originatedness of the World

The *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* opens with a number of sections which reveal al-Māturīdī's insistence on the necessity of grounding religion on reason and his rejection of blind imitation of authorities (*taqlīd*) (so, for instance, in the section entitled "The rejection of *taqlīd* and the necessity of knowing religion by proof"). In one of these sections, he declares that knowledge of religion is based on revelation (*al-samʿ*) and reason (*al-ʿaql*) coming together.[213] One aspect the knowledge of religion pertains to is the question of whether the world has a first beginning for its existence or whether it has existed from all eternity.[214] The truth of this matter, and "the knowledge of the true natures (*ḥaqāʾiq*) of things," which it entails, can be established either by recourse to sensory observation of the world around us (*al-ḥawās*), or to revelation (*al-akhbār*), or to reasoning and speculation (*al-naẓar*).[215] Turning to the section dealing with the proof that the world is

210 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 10.
211 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 11. "Atom"—or one could also translate "corporeal substance"—is here designated by the term "*ʿayn*," pl. "*aʿyān*." Al-Māturīdī often uses this term interchangeably with "*jawhar* (*wāḥid*)," pl. "*jawāhir*." On al-Māturīdī's use of terminology, see Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, 271–272.
212 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 17.
213 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 4.
214 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 10.
215 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 7.

originated, al-Māturīdī discusses the three classes of proof one after the other. In the category of revelation, he points to Qur'anic pronouncements (without, however, quoting specific verses) in which "God Himself informed that He is the creator (*khāliq*) of everything and the maker (*badīʿ*) of the heavens and the earth, and that He owns all that is in them."[216] It is interesting to observe that in seeking to prove that the world has entered existence, al-Māturīdī bases his argument on God's self-declaration as its creator. He could instead have referred his readers to verses which describe the world as "creation." Despite the somewhat curious nature of his argument, it does make sense in al-Māturīdī's system of thought. For in a previous section he explained that originatedness implies that something exists due to another, while beginningless, eternal existence implies that something is uncaused and self-subsisting. This is indicated by his distinguishing between "proofs for one who originated it [i.e. creation] (*al-dalāla ʿalā man anshaʾahu*) as opposed to [lit.: or, *aw*] its existing due to itself (*kawn bi-nafsihi*), and [proofs for] originatedness as opposed to eternity."[217] This means that if God describes Himself as the cause of the existence of the world, the world must have a beginning for its existence and is originated. The same reasoning is invoked elsewhere when al-Māturīdī states that the fact that "God created creation as creation (*khalaqa al-khalq khalqan*) proves its originatedness."[218]

In the category of proofs based on sense observation, al-Māturīdī's once more invokes the aforementioned reasoning that originatedness and dependence on another go hand in hand. He argues: "every single body (*ʿayn*) is observed to be bound by necessity (*ḍarūra*) and need (*ḥāja*), but to the eternal applies the condition of self-sufficiency (*ghinā*) as it does not need another in view of its eternity. Necessity and need, however, mean depending on another. This proves its [i.e. the body's] originatedness."[219]

In making recourse to reason-based arguments, al-Māturīdī puts forward an argument which is reminiscent of the arguments from particularisation (*ikhtiṣāṣ* or *takhṣīṣ*) frequently employed by later *mutakallimūn*.[220] Even though he does

216 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 11. Statements of this nature can be found, for instance, in Q. 39:62 and Q. 2:117. For a more detailed discussion of al-Māturīdī's arguments for the world's originatedness, see *Al-Māturīdī*, 257–268; Cerić, *Roots*, 108–141.

217 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 10.

218 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 45.

219 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 11.

220 On the *kalām* argument from particularisation, see Herbert A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), Chapter VI "Arguments from the Concept of Particularization"

not employ these terms, he makes use of the same idea: every observable thing contains different and opposing natures (*ṭabāʾiʿ*), such as being small and big, good and evil, or light and darkness, which are conjoined in it despite their natural repulsion. This proves not only that their being conjoined is due to another, but also simultaneously their originatedness: "their being conjoined due to another has been proven, and therein lies their originated."[221] Contrary natures are evidently also subject to change (*taghayyur*) and perishability (*fanāʾ*) since they never exist together at the same time. This proves that "they do not exist due to themselves," and this means nothing else than their being originated.[222]

Al-Māturīdī's invocation of "change" in his argument for the world's originatedness was not novel in *kalām*. Before him, al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 225/860) made use of it in his *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr*. Interestingly, however, al-Qāsim invoked the notion of change not in order to prove the world's temporal origin, but in support of the "principle of causation," that is, the principle that something originated depends on an originator (rather than actualising its own existence or occurring by chance).[223] Al-Māturīdī's contemporary, al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936), makes use of the very same notion of change in his own proof that the world is originated, as shall be seen in the next chapter. In al-Māturīdī, the argument from change for the world's originatedness appears as something of a forerunner of later *mutakallimūn*'s arguments based on accidents, which form the foundation of their atomistic worldview.[224] Al-Māturīdī explains that the aforementioned changes occurring in a body "are not [due to] the body [itself]" (*ghayr al-jism*), and he goes on to identify them as accidents (*aʿrāḍ*) and attributes (*ṣifāt*), respectively.[225] He then states: "at all points in time, there

(154 – 212); "Arguments from the Concept of Particularization in Arabic Philosophy", *Philosophy East and West* 18/4 (1968): 299 – 314.

221 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 12.

222 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 12.

223 Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, *Al-Ḳāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the Proof of God's Existence: The* Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr, ed. with translation, introduction, and notes by Binyamin Abrahamov (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 90: "all these changes (*al-taṣārīf*) must have one who causes change (*muṣarrif*)."

224 For an outline of Islamic atomism, see Shlomo Pines, *Studies in Islamic Atomism*, translated from German by Michael Schwarz, ed. Tzavi Langermann (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1997); A.I. Sabra, "The Simple Ontology of Kalām Atomism: An Outline," *Early Science and Medicine* 14, Evidence and Interpretations: Studies on Early Science and Medicine in Honor of John E. Murdoch (2009): 68 – 78, especially 68 – 78; Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1976).

225 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 16. On al-Māturīdī's atomistic worldview as well as the influences on him by earlier, especially Muʿtazilī, *mutakallimūn*, see the section "Die ontologische Struktur der Welt" in Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, 268 – 291.

must either be movement or rest, and whatever is either this or that, is finite (*mutanāh*). If they cannot coexist in eternity, it is necessary that each one of them has come about. This reveals as false [the claim] that there could be in eternity something originated [...]. This necessitates the originatedness of that which is not free from it."[226] In stressing that the body, in which the originated accidents inhere, is also originated, al-Māturīdī puts forward a reasoning to prove the world's origination which we will frequently encounter in the works of later *mutakallimūn* as well. This is the famous axiom that whatever is not free from something originated is also originated. In addition to this line of reasoning, al-Māturīdī proffers an argument for the originatedness of the world in which he makes recourse to the (among the *mutakallimūn* contentious) postulate that "the realm of the observable [...] is the basis for knowledge of the realm of the unobservable" (*al-shāhid* [...] *aṣl li'l-ʿilm bi'l-ghāʾib*).[227] Just as it is true for the *shāhid*, al-Māturīdī argues, that something written (*kitāba*) does not come about unless due to an author, it is also true for the *ghāʾib* and the world as a whole: a writing and the world have in common that they exhibit composition and arrangement (*taʾlīf*), and this only comes about due to another. This, in turn, indicates its originatedness, for "everything in the *shāhid* that exhibits arrangement [...] has come about after its cause (*yakūn aḥdath mimman bihi*)."[228]

Al-Māturīdī's endeavour to prove the world's originatedness, it must be noted, is of course not only related to the subsequent endeavour to show that the world depends for its existence on God. Rather, the proof that the world has entered existence is motivated by al-Māturīdī's particular understanding of the numerous Qur'anic declarations that the world is creation (*khalq*). Characteristic of the *kalām* position and at variance with the *falāsifa*'s understanding of this term (as shall be seen in the chapters to follow), al-Māturīdī defends a conception of creation as being *ex nihilo*.[229] For him, "creation" is "origination," and

226 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 12.

227 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 45. Al-Māturīdī has a section dedicated to this principle, entitled "On the proofs of the *shāhid* for the *ghāʾib*" (27–29). There, he mentions that disagreement existed about its proper use. For instance, some argued that it implied that the whole world must be eternal (an item of knowledge pertaining to the *ghāʾib*) because every moment in time is observed to be preceded by another moment (pertaining to the *shāhid*). Others argued, at variance with this view, that the world has a first beginning for its existence (*ghāʾib*) since every observable thing enters existence (*shāhid*). See also the section "Der Schluß vom Sichtbaren auf das Unsichtbare" (295–298) in Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*.

228 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 15.

229 On the *kalām* account of *creatio ex nihilo* and related debates, see Chapter V "Creation of the World" (355–465) in Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*.

it means "being after not having been"[230] (*al-kawn baʿda an lam yakun*), "being brought into existence from non-existence"[231] (*al-ikhrāj min al-ʿadam ilā al-wujūd*), and involves "the origination of the world not from anything"[232] (*ḥadath al-ʿālam lā min shayʾ*). The world was not, then God brought it about.

The affirmation that the world has come about—and more precisely: *ex nihilo*—is a crucial tenet to defend for al-Māturīdī, and he presents disagreement with his understanding of scripture on this question to have serious and problematic consequences. Castigating his fellow theologians among the Muʿtazila for their teaching that the non-existent (*al-maʿdūm*) is a thing (*shayʾ*), rather than denying it any reality whatsoever,[233] he admonishes that this teaching amounts to "the denial of God's oneness and uniqueness" (*nafī al-tawḥīd*). This is so because[234]

> the Muʿtazila said the non-existent is [the same as] things, and the "thing-ness" (*shayʾiyya*) of these things is not due to God, rather their entering existence from non-existence is due to God. [...] They believe in the eternity of the world, for the world is the things besides God, and the non-existent is things besides God which are eternal. In this they are at variance with all those who declare God to be unique (*al-muwaḥḥidūn*) when it comes to God's bringing about the things from not-anything (*lā shayʾ*).

We have encountered the link between the affirmation that the world is originated and the defence of the all-important notion of *tawḥīd* before, namely in al-Kindī's (d. 256/873) *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*. Yet, while in al-Kindī's reasoning the affirmation of a temporal beginning for the world is not a prerequisite for ascribing it to God as its cause, in al-Māturīdī it is indeed made the basis for the inference "that there is for the world an originator"[235] (*anna li'l-ʿālam muḥdith*).

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230 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 13.

231 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 235.

232 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 45.

233 On this doctrine, see, for instance, ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Firaq wa-ṭabaqāt al-Muʿtazila*, ed. ʿAlī Sāmī al-Nashshār and ʿIṣām al-Dīn Muḥammad ʿAlī (al-Iskandariyya: Dār al-Ṭibāʿa al-Jāmiʿiyya, 1972), 169; al-Māturīdī's own account in the section "The non-existent's being a thing according to the Muʿtazila and a reply to them" (*al-Tawḥīd*, 86–92). See also Richard M. Frank, "Al-maʿdūm wal-mawjūd: the non-existent, the existent, and the possible in the teachings of Abū Hāshim and his followers," *MIDEO* 14 (1980): 185–209. (Reprint in *Early Islamic Theology: The Muʿtazilites and al-Ashʿarī*, edited by Dimitri Gutas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007)).

234 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 86.

235 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 17.

4.3 The Proof of the Originator for the World

"The proof that there is for the world an originator," al-Māturīdī states in this section, "is that its originatedness has been established on the basis of what we [previously] explained, and on the basis that there is nothing in this world, belonging to the observable realm, which is conjoined or separated due to itself, it is established that this is due to another."[236] Al-Māturīdī here invokes the dichotomy he postulated before between the eternal which is self-subsistent and the originated which receives its existence from another. Since the world has a beginning for its existence, it follows that it exists due to another. The principle that underlies his reasoning is what we could term the "principle of causation." As noted above, it entails that things enter existence due to an outside cause; they do not pop into existence uncaused and by chance, or caused by their own essences. It is interesting to note that in his defence of this crucial principle al-Māturīdī does not make recourse to elaborate speculative arguments as we commonly find them in the works of many later *mutakallimūn*. Instead, he seems to rely mainly on observation of the world in order to establish the validity of this principle. It will be seen in the chapters to follow that many other *mutakallimūn*, but also Islamic philosophers, did *not* consider observation a good enough basis to affirm the principle of causation, and they instead invoked reason-based arguments.

Be this as it may, it is, as noted above, precisely the reasoning that infers the creator from creation which, in the secondary academic literature, has been described as al-Māturīdī's (cosmological) argument for God's existence. Yet, al-Māturīdī's concern and objective rather appears to be the defence of the doctrine, going back to the Qur'an itself, that the existence of the world is to be *ascribed* to God's creative activity. His objective, therefore, is to provide an answer to the question "How can it be shown that God brought the world into existence?" He does not seek to answer the question "How can it be shown that God actually exists?" I do not share the view put forward in the secondary academic literature that, at the outset of his proof, al-Māturīdī does not take God/*Allāh* Himself to be part of reality (for to prove God's existence is said to be precisely what he is after). I also do not think that al-Māturīdī's attempt at proving that God/*Allāh*, whom he takes for granted, indeed is the creator of the whole world should be described as an "argument for God's existence," as explained in the Introduction of this book. This is certainly not how in the secondary academic literature al-Māturīdī's reasoning is understood anyway. It will be seen that we can learn about what al-Māturīdī seeks to prove with his affirmation of the creator for cre-

236 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 17.

ation when taking into account certain statements found in the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* in places other than the actual section on the proof of the creator. In this latter section, al-Māturīdī is somewhat silent about the exact purpose of this proof. His statements found elsewhere, however, can shed light on this question.

One of these sections is where al-Māturīdī is concerned with the much-debated notion of human efficient causality. (The section is entitled "The disagreement among the different groups about the actions of creation (*afʿāl al-khalq*).") In this section, al-Māturīdī speaks of "the testimony contained in creation that there is no creator other than God (*Allāh*) and no *rabb* other than Him."[237] In defending the tenet that human actions are ultimately God's creation (a view al-Māturīdī shares with al-Ashʿarī and which sets him apart from the Muʿtazilī theologians), he declares that creation contains evidence that it is God, and God alone, who is creator. Creation is here used as proof for one of God's attributes, that is, His being sole creator. Furthermore, in the above statement al-Māturīdī explains that creation contains evidence that God is the only *rabb*. We have come across this term in the previous chapter of this book on al-Kindī, who employed this term to describe God in His role as cause of the world. Al-Māturīdī uses the term in exactly the same sense. In the section entitled "The originator of the world is one and unique (*wāḥid*)," [238] he explains—making explicit reference to Q. 21:22, {If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods (*āliha*) but Him, both heavens and earth would be in ruin [...]}—the following: to assume that there be an *ilāh* in addition to God (*Allāh*) would entail that each of the two has the ability (*yaqdiru*) to prevent the other from doing what he intends. As a consequence, if both were unable to act as they please, it would mean "the destruction of *al-rubūbiyya*," and if one of them had the power to prevent the other one, "then he would be *al-rabb*."[239] From these explanations we can infer that the term "*rabb*" implies the ability to act according to one's wish and will, and "*rubūbiyya*" is ascribed to the one alone from whom an act actually comes forth. As for the term "*ilāh*," in al-Māturīdī's usage it denotes the same concept as that denoted by the term "*rabb*." This

237 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 230. On al-Māturīdī's position on human efficient causality, see the section "Die Handlungen der Menschen" (336–343) in Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*; J. Meric Pessagno, "Irāda, Ikhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb: The View of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104/1, Studies in Islam and the Ancient Near East Dedicated to Franz Rosenthal (1984): 177–191.

238 For al-Māturīdī (*Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 19), God's being "*wāḥid*" refers to several things, which are best captured by the translation "one and unique": "'*al-wāḥid*' signifies the beginning of numbers; it signifies greatness, power, loftiness, and excellence."

239 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 21.

is indicated by the following statement he makes in the same section on God's creation of human deeds: "if there were in addition to God (*Allāh*) [another] *ilāh* [...] and if the other one did not act, it would be clear that God is one and unique in terms of *al-ilāhiyya* (*Allāh al-mutawaḥḥid bi'l-ilāhiyya*) and one and unique in terms of *al-rubūbiyya* (*al-mutafarrid bi'l-rubūbiyya*)."[240] (The reason I have left the terms "*ilāh*" and "*ilāhiyya*" untranslated in the above quotes has to do with the difficulty, as I see it, of finding an English term that captures the concept conveyed by them. It is not uncommon in the secondary academic literature to render the term "*ilāh*" as "god" (with a small g) or even "God" (with a capital g), so for example in the translation of the *shahāda* (testimony of faith), "*lā ilāha illā'llāh*", as "there is no god/God but God."[241] I consider it questionable whether "god" would convey the notion, intended by al-Māturīdī, that God is described as sole creator and as able to act as He pleases.)

These considerations suggest the following conclusion: creation—and therefore the proof that the world is originated—contains evidence for al-Māturīdī that points to the insight that God is to be described as the world's creator. The objective of "the proof that there is for the world an originator" is to make the point that the world, in being originated, owes its existence to another and—this being the ultimate objective—that it is God who is to be credited with its creation and to be described as its creator. To affirm God as sole *rabb* and *ilāh* requires, for al-Māturīdī, the prior proof that He has the attribute "creator." Al-Māturīdī's affirmation of God's attribute "creator" (undertaken in the section on "the proof that there is for the world an originator") aims at lending support in the form of rational arguments to certain pronouncements in scripture, such as the admonition in Q. 3:64 that {none of us takes others beside God as lords (*arbāb*)} and the aforementioned testimony of faith, which also derives from the Qur'an. It should not be forgotten that in his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, al-Māturīdī is —as the title unmistakably indicates—concerned with affirming God's *tawḥīd*, and this involves, first and foremost, the affirmation of God's being sole creator.

240 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 20 – 21.

241 For example, by Daniel A. Madigan ("Themes and Topics," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qurʾān*, ed. Jane Dammen MacAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 79 – 96) who renders both "*Allāh*" and "*ilāh*" as "God." See also Muhammad Abdel Haleem, "Qur'an and Hadith," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. T. Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 19 – 32.

4.4 The Argument from Evil for the Originator

In the section on "the proof that the world has an originator," al-Māturīdī presents a number of arguments. One argument in particular has received some attention in the secondary academic literature: the argument that proves the world's dependence on an outside cause based on the notion of evil. Kholeif has described this particular argument as "strange" 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."[242] Al-Māturīdī's argument runs as follows:[243]

> the proof that there is for the world an originator is [...] that if the world existed due to itself, there would be no point in time which is truer for it than any other, and no state which is more appropriate for it than any other, and no characteristic which is more suitable for it than any other. But since it is characterised by different points in time, states, and attributes, it is established that it does not exist due to itself—for if it did, it would be possible (*jāza*) that everything gives itself states which are most beautiful and the best, and this entails that evil and horrendous things would not exist (*fa-yabṭul bihi al-shurūr wa'l-qabā'iḥ*), but their existence proves the world's existence due to another.

Kholeif and J. Meric Pessagno both maintain that al-Māturīdī is the only Islamic thinker to present an argument of this kind.[244] No other thinker, Pessagno states, has "picked up the threat and the style" of it.[245] While it is true that thinkers of the classical period do not seem to employ the notion of evil in their arguments to establish the principle of causation and God's role as creator, it needs to be pointed out that the notion of evil does appear in the proof that God is the *sole* creator. This reasoning can be found in al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm's *Kitāb al-Radd ʿalā al-mulīd*, as Binyamin Abrahamov states. It is also encountered in al-Shahrastānī's (d. 548/1153) *Nihāyat al-iqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām*, who proffers a refutation of the view that good and evil in creation point to two creators, one causing good, the other one evil, and argues instead—in a manner characteristic of argu-

242 Kholeif's introduction in al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, xxv. Kholeif mentions Plato's proof of God's existence which is based on the notions of good and beauty.

243 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 17.

244 Kholeif's introduction in al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, xxiv: "[t]hen al-Māturīdī advances a proof which we do not find in the works of any of the philosophers or theologians who preceded him."

245 J. Meric Pessagno, "The Uses of Evil in Māturīdian Thought," *Studia Islamica* 60 (1984): 59–82, at 73.

ments from particularisation—that their existence points to a single cause.[246] In any case, Pessagno says about al-Māturīdī's argument that "the existence of evils, moral and physical, is made the explicit basis for coming to know that there is a God."[247] Kholeif, who shares this view, adds that 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" and hence "evil would not have existed," but the factual existence of evil proves that God exists.[248] It should here also be noted that al-Ghālī, too, reads al-Māturīdī's argument from evil as having the objective to prove that God exists. He discusses al-Māturīdī's argument in a section entitled "The existence of evil in the world is a proof for the existence of God (*wujūd Allāh*)."[249] There he presents al-Māturīdī's reasoning as being this: "if the world had created itself, how, then, would it be content with these imperfections and evils [existing in it]? If it existed due to itself, it would have chosen the most magnificent and beautiful conditions and the most excellent and beautiful characteristics. This means in consequence that this world [instead] exists due to another, and this other is God (*Allāh*)."[250]

There are two points worth considering. The first one is that the way al-Māturīdī phrases his argument indeed suggests that he wants to say that evil would not be found in the world if the world were not created but existed due to itself. After all, he only presents the option that, in this scenario, no evil exists, but does not present the option that no good should exist. However, it could be objected to this reading of al-Māturīdī's argument that he never actually states that, were things to give themselves existence and bring about their own attributes, they would *necessarily*, or *certainly*, be free of all evil. Instead he says, "if

246 Abrahamov (his introduction in al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 16) mentions al-Qāsim's argument that "[t]he existence of good and evil proves that the Creator of the universe is one." Al-Shahrastānī (*Nihāyat al-iqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām (The Summa Philosophiae of al-Shahrastānī)*, ed. with a translation from manuscripts in the libraries of Oxford, Paris, and Berlin by Alfred Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 97–98 (Arabic text)) discusses the following view: "the act proves the existence of a creator of the world. […] We find among the existents good and evil (*khayr wa-sharr*), order and disorder. That which good proves, is different from that which evil proves. The existence of good proves one who wants good, and the existence of evil proves one who wants evil." It has to be conceded to Pessagno and Kholeif that al-Qāsim's *Dalīl al-kabīr* was published by Abrahamov only in 1990, while their publications are from 1984 and 1970, respectively.

247 Pessagno, "The Uses of Evil," 74.

248 Kholeif's introduction in al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, xxiv.

249 Al-Ghālī, *Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī*, 115.

250 Al-Ghālī, *Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī*, 115.

the world were due to itself, it would be *possible* (*jāza*)" that evil did not exist. He could, theoretically, have maintained the exact opposite, that is, that good would not be found in the world, if it existed due to itself. For we need to bear in mind 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 stresses in the same section, "it would remain as it is and in one single state (*ḥadd wāḥid*)."[251] If the world were not dependent on another, we would not encounter goodness in it, if it chose to bring about evil only—and we would not encounter evil in it, if it chose to bring about goodness only. The same reasoning would in fact apply to all other opposing characteristics the world exhibits, and we recall that in a previous section al-Māturīdī mentioned good and evil alongside a number of other pairs, such as motion and rest as well as light and darkness. Just as in the case of good and evil, it would be true that if the world existed due to itself, it would be *possible* that there is only motion, but no rest, only light, but no darkness, and so on.

The second point we need to consider concerns Kholeif and Pessagno's as well as al-Ghālī's reading of al-Māturīdī's argument as having the purpose of proving God's existence. I have discussed above that al-Māturīdī speaks of creation as containing evidence that allows the conclusion that God is its creator —the *only* creator, in fact. This concept was conveyed by the term "*rubūbiyya*," which al-Māturīdī ascribed to God alone. Crucially, the existence of good and evil in creation is presented as evidence of the exact same point. This is spelled out in a much later section of the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, entitled "The wisdom behind the creation of harmful elements (*al-jawāhir al-ḍārra*)," in which al-Māturīdī states:[252]

> God (*Allāh*) made creation, considering the difference of its elements in terms of their being harmful or beneficial, an indication of its creator, who is wise and knowing [...]. In this [i.e. in creation's consisting of harmful and beneficial elements], therefore, lies the clarification

251 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 18. Note that a very similar notion is found already in al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm's *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr*, who writes in the context of his own proof that God is to be described as the creator of the world (that is, in the same context as al-Māturīdī's argument): "do [people] not know that, if these things [...] existed according to their own [i.e. of the things mentioned] will and wishing, no part of them would be better than any other, and the earth would not be low and raised [...]?! All things would be equal, so that nothing would be the opposite of anything else" (al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, *Al-Ḳāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the Proof of God's Existence: The* Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr, ed. with translation, introduction, and notes by Binyamin Abrahamov (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 114). Here, too, the emphasis is on the equality of all things, not on the question of whether things would be like this or like that.

252 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 109.

> 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 [that which functions as] proofs for His oneness and uniqueness (*waḥdāniyyatihi*) and in [that which is] the witness to His sole *rubūbiyya*.

This quote spells out what I have argued above: the existence of good and evil in creation is seen by al-Māturīdī as pointing to the fact that God is their creator. God Himself purposefully placed these two opposite characteristics in creation in order to provide humans with a way of knowing that He is unique and deserves the title *rabb* as He is the creator of these characteristics. This is precisely what al-Māturīdī's argument from evil in the section on the proof that the world has an originator seeks to establish—and this is not the concern to prove that God (*Allāh*) actually exists. Al-Ghālī's reading of al-Māturīdī's argument, however, implies that al-Māturīdī proves *God's* existence by inferring from the existence of evil in the world that the world depends on another entity, outside the world. This means that by introducing into reality the existence of said entity who is the world's creator, God's existence is proven, for "God" (*Allāh*) stands for nothing else than "creator of the world." In al-Ghālī's reading, there is no difference for al-Māturīdī between what "God" stands for and what "creator of the world" denotes. This is not the case for al-Māturīdī, however, who makes a distinction between what "*Allāh*" refers to and what His attributes such as "*rabb*" (which is linked to "*rubūbiyya*") and "*ilāh*" denote.

At this point I want say a word about the reasons why al-Māturīdī might have chosen the (admittedly) rarely used notions of evil and goodness in order to make the point that the world, in being creation, depends on God as its sole creator. One reason for the emphasis he places on the notions of evil and goodness—out of all other possible pairs of opposing characteristics within the world—might have to do with the intention to criticise two groups whose beliefs he repeatedly attacks throughout the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd:* the dualists (*al-thanawiyya*) and the Muʿtazilīs. It is well-known that adherents of dualist religions, such as Manichaeans and Zoroastrians, were present in Samarqand in al-Māturīdī's times. The same is true for a number of Muʿtazilī theologians, such as Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Balkhī al-Kaʿbī (d. 319/931), whom al-Māturīdī debated and about whom it has been said that "[er] zählte ohne Zweifel zu den herausragenden Theologen der Epoche."[253] (Charles Genequand and Ulrich Rudolph have pointed

253 On al-Māturīdī's engagement with dualism, see the section "Der Mittelpunkt der Diskussion: die Widerlegung der Dualisten und der 'Dahrīya'" (183–197) in Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*. On his engagement with Muʿtazilism, see the section "Die muʿtazilitische Herausforderung" (171–179) in Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*. Ahmad Mohmed Ahmad Galli ("Some Aspects of al-Māturīdī's

out that one should not assume al-Māturīdī was in direct contact with every single group he refutes in the *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*; rather, "[er] partizpiert nur an der allgemeinen Auseinandersetzung mit bestimmten notorischen Gegnern, die im islamischen *kalām* allerorts geführt wurden."[254]) The *mutakallim*'s concern, we must bear in mind, is not only to rest the teachings derived from scripture on a rational foundation, but also to point out inconsistencies in beliefs held by adherents of other faiths or indeed by fellow Muslims. This latter concern is frequently evident in al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. With a view to the Muʿtazila, al-Māturīdī's criticism unsurprisingly pertains to the following: "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 (*bi'l-majāz*)" while ascribing evil actions entirely to the authorship of humans.[255] Al-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 [my emphasis]."[256] Following al-Māturīdī's aforementioned argument from evil, if God's being originator of the world is known because of the existence of good *and* evil, the Muʿtazilīs' 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 creator of the world in the first place and in the sense that every single thing truly is God's creation. The prominent position al-Māturīdī gives to the argument from evil to prove that creation has a creator contains an implicit criticism of the Muʿtazilīs who would not be able to use the very argument. They have not understood God's wisdom in creation as they are unable to read His signs correctly.

Commentary on the Qurʾān," *Islamic Studies* 21/1 (1982): 3–21, at 18) has emphasised al-Māturīdī's very apparent critique of the Muʿtazila throughout his Qur'anic 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."

254 Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī*, 164–165. See also Charles Genequand, "Philosophical Schools as Viewed by Some Medieval Muslims," in *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*, ed. Jacques Waardenburg (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 195–201, at 198.

255 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 169–170. On the debate about the authorship of evil, see Maria De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical compromises in the works of Avicenna, al-Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī* (Abingdon, Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2014), 12; George F. Hourani, "Islamic and Non-Islamic Origins of Muʿtazilite Ethical Rationalism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 7/1 (1976): 59–87; Steven C. Judd, "The Early Qadariyya," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 44–54.

256 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 170.

In the same vein, al-Māturīdī's argument from evil poses a criticism of dualist religions. Their adherents hold, thus al-Māturīdī's presentation of their views, that the world exists eternally, emerging from the mixing of two eternal principles, light and darkness or good and evil.[257] Bearing this position in mind, the significance of al-Māturīdī's invocation of opposite characteristics, such as light and darkness as well as goodness and evil, in his proofs that the world is originated and that it depends for its existence on a creator becomes apparent. Al-Māturīdī's argument from evil must, therefore, be intended as a hint at the absurdity of the dualists' belief that a world, being made exclusively from these very principles, could be eternal, as well as that these principles could be the cause of the world. In this context, it is, however, crucial to note that al-Māturīdī does not interpret the dualists' belief that good and evil are the causes of the world as the denial on their part of God's existence. One could assume that if al-Māturīdī wants to stress that good and evil are created by God, he also wants to say that the dualists do not acknowledge God's existence—after all, God does not seem to appear in their system of thought. Yet, this is not the case as becomes clear when taking into account that, in a section entitled "The beliefs of the Magians (*al-majūs*) and the exposition of their falseness," al-Māturīdī writes: "the Magians said: God (*Allāh*) admired the beauty of His creation, and so He came to fear that which was in opposition to it and He pondered over this thought, from which Iblīs emerged. [...] Thus, all evil is from Iblīs, and from God (*Allāh*) is all goodness. [...] These dualists are evil (*fa-hum sharr min jamīʿ al-thanawiyya*) for they believe in two [creating principles] [...]."[258] The dualists are here presented as taking God for granted and assuming Him to be part of reality, and al-Māturīdī's criticism would therefore pertain to their description of God as light (for light is God's creation) and their failure to ascribe *all* of creation to God, rather than to God *and* another principle.

257 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 34.
258 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 172.

5 Abū ʾl-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936)

5.1 The Proof of God's Existence and al-Ashʿarī's *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*

Al-Ashʿarī is to be regarded as one of the most significant *mutakallimūn* in the history of Islamic thought. Not only would his name later become associated with one of Islam's major theological schools of thought, the Ashʿariyya.[259] He is also renowned for advocating that religion needs to be given a rational, reason-based foundation, in support of scripture. This conviction not only reflects his position in the debate about the principles and sources of religion. It also has to be read as being his defence of the emerging discipline of *kalām* against its critics. Al-Ashʿarī's *Risālat Istiḥsān al-khawḍ fī ʿilm al-kalām* is dedicated to this very purpose. There, he argues that the *mutakallim*, who engages in "speculation and enquiry into religious matters (*al-naẓar waʾl-baḥth ʿan al-dīn*)" and who "investigates the principles of religion (*uṣūl al-dīn*)," seeks to vindicate the very matters of faith which the Qur'an makes incumbent upon the believer.[260] Whether it is the affirmation of God's oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*), the defence of the doctrine of resurrection, or finally God's otherness from creation, al-Ashʿarī stresses that it is but the verses of the Qur'an which form the basis of the rational arguments employed by theologians.[261]

The discipline of *kalām*, it is frequently remarked in the secondary academic literature, as I have noted before, however, also seeks to defend by rational means another item of belief: the existence of God. The proof of God's existence is, unsurprisingly, said to have its place in al-Ashʿarī's writings as well. In his article entitled "The Classical Islamic Arguments for the Existence of God," Majid Fakhry briefly refers to al-Ashʿarī's *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* and his "proof that there is a creator for creation."[262] Fakhry, thus, reads al-Ashʿarī's proof in the *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* as a proof along the lines of cosmological arguments. Eric Ormsby has proposed the very same reading. He poses—like Fakhry without much elabora-

259 On the roots of the Ashʿariyya in the Kullābiyya, see Josef van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft im 2. und 3. Jahrhundert Hidschra: eine Geschichte des religiösen Denkens im frühen Islam*, 6 vols (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), vol. 4, 180–194; "Ibn Kullāb und die Miḥna," *Oriens* 18/19 (1965/1966): 92–142.

260 Abū ʾl-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Risālat Istiḥsān al-khawḍ fī ʿilm al-kalām*, ed. Muḥammad al-Walī al-Ashʿarī al-Qādirī al-Rafāʿī (n.p.: Dār al-Mashārīʿ liʾl-Ṭabāʿa waʾl-Nashr waʾl-Tawzīʿ, 1995), 38.

261 Al-Ashʿarī, *Risālat Istiḥsān*, 40 and 44.

262 Majid Fakhry, "The Classical Islamic Arguments for the Existence of God", *The Muslim World* 47/2 (1957): 133–145.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-006

tion—that al-Ashʿarī "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" and infers from this fact that God must exist.[263] In the same vein, Muḥammad Ramaḍān ʿAbd Allāh has described al-Ashʿarī's proof in the *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* 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."[264]

This reading of al-Ashʿarī's "proof that there is a creator for creation" shall be contested in the following. I propose that his proof does not aspire to establish God's existence. Al-Ashʿarī does not seek to give an answer to the questions "does God exist, and how can His existence be proven?," nor does he reason that the fact that the world, in being created and requiring a cause for its existence, points to the existence of yet another entity besides itself, thus proving that God exists. Instead, I will argue that al-Ashʿarī's proof of the creator in the *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* seeks to establish that God, whose existence is taken for granted, is to be credited with the creation of the world. In having this objective, al-Ashʿarī seeks to defend his reading of certain Qur'anic pronouncements about God and His relationship to the world, the details of which I shall address in what follows.

5.2 The Proof That There Is for Creation a Creator

The *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* immediately opens, after a very short laudation of God, with the proof in question. Al-Ashʿarī has a hypothetical interlocutor ("*in saʾala sāʾil*") ask, "what is the proof that creation has a creator who created it (*li'l-khalq ṣāniʿ ṣanaʿahu*) and an arranger who arranged it (*mudabbir dabbarahu*)?"[265] It is worth noting that, even though al-Ashʿarī here speaks of the world as "creation" (*khalq*), he has not yet addressed the question of whether the world has an origin in time or whether it is pre-eternal. This issue is addressed only after he has given his answer to the question posed by the interlocutor. The order in which al-Ashʿarī proceeds in the *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* is the reverse of how generations of later *mutakallimūn* would approach these questions, and some 150 years later

263 Eric Ormsby, *Ghazali: The Revival of Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2007), 53. Ormsby makes this statement with reference to al-Ghazālī's *al-Qisṭās al-mustaqīm*, but notes that his argument follows al-Ashʿarī's reasoning for God's existence.

264 Muḥammad Ramaḍān ʿAbd Allāh, *al-Bāqillānī wa-ārāʾuhu al-kalāmiyya*, Risāla duktūrā (Baghdād: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa'l-Shuʾūn al-Dīniyya, 1986), 402.

265 Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ fī al-radd ʿalā ahl al-zīgh wa'l-bidʿ*, ed. Ḥammūda Ghurāba (al-Qāhira: Maṭbaʿat Miṣr, 1955), 17.

the Ashʿarī *mutakallim* al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) would mention this curious detail in his *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn* when he recorded the critique uttered by certain Muʿtazilīs that "al-Ashʿarī turned over the known arrangement and opposed the established structure when he presented the affirmation of the creator before the affirmation of creation."[266]

Al-Ashʿarī puts forward two lines of reasoning to prove "that there is for creation a creator." The first one is that humans were once not more than a drop of sperm, then became a blood clot, then flesh. It is well-known that humans cannot bring about the transformation from state to state (*ḥāl*) by themselves. The second line of reasoning is that humans begin their existence as children, then grow into young adults, then elderly people, and finally grow old. Once more, al-Ashʿarī reminds the hypothetical interlocutor that this transformation is not caused by humans themselves. Based on these two considerations, he concludes: "what we described, therefore, proves that [...] there is for humans one who transforms them, from state to state, and who arranges them as they are. For it is impossible that they are transformed from state to state without there being one who causes the transformation and arranges (*bi-ghayr nāqil wa-lā mudabbir*)."[267] The argument invoking the transformation of a drop of sperm into a full human being, which al-Ashʿarī praises as "the greatest miracle" and "first in proving a creator," is strikingly Qur'anic.[268] It brings to mind verses such as Q. 75:37–38, which reads {Was he not just a drop of spilt-out sperm, which became a clinging form, which God shaped in due proportion}, and Q. 23:14, {then We 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!}. Al-Ashʿarī's explicit preference for this line of reasoning is probably not surprising given that, in the aforementioned *Risāla*, he is eager to stress that the *mutakallimūn* make use of nothing but Qur'anic forms of argumentation.

Be this as it may, al-Ashʿarī's proof that creation has a creator has, in the first place, the objective of affirming the "principle of causation." This means that he seeks to establish, first, that effects *have* causes and, second, that these causes are external to them. ("Effects" here refers to the instances of transformation he invokes, and "causes external to them" refers to the rejection of the notion that

266 ʿAbd al-Malik b. Yūsuf al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. ʿAlī Shāmī al-Nashār (al-Iskandariyya: Munshaʿāt al-Maʿārif, 1969), 276.

267 Al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 18.

268 Al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 19. This has also been observed by Fakhry ("The Classical Islamic Arguments," 140) and ʿAbd Allāh (*al-Bāqillānī*, 403).

things could be the very causes of the changes occurring to them.) It is in particular the aspect of the principle of causation that pertains to establishing that such occurrences in fact *have* a cause which al-Ashʿarī is concerned with. For he continues his reply to the interlocutor by stating:[269]

> what clarifies this [i.e. "it is impossible that they are transformed from state to state without there being one who causes the transformation"] is that cotton cannot turn into spun thread and then a woven garment without a weaver or maker (*ṣāniʿ*) or arranger (*mudabbir*). Whoever were to take cotton and wait for it to become a spun threat and then a woven garment without a maker or weaver would be out of his mind and undoubtedly ignorant!

The same would be true, al-Ashʿarī adds, for him who looks at a wasteland and expects clay to transform into bricks and to staple themselves one on top of each other without a maker or builder being involved.[270] Al-Ashʿarī evidently derives the principle of causation from observation of this world and seeks to affirm its validity based on—what became known as—the analogy between the *shāhid*, the realm of things observable by the senses, and the *ghāʾib*, the unobservable realm. In order to prove that God is to be credited with the creation of the aforementioned transformations (which is al-Ashʿarī's objective in the section on the proof that there is for creation a creator), he needs to provide good reasons that these occurrences have a cause, external to them, in the first place. For him, observation of the *shāhid* provides these reasons.[271]

It should be noted that al-Ashʿarī was not the first, much less the only theologian, to make use of the Qur'anic invocation of the transformation of a drop of sperm into a human being in order to prove "that there is for creation a creator." Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 225/860), who died more than 70 years before al-Ashʿarī, already referred to the aforementioned Qur'anic verses (that is, Q. 75:37–38) in his *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr* in order to conclude that "this does not occur except because of God (*Allāh*)."[272] We recall that al-Qāsim used verses such as this one with the objective of establishing that every single thing in this world exhibits the signs of making and that God alone, none other, is to be de-

269 Al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 18.

270 Al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 18.

271 Ibn Fūrak (Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt al-shaykh Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī*, ed. Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Raḥīm al-Sāyiḥ (al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Diniyya, 2005), for instance at 302–307) mentions al-Ashʿarī's views on reasoning on the basis of the *shāhid* for the *ghāʾib*.

272 Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, *Al-Ḳāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the Proof of God's Existence: The* Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr, ed. with translation, introduction, and notes by Binyamin Abrahamov (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 92.

scribed as having brought them about. It became clear that in al-Qāsim's *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr* the notion of change, and humans' transformation from state to state as a particular instance of change, were invoked as an argument to prove that the role of creator must be *ascribed* to God, not however as an argument for *God's existence*.[273] Al-Ashʿarī, I contend, is concerned with the very same objective as al-Qāsim. This becomes clear when taking into account the following: in his *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, al-Juwaynī has a section in which he reports that "the Muʿtazila put forward several questions about what our *shaykh* said."[274] Their questions all concerned al-Ashʿarī's very proof of the creator for creation in the *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, which al-Juwaynī reproduces this way: "he said: 'if someone were to ask: what is the proof that there is for creation a creator?' Then he said in reply to this: when the human ponders over his states and phases."[275] The questions and critique put forward by the Muʿtazilīs were these:[276]

> your companion did not present persuasive proofs [...]. The most absurd thing he said was to declare him ignorant who expects a building [to occur] without builder, and a writing without a writer [...]. According to him, writing and building do not occur as things humans have power over (*maqdūrān li'l-ʿibād*) [...]. This means that the building is [in fact] not connected with the builder, according to his own principle, neither in the way of acquisition (*iktisāb*) nor in the way of creation (*ikhtirāʿ*). It does not make sense to use as evidence that which is contrary to his own principle. [...] They questioned him: you cannot affirm the originator when you deny that origination and creation occur due to us in the *shāhid*, for the way of affirming a rule for the *ghāʾib* is to refer to the *shāhid*. So if you deny a creator and originator in the *shāhid* [...] you have no way of affirming an originator [in the *ghāʾib*]. [...] It is your principle that we are related to our actions by way of acquisition, and God (*al-rabb*) is described with creation. That which you affirm for the *shāhid*, you deny for the *ghāʾib*, and that which you affirm for the *ghāʾib*, you deny for the *shāhid*.

The Muʿtazila's critique takes its starting point from al-Ashʿarī's position that humans are not the agents of their actions, rather God alone is an agent.[277] They

273 Al-Qāsim, *al-Dalīl*, 264. In his *al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya*, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī dedicates a separate section to the reasoning based on "how humans develop from sperm" to prove the creator for creation (Muḥammad b. ʿUmar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, 5 vols (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987), vol. 1, part 1, 216).

274 Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil*, 275.

275 Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil*, 275.

276 Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil*, 276.

277 On al-Ashʿarī's doctrine of acquisition (*kasb*, *iktisāb*), see Richard M. Frank, "The Structure of Created Causality According to Al-Ashʿarī: An Analysis of the 'Kitāb al-Luma', §§ 82–164," *Studia Islamica* 25 (1966): 13–75; Binyamin Abrahamov, "A Re-Examination of al-Ashʿarī's Theory of 'Kasb' According to 'Kitāb al-Luma'," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ire-*

view this position as inherently incompatible with the reasoning al-Ashʿarī presents to prove the principle of causation and that God indeed is to be described as creator—his ultimate objective. The implications of his position are twofold, according to the Muʿtazilīs' criticism: first, since al-Ashʿarī does not affirm the principle of causation for the *shāhid* (for humans are actually *not* the agents of their actions), he cannot make an analogy to the *ghāʾib*, that is, he cannot affirm that acts, which belong to the realm of the *ghāʾib*, such as the origination of the world, must come about due to an agent.[278] He failed to affirm the principle of causation altogether, and the claim that origination occurs without originator cannot be labelled an evident absurdity anymore. Secondly, even if al-Ashʿarī's analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghāʾib* were accepted and it were granted that the observation that "cotton cannot turn into spun thread and then a woven garment without a weaver" proves the principle of causation, it would follow—to al-Ashʿarī's own detriment—that God is cause in the same way as humans are linked with their actions. He does not actually create, rather He, too, acquires His actions. Al-Ashʿarī's proof that there is for creation a creator, based on the analogy, would then necessitate the conclusion that God is the cause of the world, but not in a truly creative way. This is of course not what al-Ashʿarī is after.

What all this shows is the following: the issue at stake is not the provability or proof of God's existence. The Muʿtazilīs' critique does not concern the question of whether al-Ashʿarī's allegedly flawed analogy to affirm the creator for creation means the failure to prove that *God* exists. I, therefore, disagree with David Norcliff's evaluation of al-Ashʿarī's reasoning in the section in question, who proceeds from the very same point of critique as the Muʿtazilīs: "[t]here is a problem [...]. This comes into greater focus when one considers the impact of the denial of causality on the Ashʿarite 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."[279] There indeed is a problem, but the problem the Muʿtazilīs highlight pertains to the question on what grounds al-Ashʿarī could claim that

land 2 (1989): 210 – 221. See also Richard M. Frank, *Classical Islamic Theology: The Ashʿarites*, ed. Dimitri Gutas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); *Early Islamic Theology: The Muʿtazilites and al-Ashʿarī*, ed. Dimitri Gutas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); *Al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994).

278 ʿAbd al-Jabbār (*Kitāb al-Majmūʿ fī al-muḥīṭ bi'l-taklīf*, ed. al-Ab Jīn Jūsif (Bayrūt: al-Matbaʿat al-Kāthūlīqiyya, 1965 – 1987), vol. 1, 357) spells out this point: "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)?"

279 David Norcliffe, *Islam: Faith and Practice* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 1999), 90.

the world came into existence due to God, if he does not assume that actions depend on an agent in the seen world, which he himself declares the explicit basis for affirming the principle of causation. Al-Ashʿarī has no grounds for rejecting the view that the world is independent of God. Their critique also pertains to the question of how al-Ashʿarī can call God "creator" (*khāliq*), as he does in the *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, in view of his denial of human efficient causality. He simply has no grounds to claim that God is to be described as creator. These considerations shed light on the concerns underlying al-Ashʿarī's attempt to affirm the creator for creation, and they suggest that the proof of God's existence is not at stake.

It appears as little surprising that the Muʿtazilīs would find much to criticise about al-Ashʿarī's proof that creation has a creator, for he in fact seems to have formulated it with a critique of the Muʿtazilī position on causality in mind. This is indicated by the fact that al-Ashʿarī concludes his discussion of the proof in question by quoting Qur'anic verses which he interprets as specifically denying that any other entity besides God could be regarded as cause or creator. "God (Most-High!) said," al-Ashʿarī remarks, quoting Q. 56:58–59, "{Have you seen that which you emit? Are you the creators or are We?}" He comments: "they cannot maintain by argument that they create what they emit [...]." To this he adds: "God (Most-High!) said, making plain for His creation His oneness and uniqueness (*waḥdāniyyatihi*): {and in yourselves, too, do you not see?} [i.e. Q. 51:21]. He made plain to them that they are unable and in need of a creator who created them and an arranger who arranged them."[280] What is striking is that al-Ashʿarī explicitly mentions God's very own concern to clarify His oneness and uniqueness through these verses, which al-Ashʿarī interprets as pointing to His uniqueness as *creator*. As noted, this is a clear statement on his part against the Muʿtazilīs: it is a mistake to think that humans can cause their own actions. In addition to this, it is here where al-Ashʿarī makes plain his objective in proving that there is for creation a creator, when he links God's concern to prove His unique and very own attribute of creator with his own arguments that there is for creation a creator. Just as the Qur'an is concerned with arguing that God alone is to be regarded as creator (at least this is how al-Ashʿarī interprets the Qur'an), al-Ashʿarī himself is also concerned with presenting proofs that allow ascribing creation to God alone. After all, it should not be overlooked that God's attribute "creator," which the Qur'an highlights time and again, can, according to al-Ashʿarī, only be established on the basis of God's actions. Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015) reports on this view taken by al-Ashʿarī of the divine attributes in his *Maqālāt al-shaykh Abī al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī*: "as for God's (Most-High!) attributes,

280 Al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 19.

they are of two kinds: first, those that are known by way of [considering His] deeds and the indications contained in them pointing to these attributes [...] and, second, those that are affirmed for Him when denying a deficiency of His essence."[281] This points to the objective of the proof that there is for creation a creator. (It should here maybe be pointed out that al-Ashʿarī, of course, repeatedly picks up on different aspects related to God's oneness and uniqueness as creator in several later sections. For instance, in one section he has his interlocutor note, "you did not say that the creator of the things [making up this world] is [only] one."[282] In a later section, however, he once more returns to the question of God's sole role as creator, this time with a focus on the contentious problem of human efficient causality. There he addresses the question, "why do you assume that what humans acquire (*aksāb al-ʿibād*) is created by God (Most-High!) (*makhlūqa li'llāh*)?"[283] Yet, these details of al-Ashʿarī's position on causality build on, and indeed require, the initial proof that there is for creation a creator, which seeks to ascribe creation to God.)

5.3 God's Oneness and Uniqueness

To prove that God indeed is to be *described* as creator of the world is of significance for al-Ashʿarī not only because this is how the Qur'an speaks of God. There is more to his proof that there is for creation a creator. This is that al-Ashʿarī considers the affirmation that God has the attribute "creator" as related to the all-important affirmation of *tawḥīd* or God's oneness and uniqueness, so central to the endeavours of *kalām* as well as *falsafa*, as has already been seen in the works of al-Qāsim, al-Kindī, and al-Māturīdī. Ibn Fūrak describes al-Ashʿarī's linking God's *tawḥīd* with the affirmation of His attribute "creator" numerous times in his *Maqālāt*. He, thus, notes: "one aspect of the principles he assumed in relation to God's oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*) is to affirm that all originated things are connected (*muntasama*) with the power of one [entity] who originated them, from non-existence into existence, and that opposition to this is a kind of association of others with God (Most-High!) (*nawʿ min al-ishtirāk bi'llāh*)."[284] Elsewhere, Ibn Fūrak states: "he used to say concerning knowledge [of God] that it is submissiveness to God (Most-High!) (*al-khuḍūʿ li'llāh*), for it

281 Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt*, 40.
282 Al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 20.
283 Al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 69.
284 Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt*, 37.

pertains to the human's conviction that God is his creator and arranger [...] and this is glorification of God and it is the declaration that He is one and unique (*al-tawḥīd*)."[285] Finally, to mention one last statement: "[God's Qur'anic names] '*al-wāḥid*' and '*al-aḥad*' refer to declaring Him one and unique (*al-tawaḥḥud*), which means that He is unique and has no associate (*al-tafarrud al-nāfī li'l-ishtirāk*) and that He has no partner in terms of [...] His act [...] and His arrangement (*al-izdiwāj fī* [...] *al-fiʿl* [...] *wa-tadbīrihi*)."[286] Ibn Fūrak's explanations make it clear that for al-Ashʿarī, professing the crucial Islamic doctrine of *tawḥīd* means professing that God has the attribute "creator," much more: He is the only creator. This is the same as submission to God alone and glorification of Him. The belief that originated things in this world are to be traced back to other entities than God is, for al-Ashʿarī, a form of the arch-sin of *shirk* or association of partners with God. This understanding of *tawḥīd*, together with its centrality for Islamic thinkers, sheds light on al-Ashʿarī's objective in his proof that there is for creation a creator, which is to be able to conclude that the world is to be *linked* with God as its cause.

We should also direct our attention to a statement encountered in al-Ashʿarī's aforementioned *Risāla*. There he writes, in the context of his defence of *kalām*:[287]

> as for movement and rest and the *kalām* about them, their principles can be found in the Qur'an 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 *rabb* cannot possibly be any of these [i.e. the aforementioned celestial bodies], and that he who can sink and move from place to place is not an *ilāh*.

This statement is of interest to us insofar as al-Ashʿarī makes it clear that the *mutakallimūn*'s arguments from motion and rest—which should later become the standard argument for the creator, by taking the accidents (*aʿrāḍ*) of motion and rest as starting points to prove the originatedness of the world—have the purpose of proving God's *tawḥīd*. This includes proving that God alone, none other, deserves the titles "*rabb*" and "*ilāh*." We recall that al-Qāsim, al-Kindī, as well as al-Māturīdī already made use of the term "*rabb*," and that for them this term was conceptually related to, and derived from, God's role as creator. Al-Ashʿarī employs the terms "*rabb*" and "*ilāh*" in the exact same way. Ibn

285 Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt*, 154.
286 Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt*, 55.
287 Al-Ashʿarī, *Risālat Istiḥsān*, 40.

Fūrak explains that "[al-Ashʿarī] chose [the view] that what is meant when we describe Him as '*ilāh*' is that He has *al-ilāhiyya*, and he explained *al-ilāhiyya* as His ability to create (*qudratuhu ʿalā iktirāʿ*) the atoms and accidents."[288] This points to al-Ashʿarī's eagerness to prove that God alone, to the exclusion of all other entities in the world, deserves the titles "*ilāh*" and "*rabb*," and the method to prove this is to establish a causal link between God and creation. This is precisely what the proof that there is for creation a creator seeks to establish.[289]

5.4 The Proof of the World's Beginning

Ibn Fūrak's statement, cited above, that according to al-Ashʿarī the affirmation of God's oneness and uniqueness includes "to affirm that all originated things are connected with the power of one [entity] who originated them, from non-existence into existence" draws attention to the fact that for al-Ashʿarī the concepts of creation and the creator are by far more specific than what could so far be inferred from the section on the proof that there is for creation a creator. For as noted above, so far al-Ashʿarī has not yet addressed the question of whether creation has a first beginning or not. Yet, the concept of creation al-Ashʿarī wishes to defend is creation *ex nihilo*. This is why he concludes the present section with his hypothetical interlocutor posing: "what makes you believe that the drop of sperm is never ceasing, eternal?"[290] Even though al-Ashʿarī does not spell it out, it seems evident that the interlocutor does not intend that every particular drop of sperm is eternal. Rather, the interlocutor seems to be representative of the position that matter, from which the individual things in this world arise, is eternal. This position, and variants of it which, however, all assume that the world has no first beginning, is discussed by Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064) in his *al-*

288 Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt*, 48.

289 This method, however, also serves the purpose of establishing another aspect of God's oneness and uniqueness. This aspect also has its basis in the Qur'an, e. g. Q. 42:11, {There is nothing like Him}. Ibn Fūrak explains that, according to al-Ashʿarī, 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" (Ibn Fūrak, *Maqālāt*, 55). God's *tawḥīd*, therefore, also means showing that His essence and attributes are unique and without comparison to creation. Al-Ashʿarī establishes this on the basis of God's attribute "creator," following the reasoning that the characteristics of an act point to the characteristics of its agent.

290 Al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 19.

Fiṣal fī al-milal wa'l-ahwāʾ wa'l-niḥal. He, just like generations of other *mutakallimūn*, refers to the proponents of this view as *al-dahriyya* or *dahriyyūn*. He writes: "the world must be one of two things: either it is eternal or it is originated, [that is,] it was not, then was. A group [of people] profess that it is eternal. They are the *dahriyya*. Another group of people profess that it is originated."[291] Ibn Ḥazm presents several objections put forward by the *dahriyya* that call into question the belief in an originatedness world. One of them is this: "we have not witnessed the origination of anything except for coming from something or occurring in something. He who claims anything else claims something he does not witness and never has witnessed."[292] This is precisely the position we find alluded to in the question al-Ashʿarī's interlocutor poses. Al-Ashʿarī replies by reducing *ad absurdum* the interlocutor's assertion: if the interlocutor were right in his assumption that the world is eternal, it would not be possible to witness changes (*taghayyur*) occurring in it, for the eternal is not subject to change. But since such changes occur, and since "that which does not precede the originated thing is [itself] originated and created," it follows that "the eternity of the drop of sperm and other bodies like it is false."[293]

The difficulty with al-Ashʿarī's *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ* is that it is a very concise *kalām* manual, both in comparison with the works of authors contemporaneous with him and (even more so) with later thinkers. Al-Ashʿarī does not provide his readers with much context, which would allow to infer what precisely it is he discusses and what is at stake. Taking into account statements about him found in the works of later authors can alleviate this situation, and it suggests that his concern was not the proof of God's existence, but rather the defence of the most fundamental doctrine of God's uniqueness (*tawḥīd*), particularly in His role as creator.

291 Abū Muḥammad ʿAlī b. Aḥmad Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal fī al-milal wa'l-ahwāʾ wa'l-niḥal*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Naṣr and ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ʿUmayra (Bayrūt: Dār al-Jīl, n.d.), vol. 1, 47.
292 Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Fiṣal*, 48.
293 Al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 19.

6 Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013)

6.1 Al-Bāqillānī's *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* and *al-Inṣāf* and the Proof of God's Existence

It has been said that al-Bāqillānī's importance as a *mutakallim* lies in his contribution to systemising the theological thought he inherited from his Ashʿarī predecessors.[294] While some fifty works on various subjects are attributed to him, only a handful have survived. Among these, his *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān*,[295] in which he defends the miraculous nature of the Qur'an, has been described as being of great intellectual and historical importance. The same has been said of his *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, a voluminous *kalām* manual.[296]

A glance at the table of contents of Richard Joseph McCarthy's 1957 edition of the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* suggests that al-Bāqillānī dedicated a whole section (*bāb*) of his work to establishing "the existence of God and His attributes" (*wujūd Allāh wa-ṣifātihi*).[297] Al-Bāqillānī first establishes the originatedness of the world (*ḥadath al-ʿālam*) and then proceeds to "the affirmation of the creator" (*ithbāt al-ṣāniʿ*). In his monograph, *Al-Bāqillānī wa-ārāʾuhu al-kalāmiyya*, Muḥammad Ramaḍān ʿAbd Allāh describes al-Bāqillānī as one of the theologians who "were concerned with the issue of proving God's existence on the basis of their *kalām* proofs that have their starting point in the originatedness of atoms and accidents and their possibility, respectively."[298] Similarly, Herbert A. Davidson, in his article "Arguments from the Concept of Particularization in Arabic Philosophy," writes:[299]

294 Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroës and Aquinas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958), 40; Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 41.

295 Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *Iʿjāz al-Qurʾān* (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Maʿārīf, 1374 [1954]).

296 Yusuf Ibish, "Life and Works of al-Bāqillānī," *Islamic Studies* 4 (1965): 225–236, at 229.

297 Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, ed. Richard Joseph McCarthy (Bayrūt: al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya, 1957), (10) [*sic*].

298 Muḥammad Ramaḍān ʿAbd Allāh, *al-Bāqillānī wa-ārāʾuhu al-kalāmiyya*, Risāla duktūrā (Baghdād: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa'l-Shuʾūn al-Dīniyya, 1986), 415.

299 Herbert A. Davidson, "Arguments from the Concept of Particularization in Arabic Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West* 18/4 (1968): 299–314, at 300.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-007

> [t]he seedbed for the development of the proofs from particularization was another proof, the most popular Kalām proof for the creation of the world, that "from accidents." [...] The proof was not an end in itself, for all felt the need of supplementing it with the further inference that whatever is generated requires a cause for its generation, thus turning the proof of creation into a proof of the existence of God. [...] Al-Bāqillānī states the proof of creation from accidents [...] and then infers the existence of the creator in three ways.

These assessments suggest that, in the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, not only is al-Bāqillānī concerned with the proof of God's existence, but that his preferred method is that of a cosmological proof which infers that God must exists since the world requires a cause for its existence. Contrary to this view, I shall argue that al-Bāqillānī follows in the footsteps of his predecessors—particularly the eponym of the *kalām* school he belonged to, al-Ashʿarī (d. 324/936), but also al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) and other thinkers discussed in the previous chapter—insofar as he does not seek to prove that God exists. Just like them, it will be argued, al-Bāqillānī is concerned with *ascribing* the whole of creation to God alone. In this endeavour, God's existence is not at stake and not to be proven. The "affirmation of the creator" therefore serves a different objective than to prove God's existence. This also implies that McCarthy's editorial choice[300] of giving the section that contains the proof of the originatedness of the world and the affirmation of the creator the title "The third section: on the existence of God and His attributes (*wujūd Allāh wa-ṣifātihi*)" is misleading. These points shall be discussed with reference not only to al-Bāqillānī's *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, but also the much shorter *al-Inṣāf* which, however, resembles the former work in many respects.

6.2 Al-Bāqillānī's Three Proofs to "Affirm the Creator"

Davidson and ʿAbd Allāh's reading of al-Bāqillānī as presenting a proof of God's existence along the lines of the cosmological argument is, of course, not entirely surprising considering that in the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* al-Bāqillānī proceeds from the proof that the world has a beginning for its existence to "the affirmation of the creator" (*ithbāt al-ṣāniʿ*). Al-Bāqillānī's proof that the world is originated begins with him noting that the world consists of nothing but atoms (*jawāhir*) and accidents (*aʿrāḍ*). Accidents, he continues, are originated in time, which is evident since two opposing accidents, such as movement and rest, cannot exist together in a body at the same time. Bodies (*ajsām*), which are composed from atoms, are

300 Indicated by square brackets.

in turn originated since they cannot exist without accidents and since "they [i. e. bodies] do not precede what is originated and do not exist before it, and that which does not precede what is originated is originated like it."[301]

The insight that the world has entered existence then leads al-Bāqillānī to note, in the following section, that "it is necessarily the case that this originated, formed world has an originator and a former (*muṣawwir*)."[302] Al-Bāqillānī then proceeds to present his readers with three lines of argument to substantiate his claim.

6.2.1 The First Argument Based on the Analogy Between the *shāhid* and the *ghāʾib*

The first argument involves the following reasoning: "the proof (*al-dalīl*) for this is that something written (*al-kitāba*) necessarily has a writer, the form (*al-ṣūra*) a fashioner, and the building (*al-bināʾ*) a builder." 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, in consequence, necessary that the forms [contained in] the world and the movements of the spheres are connected with a creator (*mutaʿalliqa bi-ṣāniʿ*) who created them."[303]

Al-Bāqillānī's invocation of a writing and its dependence on a writer as well as a building and its builder is not novel in *kalām* works. We recall that al-Ashʿarī, in whose intellectual tradition al-Bāqillānī saw himself, invoked the observable connection between the occurrence of a building and its builder in

301 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 22. It is somewhat surprising to observe that al-Bāqillānī does not address the question of whether an infinite regress of accidents inhering in a body is possible, which, if possible, would not allow him to conclude that bodies are originated. This challenge to the proof that bodies are originated, based on the originatedness of accidents, is not encountered in al-Māturīdī (*Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, ed. and introduced by Fathalla Kholeif (Beyrouth: Dar El-Machreq Éditeurs, 1970), 13–14) and al-Kindī ("Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā" in *Rasāʾil al-Kindī al-falsafiyya*, ed. with introduction by Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Hādī Abū Rīda (al-Qāhira: Maṭbaʿat al-Iʿtimād bi-Miṣr, 1950), 97–162, at 92–95), who both prove the impossibility of an infinite chain of existent things. Al-Bāqillānī does, however, deny the possibility of an infinite regress of originated things elsewhere, namely in his discussion of the question of whether the originator of the world could himself depend on an originator. He argues that the originator cannot himself be originated as his dependence on another originator would also be true of the second originator and so on. Consequentially, the existence of all originated things would be impossible (al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 25).

302 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 23.

303 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 23.

order to establish the validity of "the principle of causation."[304] Al-Māturīdī, too, made use of the very same notion of a writing and its author, yet with the objective of arguing on its basis for the originatedness of the world.[305] Al-Bāqillānī evidently makes recourse to these notions with the exact same objective in mind as al-Ashʿarī: his objective is to affirm the principle of causation for the *ghāʾib*, the unobservable realm, in analogy to the *shāhid*, the realm observable by the senses. Al-Bāqillānī intends to make the point that it is true for the *ghāʾib* that originated things have causes, since this is true for the *shāhid*, and the latter is the basis for judgements about the former.[306]

It is interesting to observe that here al-Bāqillānī does not feel the need of explaining *how* the *shāhid* is the basis for judgements about the *ghāʾib*, and in particular why he is justified in assuming an *analogy* between the two realms when he seeks to make the point that the world, in being originated, has an originator and cause. For al-Bāqillānī is evidently aware, and argues elsewhere, that one cannot assume that there is an analogy between the two realms in *every* single case. For instance, in a section entitled "A speech against the Christians regarding their belief that God is a substance (*jawhar*)," al-Bāqillānī presents their reasoning in defence of this belief in this way: "the proof of this is that we find that all things and existence in the *shāhid* are either substances (*jawāhir*) or atoms. Since we agree that the eternal [i.e. God] is not an accident, it follows that He is a substance."[307] He counters them with the following challenge: "why did you assume that since you do not find anything in the *shāhid* other than in the way you described it, this applies to the *ghāʾib* as it is in the *shāhid* (*bi-mujarrad al-shāhid*)? [And why did you assume] that the existent in the *ghāʾib* is not different from the kinds of existents in the *shāhid?*"[308] Al-Bāqillānī's critique of the Christians is that they are precisely not justified in assuming that in the case under discussion there is an analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghāʾib.*

In the case of the affirmation of the general, universal validity of the principle of causation, however, al-Bāqillānī evidently follows in al-Ashʿarī's footsteps who argued for an analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghāʾib.* (Al-Bāqillānī,

304 Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ fī al-radd ʿalā ahl al-zīgh wa'l-bidʿ*, ed. Ḥammūda Ghurāba (al-Qāhira: Maṭbaʿat Miṣr, 1955), 14.

305 Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, ed. and introduced by Fathalla Kholeif (Beyrouth: Dar El-Machreq Éditeurs, 1970), 14.

306 This is, of course, not to say that Ashʿarīs like the school's eponym and al-Bāqillānī affirm efficient causality for beings in the *shāhid* in the same manner as for the *ghāʾib*, as discussed in Chapter Five with regards to al-Ashʿarī.

307 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 75.

308 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 76.

however, also follows into the footsteps of his master insofar as he adopts his conviction that humans are in fact not true agents of their actions.[309]) Without spelling it out, al-Bāqillānī intends to say that what the world has in common with a writing and a building is that they are originated, and since origination cannot occur without originator, "it is necessarily the case that this originated, formed world has an originator and a former," as he has it.

It is important to note that, for al-Bāqillānī, the general affirmation of the principle of causation, and its application to the question of the originated world, has to involve the proof that the cause of originated things is *external* to them. Unless this possibility is rejected, al-Bāqillānī is unable to ascribe the world, in being creation, to God—which, I shall argue, is his ultimate objective. This crucial point is not actually made explicit in al-Bāqillānī's present first argument which is based on the analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghāʾib*—it is, however, in the second and third arguments he presents. There, he makes the explicit point that the occurrences and changes in bodies he points to are not due to the body itself, but effected by an outside cause. In his first argument, this point is left somewhat implicit, but by noting that in the *shāhid* a writing depends on a writer and a building on a builder, al-Bāqillānī seems to want to say that the cause of the occurrence of both the writing and the building is to be found *outside* of them.[310]

6.2.2 The Second Argument Based on the Earlier and Later Occurrences of Things

Al-Bāqillānī then presents a second argument in support of his assertion that the originated world exists due to an originator. This argument focuses on "the

309 Compare the section on "the creation of [human] actions" in al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 303. On al-Ashʿarī's doctrine of acquisition (*kasb*, *iktisāb*), see Richard M. Frank, "The Structure of Created Causality According to Al-Ashʿarī: An Analysis of the 'Kitāb al-Luma', §§82–164," *Studia Islamica* 25 (1966): 13–75; Binyamin Abrahamov, "A Re-Examination of al-Ashʿarī's Theory of 'Kasb' According to 'Kitāb al-Luma'," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 2 (1989): 210–221. See also Richard M. Frank, *Classical Islamic Theology: The Ashʿarites*, ed. Dimitri Gutas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); *Early Islamic Theology: The Muʿtazilites and al-Ashʿarī*, ed. Dimitri Gutas (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); *Al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994).

310 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 24. Note that the section immediately following al-Bāqillānī's three proofs to "affirm the creator" is dedicated to the proof "that the originated thing is not its own maker (*fāʿil li-nafsihi*)" and "that there is for the whole world a creator other than it (*khāliq ghayrahu*) who is not part of it (*laysa minhu*)" (al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 24).

earlier occurrence (*taqaddum*) of some originated things than others as well as the later occurrence (*taʾakhkhur*) of some of them than others." Their occurrence at an earlier or later point in time cannot be "due to the thing itself (*li-nafsihi*) or depend on its kind (*jinsihi*)," al-Bāqillānī stresses, 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 ʿalā mashīʾatihi*)."[311]

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

The section on "the affirmation of the creator" finally contains a third argument. Al-Bāqillānī argues that "every single body in this world is receptive (*qubūl*) to a structure (*tarkīb*) different from the one it has." A square, for instance, could well have been a circle instead. Parallel to the aforementioned case of the earlier and later occurrence of things, al-Bāqillānī now argues that "the specific, particular form by which it is particularised (*ikhtaṣṣa*) is due to the thing itself or due to its receptiveness of it." If the former were the case, it would follow, for al-Bāqillānī, that all possible shapes would be present in the body at the same time. Since this is evidently absurd, he concludes, this proves that "whatever has a form only receives it from one who composed (*muʾallif*) and intended (*qāṣid*) it this way."[312]

Davidson has pointed out that arguments from particularisation, such as al-Bāqillānī's, to affirm the dependence of originated things on an originator hinge on an occasionalist worldview as the determining cause of particular occurrences in this world could otherwise be sought in the events preceding them.[313] Al-

311 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 23.

312 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 23–24.

313 Davidson, "Arguments from the Concept of Particularization," 300. Davidson describes al-Bāqillānī's work as containing the "earliest explicit use of the concept of particularization." His observation 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 them (*khaṣṣahā*) with their differences and characteristics (*al-khaṣāʾiṣ*)" (al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, *Al-Ḳāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the Proof of God's Existence: The* Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr, ed. with translation, introduction, and notes by Binyamin Abrahamov (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 114.) In Davidson's defence, it should be noted that his 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 ("al-Ḳāsim ibn Ibrāhīm's Argument from Design," *Oriens* 29/30 (1986): 259–284) in which he mentions al-Qāsim's explicit use of the same argument.)

Bāqillānī's argument, it should be added to Davidson's observation, in fact hinges on a number of assumptions that are not actually addressed by him. For instance, his assertion that bodies in this world are receptive to all kinds of other structures and shapes of course presupposes an atomistic worldview (a corollary of the occasionalist position) and the position that the differences between corporeal things only go back to the accidents inhering in them (for shape, colour, and the like are nothing but accidents).[314] According to al-Bāqillānī's reasoning, it would be equally likely for fire to be hot and cold, for its actual hotness is not due to itself and simply an accident inhering in its body (that is, its essence or "body-ness") that could have been replaced by the accident of coldness (if God had so chosen, that is). This position would later be vehemently opposed by Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037) who assumed the existence of natures of things, which explain why things are the way they are and that they could not have been different in all conceivable ways.[315] Al-Bāqillānī's reasoning in the third argument would not have been espoused by Ibn Sīnā.

Before addressing the question of what al-Bāqillānī seeks to establish on the basis of his three ways of affirming the creator, it is worth noting that in the *Inṣāf* in a section concerned with proving that "it is necessary that the world has an

314 For an outline of Islamic atomism and the related theory of occasionalism, see Shlomo Pines, *Studies in Islamic Atomism*, translated from German by Michael Schwarz, ed. Tzavi Langermann (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1997); A.I. Sabra, "The Simple Ontology of Kalām Atomism: An Outline," *Early Science and Medicine* 14, Evidence and Interpretations: Studies on Early Science and Medicine in Honor of John E. Murdoch (2009): 68–78, especially 68–78; Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1976); Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroës and Aquinas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958).

315 On Ibn Sīnā's theory of secondary causality in nature, see Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazālī & Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1992); Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Chapter "The *falāsifa*'s View of Creation by Means of Secondary Causality" (133–141); Robert Wisnovsky, "Final and Efficient Causality in Avicenna's Cosmology and Theology," *Quaestio* 2 (2002): 97–123; Gad Freudenthal, "The Medieval Hebrew Reception of Avicenna's Account of the Formation and Perseverance of Dry Land: Between Bold Naturalism and Fideist Literalism," in *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Physics and Cosmology*, Scientia Graeco-Arabica 23, ed. Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Amos Bertolacci (Boston, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 269–311; Jean-Marc Mandosio, "Follower or Opponent of Aristotle? The Critical Reception of Avicenna's Meteorology in the Latin World and the Legacy of Alfred the Englishman," in *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Physics and Cosmology*, Scientia Graeco-Arabica 23, ed. Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Amos Bertolacci (Boston, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 459–534.

originator"[316] he presents the very same three lines of argument as in the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*. The third argument, however, as it appears in the *Inṣāf*, contains an aspect which is missing in the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, yet which says a lot about al-Bāqillānī's theological stance and affiliation with Ashʿarism. In arguing that the forms (*ṣuwar*) of things in this world are not brought about by the things themselves, he introduces the example of good and evil and notes that "it is impossible that what is evil (*al-qabīḥ*) is evil due to itself and what is good (*al-ḥasan*) is good due to itself." This leads him to the already familiar conclusion that "they have one who gives them their form [...], whether evil or good, in accordance with his will and wishing."[317] Al-Bāqillānī's employment of the notions of good and evil to make the point that the world, in being originated, depends on an outside cause is noteworthy and it immediately brings to mind al-Māturīdī who, in his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, also rested his "proof that there is for the world an originator" on these very notions (concepts which, as Fathalla Kholeif and J. Meric Pessagno have noted, are rarely employed by the *mutakallimūn* in this context[318]). Just as in al-Māturīdī's case, it suggests itself that al-Bāqillānī chose these two concepts in order to make a point against his Muʿtazilī peers, whom he regarded as falsely excluding evil from the realm of God's creation. In addition to their error of ascribing evil to human efficient causality, al-Bāqillānī appears to be implicitly criticising the position held by some Muʿtazilīs that good and evil are characteristics inherent to, and objectively describing, actions. For al-Bāqillānī's reasoning in the present argument entails that the goodness and evilness said of things in this world is *not* due to themselves, that is, they are not inherent in them, and that things which are described as evil could equally have been good, and vice versa. Against the Muʿtazilī position of moral objectivism, al-Bāqillānī here alludes to his position which upholds a divine command theory and voluntarism, which he makes the implicit basis of his present argument to affirm the creator.[319] This position is in fact alluded to in a later section in the *Inṣāf* where

316 Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf fī-mā yajib iʿtiqāduhu wa-lā yajūz al-jahl bihi*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid b. al-Ḥasan al-Kawtharī (al-Qāhira: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li'l-Turāth, 2000), 29.

317 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 30.

318 Fathalla Kholeif's introduction in al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, xxiv; J. Meric Pessagno, "The Uses of Evil in Māturīdian Thought," *Studia Islamica* 60 (1984): 59 – 82, at 73.

319 On the different stances towards the question of human causality, see Maria De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, al-Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī* (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2014), 10 – 16; Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Chapter 5 "Cosmology in Early Islam," 123 – 146; David Bennett, "The Muʿtazilite Movement (II): The Early Muʿtazilites," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University

al-Bāqillānī states: "humans are obligated to [obey] what God (Most-High!) has made obligatory (*awjaba*) upon them [...]. Good is that which agrees with the order that it be done (*al-ḥasan mā wāfaqa al-amr min al-fiʿl*), and evil is that which agrees with the prohibition that it be done. The good thing is not good by virtue of its form (*min qibal al-ṣūra*), and the evil thing is not evil by virtue of its form."[320] The example al-Bāqillānī then presents is that the form (*ṣūra*) of killing is the same whether it occurs as retaliation or not, but in the case of retaliation the law (*al-sharʿ*) deems it morally good and in other cases the law declares it morally reprehensible.[321]

6.3 The Objective of "the Affirmation of the Creator"

It has, thus, become clear that al-Bāqillānī's arguments "to affirm the creator" rest on a number of assumptions which he does not spell out, address, or make explicit. Not only is this true for his atomistic worldview and the related potions of occasionalism and divine voluntarism, it is also true, I submit, in that al-Bāqillānī takes God's existence for granted when he turns to the affirmation of the creator. This is to say that in seeking to prove that the world depends for its existence on an outside cause, al-Bāqillānī does *not* intend to prove God's existence along the lines of a cosmological argument, rather what he is after is to rest the Qur'anic claim that God is to be regarded as the creator of the world on a rational, reason-based foundation. In doing so, it is not God's existence that is at stake for al-Bāqillānī, but the divine attribute "creator of the world." That God's very existence is taken for granted at the outset of the proof is, of course, not spelt out by him, just as much as other assumptions are not spelt out, but I argue that indications can be found in the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* and the *Inṣāf* that this is the case and that "the affirmation of the creator" has the objective of *ascribing* the created world to God.

That this is indeed the objective underlying al-Bāqillānī's "affirmation of the creator" is suggested by the fact that in both works he frequently makes the point that in the Qur'an God Himself is eager to stress that He is to be credited with

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Press, 2016), 142–158. For an outline of Muʿtazilī and Ashʿarī positions on the ontology of moral values, see George F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Chapters "Ethical Presuppositions of the Qurʾān" (23–48) and "Two Theories of Value in Early Islam" (57–66); Ayman Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), 47–56.

320 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 46.

321 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 47.

being the creator of the world. In the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, al-Bāqillānī states that God described Himself with the words "I am creator" (*innī khāliq*).[322] In the *Inṣāf*, al-Bāqillānī emphasises that "He called Himself creator (*khāliq*) and everything besides Him created."[323] He then mentions Q. 13:16, {Have the partners (*shurakāʾ*) they assign to God created anything like His creation? Is their creation indistinguishable from His? Say, "God is the Creator (*khāliq*) of all things [...]"}, and comments that in this verse "God refuted the unbelievers when they associated partners with Him in creation (*shurakāʾ fī al-ikhtirāʿ*)."[324] A number of other Qur'anic verses are adduced by al-Bāqillānī in support of the claim that "there is no creator (*khāliq*) other than Him,"[325] such as Q. 16:20, {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 means "assent (*al-taṣdīq*) by the heart that He is God (*Allāh*), the one, the unique [...], the creator (*al-khāliq*)."[326]

Admittedly, all these statements appear in sections other than that on "the affirmation of the creator" and they deal with various aspects which, however, all relate to God's role as creator: al-Bāqillānī mentions God's self-description as creator ("I am creator") in the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* as part of a discussion about God's attributes of action (*ṣifāt al-afʿāl*) and attributes of essence (*ṣifāt al-dhāt*) and introduces it as an example of the former category of attributes. His remark that "He called Himself creator" in the *Inṣāf* is part of a discussion about the createdness/uncreatedness of the Qur'an. Q. 13:16 is mentioned in the context of al-Bāqillānī's defence of the position that God creates human actions, including belief and unbelief (that is, the doctrine of *kasb* or acquisition). And Q. 16:20, finally, appears in support of the claim that God alone provides for humans. These statements, however, all draw attention to the importance al-Bāqillānī assigns to upholding that God is to be described as creator, not only of the world itself, but of the occurrences in it, too. The proof that God indeed is to be described with this attribute is nothing else than "the affirmation of the creator," where al-Bāqillānī establishes that the originated world came about due to an outside cause (that is, it does owe its existence to another, rather than being self-sufficient) so as to be able to ascribe it to God.

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322 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd*, 215. The editor remarks in a footnote (215, n. 364.3) that this self-description on the part of God is not taken verbatim from the Qur'an, but its meaning can obviously be found there.

323 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 70.

324 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 41.

325 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 27.

326 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 22.

Al-Bāqillānī's endeavour to provide rational arguments for statements found in scripture which describe God in His role as creator becomes further evident in the following: the *Inṣāf* opens with a list of items of knowledge which God has obligated humans (*al-mukallaf*) to attain. Among these al-Bāqillānī mentions that "he [i. e. the *mukallaf*] has to know that the world has an originator."[327] The argument he here puts forward is the already familiar reasoning based on the earlier and later occurrences of things in this world. He then links the argument's conclusion that "this proves an agent who effected it and brought it about according to his will (*irādatihi*) and made it according to his wishing (*mashīʾatihi*)"[328] with two Qur'anic verses. These are Q. 11:107, which says about God that {[He] carries out whatever He wills (*faʿʿāl li-mā yurīd*)}, and Q. 16:40, describing God's creative activity with the words {When We will (*aradnā*) something to happen, all that We say is, "Be," and it is.}. Crucially, this suggests that al-Bāqillānī sees his reason-based arguments to "affirm the creator" to have the same concern as the Qur'anic verses he quotes, which is evidently related to describing God in His role as creator and especially to stressing that creation is subjected to His absolute will and wishing. In making this point which concerns an aspect of the conception of God's attribute "creator," al-Bāqillānī's concern does not lie with the question about God's existence or whether God is part of reality or not.

In addition to this, the following should be considered. Al-Bāqillānī notes, after quoting the two Qur'anic verses:[329]

> [God] pointed to our knowledge of the act's connection (*taʿalluq*) with the agent, insofar as it is an act, just like the agent's connection with the act, insofar as he is an agent. Also, [He pointed to our knowledge] that the writing's [...] connection with the writer [...] is like the writer's connection with the writing, insofar as he is a writer. This means: if the existence of an act were possible without an agent, and a writing without a writer [...], then the existence of a writer would [also] be possible without a writing (*lā kitāba lahu*).

These remarks are noteworthy as they draw attention to the need of being precise about what al-Bāqillānī (and the same can be said of other *mutakallimūn* as well) refers to when he speaks of "the affirmation of the *originator*." What I mean by this is the following: I have argued that when al-Bāqillānī speaks of "the affirmation of the creator" and the proof "that there is for the world an originator," he refers to one of God's *attributes*, rather than *God Himself*. The affirma-

327 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 17.
328 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 18.
329 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 18.

tion of the creator concerns the affirmation of the attribute "creator" for God whose existence is taken for granted. The affirmation of the creator does not seek to introduce into reality yet another *entity* in addition to the world, whose existence was not postulated before the conclusion was reached. Al-Bāqillānī's above remarks lend support to this assertion, I submit, for the following reason: when al-Bāqillānī notes "if the existence of an act were possible without an agent [...], then the existence of a writer would [also] be possible without a writing," he seeks to make the point (in the present context) that the world, in being originated, depends on an originator. Now, it is crucial to recognise that al-Bāqillānī would of course maintain that God Himself can exist without His creation—this is in fact the very position he holds, as all *mutakallimūn*, when he defends the temporal origination of the world. In the *Inṣāf*, in the section on the proof of the world's origination, al-Bāqillānī quotes the famous *ḥadīth* according to which the Prophet explained this with the words, "God (*Allāh*) (Most-High!) was and nothing [else] was, then God created the things."[330] This implies that when al-Bāqillānī rejects what is for him an absurdity, namely that "the existence of a writer would [also] be possible without a writing," he intends to refer by "writer" not to the *entity himself* who is described as writer, but to the *role* played by said entity insofar as he has the attribute "writer." This is to say, for al-Bāqillānī it would be correct to maintain that "*God* (*Allāh*) was and nothing else was," but it would be false to maintain that "God is *creator*, but nothing exists as His creation." In the same way, al-Bāqillānī would consider it correct to say that some *person* exists without a building, but he would reject the claim that said person is a *builder* without there being a building that is ascribed to her. Parallel to this, I argue, when al-Bāqillānī speaks of the endeavour to "affirm the creator," he refers to God's *role* as creator, which is not the same as *God Himself* (that is, *Allāh*). The reason this role and attribute are established on the basis of the originatedness of the world is explained by al-Bāqillānī's statement that "[God] pointed to our knowledge of the act's connection with the agent, insofar as it is an act, [which is] just like the agent's connection with the act, insofar as he is an agent." If the world is originated and made, it is clear that God is to be described as originator and maker, for the two go hand in hand. It is worth noting that this same reasoning is also encountered in al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, this time, however, in his argument for the originatedness of the world. We recall that al-Māturīdī argued for the world's beginning in time by noting that "God

330 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 29.

Himself informed that He is the creator (*khāliq*) of everything."[331] Here the world's being originated follows from the fact that God is described as creator, for it is impossible that God should be characterised as such without there being something referred to as creation.

It is due to these considerations just discussed that I propose to reconsider whether assertions such as Davidson's that in the *Tamhīd* "the concept of particularization [is] [...] used to infer the existence of God from creation," and whether it is a correct description of al-Bāqillānī's objective that the third way represents "a direct proof of the existence of God from the presence in things of particular characteristics."[332] As noted in the Introduction, the question is not whether al-Bāqillānī's (and other thinkers') arguments to "affirm the creator" could be used to prove God's existence, but whether he himself employs them with this objective in mind. I suggest that he does not.

6.4 Creation as Proof of God's Existence?

How does the following statement made by al-Bāqillānī in his *Inṣāf* then fit in with this conclusion, which seems to be contradicted by it? Among the items of knowledge which humans are obligated to know by God al-Bāqillānī also mentions the following:[333]

> he has to know that the first thing God has made obligatory upon all humans is speculation about His signs, pondering over the things He has power over (*maqdūrātihi*), and reasoning towards Him based on the traces (*āthār*) of His power and the witnesses (*shawāhid*) to His *rubūbiyya*, for He is not known necessarily and not observable by the senses; His existence and being (*wujūduhu wa-kawnuhu*) are only known by the compelling proofs contained in His deeds.

Al-Bāqillānī here unequivocally states that it is *God's existence* which is known on the basis of creation. ʿAbd Allāh seems to have understood this kind of statement as an explanation on al-Bāqillānī's part for why in the section on "the affirmation of the creator" he presents—as ʿAbd Allāh sees it—a number of cosmological arguments for God's existence ("these are the proofs al-Bāqillānī presents to affirm the existence of God (*wujūd Allāh*)"): it is "because the *mutakal-*

331 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 11. Statements of this nature can be found, for instance, in Q. 39:62 and Q. 2:117.

332 Davidson, "Arguments from the Concept of Particularization," 304.

333 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 21.

limūn did not all agree that God is known necessarily."[334] The observation that in the aforecited quote al-Bāqillānī speaks of *God's existence* gives rise to the question of how this goes together with my assertion that, in the chapter on "the affirmation of the creator" it is not the proof of God's existence that is at stake (for it is taken for granted), and that instead al-Bāqillānī seeks to establish God *as* the creator of the world? I suggest that no contradiction is involved, for al-Bāqillānī's reference to God's existence which is known only by pondering over His signs should not be understood in the way it is used in (cosmological) arguments for God's existence. God's "existence" (*wujūd*) in the present context has a different meaning and refers to something else. Rather than referring to the dichotomy between existence and non-existence in the question whether God exists, it refers to the classification of the *kind of existence* that belongs to God. We need to bear in mind that many *mutakallimūn* were eager to stress that God's existence is of an entirely different kind than the existence that characterises created things. Al-Bāqillānī, for his part, has a section in both the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* and the *Inṣāf* where he sets out to prove that "the creator of originated things cannot resemble (*mushabbih*) them."[335] In the *Inṣāf* he explains that were God to resemble His creation it would entail that He is a "composed body" (*jism muʾallaf*) just as the bodies making up this world which are composed from atoms.[336] Al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) reports about this position held by the *mutakallimūn* in his *Nihāyat al-iqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām:* "the *ahl al-ḥaqq* maintain that God does not resemble the created things and they do not resemble Him in any respect—nothing is like Him [...]. The creator is neither an atom (*jawhar*), nor a body (*jism*), nor an accident (*ʿaraḍ*). He is neither in a place, nor in time. He is not receptive to accidents and is not the substrate of originated things."[337] Importantly, according to Ashʿarī doctrine, there are three kinds of existence characterising the created world: accidents, atoms, and bodies. Since in the Ashʿarī view existence and essence are the same thing—unlike for their Muʿtazilī peers—it follows that the existence of an accident really is different from the existence of an atom or body.[338]

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334 ʿAbd Allāh, *al-Bāqillānī*, 414.

335 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 34.

336 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 31.

337 Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-iqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām (The Summa Philosophiae of al-Shahrastānī)*, ed. with a translation from manuscripts in the libraries of Oxford, Paris, and Berlin by Alfred Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 103 (Arabic text).

338 Al-Bāqillānī's speaking of God's existence when he refers to God's essence (and vice versa) is exemplified in the following passage in the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* where he seeks to defend the Ashʿarī conception of certain attributes as hypostatic entities subsisting in God's essence: "it has been shown that the act which points to the agent's being knowing and powerful must

God, according to them, constitutes the fourth kind of existence, which is different from the three kinds of existence making up the created world. Crucially, the kind of existence that characterises God, and thereby God's very essence, is, according to al-Bāqillānī, not a self-evident item of knowledge, but can be inferred from, and in contradistinction to, God's creation. This is why al-Bāqillānī states that humans need to make recourse to speculation and that "His existence and being are only known by the compelling proofs contained in His deeds." Furthermore, even though God's essence is the object of theological enquiry, al-Bāqillānī stresses that humans are prohibited from speculating about it. Rather, they are obligated to arrive at knowledge about God's essence (which includes classifying His kind of existence) by inference from creation: "since it is the case that speculation is an obligation, humans [lit.: *al-mukallaf*] have to speculate and ponder over the things God created (*makhlūqāt Allāh*), not over God's essence (*dhāt Allāh*)." The proof of this is, al-Bāqillānī suggests, that in the Qur'an God speaks—with praise, one might add—about those {who reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth [i.e. Q. 3:191]}. "He did not say: on the creator," al-Bāqillānī points out. The Qur'anic story of Moses' conversation with Pharaoh is adduced as further evidence of the requirement to make speculation about creation the basis of statements about God's essence, and not to think of investigating God's essence itself:[339]

> when the Accursed, Pharaoh, asked Moses about God's essence (*dhāt Allāh*), he replied that the things God created allude [to the fact] that He is *ilāh* and *rabb*, and that there is no *ilāh* other than Him. But when [Moses] speculated and reflected over them [i.e. created things] and did not define for [Pharaoh] the essence (*lā yuḥaddid lahu al-dhāt*), it was not enough for [Pharaoh], for when he asked, {What is this "Lord of the Worlds"?}, [Moses] said, {the Lord of the heavens and earth} [i.e. Q. 26:23] [...]. Whenever [Pharaoh] asked him about the essence, [Moses] replied to him by speculating about created things which point to knowledge of Him.

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be connected with something that is pointed to (*madlūl*). This cannot be the essence (*nafs*) of the agent or his existence (*wujūdahu*), nor an attribute of essence, since it has been established that saying that He is knowing and powerful goes beyond (*zāʾid ʿalā*) saying that He is a thing (*shayʾ*) and an existent (*mawjūd*)" (al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 153). On the relationship between essence and existence according to the Muʿtazila and the Ashʿariyya, see Richard M. Frank, "Attribute, attribution, and being: three Islamic views," in *Philosophies of Existence, Ancient and Medieval*, ed. P. Morewedge (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1982), 258–278; "Almaʿdūm wal-mawjūd: the non-existent, the existent, and the possible in the teachings of Abū Hāshim and his followers," *MIDEO* 14 (1980): 185–209.

339 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 28.

The significance for al-Bāqillānī of distinguishing God's kind of existence as well as essence from the kinds of existence characteristic of created things cannot be overstated. At one place in the *Inṣāf* he explicitly states that this is part of the all-important declaration that God is unique (*tawḥīd*). There he refers to the Ṣūfī Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Būshanjī (d. 348/960) who reportedly replied to the question of what God's *tawḥīd* entails: "it is that you know that He has no similarity to the essences [of created things] and that the [divine] attributes must not be denied."[340] To declare God's oneness and uniqueness (*al-tawḥīd lahu*), we are told, is nothing less than an aspect of belief in God (*al-īmān bi'llāh*).[341]

It is in this very same context of defining *tawḥīd* that the following statement is encountered in the *Inṣāf:* "declaring Him one and unique is the affirmation that He is established (*thābit*) and existent (*mawjūd*), one unique *ilāh* and the object of worship—nothing is like Him [i.e. Q. 42:11]."[342] What does the declaration that God is "existent" (*mawjūd*) then mean? I propose that al-Bāqillānī's statement should in fact be translated as "He is established and *an existent*," rather than simply "existent." For his concern seems to be to address the hotly debated issue of whether it is right to say of God that He is "an existent." This question was frequently linked to the related question of whether God is to be called a "thing" (*shayʾ*). Al-Ashʿarī, in his *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, reports on the disagreement among the *mutakallimūn* about the meaning of both terms and whether they are applicable to God: "those who liken God to creation (*al-mushabbiha*) say: God is a *shayʾ* means He is a body (*jism*). Some people say: it means He is an existent (*mawjūd*) [...]. Al-Ṣāliḥī said: God is a *shayʾ* [but] unlike [created] things means that He is eternal [...]. Al-Jubbāʾī said: the word *shayʾ* denotes everything that can be known [...] and since God is known [...] it follows that He is a *shayʾ*."[343] Furthermore: "al-Jubbāʾī said: speaking of the creator's being a *mawjūd* 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 (*shayʾ*)."[344] Al-Bāqillānī,

340 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 32.

341 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 22.

342 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 22.

343 Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa-ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn,* al-juzʾ al-awwal wa'l-thānī (al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1969), part 2, 202.

344 Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, part 2, 203–204. On the debate about the meaning of the terms "*mawjūd*" and "*shayʾ*" in early *kalām*, see Robert Wisnovsky, "Notes on Avicenna's Concept of Thingness (*shayʾiyya*)," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 10 (2000): 181–221, at 182–200; F. Klein-Franke, "The non-existent is a thing," *Le Muséon* 107 (1994): 375–390; Richard M. Frank, "Bodies and Atoms: The Ashʿarite Analysis," in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, ed. M.E. Marmura (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), 39–53.

for his part, takes a clear stance in this debate: he affirms that God is to be referred to as "an existent." Elsewhere in the *Inṣāf* he remarks that being an existent (*mawjūd*) belongs to the attributes of God just as being eternal, one and unique, living, and others.[345] For al-Bāqillānī, all knowable things (*maʿlūmāt*) are either non-existent or existent; there is no third option. Invoking Q. 6:19, {Say, "What (*ayy shayʾ*) counts most as a witness?" Say, "God"}, al-Bāqillānī argues that "He (Praised be He!) is an existent, not non-existent" since God describes Himself in the Qur'anic verse as a "*shayʾ*" and since "*al-mawjūd* is *al-shayʾ*."[346] (This verse is, therefore, given preference by al-Bāqillānī over Q. 42:11, {There is nothing like Him (*laysa ka-mithlihi shayʾ*)}, which seems to juxtapose God and "things." Al-Bāqillānī quotes this verse when stating that being an existent belongs to God's attributes.) It is evident that in the present context al-Bāqillānī's declaration that God is "*mawjūd*" does not refer to the question of whether God actually is part of reality; rather, God's being part of reality is assumed and the debate is about whether it is correct to apply certain terms to Him considering that they are also used to refer to creation, and *tashbīh* or likening God to creation is sought to be avoided. In al-Bāqillānī's view, to affirm God's difference from creation is part of the affirmation of *tawḥīd*, yet the affirmation of *tawḥīd* likewise requires that God's attributes, such as His being an existent, an essence, and a thing, must not be denied.

Finally, it should be mentioned that, according to al-Bāqillānī, God's *tawḥīd* not only entails that His kind of existence and essence are to be affirmed as completely different from creation, and that He is to be called an existent and a thing, but also that God is to be considered the only *rabb* and *ilāh*, which justifies His sole worthiness of worship. We have encountered the endeavour to affirm these two attributes or titles for none but God before in the works of al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, al-Māturīdī, as well as al-Kindī, who based them on God's attribute "creator." Al-Bāqillānī states that "declaring Him one and unique is the affirmation that He is [...] one unique *ilāh* and the object of worship—nothing is like Him."[347] This understanding of *tawḥīd* is then also linked to belief in God, for "belief means assent. [...] The locus of assent is the heart, and it means that the heart assents that God is [the] one *ilāh*."[348] For al-Bāqillānī, there also is a link between God's having these two attributes and His sole right to be worshipped, for he explains: "humans have to know that the creator of the world (Exalt-

345 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 18.
346 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 15.
347 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 22.
348 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 52.

ed be His power!) is one and unique (*wāḥid aḥad*). This means that there is no *ilāh* in addition to Him and none who deserves worship except for Him."[349] Crucially, al-Bāqillānī rests the affirmation of these two all-important attributes of God and His worthiness of worship which results from them on speculation about creation, insofar as creation allows humans to gain knowledge about God since it has become clear that He is to be identified as the cause of the world's existence. This reasoning is expressed in al-Bāqillānī's aforecited statement that "the *mukallaf* has to know that the first thing God has made obligatory upon all humans is speculation about His signs, pondering over the things He has power over, and reasoning towards Him based on the traces of His power and the witnesses to His *rubūbiyya*." The same reasoning that God's being the only *rabb*, to the exclusion of any other entity in the cosmos, is known when He is considered in His role as sole creator of the world is expressed in the aforementioned story of Moses' argument with Pharaoh. There, al-Bāqillānī argued that Moses' replies to Pharaoh's questions about God's essence revolved around pointing out to him that "the things God created allude [to the fact] that He is *ilāh* and *rabb*, and that there is no *ilāh* other than Him." These considerations draw attention to the significance of "the affirmation of the creator" for al-Bāqillānī: it is here where he intends to establish a particular *attribute* for God, on which a string of other important tenets hinge, not least the declaration of God's absolute uniqueness and the promulgation of monotheism, so central to Islam.

6.5 The Conception of God as an Agent Endowed with Will

The second and third arguments to "affirm the creator" put forward by al-Bāqillānī in the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* and the *Inṣāf* include an aspect of the conception of God as creator which is absent in the first argument (the one based on the analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghāʾib*). While all three arguments have the purpose of establishing the principle of causation for the *ghāʾib* (so as to argue that the world, in being originated, indeed depends on an outside cause, with the ultimate objective of ascribing its origination to God), 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. We recall that there he reached the conclusion that "there is for it one who makes it occur earlier and who brings it into existence according to his will (*maqṣūran ʿalā mashīʾatihi*)" and that "whatever

349 Al-Bāqillānī, *al-Inṣāf*, 32.

has a form only receives it from one who composed and intended (*qāṣid*) it this way." Al-Bāqillānī's proofs to "affirm the creator" therefore seek to establish that God is the cause of the world in a specific way: He is an agent possessed of will. In the *Inṣāf*, we recall, al-Bāqillānī mentioned two Qur'anic verses stressing the important role God's will plays in creating when he discussed the proofs to "affirm the creator."

Volition should come to be regarded by subsequent generations of *mutakallimūn* as the prime aspect of their conception of God as creator, as we shall see in the chapters to follow. It is, therefore, interesting to note that for *mutakallimūn* preceding al-Bāqillānī, such as al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, al-Māturīdī, and al-Ashʿarī, but also for the philosopher al-Kindī, the notion of will cannot be said to play an equally crucial role in their defence of God as cause of the world. Al-Kindī and al-Qāsim did not seem to be preoccupied with stressing this particular aspect. Al-Ashʿarī also paid more attention to defending the notion of creation *ex nihilo*, and will plays a role only in his proof that "the creator of the things is one" where the idea is put forward that being creator and not being able to realise what one wills (*murād*) are mutually exclusive.[350] In al-Māturīdī, on the other hand, it is the notion of power (*qudra*), rather than will, which characterises the creator of the world.[351]

Al-Bāqillānī's emphasis on the notion of volition[352] in his conception of creation and the creator, runs like a red thread through the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*. This becomes apparent in a number of refutations al-Bāqillānī puts forward of beliefs he considers erroneous and contrary to scripture. One of these refutations appears in the section immediately following "the affirmation of the creator" (and its various subsections on the divine attributes that can be inferred from God's being creator) and deals with the belief that "the creator (*ṣāniʿ*) of the world is a nature from among the natures (*ṭabīʿa min al-ṭabāʾiʿ*), from the existence of which the origination of the world became necessary (*wajaba*)."[353] In the course of his refutation, al-Bāqillānī suggests that "if it [i.e. nature] is eternal, it would necessary follow that the originated things which exist due to it are [also] eternal, for [it was assumed that] nature is eternally existent and there is nothing that hinders the originated things from existing, being necessitated by it (*al-mūjaba ʿanhā*) [...] just as fire causes burning necessarily in accordance with the ex-

350 Al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, 20.

351 Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 19 – 21.

352 Note that these terms all refer to the same thing for al-Bāqillānī (*al-Inṣāf*, 43): "note that there is no difference between the [divine] will (*al-irāda*), wishing (*al-mashīʾa*) [and] choice (*al-ikhtiyār*)."

353 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 34.

istence of its nature."[354] Al-Bāqillānī's example of the necessary generation of burning by fire brings to mind al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) own refutation in the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* of the position on causality espoused by philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā where he mentions the exact same example. 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 by nature, not by choice, thus incapable of abstaining from [enacting] what is its nature."[355] Before al-Ghazālī, it was already al-Bāqillānī's concern to distinguish two types of causes, and this distinction is at the heart of his refutation of those who—erroneously—believe that nature is to be assigned the role of creator of things in this world. One type of cause exerts its efficacy by nature, which means that its effect cannot but follow, necessarily. This is contrasted with another type of cause, that is, a cause whose effect emerges in accordance with its will and wishing and who has the ability to act and abstain from it. This is made explicit by al-Bāqillānī in the following when he states: "according to us, [the divine will] is a will for the occurrence of the act in a way that it is delayed (*ʿalā al-tarākhī*) and [...] it is not an *ʿilla* for the existence of what is willed." The cause referred to by al-Bāqillānī as "*ʿilla*" denotes "something that necessitates the act" (*mūjib li'l-fiʿl*), as opposed to one that "acts according to power and choice."[356] What al-Bāqillānī means to say is that for him God caused the world to exist after it had not existed, by His eternal will which, however, in being a *will*, could produce an effect in time even though it is eternal.[357] The divine will is not a neces-

354 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 35.

355 Abū Ḥāmid b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa. The Incoherence of the Philosophers. A parallel English-Arabic text translated, introduced, and annotated by Michael M. Marmura* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 167. Al-Ghazālī's own position, in contrast, is the following: "the agent of [fire's] burning [...] is God, either through the mediation of the angels or without mediation. Fire, which is inanimate, has no act" (al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 167).

356 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 53.

357 Al-Bāqillānī appears to make this point in response to views such as that held by the philosopher al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) who defended the belief in the eternity of the world, as well as a certain related conception of God as cause, on the following grounds: "[a]ny 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 [i. e. 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

sitating cause. The reason the proponents of the belief in nature as the eternal creator of the world have to be mistaken is that their conception of nature as a necessitating cause cannot account for the temporal origination of the world. This reasoning put forward by al-Bāqillānī in his refutation highlights the importance for him of stressing that the entity who is to be credited with having created the world must be possessed of will.

To conceive of the cause of the world as an *ʿilla* which necessitates the world by nature, as opposed to the concept of the *ṣāniʿ* or creator who exerts his will in creation, involves another absurdity for al-Bāqillānī. He continues his refutation by posing: "so if nature is eternal, and what exists from it is also eternal, then why is it that one of them necessitates (*mūjib*) and causes (*sabab*) the other, rather than [saying] that the effect (*musabbab*) is [the] cause (*sabab wa-ʿilla*)?"[358] What this statement highlights is that, for al-Bāqillānī, the relationship between the world as effect and God as cause must be one characterised by temporal priority, for if both cause and effect are believed to coexist eternally, one has no grounds to claim that this one is cause and that one effect, rather than the other way round. Only in the case of a creator possessed of will and the temporally originated effect coming forth from it is one able to identify which one is cause and which one effect. Interestingly, al-Bāqillānī here remains silent that he himself does in fact accept that cause and effect can coexist eternally without this compromising identifying one as cause and the other as effect. In discussing the divine attributes (in a section entitled "*bāb al-kalām fī al-ṣifāt*") in the *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, al-Bāqillānī defends the Ashʿarī position that God's descriptions, such as His being knowing or powerful, point to hypostatic entities (*maʿānin*), such as knowledge and power, subsisting in His essence.[359] In this context, he states: "we [humans] are alive [...] only because we have life [...]. It follows that they [i.e. the entities, such as life] are the *ʿilla* for our being such [i.e. alive etc.] [...]. It follows that God possesses life [...], and if He did not possess

existence of the thing is not later than the existence of the agent" (Abū Naṣr Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl al-madanī ("Aphorisms of the Statesman")*, ed. with an English translation, introduction, and notes by D.M. Dunlop (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 66). See also Chapter "How did God create the world?" (41–106, esp. 58–59) in Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

358 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 54–55.

359 On the Ashʿarī conception of the divine attributes, see Harry Austryn Wolfson, "Philosophical Implications of the Problem of Divine Attributes in the Kalam," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 79/2 (1959): 73–80; Richard M. Frank, "Al-maʿnā: Some Reflections on the Technical Meaning of the Term in the Kalām and Its Use in the Physics of Muʿammar," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 87/3 (1967): 248–259.

any of these attributes, He would not be alive."[360] Since the hypostatic entities subsist *eternally* in God, they must eternally be the cause (*ʿilla*) of His being described as such. Ibn Sīnā would later argue—maybe with a view to arguments such as al-Bāqillānī's—that there is in fact no contradiction between the belief in the world's eternal coexistence with God, on the one hand, and the assertion that God is its cause, on the other.[361]

After his refutation of "those who believe that nature can act (*fiʿl al-ṭabāʿ*),"[362] al-Bāqillānī turns to the refutation of another group whom he labels as *al-munajjimūn* (in a section entitled "*bāb al-kalām ʿalā al-munajjimūn*"). In his refutation of their belief, it is once more the creator's particular 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 creators, fashioners, and arrangers (*ṣāniʿ*, *muṣawwir*, *mudabbir*) of the world.[363] Their mistake evidently is, as in the case of the proponents of natures, that they ascribe creation to the wrong entities. Al-Bāqillānī sets out to prove the erroneous nature of their belief by arguing, first, that the planets are originated in time (proven through the notion of the accident of movement), and he infers from this that they are dependent on another. This other entity, he then carries on, "must have originated them either by nature (*bi'l-ṭabʿ*) or by power and choice (*bi'l-qudra wa'l-ikhtiyār*)."[364] The first option is ruled out following similar considerations as in the aforementioned discussion (that is, the world, in being the creator's effect, would have to be eternal, but it is not). This leads al-Bāqillānī to consider the remaining option and to conclude:[365]

> if he originated them by power and choice, it is necessary that he is able [to bring about a state where] the originated events, whose existence they [i.e. the planets] bring about [...], do not manifest or he is not able to do so. If he is not able to do so, it is necessarily the case that the planets are in opposition to him and that they subject him—but this entails his deficiency and his [own] originatedness [which is an absurdity]. If their creator is able to prevent the existence of these effects [which are generated by the planets], despite the existence of these planets [...], and if he is able to bring about other originated events, then it is false that these planets act and exert an influence [...], and it has been established that all of this is the act of a powerful, choosing agent (*fāʿil qādir mukhtār*) who originates if he wishes so (*shāʾa*) and who abstains from it if he wishes so.

360 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 196.
361 See Chapter Seven of this book.
362 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 34.
363 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 48.
364 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 49.
365 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 50.

Al-Bāqillānī's refutation of the *munajjimūn*'s belief that it is the planets who are to be credited with creating things in this (lower) world hinges on the idea, first, that they are themselves originated and, secondly, that their creator is an entity possessed of will and choice. This proves that the *munajjimūn* credit the wrong entities with creation. 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 the argument that they are not creators, as believed by Abraham's people (yet, he left 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.

As noted above, al-Bāqillānī's two refutations hinge on describing God as a choosing creator, rather than a necessitating cause, and the importance of this particular divine attribute is reflected in al-Bāqillānī's endeavour of ascribing the world, in being originated, to God in the section on "the affirmation of the creator."

7 Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037)

7.1 The Proof of God's Existence and the Science of Metaphysics

Ibn Sīnā is, without any doubt, to be counted among the most important and influential thinkers in the classical Islamic tradition. Having been something of a universal genius who penned works on a variety of subjects and disciplines, including music, mathematics, physics, and meteorology, to name but a few, Ibn Sīnā might be best known for his incorporation of Greek philosophical ideas into Islamic philosophy (*falsafa*). It is particularly Ibn Sīnā's ideas put forward in metaphysics that would come to leave a lasting mark on those who succeeded him, not least on the *kalām* tradition.[366] Peter Adamson has emphasised the special place the proof of God's existence has in Ibn Sīnā's philosophical thought: "[i]f one were asked to name Avicenna's greatest contribution to the history of philosophy, one might reasonably choose his proof of God's existence."[367] The significance of Ibn Sīnā's proof of God's existence in the metaphysical branch of philosophy has been emphasised by Herbert A. Davidson. He explains: "Avicenna's proof of a first cause of the existence of the universe is characterized by him as a *metaphysical* [*sic*] proof, and Avicenna attaches considerable significance to that characterization. [...] he shows that one task of metaphysics—as distinguished from the subject matter of metaphysics—is the demonstration of the existence of God."[368] Davidson here refers to Ibn Sīnā's discussion of the subject matter of the science of metaphysics at the beginning of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of his *magnum opus*, the *Shifāʾ*. In the course of his discussion, Ibn Sīnā proposes sev-

366 For Ibn Sīnā's life and his influence, see Lenn E. Goodman, *Avicenna* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992), Chapter 1 (1–48); David C. Reisman, "The life and times of Avicenna: patronage and learning in medieval Islam," in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 7–27; Robert Wisnovsky, "Avicenna's Islamic reception," in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 190–213; Dimitri Gutas, "The Heritage of Avicenna: The Golden Age of Arabic Philosophy, 1000–ca. 1350," in *Avicenna and His Heritage*, Acts of the International Colloquium, Leuven—Louvain-La-Neuve, September 8–September 11, 1999, ed. Jules Janssens and Daniel De Smet (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2002), 81–98. For an introduction to the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifāʾ*, see Stephen Menn, "Avicenna's metaphysics," in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 143–169.
367 Peter Adamson, "From the necessary existent to God," in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 170–189, at 170.
368 Herbert A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 284.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-008

eral things which could be thought to be its subject matter, in order to rule out all of them and to announce that it is "the existent qua existent" (*al-mawjūd bimā huwa mawjūd*).[369] Before announcing the true subject matter of metaphysics, one of the alternatives he discusses is this: "is the subject matter of this science '*inniyyat Allāh*' or is it not, this rather being something from among the things this science seeks (*maṭālib*)?"[370] Ibn Sīnā here introduces the distinction between the subject matter proper (*mawḍūʿ*) of a science and other tasks or enquiries (sg. *maṭlūb*, pl. *maṭālib*) conducted in the science, and he poses the question whether "*inniyyat Allāh*" is the former or rather the latter. Before surveying Ibn Sīnā's reasoning for why "*iniyyat Allāh*" is not the subject matter of metaphysics (which is "the existent qua existent"), it should be pointed out that Davidson's above remark that "one task of metaphysics—as distinguished from the subject matter of metaphysics—is the demonstration of the existence of God" has in mind this very question posed by Ibn Sīnā about "*inniyat Allāh*." Davidson thus reads Ibn Sīnā as making the point that the existence of God is not metaphysics' subject matter, but it is something metaphysics seeks to prove. Davidson's reading is shared by Michael E. Marmura. In his translation of the *Metaphysics* (*al-Ilāhiyyāt*) of the *Shifāʾ*, Marmura renders "*inniyyat Allāh*" as "the existence of God."[371] In a footnote he remarks that "the term [i.e. *inniyya*] 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.'"[372] Ibn Sīnā's explanation for why "it is not possible that this [i.e. *inniyyat Allāh*] is the subject matter" follow Aristotle's general exposition of sciences and their subject matters: the subject matter of every science is something whose existence is accepted (*musallam al-wujūd*) by the science. "The existence of the *ilāh* (*wujūd al-ilāh*)," however, cannot be accepted in metaphysics so that it could be its subject matter. (Note that Marmura renders "*wujūd al-iāh*" also as "the existence of God," just like "*inniyyat Allāh*."[373]) The reason is this: in order to be metaphysics' subject matter, it would have to be something sought (*maṭlūb*) in another science so that metaphysics could simply accept it; or, alternatively, it

369 Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ = The Metaphysics of* The Healing: *A parallel English-Arabic text, translated by Michael E. Marmura* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 6. All translations of the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifāʾ* are mine and the references refer to the Arabic text.

370 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 3.

371 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 3 (l. 21–22).

372 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 383, n. 1.

373 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 3.

would simply have to be something metaphysics can accept and no other science has to establish for it. Both alternatives are wrong, Ibn Sīnā explains. The first one is rejected on the grounds that it cannot be sought in any other science for no science other than metaphysics—that is, the philosophical sciences dealing with morals and politics, nature, mathematics, and logic—has anything to do with "affirming the *ilāh*" (*ithbāt al-ilāh*). The second alternative is rejected as it would imply that "it is either self-evident (*bayyin bi-nafsihi*) or cannot be shown through rational speculation (*maʾyūs ʿan bayyānihi bi'l-naẓar*)," so that no demonstration of it were needed in order for metaphysics to accept it as its subject matter. Rather, it is the case, Ibn Sīnā states, that "there is proof for it" (*ʿalayhi dalīl*). This leads Ibn Sīnā to conclude that, since the subject matter of every science is accepted in terms of its existence, and since "*wujūd al-ilāh*" cannot simply be accepted in metaphysics, "the investigation of it belongs in this science."[374]

This investigation, Ibn Sīnā continues to explain, includes the following two aspects: "one of them is the investigation of it (*baḥth ʿanhu*) under the aspect of His existence (*wujūdihi*), and the other under the aspect of His attributes (*ṣifātihi*)." Ibn Sīnā then gives further indications of why this enquiry can only take place in metaphysics, to the exclusion of all other sciences:[375]

> 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 completely separated from matter. You have glimpsed in the *Physics* that the *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 [i.e. His existence, *al-baḥth ʿanhu*] belongs to this science.

Ibn Sīnā's first concern was to explain why an investigation of "*wujūd al-ilāh*" has to take place in the first place (it is not self-evident); his second concern now is to explain why this investigation belongs to metaphysics alone. The reason is that the existence characteristic of the *ilāh* is incorporeal and immaterial—this being something Ibn Sīnā's investigations in the science of physics have already alluded to—, and metaphysics is the only science that deals with such incorporeal and immaterial entities. Physics, for instance, deals with entities that are corporeal, and is consequently not the right place for enquiries into God. In

374 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 4.
375 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 4.

the *Dānish-nāma* Ibn Sīnā explains that all "things are classified only into three kinds" with respect to their being:[376]

> either (1) their being 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 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.

This threefold division of all entities making up the whole of reality is reflected in the threefold division of the theoretical sciences. The first division of entities mentioned by Ibn Sīnā in the *Dānish-nāma* are dealt with by metaphysics; the second division is treated in mathematics; and the third division is investigated in physics.

7.2 Metaphysics' Investigation of *wujūd al-ilāh*

Ibn Sīnā's remarks of why the investigation of "*wujūd al-ilāh*" is metaphysics' sole task have implications which, I want to suggest, have been overlooked in the secondary academic literature. As illustrated on the example of Davidson and Marmura's reading, there exists the view in the secondary academic literature that Ibn Sīnā means to say that it is metaphysics' task to prove that God actually exists. Or to put it differently, metaphysics seeks to show that reality comprises of one more entity (God) whose existence was not postulated previously. I want to suggest that when Ibn Sīnā says that "*wujūd al-ilāh*" can only be affirmed by metaphysics for it alone deals with immaterial beings he means to say that this science has the task to enquire into the *kind* of existence that is characteristic of God (namely immaterial existence). His speaking of the existence of God (that is, of "*wujūd al-ilāh*") is not meant to refer to the dichotomy between existence and non-existence as it is used in cosmological, ontological, or teleological arguments for God's existence. Ibn Sīnā is not interested in prov-

376 Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā, *Dānish Nāma-i ʿalāʾī = The Metaphysics of Avicenna: A critical translation-commentary of the fundamental arguments in Avicenna's Metaphysics in the Dānish Nāma-i ʿalāʾī* (*The Book of Scientific Knowledge*), *translated by Parviz Morewedge* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 12. In the Persian *Dānish-nāma* Ibn Sīnā makes use of the term "*hastī*," translated as "being," instead of the term "*wujūd*" used in the same context in his Arabic works and which is usually rendered "existence." On the subtle differences between these terms, see Morewedge's explanation in the glossary (300 – 302) of the *Dānish-nāma*.

ing that reality comprises of one more entity; rather he is concerned with establishing what *kind* of existence out of the three kinds of existence that characterise the entirety of beings describes God. This is, I submit, further indicated by the following. In the *Taʿliqāt* we read:[377]

> 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 (*ʿilm mā baʿd al-ṭabīʿa*) [i.e. metaphysics] for these are states of the body insofar as it is an existent, not insofar as it is subject to change, and this is the enquiry about *the kind of its existence which is characteristic of it* (*baḥth ʿan naḥw wujūdihi alladhī yakhaṣṣuhu*), that is, [the question of] *which existence is characteristic of it* (*ayy wujūd yakhaṣṣuhu*) [my emphasis].

Shortly after that Ibn Sīnā explains:[378]

> the discussion of whether the body is made up of atoms is the discussion of *the kind of its existence* (*naḥw wujūdihi*), and so is the discussion of 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 these accidents has to take place in physics. But these do not belong to the parts of the body insofar as it is made up of form and matter, therefore establishing them belongs to metaphysics [my emphasis].

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 body—yet only insofar as the accidents of movement and rest occur to it. The *existence* of physics' subject matter, that is, body, however, is established in metaphysics. Importantly, this task of metaphysics refers to nothing else than ascertaining the *kind of existence* that is specific of body, which means showing that "body" is composed from atoms. Once it has been established by metaphysics "which existence is characteristic of body," as Ibn Sīnā has it, the science of physics can proceed to investigate the accidents belonging to its subject matter, such as movement and rest. Unless physics can take it for granted that at least a part of reality is of corporeal existence, it would not be able to claim a subject matter for itself and investigate its accidents such as movement and rest—for the enquiry into these accidents requires that a part of reality is corporeal, as Ibn Sīnā's

377 Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (al-Qāhira: al-Hayʾa al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma liʾl-Kitāb, 1973), 171–172.
378 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 172.

threefold division of existence in the *Dānish-nāma* indicates. (A look at Ibn Sīnā's various books on metaphysics indeed reveals that a great deal of attention is dedicated to establishing this kind of existence: the entire Book Four of the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifāʾ*, 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).)

In analogy to the way Ibn Sīnā speaks of the *existence* of the subject matter of physics (that is, "the kind of existence which is characteristic of it"), I suggest he speaks of "*wujūd al-ilāh*" which has to be established by metaphysics. The investigation of "*wujūd al-ilāh*" in metaphysics refers to this science's task of establishing the *kind* of existence that is characteristic of God. God's existence is characterised as not being corporeal—this being something that could only be "glimpsed"[379] in the natural science, as Marmura translates it, for it does not deal at all with entities other than corporeal ones. In order to ascertain that God's existence really is an immaterial existence, it requires the science that is after physics. In the *Taʿlīqāt* Ibn Sīnā in fact explicitly states and emphasises that existence in God is not the same as existence in created beings; they are of a different kind: "the existence of every existent is due to the First because it emanates (*fāʾiḍ*) 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*) [my emphasis]."[380] The characterisation of God's kind of existence as beyond corporeality (unlike created beings) is stressed as well: "the existence of the creator is an intellectually perceived existence (*wujūd maʿqūl*), that is, pure existence (*wujūd mujarrad*)."[381] It should also be noted that Ibn Sīnā's discussion of the subject matter of metaphysics is not the only instance where he stresses that the kind of existence specific to God is not a self-evident matter (*bayyin bi-nafsihi*). He indicates this once more at the very end of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifāʾ* where he discusses what kind of knowledge of God the prophet has to communicate to the inhabitants of the ideal state pictured by Ibn Sīnā. There he explains that it does not belong to the duties of the prophet to[382]

> involve them 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

379 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 4 (l. 25).
380 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 157–158.
381 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 60.
382 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 365–366.

> 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 of God's oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*) and transcendence (*tanzīh*), hence they would not hesitate to deny such an existence (*mithl hadhā al-wujūd*).

While Ibn Sīnā here expresses his view that knowledge of the precise nature of God is not meant for the majority of people (for they are unable to comprehend immaterial existence), his statement implies that "to assert His existence"—that is, "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"—is something metaphysics can facilitate. I, thus, propose that in the present context Ibn Sīnā uses the term "*wujūd*" as referring to the different classes of existence, and not as referring to the fact that some entity has existence so that it can be affirmed as part of reality. The difference between these two meanings of "*wujūd*" in Ibn Sīnā's usage has been recognised by Stephen Menn who discusses Ibn Sīnā and Aristotle's conception of being. (Menn does, however, not relate his discussion to the question of what metaphysics seeks in investigating "*wujūd al-ilāh*.") He notes:[383]

> Avicenna distinguishes two senses of being, what he calls *wujūd khāṣṣ* ("proper being," the kind of being proper to X, namely, its being X) and *wujūd ithbātī* ("positing being," the kind of being we are attributing to X when we posit X [...]). To say "X *mawjūd*^{un}," "X *is*" or "X is a being," in the sense of *wujūd khāṣṣ*, is short for saying that X is what it is, namely, X: to say of this thing that it is *mawjūd* in this sense is to say that it is X, and so its *wujūd* in this sense is just its quiddity of X.

7.3 Metaphysics' Investigation of *inniyyat Allāh*

Let us turn our attention once more to Ibn Sīnā's discussion of metaphysics' subject matter at the beginning of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifāʾ*. We recall that he asked whether "*inniyyat Allāh*" could be its subject matter, and went on to deny this on the basis that "*wujūd al-iāh*" cannot be taken for granted by this science but has to be investigated by it. The way in which Ibn Sīnā here understands "*wujūd al-ilāh*" has become clear from the previous discussion. It will be recalled also that Marmura translated both Arabic expressions as "the existence of God," thus rendering "*inniyya*" the same as "*wujūd*." This, then, gives rise to the question of what Ibn Sīnā means when he speaks of "*inniyyat Allāh*." Mar-

383 Menn, "Avicenna's metaphysics," 150.

mura's translation and understanding of the term "*inniyya*" in this context, I submit, does not capture accurately what Ibn Sīnā intends it to refer to. (The same could be said of Davidson who likewise understands it as denoting God's existence, in the sense in which it is used in arguments for God's existence, as discussed above.)

A number of passages in the *Shifāʾ* indicate what Ibn Sīnā means by "*inniyyat Allāh*." For instance, he explains: "there is no *māhiyya* for the necessarily existent other than that He is necessarily existent, and this is the *inniyya*." He carries on: "every possessor of a *māhiyya* is caused. All other things besides the necessarily existent have *māhiyyāt*."[384] These two statements make it clear that the term "*inniyya*" is contrasted with the term "*māhiyya*," and that the former stands for the class of existence which is necessary and which has no cause, while the latter refers to the class of existence that is possible and requires a cause.

Elsewhere in the *Shifāʾ* 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." In this case, existence is "a necessary concomitant (*lāzim*) for the true nature."[385] The mention of "the true nature" in relation to necessary existence and "*inniyya*" is of significance as it is a further indication of what Ibn Sīnā intends by "*inniyyat Allāh*." Consider the following statements in the *Taʿlīqāt* where Ibn Sīnā also speaks of the true nature: "humans are unable to grasp the true nature (*ḥaqīqa*) of things [...]. They only grasp some necessary concomitants (*lawāzim*) or special characteristics (*khawāṣṣ*)."[386] God has a true nature just like all other entities in this world, yet in His case humans are likewise unable to conceive the true nature. The only thing humans can conceive is His necessary existence. This necessary existence is a necessary concomitant for God and only one among others: "we do not know the true nature of the First [i. e. God]. We only know of Him whether existence is necessary for Him or not. But this is one of his concomitants, not His true nature."[387] What singles out God's necessary existence from among His other necessary concomitants is that it is the one most characteristic of Him. On the basis of this particular concomitant, humans are able to gain knowledge of the other concomitants: "the most of what humans are able to conceive [...] is the necessity of existence (*wujūb al-wujūd*), for this is the most specific (*akhaṣṣ*) of His concomitants. [...] Through this concomitant we know other concomitants, such as [His] oneness

384 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 276.
385 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 36.
386 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 34.
387 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 35.

and uniqueness (*waḥdāniyya*), as well as the other attributes."[388] (Elsewhere, Ibn Sīnā mentions "creation [...] just as oneness and knowledge" as God's other necessary concomitants which are "mediated" (*bi-wāsiṭa*) by the first concomitant of necessary existence.[389])

Ibn Sīnā then makes a number of statements which—at first glance—seem somewhat contradictory. After having insisted that humans are unable to grasp God's true nature, he states "the true nature of the First is His *anniyya*."[390] The term "*anniyya*" as used by Ibn Sīnā in the *Taʿlīqāt* denotes the same as the term "*inniyya*" known from the *Shifāʾ*. This is clarified by his remark that "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* [...]."[391] Furthermore: "He is not caused for He has no essence (*māhiyya*), rather He has *al-anniyya*, for every possessor of an essence is caused as this possessor's existence is not due to his essence but from another."[392] Both "*anniyya*" and "*inniyya*" hence denote God's necessary existence. His above statement that "the true nature of the First is His *anniyya*" then gives the impression that God's true nature can be positively defined and named. At the same time, however, he once more maintains that "the human mind does not grasp the essence (*kunh*) and true nature of the First, and the First has a true nature which has no name (*ism*), in our view."[393] This latter statement implies that God's true nature is not only beyond human understanding but also unnameable. Both statements, taken together, seem to express contradictory views. In particular, how is it possible that Ibn Sīnā equates "*anniyya*" with God's true nature, when at the same time maintaining that "*anniyya*" denotes one of God's necessary concomitants which are not His true nature (namely, the first and foremost among them, His necessary existence)? This seeming contradiction can be resolved when taking into account the following explanation given by Ibn Sīnā: "if the true nature of the First were known, then the ne-

388 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 34–35. On the ontological distinction between names referring to God's true nature and names referring to His concomitants, see Daniel De Smet and Meryem Sebti, "Avicenna's Philosophical Approach to the Qur'an in the Light of His *Tafsīr Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 11/2 (2009): 134–148, especially 139.

389 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 158. God's necessity of existence belongs to His true nature without being mediated by other concomitants (*huwa lahā bi-lā wāsiṭat lāzim ākhar*); it is the first.

390 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 184.

391 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 36.

392 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 70. Compare Parviz Morewedge, "Philosophical Analysis and Ibn Sīnā's 'Essence-Existence' Distinction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92/3 (1972): 425–435.

393 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 185.

cessity of existence would be the explanation (*sharḥ*) of the name given to that true nature."[394] This statement indicates that God's true nature, which in itself has no name, is called and referred to by "*anniyya*" because it takes this name from the one concomitant most characteristic of God, which serves as an explanation and approximation of the otherwise obscure true nature. The same thought is expressed in the following statement:[395]

> if it were possible to conceive His true nature, it would be "the existent by virtue of its essence" (*al-mawjūd bi-dhātihi*), that is, the one that has existence by virtue of the essence. The meaning of our saying "the one that has existence by virtue of the essence" is an indication (*ishāra*) of something whose true nature we do not know. However, the true nature is not the existence itself [...]. He has a true nature above (*fawq*) existence, and existence is one of the true nature's concomitants.

God's true nature, this statement clarifies, is referred to by the name "the existent by virtue of its essence," even though this name is derived from, and denotes, God's most specific necessary concomitant, yet is serves as an "indication" for something that is otherwise entirely unknowable and unnameable. Still, Ibn Sīnā emphasises that God's true nature should not be confused with His necessary existence.

Why is this preceding discussion of the meaning of "*inniyya*" and "*anniyya*" and their relation to God's true nature important? It is important because it indicates that Marmura and Davidson's understanding of "*inniyyat Allāh*" as "God's existence" in the context of the discussion of metaphysics' subject matter appears to fail to do justice to what Ibn Sīnā intends it to denote. When Ibn Sīnā asks, "Is the subject matter of this science *inniyyat Allāh?*" and then denies this, he does not seem to intend to say that it is metaphysics' task to prove God's existence, in the sense that metaphysics seeks to introduce into reality the existence of yet another entity. I want to suggest that in the present context Ibn Sīnā uses "*inniyyat Allāh*" to refer to God's true nature which to investigate belongs to the tasks of metaphysics. God's true nature or *inniyya/anniyya* cannot be metaphysics' subject matter for the sole reason that the *kind* of God's existence cannot be taken for granted in this science, so that it could proceed to investigate what "accompanies" it. Just as much as it is metaphysics' task to investigate God's true nature (as much as humanly possible, one might add), it is its task to investigate the true natures of all other existing things. This means that metaphysics preoccupies itself with enquiring into the quiddities or *māhiyyāt* of

394 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 36.
395 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 35.

these things, and it entails aspects such as that all entities that have *māhiyyāt* exist due to a cause that renders their existence necessary. This is alluded to in statements such as the one quoted above that "He is not caused for He has no essence (*māhiyya*), rather He has *al-anniyya*, for every possessor of an essence is caused as this possessor's existence is not due to his essence but from another." Importantly, Ibn Sīnā maintains that the true natures of things in this world cannot fully be comprehended by humans, only the necessary concomitants of the true natures can be known. Their most specific concomitant is that their existence is only possible for them and caused by another, which Ibn Sīnā captures by the term "*māhiyya*" he ascribes to them. This term is then used to refer to, and approximate, their otherwise unknowable true natures. This is indicated by the following two statement: "that whose true nature is its *anniyya* has no *māhiyya*. In the case of [all] other things, *māhiyya* refers to the true nature. [...] The true nature of substance (*jawhar*) is the *māhiyya*."[396] And yet:[397]

> we do not know the true nature of the First, or of the intellect, the soul, the sphere, fire, air, water, or earth. [...] To illustrate this by way of example: we do not know the true nature of substance—we only know something that is a characteristic description of it, namely, that it is the existent which is not in a substrate. But this is not substance's true nature. [Similarly,] we do not know the true nature of body, but we know something that is a cause for it of this characteristic description, namely, [its] length, width, and depths.

This shows that for Ibn Sīnā it is metaphysics' task to investigate the true nature of God as well as the true natures of all other entities constituting reality. In both cases, he uses terms to refer to their respective true natures which are derived from their most characteristic concomitant, which pertains to the question of how existence relates to their essence. It is then not surprising at all that we should find Ibn Sīnā remarking, in one of his treatises on logic, that it is metaphysics' objective to "determine the true natures of all things (*ḥaqāʾiq al-ashyāʾ kullihā*) inasmuch as it is possible for humans."[398]

396 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 186.

397 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 34.

398 Quoted from Ibn Sīnā's *al-Madkhal* in Shams Inati, "Ibn Sīnā," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Sayyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996 (2001 [printing])), 231–246, at 233.

7.4 The Twofold Division of Existence—Proving God's Existence?

To the extent that metaphysics endeavours to investigate the true natures of all beings, it deals with the entirety of beings there are, with complete reality. I want to suggest that this means that metaphysics takes God as much to be part of reality as the world; it does not seek to prove God's existence, for it does not introduce into reality yet another entity and its investigation of God's true nature is just that. When Ibn Sīnā puts forward the famous twofold division of existence into what is necessary in itself and what is possible in itself—which I shall discuss in a moment—and seeks to show (among other things) that there is something in existence that is necessarily existent in itself, we have to be careful to distinguish the objective to *introduce into reality* an entity from the objective to show that some entity from among the entities making up reality is *described* as such. I propose that Ibn Sīnā's objective is the latter. He wants to show that necessary existence is to be *ascribed* to God, this being part of his investigation of God's true nature which also entails a lengthy discussion of other divine attributes, as shall be seen.

The aforementioned twofold division of existence appears in Ibn Sīnā's *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*, in *namaṭ* four dealing with "existence and its causes" (*al-wujūd wa-ʿilalihi*). Ibn Sīnā writes:[399]

> every existent—when you consider it in terms of its essence (*dhāt*), not considering anything else than that—, existence is either necessary for it or not.
>
> If it is necessary, it is the truth by virtue of its essence (*al-ḥaqq bi-dhātihi*), the necessarily existent by virtue of its essence (*al-wājib al-wujūd min dhātihi*), it is the self-subsisting (*al-qayyūm*).
>
> If it [i.e. its existence] is not necessary, it may not be said that it is impossible by virtue of its essence (*mumtaniʿ bi-dhātihi*), since it has been posed as existent. Rather, if a condition is coupled with it, when its essence is considered, such as the condition that its cause does not exist, it becomes impossible, or such as the condition that its cause exists, it becomes necessary.
>
> If no condition is coupled with it, neither the existence of a cause nor its non-existence, only a third option remains when considering its essence: possibility (*al-imkān*). It is, thus, when considering its essence, the thing which is not necessary nor impossible.
>
> Every existent is, then, either necessarily existent by virtue of its essence or possibly existent by virtue of its essence (*mumkin al-wujūd bi-dhātihi*).

399 Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*, maʿa sharḥ Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, vol. 3, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Maʿārif bi-Miṣr, 1958), 19.

In the subsequent discussion, Ibn Sīnā adds that "the existence of everything that is possible is due to another,"[400] even in the case of an infinite chain of causes and effects which are all possible in themselves and which has to terminate in an ultimate cause which is not itself an effect.[401] This allows Ibn Sīnā to conclude that "every chain therefore ends in a necessarily existent by virtue of its essence."[402]

A similar version of this twofold division of existence also appears in Ibn Sīnā's *al-Najāt*. There he writes:[403]

> the necessarily existent (*al-wājib al-wujūd*) is the existence which when assumed to be non-existent—an absurdity arises.
>
> The possibly existent (*al-mumkin al-wujūd*) is [...] that which is not necessary in any respect (*lā ḍarūra fīhi*), that is, in terms of its existence and its non-existence. [...] Every possibly existent by virtue of its essence, if its existence manifests itself (*ḥaṣala*), it is necessarily existent due to another (*bi-ghayrihi*).

After an extensive discussion of the oneness and uniqueness of the necessarily existent, its goodness, simplicity, and related issues, Ibn Sīnā writes:[404]

> there is no doubt that there is existence. Every existence is either necessary or possible.
>
> If it is necessary, the existence of the necessary is assured (*ṣaḥḥa*). This is what is sought.
>
> If it is possible, we shall show that the possible ends, in terms of its existence, in a necessarily existent. [...] We pose that every cause in an aggregate [of causes and effects] (*jumla*) is possibly existent, so the [ultimate] cause is then external to the aggregate and it is necessarily existent by virtue of its essence. This means that the possible things end in a cause which is necessarily existent, and it is not the case that every possible thing has a cause that is [also] possible *ad infinitum*.

These passages from the *Ishārāt* and the *Najāt* have received a good amount of attention in the secondary academic literature, and it is here where Ibn Sīnā is said to proffer his proof of God's existence. (In the *Shifāʾ*, it has been noted, the proof of God's existence, though entailing notions similar to the *Ishārāt* and the *Najāt*, stretches over several books and appears in a somewhat scattered

400 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Ishārāt*, 20.
401 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Ishārāt*, 21 and 26.
402 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Ishārāt*, 27.
403 Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Najāt*, ed. M.T. Danispazuh (Tehran: Danisgah-i Tihran, 1985), 546 and 548.
404 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min Kitāb al-Najāt*, 566–568.

from.[405]) There is some disagreement about whether Ibn Sīnā's proof should be classified as ontological or cosmological.

Toby Mayer has argued, in his "Ibn Sīnā's 'Burhān al-Ṣiddīqīn'," that Ibn Sīnā's division of existence "has stubbornly ontological traits."[406] Referring to Ibn Sīnā's statement in the *Ishārāt*, "if it is necessary, it is the truth by virtue of its essence, the necessarily existence by virtue of its essence, it is the self-subsisting," Mayer argues: "Ibn Sīnā seems immediately to proceed to infer the actual, *extra-mental* [*sic*], 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."[407] The idea proposed by Mayer (but not spelled out by him) is that "God" is a shorthand for the notion "necessarily existent" (just as in Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* "God" is a shorthand for "a first efficient cause"), and that God's existence is proven by showing that this notion has an instance in reality. Mayer then asserts that it is in fact the aforecited passage from the *Najāt* which "better brings out the ontological character of Ibn Sīnā's reasoning in this part of the proof,"[408] referring to Ibn Sīnā's statement, "if it is necessary, the existence of the necessary is assured. This is what is sought."

The majority of those who have studied Ibn Sīnā's arguments in the *Ishārāt* and the *Najāt* have, however, argued that it is a cosmological argument for God's existence. To name but a few examples, Herbert A. Davidson argued in his monograph, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God*, 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." This is so, he explains, because "Avicenna does not regard the analysis of the concept *necessarily existent by virtue of itself* [*sic*] as sufficient to establish the actual existence of anything in the external world."[409] (His reading is thus at variance with Mayer's reading. Mayer supports his reading by pointing to Ibn Sīnā's statement in the *Najāt* that to assume the necessarily existent not to exist entails an absurdity.[410]) Davidson goes

405 Thus noted by Michael E. Marmura, referred to by Adamson, "From the necessarily existent to God," 176.

406 Toby Mayer, "Ibn Sīnā's 'Burhān al-Ṣiddīqīn'," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12/1 (2001): 18–39, at 22. Ian Netton (*Allāh Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1994), 172–174) also speaks of "the ontological proof" alongside "[t]he proof from necessity," "the proof from movement," and "the proof from causality."

407 Mayer, "Ibn Sīnā's 'Burhān al-Ṣiddīqīn'," 23.

408 Mayer, "Ibn Sīnā's 'Burhān al-Ṣiddīqīn'," 24.

409 Davidson, *Proofs*, 298.

410 Mayer, "Ibn Sīnā's 'Burhān al-Ṣiddīqīn'," 24.

on to explain that Ibn Sīnā's argument relies on at least one item of knowledge derived from experience, namely that *something* exists at all, which he reads in Ibn Sīnā's own statement that "there is no doubt that there is existence."[411]

Lenn E. Goodman has expressed a very similar view in his monograph, *Avicenna*. He writes: "[t]he core of the new metaphysics is Avicenna's argument for the existence of God, a cosmological argument that combines the *kalām* appeal to contingency with the Aristotelian search for a first cause—not of motion now, but of existence."[412] Goodman agrees with Davidson's analysis that the cosmological character of the argument lies in the fact that Ibn Sīnā makes use of "a posteriori premises when he assumes the existence of something here before us."[413]

Even Mayer, who defended the ontological character of Ibn Sīnā's argument, 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."[414] It is, thus, Ibn Sīnā's insistence that a chain of possible beings ultimately terminates in a necessarily existent being by virtue of its essence that is seen to make the argument a cosmological one.

Before turning to the question of Ibn Sīnā's objective in presenting the twofold division of existence (and whether it really is to prove God's existence), I want to note something about the question of whether his argument is a posteriori and depends on sense data or whether it is a priori and rest on an analysis of concepts alone. (Even if his objective should turn out to be something different than to prove that God actually exists, I believe, this is a valid question to ask.) I tend to agree with Mayer who emphasises that Ibn Sīnā's reasoning is independent of observation of the world for "existence is amongst the primary intelligibles, ever inscribed (*tartasīm*) on the intellect."[415] This notion Mayer finds expressed also in Ibn Sīnā's opening statement in the *Najāt* that "there is no doubt that there is existence." And indeed, in the beginning of the *Shifāʾ* Ibn Sīnā writes:[416]

411 Davidson, *Proofs*, 303.
412 Lenn E. Goodman, *Avicenna* (London: Routledge, 1992), 63.
413 Goodman, *Avicenna*, 76.
414 Mayer, "Ibn Sīnā's 'Burhān al-Ṣiddīqīn'," 25.
415 Mayer, "Ibn Sīnā's 'Burhān al-Ṣiddīqīn'," 23.
416 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 22–23.

> 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 (*mabādiʾ awwaliyya*) in the category of assent (*taṣdīq*). [...] Similarly, in terms of things conceived, there are things which are principles for conception (*taṣawwur*), while they are conceived by their essences (*li-dhawātihā*).

The meaning of "*awwalī*" is also explained in the *Kitāb al-Burhān* of the *Najāt* where Ibn Sīnā notes: "primary intelligibles (*awwaliyyāt*) are things (*qaḍāyā*) and premises (*muqaddimāt*) that occur to humans, through their mental power (*ʿaqliyya*), without any cause which brings about assent to them except for their essences."[417] In the *Taʿlīqāt* Ibn Sīnā draws the same picture when he characterises primary knowledge (*maʿrifa awwaliyya*) as not acquired (*min ghayr iktisāb*).[418] Ibn Sīnā's characterisation of the notion of existence as being primary means that it entails the greatest degree possible of conviction on the part of all human beings. However, Deborah Black has stressed that[419]

> [i]t is important not to confuse Avicenna's claim that the pure intellect on its own necessitates assent to these premises [i.e. the primary intelligibles, *awwaliyyāt*] with the view that these propositions are innate in the sense of not depending upon prior activity of the senses. [...] Rather, as soon as the sensory mechanisms have been successfully engaged, "it is necessary for the mind to assent to them from the beginning, without any other cause, and without being aware that this is one of the things which is acquired instantly [...]." Thus, the primaries are not "innate" in the sense that they are actually present within the individual human mind from the outset of its existence, but they are immediate in that their acquisition requires nothing more than the conception of their terms.

Black's explanation entails that the notion of existence, which Mayer considered knowledge independent of experience, does in fact depend on the senses (both external and internal). It should be noted that Black does not explicitly discuss the status of existence as are primary intelligible, yet her general explanation must be read not to exclude it. One might want to point out, against Black's reading, that Ibn Sīnā does seem to consider existence to be a primarily intelligible of the kind Black denies—that is, he seems to hold that existence is known, both in terms of conception and assent, without the need for any external sense data.

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417 Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā, *al-Burhān min Kitāb al-Najāt*, ed. Majid Fakhry (Bayrūt: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, n.d.), 101.

418 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 35.

419 Deborah Black, "Certitude, justification, and the principle of knowledge in Avicenna's epistemology," in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 120–142, at 125–126.

This is suggested by his famous thought experiment of the Flying Man. In the *Kitāb al-Nafs* of the *Shifāʾ*, he invites his readers to imagine a human being created in an instance and floating in the air but deprived of all sensory data coming from his limbs, eyes, ears, and so on. This human being, Ibn Sīnā asserts, "has no doubts about asserting his self as something that exists without also [having to] assert the existence of any of his exterior or interior parts, his heart, his brain, or anything external. He will, in fact, be asserting the existence of his self [...]."[420] This thought experiment has the objective to prove the existence of the soul and its immateriality, but it also indicates that Ibn Sīnā holds that humans know of existence entirely independent of any sense data, and that this knowledge is of an immediate nature. By knowing of the existence of their own self or soul, humans grasp the notion of existence itself which does not require, and does not depend on, other notions, for it is the most basic notion.

Yet, even if Black is right in her observation that *all* primary intelligibles—including existence—depend on prior sense observation of the world around us, one might still want to point out that Ibn Sīnā's division of existence into what is necessary and what is possible, as well as the related discussion of the dependence of what is possible on the necessary, are conducted entirely in the realm of thinking and speculation, without recourse to the external world and experience. This might be inferred from a statement Ibn Sīnā makes in his *ʿUyūn al-ḥikma*. There, in a section entitled "On existence and the exposition of its divisions," Ibn Sīnā remarks that the act of perception done by the rational soul of humans is the noblest kind of perception (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa fāḍilat al-idrāk*), and relates this to perception of God, "the Truth, the First, who perfects all existence, nay who originates it." He then adds that once the soul has left its body in the hereafter it ponders (*naẓar*) over God and the whole of emanation, and witnesses His essence, which is a purely intellectual process (*muṭālaʿa ʿaqliyya*, *mushāhada ʿaqliyya*).[421] The point here is that all thinking about God is

420 Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Nafs min al-Shifāʾ*, I.I, quoted in *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources, trans. with introduction, notes, and glossary by Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman* (Indianapolis, Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2007), 177. Discussions of the Flying Man include Deborah Black, "Avicenna on Self-Awareness and Knowing That One Knows," in *The Unity of Science in the Arabic Tradition*, ed. S. Rahman, T. Hassan, and T. Street (Dordrecht: Springer Science, 2008), 63–87; Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's 'Flying Man' in Context," *Monist* 69 (1986): 383–395; T.-A. Druart, "The Soul and Body Problem: Avicenna and Descartes," in *Arabic Philosophy and the West: Continuity and Interaction*, ed. T.-A. Druart (Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 1998), 27–48.
421 Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā, *ʿUyūn al-ḥikma* (al-Kuwayt, Bayrūt: Wakālat al-Maṭbūʿāt, Dār al-Qalam, 1980), 59–60.

achieved without recourse to the senses. Since, after death, this is done by the rational soul which does not require the body and senses for this process, it can be done also by the rational soul in its embodied existence. There might of course be *other* thought processes which do in fact depend on data being attained from the external senses, but this does not seem to be a prerequisite for pondering about God, according to Ibn Sīnā.[422]

Let us then turn to the question of the objective Ibn Sīnā pursues in putting forward the twofold division of existence, in particular his statements, "If it is necessary, the existence of the necessary is assured. This is what is sought" and "If it is possible, we shall show that the possible ends, in terms of its existence, in a necessarily existent." At variance with the interpretations proffered in the secondary academic literature, I pose that "the necessarily existent due to itself" should not be understood as just another term referring to God Himself. What I mean by this has to do with Ibn Sīnā's own explanation that necessary existence is just one of God's concomitants—the name (if you will) "necessarily existent due to itself" is hence not God Himself, rather it *points* to God Himself, is an *indication* of His true nature. It is Ibn Sīnā's declared objective in the science of metaphysics to investigate God's true nature. There is, however, no way of "reaching" the true natures of things (whether God's or any other entity's) other than through considering their existence, as explained above. The closest one can get to "reaching" God's true nature, and to describing it, is by showing that existence contains a necessarily existent by virtue of its essence. Two things here need to be borne in mind: first, as I have pointed out above, showing that some existent (from among the entirety of existents metaphysics deals with) is to be *described* or *identified as* necessarily existent is not the same as proving that *an entity exist* (that is, seeking to introduce into reality the existence of yet another entity which was not understood to be part of reality from the outset). (This is like the distinction I proposed in the Introduction needs to be made between a debate about whether God can be identified as good and benevolent, and a debate about whether God actually exists—a crucial conceptual distinction that has been collapsed into the same thing by proponents of the "argument from evil for God's existence.") Secondly, since metaphysics deals with the exis-

422 On the role of the senses and abstraction to arrive at intelligible concepts (such as the *awwaliyyāt*), see Dimitri Gutas, "The Empiricism of Avicenna," *Oriens* 40 (2012): 391–436; Jon McGinnis, *Avicenna*, Great Medieval Thinkers (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), Chapter 4 "Psychology I: Soul and the Senses" (89–116) and Chapter 5 "Psychology II: Intellect" (117–148); "Making Abstraction Less Abstract: The Logical, Psychological, and Metaphysical Dimension of Avicenna's Theory of Abstraction," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 80 (2006): 169–183.

tent qua existent, it cannot deal with *this* particular thing or *that* particular thing, with *God* or *the world*. Metaphysics looks at the entirety of existents making up reality *only* insofar as they have existence and are existents, this being what they all have in common. This is why Ibn Sīnā's division of existence into what is necessary and what is possible always remains on the level of *existence*, and he will not be found to speak of God, or this or that thing belonging to the world. Even though it is Ibn Sīnā's declared aim to establish knowledge of God's true nature (that is, of *inniyyat Allāh*), all speaking about God in metaphysics remains on the level of classifying a part of existence as necessary in itself, just as all speaking about the world with all the different entities it contains does not diverge from classifying a part of existence as possible in itself. Ibn Sīnā's twofold division of existence is hence the first step of "reaching" the true natures of all existents—the *first* step, for much more is required to arrive at this knowledge.

If the investigation of *God*'s true nature were Ibn Sīnā's only objective, he could, it seems, have stopped at the point where he noted that existence contains a necessarily existent due to itself. From there, he could have proceeded to discussing the divine attributes, for his explanation will be recalled that "through this concomitant [i.e. the necessity of existence] we know other concomitants, such as [His] oneness and uniqueness (*waḥdāniyya*), as well as the other attributes." What is then the purpose of his introducing the second strand of the division of existence, that is, the possible which leads to the necessarily existent in itself? This second strand is of importance for Ibn Sīnā insofar, it seems, as metaphysics is clearly not concerned with God's true nature alone, but with the entirety of existents, one "portion" of which hence has to be classified as possibly existents by virtue of the essence. Moreover, the importance of the second strand is that it allows Ibn Sīnā to introduce the notion of causality, and causality is, as he points out in his discussion of the subject matter of metaphysics at the beginning of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifāʾ*, among the things investigated in this science. There he poses the question, "Is its subject matter the four ultimate causes of the entirety of existents [...]? For this is also something many have thought,"[423] answering that the *investigation* of them belongs to metaphysics (which means it cannot be its *subject matter*). Ibn Sīnā then remarks the following:[424]

> knowledge of the absolute causes comes about after the knowledge that causes can be affirmed for things which have causes. For as long as we have not affirmed the existence of causes for things that are effects—by affirming that there is a relation between the existence of these effects and that which precedes them in existence—it is not necessary for the mind

423 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 5.
424 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 5–6.

> that there is an absolute cause, or that there is some cause in the first place. As for sensation, it only leads to concomitance. [...] This is not something self-evident or a primary intelligible (*bayyin awwalī*) [...]. It is not self-evident (*bayyin bi-nafsihi*), even if close to being self-evident to the mind, that originated things have some principle for them.

This quote indicates that Ibn Sīnā, like many other Islamic thinkers before him as has been seen in the preceding chapters, subscribes to the position that the principle of causation is not a self-evident matter but requires some form of reason-based proof that goes beyond sense observation. Crucially, the affirmation of the principle of causation requires the prior division of existence into what is necessary and what is possible, and the examination of their respective natures. This is precisely what Ibn Sīnā does in the second strand of the division of existence, where he explains that the possible depends for its existence on a cause (for unlike the necessarily existent in itself it has no "assuredness of existence"[425] (*taʾakkud al-wujūd*)) and that any chain of causes has to terminate in what is necessarily existent due to itself. It is with this objective in mind (and not the objective of proving God's existence) that Ibn Sīnā writes in the *Najāt:* "if it is possible, we shall show that the possible ends, in terms of its existence, in a necessarily existent." This objective is better spelled out in the *Taʿlīqāt*. There we read:[426]

> the path followed to knowledge of the creator (*al-bāriʾ*) 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. Thus we come to know the special characteristics (*khawāṣṣ*) of each of them, some of them thanks to others, such as that we know the knowledge the necessarily existent due to the essence possesses thanks to the negation of quantities for Him, that is, whatever is not a body necessarily intellectually apprehends its 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 the essence, who is one and unique, is related regarding [its] existence with the necessarily existent* [my emphasis].

Ibn Sīnā furthermore explains:[427]

> when we find two things [...] together in existence, but one of them is necessarily existent due to the essence and the other possibly existent due to the essence, and when we know the true nature of each of them thanks to [their respective] special characteristics, *then we*

425 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 28.
426 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 162–163.
427 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 163.

> *know that what has the nature of possibility is an effect and the other a cause*. So if we know the necessity of existence (*anniyya*) of the necessarily existent due to the essence and His true nature in accordance with what we know from 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 (*istighnāʾ*), and the posteriority of it after Him is the posteriority of need (*hāja*). Between cause and effect lie sufficiency and need [my emphasis].

These quotes highlight how the affirmation of the principle of causation, which is one of metaphysics' tasks, relies on the prior twofold division of existence. Ibn Sīnā's remark that "if it is possible, we shall show that the possible ends, in terms of its existence, in a necessarily existent" of course also has the objective to show that the whole of creation (in metaphysics' parlance: all possibly existent entities) ultimately depends on God (here referred to by the name "necessarily existent due to the essence"). Ibn Sīnā is, therefore, not so far apart from his peers among the *mutakallimūn* and their concern to ascribe the world to God as His creation and work (even if his conception of creation of course fundamentally differs from that championed by the *mutakallimūn*, as is well known and as I will address in what follows). Ibn Sīnā is not far apart from the philosopher al-Kindī (d. 256/873) either who, as has been seen in Chapter Three, declared it first philosophy's task to establish God's oneness as creator of all other existents. This objective is also evident in Ibn Sīnā's speaking of "the path followed to knowledge of the creator" in the quote given above from the *Taʿlīqāt* in relation to the twofold division of existence he undertakes.

The conceptual distinction between identifying or describing some entity as this or that, on the one hand, and introducing into existence an entity, on the other—which I have stressed above—should be borne in mind also when it comes to the following: Davidson, who defended the view that Ibn Sīnā proffers a cosmological argument for God's existence when he introduces the second strand of the division of existence, has argued that his argument follows the structure of a particular form of proof called *dalīl*. Davidson's argument makes reference to Ibn Sīnā's discussion of metaphysics' subject matter at the beginning of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifāʾ* where he states that "*wujūd al-ilāh*" is neither self-evident, nor beyond speculation, "hence there is a proof (*dalīl*) for it."[428] 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*]"[429]

428 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 4.
429 Davidson, *Proofs*, 299.

(thus referring to the second strand of Ibn Sīnā's division of existence). Amos Bertolacci has suggested the same, noting that "[i]n I, 1, [Ibn Sīnā] admits that there is a 'sign' (*dalīl*), namely a 'demonstration *quod*', of God's existence."[430] The *dalīl*, Davidson continues to explain, "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."[431] Davidson and Bertolacci, then, both argue that Ibn Sīnā's proof of God's existence follows the structure of the *dalīl* in that he infers the existence of God ("God" being a shorthand for "the necessarily existent due to itself") from the existence of an effect. This effect allows the conclusion that there is more to reality than just this effect. Or expressed differently: since Davidson argued that Ibn Sīnā's argument for God's existence rests on "a single empirical datum," that is, the observation by the senses that something exists (Davidson renders Ibn Sīnā's "*lā shakka anna hunā wujūdan*" as "There is no doubt that *something* exists"[432] (my emphasis)), he presents Ibn Sīnā's objective as showing that reality comprises of yet another entity, in addition to the one postulated or observed as actually existing.

This reading of what the *dalīl* does, does however not seem to correspond to Ibn Sīnā's own explanations in the *Kitāb al-Burhān* of the *Najāt* as well as the *Kitāb al-Burhān* of the *Shifāʾ*. Ibn Sīnā explains, as is known, that all knowledge falls into the category of conception (*taṣawwur*) or into the category of assent (*taṣdīq*). Assent comes about by reasoning on the basis of syllogisms (*qiyās*).[433] Such a syllogism is the *burhān*.[434] The *burhān* has two different types, "one of which is the *burhān limā* and the other the *burhān anna*, which

430 Amos Bertolacci, *The Reception of Aristotle's* Metaphysics *in Avicenna's* Kitāb al-Shifāʾ: *A Milestone of Western Metaphysical Thought* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), 225. See also Goodman, *Avicenna*, 75, who speaks in passing of "the syllogisms leading to the recognition of God's existence [...] arguing [...] from effect to cause."

431 Davidson, *Proofs*, 299.

432 Davidson, *Proofs*, 303.

433 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Burhān min Kitāb al-Najāt*, 97; *al-Burhān min al-Shifāʾ*, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1954), 30 – 31. On logic, the syllogism as well as conception and assent, see Goodman, *Avicenna*, Chapter "Logic, Persuasion, and Poetry" (184 – 233); Tony Street, "Avicenna on the syllogism," in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 48 – 70; Black, "Certitude"; Dimitri Gutas, "Avicenna's philosophical project," in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28 – 47, especially 35 – 43.

434 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Burhān min Kitāb al-Najāt*, 102; *al-Burhān min al-Shifāʾ*, 31.

is called *dalīl*."[435] The *burhān anna* (which is the syllogism relevant to us) is divided into two different types:[436]

> [the first type is that] 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 it [...].[437]
>
> [The second type is that] it is agreed that the middle term *is*, regarding the existence, an effect of the existence of the major term in the minor term [my emphasis].
>
> The first is called *burhān al-anna ʿalā al-iṭlāq*, and the second is called *dalīl*.

One of the examples Ibn Sīnā gives for the *dalīl* is the following syllogism:

1. This tree is burnt.
2. Everything burnt was touched by fire.
3. 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"[438]—in other words: the fact that this tree (major term) is included among the things touched by fire (minor term) explains the effect of its being burnt (middle term). Or expressed differently: this particular syllogism allows one to infer that it was contact with fire (cause) which led to this tree's being burnt (effect)—it provides an answer to the question, "Why is this tree burnt? What caused its being burnt?". Ibn Sīnā himself puts it this way: the *dalīl* "clarifies the cause based on the effect."[439]

Ibn Sīnā's example and explanation are noteworthy as they draw attention to the following: he nowhere indicates that it is the *existence* of an entity which the *dalīl* seeks to prove. Instead, the *dalīl* makes it possible to *identify* some entity (to the exclusion of other possible candidates, one might want to add) as the cause of a given effect. In Ibn Sīnā's own example, it is not the existence of fire which the *dalīl* serves to establish; rather, it establishes that it is

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435 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Burhān min al-Shifāʾ*, 30.

436 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Burhān min al-Shifāʾ*, 32.

437 One example Ibn Sīnā (*al-Burhān min al-Shifāʾ*, 32) gives for the *burhān anna ʿalā al-iṭlāq* is the following: 1. This person who suffers from fever has white urine; 2. everybody who has this [i.e. white urine] is feared to have a tumour in the head; 3. therefore, this person who suffers from fever is feared to have a tumour in the head. He then explains that the occurrence of white urine as well as the existence of a 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) might have a tumour (minor term), rather it is something additional.

438 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Burhān min Kitāb al-Najāt*, 103.

439 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Burhān min al-Shifāʾ*, 33.

fire (or more precisely: contact with fire) that caused the effect under consideration. Nevertheless, Davidson puts forward a syllogism along the lines of the *dalīl*:[440]

> [t]he syllogism that encapsulates the entire "proof" (*dalīl*) might be summarized thus: Possibly existent beings are traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself [...]. Something exists which is, presumably, possibly existent by virtue of itself (empirical datum). Therefore something exists which is traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself; and the latter also exists.

Davidson's extracted *dalīl* can be represented in the following syllogistic form:

1. Something exists which is [...] possibly existent by virtue of itself.
2. Possibly existent beings are traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself [...].
3. Therefore something exists which is traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself; and the latter also exists.

Based on Ibn Sīnā's explanation of the *dalīl*, it seems unclear how Davidson's version fulfils its requirements: the *dalīl* is meant to infer the cause from the effect. The cause is contained in the minor term, the effect is contained in the middle term. The minor term is hence the explanation of the first premise, that is, of why the middle term is predicated of the major term. In Davidson's syllogism, the cause (which is contained in the minor premise) is "being traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself," the effect (which is contained in the middle term) is "which is [...] possibly existent by virtue of itself." Davidson hence makes "being traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself" the explanation of the first premise, that is, of "something exists which is [...] possibly existent by virtue of itself"—that is, "being traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself" is the explanation of why "which is [...] possibly existent by virtue of itself" is predicated of "something exists." This explanation is spelled out in the conclusion "therefore something exists which is traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself," which highlights the cause ("which is traceable to a being necessarily existent by virtue of itself") of the effect ("which is [...] possibly existent by virtue of itself") that is true of some thing ("something exists"). It is not clear to me how this existing thing's predication of being possibly existent is *explained* by its being traceable to a necessarily existent being. (This should be analogous to Ibn Sīnā's own example that this tree's predication of being burnt is explained by its having come into

440 Davidson, *Proofs*, 304.

contact with fire.) For Ibn Sīnā does not maintain that we know why something is possibly existent *once* we know that it terminates in the necessarily existent; if at all, it is the other way round in his line of reasoning in the second strand of the division of existence: we know why something terminates in the necessarily existent *once* we know its nature of possible existence. (Recall here Ibn Sīnā's explanation given in the *Taʿlīqāt* that "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.") In order not to be too harsh with Davidson's attempt at extracting a *dalīl* from Ibn Sīnā's second strand of the division of existence, the following might be proposed as an alternative and come close to what Davidson had in mind:

1. A being possibly existent in itself has attained existence.
2. Whatever attains existence is ultimately caused by the necessarily existent in itself.
3. Hence, a being possibly existent in itself is ultimately caused by the necessarily existent in itself.

In this syllogism, the cause explaining that a being possibly existent in itself has attained existence (major term and middle term) is that it is caused by the necessarily existent in itself (minor term). Or to put it differently: this *dalīl* gives an answer to the question, "Why has a possibly existent in itself attained existence?". This is what Ibn Sīnā establishes in the second strand of his division of existence: if existence is possible in itself, then it will be seen that it depends on the necessarily existent in itself.

Yet, besides the question of whether Davidson's presentation of the *dalīl* conforms to Ibn Sīnā's explanations of what this particular syllogism does (that is, clarifying the cause of a given effect based on said effect), the point remains that Davidson uses the *dalīl* in order to *introduce into existence* yet another entity, while Ibn Sīnā made it clear that it simply serves to ascertain what the cause is (e. g. contact with fire, rather than not being touched by fire) and thereby also the entity to be identified as this the cause (e. g. fire, rather than water or anything else). Based on these considerations, I propose that Ibn Sīnā uses the twofold division of existence in order to *identify* the cause of a given effect, the effect being the existence of a being possibly existent by virtue of its essence. Like the first strand of his division of existence, the second strand allows Ibn Sīnā also to pose that one "portion" of all existent beings (which metaphysics is concerned with) depends on another "portion," and if this one portion is characterised as possibly existent by virtue of the essence, it indicates that that other

portion is characterised as necessarily existent by virtue of the essence. (Once more, in disregarding all aspects of the entities making up reality besides their being existents, metaphysics cannot say "*God* is the necessarily existent" and "*the world* is possibly existent." This might also be seen to be the reason why Ibn Sīnā's present discussion seems somewhat elusive and seems to beg the question of how it should be known that his talking about the necessarily existent in itself refers to God in the first place, rather than to some entity from among "created" existence. A point going in this direction has been raised, for instance, by Peter Adamson who, in his "From the necessary existent to God," writes:[441]

> [Avicenna's] proof shows that there must be a "necessarily existent" (*wājib al-wujūd*) [...]. [However,] proving the existence of a necessary existent is different from proving the existence of God. [...] This should alert us to a fundamental limitation of Avicenna's proof: if successful, it shows the existence of a necessary existent, without showing why we should identify the necessary existent with God. An atheist might agree with Avicenna that there is a necessary existent, yet insist that this existent is the universe itself, or perhaps something else.

Adamson argues that Ibn Sīnā's proof of God's existence is only complete once the "traditional divine attributes"[442] have been established, for before that, it is impossible to say that we are actually dealing with "God." I would hold that we are dealing with God from the outset of the discussion—but again, metaphysics cannot state this. Ibn Sīnā's subsequent discussion of the divine attributes is all part of getting closer and closer to an understanding of God's true nature, as much as humanly possible. The only way metaphysics can speak about God is by speaking about "the necessarily existent in itself.") The second thing I propose based on the above considerations is that Ibn Sīnā's reference to the *dalīl* in connection with the investigation of "*wujūd al-ilāh*" at the beginning of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifāʾ* might simply denote "an indication" of the kind of existence predicated of God, rather than its technical meaning of a particular kind of syllogism. The latter point might be seen to be supported by the fact that, at a later point in the same work, Ibn Sīnā remarks, after having discussed that the First is free from quantity and quality, without "where" and "when," and generally speaking wholly different from all other entities, that there is no demonstration (*burhān*) for Him, "rather there are only clear indications"[443] (*al-dalāʾil al-wāḍiḥa*), this

441 Adamson, "From the necessary existent to God," 170 – 171.
442 Adamson, "From the necessary existent to God," 171.
443 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 283.

time using the plural of the term in question. Here, too, the context is the question of what God's true nature is like—the same being the context of Ibn Sīnā's statement at the beginning of his work that there is "(a) *dalīl*" for "*wujūd al-ilāh*," and thereby "*inniyyat Allāh*" or God's true nature (against the claim that they are beyond speculation or self-evident).

7.5 Investigating God's True Nature and His Attributes

The investigation of God's attributes is entailed in metaphysics' task of investigating God's true nature, as has become clear. Ibn Sīnā's statements in the *Taʿlīqāt* quoted above made it clear that the divine attributes are a consequence of God's being necessarily existent, and that knowledge of them follows the knowledge of His necessary existence. These attributes (referred to by Ibn Sīnā by the terms "*ṣifāt*" and "*lawāzim*"[444]) are not God's very essence, for it is beyond human understanding, but they are "an indication (*ishāra*) of something whose true nature we do not know."[445] Furthermore, in investigating the divine attributes, Ibn Sīnā pursues his declared task of investigating the *kind* of existence that is characteristic of God (that is, when he spoke of "*wujūd al-ilāh*" at the beginning of the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifāʾ*). This is evident in that he stresses that "He is pure existence (*fa-huwa mujarrad al-wujūd*) with the condition of negating [...] all other descriptions of Him."[446] For him, the divine attributes are but expressions, as it were, denoting the only and "primary attribute" (*al-ṣifa al-ūlā*) God has: His being "that-ness (*inn*) and an existent." Ibn Sīnā explains: "as for the other attributes, some of them include the meaning (*maʿnā*) of this existence with an addition (*iḍāfa*), others the meaning of this existence with a negation (*salb*)." God's attribute of being willing (*murīd*), for example, means nothing else than "the being of the 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."[447] This implies that everything that can be said to characterise the existence belonging to entities having a quiddity (*māhiyya*), such as their being composed or corporeal, their belonging to a genus (*jins*) or having differentia (*faṣl*), cannot be said of God and does not char-

444 On Ibn Sīnā's use of terminology, see Rahim Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation: Avicenna's and Thomas Aquinas' Positions* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005), 30; De Smet and Sebti, "Avicenna's Philosophical Approach," 141–142.

445 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 35.

446 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 276.

447 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 296.

acterise His kind of existence. God is "pure intellect"[448] (*ʿaql maḥḍ*). In being pure intellect, He intellectually apprehends Himself[449] and His essence as being the principle of every other existent.[450] This self-apprehension is an "act of knowing" (*ʿālimiyya*) about the emanation (*yufīḍ*) of existence from Him.[451] His knowledge is also His life (*ḥayāt*), and the emanation represents His power (*qudra*).[452] The necessarily existent is "a lover" (*ʿāshiq*) of His own essence, and the existence emanating from it "becomes loved" by Him and "this is His will (irādatuhu)."[453] The necessity of God's existence entails that everything else that is true of Him is a necessity too: "the meaning of 'the necessarily existent in Himself' is that He is necessity itself (*nafs al-wājibiyya*)."[454] Necessity means actuality and impossibility of becoming or change: "if non-existence were possible for Him, 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."[455] On this basis, Ibn Sīnā concludes that God's attributes must be actual and necessary as well, and that God "never ceases to be such."[456] Since God's will, knowledge, power and so on are nothing else than the emanation coming from Him, it means that creation exists eternally with and through God as its cause (*ʿilla*).[457] This is to say, as he does in

448 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 284.
449 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 285.
450 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 288.
451 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 291. On Ibn Sīnā's vocabulary of creation/emanation, see Jules Janssens, "Creation and emanation in Ibn Sīnā," *Documenti e Studi sulla Tradizione Filosofica Medievale 8*. Florence, 1997, 455–477 [reprinted in Jules Janssens, *Ibn Sina and his Influence in the Arabic and Latin World*, Chapter IV]; "Ibn Sīnā's ideas of ultimate realities: Neoplatonism and the Qur'ān as problem-solving paradigms in the Avicennian System," *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 10. Toronto, 1987, 252–271, especially 262–268 [reprinted in Jules Janssens, *Ibn Sina and his Influence in the Arabic and Latin World*, Chapter II]. On Ibn Sīnā's theory of secondary causality and the emanation of the world from God, see Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazālī & Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1992); Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Chapter "The *falāsifa*'s View of Creation by Means of Secondary Causality" (133–141); Robert Wisnovsky, "Final and Efficient Causality in Avicenna's Cosmology and Theology," *Quaestio* 2 (2002): 97–123; Herbert A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes, on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 74–83.
452 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 295.
453 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 292.
454 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 50.
455 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 151.
456 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 50.
457 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 271.

the *Taʿlīqāt*, that creation is one of God's necessary concomitants, which makes creation an eternal process.

Since Ibn Sīnā thus stresses that God is free of all attributes and that certain descriptions of Him only refer to His (necessary) existence, it is worth pointing out that he should not be read as saying that God *is* but existence. The translation of his statement "*fa-huwa mujarrad al-wujūd*" as "He is pure existence" might be somewhat misleading for he explicitly states, in the *Taʿlīqāt*, that "He has a true nature above (*fawq*) existence, and existence is one of the true nature's concomitants."[458] A translation better capturing Ibn Sīnā's intention would perhaps be "He is of pure existence" or "pure existence characterises Him" so as not to give the impression that existence *is* God's true nature.

I have noted above that Ibn Sīnā is not that different from his predecessors, both among the *mutakallimūn* and the *falāsifa*, in that he too is concerned with the investigation of God's true nature, which entails, as one of the most important aspects, the affirmation of God's role as creator and cause of all other entities as well as the subsequent discussion of His attributes. Ibn Sīnā himself relates these concerns of his to those of other Islamic thinkers who came before him—not, however, without taking the opportunity to praise his own method and approach as more exalted than theirs. In the *Ishārāt*, he concludes *namaṭ* four dealing with "existence and its causes" where he discussed the twofold division of existence with the following statement:[459]

> consider how our explanations to affirm the First and His oneness and uniqueness (*waḥdāniyya*) as well as His being free from the attributes does not require the consideration of anything else than existence itself (*nafs al-wujūd*). It does not require the consideration of His creation and act (*khalqihi wa-fiʿlihi*), 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 insofar as it is existence bears witness with it (*bihi*), and it also bears witness for (*ʿalā*) everything that is after it in existence.

Ibn Sīnā then adds:[460]

> something similar is alluded to in the noble book [i.e. the Qur'an]: {We shall show them Our signs on the far horizons and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this is the Truth} [i.e. Q. 41:45]. I say: this is a decree for a [certain] group (*ḥukm li-qawm*). Then it says: {Is it not enough that your Lord witnesses everything?} I say: this is a decree

458 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Taʿlīqāt*, 35.
459 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Ishārāt*, 54.
460 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Ishārāt*, 55.

> for the sincere ones (*ḥukm li-ṣiddīqīn*) who bear witness with Him, not for Him (*yastashhadūna bihi lā ʿalayhi*).

In his commentary on this passage from the *Ishārāt*, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274) explains that the "certain group" (*qawm*) mentioned by Ibn Sīnā refers to the *mutakallimūn* and some philosophers who base their proof of the creator[461] on the originatedness of bodies and accidents as well as on the notion of movement occurring to bodies. The upshot of this is that these groups, according to al-Ṭūsī, reason from the effect to the cause, taking into consideration only a certain "portion" of existence. The "sincere ones" (*al-siddīqūn*), on the other hand—the metaphysicians (*al-ilāhiyyūn*) like Ibn Sīnā himself, as al-Ṭūsī remarks—, consider existence, that is, the whole of existence. Al-Ṭūsī's comments on Ibn Sīnā's statement are particularly accurate when he states that the metaphysicians infer the divine attributes from the consideration of existence qua existence and "then reason from His attributes to the way in which His deeds come forth from Him."[462] And indeed, as the above discussion has illustrated, Ibn Sīnā infers all divine attributes from the primary insight that God is of necessary existence, and this includes also his assertion that creation is an eternal process of emanation coming from God. This is why Ibn Sīnā sees his method described by the question posed by the Qur'an, {Is it not enough that your Lord witnesses everything?}. God Himself bears witness to His own nature as well as to the essential nature of all things after Him in existence. The metaphysicians' method (which is the method Ibn Sīnā regards endorsed by the Qur'an itself) is superior to all other methods, one might want to point out, for it has the greatest claim to certainty. Existence itself, we recall Ibn Sīnā's position, is among the most fundamental notions, not depending on other notions to be conceived and confirmed.[463] The *mutakallimūn* who make the corporeal "portion" of existence the starting point of their investigation of God's nature might have a point,

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461 I would here pose that al-Ṭūsī's reference to the *mutakallimūn*'s proof of the creator denotes their proof that God is to be described as the creator of the world, as I have argued in the preceding chapters of this book. Al-Ṭūsī appears to equate the proof of the creator with Ibn Sīnā's "affirmation of the First" (*ithbāt al-awwal*) (at the beginning of his statement, "consider how our explanations to affirmation the First and His oneness and uniqueness (*waḥdāniyya*) as well as His being free from the attributes does not require the consideration of anything else than existence itself [...]"), which seems exactly right. In Ibn Sīnā's use, the term "*awwal*" is a description of God in His role as creator and cause of all other entities: "if the existence of everything other than Him derives from His existence, then He is the First" (Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 273).

462 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Ishārāt*, 55.

463 Compare Black, "Certitude," 125.

but their method is inferior and it involves certain dangers, as Ibn Sīnā seems to want to say (even though his criticism remains somewhat implicit): one of the grave errors they commit has to do with the conception of the divine attributes as real entities (*maʿnā*, pl. *maʿānin*) subsisting in God's essence, a view characteristic of the Ashʿarīs. Ibn Sīnā rejects this conception as introducing plurality into the simple divine essence. Had the Ashʿarīs and their likes followed the path of the sincere ones and considered "the state of existence" instead of framing the divine attributes in analogy to the attributes describing creation, they would have understood that their conception of God's true nature and His oneness and uniqueness (*waḥdāniyya*—mentioned above by Ibn Sīnā) is flawed.[464] The second grave error the *mutakallimūn* commit is that they extend the originatedness of bodies to the originatedness of the *whole* world, making this the premise of their subsequent enquiry into God's nature. The sincere ones are spared this mistake, for they make God the basis of their judgement of reality.

Al-Ṭūsī's reading of Ibn Sīnā's statements about the "*ḥukm li-qawm*" as a critique of *kalām* methods might not be ill-founded. After all, it is likely that Ibn Sīnā formulated his own methods and positions with a view to the intellectual tradition he had inherited from his predecessors. At the same time, however, one might be justified in posing that Ibn Sīnā's mention of a "*ḥukm li-qawm*" has another group of people in mind and is not intended as so severe a critique as al-Ṭūsī has it. It should not be overlooked that Ibn Sīnā finds this "*ḥukm li-qawm*" described and endorsed by "the noble book" itself. God Himself provides a method or way for this group of people to know of the truth propagated by scripture which focuses on {signs on the far horizons and in themselves}, that is finite phenomena in the observable world. This can be seen to indicate that Ibn Sīnā might actually have in mind the common people whom scripture addresses in ways their mental ability enables them to fathom, as Ibn Sīnā frequently emphasises in his various works. The way in which scripture communi-

464 Ibn Sīnā's conception of the divine attributes is much closer to that of Muʿtazilī *mutakallimūn* who maintained that God is, say, knowing by virtue of His essence, not due to the *maʿnā* of knowledge subsisting in His essence. Ashʿarī *mutakallimūn* formulated their conception of the divine attributes in comparison to how they conceived of the attributes of corporeal beings. This means that, for them, God is knowing due to the *maʿnā* of knowledge, in analogy to humans who are described as knowing due to the accident (*ʿaraḍ*, pl. *aʿrāḍ*) of knowledge inhering in them. See Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1976), Chapter III "Attributes" (112–234). See also Ibn Rushd's critique of the Ashʿarī conception of God's attributes in analogy to corporeal entities; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf ʿan manāhij al-adilla fī ʿaqāʾid al-milla*, ed. Maḥmūd ʿAbid al-Jābirī (Bayrūt: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1998), 139.

cates the truth to the common people might not be an entirely accurate account describing reality as it is; rather it employs "symbols and likenesses"[465] (*rumūz wa-amthila*) which are taken from the things familiar to them: "the revealed law seeks to speak to the people (*al-jumhūr*) in a way they can comprehend (*yafhamūna*), approximating what they cannot comprehend. [...] The depiction of [the truth] is not according to its true, noble, lofty, divine form but in a form they can comprehend."[466] This is also why in the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifāʾ* Ibn Sīnā emphasises that in communicating certain truths to the common people about God, the prophet's primary concern cannot be to communicate the absolute truth "for they can conceive these states in their true form only with great strain [...] and only very few among them are able to comprehend the true nature of God's oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*) and His transcendence (*tanzīh*). [...] Not everyone can attain divine wisdom (*al-ḥikma al-ilāhiyya*)."[467] The method which establishes God's role as absolute creator, His attributes, and His uniqueness based on signs in the observable world is, then, according to Ibn Sīnā, a way to the same truth which the method of the sincere ones arrives at, even if a less elevated one that expresses the truth in a less pure form.

465 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 366.
466 Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā, *al-Aḍḥawiyya fī al-maʿād* (Tehrān: Shams Tabrīsī, n.d.), 103 and 111.
467 Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ilāhiyyāt min al-Shifāʾ*, 366.

8 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111)

8.1 The Proof of God's Existence and al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*

It is known that al-Ghazālī was a very multifaceted scholar. Some works of his reflect his initial training in Ashʿarī *kalām*, others reveal his later inclination to Sufism. Some works of his also make evident the influence the study of philosophy had on him.[468] One of al-Ghazālī's earliest works, which he wrote when he was still teaching Ashʿarī *kalām* at the Niẓāmiyya college in Baghdad before his first crisis in 488/1095, is the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. Al-Ghazālī intended this work—as its title indicates and as he states in its introduction—as a refutation of Aristotle's philosophy as presented in the works and commentaries of al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 427/1037).[469] The *Tahāfut* displays clear signs that allow associating it with the *kalām* tradition—not of a particular school though, as al-Ghazālī himself stresses[470]—, which is apparent not only in the views and positions defended in it, but also in the terms and concepts employed, as shall be seen.

One of the many criticisms al-Ghazālī levels against the philosophers in the *Tahāfut* concerns, it is frequently highlighted in the secondary academic literature, the proof and provability of God's existence. The main issue dividing philosophers and *mutakallimūn*, al-Ghazālī indeed explains, is the question of whether the world is eternal or originated, with the latter group taking the well-known stance that the world has a beginning for its existence.[471] According to Herbert A. Davidson, al-Ghazālī's critique of the philosophers' belief in the eternity of the world also entails that they have no grounds for their proof

468 On al-Ghazālī's life and works, see his autobiography *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (*Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error, al-Munqidh min al-Dalal*, translated from the Arabic by R.J. McCarthy (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000)); Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Chapter 1 on his biography; Richard M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1994), 1–3; George F. Hourani, "A Revised Chronology of Ghazālī's Writings," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104/2 (1984): 289–302, at 292–293 on dating his works; Michael E. Marmura, "Ghazali and Ashʿarism Revisited," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 12 (2002): 91–110 on his relationship with, and views on, Ashʿarī *kalām*.

469 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beyrouth: Imprimeri Catholique, 1927), 6 and 8–9.

470 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 13–14.

471 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 12–13.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-009

that God exists. This is so as "[t]he 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"—thus Davidson's reading of al-Ghazālī in the *Tahāfut*.[472] In his article "Ghazālī's Argument from Creation," Lenn E. Goodman writes:[473]

> [t]he brunt of Ghazālī's effort in *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* and roughly half the bulk of the work are given over to working out the consequences of his belief that acceptance of the eternity of the world is inconsistent with belief in the existence of God, compatible only with atheism. [...] If eternalism is tantamount to atheism, it is the argument from creation alone which can prove that God exists.

William Lane Craig, in his monograph *The Cosmological Argument From Plato to Leibniz*, agrees with Goodman's analysis for he too presents al-Ghazālī's criticism of the philosophers not only as relating to the question of the provability of God's existence, but also as constituting an implicit charge of atheism: "to his mind the thesis of an eternal universe was quite simply equivalent to atheism."[474] Finally, Majid Fakhry has proposed, in similar fashion, that, according to al-Ghazālī, "the Neo-Platonists are unable to prove the existence of God"[475] as they uphold the eternity of bodies. Davidson, Goodman, and Fakhry, thus, assert that in the *Tahāfut* al-Ghazālī champions the sole validity of the *mutakallimūn*'s cosmological argument for the existence of God, for "creation is the only binding, reasoned proof of God's existence,"[476] as Goodman has it.

The critical question is: where in the *Tahāfut* is it that al-Ghazālī maintains that the philosophers are unable to prove God's existence? Davidson and Goodman, for instance, both read the tenth chapter of the *Tahāfut* as being concerned with this issue, and it appears to be particularly al-Ghazālī's concluding remark in this chapter that "he who does not assume the originatedness of the bodies has no ground at all for his assumption of the creator (*ṣāniʿ*)"[477] which lies at the foundation of their interpretation. This interpretation of al-Ghazālī's con-

472 Herbert A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 370.

473 Lenn E. Goodman, "Al-Ghazālī's Argument from Creation. (I)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2/1 (1971): 67–85, at 67.

474 William Lane Craig, *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz* (London: MacMillan, 1980), 99.

475 Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York, Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2004), 231.

476 Lenn E. Goodman, "Al-Ghazālī's Argument from Creation. (II)," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 2/2 (1971): 168–188, at 168.

477 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 209.

cerns in the tenth chapter is, arguably, not very surprising considering that his line of reasoning and terminology used resemble cosmological arguments which endeavour to affirm that God exists on the basis of His being the cause of the created world. I have in the previous chapters of this book argued that this is, however, not the *mutakallimūn*'s objective when they present their proofs to affirm the creator, and the same is true for al-Ghazālī, I submit. Al-Ghazālī does not maintain, in my view, against the philosophers that God's existence can only be proven if the createdness of the world is asserted; rather, in maintaining that "he who does not assume the originatedness of the bodies has no ground at all for his assumption of the creator" al-Ghazālī sums up his position which entails the following points: first, the philosophers are unable to *trace* the world back to God and to *ascribe* it to Him as His product, even though they maintain to believe that the world is eternal emanation from God. Secondly, even though they hold that God is to be regarded as the "creator" (*ṣāniʿ*) of the world, they have no grounds for their claim, and only the *mutakallimūn*, like al-Ghazālī himself, who uphold the world's originatedness in time are justified in *describing* God with this attribute. For al-Ghazālī, the issue at stake is, thus, *not* whether the philosophers' doctrine of an eternal world is reconcilable with the proof of *God's existence*. God's very existence is out of question, and al-Ghazālī continuously presents the philosophers as upholding that God exists and is part of reality. What is at stake is God's attribute "creator," which of course entails a particular conception of the way in which a "creator" is a cause. Al-Ghazālī's quarrel with the philosophers about God's *attribute* "creator" (which is not the only attribute he quarrels about, however) should not be construed to be the same as a quarrel about God's very *existence*. The reasons for this I have discussed in the Introduction and I will return to them in what follows. I will therefore argue that in the *Tahāfut* al-Ghazālī follows the tradition of his predecessors, discussed in the previous chapters, who were not concerned with the proof of God's existence.

8.2 "He Who Does Not Assume the Originatedness of the Bodies Has No Ground at All for His Assumption of the Creator"

In arguing this point, and in gauging what al-Ghazālī means to say when he maintains that "he who does not assume the originatedness of the bodies has no ground at all for his assumption of the creator," I propose considering more of the 20 chapters of the *Tahāfut* than just the crucial tenth chapter. For

it is the discussion in Chapter Three of the *Tahāfut* that gives us a first glimpse of what al-Ghazālī tries to get at when he speaks of the contradiction between belief in an eternal world and the "assumption of the creator."

In the third chapter, al-Ghazālī explains that "the philosophers—to the exclusion of the *dahriyya*—agree that the world has a creator (*ṣāniʿ*), and that it is God (Most-High!) (*Allāh*) who is the creator of the world and its maker (*fāʿil*)." Like the theologians, they also say that the world is "His act and His creation" (*fiʿluhu wa-ṣanʿuhu*). Yet, al-Ghazālī objects: "it is not conceivable following their own principles that the world exists by God's creation."[478] His issue with their statements, it turns out, concerns the use of terminology; their *calling* God *ṣāniʿ* and *fāʿil*, and the world His *fiʿl* and *ṣanʿ* is not justified as, on the one hand, they are not clear about the concepts associated with these terms and as, on the other, their use of terminology contradicts the way they actually perceive of the relation between God and the world. His intention, al-Ghazālī states, is but "to reveal that you [philosophers] make up names without verification (*taḥqīq*) of them" which means that "God is not truly an agent (*fāʿil)* for you and the world is not truly His act (*fiʿl).*"[479]

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. The philosophers' conception of God, however, comes closer to that of an *ʿilla* causing out of necessity (*luzūman ḍarūriyyan*). This is because they deny the divine attributes, in particular God's will, which al-Ghazālī considers tantamount to depriving Him of these very characteristics.[480] (It needs to be pointed out that al-Ghazālī leaves it unmentioned that Ibn Sīnā, for instance, was adamant to make the point that the world's eternal emanation from God occurs by God's volition, as I have pointed out in Chapter Seven.[481] Al-Ghazālī also leaves it unmentioned here that his accusation against the philosophers that according to them "He has no attribute whatsoever" is based on a very particular conception of the divine attributes and descriptions, which the Ashʿarīs espoused, not however their Muʿtazilī peers nor the philoso-

478 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 95.

479 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 109.

480 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 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 96–97: "according to you, the world comes from God like the *maʿlūl* from the *ʿilla* in the manner of necessary causation."

481 On Ibn Sīnā's insistence that God creates by volition, see Rahim Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation: Avicenna's and Thomas Aquinas' Positions* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005), Chapter "The Nature of Creative Action" (131–149).

phers. He addresses the question of the divine attributes in the sixth chapter of the *Tahāfut* where he defends the view that one needs to affirm the hypostatic entities (*maʿānin*) of knowledge, will, and so on as subsisting in God's essence (*zāʾida ʿalā al-dhāt*) in order to be able to describe God as knowing, willing, and so on. Since the philosophers—like the Muʿtazilīs—deny these entities and proffer a different conception of the divine attributes, al-Ghazālī sees himself justified in concluding: "therefore they are agreed to deny the descriptions (*al-ṣifāt*)."[482]) 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 agent (*fāʿil*) and creator (*ṣāniʿ*) simply because he is a cause (*sabab*). Rather [he is called 'agent'] because he is a cause in a specific way, namely due to will and choice."[483]

Similarly, the philosophers are not justified in labelling the world God's "act," al-Ghazālī argues, since the term "*fiʿl*" conveys a certain concept which is incompatible with their belief in the world's eternity. "*Fiʿl*" is an expression for origination (*iḥdāth*). Origination means a thing's coming into existence from non-existence, and not eternal existence.[484] It follows that "existence which is not preceded by non-existence, rather which is eternal (*dāʾim*), is not the act of an agent."[485] According to the philosophers themselves, al-Ghazālī points out, God's relation to the world should be described as that between *ʿilla* and *maʿlūl*, and they cannot call God "*ṣāniʿ*" and the world His "*fiʿl*." Al-Ghazālī's definitions of these terms are, of course, not new at all. We have encountered al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), for instance, making the very same distinction between these two types of causes.

This discussion gives us a first idea of why al-Ghazālī maintains that "he who does not assume the originatedness of the bodies has no ground at all for his assumption of the creator:" belief in an eternally existing world is not compatible with the *description* of God as its "creator." Both are mutually exclusive. In order to fully gauge al-Ghazālī's critique, it should be noted that he does not consider it logically incoherent to maintain that the world exists eternally with God, provided their relation is characterised as that between an *ʿilla* and its *maʿlūl* (as opposed to the one discussed above). He, thus, states that he does not dispute that *ʿilla* and *maʿlūl* can eternally coexist, for he himself of course holds that God's eternal knowledge, being a hypostatic entity (*maʿnā*),

482 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Maʿārif bi-Miṣr, 1961), 97.

483 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, ed. Maurice Bouyges, 97.

484 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 103.

485 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 106.

is the *ʿilla* of His being eternally knowing. What he disputes, he stresses, is the philosophers' use of the term "*fiʿl*" for the world when they should call it "*maʿlūl*."[486]

Yet, there is more to al-Ghazālī's remark about the incompatibility of affirming the creator and upholding the eternity of the world, and this becomes apparent in the fourth chapter of the *Tahāfut*. There, his critique of the philosophers continues to focus, as in the previous chapter, on the problems associated with their use of terminology. He states:[487]

> the people are divided into two groups. [First,] there is the group of the *ahl al-ḥaqq* who hold the view that the world is originated. They know by necessity that whatever is originated does not exist due to itself, hence it requires an originator. They believe in the creator. [Secondly,] there is another group, called the *dahriyya*. They hold the view that the world is eternal, always having been as it is now. They do not affirm for it an originator. Their assumption makes sense (*mafhūm*), even if it can be proven that their belief is wrong.

The first position laid out by al-Ghazālī is of course the standard view held by the *mutakallimūn:* all things that enter existence do so only because of an outside cause. They do not actualise their own existence, nor do they come about by chance (which is tantamount to saying they enter existence uncaused). Since this is true for *all* originated things, it must also hold true for the world. The second position, even though rejected by al-Ghazālī, is nevertheless presented as logically coherent as it is in line with his earlier explanations about the concepts of the agent/creator and the act/creation. *If* one holds that the world is eternal, one also needs to hold that it does not depend for its existence on a creator, for "existence which is not preceded by non-existence, rather which is eternal, is not the act of an agent." The *dahriyya*, as wrong as they may be about the actual state of things, are at least coherent. It is once more important to note at this point that in laying out these two positions, al-Ghazālī has not discusses the position that the world is eternal and depends for its existence on an *ʿilla*—he has so far only made the point that the notions of (1) the world as *creation* and its dependence on a *creator* go together, as much as (2) the *eternal* existence of the world and its independence of a *creator.* Following this theme, al-Ghazālī then states: "as for the philosophers, they hold the view that the world is eternal—and despite this (*maʿa dhālika*) they go on to affirm that it has a creator!

486 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 108. An insightful discussion of al-Ghazālī's arguments in chapter Three of the *Tahāfut* can be found in Barry S. Kogan, *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), Chapter "Averroes and the Logic of Agents and Acts" (17–70).

487 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 133.

This position is contradictory (*mutanāqiḍ*)."[488] The contradictoriness of the philosophers' position is, according to al-Ghazālī, that they believe in the eternity of the world, but nevertheless want to say that it depends for its existence on a "*creator.*" If at least, al-Ghazālī seems to want to say, they had maintained that the world, in being eternal, depends for its existence on an *ʿilla*! At least this position would not have involved bringing together concepts which are mutually exclusive and contradictory!

Al-Ghazālī's presentation of his opponents concedes a degree of sharpness to them, for he immediately introduces a hypothetical interlocutor ("*fa-in qīl*") countering:

> when we say, "the world has a creator (*ṣāniʿ*)," we do not mean by it a choosing agent (*fāʿil mukhtār*) who acts after not having acted [...]. Rather we mean by it the world's *ʿilla*, and we call it "the first principle" in the sense that it has no cause (*ʿilla*) of its own existence, but is the cause of the existence of everything else. So when we speak of a "creator," this needs to be interpreted (*taʾwīl*).

The position now presented by his interlocutor on behalf of the philosophers cannot so easily be rejected by al-Ghazālī anymore, for he cannot charge it with being logically incoherent. Al-Ghazālī's critique therefore now shifts: from being concerned with *pointing out contradictions* in the way the philosophers use terms to describe the relation between God and the world, to *attacking the very validity* of their conception of said relation as that between *ʿilla* and *maʿlūl*. Al-Ghazālī, being a *mutakallim*, can of course not accept that God should have caused the world in the manner upheld by the philosophers, even if there is no conceptual contradiction involved. Al-Ghazālī's strategy in the remainder of the chapter, therefore, is to attack the foundation on which the philosophers build their claim that God's relationship with the world is that between *ʿilla* and *maʿlūl*. This foundation is the following: al-Ghazālī has his opponent argue, in a manner reminiscent of Ibn Sīnā, that[489]

> the existents making up this world either have a cause, or not. If they have a cause, then this cause either [also] has a cause, or not. The same would have to be asked about that [second] cause, and either there would be an infinite regress of causes—which, however, is absurd!—, or they terminate somewhere. The final cause [in the chain of causes]

488 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 133–134.

489 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā, 155. On Ibn Sīnā's reasoning, see, for example, Abū ʿAlī Ibn Sīnā, *Dānish Nāma-i ʿalāʾī: The Metaphysics of Avicenna: a Critical Translation-Commentary of the Fundamental Arguments in Avicenna's Metaphysics in the Dānish Nāma-i ʿalāʾī (The Book of Scientific Knowledge)*, translated by Parviz Morewedge (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 45.

> would be the first cause which has no cause for its own existence. This one we call "the first principle." If, however, the world existed by itself, without depending on a[n outside] cause, then here we would have the first principle [...]. However, it is impossible that this first principle be [identified as] the heavens for they are numerous, but the proof of [the first principle's] oneness prohibits this.

Al-Ghazālī attacks the philosophers' foundation in two ways: first, he focuses on the part of their reasoning that rejects the notion that the world itself could be "the first principle" and exist independent of a cause based on the first principle's "oneness" (*tawḥīd*). Al-Ghazālī remarks: "this will be shown to be false when discussing the issue of [the first principle's] oneness (*tawḥīd*) and the denial of the attributes, after this [present] discussion." And indeed, in the subsequent chapters al-Ghazālī attacks the notion that the characteristic "necessarily existent" (*wājib al-wujūd*) (said of the first principle) cannot apply to several beings. Secondly, he focuses on the part of their reasoning that declares an infinite regress of causes in this world impossible: "your assertion that an infinite chain of causes cannot be affirmed is not established by you."[490]

Crucially, the consequence of the two strands of al-Ghazālī's attack is that the philosophers can no longer maintain that the world is to be *ascribed* to God. We must recall that the whole discussion started off (in Chapter Three) from al-Ghazālī critiquing the philosophers for holding that the relationship between God and the world is to be described by the terms "agent" and "act." Their change of terminology (in Chapter Four) to describing the relationship by the terms "*ʿilla*" and "*maʿlūl*" prompted al-Ghazālī to switch the focus of his attack (for no conceptual contradiction was involved any longer) and to argue that no relation *whatsoever* could be established by the philosophers. I, therefore, want to emphasise that the focus and objective of al-Ghazālī's attack have nothing to do with the alleged endeavour to show that the philosophers, in assuming the eternity of the world, have no way of proving that *God* exists. He very much appears to take it for granted in the *Tahāfut* that the philosophers, just like he himself, consider reality to comprise of the world *and* God (*Allāh*). Rather, the issue at stake is the *relationship* between God and the world, and the related *concepts* of God as creator and the world as creation.

At this point I also want to stress that al-Ghazālī's defence of a particular *concept* of God as cause of the world—namely that of a willing, choosing agent and creator, as opposed to a necessary cause—should not be read as amounting to a dispute between him and the philosophers about *God's very ex-*

490 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 156. Compare also Davidson's (*Proofs*, 366–370) detailed and insightful discussion of his arguments.

istence. As discussed in the Introduction of this book, even if some have held the view that the denial of this or that attribute of God equals the denial of God Himself, this is not, I propose, how al-Ghazālī himself treats the matter. For we should not overlook that in Chapter Six al-Ghazālī charges the philosophers, just like the Muʿtazilīs, with "denying the [divine] attributes" altogether (as I have expounded upon above). This, however, nowhere prompts him to say that this amounts to their denial of God Himself, that is, of *Allāh* or "the first principle," as they call Him. (Just as much, by the way, as the Muʿtazila's denial of God's attributes does not mean for him their denial that God is part of reality). Al-Ghazālī clearly treats disagreement about God's attributes as just that. The reason for this is of course not least that for al-Ghazālī (as for all *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa*, I dare pose), "God/*Allāh*" is not just a shorthand for "creator of the world." This means, in turn, that he can debate about the question of whether the world exists due to itself or whether it has a cause *without* this becoming, or being intended as, a debate about God's existence. In the secondary academic literature, however, this distinction frequently seems to be overlooked and "God" is taken to stand for nothing else than "creator of the world" (following in this Aquinas' understanding, as it seems), which means that al-Ghazālī is described as charging the philosophers with atheism, and as holding that *creation* alone can prove God's existence.

This observation becomes more evident when finally turning to Chapter Ten of the *Tahāfut* where al-Ghazālī's already familiar statement that "he who does not assume the originatedness of the bodies has no ground at all for his assumption of the creator" appears. Interestingly, in Chapter Ten al-Ghazālī picks up on essentially the same issue he already discussed in Chapter Four: that is, the first strand of his attack against the philosophers' conception of the relationship between God and the world as comparable to that between *ʿilla* and *maʿlūl*, which involved his asserting that they have no way of denying that the world is "the first principle" and necessarily existent, despite their assertion that the first principle is "one" (*tawḥīd*). Al-Ghazālī now challenges this aspect of the philosophers' argument by asserting that it is not so absurd after all to hold that the world could be necessarily existent. This is precisely what the aforementioned—yet unidentified—individuals referred to as *al-dahriyya* maintain: "as for you [philosophers], what prevents you from [accepting] the belief of the *dahriyya*, which is that the world is eternal as it is and it has no cause (*ʿilla*) or creator (*ṣāniʿ*)? [They hold that] only the originated things [in this world] are caused, but no body (*jism*) in this world is originated and no body ceases to exist [rather bodies are eternal]—it is only the forms and ac-

cidents that come about."[491] The *dahriyya* would, thus, assert that the world itself is necessarily existent, and consequently cannot be said to depend on any kind of cause for its existence. The causes of the transformations of eternally existing matter, al-Ghazālī carries on, are to be sought in the eternal, rotary movements of the heavenly bodies. "What do you mean," al-Ghazālī finally poses his challenge to the philosophers, "when you say that the existence of these bodies is due to a cause (*ʿilla*), even though they are eternal?" The reply al-Ghazālī puts into the philosophers' mouths is, as mentioned, the very same reasoning already encountered in Chapter Four: "that which is independent of a cause is necessarily existent. We have already discussed the attributes of the necessarily existent and explained that bodies cannot be necessarily existent!" Al-Ghazālī simply reiterates his same response to this reasoning of theirs: "and we have explained that what you claim regarding the attributes of the necessarily existent is false! All that can be demonstrated is that an infinite chain [of causes] must terminate—but this is also what the *dahrī* says." As opposed to al-Ghazālī's line of attack in Chapter Four, he here now grants to the philosophers that an infinite regress of causes is impossible, but he still maintains his other line of attack and asserts that the philosophers have no grounds for their claims about God's relation with the world for they cannot prove the crucial premise that the necessarily existent is "one" (so as to deny that the world is the necessarily existent). This leads al-Ghazālī to pass his final judgement about the philosophers, which is that[492]

> he who reflects on what we have mentioned will know the inability of him who assumes the eternity of the bodies to claim that they have a cause (*ʿilla*), and [in consequence] he needs [to adopt] the position of the *dahriyya* and heresy (*lazimahu al-dahr wa'l-ilḥād*). [...] The philosophers cannot counter this, except by pointing to the need of denying multiplicity for the first existent, but we have already disproven this, and they have no other way. This makes it clear that he who does not assume the originatedness of the bodies has no ground at all for his assumption of the creator.

What al-Ghazālī intends to say is that the only certain method of *ascribing* the world to God is the one based on the originatedness of the bodies. Not only does it spare one the embarrassment of the philosophers of being unable to prove that the world *actually* depends on a cause for its existence (for the notion of origination entails dependence on a cause—which cannot be said of eternal existence). It is also the only way of asserting—as "the people of the truth"

491 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 196.
492 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 197.

(*ahl al-ḥaqq*) do, as opposed to those professing heretical beliefs (*al-ilḥād*)—that God is to be described as "creator"—in the true sense of the word, not in the metaphorical way of the philosophers who apply terms at their convenience.

Sabih Ahmad Kamali, in his 1963 translation of the *Tahāfut*, however, renders al-Ghazālī's final statement this way: "[s]o 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-dahr*] and Atheism [*al-ilḥād*]."[493] Kamali's translation and understanding of the term "*ilḥād*" as "atheism" in this context is noteworthy as it presents al-Ghazālī's concerns and objectives in an entirely different light. No longer is al-Ghazālī concerned with the attempt to invalidate the philosophers' belief that the world eternally emanates from God (while not being concerned with the question of whether God is part of reality or not); instead he is portrayed as asserting that this belief of theirs requires them to deny *God's very existence* and to hold that all there is, is the world. Kamali is, however, not alone in his translation and understanding of al-Ghazālī's charge of "*al-dahr*" and "*al-ilḥād*" against the philosophers as denoting "atheism." As we have seen before, Goodman writes: "[i]t 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."[494] There is, in addition to this, the view frequently expresses in the secondary academic literature that the group referred to by al-Ghazālī—and a plenitude of other *mutakallimūn*—as "*al-dahriyya*" are atheists. Robert Wisnovsky, for instance, speaks of "atheist Materialists (*dahriyya*), who believed in the eternity of the world."[495] Ibrahim Y. Najjar similarly writes: "*Al-Dahriyah*. In the Arabic sources, this term refers to an undetermined group of naturalists and materialists who denied the existence of God."[496] Since in the secondary academic literature on the issue of arguments for God's existence in the Islamic tradition, "the denial of the creator" is commonly understood to mean the denial of God's existence, and "the affirmation of the creator" is taken to mean the affirmation that God actually exists and is part of reality, in addition to the world, it is not surprising that the *dahriyya* who are frequently described in the Arabic sources as rejecting the

493 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa [Incoherence of the Philosophers]*, translated into English by Sabih Ahmad Kamali (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1963), 141.

494 Goodman, "Al-Ghazālī's Argument (I)," 68.

495 Robert Wisnovsky, "One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Theology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14 (2004): 65–100, at 69.

496 Ibrahim Y. Najjar, "Ibn Rushd's Theory of Rationality," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 16 (1996), Averroës and the Rational Legacy in the East and West: 191–216, at 38, n. 57.

notion that the world has a cause for its existence are identified as atheists. In consequence, it is not surprising that al-Ghazālī has been seen to accuse the philosophers of coming dangerously close to atheism when he suggests that their position is not that far from the position of the *dahriyya*. I, however, have suggested that the focus of the discussion about whether the world has a cause or not is *not* on the possible implications of this question for the proof and provability of God's existence—I am saying "possible implication" as this question *can* be investigated with a view to its implications for the proof and provability of God's existence, but it *can* likewise be investigated *without* asking about these implications. (In this respect, the discussion of the question of whether the world has a cause or not is the same as the Avicennan proof for the existence and immateriality of the soul, mentioned in the Introduction of this book, which he does use to prove these *two* aspects, while the same argument could equally be used to simply establish the immateriality of the soul when the actual existence of the soul is already taken for granted.) I want to suggest that the focus of al-Ghazālī's mention of the *dahriyya* is to highlight their error of declaring the world necessarily existent (something that befits God alone!). Their denial of a cause for the world does not even touch upon the question of God's existence as the former has nothing to do with the latter. Al-Ghazālī's (and other *mutakallimūn*'s) silence about the *dahriyya*'s views on God Himself—which would be highly interesting, especially in this context—may not want to be taken as indication that they exclude God/*Allāh* from the picture altogether, for I for my part have not come across any passage in *kalām* works where the *dahriyya* are explicitly described as saying something alone the lines of "all there is, is the world" and "God (*Allāh*) does not exist," and since the question about whether the world exists due to an outside cause or not does not require asking the question about whether God is taken to be part of reality or not. A thorough study of the presentation of the *dahriyya* and their views in the many *kalām* works that refer to them would certainly shed more light on these questions, yet it is beyond the scope of this book.[497]

497 Note that Sarah Stroumsa in her monograph *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam* makes a similar point. She writes concerning the report that Ibn al-Rāwandī in his *Kitāb al-Tāj* assumed that world is eternally existent and does not depend on a creator: "Ibn al-Rāwandī argued that the explanation of the world does not require a creator [...]. For ʿAbd al-Jabbār and al-Ḫayyāṭ [who reported on Ibn al-Rāwandī] it was clear that the weight of Ibn al-Rāwandī's argument was to prove a pre-eternal world. *K. al-Tāj* was meant to prove that God neither created the world in time, not intervened in it, but not that there was no God of any kind. We thus do not know whether Ibn al-Rāwandī believed in Aristotle's prime Mover, or whether he developed another concept of a transcendent being that can be called God"; Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers*

I want to finally note that al-Ghazālī's concerns in the *Tahāfut* do not differ much from those of his predecessors, as discussed in the previous chapters. Even if the *Tahāfut* is written with the philosophers as al-Ghazālī's special opponents in mind, which may not be said of the *kalām* works by other thinkers, there are evident similarities both in the positions al-Ghazālī defends and in the terminology he uses. The concepts of the *ṣāniʿ*, the *fāʿil*, and the *ʿilla* he employs are precisely the ones his teacher al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), and before him al-Bāqillānī, already expounded upon when they attempted to show that God is to be described as "creator" of the world. The objective al-Ghazālī pursues in his discussions about whether the world has a cause or not, and how the relation between God and the world is to be described does not differ either from what we find in *kalām* works written before al-Ghazālī's time, as has been seen. His objective is nothing else than what the Muʿtazilī ʿAbd al-Jabbār, who died roughly a century before al-Ghazālī, expressed in his *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa* when he spoke of "the proofs [or: indications (*al-dalāla*)] which point to [the fact] that He (Most-High!) is the one who originated the world (*annahu taʿālā huwa al-muḥdith li'l-ʿālam*)."[498] Al-Ghazālī's objective in the *Tahāfut* is also nothing else than what the Muʿtazilī al-Malāḥimī, who died only a few decades after al-Ghazālī, describes in the following words in his *al-Muʿtamad fī uṣūl al-dīn:* "as for the proofs that God is the one who originated the world (*annahu huwa muḥdith al-ʿālam*) [...] no proof can be found by reason or in revelation that the originator of the world and its arranger should be some entity other than God (Most-High!) (*anna muḥdith al-ʿālam aw murattibahu huwa shayʾ ghayr Allāh taʿālā*)!"[499]

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of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and Their Impact on Islamic Thought (Leiden, Boston, Köln: Brill, 1999), 128.

498 ʿAbd al-Jabbār, *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa*, ed. ʿAbd al-Karīm ʿUthmān (al-Qāhira: Maktabat Wahba, 1996), 151. This statement appears in the section on the divine attributes. The whole sentence is: "know that the first attribute belonging to the Eternal that can be known by reasoning is His being powerful [...] for the proofs which point to [the fact] that He (Most-High!) is the one who originated the world [also] point to this attribute." The crucial point is that ʿAbd al-Jabbār here refers to the proofs presented in the section on the affirmation of the creator, whose purpose he describes as proving that the world has to be *ascribed* to God (not, however, to prove God's existence).

499 Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad al-Malāḥimī al-Khuwārazmī, *Kitāb al-Muʿtamad fī uṣūl al-dīn* (London: al-Hoda, 1991), 184.

8.3 The Proof of God's Existence and al-Ghazālī's *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād* and *al-Risāla al-qudsiyya*

Shortly after al-Ghazālī completed the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* in 1095, he completed another work of *kalām*, *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād*.[500] Al-Ghazālī himself describes *al-Iqtiṣād* as an exposition of the fundamental doctrines of the Muslim belief and their defence against heretical objections. The same can be said of his *al-Risāla al-qudsiyya*, another *kalām* manual laying out the fundamental tenets of Islam, which al-Ghazālī describes in very similar terms.[501] The *Risāla*, which became part of one of al-Ghazālī's most famous works, *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, was written shortly after the *Iqtiṣād*.[502]

The *Iqtiṣād* and the *Risāla* both immediately stand out not only in comparison with al-Ghazālī's previous work, the *Tahāfut*, but also in comparison with the works of the *mutakallimūn* preceding al-Ghazālī whom I discussed in the previous chapters: in both of these works we encounter him mentioning the *existence of the creator* and the proof thereof. This is not encountered in the works of other *mutakallimūn* before al-Ghazālī, and we recall that al-Ashʿarī, for instance, asked in his *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ*, "what is the proof that there is a creator for creation?";[503] al-Bāqillānī argued in his *Kitāb al-Tamhīd* that "for this originated, fashioned world there must be an originator, a fashioner;"[504] and, finally, al-Māturīdī spoke of "the proof that the world has an originator"[505] in his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. None of them spoke of the proof of the *existence of the originator*. In sharp contrast to his predecessors, al-Ghazālī declares, in the *Iqtiṣād*, that "the objective (*maqṣūd*) of this science is to prove the existence of the lord (Most-High!) (*wujūd al-rabb*), His attributes and deeds"[506] and he speaks of methods by which "the existence of the creator (*wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*) is known."[507] Even more noteworthy than this is that in the *Risāla*, al-Ghazālī's first point of enquiry

500 Hourani, "Revised Chronology," 293; Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 35.
501 Frank, *Al-Ghazālī*, 30–31. Marmura ("Ghazali and Ashʿarism Revisited," 100) quotes al-Ghazālī's own assessment, in his *al-Arbaʿīn*, of the *Iqtiṣād* and the *Risāla*.
502 Hourani, "Revised Chronology," 295; Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 45.
503 Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Kitāb al-Lumaʿ fī al-radd ʿalā ahl al-zīgh wa'l-bidʿ*, ed. Ḥammūda Ghurāba (al-Qāhira: Maṭbaʿat Miṣr, 1955), 17.
504 Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, ed. Richard Joseph McCarthy (Bayrūt: al-Maktaba al-Sharqiyya, 1957), 23.
505 Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, *al-Tawḥīd*, ed. and introduced by Fathalla Kholeif (Beyrouth: Dar El-Machreq Éditeurs, 1970), 17.
506 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād* (Ankara: NUR Matbaası, 1962), 8.
507 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, 34.

about God concerns "the knowledge of the existence of God (*wujūd Allāh*) (Be He praised!)."[508] The same is the case in the *Iqtiṣād*.

The method al-Ghazālī lays out to establish both "the knowledge of the existence of God" and of "the existence of the creator," as he has it, is the same in the *Iqtiṣād* and the *Risāla*, and it is strikingly reminiscent of the method used by earlier *mutakallimūn* to prove that creation has a creator, based on the world's originatedness. Al-Ghazālī's method takes the form of a syllogism. In the *Iqtiṣād*, he reasons: "every originated thing has a cause (*sabab*) for its origination (*ḥudūth*). The world is originated. This means that it has a cause."[509] Similarly, in the *Risāla*: "it is evident to the mind that the originated thing is not independent, when it comes to its origination (*ḥudūth*), of a cause (*sabab*) which originated it. The world is originated. This means that it is not independent, when it comes to its origination, of a cause."[510]

Notwithstanding the evident similarity between al-Ghazālī's reasoning and the reasoning encountered in the works of other *mutakallimūn*, there also is a conspicuous difference. Al-Ghazālī's predecessors, we recall, were eager not only to affirm that the world depends for its existence on God, but also to stress that God is the cause of the world in a specific way: He is an agent endowed with will (not a necessary cause). The terms al-Ghazālī's predecessors used to describe God's causal efficacy were invariably "*ṣāniʿ*," "*muḥdith*," "*muṣawwir*," "*fāʿil*" and the like, which represented a single concept. In the *Tahāfut*, al-Ghazālī himself had gone to great lengths to stress how mistaken the philosophers are in characterising God's relation to the world as the relation between an *ʿilla* and its *maʿlūl*, eternally coexisting, not by volition but by necessity. Al-Ghazālī's choice of term in the syllogism in both the *Iqtiṣād* and the *Risāla* is, thus, noteworthy (and arguably slightly perplexing): "this means that the world has a *sabab*"—he does not say "creator" or "originator." Al-Ghazālī's predecessors would arguably not have opted for this particular term to describe God in His role as creator and cause of the world. For them, the term "*sabab*" denotes the same kind of cause as the *ʿilla*. Both produce their effect by the necessity of

508 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla al-qudsiyya* (*Kitāb qawāʿid al-ʿaqāʾid*) of *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, vol. 1 (Jiddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2011), 382.

509 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, 24. Goodman ("Al-Ghazālī's Argument (I)," 73–75) discusses al-Ghazālī's arguments in detail. On al-Ghazālī's views on logic and, particularly, the syllogism, see Ulrich Rudolph, "Die Neubewertung der Logik durch al-Ġazālī," in *Logik und Theologie: Das Organon im Arabischen und im Lateinischen Mittelalter*, ed. Dominik Perler and Ulrich Rudolph (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005), 73–97, esp. at 90 on the syllogism employed to prove the originatedness of the world.

510 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla*, 384.

their essences, not due to will and choice. Al-Ghazālī's Ashʿarī predecessor, al-Bāqillānī, for instance, employed this term in his refutation of the view that the origination of things in this world is to be traced back to nature (*ṭabīʿa*) (rather than God/*Allāh*). In this context, al-Bāqillānī refers to nature as a *sabab* and to the originated world as its *musabbab*, being necessitated by nature (*mūjaba ʿanhā*) (rather than being the object of will).[511] The very same concept of a necessary cause remained associated with the term "*sabab*" during al-Ghazālī's days and after his death. For instance, the Muʿtazilī al-Malāḥimī, who died 30 years after al-Ghazālī, highlights the conceptual difference between "an effect coming from one who acts (*muʾaththir*) according to choice (*ikhtiyār*), which is an act (*fiʿl*)" and "an effect coming from one who acts necessarily (*mūjib*), which is [...] the *musabbab* of the *sabab*." He then explains that it is his endeavour to show that "God's essence is not one which necessitates (*mūjib*), so that it would be [...] a *sabab*."[512]

Al-Ghazālī's choice of the term "*sabab*" is all the more striking given that in both the *Iqtiṣād* and the *Risāla* he portrays God in His role as cause of the world in a manner characteristic of the *kalām* tradition and as having the attributes of power, knowledge, and will.[513] It is, however, only in later passages of the *Iqtiṣād* that al-Ghazālī notes, without much explanation, that "by the *sabab* we mean nothing other than the *murajjiḥ* [...] who gives preponderance (*yurajjiḥ*) to existence over the continuation of non-existence."[514] In the *Risāla*, he equates the *sabab* with the *muḥdith* (originator) and the *mukhaṣṣiṣ* who particularises the time of a thing's coming into existence—but again without showing a concern for expounding upon these terms and concepts.[515] The terms al-Ghazālī here makes use of are familiar from earlier *kalām* works, but the terms "*murajjiḥ*" and "*sabab*" in fact have a very Avicennan ring to them. An explanation not only for al-Ghazālī's curious choice of terms but also for his seeming lack of interest in expounding upon the precise way in which God is creator may, of course, be sought in the well-known fact that al-Ghazālī somewhat distanced himself from his Ashʿarī predecessors in favour of a leaning towards Avicenn-

511 Al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, 34–35 and 38.

512 Al-Malāḥimī, *Kitāb al-Muʿtamad*, 83.

513 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, 79: "The second section: on the attributes. [...] We claim that He is powerful, knowing, [and] willing." In the *Risāla*, 382: "The second section, on His attributes. [...] the knowledge of His being knowing, powerful, willing."

514 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, 26.

515 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla*, 385–386.

ism.[516] This observation taken together with the aforementioned fact that in the *Iqtiṣād* and the *Risāla* al-Ghazālī explicitly speaks of the task undertaken by the *mutakallimūn* of establishing "the knowledge of the existence of God" and of "the existence of the creator" might be seen to indicate that a change of the discourse is witnessed during al-Ghazālī's lifetime. Could it be that al-Ghazālī does no longer share his predecessors' focus on establishing a causal link between God and the world and describing God by the term and concept of the "creator," and that he instead now uses the same reasoning based on the originatedness of the world in order to prove God's very existence?

In the secondary academic literature, at least, we read that al-Ghazālī's aforementioned syllogism in the *Iqtiṣād* and the *Risāla* has the purpose of proving God's existence and is an instance of the cosmological argument. For instance, in his monograph, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*, Richard M. Frank writes about al-Ghazālī's "proof given in *Iqtiṣād*" that it is an argument for "the existence of God" following the traditional method "based on bodies and accidents."[517] In his monograph, *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazālī and Avicenna*, Frank similarly writes: "[i]n the beginning of *al-Iqtiṣād* [...] he wishes to prove the existence of the Creator as the cause (*sabab*) of the existence of the universe."[518] Davidson, in his *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God*, 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."[519] Finally, in his monograph, *Al-Gha-*

516 On the term "*murajjiḥ*," see Frank, *Al-Ghazālī*, 34; Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 170. Several studies discuss al-Ghazālī's theory of causality and the related issue of his use of terminology, pointing out that he distances himself to some degree, under the influence of Avicennan cosmology, from views on causality espoused by his predecessors. See especially Richard M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 1994), 36–47; *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazālī & Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1992); Binyamin Abrahamov, "Al-Ghazālī's Theory of Causality," *Studia Islamica* 67 (1988): 75–98; Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), who dedicates several chapters to the question of causality in al-Ghazālī's writings and other Islamic thinkers. Binyamin Abrahamov, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on the Knowability of God's Essence and Attributes," *Arabica*, T. 49, Fasc. 2 (2002): 204–230, shows that al-Ghazālī's conception of God in some of his works comes closer to that of Ibn Sīnā than that of his Ashʿarī predecessors. Michael E. Marmura, "Ghazali and Ashʿarism Revisited," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 12 (2002): 91–110, shows that al-Ghazālī incorporated philosophical ideas into his *kalām* works.

517 Frank, *Al-Ghazālī*, 72.

518 Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazālī & Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1992), 29.

519 Davidson, *Proofs*, 227.

zālī's Philosophical Theology, Frank Griffel discusses the "argument for God's existence based on the principle of particularization" and notes that "[i]n his *Balanced Book* [i. e. the *Iqtiṣād*] [and] in the *Letter for Jerusalem* [i. e. the *Risāla*] [...], al-Ghazālī reproduces versions of this proof."[520]

In order to attempt an answer to the question I posed above (that is, whether al-Ghazālī, unlike his predecessors, is indeed concerned with the proof of God's existence), I propose taking into account the *kalām* works written by two contemporaries of his. Their treatment of the affirmation of the creator can help shed light on the question whether a shift in discourse is discernible in and around al-Ghazālī's lifetime. The first text is Abū 'l-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 'l-Muʿīn al-Nasafī, entitled *Tabṣirat al-adilla fī uṣūl al-dīn*. Al-Nasafī belonged to the Māturīdī school of *kalām* and died in 507/1114.

8.4 Al-Anṣārī's *al-Ghunya fī al-kalām*—Continuation or Change of Discourse?

Al-Anṣārī's *al-Ghunya* is, it soon becomes apparent, a traditional work of *kalām*. As has been practice among the *mutakallimūn* for generations, al-Anṣārī uses the proof of the originatedness of the world, which he defends against "the view of many early ones that the world has always been as it is now,"[521] as the basis of "the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator" (*ithbāt al-ʿilm bi'l-ṣāniʿ*).[522] Al-Anṣārī's reasoning is strikingly reminiscent of that encountered in the works of his teacher, al-Juwaynī, who already spoke of "the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator" in his (arguably) most well-known works, *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn*, *al-Irshād ilā qawāṭiʿ al-adilla fī uṣūl al-iʿtiqād*, and *al-ʿAqīda al-Niẓẓāmiyya*.[523] Al-Anṣārī, like al-Juwaynī, argues the following: all originated things are possible (*jāʾiz, mumkin*) in terms of their existence and non-existence and with regards to the time of their coming to be. If they enter existence, rather than remain-

520 Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 170.

521 Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī, *al-Ghunya fī al-kalām, qism al-ilāhiyyāt*, study and edition of the Arabic text by Muṣṭafā Ḥasanīn ʿAbd al-Hādī (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Salām, 2010), 316.

522 Al-Anṣārī, *al-Ghunya*, 333.

523 Abū 'l-Maʿālī ʿAbd al-Malik b. Yūsuf al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn* (al-Qāhira: Dār al-ʿArab, [1960 – 1961]), 146; *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā qawāṭiʿ al-adilla fī uṣūl al-iʿtiqād* (n. p.: Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda bi-Miṣr, 1950), 27; *al-ʿAqīda al-Niẓāmiyya fī al-arkān al-islāmiyya*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī (al-Qāhira: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li'l-Turāth, 1992), 20.

ing non-existent, this points to their "need for a particulariser (*mukhaṣṣiṣ*)"[524] and "one who makes necessary (*muqtaḍin*) one of the two possible alternatives."[525] Having thus established the principle of causation and rejected the alternative that things could actualise their own existence or enter existence uncaused and by chance, al-Anṣārī turns to a discussion of the precise nature of the outside cause on whom originated things depend. He proffers the very same options his teacher already discussed: it might be "something that causes necessarily (*mūjib*), like the [kind of cause referred to as] *ʿilla* or like nature (*ṭabʿ*)." Since a necessary cause and its effect have to coexist, the belief that the originated world could be due to this kind of cause runs into all kinds of impossibilities and absurdities. Both options are, therefore, rejected and the conclusion is reached that the cause of the world is "an agent who brings into existence (*fāʿil mūjid*), as the *ahl al-ḥaqq* say" and who is "one who chooses, being alive, knowing, and powerful."[526]

When comparing al-Anṣārī's discussion of the arguments to "affirm the knowledge of the creator" with al-Ghazālī's, certain striking differences are noticeable: in al-Anṣārī's *al-Ghunya*, no mention is made of the *existence* of the creator, much less of *God's existence*. Instead, we find al-Anṣārī putting a special focus on ascertaining the nature of the cause on whom the world, in being characterised by origination, depends. With regards to the question I posed of whether al-Ghazālī's treatment of the affirmation of the creator—and in particular his mention of *God's* existence in this context—is indicative of a broader change in discourse among the *mutakallimūn*, it must be concluded that this is certainly not inferable from al-Anṣārī's treatment. For all the points discussed by al-Anṣārī we can find instances in earlier theological writings, and he does not add anything new to them. It therefore remains to be seen whether al-Nasafī's treatment of this question reveals any fundamental changes.

524 Al-Anṣārī, *al-Ghunya*, 333.

525 Al-Anṣārī, *al-Ghunya*, 337.

526 Al-Anṣārī, *al-Ghunya*, 338. Compare al-Juwaynī, *al-Irshād*, 28: "then, since the dependence of what is originated on a particulariser has become clear in a general way (*ʿalā al-jumla*), this particulariser must either be one who causes necessarily (*mūjib*) the occurrence of origination, just like the *ʿilla* which necessarily causes its effect, or [the particulariser must be] a nature (*ṭabīʿa*) [...], or a choosing agent (*fāʿil mukhtār*)."

8.5 Al-Nasafī's *Tabṣirat al-adilla*—Continuation or Change of Discourse?

And indeed, an examination of the relevant passages in al-Nasafī's *Tabṣirat al-adilla* reveals that there exists a rather conspicuous similarity between his treatment of the question of the affirmation of the creator and al-Ghazālī's. Even though the section on the affirmation "that the world has an originator (*muḥdith*)" follows, as is tradition, the section on the proof of the originatedness of the world (*ḥudūth al-ʿālam*), al-Nasafī does not show much concern for ascertaining the nature of the cause of the world. He is not concerned with discussing whether this cause is the kind of cause referred to as *ʿilla*, or like a nature, or rather an agent endowed with will, or the like. Al-Nasafī does not preoccupy himself with clarifying the concept associated with the "originator" and stressing that it involves the crucial notions of will and choice.

Al-Nasafī and al-Ghazālī's treatments of the affirmation of the creator are also similar in that al-Nasafī likewise speaks of the "proof for the *existence* of a creator (*wujūd ṣāniʿ*)" (my emphasis).[527] Among his arguments, al-Nasafī adduces the famous analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghāʾib*. The world (belonging to the realm of the *ghāʾib*) can, like a building (belonging to the *shāhid*), be existent or remain non-existent. This indicates that "its particularisation (*ikhtiṣāṣ*) with these states [it can have] will not take place unless due to the particularisation of a particulariser. It is based on these indications (*dalāla*) that we infer the existence of the builder (*wujūd al-bānī*) for every building we observe in this world." Al-Nasafī's reasoning—invoking a thing's particularisation and making an analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghāʾib*—is not original; his speaking of the *existence* of the creator and the *existence* of the builder in this context, however, is something new. Unlike al-Ghazālī, however, al-Nasafī does not mention *God's* existence.

When it comes to the question of al-Nasafī's objective in "proving the existence of the creator," I suggest, it is not different from that of the *mutakallimūn* before him, whom I have discussed in the previous chapters. He, too, is first and foremost concerned with defending the validity of the principle of causation so as to be able to say that the world as a whole, like every individual item in it, could not have come to be if it were not for its cause. This is why all those would have to be declared ignorant who "allow for the existence of the world due to chance [which means] without a creator" or who assert that "the world

527 Al-Anṣārī, *al-Ghunya*, 107.

originated itself."[528] There are hints to be found in al-Nasafī's *Tabṣirat al-adilla* which I want to draw attention to for they indicate what his "proof of the existence of the creator" is meant to establish, and that this is not to prove that God actually exists along the lines of a cosmological argument, as one might be quick to think.

One such hint can be found in a later section of the *Tabṣirat al-adilla* where al-Nasafī sets out to refute the anthropomorphists (*mujassima*). There, he presents the anthropomorphists' argument that God (*Allāh*) 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 whatever is impossible for the *shāhid* is also impossible for the *ghāʾib*."[529] To regard God as corporeal is of course a belief the majority of *mutakallimūn*, and likewise philosophers, vigorously rejected.[530] This is also true for al-Nasafī, and he therefore explains that in the view of the *ahl al-ḥaqq* this belief leads to a number of absurdities, namely: "the belief in the eternity of the world or the originatedness of the creator (*al-bāriʾ*) (Most-High!) and the non-existence of the creator (*ʿadam al-ṣāniʿ*) for the world."[531] If it is the case that al-Nasafī's aforementioned reference to the "proof of the existence of a creator"[532] refers to the objective to prove God's existence (along the lines of a cosmological argument), then it must be the case that his reference to "the non-existence of the creator" denotes the belief that God does not exist and that all reality comprises of is the world. Al-Nasafī then continues to explain:[533] if God were a body, He would have a specific shape, for instance round or triangular. If He had a particular shape to the exclusion of all others possible shapes, this would 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, however, is an absurdity as it leads to an infinite regress of originators. This is what al-Nasafī means when

528 Al-Anṣārī, *al-Ghunya*, 105.

529 Al-Anṣārī, *al-Ghunya*, 160.

530 On the disputes about anthropomorphism and the interpretation of anthropomorphic descriptions of God, see Wesley Williams, "A Body Unlike Bodies: Transcendent Anthropomorphism in Ancient Semitic Traditions and Early Islam," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 129/1 (2009): 19–44; Livnat Holtzman, *Anthropomorphism in Islam: The Challenge of Traditionalism (700–1350)* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).

531 Abū 'l-Muʿīn Maymūn b. Muḥmmad al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-adilla fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Ḥusayn Ātāy (Ankara: Riʾāsat al-Shuʾūn al-Dīniyya liʾl-Jumhūriyya al-Turkiyya, 1993), 161.

532 Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-adilla*, 107.

533 Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-adilla*, 161–163.

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 were not due to the particularisation by another, it would follow, al-Nasafī states, that this must also hold true for the world. The observation that the world exhibits different shapes is actually no "proof for its originatedness and its need for an originator who brought it about," and the *mutakallimūn*'s argument from particularisation must be false.[534] This is why al-Nasafī concludes that "the belief in His being a body leads to the belief in the eternity of the world and the *taʿṭīl* of the creator"[535] —or, as he phrased it earlier, "the non-existence of the creator for the world."

Crucially, this discussion makes it clear that "the non-existence of the creator for the world" does not refer to *God's* non-existence or the denial that God is part of reality. After all, the conclusion about "the non-existence of the creator" follows from, and is a consequence of, the anthropomorphists' claim that God (*Allāh*) is corporeal. The problem with their belief is, according to al-Nasafī, that it is incompatible with the tenet that all of creation is to be ascribed to God who Himself is not created. It is also incompatible with the argument that the particularisation of bodies is what explains their originatedness as well as dependence on an outside cause. Since it is not God's existence that is at stake when God is conceived of as corporeal, it follows, first, that the expression "the non-existence of the creator" does not have anything to do with the question about God's being part of reality and, secondly, that "the proof of the existence of the creator" is not a cosmological argument for God's existence for it has a different objective. Rather it becomes apparent that "the non-existence of the creator" which follows from the belief in God's corporeality concerns the divine attribute "creator." Al-Nasafī intends to say that this belief is incompatible with describing God as the creator of the world, for the world does not even depend on any outside cause (this being the consequence of the anthropomorphists' belief). That al-Nasafī is concerned with God's attributes when he speaks of "the non-existence of the creator" is, in my view, also indicated by his statement that "the belief in His being a body leads to [...] the *taʿṭīl* of the creator." The term "*taʿṭīl*" is used by the *mutakallimūn*, as is well-known, to describe the act of divesting God of His attributes. Ashʿarīs, for instance, charged their Muʿtazilī peers with *taʿṭīl* for their denial that the divine attributes are hypostatic entities (*maʿānin*) inhering in God's essence. Al-Nasafī discredits the anthropomorphists' belief in God's corporeality by arguing that it leads to the erroneous practice of

534 Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-adilla*, 162.
535 Al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-adilla*, 163.

divesting God of His attributes.[536] This discussion also shows that one has to be careful not to misinterpret certain phrases, such as al-Nasafī's "the non-existence of the creator for the world," because of the way Islamic thinkers expressed themselves. It is of course not deniable that al-Nasafī's expression immediately brings to mind similar statements made in the context of arguments for God's existence—yet, the similarity in expression does not mean, as has been seen, a similarity in objective and what it indicates. This will be seen once more in the chapters to come.

Returning to the question I posed above of whether al-Ghazālī's speaking of the existence of the creator as well as of God's existence is indicative of a shift in discourse, we can conclude the following based on the discussion of al-Nasafī and al-Anṣārī's treatment of the affirmation of the creator: neither scholar appears to pursue a different *objective* than generations of scholars who came before them. This is the case even if, as in the case of al-Nasafī, a change in *expression* is witnesses (that is, his explicit mention of the creator's *existence*). Neither al-Nasafī nor al-Anṣārī, both being al-Ghazālī's contemporaries, indicate that such a fundamental change of the discourse occurred; instead it appears that the *mutakallimūn* continued to be concerned with the proof that the world is creation and that it is to be ascribed to God, whose existence was taken for granted.[537] In view of this, it might not be too farfetched to suspect that al-Ghazālī, too, is concerned with the same—or at least very similar—questions. This is what I will now argue.

8.6 The Meaning of al-Ghazālī's Mention of "God's Existence"

There is something noteworthy about the place where, in both the *Risāla* and the *Iqtiṣād*, al-Ghazālī's aforementioned syllogism appears: al-Ghazālī structures his discussion in a way which includes, first, the investigation of God's essence and,

536 Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 62.

537 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, points to certain changes that took place in Ashʿarī *kalām*, prompting certain scholars, such as Ayman Shihadeh, to distinguish between "classical Ashʿarism" and "neo-Ashʿarism," 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 Ashʿarīs, and al-Nasafī among the neo-Ashʿarīs; Ayman Shihadeh, "Classical Ashʿarī Anthropology: Body, Life and Spirit," *The Muslim World* 102 (2012): 433–477, at 434.

second, God's hypostatic attributes. The section discussing God's essence (entitled "*al-naẓar fī dhāt Allāh taʿālā*" in the *Iqtiṣād* and "*fī maʿrifat dhāt Allāh taʿālā*" in the *Risāla*) includes ten points, such as the affirmation that He is eternal, incorporeal, visible—and, as the very first point, "His existence." This is followed by the section discussing God's hypostatic attributes (entitled "*fī al-ṣifāt*" in the *Iqtiṣād* and "*al-ʿilm bi-ṣifāt Allāh taʿālā*" in the *Risāla*), which include God's being powerful, knowing, and alive, among others. Strikingly, al-Ghazālī introduces his syllogism at the very beginning of the very first point he discusses in his investigation of God's essence, that is, in the subsection on God's existence. This of course gives the impression that al-Ghazālī intends to infer that God exists from his syllogism. It therefore looks as if he is concerned with a cosmological argument for God's existence. Yet, in assessing al-Ghazālī's objective, it should also be taken into account that—once more, strikingly—in the *Iqtiṣād*, al-Ghazālī adds the following after introducing the syllogism: "every originated thing has a cause for its origination. The world is originated. This means that it has a cause. And by 'the world' we mean every existent other than God (Most-High!) (*Allāh*), and by 'every existent other than God' we mean all bodies and their accidents." By defining the world in contradistinction to God, al-Ghazālī seems to postulate that reality consists of the world *and* God. It is questionable how he can be said to seek to prove that God indeed is part of reality by inferring His existence from the world's need for a creator when the world is defined as being that which is not God. It appears that God's existence is postulated before the conclusion of the syllogism is reached. This would then indicate that al-Ghazālī's syllogism has a different objective than to prove that God exists and is part of reality. It would, however, also raise the question of what al-Ghazālī means when he speaks of the investigation of "God's existence."

I propose that we are dealing with two related issues: first, al-Ghazālī employs the syllogism with the objective of establishing—just as his predecessors did before him—that the world, in being originated, depends on a cause (as the principle of causation entails). His objective in establishing this point is to *ascribe* it to God as His creation (whose existence is, as emphasised, taken for granted). The reason al-Ghazālī is eager to trace the originated world to God as its cause is this: it is part of the all-important doctrine of God's *tawḥīd*, which he seeks to defend. This link between the affirmation that God is creator of the whole world and the affirmation of His oneness and uniqueness is made explicit by al-Ghazālī in the *Risāla*. There, in the subsection in question on "knowledge of His (Most-High!) existence," shortly before the syllogism, al-Ghazālī quotes a number of Qur'anic verses. Among them are Q. 3:190, {There truly are signs in the creation of the heavens and earth, and in the alternation

of night and day, for those with understanding}, and Q. 71:15, {Have you ever wondered how God created seven heavens [...]}. He then comments:

> when one ponders over these signs [...] and reflects over the wonders contained in God's creation (*khalq Allāh*), whether in the earth or in the heavens [...], it cannot escape one that these wonders and wise arrangement (*tartīb*) cannot be without a creator who arranged them this way and an agent who decided that they should be this way [...]. This is why God (Most-High!) said, {Can there be any doubt about God, the Creator of the heavens and earth?} [i. e. Q. 14:10]. This is also why the prophets were sent, so that they would call creation to *tawḥīd* and creation would say, "there is no *ilāh* but God" (*lā ilāh illā Allāh*).

To this al-Ghazālī adds: "the human constitution (*fiṭrat al-insān*) and the evidence in the Qur'an can do without proof, but we follow the path of making things clear and take the scholars who engage in speculation as an example, so we say: the world is originated, hence it requires, in being originated, a cause."[538] The crucial point of these statements is that the affirmation of *tawḥīd*, which is the core of the message of all prophets, is understood as declaring God (*Allāh*) alone to be *ilāh*, which hinges on the insight that all things contain evidence of having been created and arranged *by Him alone*. This is precisely what the Qur'anic verses al-Ghazālī quotes allude to. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that the syllogism is linked but to this very objective. The syllogism has the same function of highlighting that the world is *God's* creation. The proof that God actually exist is the objective of neither the Qur'anic verses (as al-Ghazālī understands them), nor of the syllogism. The understanding of God's *tawḥīd* as here presented by al-Ghazālī is already familiar from the works of other *mutakallimūn* before him whom I have discussed in the previous chapters. It should be noted that, in his *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God*, Davidson mentions al-Ghazālī's reference to the aforementioned Qur'anic verses. He writes: "[a] simple teleological argument for the existence of God is put forward by Ghazali in one of his less technical works [...] which he describes as 'inborn' in man [...]. Ghazali begins by quoting passages from the Quran which contain the teleological theme."[539] In reading al-Ghazālī's mention of these Qur'anic verses as having the purpose of proving that God actually exists along the lines of a teleological argument, Davidson overlooks the significance, as I see it, of al-Ghazālī's explicit statement that their objective is to affirm God's uniqueness (*tawḥīd*) as creator and *ilāh*.

538 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla*, 383 – 384.
539 Davidson, *Proofs*, 226 – 227.

In addition to this, we are dealing with a second issue here: al-Ghazālī presents the science of *kalām* as being concerned with the investigation of God's essence and attributes. In the *Risāla*, al-Ghazālī repeatedly describes the purpose of this science as to make known "the essence of God and His attributes"[540] and he explains that "the investigation of God's essence and His attributes" is something *kalām* and the metaphysical branch of philosophy (*al-ilāhiyyāt*) have in common.[541] Like his predecessors, al-Ghazālī is evidently of the opinion that there is no way of describing what God's essence and His attributes are like other than by inferring this from God's role as creator. This is the familiar line of reasoning that God, in being beyond sense-observation, is knowable only insofar as His deeds point to His characteristics. God's deeds are nothing but the world, which is His creation. Consequently, it is necessary to trace the world to God as His creation in order to say something about His essence and attributes at all. It is precisely on the basis of the syllogism that this is established. Crucially, the investigation of God's essence and attributes is likewise linked to the objective of affirming God's *tawḥīd* and absolute oneness and uniqueness. This is nicely spelled out by al-Ghazālī in another *kalām* work of his, *al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, where he writes at the very beginning of the section entitled "On the essence" (*fī al-dhāt*): "we say: praise be to God who informs His servants through His revealed book by the tongue of His sent prophet that He is one and unique in His essence and that He has no associate (*sharīk*)."[542] Here, God's *tawḥīd* (and the rejection of its opposite, *shirk*) is linked to the fact that He is absolutely different from His creation, which is expressed as the absolute difference and uniqueness of His essence.

Both these aspects of God's *tawḥīd* (that is, His being the only *ilāh* as well as the uniqueness of His essence) depend on the syllogism, for it is the syllogism on the basis of which the world can be ascribed to God's creative activity. It is this purpose of the syllogism which al-Ghazālī refers to as establishing knowledge of "the existence of the lord" and "the existence of the creator," respectively, as this statement of his clarifies: "through this is known the existence of the creator, that is, by the syllogism we mentioned, which is: the world is originated, and every originated thing has a cause, therefore the world has a cause."

This, however, still leaves the question unanswered of what al-Ghazālī is after when he discusses "God's existence" as the first point of his enquiry into God's essence. The fact that the investigation of "God's existence" appears in

540 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla*, 54.
541 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Risāla*, 85.
542 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn fī al-ʿaqāʾid wa-asrār al-ʿibādāt wa'l-akhlāq* (Dimashq, Bayrūt: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1979), 17.

the section on God's essence is, in my view, actually indicative of what al-Ghazālī is concerned with. It is noteworthy that in discussing the divine characteristics, al-Ghazālī makes a point of differentiating some of them from others by dividing them in the two categories of essential and hypostatic attributes, respectively. For instance, God's being eternal (*qadīm*) is, in both the *Iqtiṣād* and the *Risāla*, included in the category of attributes referring to God's essence, not among the hypostatic attributes (that is, it is discussed in the section on God's essence (*dhāt*)). The categorisation of God's being eternal as an essential attribute is not a self-evident matter, but points to a choice on al-Ghazālī's part. For it should not be forgotten that the *mutakallimūn* before al-Ghazālī were not unanimous at all about the correct way of conceiving of the divine attributes (this being a matter al-Ghazālī himself alludes to in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* where he criticises the philosophers and Muʿtazilīs for denying that God's descriptions could refer to hypostatic entities subsisting in His essence). What is more, even those *mutakallimūn* who principally agreed about the differentiation of God's attributes into essential and hypostatic ones disagreed about the classification of particular attributes. This dispute is reported on by al-Ashʿarī in his *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, who states: "the followers of Ibn Kullāb disagreed whether God is eternal due to [the *maʿnā* of] eternity or not."[543] Al-Ghazālī for his part admonishes in the *Iqtiṣād*: "do not think that eternity (*al-qidam*) is a *maʿnā* in addition to the essence of the eternal!"[544] By including God's being eternal among the essential attributes, al-Ghazālī clarifies his stance in a debate with a long history. Importantly, the same discussion about the correct classification of God's attributes also pertains to God's description as being an existent. Al-Ashʿarī alludes to this debate when he presents the view that "His essence is He [...] and He is an existent not due to [the *maʿnā* of] existence."[545] What al-Ghazālī is concerned with when he discusses "God's existence" in the section on God's essence, I argue, is the question of how "existence" relates to God, that is, whether He is described as "an existent" due to an attribute of essence or a hypostatic attribute. Al-Ghazālī once more expresses his stance on this question, which is that God's being existent is different from His being, say, powerful

543 Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn wa-ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, al-juzʾ al-awwal wa'l-thānī (al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1969), 250. On Ibn Kullāb, see Josef van Ess, "Ibn Kullāb und die Miḥna," *Oriens* 18/19 (1965/1966): 92–142.

544 Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād*, 35.

545 Al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyīn*, 250. On the terms "*mawjūd*" and "*shayʾ*" in early *kalām*, see Robert Wisnovsky, "Notes on Avicenna's Concept of Thingness *(shayʾiyya)*," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 10 (2000): 181–221.

in that the former attribute refers to His very essence while the latter refers to a hypostatic entity inhering in His essence.[546]

Al-Ghazālī's discussion of God's existence as the first point of his investigation of God's essence is of significance in another respect as well. Not only does al-Ghazālī seem to want to make the point that existence in God is an essential, rather than a hypostatic attribute; he also seems to want to stress that it is correct to say of God that He is described by existence in the first place. The same could of course be said of all the other attributes al-Ghazālī elaborates on. The important point to consider, however, is that not all Islamic thinkers agreed that God should be described by any attributes at all. To mind come the Ismāʿīlīs whom al-Ghazālī derogatorily calls "*al-bāṭiniyya*" in his refutation of their beliefs, entitled *Faḍāʾiḥ al-bāṭiniyya* (*The Infamities of the Bāṭiniyya*) and written before the *Iqtiṣād* and the *Risāla*. In this work, he criticises their position that God "is described neither by existence nor by non-existence" for "they maintain that all the names are to be denied of Him," for fear of likening God to His creation (*tashbīh*).[547] Al-Ghazālī would certainly not have been the first *mutakallim* to criticise the Ismāʿīlīs for this doctrine of theirs. Other *mutakallimūn* presented their critique in a more open way than al-Ghazālī's arguably rather subtle critique in the *Iqtiṣād* and the *Risāla* (which every adherent of the Ismāʿīlī potion would, however, immedi-

546 In the *Risāla* (332–333), al-Ghazālī likewise stresses that "He is known, thanks to reason, in terms of existence when it comes to His essence," while emphasising that "He does not resemble another existent and no existent resembles Him—nothing is like Him [compare Q. 42:11]." Binyamin Abrahamov ("Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on the Knowability of God's Essence and Attributes," *Arabica*, T. 49, Fasc. 2 (2002): 204–230, at 207) has suggested the following: "note that al-Ġazālī includes a discussion of God's existence in his views on God's essence. Possibly these echo Ibn Sīnā's thesis that states, unlike created beings, in God there is no difference between essence and existence." I beg to differ on this point, for it should not be forgotten that for Ashʿarī *mutakallimūn*, such as al-Ghazālī, essence and existence are the same also in the case of created beings. They assume that reality consists of four types of essences/existence: accidents, atoms, bodies, and finally God. On Ashʿarī ontology, see Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroës and Aquinas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958), Chapter "The Islamic Account of the Metaphysics of Atoms and Accidents" (33–43); Richard M. Frank, "The Ashʿarite Ontology I: Primary Entities," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9/2 (1999): 163–231; "Bodies and Atoms: The Ashʿarite Analysis," in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, ed. Michael E. Marmura (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 39–53.

547 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Faḍāʾiḥ al-Bāṭiniyya*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (Miṣr: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 1964), 39. On dating the *Faḍāʾiḥ*, see Hourani, "Revised Chronology," 293. Paul E. Walker ("The Ismaili Vocabulary of Creation," *Studia Islamica* 40 (1974): 75–85, at 83) writes about the Ismāʿīlī 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."

ately have understood, I should add). Al-Ghazālī's teacher, al-Juwaynī, for instance, has a section in his *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn* entitled "On the proof of the existence of the eternal (Most-High!)" in which he criticises the Ismāʿīlīs openly. He writes: "the first aspect by which [God's] attributes have to be introduced is the clarification of the proofs of the existence of the eternal (Most-High!) (*wujūd al-qadīm*)." He 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* [...]. They prohibit describing the creator with existence and non-existence. [...] We will now clarify the favoured paths that lead to the knowledge of the existence of the creator (*wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*)."[548] When al-Juwaynī here speaks of the proofs of the existence of the creator, it is important to recognise that he does not mean by it what al-Ghazālī means when he speaks of the *mutakallim*'s endeavour to establish knowledge of the existence of the creator. Al-Juwaynī only ever speaks of "the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator" (*ithbāt al-ʿilm bi'l-ṣāniʿ*) (not of the *existence* of the creator) when he refers to the proof that the world, in being creation, depends on an outside cause, so as to ascribe it to God as His work. In the present context, al-Juwaynī's mention of the proof of the existence of the creator refers to the endeavour to show—as he himself makes it quite clear—that God is to be described as an existent, and that the Ismāʿīlīs are wrong in maintaining that this would entail likening God to created things which are also described as existents. It is noteworthy that al-Juwaynī, like his disciple, treats God's being an existent as an attribute of His, and in fact introduces the discussion of the divine attributes with it.

The conclusion that can be drawn from all the preceding points I have discussed is this: even though it is indeed striking that al-Ghazālī speaks of the endeavour to attain knowledge of "God's existence," and even though he clearly links this endeavour with the syllogism which establishes that the world depends on a cause, it would be mistaken to read al-Ghazālī as expressing his objective of proving God's existence along the lines of a cosmological argument. His reference to "God's existence" denotes something entirely different than what it denotes in arguments for God's existence, as has become clear.

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548 Abū 'l-Maʿālī ʿAbd al-Malik b. Yūsuf al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn* (al-Iskandariyya: Munshaʾāt al-Maʿārif, 1969), 609. Compare al-Shahrastānī's statement in his *Nihāyat al-iqdām* on those who divest God of His attributes (*taʿṭīl*): "some of the learned people are reported to have said: He is He, and we do not call Him existent and not non-existent [...]. This belief is ascribed to the *Ghāliyya* of the Shīʿa and the *Bāṭiniyya*"; Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāyat al-iqdām fī ʿilm al-kalām (The Summa Philosophiae of al-Shahrastānī)*, ed. with a translation from manuscripts in the libraries of Oxford, Paris, and Berlin by Alfred Guillaume (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 128 (of the Arabic text).

9 Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Rushd (d. 595/1198)

9.1 Ibn Rushd's *Kashf ʿan manāhij al-adilla* and the Proof of God's Existence

It is immediately evident that Ibn Rushd's *Kashf*, even though written by the hand of an adherent of *falsafa*, belongs to the genre of *kalām* works.[549] This is manifest not only in the structure and arrangement of its chapters, but also in the topics and problems discussed as well as the language and terminology used, which are all reminiscent of *kalām* manuals. This appears less surprising when bearing in mind that Ibn Rushd intended the *Kashf* as a critique of the discipline of *kalām* and its methods, and in particular the Ashʿarī *mutakallimūn* whom he repeatedly charges with engaging in speculative discussions which are not based on sound arguments and have a bad influence on the common people who end up in utter confusion about religious matters.[550] Not settling for a mere critique of the *mutakallimūn*, Ibn Rushd proffers his own views on the matters he discusses.

Seeing that the *Kashf* follows the lead of *kalām* manuals, it is not surprising either that Ibn Rushd should begin his remarks about God with the affirmation of the creator. He writes:[551]

> I will begin by explaining what the lawgiver (*al-shāriʿ*) intended the masses to believe regarding God (Most-High!), and [by explaining] the methods which he laid down for them in the honourable book [i.e. the Qur'an]. We will begin with the knowledge of the method by which the existence of the creator (*wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*) is known, for this is the first item of knowledge which humans (lit. *al-mukallaf*) have to know.

As opposed to the majority of the *mutakallimūn*, however, in Ibn Rushd's *Kashf*, the question about the originatedness of the world *follows* the affirmation of the creator and is not made its foundation. The reason for this might be sought in the fact that Ibn Rushd, the philosopher, does not share the *mutakallimūn*'s interpretation of the Qur'anic account of creation as pointing to the world's past-finiteness. In agreement with Ibn Sīnā, he instead holds that the world is co-eternal with God who is the cause of its existence. Thus, even though Ibn Rushd makes

549 Taneli Kukkonen ("Averroes and the Teleological Argument," *Religious Studies* 38/4 (2002): 405–428, at 406) characterises it as "a work of rational theology."
550 Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf ʿan manāhij al-adilla fī ʿaqāʾid al-milla*, ed. Maḥmūd ʿAbid al-Jābirī (Bayrūt: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1998), 103 and 107.
551 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 101.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-010

use of the same terminology as the *mutakallimūn*, such as when he describes the world as "created by God"[552] (*maṣnūʿ li'llāh*), he associates different concepts with these terms. This becomes clear not only in the *Kashf*, but also in the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (Ibn Rushd's response to al-Ghazālī's attack on the philosophers in the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*), and even more fully in his *Faṣl al-maqāl*.[553] This explains why Ibn Rushd does not follow the *mutakallimūn* in making the originatedness of the world—in particular in their understanding of the term *ḥudūth*—the basis of the affirmation of the creator. In fact, it is the method championed by the Ashʿarīs he criticises severely in the *Kashf*, as shall be seen. Nevertheless, Ibn Rushd evidently follows the same idea as the *mutakallimūn* when he, too, bases knowledge about God on His role as creator of the world ("we will begin with the knowledge of the method by which the existence of the creator is known")—involving a different understanding of creation, however, as noted. Yet, despite criticising the *mutakallimūn* and their method to affirm the creator, Ibn Rushd is agreed with them that it is reasoning and speculation which lead to knowledge about questions of a theological and metaphysical nature. He, thus, castigates the arch-traditionalists or *al-Ḥashwiyya*, as Ibn Rushd derogatorily refers to them, for their principle that "revelation (*al-samʿ*), not reason (*al-ʿaql*)" is the prescribed way to attaining knowledge of God. Ibn Rushd for his part holds that "this devious group evidently does not understand the intention of scripture (*al-sharʿ*)" which urges people to revert to "rational proofs" (*adilla ʿaqliyya*).[554] The Ṣūfīs are met with the same criticism on the part of Ibn Rushd for their belief that "knowledge of God and other existents is something cast in the soul when one detaches oneself from them (*ʿinda tajrīdihā*)."

552 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 161.

553 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 therefore call it eternal, while the theologians emphasise more its originated aspect and therefore call it originated; Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-maqāl: Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy, a Translation, with Introduction and Notes, of Ibn Rushd's* Kitāb faṣl al-maqāl, *with its Appendix* (Ḍamīma) *and an Extract from* Kitāb al-kashf ʿan manāhij al-adilla *by George F. Hourani* (London: Luzac, 1961), 55–56. 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, see Oliver Leaman, *Averroes and his Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 42–45; Barry S. Kogan, *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 205–207.

554 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 101–102.

They, too, fail to see that "the Qur'an only calls to speculation (*naẓar*) and reasoning (*iʿtibār*)."[555]

In any case, the position encountered in the secondary academic literature is that what Ibn Rushd intends to say when he discusses the various methods employed by different groups to attain knowledge of "the existence of the creator" is that all theological investigation about God has to start with the proof of God's existence. This point has been made by Taneli Kukkonen in his article "Averroes and the Teleological Argument." He writes:[556]

> [a]s the full title of the *Kitâb al-kashf* indicates [...], the book is a work of rational theology written with the aim of prescribing the way in which the fundamental truths of faith are to be conveyed [...]. 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.

Similarly, Majid Fakhry writes in his introduction to Ibrahim Y. Najjar's translation of the *Kashf*: "[the *Kashf*] opens with a chapter on the demonstration of God's existence."[557] Herbert A. Davison, in his *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God*, states that in the *Kashf* Ibn Rushd discusses "the proper method of teaching fundamental truths, particularly the existence and unity of God, to nonphilosophers. Methods whereby different theological schools and especially the Kalam sought to establish the existence and unity of God are passed in review."[558]

The arguments Ibn Rushd presents "with which revelation has called all people, despite their different natures, to affirm the existence of the creator" have been studied and discussed extensively in the secondary academic literature.[559] It is well-known that Ibn Rushd singles out two methods which he

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555 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 117. Ibn Rushd, however, acknowledges that their method is valid, but he points out that it is not suitable for the majority of people: "we say: even if this method [of the Ṣūfīs] is valid (*in salamnā wujūdahā*), it is not made for the people. If this method were the one intended [by scripture] for the people, the method of reason would be false and futile."

556 Kukkonen, "Averroes," 406.

557 Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Rushd, *Faith and Reason in Islam: Averroes' Exposition of Religious Arguments. Al-Kashf ʿan manāhij al-adilla fī ʿaqāʾid al-milla*, trans. with footnotes, index, and bibliography by Ibrahim Y. Najjar (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), 4.

558 Herbert A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 229.

559 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 118. See, for instance, Kukkonen, "Averroes"; Ibrahim Y. Najjar, "Ibn Rushd's Theory of Rationality," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 16, Averroës and the Rational Legacy in the East and West (1996): 191–216, especially 204–207; Davidson, *Proofs*, 229–231; Samuel Nirenstein, "The Problem of the Existence of God in Maimonides, Alanus and Averroes. A

calls the *dalīl al-ʿināya* and the *dalīl al-ikhtirāʿ* and which he argues are the arguments favoured by scripture itself. He writes:

> the first of the two is the method which rests on [the notion of] providence (*al-ʿināya*) for humans and the creation of all existents for the sake of providence—let us, then, call it *dalīl al-ʿināya*. The second method rests on the evident traces of creation (*mā yaẓhar min ikhtirāʿ*) found in existent things, such as the creation of life in what is inanimate and of perceptions based on the senses and reason—let us, then, call it *dalīl al-ikhtirāʿ*.

Ibn Rushd continues to explain that the *dalīl al-ʿināya* rests on two premises. The first states that "all existents in this world are beneficial (*muwāfiqa*) for the existence of humans;" the second states that "this benefit has to come from an agent who intends and wills it (*fāʿil qāṣid li-dhālik murīd*)."[560] The *dalīl al-ikhtirāʿ*, in turn, rests on two premises, which are that "these existents are created"—an item of knowledge Ibn Rushd considers to be self-evident (*maʿrūf bi-nafsihi*), pointing to certain Qur'anic verses—and that "every created thing has a creator." It follows from these two premises that "the existent has an agent who created it."[561] (Ibn Rushd, thus, evidently follows the tradition of presenting arguments for the creator in the form of a syllogism.)

In the secondary academic literature we read, as alluded to, that "the substance of both arguments put forward in the *Kitâb al-kashf* is teleological," exhibiting the characteristics of "an argument from design," as Kukkonen has suggested.[562] Davidson has described Ibn Rushd's *dalīl al-ʿināya* and *dalīl al-ikhtirāʿ* as "two proofs for the existence of God which can be extracted from the Quran—the simplified cosmological argument and the teleological argument."[563] Anke von Kügelgen has suggested: "[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-iḫtirāʿ*), ist ein vereinfachter, mit dem ersten Argument ver-

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Study in the Religious Philosophy of the Twelfth Century," *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, New Series 14/4 (1924): 395–454, especially 440–441.

560 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 118. Note that, in the case of the *dalīl al-ʿināya*, Ibn Rushd does not actually state the conclusion which follows from both premises, which would be that these existents are due to an agent. 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, see George F. Hourani, "Averroes on Good and Evil," *Studia Islamica* 16 (1962): 13–40; Leaman, *Averroes*, 155–156.

561 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 118–119.

562 Kukkonen, "Averroes," 405 and 408.

563 Davidson, *Proofs*, 230.

zahnter kosmologischer Beweis."[564] Fakhry writes that "Averroes proposes two [...] proofs for the existence of God, that of providence and that of invention."[565] Elsewhere, he points out that Ibn Rushd's two proofs are hence of a nature distinct from the "cosmological arguments of Ibn Sīnā and the theologians in general."[566]

It is noteworthy that in the section where Ibn Rushd discusses "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,"[567] he also occasionally mentions "the existence of God" (*wujūd Allāh*). This is the case where Ibn Rushd deals with the *Ḥashwiyya* who "say that the method to know the existence of God is revelation." For them, "[simple] belief (*īmān*) in His existence [...] is sufficient" without the requirement of proof.[568] It is also with a view to attaining knowledge of the existence of God that Ibn Rushd condemns the *Ḥashwiyya*'s approach as being inconsistent with that intended by scripture.[569] The existence of God is likewise mentioned in relation to the Ashʿarī position that reason (*al-ʿaql*) is the sole basis of its affirmation ("assent to God's existence occurs only by reason").[570] 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 has it—Qur'anic methods which he describes as "the straight path by which God called the people to knowledge of His existence."[571] These instances of Ibn Rushd mentioning "the existence of God" are noteworthy in that he evidently links them to the endeavour to establish "the existence of the creator." This was not encountered in the works of the majority of *mutakallimūn* discussed in the preceding chapter: neither did they speak of the *existence of the creator*, nor did they speak of methods by which *God's existence* could be known. It was only with

564 Anke von Kügelgen, *Averroes und die Arabische Moderne: Ansätze zu einer Neubegründung des Rationalismus im Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 403.

565 Fakhry's introduction in Ibn Rushd, *Faith and Reason in Islam*, 6.

566 Majid Fakhry, "The Ontological Argument in the Arabic Tradition: The Case of al-Fārābi [*sic*]," *Studia Islamica* 64 (1986): 5–17, at 10. See also Hans Daiber, *Das theologisch-philosophische System des Muʿammar ibn ʿAbbād as-Sulamī* (*gest. 830 n. Chr.*), Beiruter Texte und Studien, herausgegeben vom Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, Band 19 (Beirut, Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1975), 160, who briefly mentions Ibn Rushd: "Auch Ibn Rušd benutzt den teleologischen Gottesbeweis (neben dem kosmologischen): Die Zweckmäßigkeit der Natur beweist für ihn die Existenz der göttlichen Vorsehung."

567 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 122.

568 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 101.

569 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 102.

570 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 103.

571 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 121.

al-Ghazālī, as seen in the previous chapter, that a change of terminology became apparent, and he did indeed speak of the proof of the *existence of the creator*. Yet, it also became clear that, despite this change in terminology, he did not intend to prove anything other than generations of *mutakallimūn* before him: he, too, was concerned with *ascribing* the world to God, rather than proving that God actually exists, along the lines of a cosmological argument. Al-Ghazālī was also the first of the thinkers investigated in this book who spoke of *God's existence* in the context of the affirmation of the existence of the creator (to the exception of al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, perhaps, whom I will return to a little later). Al-Ghazālī's concern in proving God's existence had, however, nothing to do with the objective of arguments for God's existence, as became clear. Ibn Rushd's speaking of methods to attain knowledge of the existence of the creator as well as God's existence are, hence, at least reminiscent of al-Ghazālī—and this raises the question of what Ibn Rushd for his part seeks to prove: is he, as suggested in the secondary academic literature, indeed concerned with proving that reality comprises of one more entity than just the entities making up this world, and that God in fact exists? Or might it be the case that his concerns are not so different from those of his predecessors? And if the latter should be the case, what does he then mean when he speaks of the endeavour to prove "the existence of the creator" as well as "God's existence"?

In attempting an answer to these questions, the following should also be noted: in addition to his mentioning "the existence of the creator" as well as "God's existence," Ibn Rushd also speaks, in a few places, of the more general "knowledge of God." In the context of his discussion of the appropriate method leading to the affirmation of the creator, Ibn Rushd notes that "the famous methods of the Ashʿarīs to arrive at knowledge of God (*maʿrifat Allāh*) are neither certain methods from the viewpoint of speculation (*naẓariyya*), nor are they certain methods from the viewpoint of revelation (*sharʿiyya*),"[572] and they should therefore be avoided. Rather, "the [true] method [leading] to knowledge of God (*maʿrifat Allāh*)," that is, the two Qur'anic kinds of proof, "is much clearer" than theirs.[573] The Ṣūfī method of attaining "knowledge of God" (*al-maʿrifa bi'llāh*) is likewise deemed unsuitable for the masses by Ibn Rushd, as noted above.[574]

572 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 116.
573 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 107.
574 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 117.

9.2 The Meaning of "the Existence of the Creator"

As seen before, there are a number of instances in the section on "the affirmation of the creator" where Ibn Rushd speaks of "the existence of the creator" (*wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*). When considering a number of other passages in the *Kashf* where Ibn Rushd also speaks of "the existence of the creator" (not however as part of his discussion of the affirmation of the creator but in other contexts), it becomes clear that he employs this phrase in a different way than it is used in cosmological arguments for God's existence. In attempting to establish what Ibn Rushd means when he speaks of the *existence* of the creator, it is crucial to note that, in places, he makes use of the word "*wujūd*" or "existence" in a way that has nothing to do with the dichotomy between existence and non-existence known from arguments for God's existence—that is to say, in his use of the word "*wujūd*," it sometimes refers to something different than the question of whether an entity or a thing exists and is part of reality, or whether it does not exist. In cosmological arguments, to affirm the existence of a creator means affirming that reality comprises of more than the entities making up the world. In Ibn Rushd, the reference to the *existence* of the creator oftentimes denotes something different. This observation highlights the need of being careful about the precise meaning of a phrase or expression, especially since different languages express ideas differently.

The first instance drawing attention to this is the following: at the beginning of the section dealing with "the affirmation of the creator," Ibn Rushd discusses and criticises the Ashʿarī method of attaining knowledge of God. There, he explains: "their well-known method rests on clarifying that the world is originated [...]. If we assume that the world is originated, then it is necessary, they say, that is has a maker and originator." Ibn Rushd then comments on their method, calling into question its effectiveness: "but regarding the *existence* of this originator (*wujūd hādha al-muḥdith*), doubts arise which the science of *kalām* cannot dispel: we cannot establish whether this originator is eternal or originated" (my emphasis).[575] This passage contains an instance where the *existence* of the creator evidently does not refer to the affirmation that reality comprises of an entity who is creator. Rather, here, Ibn Rushd's reference to the *existence* of the originator refers to the question about the *classification* of the existence that belongs to the originator, for his existence could be eternal or originated. (The same could, of course, be asked of the existence of just any entity that is part of cre-

575 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 103.

ated reality: is the existence that belongs to an atom or a body, for instance, characterised as eternal or originated?)

There is another passage where Ibn Rushd also speaks of "the existence of the creator," but where he does not have in mind the question about the existence versus non-existence of an entity (as would be the case in the cosmological arguments that ask, "Does God exist?"), nor the aforementioned classification of existence as either eternal or originated. This passage appears in a section where Ibn Rushd criticises the belief that God has a body (*jism*) and where he defends His incorporeality. There, he states that most people (*al-jumhūr*) affirm for the *ghā'ib*, the invisible realm, what they know from the *shāhid*, the observable realm. He then gives an example which clarifies this point—and it is this example which is of relevance for us. With regards to the attribute of knowledge (*'ilm*), they argue: "if it is a condition for the existence of the creator (*wujūd al-ṣāni'*) in the *shāhid*, then it is [also] a condition for the existence of the creator (*wujūd al-ṣāni'*) in the *ghā'ib*."[576] It seems evident that when Ibn Rushd states that knowledge is a condition for "the existence of the creator" in the observable world, he does not want to say that the question of whether some entity exists or not depends on whether this entity has knowledge. To put it differently, Ibn Rushd's statement makes it clear that he makes a distinction between the *description of an entity* as "creator" and the question of whether said *entity itself* exists or not. This means that, according to the above reasoning, to deny knowledge for humans would mean that humans cannot be described or identified as "creators" (for no one could be said to be a creator unless they possess knowledge), but the denial of knowledge has absolutely nothing to do with the question of whether humans (the entities in question) are part of reality or not—in fact, their existence is presupposed in this discussion. In consequence, thus the reasoning goes, it could not be said of any entity belonging to the realm of the *ghā'ib* (in the present context, of course, God) that it is described and affirmed as "creator" unless said entity is also said to possess knowledge. The way in which Ibn Rushd uses the expression in question (that is, "the existence of the creator") indicates that the affirmation of "the existence of the creator" for the *ghā'ib* has nothing to do with the question of whether God exists or not—rather it pertains to one of God's attributes. It might well sound strange to our ears that "the affirmation of the existence of the creator" does *not* refer to the question of whether an entity in addition to the world, who is the world's creator, exists or not—yet, this is nevertheless the way in which Ibn Rushd expresses himself.

576 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 147.

The same conclusion suggests itself when taking into account the following: in a section belonging to the chapter on God's acts, Ibn Rushd attacks the Ashʿarī position of occasionalism and their rejection of efficient causality other than through God. There, he admonishes: "when denying causes (*asbāb*) in the *shāhid*, no way remains to affirm an efficient cause (*sabab fāʿil)* for the *ghāʾib*, for verdicts about the *ghāʾib* can only be made on the basis of verdicts about the *shāhid*." If the principle of causation is denied for the *shāhid*, and if in consequence "they cannot acknowledge that every act has an agent," it follows that "they have no way to know God," for the very foundation of attaining knowledge about the *ghāʾib* is removed. Ibn Rushd then concludes that "the denial of the existence of the agent (*nafī wujūd al-fāʿil*) in the *shāhid*" presents the adherents of occasionalism with a serious problem "for the existence of the agent (*wujūd al-fāʿil*) in the *shāhid* is the basis for the inference of the existence of the agent (*wujūd al-fāʿil*) in the *ghāʾib*."[577] Ibn Rushd is undoubtedly concerned with making the point that one encounters unresolvable challenges with declaring God an efficient cause and agent, if agency is denied for humans. Importantly, this passage, like the one discussed above, makes it clear that "the affirmation of the existence of the agent" as well as "the denial of the existence of the agent" must be distinguished from the question about the existence of *entities*, that is, humans in the *shāhid* who might or might not be declared agents, and the existence of God in the *ghāʾib*. To deny "agents" for the *shāhid* does not mean, in Ibn Rushd's use of the phrase, to deny *entities* in the *shāhid*—rather, it means that said entities (that is, humans) cannot be *described* as "agents." In the same way, the denial of an agent for the *ghāʾib* does not amount to denying God's very existence or assuming that all there is, is the observable world. It simply means that God cannot be *described* by the attribute "agent."

Taken together with these indications, there are several other indications, I suggest, that Ibn Rushd's proofs for "the existence of the creator" do not have the objective of establishing that another entity, in addition to the world, exists so as to prove God's existence. For instance, there is Ibn Rushd's remark that the *dalīl al-ʿināya* serves to establish "one who intends and wills it [i.e. the world]" (*qāṣid qaṣadahu wa-murīd arādahu*), to which he adds: "and this is God (*huwa Allāh*)."[578] Likewise, the *dalīl al-ikhtirāʿ*, the other of the two Qur'anic methods, Ibn Rushd explains, involves reflection about inanimate bodies in which life appears and from which humans know that "there is one who brings

577 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 193.
578 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 163.

about (*mūjid*) life in them, and this is God (*huwa Allāh*)."[579] I propose that statements such as these are indicative of Ibn Rushd's objective of *ascribing* the creation of the world to God. The statement "and this is God" points to the objective of crediting none but God, whose existence is taken for granted, with the purposeful creation of life in inanimate objects. (Ibn Rushd's concern is, hence, the same as when I were to point out that this book in front of you necessarily has an author and when I were to add, "and this is me." Just as I want to make the point that this book is to be ascribed to me as *my* work (rather than to someone else), Ibn Rushd wants to make the point that the world is *God's* handiwork.)

In the secondary academic literature, this reading is not shared. Fakhry, for instance, faithfully reproduces the way Ibn Rushd presents the *dalīl al-ikhtirāʿ* 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,"[580] but he nevertheless interprets the whole argument, and thus also the reference to God in "who is God," as being a cosmological argument for God's existence. 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."[581] In Fakhry and Kukkonen's view, Ibn Rushd's adding "and this is God" does not indicate his objective of identifying none but God as the creator of the world. Rather, their reading of his arguments seems to follow Aquinas' logic in his own arguments for God's existence put forward in the *Summa Theologica* (which I have discussed in the Introduction). Especially Kukkonen's analysis of Ibn Rushd's argument bears witness to this: Kukkonen seems to understand the term "God" both as something like the proper name of God Himself ("the fact of *God's* fashioning the world") as well as something like a title or role which might, theoretically, be shared by several entities ("we have *a God*"). Furthermore, he seems to hold that the name "God" derives from the title "God," and that this title "God" is but a shorthand for "creator and maker of the world" ("that we have a [...] maker [...] means that we have a God"). In this, Kukkonen appears to follow Aquinas who, in one of his Five Ways, introduces into existence another entity by arguing that the world requires an efficient cause, and concludes that "it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause [outside and in addition to the world], to which everyone gives the name of God."[582] Kukkonen, hence, seems to read

579 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 119.

580 Fakhry's introduction in Ibn Rushd, *Faith and Reason in Islam*, 6.

581 Kukkonen, "Averroes," 406–407.

582 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, quoted in John Hick, *The Existence of God: A Reader Edited with an Introduction by John Hick* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1964), 82–85.

Ibn Rushd as arguing that an entity in addition to the world needs to be affirmed who is its creator, and since being "the creator of the world" is captured by the term "God," Ibn Rushd has proven God's existence—whom he then gives the name "*Allāh*." Yet, even if Aquinas' conclusion indeed sounds very similar to Ibn Rushd's when he concludes "there is one who brings about life in them, and this is God," I have argued that, and explained how, their objective fundamentally differs. Essentially, Ibn Rushd and Aquinas give a similar sounding answer to different questions.

Ibn Rushd's endeavour, as I see it, of *identifying* and *describing* God as creator of the world also becomes apparent in the following discussion in the *Kashf*. Importantly, this discussion is directly linked to the all-important affirmation of the existence of the creator. At the beginning of the section dealing with the affirmation of the creator Ibn Rushd defends, as noted above, reasoning and speculation as a necessary prerequisite for knowledge of God against the champions of *taqlīd* (blind acceptance of tenets from authorities). There, he relates the position of the *Ḥashwiyya* who argue that reason may not be declared the basis of correct belief. They argue that "all the Arabs accepted the existence of the creator" before the Prophet invited them to consider the rational proofs of the Qur'an (*rational* proofs according to the *mutakallimūn*, that is). This means that rational proofs and reasoning cannot be declared a condition for belief. In support of their position the arch-traditionalists refer to the Qur'an itself, as Ibn Rushd relates, where "God Himself said: {If you ask them who created the heavens and the earth, they are sure to say, 'God' (*Allāh*)} [i.e. Q. 31:25]."[583] As I have argued above, here, too, the focus is on the question of who is to be credited with having brought the world into existence ("*who* created…?"). Since the Arabs, according to the *Ḥashwiyya*, considered God (*Allāh*) to be the creator of the world anyway (as indicated by the Qur'an itself), there was no need for the Prophet to come forward with rational proofs for "the existence of the creator." What the *Ḥashwiyya* are after is, of course, that this invalidates the *mutakallimūn*'s claim that belief is to be based on reason and rational arguments—yet, for our purposes it is important to note that the *Ḥashwiyya*'s argument makes it clear that the objective of the affirmation of the creator as well as the proof for the existence of the creator is to establish that the world is to be *ascribed* to God, and not to prove that God actually exists. Despite this, Samuel Nirenstein has interpreted this dis-

583 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 102. On the application of the label "*ḥashwiyya*" to individuals and groups, see A.S. Halkin, "The Ḥashwiyya," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 54/1 (1934): 1–28.

pute between the *Ḥashwiyya* and the *mutakallimūn* to be about the proof and provability of God's existence, as this quote shows:[584]

> [t]he existence of God, and the other principles, according to the Ḥashwiyya, must not be subjected to rational investigation; they are commanded by Authority, and this is sufficient to insure their truth. In other worlds, they deny that the Existence of God can be demonstrated by the human intellect. This view can easily be refuted, since the Koran itself enjoins the speculative consideration of His Existence (Sur. II, 19 et al.). "If so", one may ask, "why did not the Prophet give a philosophical demonstration of the Existence of the creator, before he called men to His service?" The answer to this is evident. All Arabs believe in God instinctively, and it was not necessary for the Prophet to establish this truth for them.

This quote is exemplary for the tendency in the secondary academic literature, repeatedly addressed in this book, to equate the proof of the (existence of the) creator with the proof of God's existence. While this describes the logic of cosmological arguments, it is not, as I have argued, what the Islamic thinkers discussed in this book are after, and this once more draws attention to the importance of recognising that one language might express an idea differently than another language.

Finally, it should be noted that in the section on God's acts, more precisely in the section dealing with the question of whether the world is creation, Ibn Rushd explains:[585]

> the method by which revelation teaches the masses (*al-jumhūr*) that the world is produced by God (*maṣnūʿ li'llāh*) (Most-High!) is that, if you ponder over the signs which contain this aspect [i.e. being produced], you will find that this method is the method based on providence (*al-ʿināya*). This is one of the methods which we described as proving the existence of the creator (*wujūd al-khāliq*).

It is noteworthy that here Ibn Rushd clearly states that the purpose of the *dalīl al-ʿināya* is to prove "the existence of the creator," which is nothing else than to prove that "the world is produced by God (*maṣnūʿ li'llāh*)." This underscores what I have argued above, namely that the proof of the existence of the creator has no other objective than to *ascribe* the world to God and, thereby, to assign the attribute "creator" to God. According to Ibn Rushd, the *dalīl al-ʿināya* proves both things at the same time: it is the method of giving an answer to the question of whether the world is creation or not, and it is the method of giving an answer to the question of whether the world depends on God. This is clear from the fol-

584 Nirenstein, "The Problem of the Existence of God," 431–432.
585 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 162.

lowing: in the present context, Ibn Rushd presents the *dalīl al-ʿināya* in a slightly different form than in the previous section on the affirmation of the creator. The first premise still refers to the world's beneficial nature, yet the second premise now states that "everything beneficial [...] is necessarily produced," while it previously appeared as "this benefit necessarily comes from an agent." The conclusion following from these two principles is of course that this world is produced —this being precisely what Ibn Rushd intends to establish in the present section on the question of the createdness of the world—but this is not where he ends and he therefore adds: "from these two premises it follows that the world is created *and* that it has a creator" (my emphasis). This is the case as "the proofs based on providence (*dalāla al-ʿināya*) prove both things together, and they are therefore the noblest proofs for the existence of the creator."[586] It is here important to bear in mind that when Ibn Rushd discusses whether the world is "creation" he is not concerned with the question of whether the world has an origin in time or is eternal. This is not a matter scripture deals with, as he states in the *Kashf*, which addresses itself to the masses. Rather, the world's being "creation" is maintained against the alternative that is exists by chance: "know that what revelation wants to be known about the world is that it is created by God (Most-High!) (*maṣnūʿ bi'llāh wa-mukhtaraʿ lahu*), and that it does not exist due to chance (*ittifāq*) and by itself (*min nafsihi*)."[587] A little later he states: "the world is created (*maṣnūʿ*) [...]. It would not be possible for these benefits to exist in it, if its existence [i.e. of the world] were not due to a creator, but if it were due to chance (*ittifāq*)."[588] The reason why Ibn Rushd calls the proofs based on providence "the noblest proofs" is that this method refers to a single characteristic about the world—its beneficial nature—to prove the *two* aspects mentioned above (that is, the world's being produced *and* its depending on a creator), which are in reality like two sides of one coin: being produced *means* depending on a creator, and depending on a creator *means* being produced. This highlights the superiority of Ibn Rushd's proof—which is the Qur'anic method of argumentation—over the proofs employed by other *mutakallimūn*. In Ibn Rushd's view, the proofs employed by the *mutakallimūn* to ascribe the world to God as His product 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.

586 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 163.
587 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 161.
588 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 163.

9.3 The Meaning of "the Existence of God"

After having clarified what Ibn Rushd means when he speaks of the proof of "the existence of the creator," it remains to be seen whether he might not still be concerned with the proof of God's existence, for it has been seen that he does in fact speak of "the method leading to knowledge of the existence of God (*wujūd Allāh*)" and criticises the Ashʿarīs for claiming that "assent to the existence of God (Most-High!) (*al-taṣdīq bi-wujūd Allāh*) is only by reason."[589] The question then is what Ibn Rushd refers to when he speaks of "the existence of God." Does he, in the present context, refer to the question of whether God exists or not, and how this could be established, as cosmological and other arguments for God's existence seek to do? Or might he refer to something different when he speaks of methods to know of "God's existence"?

It is possible to gain an idea of what Ibn Rushd refers to when taking into account that his discussion of "the affirmation of the creator" and "the method leading to knowledge of the existence of God" are located in the very first section of the *Kashf* which is entitled "On the essence" (*fī al-dhāt*). The place where his discussion is located is, in my estimation, significant, but its implications have not been considered in the secondary academic literature. Ibn Rushd divides his entire investigation pertaining to God into three main sections: the first one deals, as noted, with God's essence; the second with His hypostatic attributes; and the third with His deeds. This approach and structure are of course not uncharacteristic of other *kalām* works written before Ibn Rushd's time, and it is particularly reminiscent of al-Ghazālī's approach in *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād* and *al-Risāla al-qudsiyya* who first discussed God's essence and then turned to the hypostatic divine attributes. In Ibn Rushd's *Kashf*, the section dealing with God's essence contains, besides the discussion of the affirmation of the creator, one more subsection which deals with "God's oneness and uniqueness" (*al-waḥdāniyya*). God's oneness is the first thing Ibn Rushd demonstrates after he has established that there is a link between the produced world and God as its producer. Ibn Rushd explicitly emphasises that knowledge about God's oneness pertains to nothing other than God's very essence in the following section on God's attributes which he begins with a discussion of how God's attributes relate to His essence. There he points out that God's attribute or description of being one and unique constitute a so-called "*ṣifa nafsiyya*" or "essential attribute" (the same is true for His description as eternal), and it is thereby different from the other class of divine attributes, the "*ṣifāt maʿnawiyya*" or "hypostatic

589 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 101 and 103.

attributes." "By the essential attribute," Ibn Rushd explains, "I mean that with which the essence is described due to itself, not due to the subsistence of a hypostatic entity (*maʿnā*) in it, in addition to the essence, like when we say: one and eternal."[590] The other divine attributes of knowledge, power, will, life, speech, hearing, and sight are discussed by Ibn Rushd in the following main section entitled "On the attributes." He, thus, follows the approach of the Ashʿarī *mutakallimūn*, as opposed to that of the Muʿtazilīs, who famously held that these seven attributes subsist in God's essence and must, therefore, be treated differently than His essential attributes. Ibn Rushd in fact refers to the Ashʿarī position and explains that they consider these seven attributes to be "in addition to the essence" (*zāʾida ʿalā al-dhāt*), that is, as *ṣifāt maʿnawiyya*. Interestingly, despite his following the Ashʿarīs in the way he discusses the attributes in the *Kashf*, Ibn Rushd hints at his own position vis-à-vis the classification of the divine attributes, and he expresses his critique of the Ashʿarī approach. He thus remarks: "when these people hold that He (Praised be He!) is an essence and attributes in addition to the essence, they come closer to implying that He is a body than to denying it"—something Ibn Rushd of course considers unacceptable (and so would the Ashʿarīs, too).[591] His opposition to the Ashʿarī conception of the attributes is even more evident in the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*. There, he speaks of the "absurdities which arise from the doctrine that the First Principle possesses attributes additional to His essence,"[592] and continues to explain that God's various descriptions are in reality only aspects or ways of considering His very 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."[593] This indicates 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.

Returning to God's essential attributes, such as His being one and unique, it needs to be born in mind that these attributes not only describe God's *essence* but also His *existence*. This is the case as for Ibn Rushd a thing's essence and its existence are one and the same and identical. In this he actually agrees with his

590 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 134.

591 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 139.

592 Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1964), 179.

593 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 497.

arch-enemies, the Ashʿarīs, and disagrees with the Muʿtazilīs and Ibn Sīnā.[594] In the *Kashf*, he only hints at this conviction of his, in a concise remark in his discussion of the question of whether God can be seen: "the senses only perceive the essence, and the essence is the existent itself (*al-dhāt hiya nafs al-mawjūd*), something shared by all existents. Hence, the senses only perceive things insofar as they are existents."[595] The equation of essence and existence is a tenet Ibn Rushd also expounds upon in the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*. With the aim of criticising Ibn Sīnā's stance on this question, Ibn Rushd remarks: "he believed that the thing's existence refers to an attribute in addition to its essence [...]. However, all of this is based on a mistake, which is that the existence of a thing is one of its attributes [and not the thing itself]."[596] According to Ibn Rushd, the correct view is that "existence is an attribute which is the essence itself, and whoever maintains something different is mistaken."[597] Importantly, this means that all aspects of Ibn Rushd's investigation of God's *essence* also pertain to God's *existence*. To describe God as unique means saying that His essence is unique (that is, the essences of created things do not resemble God's essence), and it likewise means saying that His existence is unique (that is, God's existence *really* is different from the existence of created things, they are not comparable in any respect—this being the opposite of Ibn Sīnā and the Muʿtazilīs' positions, for instance, who hold that existence is the same in all existents). The same is true of God's other essential attributes, such as His being eternal, mentioned explicitly by Ibn Rushd. As a matter of fact, we have already encountered Ibn Rushd using the word "existence," not "essence" in relation to the question of whether God is eternal or not. This is in the aforementioned passage where he criticises the Ashʿarīs' proof for the creator based on the originatedness of the world: "but regarding the *existence* of this originator, doubts arise which the science of *kalām* cannot dispel: we cannot establish whether this originator is eternal or originated" (my emphasis).[598]

The observation that for Ibn Rushd essence and existence are one and the same thing is important, for it allows the conclusion—which I am in fact proposing—that when he discusses "the method leading to knowledge of the existence of God (*wujūd Allāh*)," he does *not* refer to the question of whether God actually

594 On Ibn Rushd's position on essence and existence and his critique of Ibn Sīnā, see Leaman, *Averroes*, 104–106. See also Fadlou Shehadi, *Metaphysics in Islamic Philosophy* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1982), 87–100.

595 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 156–157.

596 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 597–598.

597 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 516.

598 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 103.

exists or not. Rather, what he is concerned with is the question of how and by what method knowledge of God Himself, that is, His very essence, can be attained. This concern, it must be noted, is of a different kind than the concern of arguments for God's existence, for Ibn Rushd seeks to investigate the divine essence and *kind of existence* specific to God, while taking it for granted from the outset of his investigation that God is part of reality, just as much as the world is—arguments for God's existence, on the other hand, proceed to the investigation of God's nature only after having introduced into reality the existence of yet another entity in addition to the world.

This might at first seem perplexing, in particular when the whole discussion is approached with certain presuppositions about what Ibn Rushd's reference to "God's existence" means. Yet, it should also be noted that in places Ibn Rushd speaks of "knowledge of the existence of God" alongside the more general "knowledge of God," in the context of his discussion of the methods employed by the Ashʿarī *mutakallimūn*, the *Ḥashwiyya*, and the Ṣūfīs. For instance, his discussion of the Ashʿarīs' conviction that "the affirmation of *the existence of God* (*wujūd Allāh*) is only due to reason"[599] concludes with him denying the validity and effectiveness of their reason-based proofs, stating: "in the science of dialectics there is no solution to these doubts [raised by me, Ibn Rushd], as you see. It is, consequently, necessary that it is not made the basis for *knowledge of God* (*maʿrifat Allāh*), in particular not in the case of the masses. The [true] method to know God is clearer than this" (my emphasis).[600] Likewise, still in the context of the question about the correct method leading to knowledge of the *existence of God*, he states that "from all this it becomes clear to you that the famous methods of the Ashʿarīs to arrive at *knowledge of God* (*maʿrifat Allāh*) are neither certain methods from the viewpoint of speculation, nor are they certain methods from the viewpoint of revelation" (my emphasis).[601] This indicates that Ibn Rushd's speaking of methods leading to knowledge of God's existence refers to nothing other than methods leading to knowledge of God in general, for he uses them side by side and interchangeably in the same context and in the same discussion. Attaining knowledge of God, however, means nothing other than investigating His essence and, thus, also His particular kind of existence. Importantly, the methods to arrive at this knowledge of God are but Ibn Rushd's *dalīl al-ikhtirāʿ* and *dalīl al-ʿināya*. By establishing that the world, in displaying signs of being produced, is God's handiwork, Ibn Rushd is able to describe

599 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 103.
600 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 107.
601 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 116.

God's essence/existence, for God's deeds (which are His creation) are indicative of His attributes, both the essential ones and hypostatic ones. Ibn Rushd's method as well as concerns are, thus, not so different from the methods and concerns encountered in the writings of his predecessors. Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, for instance, we recall, already endeavoured to investigate God's nature and attributes, and the method he proposed was to infer these from, and particularly in contradistinction to, created things. In this context, al-Qāsim, too, spoke of the investigation of *God's existence*, and he did not mean by it the question of whether God actually is part of reality or not: "He (Be He Praised!) and His existence (*wujūdihi*) are perceived when the things [in this world around us] are perceived in their existence (*wujūdihā*), for He (Be He Praised!) is different from all these existent things."[602]

Some final words should be said concerning Ibn Rushd's reasons for putting such emphasise on investigating "God's existence," for the acquisition of knowledge about God, that is, of what His essence and the kind of existence characteristic of Him are like, is not an end in itself for Ibn Rushd. Rather, he makes it clear that the attainment of knowledge about God's essence and specific existence goes to the heart of the Qur'anic and Islamic message of monotheism. This is evident in his discussion of God's attribute of being one and unique which, as seen above, describes His very essence and existence, and thereby distinguishes God Himself from all other existents. In this section, Ibn Rushd has an interlocutor ask ("*fa-in qīl*"): "what is the method of revelation [to affirm] His oneness and uniqueness (*waḥdāniyya*), which is the knowledge that there is no *ilāh* other than Him (*lā ilāh illā huwa*)?" This question clarifies that God's special characteristic of uniqueness is related to the declaration that God (*Allāh*) alone, to the exclusion of all other entities in the cosmos, is to be described as "*ilāh*." Ibn Rushd's reply to the interlocutor shows that God's description as "*ilāh*" in turn is based on, and related to, His creative activity: God is the one agent and creator on whom all things in this world depend. Ibn Rushd writes:

> we would reply: as for the denial of [the description of] *ulūhiyya* for anyone other than Him, the method of revelation in this is the method which God (Most-High!) laid down in His honourable book, in three verses. The first one of them is His saying: {If there had been in the heavens or earth any gods (*āliha*) but God (*Allāh*), both heavens and earth would be in ruins} [i.e. Q. 21:22]. The second one is His saying: {God has never had a child. Nor is there any god (*ilāh*) besides Him—if there were, each god would have taken his creation

602 Al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, *Al-Ḳāsim b. Ibrāhīm on the Proof of God's Existence: The* Kitāb al-dalīl al-kabīr, ed. with translation, introduction, and notes by Binyamin Abrahamov (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 74.

> aside and tried to overcome the others. May God be exalted above what they describe!} [i. e. Q. 23:91].

He then comments on the meaning of these two verses:[603]

> as for the first verse [...], it is evident [...] that it is not possible that one single act emerges from two agents [...] or it is the case that one of them acts and the other one remains passive —but this is denied when it comes to the attribute (*ṣifa*) of *ilāhiyya*. [...] As for His saying [in the second verse cited], {if there were, each god would have taken his creation aside}, this is His refutation of those who postulate several *āilha* from whom different acts emerge.

Ibn Rushd's comments illustrate that an entity's description as "*ilāh*" depends on this entity's ability to create. Since he denies, following the Qur'an's own pronouncements, that created things in this world could possibly be traced back to the agency of entities other than God,[604] he affirms the first part of the Islamic testimony of faith (*shahāda*) which asserts: *lā ilāh illā Allāh*, there is no *ilāh* other than God. God indeed is unique, and thus distinct from all other existents, in that He alone has the attribute of *ilāhiyya*. Importantly, this uniqueness describing God is known but through His description as creator—this is why all investigations about God's essence and specific existence (as well as about His hypostatic attributes) follow the affirmation that the world indeed is God's creation. Without ascribing the world to God's creative activity, the very foundation of the declaration that "*lā ilāh illā Allāh*" would be removed, according to Ibn Rushd's argumentation. This very notion is also expressed in the following statement, already cited above:[605]

> I will begin by explaining what the lawgiver intended the masses to believe regarding God (Most-High!), and [by explaining] the methods which he laid down for them in the honourable book. We will begin with the knowledge of the method by which the existence of the creator is known, for this is the first item of knowledge which humans have to know.

The affirmation that God is to be described as creator of the world ("the method by which the existence of the creator is known") is the foundation on which all

603 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 123.

604 This is not to say, however, that Ibn Rushd espoused an occasionalist worldview. He does in fact affirm secondary causes besides God, yet the point is that God "reigns over" all of them, so to speak. See, for example, the section starting on p. 166 of the *Kashf* where Ibn Rushd criticises the Ashʿarīs denial of secondary causes (*asbāb*). On the details of his theory of causality, and the secondary causes' relationship to God, see Kogan, *Averroes*, especially Chapter Three "Averroes on Necessary Connection" (71–164).

605 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 101.

other religious tenets, taught by scripture about God, are built. Ibn Rushd's *dalīl al-ikhtirāʿ* and *dalīl al-ʿināya* ultimately serve the objective of defending the declaration made in the testimony of faith that God is unique and distinct from all other beings in that He alone is *ilāh*, as this quote finally establishes:[606]

> this discussion clarified the methods by which revelation calls the people to the affirmation of the existence of the creator (*al-iqrār bi-wujūd al-bāriʾ*) and to the denial of *ulūhiyya* for whoever is other than Him. These are the two aspects (*maʿniyān*) the testimony of God's oneness and uniqueness (*kalimat al-tawḥīd*) entails, I mean: there is no *ilāh* other than God (*lā ilāh illā Allāh*). Whoever speaks this testimony and assents to [the truth of] these two aspects which it entails, by the method we described—he is the true Muslim (*al-muslim al-ḥaqīqī*) whose creed (*ʿaqīda*) is the Islamic creed.

9.4 The *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* and the Terminology of Creation

It has been seen 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 "*ṣāniʿ*," "*bāriʾ*," "*fāʿil*," "*muḥdith*," and "*khāliq*"[607] that appear in Ibn Rushd's affirmation of the creator and the *dalīl al-ʿināya* and *dalīl al-ikhtirāʿ*. Yet, I have emphasised above that, and how, Ibn Rushd's understanding of the mode of creation is quite different from that of the *mutakallimūn*. This is so even if Ibn Rushd himself wants 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."[608] In the *Kashf*, Ibn Rushd does not go into detail expounding upon the differences in the way the *mutakallimūn* and the philosophers understand the terminology of creation; rather, one has to turn to his *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*. Following al-Ghazālī in his structuring of the *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* and the order in which he presents his critique of the philosophers, in the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* Ibn Rushd discusses the notion of God as agent who brought about the world in the third chapter. The discussion of this question in both *Tahāfut*s illustrates how, from the *mutakallimūn*'s perspective, the philosophers use the terminology of creation in a way that deprives it of its true meaning when they associate concepts with it which, for the *mutakallimūn*, have nothing to do with the true nature of God's creating the world. In turn, from the perspective of the philosophers, the theologians claim to know the true meaning

606 Ibn Rushd, *al-Kashf*, 127.
607 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 101, 117, and 120; 102, 103, and 118; 118, 167, and 169; 103; 162.
608 Ibn Rushd, *Faṣl al-maqāl*, 40 – 41.

of these terms, while they in fact misunderstand scripture's teachings in these matters. Both camps essentially accuse each other of committing the same error.

In both *Tahāfut*s, Chapter Three addresses the philosophers' (alleged) "confusion in saying that God is the agent (*fāʿil*) and creator (*ṣāniʿ*) of the world and that the world is His creation and act." Al-Ghazālī, we recall, based his critique of the philosophers' calling God an agent and creator on his 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."[609] The philosophers' conception of God as cause of the world, he then argued, however, entailed its necessary causation (*luzūman ḍarūriyyan*) as they deny His attributes, in particular that of will, and therefore He cannot be called "agent."[610]

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-fāʿil bi'l-ṭabʿ*) from it, such as fire, wanting to affirm voluntary agents (*bi-ruʾya wa-ikhtiyār*) only. The correct definition of "agent" is "what causes another to pass from potentiality into actuality and from non-existence into existence."[611] Will is not part of this definition, and the term therefore applies to both natural and voluntary agents. Al-Ghazālī is mistaken not only in his definition of "agent," but also in maintaining that the philosophers conceive of God as acting out of necessity. Ibn Rushd clarifies that the mistake lies in comparing God with agents in the *shāhid*; He is, however, neither like humans who are voluntary agents, nor like any agent acting necessarily. His knowledge, will, and bounty from which the world proceeds are more prefect than in the agents of the *shāhid*.[612] 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, still in Chapter Three, 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"—which is for Ibn Rushd, as seen, too narrow an understanding—and as that which is "an expression for temporal origination

609 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 96.

610 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 250. In al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beyrouth: Imprimeri Catholique, 1927), 18) the heading appears as "The illustration of their confusion in saying that God is the creator (*ṣāniʿ*) of the world and that the world is His creation." On this discussion, see Leaman, *Averroes*, Chapter "Is God really an agent?" (42–81).

611 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 255. On the three kinds of non-existence according to Ibn Rushd and the one he singles out as the one God's creative act pertains to, see Kogan, *Averroes*, 216.

612 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 255–257.

(*iḥdāth*)"—which Ibn Rushd likewise denies as he acknowledges "everlasting origination" (*ḥudūth dāʾim*) which has no first beginning.[613] 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 accused the philosophers of using the terms "agent" and "act" only metaphorically (*bi-ṭarīq al-majāz*) and deprived of their real meaning. Ibn Rushd now reverses the charge and argues that, if at all, it is al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarīs who call God an agent in a metaphorical sense.[614] His argument is rather interesting as it comes close to an argument the Muʿtazilīs brought up against al-Ashʿarī at least a century before Ibn Rushd, as is reported by al-Juwaynī in his *Kitāb al-Shāmil*. As I have discussed in some detail in Chapter Five of this book, al-Juwaynī states that the Muʿtazilīs criticised al-Ashʿarī for his arguments relating to the question about "the need of origination for the originator."[615] Their critique focused in particular on his use of the famous analogy between the observable and the unobservable realms (based on the observation that every writing exists due to a writer and every building due to a builder) in order to affirm the principle of causation for the unobservable realm. Since "the building does not occur, according to him [i.e. al-Ashʿarī], as something humans have power over," the Muʿtazilīs remarked (alluding to al-Ashʿarī's denial of real human causal efficacy), he has no basis to affirm that God indeed is agent and creator of the world, or he has to affirm that God's agency is of the same kind as human agency, which entails "acquisition" (*kasb*).[616]

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 was the focal point of the Muʿtazilīs' critique of al-Ashʿarī's argument. Al-Ghazālī maintained, Ibn Rushd argues, that the only kind of agent is the voluntary agent, and he thus rejected the philosophers' notion of God as agent. Yet, it is precisely due to their insistence on the analogy between the *shāhid* and the *ghāʾib* that the Ashʿarīs render God's being called a voluntary agent a metaphor as they "do [actually] not acknowledge a free will in man and a power to exercise an influence

613 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 270 – 271.

614 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, 267.

615 Abū ʾl-Maʿālī ʿAbd al-Malik b. Yūsuf al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil fī uṣūl al-dīn* (al-Qāhira: Dār al-ʿArab, [1960 – 1961]), 154.

616 Al-Juwaynī, *al-Shāmil*, 157.

on reality."[617] 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?"[618]

Even though Ibn Rushd argues, at least in the *Faṣl al-maqāl*, that the philosophers' understanding of the way in which God created the world is not actually that different from that of the theologians, the above discussion shows that their disagreement about the correct use of terminology primarily stems from, and reflects, their different world views: the concept of the agent, for instance, must vary depending on whether it is believed that acknowledging efficient causes besides God violates the notion of His omnipotence and control over the cosmos, or whether it is believed that acknowledging efficient causes besides God is a prerequisite for affirming the world's dependence on God.

9.5 The *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* and the Proof of the Creator

It is a little surprising that the study of Ibn Rushd's arguments for God's existence in the secondary academic literature has for the most part somewhat neglected his *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*. This is somewhat surprising since al-Ghazālī's—alleged, as I would pose—argument for God's existence as presented in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* is frequently discussed, as has been seen in Chapter Eight of this book. Moreover, it is well-known that Ibn Rushd, in his own *Tahāfut*, deals with the exact same questions as al-Ghazālī, in response to whom this work was written. In al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut*, it was particularly Chapters Four and Ten where students of his thought presumed his proof for God's existence to be located, focussing on his charge against the philosophers that they are unable to show that the world has a creator and cause external to it. Ibn Rushd similarly discusses—and ultimately denies—the philosophers' alleged "inability to prove the existence of the creator of the world (*wujūd ṣāniʿ al-ʿālam*)" or "to affirm the creator of the world" in Chapter Four (different manuscripts have different headings for this chapter, as indicated in Sulaymān Dunyā's edition of the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*),[619] as well as "their incapacity to establish the proof that the world has a creator and cause (*li'l-ʿālam ṣāniʿ wa-ʿilla*)" in Chapter Ten.[620] In Dunyā's edition of

617 Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*), trans. from the Arabic with Introduction and Notes by Simon van den Bergh, vol. 1 (London: Luzac, 1954), 94.
618 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 267.
619 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 427.
620 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 630.

the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* we encounter the editor's short remark 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*."[621] There is also the remark by Simon van den Bergh in the introduction to his translation of the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* 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.[622] It is noteworthy that Dunyā expresses Ibn Rushd's objective with the words "*ithbāt wujūd Allāh.*" This is indicative of the equation of the proof of the existence of the *creator* (*al-ṣāniʿ*) with the proof of *God's* (*Allāh*) existence, encountered in the secondary academic literature, not, however, in the primary Arabic sources investigated in this book. In the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, Ibn Rushd nowhere speaks of his endeavour to "affirm *God's* existence," that is, Dunyā's "*ithbāt wujūd Allāh.*" All he speaks of is, as noted above, the proof of "the existence of the creator of the world" (*wujūd ṣāniʿ al-ʿālam*)" or "the proof that the world has a creator and cause (*li'l-ʿālam ṣāniʿ wa-ʿilla*)."

Far from criticising the philosophers' failure to prove that God actually exist, we recall, it was al-Ghazālī's aim in Chapter Four to show that they are unable to prove that there is a causal connection between God and the world in the first place. Having first charged the philosophers for holding the logically incoherent position that the world, in being eternal, could depend on a "creator" (these being two mutually exclusive concepts), al-Ghazālī then changed the focus of his attack when he had his interlocutor remark: "when we say, 'the world has a creator (*ṣāniʿ*),' we do not mean by it a choosing agent (*fāʿil mukhtār*) who acts after not having acted [...]. Rather we mean by it the world's *ʿilla*."[623] Not being able to declare as logically incoherent the philosophers' characterisation of the connection between God and the world as that between *ʿilla* and *maʿlūl*, al-Ghazālī focused his attack on showing that the philosophers have no grounds to maintain that there should be a connection between God and the world in the first place.

Ibn Rushd for his part counters al-Ghazālī by maintaining: "the philosophers' position certainly makes sense (*mafhūm*) when taking into account what is observable (*min al-shāhid*), more so than the two positions [of the *ahl*

621 Sulaymān Dunyā (section "*nuṣūṣ wa-mawḍūʿāt*") in Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 983.
622 Van den Bergh in Ibn Rushd, *Averroes' Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, xv.
623 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Maʿārif bi-Miṣr, 1961), 155.

al-ḥaqq and the *dahriyya*] taken together!"[624] His argument focuses on stressing that it is not absurd at all that an *eternal* world should come from a *creator*:[625]

> this is so as there are two kinds of agent (*fāʿil*) [...]. The [first kind of] agent is nobler than the other and his agency is truer, for he brings into existence his product (*mafʿūl*) and [also] preserves it in existence. The other agent brings into existence his product, but requires another agent to preserve it in existence after having brought it about. [...] the world has an agent by whose existence it is existent. Whoever thinks that the act proceeding from the agent of the world is originated says: "the world is originated, coming from an eternal agent." Whoever thinks that the act coming from the eternal is [also] eternal says: "the world is originated coming from an eternal agent and his act is [also] eternal." That is, it has no beginning—but not in the sense that it is eternally existent due to its own essence.

Al-Ghazālī committed the error, according to Ibn Rushd, of maintaining that the notion of an eternal act is contradictory, and he failed to see that this is in fact the most noble kind of agency.

Ibn Rushd then addresses al-Ghazālī's charge, after he shifted the focus of his attack, that the philosophers have no grounds at all for their ascribing the world to God, for they cannot show, first, that an infinite chain of causes is impossible and, secondly, that the heavens are not necessarily existent. Ibn Rushd intends to refute al-Ghazālī's first point of critique by stressing that he is imprecise when he speaks of an infinite regress in this context and that there is no doubt among the philosophers that the kind of infinite regress in question must terminate. He writes:[626]

> an infinite chain of causes is from one perspective impossible, according to them, and from another perspective it is necessary, according to the philosophers. This means that is it impossible, according to them, if it is essential (*bi'l-dhāt*) and in a straight line and if the preceding [cause] is a condition for the existence of the following [cause]. It is, however, not impossible, according to them, if it is accidental (*bi'l-ʿaraḍ*) and circular [...], such as in the case of the existence of rain from a cloud, and the cloud from vapour, and vapour from rain.

To the philosophers, it is clear that the infinite regress in question is of the former kind (that is, it is essential), and that it ends in a cause necessarily existent which is not the world itself (thus maintaining their claim that the world is to be ascribed to God for it is not the principle of its own existence). Al-Ghazālī's charge is, thus, unfounded, and his comparison of the philosophers with the

624 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 427.
625 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 428 – 429.
626 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 433 – 434.

dahriyya is unsubstantiated: "as for those who allow for an infinite chain of causes which is essential (*bi'l-dhāt*), they are the *dahriyya*. But he who admits this has clearly not understood the [concept of the] efficient cause (*ʿilla fāʿila*)! There is no disagreement, however, among the philosophers about the efficient cause."[627]

Al-Ghazālī's second point of critique was that the philosophers cannot prove that the heavens are not necessarily existent, for they cannot defend their claim that the necessarily existent has to be simple and one. Ibn Rushd addresses this point of critique as well, even though the bigger part of his refutation of al-Ghazālī deals with the question of the infinite regress. He writes:[628]

> he [i.e. al-Ghazālī] means that since they cannot affirm [the first principle's] oneness (*al-waḥdāniyya*), and since they cannot affirm that what is one (*al-wāḥid*) is not a body—for since they cannot deny the attributes, the first must, according to them, be an essence with attributes, and that which is thus described is a body or a power in a body—it follows that the first which has no cause is [to be identified with] the heavenly bodies. [...] The philosophers do not argue for the existence of the first who has no cause in the way he ascribes to them! Also, they do not claim to be unable to prove [the first's] oneness (*al-tawḥīd*) and incorporeality!

Rejecting al-Ghazālī's critique as unfounded, Ibn Rushd defends the philosophers' method of establishing that the world is "creation" and that it can indeed be ascribed to God, as al-Ghazālī clearly stated the focus of the debate at the beginning of his critique.

Chapter Ten of al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* contains the famous statement that "he who does not assume the originatedness of the bodies has no ground at all for his assumption of the creator."[629] This statement has, in the secondary academic literature, been interpreted as an expression of al-Ghazālī's intention to defend the sole validity of the cosmological argument for God's existence, and his insistence that the philosophers are unable to prove God's existence and come dangerously close to upholding atheism. I have argued that this is not what al-Ghazālī wants to say. Rather, he picks up on his earlier argument in Chapter Four, seeking to show that the philosophers are unable to trace the existence of the world back to God for they cannot disprove that the chain of terrestrial causes ends in the heavens (as the *dahriyyūn* believe) which are eternal and necessarily existent. It does not help them to maintain that being necessarily

627 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 436.
628 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 440.
629 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, ed. Maurice Bouyges (Beyrouth: Imprimeri Catholique, 1927), 209.

existent and being corporeal (as the heavens are) are mutually exclusive, for al-Ghazālī maintains that they cannot substantiate this claim. This is where he concluded that the only safe method of proving that there is a causal connection between the world and God, and even more so: that God is the world's cause in the way of a "creator," is when assuming the originatedness of bodies.

Ibn Rushd for his part concedes to al-Ghazālī that his critique actually is valid—but only for the reasoning championed by Ibn Sīnā, who is not representative of the philosophers as a whole. He indeed introduced a reasoning which is somewhat flawed:[630]

> this argument [advanced by al-Ghazālī] is without doubt valid for him who follows the method of the necessarily existent to affirm an existent which is not a body. But this is not the method of the ancient philosophers. The first person to use it was, as far as we know, Ibn Sīnā. [...] This method arrives, according to him, at the affirmation of a principle which is described (*bi'l-ṣifa*) the way the ancients did by speculating about the nature of the existent insofar as it is an existent. If it did arrive [at an existent with such attributes], what he asserted would be correct—but it does not!

The philosophers who follow the correct reasoning, on the other hand, are able to prove—against al-Ghazālī's accusation—that the heavens, despite being eternal and even necessarily existent, depend on an outside cause. Ibn Rushd explains: "this method is that we say: the possibly existent in corporeal substance must be preceded by a necessarily existent in corporeal substance. The necessarily existent in corporeal substance must [in turn] be preceded by an absolutely (*bi-iṭlāq*) necessarily existent, in which there is no potentiality whatsoever [...]. Whatever is like this is not a body."[631] To this he adds that the nature of the heavens discloses their being necessarily existent in terms of their substance, but that their movement is possibly existent. This requires that the heavens depend on another entity which is absolutely necessarily existent. The consequence of Ibn Rushd's argument is that al-Ghazālī has not succeeded in his objective (which became clear when taking into account Chapters Three, Four, and Ten together) to invalidate the philosophers' claim that the world is eternal emanation from God. Al-Ghazālī wanted to make the point that the world can only be ascribed to God as His creation if one rests one's argument on the notion of the originatedness of bodies and the world as a whole (as the *mutakallimūn* did). Ibn Rushd for his part has argued that this is not the case, and al-Ghazālī's arguments are incoherent.

630 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 637–638.
631 Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, 641.

9.6 A Note on Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and the Proof of God's Existence

Motion is an important notion not only in Ibn Rushd's *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, as seen, but also in his commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics* (Book *Lām*). There he states that "there is no way to demonstrate the existence of the separate substance (*wujūd jawhar mufāriq*) except 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."[632] This statement on the part of Ibn Rushd is yet another instance where he is said to discuss the correct method of proving that God exists. Kukkonen, for instance, speaks of "the proof from motion, touted in Averroes' commentary works as the one and only scientific method of proving God's existence."[633] Davidson holds that "Averroes furthermore understands that the proof of the existence of God has to take its departure from a physical phenomenon," namely motion.[634] Evidently, it is when Ibn Rushd speaks of the aim to prove "the existence of the first mover" in the aforementioned quote, or when he concludes that "there is then something which imparts motion, but which is not moved,"[635] 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."[636] As in the case of the *Kashf* and the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, a different reading of what Ibn Rushd discusses and intends to prove 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."[637] This can be seen to suggest that to prove "the existence of the first mover" refers to nothing but the investigation of the *causes* of substance (for the first mover is the ultimate cause). A distinction, therefore, needs to be made between the objective to prove that

632 Muḥammad b. Aḥmad Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr mā baʿd al-ṭabīʿa: Ibn Rushd's Metaphysics*. A Translation with Introduction of Ibn Rushd's Commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Book *Lām* by Charles Genequand, Book 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1984), commentary 5, 1423. On Ibn Rushd's reception of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, see Matteo di Giovanni, "The Commentator: Averroes's Reading of the *Metaphysics*," in *A Companion to the Latin Medieval Commentaries on Aristotle's* Metaphysics, ed. Gabriele Galluzzo and Fabrizio Amerini (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2014), 59 – 94; Carmela Baffioni (ed.), *Averroes and the Aristotelian Heritage* (Naples: Instituto Universitario Orientale, 2002).

633 Kukkonen, "Averroes," 408.

634 Davidson, *Proofs*, 317.

635 Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, commentary 35, 1588.

636 Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, commentary 29, 1558.

637 Ibn Rushd, *Tafsīr*, text 1, 1406.

God Himself exists (as arguments for God's existence seek to do) and the objective to prove that the substances making of this world depend on another substance which is different from them and their cause, thus affirming God's role as the final cause (this being part of the broader investigation of causes). In cosmological arguments for God's existence, the proof of the *creator* indeed is nothing else than the proof that *God* is part of reality. 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 exist, as I have repeatedly emphasised and attempted to substantiate. Likewise, Ibn Rushd's conclusion (following Aristotle) that the proof from motion allows to establish "the existence of the separate substance" is, first, 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 is the first mover and 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 that relates to God also applies to the heavens and the sublunary world respectively: with regards to God, His status as cause and His particular type of substance are enquired into by Ibn Rushd, and with regards to the heavens and the sublunary world, their being effects/causes and their type of substance are enquired into as well. In the case of Ibn Rushd's proof that there is a substance which is movable but eternal and not corruptible, as well as his proof that the movable and corruptible substance (that is, the sublunary world) has a cause, it would not come to mind to hold that he intends to prove that *the heavens* (to which all of this refers) *exist*. The proof *that there is a particular type of substance* (that is, the one characterising the heavens) is not a proof for *the existence of the heavens*—and this distinction also holds true of the proof *that there is yet another, third type of substance* (that is, the one characterising God), which is not a proof for *God's existence*.

10 Muḥammad b. ʿUmar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210)[638]

10.1 Al-Rāzī's "Proof of the Existence of the Creator" and the Proof of God's Existence

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī is considered an immensely significant and highly original *mutakallim*.[639] Despite his Ashʿarī affiliation, his writings reveal the profound influence the Islamic philosophical tradition (*falsafa*) 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 borrows from them a number of their most characteristic concepts and ideas, such as the notions of possibility (*jawāz*, *imkān*) and necessity (*wujūb*), and incorporated them into the arguments associated with the *kalām* tradition. This observation is also said to be true of al-Rāzī's 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. In the secondary academic literature, we encounter the position that, generally speaking, al-Rāzī can be seen as an adherent of "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,"[640] as Herbert A. Davidson puts it in his *Proofs for Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God*. Muhsin Mahdi has made the same observation when he states, "[al-Rāzī's] general argument is that creation proves the existence of God [...]. This is of course the standard argument of kalām-theology."[641] In his "The existence of God," Ayman Shihadeh ascribes four kinds of arguments to prove the existence of God to al-Rāzī: "(I) arguments from the creation of the

638 Some aspects of al-Rāzī's proofs of the creator discussed in this chapter also appear in my "Proving God's Existence? A Reassessment of al-Rāzī's Arguments for the Existence of the Creator," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 19/2 (2017): 31–63.

639 On al-Rāzī's life and significance as a scholar, see Frank Griffel, "On Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Life and the Patronage He Received," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18/3 (2007): 313–344; M. Ṣaghīr Ḥasan Maʿṣūmī, "Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Critics," *Islamic Studies* 6/4 (1967): 355–374.

640 Herbert A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 75.

641 Muhsin Mahdi, "Response to Jane Dammen McAuliffe," in *God and Creation: An Ecumenical Symposium*, ed. David B. Burrell and Bernard McGinn (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 297–303, at 299.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-011

attributes of things [...]; (2) arguments from the creation of things; (3) arguments from the contingency of the attributes of things [...]; and (4) arguments from the contingency of things."[642]

At variance with Davidson and Shihadeh's assessment that al-Rāzī was eager to present arguments to prove God's existence, I seek to show in this chapter that his arguments do not have the purpose of establishing that God actually exists. Instead, al-Rāzī can be seen to follow the tradition of generations of thinkers who came before him whose concern in establishing the existence of the creator (and similar expressions) was—as I have argued throughout this book—to prove that God, whose existence they took for granted and did not seek to prove, is to be *described* as the creator of the world. While I then disagree with Davidson and Shihadeh's description of the *objective* of al-Rāzī's arguments, Shihadeh's enumeration of them is in fact correct. In his various *kalām* works, al-Rāzī is seen to present the same four methods to affirm the creator.[643] In his influential *al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, for instance, al-Rāzī follows the section on the affirmation of the originatedness of the world with a section entitled "On establishing knowledge of the creator."[644] There he introduces the aforementioned four methods. The first two methods focus on the notion of the possibility[645] of essences

642 Ayman Shihadeh, "The Existence of God," in *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, ed. T. Winter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 197–217, at 198. Compare also Yasin Ceylan, *Theology and Tafsīr in the Major Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996), 81–85, who makes the same observation.

643 For a chronology of al-Rāzī's works, see Ayman Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), 7–11.

644 Muḥammad b. ʿUmar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, 2 vols (al-Qāhira: Maktabat al-Kulliyyāt al-Azhariyya, 1986), vol. 1, 101.

645 I tend to think that the translation of "*imkān*" as "possibility," rather than "contingency," is more fitting in this context. According to al-Rāzī, and following Ibn Sīnā, being *mumkin* means that a thing's essence has, in itself, no preference for either existence or non-existence; it can equally exist or not exist. It is this "indifference" of the essence towards existence and non-existence which explains its dependence on a cause: its contingency (i.e. its dependence on a cause) is therefore the *consequence* of, or explained by, its being *mumkin* (i.e. its being receptive to either existence or non-existence). When al-Rāzī, in one of his four methods, focuses on the notion of *imkān al-dhawāt*, what he stresses is that things can exist or not (which is their being *mumkin* or possible), and it is only on the basis of this insight that he establishes their dependence on a cause and their being contingent. Hence, *imkān* is not so much "contingency," but rather "possibility." Compare, for example, al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 103–105. In the secondary academic literature, the terms "*imkān*" and "*mumkin*" have variably been rendered "contingency/contingent" and "possibility/possible." Compare, for example, Parviz Morewedge, "Philosophical Analysis and Ibn Sīnā's 'Essence-Existence' Distinction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 92/3 (1972): 425–435, at 432, who speaks of Ibn Sīnā's division of being into

(*imkān al-dhawāt*) of the things making up this world and their attributes (*imkān al-ṣifāt*) respectively. They result in the affirmation of "the existence of the necessarily existent" (*wujūd wājib al-wujūd*) and "the necessarily existent due to essence" (*ithbāt wājib al-wujūd li-dhātihi*) respectively.[646]

The reasoning of the first method can be summed up as this: the essences of things in this world are characterised by receptiveness to existence and non-existence—existence is not a necessity for them. This entails that, if these things enter existence, this must be due to "one who gives preponderance" (*murajjiḥ*) to existence over non-existence. Rejecting an infinite regress of causes consisting of essences which are all possibly existent (*mumkin al-wujūd*), al-Rāzī concludes that "they must end in the necessarily existent due to essence."[647]

The reasoning of the second method is similar to the first method: the things in this world have different attributes and characteristics. Their variety cannot be accounted for by pointing to the things themselves as their cause as these things are all "equal in terms of their essences"—things that are equal in terms of the essence are expected to produce the same effects. This indicates their need for "one who particularises and gives preponderance" (*mukhaṣṣiṣ wa-murajjiḥ*) to certain characteristics over others.[648] Al-Rāzī concludes his exposition of the second method by stating: "if we want to show that this existent [i.e. the particulariser] is necessarily existent due to essence, we return to what we mentioned in the first proof,"[649] referring to his refutation of the possibility of a never-ending chain of particularising entities.

The other two methods, out of the four methods, employ the notion of the originatedness of atoms and bodies (*ḥudūth al-jawāhir wa'l-ajsām*) and their attributes (*ḥudūth al-ṣifāt*). They result in the affirmation of "the knowledge of the creator" (*al-ʿilm bi'l-ṣāniʿ*).[650]

"contingencies, impossibilities, and necessities"; Majid Fakhry, "The Ontological Argument in the Arabic Tradition: The Case of al-Fārābi [*sic*]," *Studia Islamica* 64 (1986): 5–17, at 8, who speaks of Ibn Sīnā's reasoning on the basis of "the contingency or possibility of the world"; and, finally, Emil L. Fackenheim, "The Possibility of the Universe in Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina and Maimonides," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 16 (1946–1947): 39–70, at 39, who speaks of Ibn Sīnā having introduced into philosophy "a concept of 'possibility'."

646 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 103 and 121.

647 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 103.

648 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 121. On the notion of particularisation, see Herbert A. Davidson, "Arguments from the Concept of Particularization in Arabic Philosophy," *Philosophy East and West* 18/4 (1968): 299–314.

649 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 124.

650 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 124 and 129.

The third method reasons: "it has been established that the bodies [making up this world] are originated, and everything that is originated has an originator, hence the bodies are in need of the originator."[651] In *al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*, al-Rāzī comments on this method that it is the one preferred by the majority of *mutakallimūn*, and that the proof is complete (*al-dalīl innamā yatimmu*) once it has been shown that this creator is eternal and necessarily existent, once more so as to avoid the pitfall of an infinite regress of causes.[652]

The fourth and last method is subdivided by al-Rāzī into proofs contained in humans themselves (*dalāʾil al-anfus*) and proofs contained in the world (*dalāʾil al-āfāq*). In al-Rāzī's view, this method is somewhat more straightforward than the previous ones, as he indicates in the *Maṭālib*, since "before knowledge of the possibility of the essences of bodies [is attained] and before knowledge of their originatedness [is gained], we observe that [their] states (*aḥwāl*) and attributes, over which humans have no power, are originated."[653] In the *Maṭālib* he also remarks that "this kind of proof is closest to the hearts and has the greatest impact on the minds."[654] This method focuses on observable phenomena in the upper world such 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. It also invokes the Qur'anic *topos* of God's fashioning humans from a drop of sperm. The point is that, for al-Rāzī, all these phenomena can only be accounted for by "a wise creator and fashioner endowed with power and choice."[655] Like in his account of the previous methods, al-Rāzī concludes by pointing out that the creator to whom all existents are to be traced must be necessarily existent by virtue of the essence, and he adds that this is what God Himself intended to allude to when He said in the Qur'an {that the final goal [*al-muntahī*] is your Lord}.[656]

651 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 124.

652 Muḥammad b. ʿUmar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā, 5 vols (Bayrūt: Dār al-Kitāb al-ʿArabī, 1987), vol. 1, part 1, 200.

653 Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, 215.

654 Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, 216.

655 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 130.

656 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 227. This is Q. 53:42. In the *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī presents the methods as "the affirmation of the *ilāh* of the world based on the possibility of the attributes" (in three chapters, vol. 1, part 1, 177–199), followed by "the affirmation of the knowledge of the existence of the *ilāh* based on the originatedness of the essences" (200), and finally "the affirmation of the knowledge of the creator based on the originatedness of the attributes" (in three chapters, 215–232). The method invoking the possibility of the essences does not seem to be included in the *Maṭālib*.

In arguing that the objective of these four methods is *not* to prove that God actually exists, along the lines of a cosmological argument (despite the fact that they reason to the need of a creator for creation), I will mainly focus on al-Rāzī's celebrated Qur'anic commentary, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, also known by the title *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*. References to his *kalām* works proper shall be made as well. Nominally, al-Rāzī's *Tafsīr*, in being a commentary on the Qur'an, belongs to a different genre and discipline than the works of *kalām* and *falsafa* which are the focus of this book. The reason for focusing on the *Tafsīr* in this chapter is that it is an abundant source of inherently philosophical and theological discussions. It is well known that in the *Tafsīr* al-Rāzī frequently takes the opportunity to introduce into his exegesis discussions of matters debated by the *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa*. This is also true of the proof of the creator, which plays a major role in the *Tafsīr*. What is more, in the *Tafsīr* al-Rāzī provides a thematic context for the proof of the creator, which in his *kalām* works proper is oftentimes missing or scarcer.[657]

10.2 The Objective of "the Proof of the Existence of the Creator" in the *Tafsīr*

Throughout his *Tafsīr* al-Rāzī frequently makes the point that the Qur'an calls people to make use of their capacity to reason, even orders them to do so. "God commanded speculation (*naẓar*)," al-Rāzī avers, basing his claim on verses such as Q. 4:82, {Will they not think about this Qur'an?}, and Q. 88:17, {Do the disbelievers not see (*yanẓurūna*) how rain clouds are formed}.[658] (Especially the latter verse is of course welcome evidence for al-Rāzī as it uses a word from the same root "*n-ẓ-r*" as the term commonly employed by the *mutakallimūn* for reasoning and speculation.) Al-Rāzī's insistence on the use of reason is not least a defence of the discipline of *kalām* against its detractors who emphasised the importance of following authorities in religious matters: "all this proves the necessity of speculation, reasoning, and pondering and of rejecting blind following of authorities (*taqlīd*). Whoever calls to speculation and reasoning is in conformity with the Qur'an and the way of the prophets, and whoever calls to blind imitation is opposed to the Qur'an and in conformity with the way of the unbe-

657 Compare Tariq Jaffer's study of al-Rāzī's *Tafsīr*, who highlights certain theological/philosophical discussions underlying al-Rāzī's exegesis. Tariq Jaffer, *Rāzī: Master of Qurʾānic Interpretation and Theological Reasoning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

658 Muḥammad b. ʿUmar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (*Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*), 32 vols (Bayrūt: Dār al-Fikr li'l-Ṭabāʿa wa'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzīʿ, 1981), vol. 2, 99–100.

lievers."[659] The defence of *kalām* was already taken up by al-Rāzī in his earlier *al-Ishāra fī ʿilm al-kalām*. This *kalām* work opens with a chapter in which al-Rāzī explains that theology (*ʿilm al-kalām*) is the noblest of all sciences since its subject matters, "the essence of the creator and His attributes, and what is necessary for Him and what is not permissible for Him,"[660] is the noblest of all subject matters. Not everybody, however, al-Rāzī goes on to remark, shares this view, and there are people who consider it a baleful innovation (*bidʿa*). As evidence of their claim, these individuals quote the Prophetic saying, "ponder over creation, do not ponder over the creator!" Certain discussions characteristic of theology are, therefore, forbidden, they pose: "pondering over whether He is knowing by virtue of His essence or due to knowledge [...], all this is pondering over the creator, and this is prohibited." Al-Rāzī counters this critique by pointing out that, admittedly, pondering over the creator is prohibited, but theology does not speculate about God's essence, that is, God Himself; rather, it investigates "what is necessary for Him and what is permissible for Him and what is absurd for Him."[661] What the theologian does—and in fact is ordered to do—is "to speculate about the created things insofar as they are proofs for the existence of the creator (*wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*) and His attributes."[662] The "proof of the existence

659 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 100. In holding this position, al-Rāzī follows the tradition of generations of *mutakallimūn* who related the questions of *taqlīd* and speculation to the question of when someone could be called a "believer" (*muʾmin*). Most Ashʿarī theologians maintained that belief (*īmān*) is assent (*taṣdīq*) to the truth of religious teachings. Assent presupposes knowledge (*ʿilm*) that and why a given tenet is true. This kind of understanding can only be attained by reasoning. Following others in their beliefs (*taqlīd*) is not a valid source of knowledge; it only leads to conviction (*iʿtiqād*) (even if the beliefs held should turn out to be true). See Richard M. Frank, "Knowledge and *Taqlīd:* The Foundations of Religious Belief in Classical Ashʿarism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109/1 (1989): 37–62, especially 37–48. See also Binyamin Abrahamov, "Necessary Knowledge in Islamic Theology," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20/1 (1993): 20–30; Ayman Shihadeh, "From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī: 6th/12th Century Developments in Muslim Philosophical Theology," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 15 (2005): 141–179; Jaffer, *Rāzī*, Chapter 3 "Reconciling Reason (*ʿaql*) and Transmitted Knowledge (*naql*)" (84–130, especially 84–99).

660 Muḥammad b. ʿUmar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra fī ʿilm al-kalām*, ed. Hānī Muḥammad Ḥāmid (n.p.: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li'l-Turāth, al-Jazīra li'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzīʿ, 2009), 29.

661 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, for instance, with regards to the attribute of endurance. Compare al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, 244–253.

662 Al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, 38. In the *Tafsīr*, he expresses a similar critique: "this proves that there is no way to knowledge of God except through speculation and reasoning, but some adherents of the *Ḥashwiyya* [i.e. the arch-traditionalists] contest this method and hold that engaging in this discipline [i.e. *kalām*] is baleful innovation (*bidʿa*). We, however, can confirm our position through recourse to scripture and reason (*wujūh naqliyya wa-ʿaqliyya*)" (al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*,

of the creator" is, thus, at the very heart of theological investigations, an activity al-Rāzī considers to be ordained by God Himself.

One instance allowing us to establish what al-Rāzī means by "the proof of the existence of the creator," and what its objective is, is his commentary on Q. 2:21 which reads: {People, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that you may be mindful [of Him]}. There, al-Rāzī introduces the very four methods mentioned above which are also known from his *kalām* works. The connection between the methods he presents in this part of his commentary and the methods in his *kalām* works is in fact made explicit by al-Rāzī himself when he notes that he has previously discussed them in his "reason-based books"[663] (*al-kutub al-ʿaqliyya)*. In his commentary on Q. 2:21, al-Rāzī then explains:[664]

> the first [of these four methods] is reasoning based on the possibility of the essences [...]. The second one is reasoning based on the possibility of attributes [...]. The third one is reasoning based on the originatedness of the bodies [...] and the fourth is reasoning based on the originatedness of accidents, and this method is easiest for creation to understand and takes two forms: proofs in humans themselves and proofs in the world around them.

In the chapter "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on God as al-Khāliq," Jane Dammen McAuliffe has suggested that al-Rāzī "[is] reflecting upon the Qur'ānic evidence for God's existence to be found in the five kinds of creation mentioned in 2:21–22"[665]—*five* kinds of creation insofar as verse 21 (quoted above), which mentions God's creation of humans, is followed by verse 22, which adds to it, {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. [...]}. In this part of his commentary, al-Rāzī does not provide much detailed explanation of these methods as he does in other works of his. He does, however, mention a number of Qur'anic verses which, according to Him, contain and represent the same reasoning. To mention but a few examples, the reasoning of the first method is exemplified in Q. 47:38, {God has no needs (*al-ghanī*) and you are the needy ones (*al-fuqarāʾ*)}, and in Q. 53:42, {that the final goal (*al-muntahī*) is your Lord}. The second method is represented by Q. 11:7, {it is He who created the heavens and the earth}, as well as by Q. 2:22, {who spread out the earth for you and built the sky}.

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vol. 2, 95). On the (derogatory) label *Ḥashwiyya*, see A.S. Halkin, "The Ḥashwiyya," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 54/1 (1934): 1–28.

663 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 106.

664 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 107.

665 Jane Dammen McAuliffe, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on God as al-Khāliq," in *God and Creation: An Ecumenical Symposium*, ed. David B. Burrell and Bernard McGinn (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 276–296, at 283.

The third method can be found in Q. 6:76, {I do not like things that set}. The fourth and final method is associated with Q. 2:21, {People, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you, so that you may be mindful [of Him]} —the very Qur'anic verse al-Rāzī is here commenting on.[666]

The verse al-Rāzī adduces as an example of the third method—that is, the method focusing on the notion of the originatedness of bodies—is particularly useful in investigating what his proof of the existence of the creator seeks to establish. The verse in question is Q. 6:76 which is part of a longer passage about the prophet Abraham. It narrates Abraham's exclamation, {I do not like things that set}, when he observes the star above him set which he had just called his lord (*rabb*).[667] Before explaining how Abraham's utterance is the same as the *mutakallimūn*'s proof of the creator based on the notion of originatedness, al-Rāzī provides his readers with some information about the context of the words of the prophet: Abraham's people practiced astrolatry and worshipped the heavenly bodies which they called their "*āliha*" and "*arbāb*." It was their conviction that the stars are part of God's creation, whom they considered to be the supreme *ilāh* (*al-ilāh al-akbar*) or the *ilāh* of all other *āliha*.[668] They justified their worship of the heavenly bodies, in addition to their worship of God (*Allāh*), by saying that these celestial bodies are responsible for the creation (*takhluq*) of plants and animals in this lower world.[669] The assumption underlying the reasoning put forward by Abraham's people is, thus, as I have explained elsewhere, that an entity's deservedness of worship depends on this entity's ability to create.[670] Al-Rāzī makes it clear in his commentary that he accepts this assumption

666 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 107.

667 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 13, 52. Al-Rāzī is eager to stress that Abraham did not, by uttering these words, express his own conviction, rather he might have reflected about what his people believed about the star. Al-Rāzī is here evidently concerned with defending the doctrine of the prophets' immunity to sin. See Ahmad Hasan, "The Concept of Infallibility in Islam," *Islamic Studies* 11/1 (1972): 1–11; Shahab Ahmad, *Before Orthodoxy: The Satanic Verses in Early Islam* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017).

668 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 52: "He (Most-High!) is the *ilāh al-āliha* in their opinion."

669 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 13, 56.

670 Hannah C. Erlwein, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on the Question 'Why Worship God?'," *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 21/2 (2019): 39–67. This reasoning can be derived from the following statements: "there is no way to expose as false the worship of idols except by exposing as false that the sun, the moon, and the other celestial bodies are *āliha* of this world and govern (*mudabbira*) it" (al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 13, 39) and "[the attribute of] *ilāhiyya* is based on the faculty of creation (*al-khāliqiyya*), and it has been established that he who does not create is not [to be called] *ilāh*" (al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 32, 15). The terms "*rabb*" and "*ilāh*" in most contexts denote the same for al-Rāzī: "what is meant by *al-rabb* and *al-ilāh* is: he who is our creator and maker of our essences and attributes" (al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 13, p. 43)

and reasoning, but he—unsurprisingly—rejects the conclusion reached by Abraham's people that the heavenly bodies are consequently deserving of worship. Among the several arguments he presents in refutation of astrolatry is the argument that the setting of the heavenly bodies indicates their originatedness and their dependence on another to give them existence and to make them what they are. That which is in need of another does not deserve to be called "*rabb*" and "*ilāh*," al-Rāzī then remarks.[671] This is, according to al-Rāzī, the reasoning contained in Abraham's utterance, {I do not like things that set}, in Q. 6:76. He then proceeds to explain that by making use of this reasoning Abraham "called [his people] away from the worship of the stars and to *tawḥīd*."[672] This means that al-Rāzī views Abraham's mission as to convince his people to give up their astrolatry and to abandon associating other entities as partners with God (*nafī al-sharīk*), and instead to affirm God's oneness and uniqueness (*ithbāth al-tawḥīd*).[673]

Al-Rāzī's commentary on this verse clarifies two things: first, he adduces this verse as an example of reasoning on the basis of the originatedness of the bodies for the existence of the creator, for the corollary of the setting of the heavenly bodies (such as the star observed by Abraham) is that they are originated and hence depend for their existence on a creator. (The connection between this particular method to prove the existence of the creator and Abraham's utterance in Q. 6:76 is made not only in the *Tafsīr* but also in the *Muḥaṣṣal*. There al-Rāzī notes, in line with the *Tafsīr*, that the method focussing on "the originatedness of the bodies is the method of Abraham [lit. *al-khalīl*] when he said, {I do not like things that set}.[674]) The second point al-Rāzī's commentary clarifies is that, following his own account, Abraham does not make use of this reasoning and method in order to prove God's existence. The context al-Rāzī provides shows that the question of whether God exists or not is not only absent but even redundant: to hold that Abraham sought to convince his astrolatrous people that God actually exists seems at odds with al-Rāzī's portrayal of the beliefs held by them for they acknowledged God's existence, and worshipped God, even *before* the prophet was sent to them. Moreover, it seems at odds with al-Rāzī's own description of Abraham's mission which entailed the propagation of God's oneness and uniqueness and the call to abandon worshipping other enti-

671 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 13, 56.
672 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 13, 58.
673 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 13, 61.
674 Muḥammad b. ʿUmar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal afkār al-mutaqaddimīn wa'l-mutaʾakhkhirīn min al-ʿulamāʾ wa'l-ḥukamāʾ wa'l-mutakallimīn* (n. p.: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Ḥusayniyya al-Miṣriyya, n.d.), 106.

ties besides God. Abraham's realisation (as construed by al-Rāzī) that the heavenly bodies, including the star above him, are originated entails the need to acknowledge that only God is to be described as "*rabb*" and "*ilāh*." God is not the "*ilāh al-āliha*" or the most distinguished of all *āliha*—but the *only ilāh*.[675] He alone, not the heavenly bodies, is therefore worthy of worship, and this is the acknowledgement of God's oneness and uniqueness propagated by Abraham. It is this insight Abraham attempted to convince his people of—by making use of what al-Rāzī calls "reasoning based on the originatedness of the bodies" to prove the existence of the creator. Al-Rāzī does not present Abraham's reasoning as having the objective to infer from the originatedness of bodies that some other entity, in addition to the world, must exist. The objective of Abraham's reasoning is not to introduce into existence yet another entity, who was not assumed to be part of reality at the outset of the proof. Rather, what the prophet infers is that the *attribute* of being creator belongs to God, not the star and other heavenly bodies. This conclusion, which follows from al-Rāzī's own remarks in his commentary on Q. 6:76, is thus at variance with the view encountered in the secondary academic literature that al-Rāzī's four methods to prove the creator have the objective of proving God's existence, along the lines of a cosmological argument. Importantly, the conclusion reached about the objective of the particular method discussed by al-Rāzī in his commentary on Q. 6:76 must also apply to the other three methods he enumerated alongside this one, for he presents all of these methods as having the same objective to prove the existence of the creator.

It is worth pointing out that in his *Die koranische Herausforderung*, Matthias Radscheit has made a similar observation. With reference to the Abraham story in Q. 6, he notes that the prophet's pondering over the heavenly bodies is not presented by the Qur'an as resulting in the insight that God exists, but in the insight of the truth of monotheism (which are evidently two different things):[676]

> Auf den ersten Blick scheint dieser Gedankengang Abrahams Ähnlichkeit mit dem kosmologischen Gottesbeweis zu haben. Ein näheres Hinsehen aber zeigt, daß dies nicht der Fall ist. Es wird mit keinem Wort angedeutet, daß Abraham aus der Beschaffenheit der Welt auf die Existenz eines (Schöpfer-) Gottes schließt. Vielmehr kommt deutlich zum Ausdruck, daß das Entscheidende an seinem religiösen Erlebnis die doppelte Erkenntnis von der Bedingtheit der von den Vätern verehrten Gestirnsgottheiten und von der alleinigen Macht des Schöpfergottes ist. Das bedeutet: Abrahams Interpretation der Gestirne geht von der

675 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 13, 56.

676 Matthias Radscheit, *Die koranische Herausforderung: die taḥaddī-Verse im Rahmen der Polemikpassagen des Korans*, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen 198 (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 1996), 65.

> vorausgesetzten Existenz eines Schöpfergottes aus und markiert [...] den Übergang [...] zum wahren Glauben, dem Monotheismus.

Since Radscheit's study is concerned with the Qur'anic *taḥaddī*-verses ("challenge verses") and polemics against adherents of other faiths, he does not consider the implications of his analysis of the Abraham story for the question of the objective of al-Rāzī's (or, for that matter, any other *mutakallim*'s) "proofs of the existence of the creator." Still, his reading of the Abraham story interestingly matches al-Rāzī's own reading of it, as I have explained above.

The finding based on al-Rāzī's discussion of the story of Abraham is further supported by the following: in his commentary of Q. 2:21, after having introduced the four methods in question (one of which is exemplified by Q. 6:76 and the story of Abraham), al-Rāzī states that the pious ancestors (*al-salaf*) had their own methods to prove the same point. Among them, he mentions a conversation between the Prophet and ʿImrān b. Ḥuṣayn, one of his companions:[677]

> the Prophet said to him: how many *āliha*[678] 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?

This conversation, which al-Rāzī presents as another form of proof of the existence of the creator, is indicative of the objective of the proof: just as in the story of Abraham, it is to single out God as the only entity deserving the title "*ilah*." In the present context, God's being the only "*ilāh*" is implicitly explained as His ability to avert harm—a notion al-Rāzī spells out elsewhere in the *Tafsīr*, where the ability to avert harm is made an aspect of God's creative activity, and thus explains His deservedness of worship.[679]

There are other instances in al-Rāzī's *Tafsīr* which indicate that the objective of "the proof of the existence of the creator" is to *identify* God as creator—or to put it differently, to affirm the *attribute* "creator" for God. To mention one more of these instances: it is indicated by al-Rāzī's 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

677 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 108.
678 Literally singular: *kam ilāh.*
679 Erlwein, "Why worship God?," 57–61.

changing of the winds and clouds [...]: there are signs in all these for those who use their minds.} In his "The Existence of God," Ayman Shihadeh refers to this very verse and mentions it as an example of how, in the *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī takes his inspiration from the Qur'an to present a teleological or design argument for God's existence.[680] In the *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī indeed refers to the verse in question and remarks:[681]

> 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 for this world.

To this he adds: "no other book contains an explanation of this kind of proof coming close to that of the Qur'an, and it is replete with this kind of explanation—God said: {In the creation of the heavens and the earth [...]} [i.e. Q. 2:164]."[682] Yet, a different picture about the intention behind al-Rāzī's "argument from design" emerges when taking into account his commentary on this verse in the *Tafsīr*. (That is to say, Shihadeh is correct in describing the argument as an argument from design, but seems to be mistaken when it comes to the question of what the argument is meant to prove.) Referring to "the ships that sail the seas" mentioned in the verse, al-Rāzī explains that they exemplify "reasoning [...] for the existence of the creator." He then comments: "even if 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 were not for His creation of them [i.e. the devices], this would not be possible [for humans]."[683] Al-Rāzī's comment indicates, I submit, that his concern lies with making a point about the contentious and much debated issue of human efficient causality. He wants to stress that, even if humans are regarded as agents, this is not at the expense of the all-important declaration that God, of course, is creator. Much more than that, He is of course the creator on whom everything else depends, as emphasised by al-Rāzī's insistence that without God's creative input, no human action (exemplified by the assembly of ships, in reference to the Qur'anic example) would be possible in the first place.[684] Al-Rāzī's concern is then here the same as in his commentary on the story of Abraham: even if it

680 Shihadeh, "The Existence of God," 201.
681 Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, 233.
682 Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, 235.
683 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 4, 218.
684 See Erlwein, "Why worship God?," 45–53.

might be the case that other entities are agents and bring about events in this world (whether these be humans or the heavenly bodies), God ultimately is the creator of it all, for everything depends on him. Much more could be said about al-Rāzī's theory of causality, but a detailed study of this is beyond the scope and focus of this chapter. It is, however, noteworthy that al-Rāzī here seems to part with the position traditionally associated with the Ashʿarīs (at least before Ibn Sīnā) that God alone is cause and creator in the universe, for al-Rāzī here seems to ascribe some degree of causal efficacy to humans.[685] For our purposes, it shall, however, suffice to note that his explanations are another indication that "the proof of the existence of the creator" has the objective of *ascribing* the title "creator" to God, not to prove that God exists in the first place.

In the same manner, God's sending down of 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." Once more, it is al-Rāzī's objective to make the point (following the Qur'an's own pronouncement) that God is to be identified as the entity responsible for this event. Rain, al-Rāzī states, belongs to the things "no one can create except for God (Most-High!)." The colours in things as well as their taste and smell, which are all caused by rain falling on the earth, in reality also belong to the things and occurrences "no one is capable of [bringing about] except for God."[686] Again, al-Rāzī's insistence that these phenomena are to be attributes to God, so as to call Him their creator, appears against the background of opposing opinions he introduces by means of a hypothetical interlocutor who proposes a natural explanation of them.[687]

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685 On the dispute about (human efficient) causality among Ashʿarīs and Muʿtazilīs, see, for example, Maria De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, al-Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī* (Abingdon, New York: Routledge, 2014), 10–16; Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Chapter 5 "Cosmology in Early Islam," 123–146; David Bennett, "The Muʿtazilite Movement (II): The Early Muʿtazilites," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 142–158. For Ibn Sīnā's theory of causality and its influence on *kalām*, see Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, Section "The *falāsifa*'s View of Creation by Means of Secondary Causality," 133–141; Robert Wisnovsky, "Final and Efficient Causality in Avicenna's Cosmology and Theology," *Quaestio* 2 (2002): 97–123; Richard M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazālī and Avicenna* (Heidelberg: C. Winter Universitätsverlag, 1992).

686 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 4, 219.

687 These positions are strikingly reminiscent of Ibn Sīnā's views on cosmology and meteorology which proffer naturalistic explanations. See Gad Freudenthal, "The Medieval Hebrew Reception of Avicenna's Account of the Formation and Perseverance of Dry Land: Between Bold Naturalism and Fideist Literalism," in *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Physics and Cosmology*, Scientia Graeco-Arabica 23, ed. Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Amos Bertolacci (Bos-

At this point, it seems worth pointing out that, even if it appears somewhat curious to our ears to speak of "the proof of the existence of the creator" when the intention is to prove that God is to be *described* as creator, this is simply the language al-Rāzī uses. It should not be forgotten that al-Rāzī is certainly not the first theologian to use this kind of expression in the present context. As seen in the preceding chapters of this book, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and al-Nasafī (d. 507/1114) already spoke of the proof of "the *existence* of the creator" when referring to the objective of ascribing the title "creator of the world" to God. (Al-Ghazālī spoke of methods by which "the existence of the creator (*wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*) is known,"[688] and al-Nasafī discussed the "proof for the existence of a creator (*wujūd ṣāniʿ*)."[689]) Despite its somewhat unusual ring, there are other instances in the *Tafsīr* that confirm that al-Rāzī sometimes uses the term "*wujūd*" without intending to refer to the dichotomy between the existence and non-existence of an entity (this being how "*wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*" has been understood in the secondary academic literature). One such instance is al-Rāzī's discussion of God's attribute of being powerful. He explains: "as for the attribute of power (*ṣifat al-qudra*), everything He (Most-High!) mentioned regarding the originatedness of varieties of plants and animals [...] indicates His being powerful and endowed with will (*kawnuhu subḥānahu qādiran mukhtāran*), and not a cause by virtue of His essence (*mūjib bi'l-dhāt*)." In this particular instance, al-Rāzī does not expound upon the reasoning underlying this argument; all he mentions is that the variety of plants and animals exists "despite the fact that they are all equal when it comes to the four natures (*al-ṭabāʾiʿ al-arbaʿ*)."[690] Elsewhere, however, he provides more detail: the idea is that being "powerful" is defined as "being able to act and not to act" as one wishes. This is epitomised in the two interrelated notions that the effect of an entity such described is temporally originated, and that such an entity is able to produce diverse effects. This is contrasted with the notion of an involuntary cause whose very essence compels it to exert an influence. (Al-Rāzī mentions fire as an example of the latter kind.) An entity thus characterised cannot account for the existence of various things

ton, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 269 – 311; Jean-Marc Mandosio, "Follower or Opponent of Aristotle? The Critical Reception of Avicenna's Meteorology in the Latin World and the Legacy of Alfred the Englishman," in *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Physics and Cosmology*, Scientia Graeco-Arabica 23, ed. Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Amos Bertolacci (Boston, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 459 – 534.

688 Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād* (Ankara: NUR Matbaası, 1962), 34.

689 Abū 'l-Qāsim al-Anṣārī, *al-Ghunya fī al-kalām*, *qism al-ilāhiyyāt*, study and edition of the Arabic text by Muṣṭafā Ḥasanīn ʿAbd al-Hādī (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Salām, 2010), 107.

690 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 97.

as its effects.[691] This is the reasoning that underlies al-Rāzī's aforementioned statement that "everything He (Most-High!) mentioned regarding the originatedness of varieties of plants and animals [...] indicates His being powerful and endowed with will, and not a cause by virtue of His essence." Importantly, one page later, and still in the same context, al-Rāzī states the following: "[as for those] who deny the powerful one, the one possessed of will (*al-qādir al-mukhtār*), God (Most-High!) exposed their belief as false on the basis of the originatedness of all kinds of plants and classes of living beings, despite the fact that they all share in the [four] natures [...], and this proves *the existence of the powerful one* (*dhālik yadullu ʿalā wujūd al-qādir*) [my emphasis]."[692] The line of reasoning contained in this quote as well as the line of reasoning contained in the aforementioned quote are evidently the same. Both appear in the same context of al-Rāzī's discussion of God's attribute of power and His description as being powerful. The issue at stake is that certain phenomena in this world indicate that God indeed is to be characterised as powerful, and that the denial of this attribute and description of Him is at odds with the evidence, as al-Rāzī believes. What is noteworthy is that, in this particular context and with this particular concern in mind, al-Rāzī speaks of proofs for "the existence of the powerful one" (*wujūd al-qādir*). He also uses this expression as an equivalent for, and interchangeably with, the expression that certain things are evidence for "His being powerful." No matter the expression, in both cases an *attribute* of God is at stake, which has nothing to do with the question of *God's existence* (rather al-Rāzī's discussion of said attribute presupposes God's very existence). In the same way, as has been seen, al-Rāzī speaks of "proofs for the existence of the creator." Here, too, the curious sounding expression should not cause us to assume that al-Rāzī is concerned with anything other than establishing an *attribute* for God (in this case, the attribute "creator"). Cosmological arguments for God's existence and al-Rāzī's "proofs for the existence of the creator" may have it in common that they make use of very similar expressions and that the reasoning they employ is strikingly similar (that is, reasoning from the effect to the cause); yet, it is the *objective* of al-Rāzī's proof which distinguishes it from cosmological arguments. The fundamental difference is, as has become clear, that al-Rāzī takes God (that is, *Allāh*) to be part of reality, as much as the world, when he presents his "proof for the existence of the creator," and that his concern lies with establishing God's unique attribute "creator of the world." Cosmological arguments for God's existence, in contrast, seek to show that reality does not com-

691 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 174; *al-Ishāra*, 110.
692 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 98.

prise of the world alone (which is the starting point of these arguments), but that the existence of yet another entity needs to be *introduced* into reality, which is known since the world requires a cause. God's existence is, thus, the conclusion sought by cosmological arguments. Al-Rāzī, in contrast, accepts God's existence from the outset of his proof—*accepts* God's existence in the sense that has become apparent especially in his commentary on the Abraham story. As opposed to several versions of the cosmological argument (as discussed in the Introduction), al-Rāzī does not take "God" to be a shorthand for "creator of the world," nor does he think that they refer to the same thing (rather, "creator" for al-Rāzī is analogous to "powerful" in that both refer to *descriptions* of God, and do not denote *God Himself*). In the secondary academic literature, this distinction is often overlooked. Fathallah Kholeif, for instance, in his Arabic monograph *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, discusses al-Rāzī's proofs for "God's existence" (*wujūd Allāh*), as Kholeif describes them. In the course of his discussion of al-Rāzī's arguments, Kholeif interchangeably speaks of "God's existence" (*wujūd Allāh*), "the existence of the necessarily existent" (*wujūd wājib al-wujūd*), and "the existence of the creator" (*wujūd al-ṣāniʿ*), thus overlooking that these expressions refer to different aspects in relation to God.

This insight also draws attention to the need of being cautious not to misunderstand al-Rāzī's intention in certain statements of his. Take the following example: in the *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī notes that the early philosophers (*qudamāʾ al-falāsifa*) already made use of the reasoning that invokes the originatedness of the attributes found in created beings, in particular the endless rotations this world goes through (inspired, as al-Rāzī suggests, by the Qur'anic statement that {The creation of the heavens and the earth is greater by far than the creation of mankind} at Q. 40:57). On this basis they concluded that the agent causing these rotations "cannot be a body or corporeal, and one, thus, needs to acknowledge an existent which is not a body nor corporeal and who is the mover of [...] the planets. This existent is God (Most-High!)."[693] Al-Rāzī's emphasising, "this existent is God" (quoting the philosophers) is suspiciously reminiscent of Aquinas' statement in the *Summa Theologica* that "it is necessary to admit a first efficient cause [outside and in addition to the world], to which everyone gives the name of God."[694] As opposed to Aquinas' reasoning, however, al-Rāzī means to say that out of all entities constituting reality it is God, none other, who is to be identified as the mover of the planets (since the corporeal planets cannot

693 Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, 228.

694 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, quoted in John Hick, *The Existence of God: A Reader Edited with an Introduction by John Hick* (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1964), 82–85.

bring about these movements, which also indicates that He is incorporeal). He does not mean to say that the existence of yet another entity needs to be introduced into reality since the aforementioned rotations require a cause, and this mover is then called "God."

10.3 Establishing God's (Kind of) Existence

Considering these findings, it must seem somewhat astonishing that, in his commentary on Q. 2:21–21 (discussed above), just before al-Rāzī lists the four methods to prove the creator and the Qur'anic verses he associates with them, we read the following:[695]

> note that He (Praised be He!) decreed that He should be worshipped—but the order to worship Him depends on knowledge of *His existence* (*maʿrifat wujūdihi*). Since knowledge of His existence is not immediate (*ḍarūrī*), rather it is based on reasoning (*istidlālī*), He reports here what proves His existence. Note that we explained in the reason-based books that the method to affirm Him (Praised and Most-High!) (*ithbātihi*) is either possibility or originatedness or both together, and all this with regards to atoms or accidents [my emphasis].

The reason al-Rāzī here mentions God's order to worship Him has to do with the admonition found in the Qur'anic verses he presently focuses on, {People, worship your Lord, who created you and those before you [...]. Do not knowingly set up rivals with God}. What is noteworthy, however, is that here he makes knowledge of *God's existence* the prerequisite for God's order to worship Him alone, and what is more, he makes knowledge of *God's existence* dependent on the very methods which I previously showed have the objective of proving that God has the attribute "creator." This raises two obvious question: first, what *is* the objective of the methods in question, for there seems to be a contradiction involved? And secondly, is al-Rāzī then concerned with the proof of God's existence, more specifically with a cosmological argument for he mentions the possibility and originatedness of atoms and accidents as the starting point of the proof?

An answer to these questions may be found when considering the following: towards the very end of his commentary on Q. 2.21–22 al-Rāzī gives an explanation of God's saying {[He] who sent water down from it [i.e. the sky] and with that water produced things for your sustenance} (i.e. verse 22). He points out that God mentions rain and provisions coming from Him so that human "may

695 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 106.

ponder about themselves and about the states of what is above them and what is beneath them, and so 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!)."[696] The idea al-Rāzī puts forward is that by considering what the essences and attributes of created things are like, humans are able to reach the conclusion that their creator must be one who is completely different from them. This reasoning in fact underlies one of the four methods to prove the creator, and it is spelled out in al-Rāzī's discussion of the method based on the originatedness of the accidents. There he argues that everyone necessarily knows that they were once non-existent and that they therefore depend on one who brought them into existence. This creative role, the observant human being knows, is not to be assigned to himself or herself, nor to their parents or any other human. The planets and stars are not to be credited with the creation of the pondering human being either as they are subject to change which indicates their own originatedness and dependence. (This reasoning is reminiscent of the reasoning Abraham put before his people.) The role as creator must consequently be ascribed to "something" (*amr*) which is not a body or corporeal like the created entities in this world and it must have choice (*mukhtār*) in creating as well as power over it (*qādir*).[697] (Certain aspects of al-Rāzī's train of thought are here evidently not spelled out and they remain implicit: for instance, there is the notion that corporeal entities cannot be efficient causes of a given effect since they are originated (indicated by their corporeality) and therefore themselves dependent on another entity in all respects. In other places of the *Tafsīr*, however, he provides more detail.[698]) Al-Rāzī's mentioning the aspect of incorporeality when it comes to the entity who may truly be called the creator of the pondering human being (and the world as a whole, one may add) is of significance: this is so as incorporeality characterises one kind of essence and existence, out of the four kinds of essence and existence al-Rāzī acknowledges (thus following the tradition of his school). Incorporeality is precisely what characterises God's essence and existence. Created entities are characterised by the other three kinds of essence and existence: atoms, bodies, and accidents. Accidents, for instance, are also incorporeal, but they constitute a category of essence and existence different from God's as they require a substrate to inhere in.[699] The upshot

696 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 120.

697 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 107.

698 Erlwein, "Why worship God?," 44.

699 For an outline of Islamic atomism, see Shlomo Pines, *Studies in Islamic Atomism*, translated from German by Michael Schwarz, ed. Tzavi Langermann (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew

of this is that knowledge of God's incorporeality *is* knowledge of His particular kind of existence. When al-Rāzī speaks of the endeavour to prove God's existence in the above statement (that is, "since the knowledge of His existence is not immediate, rather it is based on reasoning, He reports here what proves His existence"), I pose he refers to the endeavour to make known *the kind of existence* that characterises God. The reason al-Rāzī is concerned with making known God's specific kind of existence is that only once humans grasp how God's kind of existence is different from the kinds of existence characterising created beings, they know why God's order to worship only Him has a foundation ("note that He (Praised be He!) decreed that He should be worshipped, but the order to worship Him depends on knowledge of His existence"). As illustrated by al-Rāzī's example of the train of thought of the human being who ponders over his or her own existence, for him the attribute of being creator (or one should say: ultimate creator and truly efficient cause) and the characterisation of existence as corporeal are mutually exclusive. Whatever is corporeal (that is, all entities making up this world) cannot be called a true creator. Since the right to be worshipped depends on the attribute of creator, as I have explained above, God's deservedness of worship, to the exclusion of all other entities, requires the insight that He is not like them in terms of His existence and essence. Importantly, the way of attaining this insight is but the four methods al-Rāzī mentions: "note that we explained in the reason-based books that the method to affirm Him [that is, to establish what He is like in terms of existence and the essence] is either possibility or originatedness or both together, and all this with regards to atoms or accidents."

All the aforementioned also applies to the characterisation of God's kind of existence and, thereby, His essence as eternal and necessary. It is due to the classification of the existence characteristic of atoms/bodies and accidents as originated that God's existence can be classified as eternal (this being something that is not known immediately, as al-Rāzī himself emphasises). If God were not of eternal existence, it would not be justified to call Him creator and to distinguish Him from creation as He Himself would likewise depend on a cause. The originated existence of everything other than God is thus made the very basis for the justification of His exclusive worthiness of worship, based on the very two methods al-Rāzī puts forward: "the third method [which] is reasoning based on the originatedness of the bodies [...] and the fourth method [which] is reason-

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University, 1997); A.I. Sabra, "The Simple Ontology of Kalām Atomism: An Outline," *Early Science and Medicine* 14, Evidence and Interpretations: Studies on Early Science and Medicine in Honor of John E. Murdoch (2009): 68–78, especially 68–78; Harry Austryn Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1976).

ing based on the originatedness of accidents."[700] The same is true of the remaining 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 for an entity by virtue of the essence is nothing else than eternal, beginningless, uncaused existence, and the insight that God is to be described as the necessarily existent goes hand in hand with His being the creator of the world. All this can, however, only be established on the basis of speculation about God's "traces"[701] (*āthār*), as al-Rāzī has it elsewhere, which is the starting point of the four methods.

This discussion suggests that, contrary to the view found in the secondary academic sources, al-Rāzī's four methods to prove the existence of the creator do not have the purpose of proving that God actually exists. Rather, it has been seen that al-Rāzī takes God's very existence for granted, and that his concern is a different one than the proof and provability of God's existence (along the lines of a cosmological argument): he is concerned with establishing the attribute "creator" for God alone, which entails characterising God's kind of existence and essence in contradistinction to created beings. It is this what al-Rāzī has in mind when he states that "every existent other than God points to the existence of God"[702] and "the proof of His existence is the existence of His creation, and His saying {Lord of the Worlds} [i.e. Q. 1:2] indicates that there is no way to know His existence except on the basis of His being the Lord (*rabb*) of the worlds."[703]

The difficulty in grasping al-Rāzī's intent is that he once more uses the term "*wujūd*" in a way somewhat unfamiliar to our ears. Yet, the way in which al-Rāzī here speaks of God's existence is confirmed in other instances of the *Tafsīr* where he likewise intends it to refer to the kind of existence characteristic of some entity, rather than to the question of whether some entity is part of reality or not. Consider the following statement: "we have mentioned in this book how the existence of the heavens and the earth proves their need for the choosing creator."[704] Al-Rāzī evidently does not want to say that it is the mere fact that the heavens and the earth are existents that points to their createdness; the fact that something exists says, for al-Rāzī, nothing about whether it exists due to an-

700 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 107.
701 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 24, 128.
702 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 223.
703 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 1, 180. Recall that al-Rāzī explains the term "*rabb*" as referring to the entity who has the attribute "creator": "what is meant by *al-rabb* [...] is: he who is our creator and maker of our essences and attributes" (al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 13, 43).
704 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 19, 93.

other or uncaused—rather, it is an entity's originatedness or inherent possibility that necessitates the conclusion that it depends on another. What al-Rāzī means to say in the aforementioned two quotes is that the *kind* of existence specific to the heavens and the earth *insofar* as this existence is originated and inherently possible points to their dependence on God as their creator.

10.4 The Importance of the Proof of the Existence of the Creator

Since it has become clear what purpose al-Rāzī's "proof of the existence of the creator" serves, I want to turn once more to the question of why al-Rāzī ascribes such importance to proving that God alone is the creator of this world. A number of reasons could be pointed to. One of them—and certainly one of the most important ones—is, as has been seen, that he justifies God's sole worthiness of worship on the basis of this attribute. The fundamental Qur'anic teaching of monotheism and the rejection of polytheism are dependent on God's very own attribute of creative activity. The significance al-Rāzī thus attaches to "the proof of the existence of the creator" is not novel. Other *mutakallimūn* before him, going back as already as al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm (d. 225/860) as seen in Chapter Two, pointed to God's special attribute of being creator and to the dependence of all other entities on Him in order to substantiate the Qur'anic call for monotheism.

Another reason for the prime place of "the proof of the existence of the creator" in al-Rāzī's thought is that, in his *Tafsīr*, he repeatedly stresses that reasoning on the basis of creation for the creator is the one and only method to gain knowledge about God's nature, which is what theology is all about. The proof is, hence, inextricably linked with the subject of epistemology. This is an aspect I have also already alluded to in the above discussion, and it is made explicit in al-Rāzī's commentary on Q. 2:21. There, al-Rāzī expresses his view that theology —or more precisely: the science of the principles of religion (*ʿilm al-uṣūl*)—is the noblest of all sciences. This is so because theology's subject matter (*mawḍūʿ*) is the noblest of all: "as for theology, what it seeks (*maṭlūb*) is God's essence and His attributes and His deeds, and [it seeks] all classes of things known, whether non-existent or existent."[705] Upholding the view characteristic of the proponents

705 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 96. Al-Rāzī's characterisation of theology's concern is the same as found in the writings of his Ashʿarī predecessors such as al-Ghazālī who described theology's endeavour as "the investigation of God's essence and His attributes" (Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī,

of *kalām*, al-Rāzī notes that knowledge about 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 and that this "can only be God (Most-High!)."[706] 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.

This notion is also expressed in al-Rāzī's commentary on 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 remarks that according to the *mutakallimūn* "the first knowledge about God is the knowledge of *His being* originator for the world and its maker [my emphasis]"[707] (*al-ʿilm bi-kawnihi muḥdithan li'l-ʿālam fāʿilan lahu*)—that is, of the fact that God has the attribute "creator."

Al-Rāzī's insistence that the knowledge of God's primary attribute of being creator is the basis for establishing knowledge about His essence, attributes, and acts (this being what theology is interested in) becomes even more evident in his commentary on Q. 26:23. This verse is part of a longer narration of how the prophet Moses was sent by God to Pharaoh to demand from him, in the name of "the lord of the worlds," to free the Children of Israel. In the aforementioned verse, Pharaoh is seen to pose the question to Moses, {What is this "Lord of the Worlds"?}. Al-Rāzī takes Pharaoh's question as an opportunity to explain that questions introduced by "what" (*mā*) demand that "the essence of the thing should be made known" (*taʿrīf ḥaqīqat al-shayʾ*). The essences of things may be known in a number of different ways,[708] but "making known the essence 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" as the most evident ones. 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 the essence, they understand that God is "absolutely unique"[709] (*farad muṭlaq*).

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al-Risāla al-qudsiyya (*Kitāb qawāʿid al-ʿaqāʾid*) of *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn*, vol. 1 (Jiddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2011), 85).

706 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 2, 104.

707 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 27, 197.

708 Namely: "either through the essence itself; or through a part of it; or through something outside it; or through something combined from inside and outside it" (al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 24, 128).

709 Al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr*, vol. 24, 128.

Returning to Pharaoh's question to Moses, al-Rāzī goes on to explain that Pharaoh dismissed Moses' reply, in the following verse, that the "the lord of the worlds" is {the Lord of the heavens and the earth and everything between them}, because the prophet referred to God's *role* as creator (*al-fāʿiliyya wa'l-muʾaththiriyya*) without actually stating what makes God's *essence* specific and unique (*khuṣūṣiyyat al-ḥaqīqa*). Al-Rāzī finally comments—apparently in line with Pharaoh's own grievance—that knowing about a thing's necessary concomitants or traces, such as the notion that the world depends on God, does not result in firm knowledge of the essence itself. For our purposes, however, it is important to note that al-Rāzī still presents the insight that the world depends on God as being the method that allows 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 and is an indication of His characteristics for He is described as the world's creator.

In this part of his commentary, al-Rāzī displays a strikingly Avicennan conception of the relationship between attributes and the true nature or essence of things, including God, maintaining that attributes allow "approximating" the true nature, without ever fully comprehending it.[710] The same attitude is evident in the *Arbaʿīn* and the *Maṭālib*, written before and after the *Tafsīr* respectively. In the *Arabʿīn* al-Rāzī champions the position which he ascribes to many *mutakallimūn* and most philosophers and according to which "the existence of the thing is a description (*waṣf*) different from its essence"[711] or "existence is in addition (*zāʾid*) to the essence"[712] (an expression characteristic of Ibn Sīnā). 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."[713] This applies not only to God's description as existent, but also to all other descriptions of His, and al-Rāzī thus avers that "the essence of the True One cannot be grasped [fully]."[714] In the *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī similarly holds that, since God's essence is unlike everything humans have ever known, it cannot be conceived in the same way as observable existents around us, and the only method available to humans to know God's nature is "reasoning on the basis of the effect (*al-maʿlūl*) to the cause (*al-ʿilla*) [...]

710 Compare Chapter Seven of this book on Ibn Sīnā. See also Binyamin Abrahamov, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on the Knowability of God's Essence and Attributes," *Arabica*, T. 49, Fasc. 2 (2002): 204 – 230.

711 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 82.

712 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 85.

713 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 86.

714 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 145 – 146.

which is moving from the created thing (*al-makhlūq*) to the creator (*al-khāliq*)."[715] In the *Ishāra*, however, which is among al-Rāzī's earliest writings, he interestingly took a different position on this matter. In discussing whether the philosophers are right in maintaining that God's true nature (*ḥaqīqa*) cannot be grasped by humans, he points out that revelation obligates humans to know God's essence, and that there must, consequently, be a way of attaining knowledge about it. (Once more the point is that God's uniqueness, which revelation is found to proclaim, is the difference of God's essence from all other entities and their essences.) This way is based on reason and it entails that "we know that it is necessary that possible things (*al-mumkināt*) terminate in an existent which is not dependent on another. We have [previously] shown that its existence is its very essence (*ḥaqīqa*)—it is not permissible that they should be different from each other. When we, thus, know its existence and its necessity, we know its [very] essence."[716] In the *Ishāra*, al-Rāzī still followed the position traditionally espoused by Ashʿarīs that essence and existence are one and the same thing.[717] This means that in order to gain knowledge about God's essence, one simply needs to know about God's existence. Knowledge about God's existence, however, means knowing that His specific existence, by which He is distinguished from created existence, is necessary. This follows from the fact that the existence of created things is possible. In any case, whatever position al-Rāzī took in

715 Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, 50 – 51.

716 Al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, 270. This also applies to all the other divine attributes which al-Rāzī establishes in the subsequent sections. Note that what al-Rāzī establishes as knowledge of God's essence is very much the same as what his predecessor al-Ghazālī established with regards to the divine essence in his *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-iʿtiqād*: 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. See Chapter Eight of this book on al-Ghazālī.

717 In the *Ishāra*, al-Rāzī argues that essence and existence must be the same because "if the existence of the atom (*jawhar*) were different from its essence, it would entail that we know that its essence is described with extension and has directions, even though it might not [actually] be existent [...] and the knowledge of one of them would be possible without the other, but this is an absurdity" (al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, 83). In the *Arbaʿīn*, in contrast, al-Rāzī argues that, while a body and an accident are different kinds of essences, they are the same when it comes to the fact of their existence, and existence must hence be something different than the particular essences (al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 83). On Ashʿarī ontology, see Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroës and Aquinas* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1958), Chapter "The Islamic Account of the Metaphysics of Atoms and Accidents" (33 – 43); Richard M. Frank, "The Ashʿarite Ontology I: Primary Entities," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 9/2 (1999): 163 – 231; "Bodies and Atoms: The Ashʿarite Analysis," in *Islamic Theology and Philosophy*, ed. Michael E. Marmura (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), 39 – 53.

his various works on the questions of whether God's true nature can be known and of whether some of His attributes are attributes of His essence, he consistently maintained that God's nature (not His existence!) is known on the basis of His attribute "creator" and in contradistinction and comparison to creation. This underscores the significance of "the proof of the existence of the creator."

10.5 God—Agent or Necessary Cause?

The foregoing discussion has highlighted the essential role the proof of God's being originator of the entire world plays in al-Rāzī's thought. In this respect, his works are not distinct from the *kalām* works of his predecessors. In another respect, however, a certain difference is observable. Many *mutakallimūn* before al-Rāzī's time displayed an eagerness to stress, with a view to the philosophers, that God is the cause of the world in a *specific* way. This was most evident in al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, who went to great lengths to stress choice and will as essential aspects of the notion of God as creator (while accusing the philosophers of depriving God of these and making Him an involuntary, necessary cause).[718] The same is also true of *mutakallimūn* such as al-Malāḥimī (d. 536/1141), who emphasised the difference between these two kinds of causes, and al-Bāqillānī (d. 402/1013), who included the notion of will in his proof of the creator.[719]

Unlike his predecessors, it does not seem to be of major importance to al-Rāzī to make a point about the way in which God is creator in his proof of the creator. In the section on the affirmation of the creator in the *Ishāra*, al-Rāzī,

718 See Chapter Three of the *Tahāfut* which deals with the philosophers and theologians' respective notions of the terms "*fāʿil*/agent" and "*ṣāniʿ*/creator." There al-Ghazālī stresses: "the agent is not called *fāʿil* and *ṣāniʿ* simply because he is a cause (*sabab*); rather [he is thus called] because he is a cause in a specific way, namely by will and choice" (Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (Beyrouth: Imprimeri Catholique, 1927), 97).

719 Maḥmūd b. Muḥammad al-Malāḥimī al-Khuwārazmī, *Kitāb al-Muʿtamad fī uṣūl al-dīn* (London: al-Hoda, 1991), 83: "[there is first] the influence coming from one who exerts an influence according to choice, and this is [called] 'act' (*fiʿl*). [There is secondly] an influence coming from one who exerts an influence by necessity, which is [called] 'the *ḥukm* of the *ʿilla*' or 'the *musabbab* of the *sabab*.' We will now clarify that His essence is not one that causes by necessity like an *ʿilla* or a *sabab*." Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī, *al-Tamhīd fī al-radd ʿalā al-mulḥida wa'l-muʿaṭṭila wa'l-rāfiḍa wa'l-khawārij wa'l-muʿtazila*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad al-Khaḍīrī and Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Hādī Abū Rīda (al-Qāhira: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1947), 23: "[...] that there is for it one who makes it occur earlier [than others] and who brings it into existence according to his will (*maqṣūran ʿalā mashīʾatihi*)."

for instance, uses the terms "*ṣāniʿ*," "*sabab*," and "*muqtaḍin*" interchangeably without further defining them or even indicating that they might be understood to denote different kinds of causes (as they did for certain early *mutakallimūn*, as seen in the previous chapters).[720] The first time the distinction between a voluntary agent and a necessary cause is made explicit is when al-Rāzī turns to the discussion of the hypostatic divine attributes. There, the idea of God's being a necessary cause by virtue of His essence is rejected and made the basis of the affirmation of the hypostatic attribute of power.[721] Only much later in the *Ishāra* do we encounter a section entitled "On the impossibility that He (Most-High!) causes essentially (*mūjib bi'l-dhāt*)"[722] which contains a refutation proper of the philosophers' position.

In the *Arbaʿīn*, al-Rāzī also employs a host of terms to describe God in His role as creator, such as "*ṣāniʿ*," "*muʾaththir*," "*mukhaṣṣiṣ*," "*murajjiḥ*," and "*muḥdith*,"[723] but does not expound upon the concepts of a necessary cause (*al-ʿilla al-mūjiba* and *mūjib bi'l-dhāt*) and a powerful, choosing agent (*qādir fāʿil mukhtar*) until his discussion of the first of God's hypostatic attributes, that is, His being powerful.[724]

The many chapters in the *Maṭālib* concerned with the proof of the creator are no exception to this rule. Whether al-Rāzī makes use of the terms "*ilāh*," "*fāʿil*," or "*ṣāniʿ*," he does not proceed to define them—except in two instances, it appears: one of them is his presentation of the method which reasons on the basis of the possibility of the attributes.[725] There he states, after having affirmed a cause (*muʾaththir*) for the world, that the *mutakallimūn* would continue asking whether this cause is a necessary cause due to the nature of the essence (*mūjib bi'l-dhāt*) or an agent endowed with choice (*fāʿil bi'l-ikhtiyār*). The first option is of course rejected.[726] The other instance is in an even later section entitled "On enumerating the proofs [of the creator] mentioned by different classes of people."[727] There he proposes to consider that "this world either has a creator or not [...]. Then we say: the creator of this world is either a choosing agent (*fāʿil mukhtār*) or not [...]."[728] Other than these two instances, it is once more only in his

720 Al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, 75.
721 Al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, 108 and 110: "*lam takun mūjidiyyatuhu li-dhātihi*."
722 Al-Rāzī, *al-Ishāra*, 161.
723 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 101; 101; 121; 121; 124.
724 Al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, vol. 1, 180; 182; 183.
725 Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, 184.
726 Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, 186.
727 Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, 249.
728 Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 1, part 1, 272.

discussion of the hypostatic divine attributes, and the attribute of power in particular, that al-Rāzī objects to the notion of God's being a necessary cause (*mūjib bi'l-dhāt*) and instead defends His being a choosing agent (*fāʿil mukhtār*).[729]

It would certainly be wrong to conclude that to specify the way in which God is the world's cause is not of importance for al-Rāzī since it does not play an essential role in the sections on the affirmation of the creator. After all, in the works of his considered in this chapter he does make the point in other sections 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 slightly shifted—away from what was a major concern for some of his predecessors, that is, to clarify the way in which God is cause and the diverse terminology that applies (and does not apply) to Him, to the more fundamental concern to establish that the world actually depends on another, namely God, for its existence.

729 Al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, vol. 2, part 3, 86; 89.

11 Conclusion

Let us end this book with a few concluding remarks.

Throughout this book I argued that, contrary to the frequently articulated assumption in the secondary academic literature that medieval Islamic *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa* sought to prove that God exists, proofs for God's existence are in fact absent from their works. In arguing this point, I referred to the *objective* of the arguments found in the works of Islamic thinkers, that is, to the question of what their arguments are meant to prove. While classical *kalām* manuals and works of *falsafa* certainly contain a variety of arguments for the creator (and similar expressions), I argued that their authors did not *intend* or *seek* to prove that God exists. It is in this sense that arguments for God's existence are absent from their works. In investigating the arguments and ideas put forward by some of the most influential thinkers in the classical Islamic tradition (influential not only in their own times, but also insofar as it is their works that became the focus of existing studies), I showed that the discourse these thinkers were part of and shaped was a discourse first and foremost concerned with *God's role as creator* of the world. The discussions conducted by these thinkers pertaining to the questions about the temporal origination of the world and the affirmation that it depends on an originator had the objective of *identifying* God as the one to be credited with the creation of the world—or to put it differently: the objective of affirming the *attribute* "creator" for God. In pursuing this objective, Islamic thinkers took God's very existence for granted and assumed Him to be part of reality from the outset of their proofs.

Islamic thinkers formulated their proofs that God is to be described as the creator of the world with certain opponents in mind. Some of these opponents were perceived to be adherents of other faiths, others were found within the fold of Islam. For instance, the bigger part of al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* was directed against adherents of dualist religions (*al-thanawiyya*) whose belief that the world was created by two eternal principles earned al-Māturīdī's disapproval, for the Qur'an clearly states in numerous verses that {God is the Creator of all things} (i. e. Q. 39:62). The *mutakallimūn* also made it their task to refute the view they often ascribed to a rather ill-defined group called "*al-dahriyya*" that the world has always existed as it does now and does not depend on any creator for its existence. The proof of the creator was meant to expose the erroneous nature of their position as well. Upholding the world's originatedness, as the *mutakallimūn* did, was not a prerequisite for Ibn Sīnā's own argument that the world depends for its existence on God. No matter the differences between *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa* about whether the world has a beginning in time or is

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-012

eternal emanation, they shared the objective to establish God's role as cause and creator of the world.

The proof of the creator had, however, evidently the purpose not only of establishing a causal link between God and the world, but also of establishing the way in which God is its cause. Al-Māturīdī represents one of the earliest instances of a *mutakallim* discussing the notion of God as cause. He displayed an eagerness to refute the notion of God as a necessary cause, bringing about the existence of the world by the necessity of His nature (a position the *mutakallimūn* would habitually ascribe to the Islamic philosopher), and vigorously defended the notion of God as a creator who brings into existence by will and choice (this being the notion typically espoused by the *mutakallimūn*).

Under the enormous influence of Ibn Sīnā's philosophical ideas on the *kalām* tradition, al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī adopted certain terminology and concepts that were previously rejected by their predecessors as not apt to describe God in His role as creator. Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Rushd, in turn, exemplified how the philosophers made use of the very same terminology employed by the *mutakallimūn*, while associating a different mode of creation and concept of God as creator with these terms. Ibn Sīnā, for his part, expressed a more or less subtle critique of the *mutakallimūn* for their method of establishing God's attribute of being creator based on the premise that the world has a first beginning for its existence. Had they considered his own superior method, they would have been able to grasp the true meaning of scripture's account of creation and the way in which God is creator.

The proof of God's attribute "creator" was not an end in itself for Islamic thinkers. Rather, they made it the foundation of declaring God's oneness and uniqueness (*tawḥīd*), one of Islam's central tenets. God's uniqueness for them meant precisely that all of creation is to be traced back to God's creative activity. For some *mutakallimūn*, such as al-Ashʿarī, this entailed that no entity other than God is to be called creator and described as exerting an influence (this coming down to the dispute between early Muʿtazilīs and Ashʿarīs about human efficient causality). For others, such as al-Kindī, Ibn Sīnā, and al-Rāzī, it meant showing that all other entities in the cosmos that might also have some degree of causal efficacy are ultimately dependent on God, which makes Him unique in His role as creator. In any case, God's attribute of creator had to be established by the proof of the creator.

God's *tawḥīd* was also seen by many *mutakallimūn* to include the affirmation that God is completely different from the entities making up the world and creation. Different thinkers had different notions of God's uniqueness and difference from creation, but they could all point to Qur'anic pronouncements such as that {There is nothing like Him} (i. e. Q. 42:11) in order to defend this idea.

Against the *mujassima*, at one end of the spectrum, one could maintain that *God* must be incorporeal for His *creation* is corporeal. Against the Ismāʿīlīs (often derogatorily called "*al-muʿaṭṭila*," i.e. those who divest God of His attributes), at the other end of the spectrum, one could hold that *God* has to be affirmed as "an existent" just like *created existents*, of course without running the danger of likening Him to creation (*tashbīh*). One aspect all *mutakallimūn* agreed on, including the philosopher al-Kindī, was that the world has to be temporally originated and God eternal so as to affirm His uniqueness. Ibn Sīnā of course rejected this dichotomy, but likewise insisted on God's absolute otherness from the world and His *tawḥīd* by declaring Him necessarily existent by virtue of His essence (a concept which later *mutakallimūn* were keen to incorporate into their own ways of expressing God's otherness). Regardless of the precise way in which God's *tawḥīd* was conceived of, the crucial observation is that its affirmation was seen to depend on contrasting and comparing God with creation. For the *mutakallimūn*, this meant that the only method to affirm God's uniqueness was on the basis of His attribute of creator—which the proof of the creator was meant to establish. Even for Ibn Sīnā, knowledge of God's uniqueness required affirming Him as the cause of all other things in existence (even though knowledge of God's attributes depends on the consideration of the notion of necessary existence alone).

Finally, the reason many Islamic thinkers put such emphasis, first, on the proof of the creator and, secondly, on the affirmation of God's uniqueness (two interrelated aspects) is that this is how they explained God's sole deservedness of worship—arguably the most central tenet of Islam. This became clear as early as al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm's writing, and was most evident in al-Rāzī's *Tafsīr* where he made it explicit that the proof of the creator serves the purpose of defending monotheism, by highlighting God's unique role as creator.

In the context of the endeavour to establish God's essence as unique and different from all other beings, later *mutakallimūn* and *falāsifa*—such as Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī, Ibn Rushd, and al-Rāzī—began to speak of the proof of "God's existence." (The roots of this, however, already go back to thinkers such as al-Qāsim.) In adopting this terminology, the difference between God and creation came now to be expressed in terms of the difference between His kind of existence and the kinds of existence characteristic of created reality. This development was surely due to the sweeping influence of Ibn Sīnā's identification of metaphysics' subject matter as the existent qua existent and his speaking about God in terms of His necessary existence. It became apparent that these thinkers did not intend this expression to denote what it denotes in arguments for God's existence. Rather, their proof of "God's existence" referred to the *classification* of God's particular kind of existence. If God is unlike creation, His existence

must be transcendent and incorporeal. Or should it be the case that God is not to be described as an existent at all?, as some maintained. Further, what is the relation of God's existence to His essential and hypostatic attributes?

The present study of some of the earliest Islamic thinkers, such as al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm and al-Kindī, as well as of their successors in later generations, up until Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, has shown that it is these problems that characterise the discourse in question. In discussing these questions, it became evident time and again that Islamic thinkers had a particular interest in confirming the teachings of scripture by means of reason. This endeavour to lend support to scripture was more than evident in al-Qāsim's thought. His *Kitāb al-Dalīl al-kabīr* is almost entirely based on Qur'anic verses speaking about God in His role as creator. It is thus not surprising that al-Qāsim, as one of the earliest proponents of *kalām*, adopted the Qur'anic reasoning that creation points to God's being creator, so as to make possible the inference of the divine attributes and characteristics from the attributes and characteristics of creation. Other thinkers, too, went to great lengths to emphasise that their reason-based methods derive from the Qur'an itself. Ibn Rushd, for instance, stressed that his two methods to prove the creator *are* but the Qur'anic methods. Al-Rāzī similarly pointed out in his *Tafsīr* (in a more explicit way than in his *kalām* works proper) that the *kalām* methods to prove the creator follow Qur'anic forms of argumentation—only, the *mutakallimūn* spell out what the Qur'an indicates. Al-Kindī, Islam's first philosopher, shared these concerns, making explicit reference to Qur'anic notions of God's rule over the cosmos, but he very much drew on methods and ideas inherited from the Greek philosophical tradition. For example, his proof of God's being described as creator did not require the premise of the world's origin in time; 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 their proofs of the creator, can already be found in al-Qāsim and other early Muʿtazilīs. This includes the notions of particularisation (*ikhtiṣāṣ*, *takhṣīṣ*) and change (*taghayyur*), which all have a Qur'anic provenance as well. The treatment of the proof of the creator on the part of later *mutakallimūn*, starting with al-Māturīdī, became more and more systematised. Unlike in al-Qāsim's work, their discussions are mainly based on rational arguments without a host of direct references to the Qur'an. Yet, the spirit of the Qur'an remains discernible, for example, in the arrangement of chapters (later also having been standardised) where the originatedness of the world is made the premise for the inference that God is its creator. (This is not to say that the Qur'an necessarily espouses the temporal origination of the world. It simply means that the Qur'an typically invokes creation as a sign of God as its maker.)

In the Introduction of this book I have emphasised that it might not be that surprising after all that the objective of the philosophical and theological arguments which are the focus of this study has been misconstrued in the secondary academic literature. This is so, as has become clear, since both the terminology employed in these arguments as well as the reasoning they follow is strikingly similar to arguments for God's existence (in particular cosmological ones) known from the western philosophical tradition. The declared aim of Islamic thinkers to "prove the existence of the creator" and to put forwards "proofs that the world has a creator" seems to be a clear indication (at first glance, that is) that these arguments share the objective of cosmological arguments for God's existence. This impression is even more reinforced when reading about the endeavour on the part of these thinkers to "affirm the existence of God" (mentioned above) or when al-Rāzī states that "every existent other than God points to the existence of God."[730]

It became clear how crucial it is to take into account the broader context in which the proofs of the creator appear, as well as to be cautious about the way in which Islamic thinkers used terminology (which might differ from the way we are familiar with), in order to gauge their intention and concerns. The importance of taking into account the broader context was particularly highlighted in al-Rāzī's discussion of the methods to prove the creator in the *Tafsīr*, as his explanations there indicate that their purpose is not to prove God's very existence, but to underscore His unique attribute of being creator by tracing all of creation to Him. Other thinkers, too, in fact indicated in a rather explicit manner what their proof of the creator is meant to establish. Examples of this are al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, al-Kindī, and al-Māturīdī who presented their proofs of the creator in the context of the objective to establish God's *rubūbiyya*—a term once more referring to the description of God as creator and cause of all other existents.

The central argument of this book then is that, in the secondary academic literature, a crucial distinction is not made when it comes to the proofs of the creator: this is the distinction between terms that refer to *attributes* of God and terms that refer to *God Himself*. The "proof of the creator" (or of the existence of the creator and similar expressions) meant for the *mutakallimūn* establishing God's attribute "creator." (Compare here the parallel with the "proof of the existence of the powerful one" in al-Rāzī's *Tafsīr*.) Establishing an attribute for an entity is, however, different from proving the very existence of that entity. In seeking to show that God is to be described as "creator," these thinkers took God to

730 Muḥammad b. ʿUmar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (*Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*), 32 vols (Bayrūt: Dār al-Fikr li'l-Ṭabāʿa wa'l-Nashr wa'l-Tawzīʿ, 1981), vol. 1, 223.

be part of reality from the outset of their proofs and discussions, and they did not intend to show that reality comprises of more than just the entities making up this world. In the Islamic arguments for the creator, "creator" is not equivalent to "God" (or "God" a shorthand for "creator of the world") as it often appears in cosmological arguments for God's existence. (Consider the examples of Thomas Aquinas and William Paley I discussed in the Introduction.) In cosmological arguments for God's existence, the proof that the world has a creator is then nothing else than the proof that God exists (fittingly expressed by Taneli Kukkonen as: "that we have a [...] maker [...] means that we have a God."[731]). I attempted to highlight the difference between the Islamic arguments for the creator and cosmological arguments for God's existence as they are known from, and classified in, the western philosophical tradition by the following example: arguments for God's existence start off with the existence of the world or, say, 100 "items" or "entities" constituting reality. Their objective is to *introduce* into reality the existence of a 101st item or entity, by reasoning to its existence on the basis of the need of the world for a creator. The Islamic arguments, in contrast, always assume that reality comprises of 101 entities, and their concern lies with *identifying* one particular entity out of the 101 entities as "creator" of the remaining entities. It is this difference in assumptions and objectives that underscores why to identify the objective of the Islamic arguments in question as to prove that God actually exists means misconstruing their objective.

I want to lastly stress something I have pointed out at the beginning of this book: this study is solely concerned with investigating the way in which classical Islamic thinkers used their arguments for the creator and the objective they ascribed to these arguments. This does then not imply that their arguments *could* not be made use of if one sought to presents an argument for God's existence. After all, and as I have emphasised repeatedly, the structure and reasoning of the Islamic arguments in question and arguments for God's existence (as defined in the western tradition and following Immanuel Kant's classification) is strikingly similar. Yet, the important point remains that the question about the objective for which an argument *could* be used is different from the question about the objective for which it *was* in fact used.

731 Taneli Kukkonen, "Averroes and the Teleological Argument," *Religious Studies* 38/4 (2002): 405–428, at 406–407.

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https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-014

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https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110619560-015