

Reason and Revelation in Islam before Ibn Taymiyya

Ibn Taymiyya's massive effort to refute the universal rule and his exhaustive deconstruction and reconstruction of reason in his colossal work, *Dar' ta'arūḍ al-'aql wa-l-naql*, were not just a spur-of-the-moment intellectual exercise. Rather, his efforts were occasioned by centuries of intense theological and intellectual debate that involved scholars of law, theology, and philosophy, as well as Sufis, and expressed a fundamental clash between distinct epistemological approaches. This debate did not simply result from the absorption of Greek philosophy into Muslim thought, as has often been assumed, but manifested itself in nascent form from the earliest days of the Islamic community. The following sections provide an overview of the multi-layered development and interaction between reason and revelation in the Qur'ān and the major Islamic disciplines, with a particular emphasis on theology, up to the time of Ibn Taymiyya in the seventh/thirteenth and eighth/fourteenth centuries.

1 Reason and Revelation, Reason in Revelation

The Qur'ān is a book intensely concerned with knowledge.¹ In addition to making various declarative and imperative statements, it repeatedly invites those it addresses to reflect—especially to reflect upon the created order, including man, as a sign of God. In addition, it makes abundant use of arguments to persuade its audience of the truth of its teachings, thus inviting believers, from the very inception of revelation, to an integrated paradigm of reason and revelation. The Qur'ān, moreover, does not present itself as the least bit self-conscious or defensive in the face of a questioning human reason. Indeed, it boldly challenges its readers to find within it any fundamental contradiction² and to inspect the created order with careful scrutiny for any gaps or incongruences.³

1 The word *'ilm* (knowledge) and other verbal and nominal derivatives of the root *'-l-m* (to know) appear in the Qur'ān in a staggering 811 verses, or roughly thirteen percent of all verses of the Qur'ān.

2 "Do they not consider the Qur'ān (with care)? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy." (Q. *al-Nisā'* 4:82); trans. Yusuf Ali.

3 "(3) ... No want of proportion will you see in the creation of the Most Merciful. So turn your

The Qurʾān identifies the locus of rational reflection variously as the “*aql*,” “*qalb*,” “*lubb*,” and “*fuʿād*,” among other, related terms.⁴ It also makes frequent use of terms connoting mental cognition and reflection, describes itself as bringing knowledge to a humanity that has “been given of knowledge but little,”⁵ draws stark distinctions between “those who know and those who know not,”⁶ repeatedly exhorts mankind to ponder and to reflect,⁷ and, significantly, insists that belief in God and the acceptance of the truth of revelation arise as the natural result of a healthy, properly functioning intellect. It is a remarkable fact that nowhere in the Qurʾān is knowledge (*ʿilm*) contrasted with faith (*īmān*), as is typical in modern parlance, but only with lack of knowledge, or ignorance (*jahl*, *jahāla*).⁸ Knowledge and faith, rather, are presented as being fully concomitant and mutually entailing. The distinctly Enlightenment notion that one has “faith” in something of which one does not have, and in principle cannot have, bona fide knowledge, or the related notion that knowing something precludes having “faith” in it, is entirely alien to the Qurʾānic worldview and epistemology.⁹ At the same time, the Qurʾān squarely admits that human reason, being a faculty of a limited and finite being, is of necessity not boundless—for “you have been given of knowledge but little,”¹⁰ and

sight again: do you see any flaw? (4) Then turn your sight twice more; (your) sight will come back to you feeble and weary.” (Q. *al-Mulk* 67:3–4).

- 4 For a discussion, with Qurʾānic references, of various terms used in the Qurʾān to signify reason, reflection, and related meanings—particularly the words *yaʿqilūn/taʿqilūn*, *ulū al-albāb*, *yatafakkarūn*, *yubṣirūn*, *yaʿqahūn*, *ulū al-abṣār*, and *yaʿlamūn*—see al-Kattāni, *Jadal*, 1:281–285. See also Kalin, *Reason and Rationality in the Qurʾān*.
- 5 See, for example, Q. *al-Isrāʾ* 17:85.
- 6 As in the verse “Say, ‘Are those who know equal to those who know not?’” (Q. *al-Zumar* 39:9).
- 7 For example, “Thus do We explain the signs in detail for a people who reflect (*yatafakkarūn*)” (Q. *Yūnus* 10:24) and similar at Q. *al-Raʿd* 13:3; *al-Naḥl* 16:11, 16:69; *al-Rūm* 30:21; *al-Zumar* 39:42; and *al-Jāthiyā* 45:13. Also, “perchance they may reflect” (*laʿallahum yatafakkarūn*) at Q. *al-Aʿrāf* 7:176 and similar at Q. *al-Naḥl* 16:44 and *al-Ḥaṣhr* 59:21.
- 8 See, e.g., Q. *al-Baqara* 2:30, 2:216, 2:232; *Āl ʿImrān* 3:66; *al-Naḥl* 16:74, 16:78; and *al-Nūr* 24:19 for lack of knowledge (especially in comparison to God’s omniscience) and, e.g., Q. *al-Nisāʾ* 4:17; *al-Māʿida* 5:50; *Hūd* 11:29; *al-Furqān* 25:63; *al-Naml* 27:55; *al-Zumar* 39:64; and *al-Ḥujurāt* 49:6 for references to ignorance.
- 9 Josef van Ess has observed that “Christianity speaks of ‘mysteries’ of faith; Islam has nothing like that. For Saint Paul, reason belongs to the realm of the ‘flesh’; for Muslims, reason, *ʿaql*, has always been the chief faculty granted human beings by God.” Van Ess, *Flowering*, 153–154. Similarly, Eric Ormsby begins a chapter on Arabic philosophy with the statement, “Reason is central to Islam,” then goes on to elaborate that “an intense preoccupation with reason is one of the most enduring and characteristic aspects of Islam and of Islamic culture.” Ormsby, “Arabic Philosophy,” 125.
- 10 “*wa-mā ūtītum min al-ʿilmi illā qalīlan*” (Q. *al-Isrāʾ* 17:85).

indeed, more soberingly, “God knows and you know not.”¹¹ The Qur’ānic revelation, therefore, actively directs human beings to think and to reflect with their minds, the full and earnest use of which will inexorably bring them not only to God and the truth of religion but also, simultaneously, to the understanding that ultimately God alone is absolute and that all else, including man and his formidable powers of intellect, is relative and limited.

Complementing its insistence on the centrality of knowledge and its persistent encouragement to reflect, the Qur’ān also describes itself variously as an “evincive proof” (*burhān*),¹² a “criterion of judgement” (*furqān*),¹³ an “elucidation” (*bayān*),¹⁴ a “clarification of all things” (*tibyān^{an} li-kulli shay’*),¹⁵ and as “consummate wisdom” (*ḥikma bāligha*).¹⁶ Indeed, it frequently challenges its readers with a variety of arguments, inferences that are to be drawn, step by step, by the person who reflects with consideration.¹⁷ The notable fact that the Qur’ān grounds its teachings not only in raw assertion but also through argumentation and persuasion is often overlooked. Yet this fact is of key importance because it establishes, or at least opens the door to, a complementary and harmonious paradigm of the relationship between reason and revelation in and through the text of revelation itself.¹⁸

11 Q. *al-Baqara* 2:216. Also Q. *al-Baqara* 2:232, *Āl ‘Imrān* 3:66, *al-Nahl* 16:74, and *al-Nūr* 24:19.

12 Q. *al-Nisā’* 4:174.

13 Q. *al-Baqara* 2:185. See also Q. *Āl ‘Imrān* 3:4 and *al-Furqān* 25:1.

14 Q. *Āl ‘Imrān* 3:138.

15 Q. *al-Nahl* 16:89.

16 Q. *al-Qamar* 54:5.

17 See Blankinship, “Early Creed,” 34, where the author remarks that the Qur’ān “develops its own themes argumentatively, sometimes at considerable length, to explain its teachings, and to rebut the established anti-monotheistic arguments of its initial target audience.” Rosalind Ward Gwynne has dedicated an entire monograph, based on al-Ghazālī’s treatise *al-Qistās al-mustaqīm*, to identifying and categorizing all instances of rational argumentation used in the Qur’ān. She remarks in the introduction to this study that “I believe that the reader will be surprised at how thick with argument the Qur’ān actually is.” Gwynne, *Logic, Rhetoric, and Legal Reasoning*, xiii. See also van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, 1:48, where he likewise makes note of the Qur’ān’s frequent use of dialectical argumentation as it engages with the Prophet’s opponents directly in an argumentative and reasoned manner.

18 The view that the Qur’ān makes abundant use of various kinds of argumentation is echoed by the famous ninth-/fifteenth-century polymath Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505) in his *al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, where he states: “Scholars have held that the Qur’ān contains all kinds of [rational] proofs (*barāhīn, adilla*) and that there exists no [type of] indication (*dalāla*), disjunction (*taqsīm*), or admonition (*tahdhīr*) built upon the general categories of knowledge afforded by reason and revelation (*tubnā min kullīyyāt al-ma’lūmāt al-aqlīyya wa-l-sam’īyya*) that the Book of God has failed to mention, except that it has mentioned them according to the customary [speech] habits of the Arabs and not

Further evidence of the argumentative nature of the initial revelatory moment can be found in classical sources of *ḥadīth*¹⁹ and *sīra*.²⁰ These sources record echoes of discussions during the lifetime of the Prophet, discussions that can comfortably be termed proto-theological by virtue of their subject matter rather than because of any conscious effort to engage in the deliberate, methodical speculation implied in the common use of the term “theological.” The Prophet was naturally questioned by his Companions on numerous occasions regarding matters of the hereafter, God, angels, and a host of other topics directly connected to the creedal content of the new faith. Some *ḥadīth* reports portray the Prophet as instructing his followers—in a manner similar to that of the Qurʾān—by inviting them to reflect and to draw certain conclusions on their own.²¹ Other narrations show the Prophet warning his community against the inherent futility of pursuing certain lines of rational inquiry that are necessarily without issue, such as the *ḥadīth* that states: “Satan shall come to you and say, ‘Who created this?’ and ‘Who created that?’ until he says, ‘Who created your Lord?’ So if anyone of you should reach this point, let him seek refuge in God and desist”²²—as if to alert his Companions that the argument of an infinite causal regress cannot, with proper rational justification, be extended to

in accordance with the detailed [discursive] methods of the theologians.” See al-Suyūṭī, *Itqān*, 4:60. Earlier protagonists in the debate on reason and revelation in Islam also based their claims for the legitimacy of certain forms of ratiocination on particular verses of the Qurʾān. Al-Ghazālī, for example, believed he had located the five classical figures of the Aristotelian syllogism in the Qurʾān in implicit form, while Ibn Rushd identified the three levels of argumentation as defined by Aristotle, namely, rhetorical, dialectical, and demonstrative. On al-Ghazālī, see Chelhot, “«al-Qiṣṣat al-Mustaqīm»,” esp. 6–8 and Marmura, “Ghazali’s Attitude to the Secular Sciences and Logic,” esp. 102–103. On Ibn Rushd, see Hourani, *Averroes on the Harmony of Religion and Philosophy*, esp. 32–37.

- 19 For a précis on the Western scholarly debate concerning the authenticity of *ḥadīth* material, see Harald Motzki’s introduction in Motzki, ed., *Hadīth: Origins and Developments* and Brown, *Hadīth*, 226–276, both of whom discuss the recent scholarship that casts doubt on the radical skepticism of earlier generations of Islamicists (such as, most famously, Ignaz Goldziher and Joseph Schacht). Furthermore, the types of questions raised in the *ḥadīth* cited here are not so formally developed or theoretical as to appear anachronistic for this early period. In fact, it would be extraordinary if the Companions had never asked the Prophet any questions related to theological issues.
- 20 See van Ess, *Flowering*, 45 ff. for a discussion of the *sīra* literature as containing formal argumentation.
- 21 See al-Kattānī’s discussion of the use of rational methods of inference by the Prophet and his Companions. Al-Kattānī, *Jadal*, 1:614–627, 642–643.
- 22 See, e.g., al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 807; Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 69–70. An alternative version of the *ḥadīth* says, “... let him say, ‘I have believed in God and His messengers’” (Muslim, 69), and a third version contains the wording “People will continue to pose questions until they ask, ‘Who created God?’” (Muslim, 69).

God, the Necessarily and Beginninglessly Existent. Finally, a few *ḥadīth* reports depict the Companions as occasionally becoming embroiled in controversy over theological topics. In one instance, a group of them were arguing over the divine decree (*qadar*), whereupon the Prophet, overhearing their altercation, became vexed and obliged them to remain silent concerning such matters that are “but known unto God.”²³ The main theme of these instances appears to be that the use of reason is reliable and legitimate in some domains, that it is invalid if based on false or absurd premises, and, finally, that certain matters lie inherently beyond the ken of rational apprehension altogether. The implication would therefore seem to be that we should (1) employ reason to its full extent in areas that are amenable to rational scrutiny, (2) use reason for such matters in a correct and valid manner, and (3) accept that some matters, by their very nature and that of reason itself, are simply not subject to rational apprehension such that trying to “rationalize” them can lead, of necessity, only to their distortion. The Qurʾān and the prophetic Sunna, therefore, appear to urge man to deploy his rational faculties within their proper scope and domain, yet we are ever reminded that, as great as these powers may be, in the larger scheme of reality and from the perspective of divine omniscience, we have indeed “been given of knowledge but little.”²⁴

2 The Early Emergence of Rationalist and Textualist Tendencies: The Case of the Law

In addition to its numerous exhortations to think, reflect, and ponder and its own frequent deployment of rational argumentation in support of its funda-

23 A more extensive discussion of such instances can be found in Abdel Haleem, “Early *Kalām*,” 71–88.

24 It is significant that the Qurʾān’s emphasis on the validity of reason, on what reasoned reflection ultimately leads to (namely, knowledge of and faith in God), and on the inherent limits of reason (namely, the fact that certain existent realities escape the grasp of reason altogether) parallels the Qurʾānic depiction of the empirical realm that it so urgently encourages us to ponder. Our senses mediate to us a picture of reality that reveals an underlying unity and perfection of structure that rational reflection (*ʿaql*) finds can only be the result of an intelligent, omniscient will backed by boundless powers of instantiation; yet reason also discerns that not all that exists necessarily lies within the realm of our empirical perception. In this vein, the very beginning of the second chapter of the Qurʾān makes mention of “those who believe in the unseen” (Q. *al-Baqara* 2:3), enunciating thereby the existence of two fundamental orders of reality: the visible, or seen (*shahāda*), and the invisible, or unseen (*ghayb*). In the Qurʾānic worldview, a thing is no less real for its being imperceptible to our senses.

mental doctrines, the Qurʾān also contains the germ of theological speculation by virtue of its engagement with questions of ultimate truth and the interpretation of reality. Though the utterances of the Qurʾān were accepted by all Muslims as the authentically preserved and transmitted articulations of divine revelation, such utterances could nevertheless lend themselves to more than one understanding—a fact that was bound to create rifts not only in questions of theology but also in the daily tumble of social and political affairs. Indeed, the first schisms that arose in the early community were expressed, to some degree, in theological terms, though they were unmistakably political in origin.²⁵ This is hardly surprising given that the Qurʾān both specifically addressed and intimately interacted with the socio-political milieu of its original recipients, even as it presented its message in universal ethical and spiritual terms. Concurrent with early political developments and the inchoate proto-theological discussions they engendered, other disciplines were starting to be developed more systematically and deliberately; these were, primarily, Qurʾānic exegesis (*tafsīr*),²⁶ grammar,²⁷ *ḥadīth*,²⁸ and law (*fiqh*). These disciplines represent fully indigenous Islamic sciences pursued (originally) with the tools and methods of reasoning and analysis that came intuitively to the earliest generations of Muslims. These tools and methods, in turn, directly influenced the earliest systematic theological reflections that arose in the first Islamic century. We focus here on the domain of law.

Whereas the enterprise of speculative theology, as we shall see, lays claim by its very nature to being a rational (*aqlī*) science, the subject matter of the

25 In their careful, historically and theologically informed study of Islamic theology, Louis Gardet and M.-M. Anawati speak of the «ferment» déposé par les dissensions politiques au sein de la pensée religieuse.” See Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 35.

26 On the earliest attitudes towards *tafsīr*, see *ibid.*, 26–31, as well as Gilliot, “Kontinuität und Wandel,” 5–17 and Gilliot, “Exegesis of the Qurʾān.” For a general overview of *tafsīr* as a genre, see Saleh, “Quranic Commentaries.” On the nascent “rationalist” versus more “textualist” trends in early *tafsīr*, see al-Kattānī, *Jadal*, 1:504–529 ff.

27 On the rise and significance of the science of Arabic grammar, see Versteegh, *Arabic Language*, 60–84. On the introduction of grammar and the nascent linguistic sciences into early *tafsīr*, see Gilliot, “Kontinuität und Wandel,” 18–25. For a detailed study of the relationship between grammar and the development of *tafsīr*, see Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar*. For a discussion of the contrasting methodologies, and particularly the variant terminology, of the Kufan and the (more rationalistically inclined) Basran schools of grammar, see Versteegh, *Arabic Grammar*, 9–16.

28 On the vitally important notion of “*sunna*” for traditional Arab society and, hence, for the Prophet Muḥammad’s contemporaries, who received him as no less than the Messenger of God, see Bravmann, *Spiritual Background*, 123–198 (esp. 123–177). See also Ansari, “Islamic Juristic Terminology,” 259–282.

legal sciences was seen to be squarely revelational/transmitted (*naqli*). Be that as it may, revealed texts must be understood and interpreted in order to determine their relevance and applicability to a given situation. It is significant that the very term usually translated as “law” is *fiqh*, the primary meaning of which is simply “to understand.”²⁹ The methodological and hermeneutical principles involved in deriving the law are, therefore, without question based on disciplined and methodical reasoning—reasoning that began as informal *ra’y*, or reasoned opinion, and became ever more sophisticated and refined as the science of jurisprudence developed. The use of reasoning in legal matters was, however, regarded with suspicion by some, who preferred to resolve legal questions, to the extent possible, solely on the basis of the revealed texts.³⁰ Similar to trends taking place in the emerging sciences of Qur’ānic exegesis and grammar, this methodological bifurcation resulted in two distinct approaches to questions of law. One trend was self-consciously based on a strict adherence to *ḥadīth* (with as little interpretation of them as possible), while the second accorded freer rein to reasoned opinion (*ra’y*) when applying revelation to the social and legal realities at hand.³¹ The opposing methodological tendencies of *ahl al-ra’y* (the people of reasoned opinion) and *ahl al-ḥadīth* (the people of *ḥadīth*) resulted in a tension that was not resolved until the third/ninth century.

It fell to Muḥammad b. Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) to sketch what eventually became the outlines of a reconciliation between these opposing tendencies. In his famous treatise *al-Risāla*, al-Shāfi‘ī argued for restricting the notion of *sunna* exclusively to the Sunna of the Prophet and further mandated that

29 Derivatives of the root *f-q-h* occur twenty times in the Qur’ān, invariably with the meaning of “to understand,” “fathom,” “comprehend.” In a well-known *ḥadīth*, the causative form “*faqqaha*” (to cause to understand or comprehend) is used in an analogous sense: “*man yurid Allāh bihi khayran yufaqqihhu fi al-dīn*” (For whomever God desires good, He grants him understanding in religion). See, e.g., al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 30 (and elsewhere); Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 417 (and elsewhere); al-Tirmidhī, *Jāmi‘*, 4:385; Ibn Mājah, *Sunan*, 80.

30 Watt, *Formative Period*, 181.

31 Concerning the relationship between the availability of *ḥadīth* and the use of reason in legal matters, some have speculated that early Iraqi jurists relied more heavily on *ra’y* because they had access to fewer *ḥadīth* reports—and, by consequence, less knowledge regarding the details of the prophetic Sunna—than their counterparts in the Hijaz. This point is made, for example, by al-Kattānī (*Jadal*, 1:307–309, 631), but also by no less authoritative an interpreter of early Muslim history than Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), who, in his discussion of the rise of a *ḥadīth*- versus a *ra’y*-based jurisprudence in the early period, identifies the latter with the jurists of Iraq, explaining that “the people of Iraq had little in the way of *ḥadīth* (*kāna al-ḥadīth qalīlan fi ahl al-‘Irāq*) for the reasons we have previously stated; thus, they made much use of *qiyās* (*fa-istaktharū min al-qiyās*) and became skilled in it (*wa-maharū fihī*).” Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddīma*, 446, lines 9–12.

this prophetic Sunna be supported by properly attested *ḥadīth* reports.³² At the same time, he articulated a theory of legal methodology that reduced the kinds of rational arguments that could be used, but simultaneously confirmed and consecrated those kinds of rational arguments accepted in the theory (primarily analogical reasoning, known as *qiyās*). The result of al-Shāfiʿī's effort was thus to defend and normalize the use of *qiyās* against those who were opposed to it—making it a permanent part of Islamic juristic thought—and to reduce other, less controlled methods of legal reasoning.

Al-Shāfiʿī's thesis should not be seen as a one-sided triumph of “textualists”³³ over “rationalists.” While much of the *Risāla* is squarely aimed at justifying the preeminence of scriptural sources for the law—especially the prophetic Sunna as expressed in *ḥadīth*—over “free” rational methods, al-Shāfiʿī's incorporation of the rational processes of analogical reasoning into legal theory was apparently enough for hard-core textualists to associate him with the (legal) rationalists, and even with the Muʿtazila.³⁴ In tracing a middle path between textualism and rationalism, however, the *Risāla* aptly represents “the first attempt at synthesizing the disciplined exercise of human reasoning and the complete assimilation of revelation as the basis of the law”³⁵—a synthesis that came to form the foundation of Islamic legal theory as a whole after the late third/ninth century. The tension that al-Shāfiʿī sought to alleviate between rational modes of reasoning and the revealed texts—that is, between reason

32 For a concise presentation and discussion of the contents of al-Shāfiʿī's *Risāla*, see Hallaq, *History*, 21–29. For an extended study and reinterpretation of this foundational text, see Lowry, *Early Islamic Legal Theory*. For a complete English translation of the *Risāla* with parallel Arabic text, see Lowry, *Epistle on Legal Theory*.

33 Most contemporary scholars speak reflexively of a “rationalist” versus a “literalist” tendency. I consider the term “literalist” to be problematic, as it carries with it implicit assumptions regarding reason, the use of language, and the relationship of language to rationality that prejudge a number of issues central to Ibn Taymiyya's critique. I have therefore opted for “textualist” as a more neutral, descriptive term. My usage follows that of Bernard Weiss in *The Spirit of Islamic Law*, particularly chap. 3, where he defines and uses the term “textualist” in the same manner as described here, and primarily for the same reasons.

34 Hallaq, *History*, 31.

35 *Ibid.*, 34. As we shall see below, the Ashʿarī theological school attempted, one century later, to effect a similar reconciliation between reason and revelation by synthesizing the disciplined exercise of human reason and the complete assimilation of revelation as the basis of theology. And this is precisely Ibn Taymiyya's project as well, as we shall discover in the course of this study, albeit on the basis of a radically different notion of reason—reason returned, as Ibn Taymiyya contends, to its original, intuitive (*fiṭrī*), pre-*kalām*/pre-*falsafa* synthetic state. For a discussion of the synthesis of reason and revelation and the lack of dichotomy between the two in the early Muslim community, see Winter, “Reason as Balance.”

and revelation—constitutes a reflection on the legal plane of a much broader tension that was occurring in Islamic thought as a whole, including theology, and that would eventually require a synthesis analogous to that of al-Shāfiʿī in law.

3 Early Theological Reflection and Contention

The methodology of early theological reflection initially reflected patterns of thought and methods of reasoning worked out in the indigenous disciplines of Qurʾānic exegesis, grammar, *ḥadīth*, and law. This was because the men engaged in these early theological ruminations were, first and foremost, jurists who were required to know grammar and *tafsīr* in order to engage in *fiqh*.³⁶ But the early Muslims who first developed the new Islamic sciences were by no means living in comfortable isolation in the Arabian Peninsula. Just thirty years after the Prophet's death, the Muslims found themselves at the helm of a vast cosmopolitan empire that stretched from western Libya to the eastern borders of Persia and, less than one hundred years later, from northern Spain in the west to the Indus River in the east. In the year 40/661, following the assassination of the fourth caliph, 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, the capital of the new empire was relocated from Medina (and briefly Kufa) to Damascus, an ancient seat of culture most recently heir to a fecund overlay of Hellenistic high culture deposited onto the Syro-Aramaic backdrop of an age-old Near Eastern civilization. The earliest influences of Greek thought came about through contact with the Hellenistic tradition that was still being cultivated in the Christian schools established by the Sassanians in Iraq and Persia and continued by the Muslims who took possession of these territories.³⁷ Most noteworthy of these was the school of Jundishapur in addition to non-Christian schools, particularly that of the Sabians of Harran (Ibn Taymiyya's hometown, incidentally). The intellectual languages used throughout the region were predominantly Syriac and Greek.³⁸ Thus, the dominant intellectual strand in the area ruled by the early

36 Watt observes that the "discussion of the roots of jurisprudence affected the whole future course of Islamic thought, for jurisprudence was the central intellectual discipline in the Islamic world." Watt, *Formative Period*, 181. It has likewise been suggested that the formative legal training of most early theologians naturally predisposed them to apply to their theological reflections the habits of mind they had acquired in their study of *fiqh*. Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 44. For the most recent treatment of the origins of the style of argumentation used in *kalām* theology, see Treiger, "Origins of *Kalām*," 29–34.

37 Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 37.

38 On the linguistic situation of the Near East in the early Islamic period, see Versteegh, *Greek Elements*, 1–4.

Muslim state was Hellenism in its Syriac expression, admixed with Indic elements transmitted through Old Persian, or Pahlavi.³⁹

The Muslims thus came to rule a vast conglomeration of peoples and cultures teeming with Persian, Indian, Greek, and other philosophies and beliefs that were often radically at odds with Islamic teachings. Such doctrines included Mazdaism, Manichaeism, materialism (*dahriyya*),⁴⁰ the doctrines of the Sumaniyya of Central Asia,⁴¹ and others. In this early period, as Muslims came into contact with educated non-Muslims who often argued against Islamic teachings, Muslims found themselves in need of tools to defend—in universally acceptable terms—the underlying reasonability and plausibility of their creed. This was true especially with respect to the Christians, who not only formed the majority of the populace, particularly in the region of Greater Syria, but who also represented a rival monotheism with a similarly universalist outlook. Moreover, competing Christian theological claims were couched in a sophisticated intellectual idiom that had resulted from over six hundred years during which Christian thought had been infused with Greek philosophy, particularly in the form of a late Hellenic Neoplatonism combined with certain Aristotelian and Stoic elements as well.⁴² The early Muslims were primed to engage in such debates by virtue of the “dialectical way of thinking”⁴³ that they had learned not only from the Qurʾān and prophetic practice but also from the early, indigenous Islamic disciplines of *tafsīr*, grammar, *ḥadīth*, and law men-

39 The influence of Hellenism was found chiefly in Iraq, first Basra and Kufa, then Baghdad. The regions farther to the east had also long been exposed to Hellenistic culture, but not much is known about the rationalizing theological activity there prior to the theologian Abū Maṣʿūd al-Māturīdī (d. ca. 333/944). See Watt, *Formative Period*, 184. On the rise of Māturīdī theology, see Rudolph, “Das Entstehen der Māturīdiya”; Rudolph, “Ḥanafī Theological Tradition and Māturīdism,” 285–293; and, more extensively, Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī und die sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (trans. Adem, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand*). Alternative death dates for al-Māturīdī have been given as 332/943 or 336/947. See Madelung, “al-Māturīdī,” *EI*², 6:846a.

40 On the Dahriyya, see Crone, “Excursus 11: Ungodly Cosmologies,” 115–123.

41 Primarily in Tirmidh and Samarqand. The early figure Jahm b. Ṣafwān (see p. 34 below) may have taken certain extreme positions in the theology primarily in response to this group, who may have been Buddhists of some sort.

42 For an analysis of the Stoic influences on early Islamic theological thought, see van Ess, “The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology,” esp. 26–42.

43 “*dialektische[r] Denkstil*,” van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, 1:48–49. See also van Ess, 1:55 for the observation that not only in the Qurʾān but also in the *Sīra* of Ibn Ishāq (d. ca. 150/767) can we begin to detect a *kalām* style of argumentation. For a critique of van Ess and a different perspective on the sources and dates of *kalām*, see Cook, “Origins of Kalam” (also discussed in Treiger, “Origins of *Kalām*” 30–31).

tioned above.⁴⁴ But these tendencies were now reinforced and supplemented by the new cultural milieu of the lands that the Arabs had come to control (and from which the non-Arab converts originally hailed). The immediate effect of this cultural and intellectual interaction was the adoption by Muslim theologians of certain concepts and methods they deemed necessary to answer their rivals and to present Islam in what was taken to be the neutral canons of a universally shared rational discourse. Greek concepts in particular, as well as Greek methods of argumentation such as formal disputation,⁴⁵ were powerful tools that could be deployed for the defense of Islam in the context of strident inter-confessional debate. The overall result of this polemical *rencontre* was that both the methods and, to a considerable extent, even the content and problems of *kalām* theology as developed by the late second/eighth century bear the distinct imprint of these early exchanges in which Muslim debaters were compelled to adapt themselves to the categories of their opponents.⁴⁶

It is in the context of this intellectual backdrop that the first full-fledged, properly speculative theological discussions in Islam took place.⁴⁷ The first such debate revolved around the question of free will and determinism and influenced the manner in which various other questions of dogma were conceived and debated.⁴⁸ The debate over free will concerned the issue of whether human beings have free choice in their moral action or whether their deeds are inexorably predetermined by God. Advocating for the first position were the

44 Watt suggests that the receptivity of Muslim scholars to the use of Greek rational methods once these became available may have been a result of their training in Islamic jurisprudence, through which they had already become familiar with various forms of rational argumentation. Watt, *Formative Period*, 180.

45 Cook, "Origins of Kalam" and Tannous, "Between Christology and Kalām?" trace the dialectical method of early *kalām* specifically to Syriac Christological disputations that took place in the second half of the seventh century. Tannous suggests that this methodology may have been transmitted to the early Muslim community via Arab Christian communities in Iraq and Syria. (See Treiger, "Origins of *Kalām*," 30–32.)

46 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, 1:52–53. For a detailed discussion of these exchanges, see Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalam*, 1–43, 64–66.

47 Blankinship, "Early Creed," 38.

48 The extent to which early Muslim theological debates may have been due to Christian or other outside influences is a matter of debate. For a fairly extensive discussion of Western scholars' (highly variable) views on this issue, see Wolfson, *Philosophy of the Kalam*, 58–64 and, more recently, Treiger, "Origins of *Kalām*," 29–34. (On the origins of the debate over free will in particular, see Treiger, 34–38.) Steven Judd ("Early Qadariyya," 46) remarks that modern scholars who attribute Christian origins to the debate on free will do so, to some extent, in keeping with medieval Arabic sources but suggests that these sources' own ascription of a Christian origin to the debate was likely "more polemical than theological." See also Judd, 48, 50, 53.

Qadarīs (or Qadariyya),⁴⁹ a group purportedly started by Ma‘bad al-Juhanī (executed 80/699), a well-regarded *ḥadīth* transmitter whose father was a Companion of the Prophet. The single common point of doctrine unifying the Qadariyya seems to have been their assertion of human volition in moral acts (particularly sinful ones). The famous al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728)—a figure universally revered by later schools of law, theology, and Sufism⁵⁰—likewise spoke forcefully in favor of a person’s ability to choose to sin (or not) and his consequent responsibility for his sin, arguing that God creates only good, while evil stems either from man himself or from Satan.⁵¹ The early Mu‘tazila subsequently developed the Qadarī stress on human volition into a more robust doctrine of free will, one in which human moral responsibility was held to depend on the fact that men not only chose and performed (*fa‘ala*) their actions but positively “created” (*khalaqa*) them as well. This view was widely denounced as compromising the unique status of God as the only Creator (*khāliq*) and instantiator of all that exists. The Qadarīs, whose doctrine was less formally developed, became embroiled in politics, and their cause was taken up for a brief time on the occasion of a political revolt against the Umayyad caliph al-Walīd b. Yazīd (al-Walīd II) in the year 126/744.⁵² The Qadarī cause was eclipsed, however, with the eventual political failure of the movement. The opposite, “*jabrī*” impulse tended towards a strict determinism and categorical denial of human free will. This side of the debate was represented in its most extreme form by Jahm b. Ṣafwān (d. 128/746), whose views on the issue seem to have been supported by the ruling Umayyads. Some have speculated that the Umayyads favored the *jabrī* doctrine as a way of excusing their actions as simply the result of God’s determinative will and for which they could not be held morally (or politically) accountable.⁵³

The second major debate was the abstruse and perplexing question of God’s relationship to the Qur’ān as His word. Specifically, this question concerned whether the Qur’ān, as God’s speech, was to be considered an “attribute” of the

49 The name “Qadarī” for this movement may seem counterintuitive, since *qadar* is almost always used with reference to God’s divine decree. Judd suggests that *qadar* here, however, may have been meant as a reference to *human beings’* ability (*qadar*) to determine and choose their own actions. Judd, “Early Qadariyya,” 45.

50 On al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī and the multifaceted (and often contradictory) ways in which he is presented in early and medieval Islamic sources, see Mourad, *Early Islam between Myth and History*.

51 Blankinship, “Early Creed,” 39.

52 Al-Walīd II was killed during this turmoil in April 126/744, bringing an end to his brief, one-year reign (which had begun only in February of the preceding year, 125/743).

53 See, e.g., Blankinship, “Early Creed,” 38–39; Judd, “Early Qadariyya,” 51.

divine essence and therefore eternal (*qadīm*) or, rather, separate from God's essence and thus contingent and temporally originated (*muḥdath*)—or, as it was eventually described, “created” (*makhlūq*).⁵⁴ First formulated by al-Ja’d b. Dirham⁵⁵ and subsequently propagated by his student, Jahm b. Ṣafwān,⁵⁶ the notion that the Qur’ān was not eternal but created may have been an attempt to safeguard the notion of God’s exclusive eternity in the face of Christian claims of Jesus’s divinity on the basis of his status as God’s word (*kalimat Allāh*), or logos.⁵⁷ Yet the notion of a “created Qur’ān” appears, by all accounts, to have stoked the ire of almost all contemporary Muslim scholars and, in fact, was deemed so pernicious a doctrine that it served to justify the execution of both al-Ja’d b. Dirham and Jahm b. Ṣafwān. The debate on the nature of the Qur’ān became one of the most pivotal and divisive issues in early Muslim theology, and it formed the crux of a major showdown between theological “rationalists” and “textualists” in the mid-third/ninth century. The question of the Qur’ān is also central to the concerns of this study because it relates directly to the question of the divine attributes—a question that forms the spine of Islamic theology and that lies at the very heart of Ibn Taymiyya’s main preoccupation in the *Dar’ ta’āruḍ*.

Several comments of a conceptual character are in order here regarding the nature and implications of these early debates, which manifest a distinct progression in terms of their abstraction, their use of a formal philosophical

54 For an in-depth account of the issue of the createdness of the Qur’ān, see the classic article by Wilferd Madelung, “The Origins of the Controversy Concerning the Creation of the Koran.” A useful shorter survey can be found in El-Bizri, “God: Essence and Attributes,” 122–131. In addition to the view that the Qur’ān must be either “created” (*makhlūq*) or else eternal (*qadīm*), there is an important intermediate position, critical to Ibn Taymiyya’s view on the issue, namely, that the Qur’ān is “non-created” (*ghayr makhlūq*). See Hoover, “Perpetual Creativity,” 296.

55 Executed by Khālīd al-Qasrī sometime during his reign as governor of Iraq (105–120/724–738). See Judd, “Ja’d b. Dirham,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam—Three* [hereafter *EI³*] (2016–5), 150.

56 On whom see Schöck, “Jahm b. Ṣafwān.”

57 See Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 38 on the probable origin of this discussion in the Christian challenge of the logos. It is of note that not only Christian theology but also the Qur’ān itself describes Jesus as “a word from Him [God]” (Q. *Āl Imrān* 3:45). The early Muslims must have felt a pressing need to explain such verses in a manner consistent with Islamic monotheism in the face of Christian trinitarianism, particularly since it was the Christian understanding of the concept of the logos—ostensibly (in Christian eyes) embraced by the Qur’ān as well—that underpinned the Christian doctrine of the divinity of Jesus. For the challenge of the “Sumanīyya” of Tirmidh, who may have been Buddhists, and their possible influence on the highly abstract and transcendentalizing theology of Jahm b. Ṣafwān, see Nagel, *History*, 101–102.

nomenclature, and the degree to which their protagonists explicitly appealed to reason as the arbiter of competing theological claims. The first of these debates, the debate over free will and predestination, involved a crucial aspect of the relationship between man and God and directly implicated revelation inasmuch as it was related to different ways of interpreting scriptural assertions about God. This debate, though initially motivated by political events, involved the nature of God and turned on what was implied by certain discrete statements in revelation concerning that nature. The proponents of free will (Qadarīs) reasoned that since God is just,⁵⁸ human beings must be acting freely as the authors and creators of their own deeds; this is necessary for their reward or punishment in the hereafter to be just. By contrast, the proponents of determinism (Jabrīs) reasoned that if God is all-powerful,⁵⁹ then His power must extend—as the Qurʾān so clearly seems to state—to *all* things, including the actions of human beings. Were it not so, we might reason, then God would not be “powerful over all things.”

The debate over free will is conceptually foundational for two reasons. First, it illustrates the manner in which early theological debate grew out of differing interpretations of the Qurʾān that emerged once questions were raised that had not been posed in the time of the Prophet or addressed explicitly by revelation. These questions left later protagonists to search for answers to new quandaries in the verses of the Qurʾān.⁶⁰ The second reason for the importance of the debate over free will is largely historical insofar as it discloses—now in

58 Numerous Qurʾānic verses affirm, for instance, that God never does any injustice unto His servants. See, for instance, Q. *Āl Imrān* 3:108 (“And God wills no wrong for the worlds [i.e., His creation]”), *al-Kahf* 18:49 (“And your Lord does wrong unto none”), and *Fuṣṣilat* 41:46 (“And your Lord is in no wise unjust to [His] slaves”). Numerous other passages affirm that God does not wrong His servants, but rather they do wrong unto themselves. See, e.g., Q. *Āl Imrān* 3:117; *al-Tawba* 9:70; *Hūd* 11:101; *al-Nahl* 16:33, 16:118; *al-Ankabūt* 29:40; *al-Rūm* 30:9; and *al-Zukhruf* 43:76.

59 As per numerous verses of the Qurʾān, such as *al-Kahf* 18:45: “And God has power over all things.” See also Q. *al-Aḥzāb* 33:27, *Fāṭir* 35:44, and *al-Zukhruf* 43:42.

60 It is important, however, to underscore that the difference of opinion in this instance reflects not so much a “rational” exegesis of the text in contrast to an unreflective “literalism” but rather a differential emphasis placed on contradistinctive descriptions of God found in revelation. The Qurʾān asserts that God is just; it likewise asserts that He is all-powerful. Revelation affirms both statements unequivocally, yet the implications of this twin affirmation for the question of the freedom or determinism of human action, once posed in this manner, are not elaborated, or even adumbrated, in the Qurʾān. It is the challenge of the theologian somehow to articulate an understanding of God that coherently and judiciously accounts for *all* the various contradistinct attributes and qualities predicated of Him in revelation.

the realm of theology—the same emerging fault line between two distinct epistemological approaches to revelation that had appeared earlier in the domains of Qurʾānic exegesis, grammar, *ḥadīth*, and law and that soon pitted faction against faction in a bitter ideological tussle that raged throughout the second/eighth and third/ninth centuries. The question of free will is thus foundational because it is the first instance of debate that clearly shows a transposition onto the theological plane of the nascent rationalist–textualist cleavage already operative in the other Islamic disciplines.

The question of freedom and determinism, then, is essentially an exegetical debate cast in moral-ethical terms, both in the sense that it carries implications for human moral responsibility and in the sense that it attempts to account rationally, in human ethical terms, for God's justice in the face of His unbounded might. This question stands in contrast to the debate concerning the nature of the Qurʾān as the word of God, which involves more abstract considerations of an explicitly metaphysical and ontological order. That is, what was at stake in this debate was not whether God had spoken the Qurʾān and what this might entail for human ethical, moral, and spiritual life but rather the very nature of God's being, His relationship to His word, and the nuanced ontological questions pertaining to God's essence, His attributes, and so forth. Furthermore, the *terms* in which this latter debate was conceived and the conceptual framework on the basis of which the problem itself was defined and discussed—"essence," "attributes," and so on—are a direct result of the influence of Greek philosophy and the discussions with Hellenized Christian theologians in Syria and elsewhere. In such discussions, proto-Muʿtazilī, rationalistically inclined theologians appealed directly and explicitly to reason (*ʿaql*) and sought to adopt a consistent methodological rationalism as their choice method of inquiry. This rationalism was meant not merely to serve the hermeneutic objective of interpreting scriptural passages related to the nature of God but also to further the quasi-philosophical goal of delineating a conception of God's nature in entirely rational terms and independently of the "constraints" of revelation.

Thus, the debate over the ontological status of the Qurʾān introduced into theological discussion, for the first time, a level of speculative abstraction (supplied by outside sources) that came to form a particular rational optic through which revelation was henceforth to be refracted. With the debate on the status of the Qurʾān, we are no longer grappling with an intertextual, purely hermeneutical enterprise that is fully contained within the textual bounds of revelation. Rather, for the first time, we are witness to a speculative theological venture that makes claims in its own right, and independently of revelation, about how the nature of God "must be" according to the dictates of reason. This venture represented a systematic attempt to mold the understanding of

revelation to the contours of a rational framework that would henceforth dictate, on its own authority, the essential terms of analysis.

3.1 *The Translation Movement and the Impact of Greek Philosophy*

Despite the centrality of personal contact with a living philosophical tradition and with Hellenized Christian theologians in the early Islamic period, the influence of Greek ideas on Muslim thought eventually came primarily—and profusely—in the form of Arabic translations of the Greek philosophical corpus, made directly from Greek originals or from intermediate Syriac translations.⁶¹ Although some Greek works—particularly medical and scientific treatises—were translated in late Umayyad times (that is, in the first half of the second/eighth century, before the Abbasid revolution of 132/750), it was not until well after the consolidation of Abbasid rule that the large-scale project of translation came into full swing. The Abbasid revolution brought about far-reaching changes on a number of levels, spelling a new era for *kalām* as well as for a host of other intellectual disciplines and cultural pursuits. Politically, the capital of the Muslim *umma* moved from Damascus to Baghdad, whereafter Syria and the Hijaz were no longer centers of innovative theological development.⁶² Under the new order, religious knowledge and its cultivators received new prominence as the Abbasids explicitly promoted themselves as the defenders of a multiethnic and specifically Islamic order meant to supersede the Umayyad order, which was based on the ethnic favoritism of Arabs.⁶³ Such circumstances inaugurated an unprecedented efflorescence of *kalām*, the technique of which was developed primarily in Iraq in an atmosphere favorable to theological debate and with the patronage of the Abbasid authorities.⁶⁴ Indeed, it was primarily at the caliphal court, where thinkers from various regions and intellectual proclivities regularly comingled, that the new theology was most highly refined and developed into a sophisticated arm of intellectual disputation.⁶⁵

Although *kalām* as a discrete discipline was already firmly established by the time of the illustrious Hārūn al-Rashīd (r. 170–193/786–809) and although the term *mutakallim* is applied in the literature to some figures even before this period, information about the views of these early theologians is so scant that

61 For a comprehensive treatment of the translation movement and the transmission of Greek learning into early Arab-Islamic society, see Gutas, *Greek Thought*. Also informative is Endreß, “Athen, Alexandria, Bagdad, Samarkand.”

62 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, 1:56.

63 See the discussion in Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 39–41.

64 Van Ess, *Theologie und Gesellschaft*, 1:55.

65 *Ibid.*, 1:56.

we cannot draw firm conclusions regarding their individual doctrines. In any case, it was the translation movement—particularly after the founding of the Bayt al-Ḥikma, or “House of Wisdom,” as a public institution in Baghdad by the Abbasid caliph Abū al-‘Abbās al-Ma’mūn (r. 198–218/813–833)—that seems to have constituted the major impetus for the dramatic political rise of the first theological school proper, that of the Mu‘tazila.

TABLE 1 Timeline of the development of the reason–revelation dichotomy in Islam before Ibn Taymiyya

610CE–AH11/632CE	The Qur’ān encourages use of reason to arrive at faith; simultaneously declares reason limited.
mid-first/seventh c.	Beginnings of the sciences of Qur’ānic exegesis, Arabic grammar, law, and <i>ḥadīth</i> .
41/661 and after	Capital of emerging Islamic empire moved to the cosmopolitan environment of Damascus. Muslims increasingly exposed to Hellenistic, Christian, Persian, and other influences, causing early theologians to adopt some Greek methods and vocabulary to defend Islamic belief.
late first/seventh c.	Rise of the debate over free will and predestination.
early second/eighth c.	Rise of the debate over the createdness of the Qur’ān.
early to mid-second/eighth c.	Some Greek texts, primarily medical and scientific, translated into Arabic. Emergence of methodological division in law between <i>ahl al-ra’y</i> and <i>ahl al-ḥadīth</i> . Beginnings of Mu‘tazilī school at the hands of Wāṣil b. ‘Aṭā’ and ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd.
132/750	Abbasid revolution. Capital of empire moved from Damascus to Baghdad. Theological speculation given new impetus under Abbasid rule.
early third/ninth c.	Bayt al-Ḥikma (“House of Wisdom”) founded in Baghdad by the caliph al-Ma’mūn (r. 198–218/813–833). Massive translation of Greek philosophical texts begins. Al-Shāfi‘ī synthesizes methodologies of <i>ahl al-ra’y</i> and <i>ahl al-ḥadīth</i> by consecrating rational <i>qiyās</i> , along with firm adherence to <i>ḥadīth</i> , as basis of the law.
ca. 205–235/820–850	Flourishing of the major architects of Mu‘tazilī theology. Assimilation of numerous Greek concepts and methods of argumentation.
218–232/833–847	<i>Miḥna</i> instituted by three consecutive Abbasid caliphs in an attempt to impose the Mu‘tazilī doctrine of the createdness of the Qur’ān as official doctrine.
early to mid-third/ninth c.	Al-Kindī, first Muslim philosopher, flourishes. Shows clear Islamic doctrinal commitments, especially on the question of the non-eternality of the world, but his method is that of <i>falsafa</i> . Al-Muḥāsibī and Ibn Kullāb active, both of whom shun Mu‘tazilī doctrine but begin using systematic rational methods to defend transmitted Sunnī orthodoxy.

TABLE 1 The development of the reason–revelation dichotomy in Islam (*cont.*)

ca. 233–237/848–851	The caliph al-Wāthiq turns on the Mu‘tazila, ends the <i>miḥna</i> , and reinstates Sunni orthodoxy. Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal emerges as a hero for his refusal to capitulate to the inquisition.
second half of third/ninth c.	Influence of the theological style of al-Muḥāsibī and Ibn Kullāb spreads, complemented by the similar work of figures like Ibn Qutayba and al-Qalānisī.
first half of fourth/tenth c.	Emergence of the traditionalist creed of al-Ṭaḥāwī. Active period of other traditionalist voices, such as al-Ṭabarī and Ḥanbalīs like al-Khallāl, al-Barbahārī, and Ibn Khuzayma. Al-Ash‘arī breaks from the Mu‘tazila at age forty but uses their rational method to launch a full-fledged defense of inherited orthodox creed. Al-Fārābī flourishes. Explicitly theorizes the outward sense of revelation as being for the masses only.
late fourth/tenth to early fifth/eleventh c.	Al-Bāqillānī flourishes in the second generation after al-Ash‘arī, strongly reinforcing the foundations of Ash‘arī thought and bringing the “old doctrine” of the school to its highest point.
early to mid-fifth/eleventh c.	Active period of Ibn Sīnā, whose philosophical system exercises a major impact on <i>kalām</i> and practically all subsequent Islamic thought.
mid- to late fifth/eleventh c.	Flourishing of al-Juwaynī, first Ash‘arī theologian to feel the full force of Ibn Sīnā’s influence. Considered a crossover figure between early and later Ash‘arī school.
late fifth/eleventh to early sixth/twelfth c.	Al-Ghazālī pens scathing attack on the philosophers but incorporates logical methods of <i>falsafa</i> into theology and legal theory. Explicitly endorses <i>ta’wīl</i> . Adopts certain esotericist doctrines as well.
second half of sixth/twelfth c.	Ibn Rushd flourishes. Defends Aristotelianism and responds to al-Ghazālī point for point. Writes <i>Faṣl al-maqāl</i> on the necessity of upholding the literal sense of revelation for the common people while reserving the real truth, gained through reason, for the philosophical elite. Flourishing of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, seminal figure of the later Ash‘arī school whose work represents a sophisticated philosophical theology. Al-Rāzī further elaborates the universal rule of interpretation articulated by al-Ghazālī and targeted by Ibn Taymiyya in the <i>Dar’ ta’arūḍ</i> . Active period of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī and rise of the Ishrāqī, or “Illuminationist,” school of philosophy.
first half of seventh/thirteenth c.	Flourishing of Ibn ‘Arabī, seminal figure in later Sufi thought, strongly criticized by Ibn Taymiyya for his monistic ontology.
661–728/1263–1328	Life and work of Ibn Taymiyya.

4 The Mu‘tazila

The first speculations of the Mu‘tazila can be traced back to the last decade of the Umayyad dynasty, just prior to the Abbasid revolution.⁶⁶ The origin of Mu‘tazilī thought is normally attributed to Wāṣil b. ‘Atā’ (d. 131/748 or 749)—who is said to have separated from (*i‘tazala*) the circle of al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī over the question of the status of the grave sinner⁶⁷—and to Wāṣil’s contemporary ‘Amr b. ‘Ubayd (d. 144/761), though the main architects of the school died several generations later, between 204/820 and 224/840. In terms of methodology, the early Mu‘tazila seem to have relied principally on the styles of reasoning and argumentation that had been developed in the indigenous Islamic sciences of Arabic grammar and law,⁶⁸ as well as Qur’ānic exegesis and *ḥadīth*.⁶⁹ Eventually, however, the mature Mu‘tazilī school reinforced its intellectual armature by adopting numerous aspects of Greek reasoning and methods of argumentation over the course of early Abbasid rule.⁷⁰

Of the famous so-called five principles (*al-uṣūl al-khamsa*) of the Mu‘tazila⁷¹—first articulated, most likely, by Abū al-Hudhayl al-Allāf (d. between 226/840 and 235/850)⁷²—the most important for our topic is the first principle, involving the notion of *tawḥīd*, since it touches directly on the question of the divine attributes, one of Ibn Taymiyya’s overriding preoccupations in the *Dar’*. The three main aspects of the Mu‘tazilī notion of *tawḥīd* are (1) the denial of the distinctiveness of the essential attributes of God, such as knowledge, power, and speech; (2) the denial of the eternity (*qidam*), or “uncreatedness,” of the Qur’ān; and (3) the radical denial of resemblance between God and any created thing (*tanzīh*).⁷³ Indeed, the doctrines the Mu‘tazila most vehemently

66 Van Ess, *Flowering*, 123. For an overview of the scholarship on the origins and rise of the Mu‘tazila, see el-Omari, “The Mu‘tazilite Movement (1),” 152–154.

67 Sarah Stroumsa, however, makes a plausible argument in support of Goldziher’s thesis that the name “Mu‘tazila,” derived from the verb *i‘tazala*, is in reference to the asceticism of the movement’s founders (and, hence, their *i‘tizāl* of—or separation from and renunciation of—the world). See Stroumsa, “The Beginnings of the Mu‘tazila Reconsidered.”

68 Blankinship, “Early Creed,” 50–51.

69 Daiber, *Islamic Thought in the Dialogue of Cultures*, 19.

70 See Blankinship, “Early Creed,” 50–51.

71 On which see Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 48–53, as well as Bennett, “Mu‘tazilite Movement (11),” 146–147 and 152–156.

72 Blankinship, “Early Creed,” 47.

73 Watt, *Formative Period*, 242. On the Mu‘tazilī conception of the divine attributes, see also Bennett, “Mu‘tazilite Movement (11),” 152–154.

opposed were predestination and anthropomorphism,⁷⁴ the latter of which they regularly sought to neutralize through figurative interpretation, or *ta'wīl*.

In addition to these five principles, Mu'tazilī thinkers were also united by an apologetic program that was motivated by a common zeal to defend the core doctrines of Islam against the arguments put forth by the adherents of other religions, as well as against groups of their Muslim co-religionists whom they deemed to have compromised God's unique and incomparable nature by clinging to what they (the Mu'tazila) considered an overly literal and, therefore, overtly anthropomorphic understanding of scripture. Most important to our topic is the way in which Mu'tazilī thinkers sought to realize this defensive project through a shared interpretive methodology that consisted in applying reason (as they conceived of it) as rigorously and consistently as possible to all questions of a theological nature, even if—critically—the conclusions they reached ended up contradicting the plain sense of the Qur'ānic text.

The Mu'tazila, through their theological and polemical engagements, adopted a large number of Greek concepts and methods of reasoning and argumentation, leaving it to later scholars to sift through the spoils to determine which of these were truly assimilable to Islamic thought. As a result of this process, many ideas were retained and absorbed into Sunnī *kalām*, such that Greek ideas “came to dominate one great wing of Islamic theology, namely, rational or philosophical theology.”⁷⁵ Yet since the majority of Sunnī scholars generally regarded the Mu'tazila as heretics, Mu'tazilī doctrines and theses could not simply be taken over by mainstream thought, at least not in the same form in which the Mu'tazila had presented them. The result was that such ideas often exercised only an indirect influence—a reality that Ibn Taymiyya sensed acutely and that, in fact, he held responsible for a great deal of what had “gone wrong” in later Islamic theology.⁷⁶ Thus, although the Mu'tazilī school was eventually defeated, it nevertheless influenced permanently not only the form of but also the problems dealt with in all subsequent *kalām*.

5 Non-speculative Theology and the Legacy of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal

Throughout the third/ninth century, there were a number of figures who upheld conservative doctrinal positions but who nevertheless engaged to some

74 Van Ess, *Flowering*, 31.

75 Watt, *Formative Period*, 249.

76 See below, p. 102 ff. on Ibn Taymiyya's understanding and assessment of the intellectual tradition he inherited.

extent, even if by way of refutation and disavowal, with the newly developing science of (Mu'tazilī) *kalām*. Indeed, the fifth-/eleventh-century Ash'arī theologian 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037 or 1038) includes in his *Kitāb Uṣūl al-dīn* a section on the “*mutakallimūn of ahl al-sunna*,” among whom some were prominent in the science of *ḥadīth*.⁷⁷ For our purposes, then, a “theologian” is not strictly a rationalist theologian in the way of the Mu'tazila but anyone who explicitly and consciously articulated views on the pressing theological matters of the day, regardless of the extent to which he may or may not have relied on or articulated his views in terms of the rationalistic framework of the emerging science of *kalām*. It is precisely such men who took explicit stands on theological issues, albeit while consciously avoiding or openly opposing the rationalistic program of the Mu'tazila, that I refer to as “non-speculative theologians” and whose style of engagement in theological debates I have labeled “non-speculative theology.”⁷⁸

The non-speculative approach to theology, which eventually came to be most closely associated with the Ḥanbalī school,⁷⁹ was, in fact, favored—especially before the triumphant rise of the Ash'arī and Māturīdī style of *kalām* in the fifth/eleventh century—by a substantial number of scholars from all

77 Watt, *Formative Period*, 279. See 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb Uṣūl al-dīn*, 333–334. Al-Baghdādī identifies two figures as the “first *mutakallimūn of ahl al-sunna*” among the Companions: 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib, on account of his theological disputations with the Khawārij and the Qadariyya, and 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar (d. 73/693), also for his debates with the Qadariyya. Among the first *mutakallimūn of ahl al-sunna* in the generation of the Successors al-Baghdādī identifies 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Azīz (d. 101/720), Zayd b. 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn (d. 122/740; the great-grandson of 'Alī b. Abī Ṭālib), al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, al-Sha'bī (d. between 104/722 or 723 and 106/724 or 725), and al-Zuhri (d. 124/742), followed by Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765) in the following generation. Finally, as the first *mutakallimūn* among the jurists and authorities (*arbāb*) of the legal schools he names Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767) and al-Shāfi'i, followed by the students of al-Shāfi'i “who combined knowledge of law (*fiqh*) and theology (*kalām*).” These students of al-Shāfi'i include specifically al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857), Abū 'Alī al-Karābīsī (d. 245/859 or 248/862), Abū Ya'qūb al-Buwayṭī (d. 231/846), Ḥarmala b. Yaḥyā (d. 243/858), and Dāwūd al-Aṣbahānī (al-Zāhiri) (d. 270/884). [N.B.: Al-Baghdādī lists “Ḥarmala al-Buwayṭī,” but “Ḥarmala” and “al-Buwayṭī” are, in fact, two separate figures. I have listed them both here, though it is not altogether clear whether al-Baghdādī meant to list both or just one of them.]

78 The term “non-speculative theology” I employ here is roughly equivalent in scope and implication to the Arabic term *uṣūl al-dīn*, which refers in a general sense to Islamic creedal commitments and their foundations (*uṣūl*)—both scriptural and rational—without, however, implying a commitment to or an endorsement of the particular rationalistic approach and dialectical style normally implied by the term *kalām*.

79 On the formation and development of Ḥanbalī thought, especially as a theological orientation, see Hoover, “Ḥanbalī Theology,” esp. 627–630.

the major legal schools. This was particularly true of early Mālikī and Shāfiʿī scholars, but it also holds for a number of prominent early Ḥanafīs, who, in legal matters, tended to accord a greater role to reasoned opinion (*raʿy*) and other extra-textual methods, such as *istiḥsān* (juristic preference), that were often disapproved of by other schools. So although a certain strand of Ḥanafīs accepted *kalām* and the conclusions to which it led and although a number of prominent Muʿtazilīs were also Ḥanafī in legal *madhhab* (pl. *madhāhib*), it is by no means the case that the early Ḥanafīs were, as a group, automatically or immediately inclined to theological rationalism.⁸⁰ Indeed, there is a contrasting, more cautious Ḥanafī attitude that was apprehensive of rationalistic *kalām*, as evidenced by the famous creed of Abū Jaʿfar al-Ṭaḥāwī (d. 321/933), a prominent Ḥanafī authority and leading scholar of *ḥadīth* who, in general, insisted on hewing closely to the terms of the Qurʾān and Sunna.⁸¹

The final piece of the puzzle on the third-/ninth-century Islamic theological scene is represented by those who opposed the methods and conclusions of (Muʿtazilī) *kalām* outright but who nevertheless put forward explicit doctrines on controversial issues of theology. In general, such men belonged to the group that the sources designate as *ahl al-ḥadīth*, the most influential of whom was Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 241/855),⁸² founder of the fourth Sunnī legal school, of which Ibn Taymiyya was a loyal adherent.⁸³ Ibn Taymiyya, as we shall see, has much praise for Ibn Ḥanbal's keen intellect, a judgement shared by contemporary Western scholars such as Watt, who says of Ibn Ḥanbal that "he was clearly a man of powerful intellect capable of adopting a coherent view in matters of great complexity."⁸⁴ On the other hand, Watt's claim—typical of an earlier generation of Western scholarship—that Ibn Ḥanbal "rejected [altogether] the rational methods of the Mutakallimūn and insisted on deriving religious doc-

80 On the "traditionalization" of the Ḥanafī school in the third/ninth century, see Melchert, *Formation*, 54–60.

81 Watt, *Formative Period*, 284. Watt mentions this specifically with regard to whether the verbalization (*lafẓ*) of the Qurʾān during recitation is "created" or "uncreated," though al-Ṭaḥāwī's circumspection on this issue can be generalized to his approach as a whole. For a translation of al-Ṭaḥāwī's creed with an extensive introduction and notes, see Hamza Yusuf, *The Creed of Imam al-Ṭaḥāwī*. On the development of theology among Ḥanafīs from the time of Abū Ḥanīfa through the founding of the Māturīdī school in the fourth/tenth century, see Rudolph, "Ḥanafī Theological Tradition and Māturīdism."

82 On whom see especially Melchert, *Aḥmad ibn Hanbal*.

83 With some qualifications, as discussed in chapter 2.

84 Watt, *Formative Period*, 291.

trines and legal rules solely from the Qurʾān and the Traditions”⁸⁵ must be nuanced in light of more recent studies. Binyamin Abrahamov, for instance, has shown that many in the traditionalist camp indeed used rational arguments—sometimes even *kalām*-style proofs—in addition to direct appeals to the Qurʾān and *ḥadīth* in order to establish a given point of theology.⁸⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, incidentally, makes a very similar point, as we explore further in chapter 2.⁸⁷

Prominent Ḥanbalīs of this period include Abū Bakr al-Khallāl (d. 311/923), al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī al-Barbahārī (d. 329/941), and Ibn Khuzayma (d. 311/924). Yet not all *ḥadīth* scholars who took public positions on theological matters were followers of Ibn Ḥanbal. Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), for instance, who lived about one generation after Ibn Ḥanbal, deemed himself a member of the *ahl al-ḥadīth* but not necessarily a follower of Ibn Ḥanbal, whom he considered “only one of at least a dozen distinguished scholars of this party.”⁸⁸ The famous Muḥammad b. Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), known primarily for his forty-volume historical chronicle⁸⁹ but who also founded a legal school (which, however, did not survive in the long run), also held theological views that were, by and large, very close to those held by this group of scholars. Nevertheless, al-Ṭabarī is not usually thought of as a Ḥanbalī, and, in fact, he drew the ire of the Ḥanbalīs in the last year or so of his life, apparently for conceding certain Muʿtazilī theses regarding some of the seemingly anthropomorphic passages of the Qurʾān.⁹⁰ These various names and tendencies serve to demonstrate the extent to which there existed “orthodox,” primarily non-speculative Sunnī (as opposed to Muʿtazilī) theologians even before the time of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ashʿarī in the early fourth/tenth century.

85 Ibid.

86 See Abrahamov, “Scripturalist and Traditionalist Theology,” 273–274, where he details Ibn Ḥanbal’s use of the *kalām* argument from disjunction (*taqsīm*) to prove the impossibility of God’s being present (i.e., in His essence, as opposed to with His knowledge) in each and every place.

87 See, e.g., *Darʿ*, 7:154, lines 7–8 in reference to Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal’s use of definitive proofs (*adilla qaṭʿiyya*) based in both reason (*ʿaql*) and revelation (*naql*).

88 Watt, *Formative Period*, 296.

89 Entitled *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk* (History of prophets and kings).

90 See van Ess, *Flowering*, 60–61.

6 The *Miḥna* and Its Aftermath

The clash between Muʿtazilī rationalistic theology, on the one hand, and the non-speculative, or minimally speculative, amodal adherence to the overt meaning of scripture (as propounded by the founders of the main Sunnī legal schools, master *ḥadīth* critics, and figures like al-Baghdādī's *mutakallimūn* of *ahl al-sunna*), on the other hand, came to a head in the first half of the third/ninth century with the infamous *miḥna*, or "inquisition."⁹¹ At issue in the *miḥna* was the highly contentious question encountered above concerning the "createdness" of the Qurʾān. Though remembered primarily as a theological dispute, the *miḥna* had important political ramifications and was symptomatic of a wider struggle for legitimacy and religious authority between the office of the caliph and the collective body of religious scholars, or *ʿulamāʾ*.⁹² During the reign of three successive Abbasid caliphs,⁹³ all religious scholars, judges, and other notables, particularly in Baghdad and its immediate environs, were forced publicly to endorse the Muʿtazilī doctrine that the Qurʾān was "created" (*makhliūq*) rather than eternal (*qadīm*).⁹⁴ Those who refused were imprisoned, beaten, and, in some cases, killed. While the vast majority of *ʿulamāʾ* relented under such pressing duress, a few stalwart souls held out, braving torment and humiliation to uphold what was widely considered the orthodox position of the early community (*salaf*) and authoritative scholars (*aʿimma*) of the first two centuries of Islam: namely, that the Qurʾān was the eternal and *uncreated* word of God, an intrinsic and inseparable part of His essence and not a creation extrinsic to the divine being and originated in time like the created universe and all that it contains. Among those few who defied the inquisition authorities and refused to flinch under any circumstances was, most prominently, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal.⁹⁵

91 For a summary of these events, see Hurvitz, "al-Maʿmūn (r. 198/813–218/833) and the *Miḥna*."

92 For a discussion of the political dimensions of the *miḥna* and its connection to the struggle over ultimate religious authority, see Zaman, *Religion and Politics*. For a different perspective on the possible causes of the *miḥna*, see Nawas, "Reexamination" and Nawas, "Miḥna."

93 The first of whom was the caliph al-Maʿmūn (d. 218/833), son of the famed Hārūn al-Rashīd (d. 193/809). On al-Maʿmūn, see Cooperson, *Al-Maʿmūn*.

94 This doctrine was held by a number of Ḥanafīs as well, and it has been argued that the *miḥna* was largely aimed at supporting rationalist and semi-rationalist trends more generally against an "increasingly assertive traditionalism." Hoover, "Ḥanbalī Theology," 628.

95 The one other person who held out indefinitely—until he finally died in chains while being transported back to Baghdad from the Byzantine border, where he and Ibn Ḥanbal had been interrogated under the caliph's personal supervision—was a scholar by the name of Muḥammad b. Nūḥ al-ʿIjlī (d. 218/833). Melchert, *Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal*, 11.

In the year 232/847, the tables were turned on the Mu‘tazila when the caliph Ja‘far b. al-Mu‘taṣim al-Mutawakkil (r. 232–247/847–861) succeeded his brother, Abū Ja‘far al-Wāthiq (r. 227–232/842–847), and deposed the Mu‘tazila,⁹⁶ removing them from their posts and initiating a downhill spiral from which they never fully recovered. Though the Mu‘tazila remained a strong theological (and sometimes political) voice in pockets beyond the central Abbasid lands for several centuries, they became increasingly marginalized from mainstream scholarly discourse.⁹⁷

In the wake of the *miḥna*, a group of theologians emerged in Baghdad whose doctrinal positions were close to the views of Ibn Ḥanbal and of those Ḥanafis and others who had remained aloof from Mu‘tazilī methods and had refused to debate theological issues on the terms set by *kalām*.⁹⁸ One figure in this emerging group was the famous early Sufi al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī (d. 243/857),⁹⁹ a contemporary of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal who, in spite of his essentially traditionalist orientation, nevertheless incurred Ibn Ḥanbal’s wrath merely for engaging with the discourse of *kalām* in order to refute it. Ibn Ḥanbal seems to have deemed this engagement in and of itself a dangerous endorsement of the legitimacy of the methods and assumptions of *kalām*.¹⁰⁰ Other figures who engaged in *kalām* discourse at this time include Abū al-‘Abbās al-Qalānisi¹⁰¹ and the aforementioned Ibn Qutayba.¹⁰² Ibn Qutayba and al-Muḥāsibī can be understood as

96 On the reversal of the *miḥna* and the period immediately succeeding it, see Melchert, “Religious Policies.”

97 Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 53.

98 It is important to remember that *kalām* at this time was more or less an entirely Mu‘tazilī affair, which explains why some were so adamantly opposed to it; it had not yet been integrated into mainstream discourse or rendered “safe” in the eyes of more circumspect, traditionally-minded individuals.

99 Major studies on al-Muḥāsibī include van Ess, *Die Gedankenwelt des Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī*; de Crussol, *Le rôle de la raison dans la réflexion éthique d’Al-Muḥāsibī*; and, more recently, Picken, *Spiritual Purification in Islam*. See summary treatment in Bin Ramli, “Predecessors of Ash‘arism,” 219–221.

100 Bin Ramli, “Predecessors of Ash‘arism,” 219. On the relationship between al-Ḥārith al-Muḥāsibī and Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, see Picken, “Ibn Ḥanbal and al-Muḥāsibī.”

101 The place and dates of al-Qalānisi’s birth and death are not known with precision. Ibn ‘Asākir (d. 571/1176) describes him as “a contemporary, though not a pupil, of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī” (*min mu‘āṣirī Abī al-Ḥasan, raḥimahu Allāh, lā min talāmidhatihi*). See Ibn ‘Asākir, *Tabyīn kadhib al-muftarī*, 398. On al-Qalānisi more generally, see al-Salālī, *Ārā’ al-Kullābiyya*, 73–78, as well as Gimaret, “Cet autre théologien sunnite” (summarized in Bin Ramli, “Predecessors of Ash‘arism,” 221–223).

102 Regarding the divine attributes, for instance, Ibn Qutayba took the position that God’s essence and acts could not be fully comprehended by reason. Rather, the essential reality of such matters lay inherently and irremediably beyond full human comprehension, such

treading a middle path between the practitioners of *kalām* as it had developed up to their day and those who refused even to engage with its discourse.¹⁰³

Another theologian of great influence in the period immediately following the *miḥna* was ‘Abd Allāh b. Kullāb (d. ca. 241/855),¹⁰⁴ who played a central role in the movement for the acceptance of *kalām* and its methods among mainstream Sunnīs.¹⁰⁵ Though Ibn Kullāb largely inclined towards the substantive doctrines of the Ḥanbalī-style traditionalists,¹⁰⁶ he is famous for the view, which became standard in subsequent Ash‘arī doctrine, that the divine attributes are neither identical to God nor other than God.¹⁰⁷ In sum, al-Muḥāsibī, Ibn Kullāb, and al-Qalānīsī can be seen as the immediate forerunners of al-Ash‘arī; they were “semi-rationalists”¹⁰⁸ who used some measure of *kalām* argumentation in defending (more or less) traditionalist theological positions.¹⁰⁹

7 Nascent Ash‘arī Thought and the Early *Kalām*

7.1 *al-Ash‘arī*

Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/935 or 936),¹¹⁰ a descendent of the famous Companion of the Prophet Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī (d. ca. 42/662),¹¹¹ hailed from the city of Basra but spent most of his life in Baghdad, the capital of the Abbasid

that attempting to confine any such truths within perfectly transparent rational categories could only lead to their distortion. Nagel, *History*, 135.

103 Al-Muḥāsibī, for instance, attempted to respond to the Mu‘tazila by “develop[ing] the concept of a certain alignment of God’s actions and those of His creatures,” that is, by “rationalizing” the divine attributes to some degree—even if slight—in order to bring them more within the range of human rational apprehension. *Ibid.*, 140.

104 On Ibn Kullāb, see van Ess, “Ibn Kullāb and His School,” 263–267. For a more specific discussion of Ibn Kullāb’s role in the *miḥna*, see van Ess, “Ibn Kullāb und die Miḥna” (subsequently published in French as “Ibn Kullāb et la Miḥna”).

105 Watt, *Formative Period*, 288.

106 Bin Ramli, “Predecessors of Ash‘arism,” 218.

107 *Ibid.*, 217.

108 *Ibid.*, 223–224.

109 Watt, *Formative Period*, 288; Bin Ramli, “Predecessors of Ash‘arism,” 217.

110 There is some uncertainty concerning al-Ash‘arī’s death date. Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī (d. 463/1071) reports three possible dates: (1) the 330s/940s; (2) between 320/932 and 330/941; and (3) the precise year 324/935 or 936, which he reports on the authority of Ibn Ḥazm. See al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād*, 13:260. Kaḥḥāla reports the same three dates (the second on the authority of the Ottoman historian and chronicler Taşköprüzade [d. 968/1561]) and concludes that the most likely date is 324/935 or 936. See Kaḥḥāla, *Mu‘jam al-mu‘allifīn*, 7:35.

111 The death date of Abū Mūsā al-Ash‘arī is also a matter of considerable uncertainty, with various dates given in the sources as AH 41, 42, 50, 52, or 53. The most likely date seems to be 42/662. Vaglieri, “al-Ash‘arī, Abū Mūsā,” *ET*², 1:694–696.

empire. In Baghdad, he dedicated himself to the religious sciences, eventually emerging as the top student of the leading Mu'tazilī authority of his day, Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (d. 303/915 or 916). Around the age of forty, al-Ash'arī experienced an abrupt change of heart after a dream in which the Prophet visited him and urged him to defend the Sunna (as transmitted through *ḥadīth*). Al-Ash'arī thereupon publicly recanted Mu'tazilī doctrine,¹¹² completely abandoned the pursuit of *kalām*, and devoted himself exclusively to the study of the Qur'ān and *ḥadīth*. In a subsequent vision, however, the Prophet reproved al-Ash'arī, clarifying that while he had commanded him to defend the doctrines reported on his authority, he had not commanded him to give up rational methods of argumentation. Al-Ash'arī thus dedicated the remainder of his life to working out a methodology for systematically defending revealed doctrines on the basis of rational argumentation.¹¹³

Al-Ash'arī adopted theological positions close to those of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal but sought to support these positions on the basis of reasoned argument.¹¹⁴ The novelty in al-Ash'arī's approach can be discerned in the fact that even when, in the course of an argument, he quotes from the Qur'ān, it can be seen that he is building up a "considerable structure of rational argument" around the verses.¹¹⁵ And while it is true that Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal had made some cautious use of rational argumentation, al-Ash'arī went farther by arguing unapologetically for the legitimacy of defending theological doctrines by means of formal rational argumentation based on the very methods developed and employed by the Mu'tazila, whose substantive theological doctrine he had so resolutely rejected. Al-Ash'arī even sought to justify this approach by arguing that the Qur'ān itself contained the germ of certain rational methods the Mu'tazila had employed.¹¹⁶ For this reason, most Ḥanbalīs of al-Ash'arī's day rejected him and

112 For an account of al-Ash'arī's public dispute with his master, al-Jubbā'ī, that occurred around the same time and that also contributed to his loss of faith in the Mu'tazilī creed, see Fakhry, *History*, 204–205. On the rise of Ash'arī *kalām* more generally, see Thiele, "Between Cordoba and Nisābūr."

113 Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 64–65. For the main differences between Mu'tazilī theology and the theology eventually developed by al-Ash'arī, see Thiele, "Between Cordoba and Nisābūr," 226–229.

114 On al-Ash'arī's view of the nature and function of reason in the theological matters, see Frank, "Al-Ash'arī's Conception."

115 Watt, *Formative Period*, 307. See also Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 66: "When he [al-Ash'arī] quotes a verse and argues from it, he is not simply quoting (as some other writers did) but is placing the verse within a setting of rational conceptions, and he has other arguments which do not depend on quotations"—a description that is equally apt for Ibn Taymiyya's methodology.

116 Nagel, *History*, 152. This is a critical point since Ibn Taymiyya also stresses the Qur'ān's use of rational argumentation and consciously tries to develop a notion of reason that grows out of and is congruent with the Qur'ān.

his followers since they, like their leader, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, considered the very use of formalized *kalām* a dangerous capitulation to methods and assumptions that, in and of themselves, were invalid and without foundation.¹¹⁷

In terms of substantive doctrine, al-Ash'arī differed from the Ḥanbalīs in that he took an explicit position on the question of the divine attributes initially raised by the Mu'tazila,¹¹⁸ in contrast to the Ḥanbalīs' strict amodal (*bi-lā kayf*) approach. Al-Ash'arī's position allows some measure of analogy between the attributes of God and those human attributes designated by the same name, in accordance with an attenuated form of the Mu'tazilī principle of *qiyās al-ghā'ib 'alā al-shāhid* (or *al-qiyās bi-l-shāhid 'alā al-ghā'ib*), that is, drawing an analogical inference from the "visible" (*shāhid*) world of our empirical experience to the "invisible" (*ghā'ib*) world of unseen realities that lie beyond our sense perception.¹¹⁹ By cautiously adopting this principle in a moderated form, al-Ash'arī tried to steer a middle course between the radical views of the Mu'tazila¹²⁰ and those of the strictest Ḥanbalīs.¹²¹ Thomas Nagel sums up al-Ash'arī's position on the divine attributes by explaining that

they [the attributes] were not merely some phantom of the necessarily human language of revelation. To be sure, when the Koran spoke of God's hands, it meant something that exclusively referred to God's reality, but it also had a comparable reference point in the realm of human experience. . . . Expressions in the revelation such as hand, face, etc., which

117 See, e.g., *ibid.*, 178.

118 For an extended discussion of al-Ash'arī's position on the divine attributes in his various works, see Allard, *Le problème*, 173–285.

119 Nagel, *History*, 153. We deal with the question of *qiyās al-ghā'ib 'alā al-shāhid*, which is central to Ibn Taymiyya's methodology and approach to the divine attributes, in detail in chapter 6.

120 This inference from the seen to the unseen was one of the Mu'tazilī principles that al-Ash'arī initially adopted but attempted to bend to his own purposes. He seems to have concluded that the Mu'tazila were not wrong in principle to draw such inferences with regard to the divine attributes (otherwise we would have no way of relating to the attributes at all); however, in their attempt to achieve maximum rational consistency, the Mu'tazila had pushed the principle so far that they committed precisely that kind of *tashbūh* from which they had originally fled. Thus, they essentially came to conceive of the divine attributes as being subject to the very same sorts of limitations that apply to human attributes denoted by the same name. It is for this reason that, in an effort to avoid likening God to created things, they ultimately denied the divine attributes altogether. Because they had essentially assimilated (*shabbahū*) God's attributes to man's, the Mu'tazila drew the inexorable conclusion that affirming *any* of the divine attributes necessarily involved likening God to creation (*tashbūh*).

121 See Nagel, *History*, 154; also Thiele, "Between Cordoba and Nisābūr," 227–228.

God Himself chose, were by no means metaphors! But neither must they be understood in purely human-physical terms. Rather, they were real attributes whose true nature man was not able to recognize.¹²²

Al-Ash'arī's theological treatise *al-Ibāna 'an uṣūl al-dīyāna*¹²³ has been described as a turning point in Islamic theology, a kind of bridge work between the earlier credos (like that of al-Ṭaḥāwī) and the later dogmatic treatises, such as those of al-Ghazālī, al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286 or 691/1292), al-Ījī (d. 756/1355), or al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490).¹²⁴ In the *Ibāna*, which may be his first work after embracing Sunnism,¹²⁵ al-Ash'arī shows no compromise with Mu'tazilī doctrines or methods whatsoever. In a later work, *Maqālāt al-Islāmīyyīn* (Theological doctrines of the Muslims), however, his tone is calmer and his positions are less black and white, as he is freer to "take the spoils from defeated Mu'tazilism and enrich therewith a henceforth orthodox *kalām*"¹²⁶ (which, for Ibn Taymiyya, it might be added, is precisely where al-Ash'arī went wrong).¹²⁷

122 Nagel, *History*, 154.

123 For the Arabic text of this work with an English translation, see Klein, *Abu'l-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl al-Ash'arī's al-Ibānah 'an uṣūl ad-dīyānah*.

124 Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 60.

125 The chronology of the *Ibāna* is disputed. Gardet and Anawati (*Introduction*, 60) follow Wensinck (*Muslim Creed*, 93) in suggesting that the *Ibāna* was al-Ash'arī's first post-conversion work. Allard (*Le problème*, 250–251), by contrast, dates it to around the year 315/927 or 928, placing it after al-Ash'arī's other major works, including *Risāla ilā ahl al-thaḡhr*, *Kitāb al-Luma'*, and *Istiḥsān al-khawḍ fi 'ilm al-kalām* [also known by the title *Kitāb al-Hathth 'alā al-baḥth*—on which see Frank, "Al-Ash'arī's *Kitāb al-hathth 'alā l-baḥth*"]. Note that Ibn Taymiyya also considered the *Ibāna* to be al-Ash'arī's last work on theology, one that represented his final view on theological matters. On various views concerning the authenticity of and the relationship among al-Ash'arī's various works, see Thiele, "Between Cordoba and Nisābūr," 227, n. 2.

126 Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 60. The difference in the tone of al-Ash'arī's various treatises has also been interpreted as a function of each work's respective audience. Watt (*Formative Period*, 306–307), for instance, follows Allard's view that al-Ash'arī's *al-Luma'* was directed to the Mu'tazila and other *mutakallimūn*, whereas the *Ibāna* contains arguments specifically addressed to the Ḥanbalīs—a point that perhaps explains its more strident, less compromising tone. See Allard, *Le problème*, esp. 215–285. Yet we must bear in mind that al-Ash'arī also seems to have written the work *Istiḥsān al-khawḍ fi 'ilm al-kalām* (The vindication of the use of the science of *kalām*) with a Ḥanbalī audience in mind, in this case to convince them of the legitimacy and appropriateness, or "permissibility" ("*istiḥsān*" here presumably being used in its legal sense), of engaging in *kalām*. These positions are perhaps not incompatible since a strict Ḥanbalī (recall Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal) would have objected to any rationalistic (understood here in the pejorative sense of pseudo-rational) defense of theological doctrines, regardless how conservative and traditionalist the positions defended. For the Arabic text of al-Ash'arī's *Istiḥsān* with an English translation, see McCarthy, *The Theology of al-Ash'arī*.

127 For a summary of the achievement of al-Ash'arī, see Watt, *Formative Period*, 303ff. For

When Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī died in 324/935 (or 936), he left behind only three pupils, none of whom are particularly well known to posterity.¹²⁸ It is not until the second generation after al-Ash‘arī that we encounter three other, prominent figures who took up al-Ash‘arī’s torch and who further developed the thought and formalized the method of their esteemed master. The most important of these figures is Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī.¹²⁹

7.2 *al-Bāqillānī*

Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), like al-Ash‘arī, hailed from the city of Basra, where he is reported to have studied *kalām* under two of al-Ash‘arī’s direct students.¹³⁰ A Mālikī in legal rite,¹³¹ al-Bāqillānī spent much of his life in Baghdad with the exception of a period during which he held the office of judge (*qāḍī*) somewhere outside the capital city.¹³² Ibn Khaldūn credits al-Bāqillānī with perfecting the early methodology of Ash‘arī *kalām*,¹³³ and modern scholars have agreed on the pivotal role al-Bāqillānī played in consolidating the school.¹³⁴ Al-Bāqillānī drew out al-Ash‘arī’s initial insights and positions more fully and refined his method in order to provide the most robust defense of al-Ash‘arī’s original doctrine possible.¹³⁵ We recall that

a more detailed study of the development of al-Ash‘arī’s doctrine, see Frank, “Elements in the Development of the Teaching of al-Ash‘arī.” For an extended study of the life and thought of al-Ash‘arī, see McCarthy, *Theology, passion* and Allard, *Le problème*, 25–72.

- 128 These are Abū Sahl al-Ṣu‘lūkī (d. 369/980) of Nishapur, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Bāhili (d. ca. 370/980) of Basra, and Abū ‘Abd Allāh b. Mujāhid al-Ṭā‘ī (d. 360s/970s or 370s/980s) of Basra. Watt, *Formative Period*, 312. For a discussion of the major Ash‘arī figures up until al-Ghazālī, see Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 75–84.
- 129 The other two being Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015) and Abū Ishāq al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 418/1027). Thiele, “Between Cordoba and Nisābūr,” 229.
- 130 Namely, al-Bāhili and Ibn Mujāhid. Watt, *Formative Period*, 312.
- 131 Al-Bāqillānī’s Mālikī affiliation seems to have contributed to the spread and acceptance of Ash‘arī theology in North Africa, a region uniformly Mālikī in legal rite. Before this time, most adherents of Ash‘arī *kalām* were Shāfi‘ī (like al-Ash‘arī himself), though there were some Ḥanafīs among them as well. Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 76.
- 132 Ibid.
- 133 See Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, 465, lines 12–13 for the remark that al-Bāqillānī “took a leading role in [developing] their [the Ash‘arīs’] method,” specifically by making explicit the rational premises on which the key positions of the school rested.
- 134 Thiele, “Between Cordoba and Nisābūr,” 231. Majid Fakhry, for instance, speaks of the “pioneering role [al-Bāqillānī played] in elaborating the metaphysical groundwork of Ash‘arism.” Fakhry, *History*, 213.
- 135 Al-Bāqillānī’s ingenuity in this regard can be seen in his remodeling of al-Jubbā‘ī’s theory of the *aḥwāl*, or “states,” a theory that he adapted to the needs of Ash‘arī theology by using it to prove what the Mu‘tazila had intended it to *disprove* (namely, the subsistence in God of qualities such as knowledge, power, and will as distinct, existing entities,

al-Ash'arī's views were, on the whole, rather conservative and close to those of Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (though on some issues they tended more towards a middle path between strict Ḥanbalī traditionalism and Mu'tazilī-inspired rationalism). Whereas al-Ash'arī had set stringent conditions for proofs, al-Bāqillānī laid down even more exacting standards, namely, through his principle of reversibility, which requires that proofs be fully reversible, meaning that the invalidity of a proof necessarily entails the falsity of that which it was meant to prove.¹³⁶

On the whole, al-Bāqillānī can be considered the greatest systematizer of early Ash'arī theology (the way of the "*mutaqaddimūn*") and, in a sense, the last one since, starting with al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085) in the next generation, fundamental changes began to occur that paved the way for a "new *kalām*" (that of the "*muta'akhhirūn*")—changes that involved a number of conceptual reformulations and methodological renovations of earlier Ash'arī doctrine. But to gain an adequate understanding of exactly what happened and why, we must divert our attention briefly to the rise and development of an entirely separate discourse that had a major impact on Ash'arī *kalām* as of the middle of the fifth/eleventh century: namely, philosophy (*falsafa*).

8 Philosophy

Philosophical reflection began early in the intellectual career of Islam.¹³⁷ As we have seen above, some Greek materials were already in circulation and being used in the Syriac tradition before the rise of Islam in the first/seventh century. Greek logic, along with other categories of Greek philosophy, had been incorporated into Christian theological discourse for several centuries, and elements of it had already begun to appear in early Muslim theological debates.¹³⁸ But it was the massive movement to translate Greek philosophical and scientific texts, an effort that lasted from the second/eighth to the fourth/tenth century and known simply as the translation movement, that was the major catalyst for the rise of a rationalist Mu'tazilī theology. This move-

or *ma'ānī*). See Thiele, "Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī's (d. 321/933) Theory of 'States' (*aḥwāl*)," 377–380.

136 Nagel, *History*, 160.

137 For a useful list of selected readings on all aspects of the Islamic philosophical tradition, see Adamson and Taylor, eds., *Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, 426–441 ("Select Bibliography and Further Reading").

138 See section 3 of the current chapter, p. 31 ff.

ment also catalyzed the development of an independent tradition of philosophical reflection in Arabic, one whose formative and classical stages stretch from early third-/ninth-century Baghdad to late sixth-/twelfth-century Andalusia.¹³⁹

The genealogy of the Arabic-Islamic philosophical tradition (also known by its Arabic name *falsafa*) that arose in the Muslim world as a result of the Greco-Arabic translation movement includes Aristotle and the main Hellenistic commentators on his work—all of whom, with the exception of the Aristotelian Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. ca. 200 CE), were Neoplatonists—in addition to original Neoplatonic texts.¹⁴⁰ Since even Aristotle's works were transmitted into Arabic through a distinctly Neoplatonic lens, Neoplatonism was central in setting the tenor of the Muslim philosophical tradition, and many of the ideas that Ibn Taymiyya found most objectionable in the philosophical and theological traditions he inherited were of Neoplatonic inspiration. The most outstanding (earlier) figures of the Arabic-Islamic philosophical tradition are al-Kindī (d. ca. 252/866), al-Fārābī (d. ca. 339/950), and, especially, their preeminent successor Ibn Sīnā, an independent and original thinker widely hailed as the greatest figure in the Muslim Peripatetic tradition. Ibn Sīnā, in fact, took up many of the questions that had been put forth in *kalām*, such that philosophy after the classical period had to contend with both Ibn Sīnā and the tradition of *kalām*.¹⁴¹ As a result, philosophers post-Ibn Sīnā became more consistently concerned with providing solutions anchored in philosophy to the problems set forth by *kalām*.¹⁴² At the same time, and far more significantly for our inquiry, *kalām* itself was enormously influenced by the thought of Ibn Sīnā, whose categories, ideas, and terminology left a lasting

139 For a detailed presentation of the various stages of the translation movement and the actors involved, see Fakhry, *History*, 4–19 and, more extensively, Gutas, *Greek Thought, passim*.

140 For a table of the numerous Neoplatonic writings translated into Arabic (or Syriac) presented in convenient table form, see d'Ancona, "Greek into Arabic," 22–23.

141 See comments at Wisnovsky, "Avicenna," 92.

142 *Falsafa* has traditionally been seen as primarily, and perhaps exclusively, influenced by Islamic theological discourse not in its method or basic philosophical precommitments but only in the sense that it ultimately took up some of the issues discussed in *kalām* and "philosophized" them, so to speak, by assimilating them to the larger philosophical *Weltanschauung* and recasting them in light of a purely philosophical interpretation. (See, e.g., Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 322, n. 3.) More recent scholarship, however, has contended that the boundaries between theology and philosophy were not as clearly demarcated, whether in terms of methodology or in terms of subject matter. See, for instance, Wisnovsky, "Notes," as well as Wisnovsky, "Nature and Scope."

imprint on the works of the later *mutakallimūn*.¹⁴³ To gain a just appreciation of al-Ghazālī's synthesis at the turn of the sixth/twelfth century—and, ultimately, of the nature of the intellectual tradition that Ibn Taymiyya inherited and to which he responded with such vigor two centuries later—we must first understand the challenge philosophy posed to *kalām* and to Islamic religious belief more generally, as well as the imprint the philosophical tradition left on *kalām* and its practitioners.

8.1 *al-Kindī*

The Kufan-educated Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb b. Ishāq al-Kindī (d. ca. 252/866), known as the “philosopher of the Arabs” (*ḥaylasūf al-ʿArab*), flourished in Baghdad under the patronage of the same three Abbasid caliphs who had executed the *miḥna*. Al-Kindī endeavored to make philosophy acceptable to his fellow Muslims through a “policy of reconciliation,”¹⁴⁴ in part by designating philosophy by the Qur'ānic term *ḥikma* (wisdom) and in part by attempting to demonstrate that the rational sciences were consistent with true belief, specifically *tawḥīd*.¹⁴⁵ Classical biographers, both supporters and detractors, agree that al-Kindī sought to bridge the gap between philosophy and religion,¹⁴⁶ holding that the two could not be truly contradictory since they both served the common end of making accessible to men the knowledge of the True One (al-Ḥaqq), God.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, while al-Kindī privileged prophetic over philosophical knowledge with respect to the immediacy of the former (in contrast to the latter, which can be acquired only after years of arduous learning), he did not seem to believe that prophets had access to a categorically different *kind* of knowledge than what was available to the best philosophers.¹⁴⁸

As a philosopher, al-Kindī advocated the application of rational philosophical methods to the texts of revelation. Not surprisingly, his overall positions on theological issues were close to those of the Mu'tazila—although there appears to be no evidence in his writings that he considered himself either a theologian or a Mu'tazili proper¹⁴⁹—and, as a methodological principle, he placed the tools and techniques of philosophy above those of *kalām*.¹⁵⁰ Thus, while the

143 See, for example, Wisnovsky, “One Aspect.”

144 Endress, “Defense of Reason,” 15.

145 Ibid., 4–5. See also Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 43 on his “belief in the harmony, even the identity, of the truths of philosophy and the truths of Islam.”

146 Fakhry, *History*, 68.

147 Klein-Franke, “Al-Kindī,” 171.

148 Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 43.

149 Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation*, 5.

150 Endress, “Defense of Reason,” 6, 8. See also Watt, *Formative Period*, 206–208.

titles of a number of al-Kindī's works reveal his clear affinities with Mu'tazilī preoccupations, the titles of other treatises show that he also undertook detailed refutations of certain Mu'tazilī theses, such as atomism.¹⁵¹ Significantly, however, al-Kindī—almost uniquely among the philosophers—parted ways with Aristotle on a number of fundamental issues in favor of positions that were in line with Islamic theological postulates. He joined with Mu'tazilī theologians in defending Islamic beliefs against various groups (materialists, Manichaeans, atheists, and rival philosophers), breaking ranks with both Aristotle and the Neoplatonists on touchstone issues like the creation of the world *ex nihilo*,¹⁵² the resurrection of the body, the possibility of miracles and prophetic revelation, and the ultimate destruction of the world—all of which he upheld, in conformity with Islamic teachings but in opposition to the Greek philosophical tradition and to later *falsafa*.¹⁵³ Finally, it has been suggested that al-Kindī's conception of God as the efficient cause of the universe can, in a sense, be seen as an adaptation of the Neoplatonic conception of the One to the theistic concept of God as Creator.¹⁵⁴

We can likewise discern the impact of *kalām* on some of the topics taken up by philosophy even as early as al-Kindī, insofar as he attempted to provide solutions from within philosophy to some of the issues being debated in *kalām*. In his most important treatise, *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā* (On first philosophy, of which only the first of four parts has been preserved),¹⁵⁵ al-Kindī discusses the notion of oneness, the crux of which is that nothing about which something can be predicated can be said to be "one." Since God is the ultimate One

151 Adamson, "Al-Kindī and the Reception," 48. For a detailed discussion of the philosophical convergences and divergences between al-Kindī and the Mu'tazilī, see Adamson, "Al-Kindī and the Mu'tazilī," 45–77. For the theory of atomism as first introduced by the Mu'tazilī theologian Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf, see Frank, *Metaphysics of Created Being*.

152 Though he seems to have embraced a composite doctrine that combined the Neoplatonic emanationist notion of the One, Aristotle's Unmoved Mover, and the theistic conception of God as Creator, thus simultaneously combining Neoplatonic, Aristotelian, and Islamic doctrines on God. See Adamson, "Al-Kindī and the Reception," 38–39; also Endreß, "Athen, Alexandria, Bagdad, Samarkand," 49.

153 Fakhry, *History*, 69. Fakhry stresses how orthodox al-Kindī was for a philosopher (see, for instance, Fakhry, 93–94). Muhsin Mahdi, by contrast, remarks that while al-Kindī's views in some respects resemble those of Mu'tazilī theologians, nevertheless "as one looks more closely at what al-Kindī writes, he sees that the spirit, intention, and substance of his thought are quite different from those of the Mu'tazilī." See Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation*, 5.

154 Endreß, "Defense of Reason," 10–11. See also Ivry, "Al-Kindī as Philosopher," 118–124 and *passim* for al-Kindī's eclectic blending of Neoplatonic and Islamic monotheistic elements within a larger framework of primarily Aristotelian inspiration.

155 Klein-Franke, "Al-Kindī," 168.

and since the ascription of any predicate or concept to an entity automatically entails its multiplicity, it follows that nothing whatsoever can be predicated of God. The radical negative theology that results from this conception of oneness is a standard feature of later *falsafa* and, as we have seen, a central tenet (albeit in a mitigated form) of the Muʿtazila, self-styled “people of (divine) justice and unicity” (*ahl al-ʿadl wa-l-tawḥīd*). Even in the case of al-Kindī the philosopher, however, some argue against interpreting his theology as purely negative, contending that the *ḥakīm al-ʿArab* was primarily concerned with “preserving a doctrine of positive divine attribution that can withstand the requirements of simplicity and transcendence.”¹⁵⁶ In particular, at the end of *Fī al-falsafa al-ūlā*, al-Kindī refers to the True One, God, as “the Giver and Originator, the Powerful, the Supporter,” from which Peter Adamson concludes that, for al-Kindī, “God is not just a principle of oneness; He is an agent.”¹⁵⁷ Be that as it may, the philosophers’ starkly abstract conception of divine oneness, with the attendant radical denial of most or all of the divine attributes this conception entails, is one of the targets Ibn Taymiyya attacks most consistently and relentlessly in the *Darʿ taʿarūḍ*.

8.2 *al-Fārābī*

Born in Farab (located in current-day Turkmenistan), Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī (d. ca. 339/950) spent most of his life in Baghdad, where he studied logic under the Nestorian Christian scholars Yūḥannā b. Ḥaylān (fl. early fourth/tenth century)¹⁵⁸ and Abū Bishr Mattā b. Yūnus (d. 328/940) and where he taught the Syriac Jacobite Christian translator and logician Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī (d. 363/974).¹⁵⁹ Al-Fārābī was universally venerated as an unparalleled master of logic and was also considered the leading expositor of Plato and Aristotle in his day.¹⁶⁰ It is primarily his work on logic, however, that earned him the epithet “the Second Teacher” (*al-muʿallim al-thānī*)¹⁶¹—second only to the First

156 Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 55.

157 Ibid., 57.

158 We do not have precise information about the date of Yūḥannā b. Ḥaylān’s death; we know only that he died during the reign of the Abbasid caliph al-Muqtadir bi-Llāh, that is, sometime between the years 295/908 and 320/932. See Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ*, 605; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*, 7:237.

159 Black, “Al-Fārābī,” 178.

160 Fakhry, *History*, 107. For a list of al-Fārābī’s chief logical writings, see Fakhry, 109. For a study of the pre-Fārābian logical tradition in Arabic, with a concentration on early terminology as an indication of the primarily Syriac roots thereof, see Zimmermann, “Some Observations on al-Farabi and Logical Tradition.”

161 For one interpretation of how al-Fārābī came to merit this appellation, see S.H. Nasr, “Why Was Al-Fārābī Called the Second Teacher?”

Teacher, Aristotle. Ibn Rushd and Maimonides (d. 601/1204) pay tribute to him for his work on logic,¹⁶² and Ibn Sīnā records his debt to al-Fārābī for his understanding of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.¹⁶³

Al-Fārābī is credited not only with writing the “first systematic exposition of Neo-Platonism in Arabic”¹⁶⁴ but also, indeed, with laying the foundations of the mainstream tradition of Islamic philosophy.¹⁶⁵ Like al-Kindī, only a small portion of his many works has survived.¹⁶⁶ The majority of al-Fārābī's writings are dedicated to logic and the philosophy of language, specifically the relationship between abstract logic and the philosophical terminology used to express logical relations, on the one hand, and ordinary language and grammar, on the other.¹⁶⁷ The issue of logic and language represents a cardinal point of contention in the debate between reason and revelation¹⁶⁸ and, in fact, constitutes a major element of Ibn Taymiyya's attack on abstract philosophical reasoning and of his attempt to reconstitute rationality on more intuitive principles of everyday reasoning.¹⁶⁹

Also relevant to the topic of reason and revelation is the fact that al-Fārābī, like al-Kindī before him, dealt explicitly with the relationship between philosophy and religion,¹⁷⁰ casting this vital discussion in terms that were later

162 Black, “Al-Fārābī,” 192.

163 Ibid., 188.

164 Fakhry, *History*, 107.

165 Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation*, 3. This work provides an informative and interesting treatment of the background to and the various aspects of al-Fārābī's philosophical work.

166 Black, “Al-Fārābī,” 179.

167 Ibid. For a full treatment, see Abed, *Aristotelian Logic and the Arabic Language in Alfarabi*. Al-Fārābī is also well known for his various writings on political science and philosophy. (See, for instance, the discussion in Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation*, 14–15 ff.)

168 Epitomized by the famous debate between Mattā b. Yūnus, the logician, and Abū Saʿīd al-Ṣīrāfī (d. 368/979), the theologian, jurist, and philologist. For a presentation and English paraphrase of this debate, see Mahdi, “Language and Logic,” 51–84. A full German translation of the debate by Gerhard Endreß is available as an appendix to his detailed study on the contentious relationship between Greek logic and Arabic grammar and philology from the beginning of Islam through al-Ghazālī. See Endreß, “Grammatik und Logik,” 235–270. This appendix also includes a presentation and translation of a text by Yaḥyā b. ʿAdī, Mattā b. Yūnus's most important Christian disciple (al-Fārābī, of course, was his most important Muslim disciple), on the difference between logic and grammar. (See Endreß, 271–296.) For an extensive study of al-Ṣīrāfī and a systematic interpretation of his debate with Mattā b. Yūnus, see, in the same volume, Kühn, “Die Rehabilitierung der Sprache.”

169 We return to the issue of language and terminology, a crucial component of Ibn Taymiyya's critique, in greater detail in chapter 4, then take up the question of the status of reason and rationality proper in chapter 5.

170 See Mahdi, “Alfarabi on Philosophy and Religion.”

closely echoed by Ibn Sīnā and, especially, Ibn Rushd. Al-Fārābī saw the language of revelation as a popular expression of philosophical truth, employing the tools of rhetoric (*khiṭāb*) and poetics (*shīʿr*) to indicate, in figurative terms, truths that the unphilosophical masses are incapable of grasping rationally.¹⁷¹ Though based on Platonic and Hellenistic antecedents, this notion of revelation as a (mere) representation of reality encoded in literary form was fully worked out, it seems, only in the context of the Arabic-Islamic philosophical tradition.¹⁷² In his writings, al-Fārābī articulates a hierarchy of syllogistic arts in which, following Aristotle, demonstration (*burhān*) is the only apodictic method available in philosophy,¹⁷³ while other modes of discourse, particularly rhetoric and poetics, serve the purposes of non-philosophical communication. As for dialectic (*jadāl*), although it falls short of apodictic demonstration, al-Fārābī nevertheless assigns it a number of important ancillary functions that, taken together, “elevate [it] from the status of a mere handmaiden to a *de facto* partner with demonstration in philosophical pursuits.”¹⁷⁴ Like al-Kindī before

171 Black, “Al-Fārābī,” 181.

172 Griffel, *Apostasie und Toleranz*, 246.

173 Black, “Al-Fārābī,” 181. For a discussion of al-Fārābī’s theory of demonstration, including those aspects in which he differs from Aristotle—particularly al-Fārābī’s “emphasis on the ascent toward primary truths at the expense of the subsequent deductive reasoning from them and his concomitant elevation of dialectic at the expense of demonstration in its usual meaning”—see Galston, “Al-Fārābī on Aristotle’s Theory of Demonstration” (cited quotation at p. 30). Relevant to our concerns farther on, Galston raises the possibility that al-Fārābī may have viewed Aristotle’s apodictic demonstration as merely “a guide for reasoning while itself an unattainable goal” (Galston, 32). Furthermore, al-Fārābī seems to have deemed it very difficult to construct full-fledged demonstrations from scratch and, consequently, to have given considerable weight to the practical necessity of beginning one’s pursuit of truth by reasoning from dialectical syllogisms based on generally accepted premises, then refining these by a subsequent application of the rules of demonstration in order to distinguish true premises from false. Al-Fārābī therefore seems to stand in agreement with Ibn Taymiyya that true apodictic demonstration (as per the doctrine of the philosophers) is hard to come by, particularly when it comes to “acquiring premises of the requisite kind” (Galston, 31). Galston states the matter aptly when she asks if, for al-Fārābī, “the upward movement [i.e., from particular sense experiences] toward primary principles can ever provide the necessary certainty that demonstrations require of their starting-points” (Galston, 31).

174 Black, “Al-Fārābī,” 182. At the beginning of his *Kitāb al-Jadal* (Book of dialectic), al-Fārābī enumerates five ways in which dialectic contributes substantively to the philosophical pursuit, namely, (as paraphrased in Black, 182) “(1) by offering training in the skills of argumentation; (2) by providing an initial exposure to the principles of the individual demonstrative sciences; (3) by awakening awareness of the innate self-evident principles of demonstration, in particular for the physical sciences; (4) by developing the skills useful for communicating with the masses; and (5) for refuting sophistry.”

him, al-Fārābī explicitly called for the allegorical reinterpretation of scripture in instances in which the literal meaning conflicts with reason.¹⁷⁵ In this vein, he outlined a theory in which Aristotle's poetics is identified as the means of communication employed by revelation, the truths of which are thus communicated to the masses through *takhyīl*, a kind of "imagination" or imaginative evocation meant to stand in as a surrogate for the benefit of those incapable of philosophical reasoning.¹⁷⁶ This notion of revelation's reliance on poetic language and on the imaginative evocation such language is said to enable went on to become standard doctrines of the philosophers; both ideas were forcefully reasserted two and a half centuries later by Ibn Rushd and come under massive and sustained attack by Ibn Taymiyya in the *Dar' ta'āruḍ*. Al-Fārābī's central relevance to the debate on reason and revelation in Islam thus lies principally in his "interest in types of rationality, in modes of discourse and argumentation, and in the relations between ordinary and philosophical language," all of which form an "integral part of his answer to [the] historical challenge [of the] need to address seriously the sometimes competing claims between philosophy and religion."¹⁷⁷

8.3 *Ibn Sīnā*

Born near Bukhara (in current-day Uzbekistan), Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn b. Sīnā (d. 428/1037), known in the medieval and modern West under the Latinized name Avicenna, is without a doubt *the* central figure in the Arabic-Islamic philosophical tradition. Before Ibn Sīnā, philosophy and *kalām*, despite cross-fertilizations, represented two distinct strands of thought. With Ibn Sīnā, the two strands became intertwined to such an extent that post-Avicennian *kalām* came to represent a synthesis of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics and Islamic theological doctrine.¹⁷⁸ Ibn Sīnā's metaphysical theses were taken up and debated by *kalām* theologians right up to the dawn of the modern era.¹⁷⁹ In short, Ibn Sīnā "straddled two worlds: the world of *falsafa* and the world of *kalām*."¹⁸⁰

175 Fakhry, *History*, 116.

176 Black, "Al-Fārābī," 182.

177 *Ibid.*, 192.

178 See Wisnovsky, "Avicenna," 92. See also Ayman Shihadeh, "From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī," 175 for the observation that philosophy (*falsafa*) and theology (*kalām*) "came to be as if one and the same discipline." See also Endress, "Defense of Reason," 30 for the point that "it was through him [Ibn Sīnā] that the *falsafa* came to be and to stay an integral and living part of Islamic thought" (and further remarks at Endress, 37).

179 Wisnovsky, "Avicenna," 93. For an overview of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics, see Marmura, "Avicenna's Metaphysics"; also Hallaq, *Greek Logicians*, xiv–xxiv and *passim*. For a more in-depth treatment, see Menn, "Avicenna's Metaphysics" and McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 149–208. For an exhaustive exploration, see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics in Context*.

180 Wisnovsky, "Avicenna," 109.

Ibn Sīnā's influence, like that of al-Fārābī, was felt most profoundly in the fields of logic and, especially, metaphysics. Our concern here is strictly limited to those aspects of Ibn Sīnā's thought that were eventually adopted by mainstream *mutakallimūn* and naturalized into later *kalām*. One of the most important of these ideas is Ibn Sīnā's distinction between essence and existence, as well as his distinction (which attracted a considerable amount of criticism) between that which is necessary by virtue of itself (*al-wājib bi-dhātihī*), namely, God, and that which is necessary but by virtue of another (*al-wājib bi-ghayrihī*), namely, everything other than God (which is deemed to exist necessarily, albeit by virtue of God and not by virtue of itself). These twin theses exercised an enormous influence in post-classical Islamic intellectual history, both in various strains of later philosophy and in mainstream Sunnī, as well as Shī'ī, *kalām*.¹⁸¹

Ibn Sīnā viewed logic as the key to philosophy, an indispensable tool that leads to knowledge of the essential natures of things¹⁸²—a conception of logic that Ibn Taymiyya attacks emphatically.¹⁸³ Ibn Sīnā is credited with articulating the original notion of God as being “necessarily existent by virtue of Himself” (*wājib al-wujūd bi-dhātihī*)—the Necessarily Existent from whom the rest of existent things then overflow by necessity (which is why they are classified as *necessarily* existent, though by virtue not of themselves but of God) in typical Neoplatonic emanationist fashion. Ibn Sīnā's particular notion of God precluded that He could have any intentional relation to the world¹⁸⁴—a major point of variance with Islamic theological doctrine, which insists on God's fully free and volitional creation of the cosmos. Furthermore, according to Ibn Sīnā, divine providence cannot be understood in terms of God's direct superintendence of or concern for the world, but only in the far more remote sense of God's (mere) knowledge of the order of all existence and the manner of its goodness.¹⁸⁵

Later critics of Ibn Sīnā, such as the Ash'arī theologians al-Ghazālī and al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), mostly took issue with Ibn Sīnā's conception of God and His relationship to the world, his denial of God's knowledge of particulars

181 Ibid., 93.

182 Inatī, “Ibn Sīnā,” 234–235. See also McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 28–35.

183 On Ibn Taymiyya's critique of logic, see Hallaq, *Greek Logicians*, as well as von Kügelgen, “Ibn Taymiyyas Kritik” and von Kügelgen, “Poison of Philosophy.” For a recent reassessment of Hallaq's interpretation of Ibn Taymiyya and a critical review of Ibn Taymiyya's critique of logic and the logicians, see El-Rouayheb, “Theology and Logic,” 416–422.

184 Inatī, “Ibn Sīnā,” 242.

185 Ibid.

as particulars, the doctrine of the eternity of the universe, and his purely spiritualist, non-corporeal conception of the afterlife. Al-Ghazālī, as we shall see, dedicated one of his most famous and influential works, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*), to launching a devastating attack on major elements of the Muslim philosophical tradition, primarily as incarnated in Ibn Sīnā's unique synthesis of Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, and original Avicennian elements. In his attack on philosophy, al-Ghazālī singled out the last three doctrines enumerated above (the eternity of the world, the denial of God's knowledge of particulars, and the denial of a physical resurrection) as fundamentally irreconcilable with the tenets of Islam, such that anyone who held these views was beyond the pale of the faith. Ibn Taymiyya, too, had many criticisms of Ibn Sīnā, for he "very perspicaciously saw what Avicenna had done: he had incorporated into, and discussed in terms of his own philosophical system, all the intellectual concerns of Islamic society, such as the nature of prophecy, eschatology (*ma'ād*), etc."¹⁸⁶ It was precisely Ibn Sīnā's discussion and reinterpretation of central Islamic doctrines on the terms of an independent (and, in his eyes, rationally inadequate) philosophical system that Ibn Taymiyya objected to so strongly and that he sought to remedy.

Ultimately, however, the criticisms of al-Ghazālī and others failed to prevent Ibn Sīnā's thought not only from profoundly affecting the post-Avicennian philosophical tradition (which is to be expected) but also from penetrating the very conceptual core of *kalām*, leading to a distinction between the early *kalām* tradition (that of the so-called *mutaqaddimūn*) and a later, distinctly "post-Avicennian" *kalām* (that of the so-called *muta'akhhirūn*) that unmistakably bears the imprint of Ibn Sīnā's philosophy.¹⁸⁷ Even al-Ghazālī himself, who was initially perceived by Western scholars to be categorically opposed to philosophy on all levels, is now understood to have been rather deeply influenced by his arch-rival Persian compatriot.¹⁸⁸

186 Gutas, "Heritage of Avicenna," 85.

187 Wisnovsky, "Avicenna," 92. See further at p. 133, where Wisnovsky goes so far as to characterize the post-Avicennian *mutakallimūn* as "the torchbearers of the Avicennian tradition in Islamic intellectual history."

188 And, in fact, this post-Avicennian "*kalām* of the *muta'akhhirūn*" may just as well be described as a "post-Ghazālian *kalām*" since it was primarily al-Ghazālī who, in refuting Ibn Sīnā, simultaneously opened the door to his philosophy and (unwittingly?) adopted and domesticated within both *kalām* and Sufism a number of important tenets of his rival's teaching. For a study of the affinities between al-Ghazālī's thought and that of Ibn Sīnā, see Janssens, "Al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut*." See also Tim Winter's remarks in his introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology*, 12–14.

9 The New *Kalām* and Subsequent Developments

Theology in the fifth/eleventh century underwent a fundamental change as it came under the direct influence of the imposing philosophical system of Ibn Sīnā. We recall that philosophy until the middle of the fourth/tenth century was, both methodologically and institutionally, separate from *kalām* to a considerable degree and that the philosophers as a group, from al-Kindī through al-Fārābī, had a relatively minor impact on theological discourse.¹⁸⁹ Indeed, although the theologians had absorbed a number of methodological tools from the philosophers,¹⁹⁰ the problems treated in *kalām* remained essentially the same throughout this nearly three-century period. This remained true until a seismic shift took place with the rise, post-Ibn Sīnā, of the new *kalām* reflected in the work of al-Juwaynī and, especially, of his famous student, al-Ghazālī. Given the relative isolation in which philosophy had incubated during its initial development and subsequent consolidation—that is, during the period of some two hundred years from al-Kindī through Ibn Sīnā—it must have seemed as if philosophy had come from nowhere to shake the very foundations of theology itself. This shock may well have led to a sense that Ash‘arī *kalām*, as originally developed by al-Ash‘arī in response to the Mu‘tazila, was relatively ill-equipped to deal with philosophy proper and that even after the introduction of what were hoped to be the requisite methodological renovations, such as those of al-Bāqillānī, rational *certainty* in matters of theology continued to prove elusive, particularly in the face of philosophy’s supreme confidence in its ability to engender certitude.

9.1 *al-Juwaynī*

The first major Ash‘arī theologian to have come under the direct influence of philosophy via Ibn Sīnā seems to be Abū al-Ma‘ālī (“Imām al-Ḥaramayn”) al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085). Al-Juwaynī sought to rectify the inadequacies that had become apparent when *kalām* was confronted with philosophy. He did this by adopting certain aspects of the philosophical tradition that he deemed not only compatible with *kalām* but also, indeed, vital for shoring up the worldview of *kalām* in the face of Ibn Sīnā’s imposing philosophy. Al-Juwaynī’s changing attitude towards the place of the rational sciences in the overall hierarchy of Islamic religious disciplines is apparent from his view that *naẓar* (that is,

189 Watt, *Formative Period*, 204–208.

190 On the nature of this process, see especially Wisnovsky, “Nature and Scope,” as well as Wisnovsky, “Essence and Existence.”

engaging in a deliberate process of rational inquiry regarding the foundations of faith) is an obligation for all Muslims who have reached the age of maturity and must be undertaken in order for their faith to be considered valid.¹⁹¹

Though al-Bāqillānī had harbored reservations about the analogical inference from the seen to the unseen (*al-qiyās bi-l-shāhid ‘alā al-ghā’ib*) and had tried to reinforce the defensive arsenal of *kalām* by adding to it his principle of reversibility, with al-Juwaynī this inference from the seen was abandoned altogether.¹⁹² But al-Juwaynī went farther and dropped al-Bāqillānī’s reversibility principle as well, replacing it with certain elements selectively incorporated from the new logic, which was becoming more widespread via the work of Ibn Sīnā. Al-Juwaynī incorporated into the logical armor of *kalām* a number of techniques such as enumeration and division (*al-sabr wa-l-taqṣīm*) and the disjunction between affirmation and negation. Such methods supplemented the two main procedures previously in use, the indirect syllogism (*qiyās al-khalf*) and the direct, or standard, syllogism (*al-qiyās al-mustaqīm*).¹⁹³

In his final theological work, *al-‘Aqīda al-Niẓāmiyya*,¹⁹⁴ al-Juwaynī abandons the earlier *kalām*’s method of proving the existence of God from the createdness of the world (specifically the argument from the temporal origination of bodies, or *hudūth al-aqsām*) in favor of Ibn Sīnā’s proof, which was based on the dichotomy of ontological necessity (*wujūb*) and contingency (*imkān*).¹⁹⁵ This change in the argument used for proving the existence of God and the increasing appropriation of logic as a tool for theology represent two funda-

191 See Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 66 (citing the opening of al-Juwaynī’s *Kitāb al-Irshād*). As we shall discover, Ibn Taymiyya would not reject this in principle since the Qur’ān is full of exhortations to “look” (*fa’nẓurū*, etc.) and to ponder. Rational reflection (in the sense of looking and pondering) is therefore fundamental, in Ibn Taymiyya’s view, to reaching and maintaining authentic conviction in the truth of Islam. His main goal in the *Dar’*, however, is to refute the validity of the *methods* and *content* of what passed for *naẓar* among later *kalām* theologians, such as al-Juwaynī, and to replace this with a reconfigured “sound reasoning” (*husn al-naẓar*) that he identifies with that of the early community of the pre-*kalām*/pre-philosophy stage, in which “reason and revelation” ... were not experienced as dichotomous” (Winter, “Reason as Balance,” 8).

192 Nagel, *History*, 165.

193 Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 73.

194 On the chronology of al-Juwaynī’s works, see Allard, *Le problème*, 379–380.

195 Nagel, *History*, 173. See also Wisnovsky, “One Aspect.” On al-Juwaynī’s reforms of the earlier *kalām* argument for the existence of God, see Thiele, “Between Cordoba and Nisābūr,” 236. Antecedents to al-Juwaynī’s reform can be found even before Ibn Sīnā in the work of the Mu’tazilī Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044); see Madelung, “Abū l-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī’s Proof.” On the relationship between Ibn Sīnā’s proof for the existence of God and *kalām* theology more generally, see Rudolph, “La preuve de l’existence de Dieu.”

mental distinctions on the basis of which practically all later thinkers¹⁹⁶ differentiate between the “early *kalām*” of the *mutaqaddimūn* and the “later *kalām*” of the *muta’akhhirūn*. Furthermore, al-Juwaynī seems to have been the first to incorporate the Mu‘tazilī doctrine of atomism into Ash‘arī *kalām* as a normative teaching that, in combination with the argument from contingency, was used to prove the existence of God, His attributes, and the temporality, or “temporal origination” (*ḥudūth*), of the world.¹⁹⁷

Another crucial departure from al-Ash‘arī’s methodology in the work of al-Juwaynī—and one that is of central concern to Ibn Taymiyya—relates to al-Juwaynī’s position on the divine attributes. Both al-Ash‘arī and al-Bāqillānī, as we have seen, upheld a modified version of the *bi-lā kayf* doctrine of the early Muslim community as a means of preserving both divine transcendence and the literal integrity of the Qur’ān’s assertions regarding the attributes of God. Al-Juwaynī, however, went farther by separating attributes into essential (*naḥsī*) and qualitative (*ma’nawī*), a move that has been described as a shift towards a more “liberal” Ash‘arī theology, one less attached to a literal understanding of Qur’ānic statements regarding the divine attributes.¹⁹⁸ In this, al-Juwaynī was one of the first Ash‘arī theologians to make *ta’wīl* of—in the sense of explicitly interpreting in a figurative manner—the so-called revealed attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-khabariyya*), such as God’s hands, face, and other such attributes that cannot be known through independent reason and are denoted in revelation by terms that could seem to imply corporeality.¹⁹⁹

Similarly, al-Juwaynī was the first theologian to elaborate a juridical methodology on the basis of the principles of the new *kalām*, an initiative brought to full fruition by his student, al-Ghazālī,²⁰⁰ who oversaw the firm and complete incorporation of logic into theology as well. Al-Juwaynī nonetheless represents a critical juncture in the transition from the earlier style of reasoning in *kalām* to the new, philosophically oriented *kalām*, being as he was “old-school by virtue of his dialectical method, but an old-schooler who por-

196 Such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (Nagel, *History*, 207). See Ibn Khaldūn, *al-Muqaddima*, 465, line 22 to 466, line 4 for the incorporation of logic into *kalām* and its centrality in the demarcation of “old-style *kalām*” (*ṭarīqat al-mutaqaddimīn*) from “new-style *kalām*” (*ṭarīqat al-muta’akhhirīn*).

197 Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 73.

198 Ibid., 66. In the generation before al-Juwaynī, Ibn Fūrak made *ta’wīl* of certain *ḥadīth*, while ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī had previously endorsed a more thorough-going *ta’wīl* than Ibn Fūrak. See Allard, *Le problème*, 326–329 on Ibn Fūrak and Allard, 334–342 on al-Baghdādī.

199 Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 73.

200 Primarily through al-Ghazālī’s systematic incorporation of logic into his famous work on jurisprudence, *al-Mustasfā min ‘ilm al-uṣūl*.

tends the triumph of the new method.”²⁰¹ According to Ibn Khaldūn, the old way is exemplified by al-Bāqillānī’s reversibility principle (which states that the invalidity of the proof entails the falsity of what is being proved), while the new way, informed by Aristotelian logic, is not bound by this principle. The principle itself seems to be drawn primarily from legal analogy (*qiyās*) as it was originally used in the domain of *fiqh*, in which the Aristotelian syllogism had not yet made its appearance.²⁰² In the new logic, on the basis of which al-Bāqillānī’s reversibility principle is rejected, however, the Aristotelian syllogism becomes predominant. This “new method”—which incorporates the new logic as well as the new argument for the existence of God, both compliments of Ibn Sīnā—comes fully into its own with al-Ghazālī, after whom the method and terminology of *kalām* come to resemble that of philosophy more and more with each succeeding generation of Ash’arīs.²⁰³

9.2 *al-Ghazālī*

The “Proof of Islam” (Ḥujjat al-Islām) Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) is a watershed figure in Islamic intellectual history whose thought represents a confluence of jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, and Sufism and who rightfully deserves a separate discussion in relation to each of these fields.²⁰⁴ We treat him here not only because of his superb philosophical education and sharply analytical mind but also because it is his engagement with the Muslim philosophical tradition that is most relevant to the concerns of this study. This relevance stems not only from al-Ghazālī’s refutation of certain central theses of the philosophers on purely *philosophical* grounds (similar to Ibn Taymiyya’s refutations) but also from his adoption of certain elements of philosophy that he made part and parcel of Islamic orthodoxy (legal and theological, as well as spiritual and mystical). In the pivotal figure of al-Ghazālī, who developed an early interest in the epistemological foundations of knowledge,²⁰⁵ we witness the full crossover in Islamic theology from the way of the early school (*ṭarīq al-mutaqaddimīn*) to the way of the later school (*ṭarīq al-muta’akhhirīn*) foreshadowed by al-Juwaynī.²⁰⁶

201 Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 154. For an analysis of the main differences between old-style and new-style *kalām*, see the discussion at Gardet and Anawati, 72–76.

202 *Ibid.*, 72–73.

203 *Ibid.*, 154.

204 On al-Ghazālī’s life and works, see Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 19–59.

205 Griffel, *Apostasie und Toleranz*, 264.

206 Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 72. For a more detailed discussion of the progressive crossover from the “old way” to the “new way” through an analysis of al-Bāqillānī’s *Tamhīd*, al-Juwaynī’s *Irshād*, and al-Ghazālī’s *Iqtisād*, see Gardet and Anawati, 153–160. In sum,

Born in 450/1058 in the northeastern Iranian city of Tus, al-Ghazālī studied in Nishapur under the eminent Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī. He then taught at the prestigious Nizāmiyya madrasa in Baghdad for four years. During this period, al-Ghazālī's intense philosophical studies led him to produce a number of important works,²⁰⁷ including an exposition of logic, *Mi'yār al-'ilm fī fann al-mantiq* (The standard of knowledge in the art of logic),²⁰⁸ and an important work of Ash'arī theology, *al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād* (The just mean in belief). He wrote his most celebrated work, *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn* (*The Revival of the Religious Sciences*), after a lengthy period of solitary travel dedicated to treading the Sufi path of spiritual purification and mystical realization. Upon returning home from this extended hiatus,²⁰⁹ al-Ghazālī resumed his teaching and other scholarly activities, producing, inter alia, a major work on *uṣūl al-fiqh* (the aforementioned *al-Mustasfā*),²¹⁰ an intellectual and spiritual autobiography, two mystical treatises, and, shortly before his death, a small work warning against the pursuit of *kalām* theology by the common people.

In one of his most famous and influential works, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*),²¹¹ al-Ghazālī sharply critiques the philosophical tradition—particularly Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics and psychology,²¹² but also aspects of al-Fārābī's philosophy.²¹³ This attack elicited a strident, line-by-line response by the staunchly Aristotelian philosopher Ibn Rushd, born in the Andalusian city of Cordoba only fifteen years after al-Ghazālī's death in north-

the authors remark that the new way, whose eventual triumph one can already sense in the work of al-Juwaynī, becomes fully actualized in the work of al-Ghazālī, with Ash'arī theologians thereafter incorporating an ever greater portion of the terms and categories of philosophy into *kalām* proper (Gardet and Anawati, 154).

- 207 For a chronological presentation and discussion of al-Ghazālī's main works, see Madelung, "Al-Ghazālī's Changing Attitude."
- 208 Michael Marmura speaks of al-Ghazālī's work as being an exposition of "Avicenna's logic." Marmura, "Al-Ghazālī," 139. Fakhry specifies this notion of an Avicennian logic as one in which "Aristotelian, Neo-Platonic, and Stoic elements are intermingled." Fakhry, *History*, 133. For a discussion of Ibn Sīnā's presentation of logic in his famous *Shifā'*, see Fakhry, 133–135.
- 209 For a reinterpretation of al-Ghazālī's "crisis" as traditionally depicted on the basis of his *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl* (*Deliverance from Error*), see Garden, "Revisiting al-Ghazālī's Crisis" and, more extensively, Garden, *First Islamic Reviver*, 1–60.
- 210 See p. 65, n. 200 above.
- 211 On which see Griffel, "Theology Engages with Avicennan Philosophy," 437–446.
- 212 Marmura, "Al-Ghazālī," 137. For al-Ghazālī's debt, on the other hand, to philosophy—and particularly to Ibn Sīnā—in his theory of mystical cognition, see Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*. For a concise and pointed account of al-Ghazālī's complex relationship to philosophy, see Madelung, "Al-Ghazālī's Changing Attitude."
- 213 Marmura, "Al-Ghazālī," 144.

eastern Iran. In the *Tahāfut*, al-Ghazālī charges the philosophers with relying on inherited assumptions that cannot be deduced apodictically²¹⁴ and sets out to refute twenty of their discrete doctrines, three of which he considered irreconcilable with Islamic belief.²¹⁵ These three doctrines are (1) the eternity of the world, (2) the idea that God knows only universal concepts and not particular instantiations thereof, and (3) the impossibility of a physical resurrection after death.²¹⁶

Al-Ghazālī's was the first, though not the last, attempt in Islam to respond to philosophy on its own grounds, using purely philosophical arguments rather than merely vilifying philosophy as a foreign science, accusing its practitioners of impiety, or arguing against it based solely on the authority of scripture. Yet despite the mordancy of al-Ghazālī's attack against the philosophers and the longstanding view that his offensive sounded the death knell of (at least a particular brand of) philosophy in the Muslim world, more recent scholarship has revealed the extent to which al-Ghazālī's own thought was indebted to that of his ideological foes, in particular Ibn Sīnā.²¹⁷ Indeed, it is well known that while al-Ghazālī rejected many aspects of philosophy entirely, most notably its precarious metaphysics, he nonetheless enthusiastically embraced the Aristotelian logic built on definition and syllogism that forms the core of the entire system.²¹⁸ Perhaps sensing the vulnerability of *kalām* arguments supported by earlier forms of logic in the face of Ibn Sīnā's imposing philosophical edifice, al-Ghazālī made Ibn Sīnā's logic his own and henceforth incorporated it into *kalām* (just as he made it part and parcel of legal theory as well). In his enthusiasm for this powerful new tool of logic, al-Ghazālī even believed he could identify in the Qur'an a prefiguring of the five forms of the Aristotelian syllo-

214 Griffel, *Apostasie und Toleranz*, 274–275.

215 For a concise and lucid summary of all twenty issues dealt with in the *Tahāfut*, see Fakhry, *History*, 222–233.

216 On al-Ghazālī's treatment of these three doctrines and his *fatwā* against them, see Griffel, "Theology Engages with Avicennan Philosophy," 442–446 and, more exhaustively, Griffel, *Apostasie und Toleranz*, 260–281. For a succinct discussion of al-Ghazālī's views on defining the proper boundaries of faith in his *Fayṣal al-tafrīqa bayna al-Islām wa-l-zandaqa* (Criterion for discernment between Islam and disbelief), see Jackson, *On the Boundaries*. For an extended analysis, see Griffel, *Apostasie und Toleranz*, 304–335, esp. sections 3 and 4.

217 See, e.g., Janssens, "Al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut*." See also Landolt, "Ghazālī and 'Religionswissenschaft'"; Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 97–109; Wisnovsky, "One Aspect," *passim*; Madelung, "Al-Ghazālī's Changing Attitude," esp. 29–31; Rudolph, "Al-Ghazālī's Concept of Philosophy," *passim*; and Treiger, *Inspired Knowledge*, 81–101.

218 See introduction to Hallaq, *Greek Logicians*, xii–xiv.

gism.²¹⁹ We saw above how, starting with al-Juwaynī, the dialectical and syllogistic methods of argumentation were combined. Al-Ghazālī now fully accepts formal deductive reasoning based on the search for a universal middle term and makes it part and parcel of Islamic theological reasoning.²²⁰ Al-Ghazālī thus made important innovations in terms of method, mode of exposition, and style of reasoning,²²¹ and it is this new method of reasoning and arguing that was identified as the “way of the later [school]” (*ṭarīq al-muta’akhhirīn*) by Ibn Khaldūn and others.²²²

Regarding the metaphorical interpretation of texts, al-Ghazālī accepted the use of *ta’wīl*, in the manner of al-Juwaynī, to obviate overtly anthropomorphic readings of the *ṣifāt khabariyya*, or “revealed attributes” (hands, face, etc.),²²³ but he insisted that such *ta’wīlāt* should remain the province of the elite and not be discussed among the general populace for fear of inducing confusion in their minds.²²⁴ Yet al-Ghazālī seems willing—at least in some of his writings—to go a step farther than al-Juwaynī. We see an example of this tendency in his *Mishkāt al-anwār* (*Niche of Lights*),²²⁵ which contains a complete theory of symbolism (in the sense of allegory, or *tamthīl*) with respect to the sensible and intelligible worlds, as well as multiple examples of symbolic exegesis of the Qur’ān.²²⁶

219 See Chelhot, “«al-Qiṣṭās al-Mustaqīm»,” 12–15 for a discussion of al-Ghazālī’s identification of the “five rules of thought” (namely, five different syllogistic figures) that he contends are revealed in the Qur’ān. See also Kleinknecht, “Al-Qiṣṭās al-Mustaqīm,” where the author emphasizes, in particular, al-Ghazālī’s attempt to wrest logic from the exclusive province of the philosophers and to win it over for more general use by the educated, as well as his use of tangible metaphors to make logical reasoning acceptable to those suspicious of abstractions. For a nuanced study of al-Ghazālī’s role in the reassessment and appropriation of logic, see Rudolph, “Die Neubewertung der Logik durch al-Ghazālī.” On knowledge and certainty in al-Ghazālī more generally, see Luis Xavier López-Farjeat, “Al-Ghazālī on Knowledge (*‘ilm*) and Certainty (*yaqīn*).”

220 Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 360–361.

221 *Ibid.*, 71–72.

222 See Ibn Khaldūn’s discussion in *al-Muqaddima*, 466, esp. lines 3–7 ff.

223 For a detailed discussion of al-Ghazālī’s position on the use of *ta’wīl*, see Aydin, “Al-Ghazālī on Metaphorical Interpretation.”

224 Griffel, *Apostasie und Toleranz*, 273–274, 317–319. See also Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 111–122 and, for a much more extensive treatment, Griffel, “Al-Ghazālī at His Most Rationalist.” The latter two studies provide a thorough analysis of al-Ghazālī’s iteration of the *qānūn al-ta’wīl*, Ibn Taymiyya’s response to which forms the subject of chapter 3 of the present study.

225 On this text, see Landolt, “Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*.”

226 For al-Ghazālī’s use of allegory and his development of a symbolic vocabulary in the *Mishkāt*, see *ibid.* On the *Mishkāt*, see also Girdner, “Ghazālī’s Hermeneutics.”

Al-Ghazālī's attitude towards *kalām*—and, by extension, the status of discursive knowledge more generally—is critical for an understanding of his potent legacy and the development of Islamic thought that Ibn Taymiyya inherited one and a half centuries later. In the *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, al-Ghazālī exhibits a guarded attitude towards *kalām*, admitting that it was not practiced by the earliest generations of Muslims but nevertheless conceding a limited use of it as indispensable for combatting heretical innovations (*bida'*) that risked leading believers away from the path of the Qur'ān and Sunna. Given that such innovations were often put forth in the name of reason, they could only be effectively countered on their own—that is, on rational—terms. Notwithstanding this remedial function of *kalām*, al-Ghazālī does not seem to accept it as a fully legitimate (or at least not a fully adequate, much less necessary) path for reaching truth.²²⁷ The inherent limitations of *kalām*, as al-Ghazālī instructs us in his work *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (*Deliverance from Error*), lie in the fact that it proceeds on the basis of premises that are not rationally certain in and of themselves since they must be accepted on the basis of revelation or the consensus (*ijmā'*) of the community; for this reason, they are incapable of yielding apodictic certitude (on a purely rational level) as the would-be result of a syllogistic process of inference.²²⁸ Yet just as we saw in the case of al-Ash'arī after his abandonment of the Mu'tazila, al-Ghazālī's initially critical, if not deprecatory, assessment of *kalām* yielded, in his later writings, to a more moderate and nuanced tone that accords *kalām* a legitimate, if duly circumscribed, place in the overall hierarchy of sciences. Thus, in his *al-Risāla al-Laduniyya*, for instance, al-Ghazālī classifies *'ilm al-tawhīd*—the science of the oneness of God, “also known as *kalām*”²²⁹—as occupying a position of prime importance. And while the sources of the knowledge of *tawhīd*, according to the *Risāla*, are primarily the Qur'ān and the Sunna, he also specifically acknowledges that these sources contain “rational proofs and syllogistic demonstrations” (*al-dalā'il al-'aqliyya wa-l-barāhīn al-qiyāsiyya*).²³⁰

Al-Ghazālī's guarded acceptance of *kalām* in some of his writings should not, however, obscure his abiding insistence on the limited nature of all purely discursive thought and related rational discourse, *kalām* being no exception.

227 Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 70–71. Breaking with his teacher, al-Juwaynī, al-Ghazālī explicitly distanced himself from the Ash'arī view that makes some measure of rational inquiry (*nazar*) into theological questions a requirement for salvation. Griffel, *Apostasie und Toleranz*, 273.

228 Fakhry, *History*, 220.

229 Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 119.

230 Ibid.

For al-Ghazālī, true certainty (*yaqīn*) can ultimately be gained only through the “witnessing of realities” (*mushāhada*, or *mushāhadat al-ḥaqāʾiq*)²³¹ by way of spiritual unveiling (*kashf*). While *kalām* may be of initial assistance in helping one move towards this goal, it can also act as a veil insofar as one may unwittingly mistake the means for the end.

10 *Kalām* and *Falsafa* in the Wake of al-Ghazālī

10.1 *Ashʿarī Theology and the Struggle to Orthodoxy*

The immediate reception of the new Ashʿarī *kalām* in the sixth/twelfth century is illustrative of the larger intellectual mood of the period. While the Ashʿarī method undoubtedly had its enthusiastic supporters, it had many implacable opponents as well. As we may expect, the most vociferous opposition came from Ḥanbalī quarters—an example being ʿAbd Allāh al-Anṣārī al-Harawī (d. 481/1089), a Ḥanbalī and well-known Sufī who attacked the Ashʿarīs vigorously²³²—but opposition during this period went considerably beyond strictly Ḥanbalī circles. Yet in spite of ongoing polemics against rationalist *kalām* by Ḥanbalīs and others, the Ashʿarī school boasted a number of enthusiastic and vocal supporters as well, such as the Shāfiʿī *ḥadīth* master and historian Ibn ʿAsākir (d. 571/1176), who forcefully defended the legitimacy of a rational theological dialectic,²³³ and even the Ḥanbalī jurist and theologian Ibn ʿAqīl (d. 513/1119).²³⁴ In time, Ashʿarī *kalām* established itself as the dominant theological school in the central regions of the Islamic world, but not without a struggle.²³⁵ It was not until the famous Seljuq vizier Niẓām al-Mulk (active 455–485/1063–1092) established positions in the major madrasas of the empire specifically to teach the new theology that the Ashʿarī school was finally able to triumph over its two rivals: the Muʿtazila, on the one hand, and the strictest of the Ḥanbalīs, on the other.²³⁶

231 Marmura, “Al-Ghazālī,” 152.

232 Nagel, *History*, 242. Al-Harawī’s opposition to *kalām* seems to have stemmed as much from his mystical orientation as from his Ḥanbalī commitments. With respect to the view that *kalām* is unnecessary at best and that scripture alone suffices, Tim Winter remarks that “al-Harawī (d. 1089) agrees, suggesting that *kalām* is an unreliable substitute for the true gift of mystical illumination.” Winter, *Cambridge Companion*, 5.

233 Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 57.

234 On whom see Makdisi, *Ibn ʿAqīl*.

235 See Makdisi, “Ashʿarī and the Ashʿarites” (to be qualified, however, by Khaled El-Rouayheb’s remarks in “From Ibn Ḥajar al-Haytamī,” 295–296 ff.).

236 Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 61–62. Major representatives of new Ashʿarī *kalām* in

By the time Ibn Taymiyya was born some two hundred years later,²³⁷ any significant opposition to *kalām* theology had all but dissipated in most quarters. Ash'arī *kalām* had long since been accepted by much of the Sunnī world as the normative, orthodox expression of Islamic belief in rational-theological terms. At the same time, the Mamluk rulers of Syria and Egypt (the two countries where Ibn Taymiyya spent his life) had proved themselves enthusiastic patrons of the now dominant Ash'arī theology, and also of the many eclectic brands of Sufism—some quite orthodox, others decidedly less so—that had also become widespread. Their patronage meant that conflicts with those who abjured theological speculation and advocated a stricter adherence to the literal text would be unavoidable.²³⁸

10.2 *Philosophical Theology and the Fate of Falsafa Proper*

While al-Ghazālī's attack on the Muslim Peripatetic tradition was long understood in Western scholarship to have spelled the death of philosophy in the Muslim world, this is only true in one limited sense, namely, that there was no continuation of an independent philosophical tradition pursued along the largely Aristotelian lines of classical *falsafa*. One notable exception to this was Ibn Rushd, whose work, however consequential it may have been for medieval Europe, had virtually no impact on the Muslim world itself.²³⁹ On the one hand, alternative schools of philosophy arose and flourished, most notably the Ishrāqī, or "Illuminationist," tradition founded by Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī "al-Maqtūl" (executed 587/1191). This tradition reached its culmination in the eleventh-/seventeenth-century synthesis represented by the "transcendent theosophy," or *ḥikma muta'āliya*, of the Persian Shī'ī philosopher, theologian, and mystic Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā) (d. 1050/1640)²⁴⁰ and has survived in Iran up to the present day.²⁴¹ On the other hand, a perusal

the post-Ghazālī period include Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), Ḥāfiẓ al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 701/1301 or 710/1310), 'Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355), Sa'd al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 793/1390), al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Sanūsī (d. 895/1490), and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (d. 908/1502). On the appropriation of Avicennian thought by the new *kalām*, see Wisnovsky, "Nature and Scope."

237 That is, in the year 661/1263.

238 Nagel, *History*, 243.

239 Ibn Rushd's views on the relationship between reason and revelation are discussed in more detail at the end of the following chapter. For a lucid overview, see Fakhry, *History*, 270–292.

240 On whom see Rustom, *Triumph of Mercy*.

241 Fakhry refers to Mullā Ṣadrā as "the last great encyclopedic writer in Islam" and remarks that "his voluminous output is an eloquent disproof of the view expressed by many his-

of later *kalām* works makes it abundantly clear that mainstream Islamic discourse in a sense co-opted, rather than banished, philosophy, absorbing it into the body of *kalām* while bending it to the outlook, purposes, and needs of the discipline.²⁴²

Contemporary scholars have offered contrasting pictures of the precise nature of the intertwinement of philosophy and theology that took place in the post-Ibn Sīnā / post-Ghazālī period. Earlier scholarship stressed that the philosophers (with the sole exception of al-Kindī) had retained full autonomy in the face of Islamic doctrine,²⁴³ underscoring their reluctance to “surrender any aspect of [philosophy], or to attribute any mark of privilege or distinction to [Islamic belief] by virtue of its supernatural or divine origin.”²⁴⁴ More recent studies, however, have brought to light the (formerly unappreciated) extent to which *falsafa* itself and its practitioners were influenced by *kalām*, not merely in terms of the topics with which they dealt but also in terms of their conceptual vocabulary, discrete arguments, the examples they used, and sometimes even the substantive positions they adopted.²⁴⁵ Building on the argument that Ibn Sīnā himself had been influenced by *kalām* in developing certain fundamental notions, including the key distinction between essence and existence so central to his thought,²⁴⁶ it has been suggested that this “theologization”

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- torians of Islamic medieval philosophy that by the end of the eleventh century al-Ghazālī had dealt philosophy a crippling blow from which it never recovered” (Fakhry, *History*, 311). For a detailed recent study on the influence of Ibn Sīnā and how it manifests in the work of Mullā Ṣadrā, see Eichner, “Die iranische Philosophie von Ibn Sīnā bis Mullā Ṣadrā.”
- 242 See Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 325 ff. See also Winter’s remarks in his introduction to *Cambridge Companion*, esp. 11–14 (“The fate of *falsafa*”), where he observes that “even the most superficial perusal of a late *kalām* work will reveal the immense influence which Avicenna exerted on the framing of Muslim orthodoxy” (Winter, 12). He goes on to remark, following Khaled El-Rouayheb, that “Muslim orthodoxy did not shed Hellenism, but steadily accumulated it, and continued to extol the core Aristotelian discipline of logic, not only in *kalām*, but in law” (Winter, 14). Further, he cites al-Taftāzānī, “author of perhaps the most widely used text of later Muslim theology,” to the effect that “the *kalām* folk had ‘incorporated most of the physics and metaphysics, and delved deeply into the mathematics, so that but for the *sam’iyyāt*, *kalām* was hardly distinguishable from *falsafa*” (Winter, 12).
- 243 Gardet and Anawati, for instance, argued that although the Muslim philosophers tried hard to maintain the letter of the Qur’ān, they never accepted anything from revelation that went beyond the domain of philosophy proper. See Gardet and Anawati, *Introduction*, 321–323.
- 244 Fakhry, *History*, 91.
- 245 See, e.g., Wisnovsky, “Notes” and Wisnovsky, “Essence and Existence.” See also Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, 145–160, 227–244.
- 246 See Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, 16, 145–180.

of the philosophical tradition may even help explain why Ibn Sīnā's thought spread so rapidly among the *mutakallimūn* and was eventually taken up in so many quarters with such enthusiasm.²⁴⁷ On the ultimate fate of philosophy as an independent pursuit in the Islamic world, Tim Winter concludes that

falsafa as a discipline was progressively overtaken, or perhaps swallowed up, by Sunnī *kalām* at some point after the twelfth century. Perhaps the reason for this was the same factor which had caused the translation movement to wind down two centuries earlier: the ideas had been successfully transmitted. *Falsafa* functioned as an intermediary school, a module provisionally and imperfectly integrated into Muslim culture which allowed Muslim thinkers to entertain Greek ideas and choose those which seemed to them persuasive and true. As a system, however, it did not possess the resources to survive indefinitely. Once Muslims found that their need for a sophisticated philosophical theology was satisfied by the *kalām*, *falsafa* as an independent discipline naturally withered.²⁴⁸

10.3 *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*

One of the main architects of this new “philosophical theology” in the century immediately after al-Ghazālī was the Persian Shāfiʿī theologian and polymath Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209),²⁴⁹ who has been referred to as “the most outstanding phenomenon in speculative theology in the post-Ghazālī period.”²⁵⁰ He has also been characterized as a “subtle dialectician, possessor of a vast philosophical and theological culture as well as of an intellectual courage rare in his time, [who] is among the leading representatives of Sunnite Islam.”²⁵¹ More recently, the “breadth of Rāzī's intellectual ambition” has been described as “unprecedented in the history of Islamic civilization.”²⁵² Born in the city of Rayy (near present-day Tehran) in 543/1149, it is al-Rāzī who, coupled with

247 See, e.g., Winter's remarks at *Cambridge Companion*, 11.

248 *Ibid.*, 13.

249 For background on al-Rāzī's life and works, see Street, “Concerning the Life and Works,” as well as Griffel, “On Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Life.” For immediate intellectual antecedents, see Shihadeh, “From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī.” For al-Rāzī's thought in general, and his theological and philosophical views in particular, see al-Zarkān, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*; Arnaldez, “L'œuvre”; and Jaffer, *Rāzī*. On al-Rāzī's polemical entanglements with Mu'tazilīs, Karāmīs, and others, see Kraus, “‘Controversies.’”

250 “die hervorragendste Erscheinung der spekulativen Theologie der nach-ghazālischen Zeit.” Goldziher, “Aus der Theologie,” 223.

251 Kraus, “‘Controversies,’” 131.

252 Jaffer, *Rāzī*, 10.

al-Ghazālī, did the most to incorporate the new philosophical approach into the body of *kalām*.²⁵³ In addition to his studies in history, literature, law, theology, medicine, and the natural sciences,²⁵⁴ al-Rāzī immersed himself in the study of philosophy and was a master of the art of disputation. His thought was profoundly influenced by Ibn Sīnā, but mostly in the way of the philosopher Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. 560/1164 or 1165), a convert from Judaism to Islam whose thought, while steeped in that of Ibn Sīnā, was nevertheless critical of the latter and whose views, on the whole, were closer to orthodox Muslim (and Jewish) theological positions.²⁵⁵ Al-Rāzī wrote an important work on metaphysics, *al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqīyya* (Oriental investigations), that manifests his clear debt to Ibn Sīnā but also his rejection of certain central aspects of Ibn Sīnā's system, such as the doctrine of emanation.²⁵⁶ Nevertheless, al-Rāzī's most important work on theology, *Muḥaṣṣal afkār al-mutaqaddimīn wa-l-muta'akhhirīn min al-'ulamā' wa-l-ḥukamā' wa-l-mutakallimīn* (The harvest of the thought of the ancients and moderns among scholars, philosophers, and theologians), which begins with an extended disquisition on metaphysics, epistemology, and logic, clearly shows the increasing influence of the terms and categories of philosophy in the discourse of *kalām*. Indeed, al-Rāzī's inclusion of a metaphysical preamble to the *Muḥaṣṣal* became standard in subsequent works of Ash'arī theology.

Contemporary scholars have brought considerable nuance to our understanding of al-Rāzī's thought. Ayman Shihadeh traces the crucial developments in sixth-/twelfth-century philosophical theology that led from al-Ghazālī, who died at the beginning of that century, to al-Rāzī, who died almost exactly one hundred years later.²⁵⁷ He elucidates al-Rāzī's ethical theory, taking up age-old theological questions concerning the ethical nature as well as the ontological instantiation of human acts.²⁵⁸ More relevant to our concerns, Shihadeh deals in depth with al-Rāzī's apparent late-life skepticism concerning the ability of

253 Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 94.

254 For a list of seventy-six treatises ascribed to al-Rāzī across a wide range of disciplines, see Muhibbu-Din, "Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī: Philosophical Theology in *al-Taḥṣīr al-Kabīr*," 58–62.

255 Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, 94. On the philosophical and theological developments that occurred between al-Ghazālī and Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, see Griffel, "Between al-Ghazālī and Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī."

256 Fakhry, *History*, 319–321.

257 See Shihadeh, "From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī." On these developments, see also Griffel, "Theology Engages with Avicennan Philosophy."

258 See Ayman Shihadeh, *Teleological Ethics*.

reason to yield certain knowledge,²⁵⁹ a theme to which we shall return at several junctures in the course of subsequent investigations.

In a volume on the medieval reception of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics,²⁶⁰ Heidrun Eichner traces the major role al-Rāzī played in "shaping the reception and interpretation of Avicennian ontology" and identifies his compendium *al-Mulakhkhaṣ fī al-ḥikma wa-l-manṭiq* (The epitome on philosophy and logic) as "one of the most influential works in the Arabic reception of Avicennian philosophy from the late thirteenth century onwards."²⁶¹ Al-Rāzī's influential presentation of Ibn Sīnā's positions does not necessarily mean that he always agreed with them. In fact, he often explicates them only to argue an alternative position against them. On some occasions, al-Rāzī does not faithfully represent Ibn Sīnā's views; furthermore, he uses a vocabulary that is not always adequate to render Ibn Sīnā's thought.²⁶² On another note, al-Rāzī has been identified as "the most prominent exponent of the thesis that existence is superadded to quiddity,"²⁶³ a view that Ibn Taymiyya ascribes to the Muslim Peripatetic philosophers and that forms a main crux in his attack on their ontology. It is of note that al-Rāzī maintained this view in opposition to al-Ash'arī himself, albeit with the (from an Ash'arī perspective) very commendable goal of maintaining God's willful *creation* of the world as opposed to His mere, as it were automatic, *necessitation* of it as conceptualized by Ibn Sīnā.²⁶⁴

Finally, Tariq Jaffer has dedicated a full monograph to al-Rāzī²⁶⁵ in which he elaborates in depth on al-Rāzī's endeavor to establish Islamic (specifically Ash'arī) theology on the most solid rational foundations possible. Significantly, al-Rāzī undertakes this ambitious project not merely by means of the received medium of the formal theological or philosophical treatise but even more so through his massive, 32-volume Qur'ānic commentary, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Keys of the unseen), also known simply as *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (The grand *tafsīr*).²⁶⁶

259 On al-Rāzī's eventual skepticism and epistemological pessimism, see Shihadeh, *Teleological Ethics*, 181–203. Al-Rāzī's pessimism stands in marked contrast to Ibn Taymiyya's overall confidence in sound human reason (*ʿaql ṣarīḥ*) and his concomitant optimism, in both the epistemological and the ethical realms. See Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy*, 1–6, 224–237.

260 Hasse and Bertolacci, eds., *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics*.

261 See Eichner, "Essence and Existence," 123.

262 *Ibid.*, 124.

263 Wisnovsky, "Essence and Existence," 29, 42–43.

264 For details, see *ibid.*, 40–44; also, on a somewhat related question, Abrahamov, "Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī."

265 Jaffer, *Rāzī*.

266 Ibn Taymiyya is reported to have quipped that this massive work "contains everything but *tafsīr*," to which the Ash'arī jurist Ḍiyā' al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 725/1325) retorted that, in

Jaffer argues that “by using the Qurʾān to express his philosophical theology, Rāzī gave his revolutionary agenda an undisputed authority in Sunnī Islam.”²⁶⁷ By bringing about a “grand synthesis of ideas” through his *tafsīr*, al-Rāzī sought to achieve three overriding objectives,²⁶⁸ one of which was to synthesize Islamic revelation with the rich Aristotelian-Avicennian philosophical tradition that had gained such prominence in the century before al-Rāzī, thereby extending to this tradition the sanctioning mantle of the Qurʾān.

Al-Rāzī’s other two main objectives are, in fact, also central to Ibn Taymiyya’s project in the *Darʾ taʾarūḍ*. The first of these was to put the science of *tafsīr*—and thereby of theology more generally—on a firm epistemological footing by grounding it in rigorous rational and logical principles that would act as a control on the possible meanings that could be derived from the revealed texts. It is partly in pursuit of this goal that al-Rāzī (following al-Ghazālī and others) articulated the universal rule of interpretation,²⁶⁹ which explicitly prioritizes reason over revelation when adjudicating any possible conflicts between the two. Ibn Taymiyya cites this rule of interpretation on the first page of the *Darʾ taʾarūḍ*, then declares that he has dedicated the entirety of the work to refuting it. (We examine this universal rule, and Ibn Taymiyya’s response to it, in detail in chapter 3.)²⁷⁰ After establishing reason as the arbiter in interpreting revelation, al-Rāzī’s final goal is to “demonstrate the Qurʾān’s pre-eminence by disclosing that its method of reasoning coincides with the human intellect’s procedure of discursive reasoning and the conclusions reached by it.”²⁷¹

These lines could just as easily have been written about Ibn Taymiyya, for whom the natural concord between the deliverances of human reason and the declarations of revelation is, in fact, the principal thesis of the *Darʾ taʾarūḍ*. But before delving into Ibn Taymiyya’s work, we would do well first to acquaint ourselves with the man himself.

fact, it “contains everything along with *tafsīr*.” See Maʾšūmī, “Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Critics,” 357.

267 Jaffer, *Rāzī*, 14. See also, on the epistemological aspects of al-Rāzī’s grand *tafsīr*, Oulddali, *Raison et révélation en Islam*.

268 Jaffer, *Rāzī*, 14.

269 Known variously as “*al-qānūn al-kullī*” (the universal rule), “*qānūn al-taʾwīl*” (the rule of interpretation), or “*al-qānūn al-kullī fī al-taʾwīl*” (the universal rule of interpretation). Chapter 3 of the present work is dedicated to a detailed examination of this universal rule and Ibn Taymiyya’s numerous arguments against it.

270 Jaffer deals with al-Rāzī’s principles of interpretation in detail at Jaffer, *Rāzī*, 54–83 and with al-Rāzī’s proposed reconciliation of reason and revelation on the basis of these principles at Jaffer, 84–130. The last section of Jaffer’s treatment (pp. 117–130) consists, in fact, of a summary of Ibn Taymiyya’s response in the *Darʾ taʾarūḍ* to al-Rāzī’s version of the *qānūn*.

271 Jaffer, *Rāzī*, 14.