According to Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkı¯ (d. 771 / 1370), al-Ghazālī (d. 505 / 1111) was the renewer (mujaddid) of the Muslim faith at the end of the 5th / 11th century, whereas al-Rāzī (d. 606 / 1210) was the renewer of faith at the end of the 6th / 12th century.¹ That al-Ghazālī deserves such an honour can hardly be disputed, and his importance in the history of Islamic thought is generally recognised. However, the same cannot, as easily, be said of al-Rāzī, whose historical significance is far from being truly appreciated, and some of the most important books of whom still await publication. Much is known about his views on particular philosophical and theological problems, and about the historical backgrounds to, and the relations amongst, some of these views. Some rather general observations on his thought are also common; for instance, that he is a heavily philosophising Ashʿarī mutakallim, a master dialectician, and an influential critic of Ibn Sīnā.

What we wish to do in what follows is not to question such notions in any direct way, but to attempt a more precise understanding of some of the main underlying developments that occurred during that influential chapter in Muslim intellectual history, to which al-Rāzī is central. Some of these have been referred to briefly, and not always accurately, by Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808 / 1406). We need to examine the main relevant features within two closely-linked historical contexts: (a) al-Rāzī’s intellectual background, starting with al-Ghazālī, and including previously unexplored aspects of al-Rāzī’s immediate milieu;² and (b) his own philosophical and theological writings

² On the dearth of scholarship on philosophical activity in this crucial period, see Dimitri Gutas, ‘The heritage of Avicenna: The golden age of Arabic
and the main developments that can be detected in them when considered chronologically and vis-à-vis his intellectual background. These two contexts intersect almost theatrically in the lively dialectical setting of his record of some of his debates, the Munāẓarat.

FROM AL-GHAZĀLĪ TO AL-RĀZĪ

Al-Ghazālī’s Approach to Kalām

Ibn Sīnā’s (d. 428 / 1037) legacy was a sophisticated philosophical system that appeared to many to surpass, even abrogate, previous philosophy. ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī (d. 629 / 1231) writes that he initially did not think much of more ancient philosophers, such as al-Fārābī and Themistius, because he ‘‘believed that Ibn Sīnā digested the entirety of wisdom and stuffed it in his books.’’3 Another author, from the 6th / 12th century, writes that, ‘‘it has become rooted in the hearts of some people nowadays that truth is whatever [Ibn Sīnā] says, that it is inconceivable for him to err, and that whoever contradicts him in anything he says cannot be rational.’’4 Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy became attractive in some circles in the Sunni mainstream, not only for its sophistication, but also for its treatment of many theological and religious themes, such as the afterlife, destiny, prophecy and Sufi practice, without showing the Bāṭinī influence that pervaded the works of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’.

The views of the falāsifa, Ibn Sīnā included, were then severely criticised by al-Ghazālī, some of whose general views on kalām, relevant to our present context, we should examine

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3 Quoted in: Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a, ‘Uyūn al-anbā’ fi ṭabaqāt al-aṭībā’ (Beirut, n.d.), p. 688. Al-Baghdādī changes his mind afterwards: ‘‘The more I read into the books of the ancients, the more indifferent I became towards Ibn Sīnā’s books.’’ (Unless otherwise indicated, translations from the Arabic are mine).

4 Aḥfāl al-Dīn ‘Umar ibn ‘Aff al-ṣufi, Ḥudūth al-‘ālam, ed. M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1998), p. 13 [= 342]. [The introduction to this same work is published also in Yahya Michot, ‘‘La pandémie avicennienne au VIe / XIIe siècle’’, Arabica, 40 (1993): 288–344, at pp. 327–44. Page numbers in references to this part of Ibn Ghaylān’s work will be to Muḥaqqiq’s edition first and (where applicable) to Michot’s, in square brackets, second.]
briefly. He tells us, in the introduction of *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*,
of this book’s general approach:

Let it be known that [our] objective is to alert those who think well of
the *falāsifa* and believe that their ways are free from contradiction by
showing the [various] aspects of their incoherence. For this reason, I do
not enter into [argument] objecting to them, except as one who demands
and denies, not as one who claims [and] affirms. I will render murky what
they believe in [by showing] conclusively that they must hold to various
consequences [of their theories . . .]. I, however, will not rise to the
defence of any one doctrine.

This negativism relates to the fact that al-Ghazālī considers the
*Tahāfut* as a *kalām* work; for it serves one of the two essential
functions he assigns to this discipline. This, primarily nega-
tivist function concerns the defence of the common orthodox
creed, by the refutation of conflicting views.

The second function he assigns to *kalām* concerns dispelling
doubts that may plague the average believer’s mind, by providing
persuasive proofs (*dalīl*) for the orthodox creed. As such,
the *mutakallim* will arrive to more or less the same point at
which the average uncritical imitator (*muqallid*) stands,
namely mere belief (*i’tiqād*) in the truth of the formal expres-
sions of the doctrines that constitute this creed. According to
al-Ghazālī, real and direct positive knowledge of what these
doctrinal formulations refer to can be sought through a
higher theology, the ‘science of spiritual illumination’ (*‘ilm
al-mukāshafa*), combined with spiritual discipline.

Given these two objectives that he specifies for *kalām*,
al-Ghazālī holds that this discipline should be reverted to only
when opponents or doubts appear; otherwise, it should be
avoided. Learning and practicing *kalām* becomes a collective

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5 Al-Ghazālī’s views on *kalām* have been examined in: Richard M. Frank,
*Al-Ghazālī and the Ash’arite School* (Durham and London, 1994); Kojiro
revisited”, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, 12 (2002): 91–110. The subject,
however, is still in need of further study. For the purposes of this section, by no
means intended as a comprehensive account of al-Ghazālī’s position, a fresh
examination of his works was found necessary.

6 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, ed. S. Dunya (Cairo, 1980); *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*,
trans. M. Marmura (Provo, Utah, 2000), p. 82 (Marmura’s translation, with
adjustments, pp. 7–8).


obligation (fard kifāya), not an individual obligation (fard 'ayn).

Al-Ghazālī, therefore, downgrades kalām considerably, with respect to its function and status. The majority of previous mutakallimūn considered kalām to have two objectives: (a) primarily, as some put it, “learning what can only be learnt through theological speculation (nazār)”, which constitutes the foundation to recognising the validity of Revelation and to religious belief as a whole, and is thus obligatory upon everyone (e.g. that the world is created, and that the sending of prophets is conceivable); and (b) refuting opposing views. While al-Ghazālī downgrades the former objective from a pursuit of the highest humanly-possible knowledge, to the pursuit of persuasion and an inferior form of indirect knowledge, he greatly emphasises the latter, negativist objective.

Now, al-Ghazālī is often credited with having promoted Aristotelian logic in kalām. But in what sense does he do so? And how does logic relate to the two functions he assigns to kalām?

In more than one place, al-Ghazālī indicates that logic is the methodological tool that should be used in kalām. For instance, he writes, vaguely, that “truth in issues falling within kalām (kalāmiyyāt) is known through” logic. Equally vaguely, he states that logic is “of the same kind as what the mutakallimūn and [religious] speculative thinkers discuss in relation to proofs, the [falāsifa] differing from them only in expression and terminology, and in their more extensive examination of definitions and classifications”. That logic is ‘of the same kind as’ something that the mutakallimūn already have is true, but only in the widest sense of ‘logic’. However, the suggestion that the only differences are in terminology and exhaustiveness is at best superficial, and in fact untenable. The mutakallimūn did not adhere, for instance, to Aristotelian criteria for demonstration, under whatever name. And although the falāsifa did analyse some types of premises and logical forms used by the mutakallimūn, they considered many to involve fallacies. As it

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10 The latter, he argues, was the sole objective of early Sunnī kalām, whereas the former is a later, accidental objective (Al-Munqidh min al-dalāl, ed. J. Saliba et al. [Beirut, 1980], pp. 91–3).
12 Al-Ghazālī, Munqidh, p. 104; cf. Tahāfut, p. 85.
is almost inconceivable that al-Ghazālī did not realise this, the second part of his statement should be treated as rhetorical, especially when its context is considered.13

Yet the most unambiguous indications of the link he establishes between logic and kalām are his two kalām works that rely explicitly on logic, al-Qistās al-mustaqīm and the Tahāfut, with its logical appendix, Mi‘yār al-‘ilm. So, let us assume that al-Ghazālī does indeed promote Aristotelian logic definitively and consistently in kalām, such that a mutakallim ought to be a logician. Ideally, we would expect al-Ghazālī to depart from the methods of inference used by previous mutakallimūn, which, by the standards of Aristotelian logic, are non-apodictic, but lead only to presumption (ẓann). However, he does not provide such criticism; and, in the Mi‘yār, we seem to find criticism of analogical reasoning (qiyaṣ) only.14 Contra-Rily, he wants at least some readers to believe that the mutakallimūn and the falāsifā had pretty much the same sort of logic.

We may test our assumption by examining the Iqtisād, another of his kalām works. He considers it superior to earlier kalām works, since it offers a type of theology that goes further in critical enquiry (tahqīq) and comes closer to true knowledge (ma‘rifa).15 This assessment appears to rely ultimately on the superior methods of inference he adopts in it. But to what extent does al-Ghazālī depart, in the Iqtisād, from the methods of earlier kalām? We find clues in the introductory section on the forms of evidence (manāhij al-adilla) used in the book, where he writes:

Know that the methods of inference are manifold. We mention some of them in Miḥakk al-nazar, and we discuss them exhaustively in Mi‘yār al-‘ilm. However, in the present book, we avoid abstruse methods and obscure routes, for the sake of clarity and conciseness [...], and [we use] only three methods.

These are: (a) “Investigation and disjunction” (al-sabr wa-al-taqsīm);16 (b) other syllogistic forms, which al-Ghazālī refers to

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13 See a different approach to al-Ghazālī’s statement by M. Marmura (“Ghazali’s attitude to the secular sciences and logic”, in G. Hourani [ed.], Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science [Albany, 1975], pp. 100–11, at pp. 103 ff.).
14 Al-Ghazālī, Mi‘yār al-‘ilm, ed. S. Dunya (Cairo, 1961), pp. 165ff.
16 Using Joseph van Ess’s translation (“The logical structure of Islamic theology”, in G. Grunebaum [ed.], Logic in Classical Islamic Culture; Giorgio Levi
simply by giving one example; and (c) the argument *ad hominem* (*ilzām*). The first and third forms of argument are among the most common in classical *kalām*, whereas the second appears as a very vague hint at Aristotelian syllogisms. Al-Ghazālī then lists the types of premises used in the *Iqtisād*, which correspond to earlier *kalām* classifications. The *Iqtisād*, in fact, does not contain any clear references to logic. Does the *mutakallim*, accordingly, need to know logic? The answer here is ‘no’. The curious reader is referred to the *Miḥakk* and the *Miʿyar*, while normal *kalām* methods, modified slightly, are found sufficient for the *Iqtisād*. We, therefore, need to modify our original assumption regarding the definitiveness of al-Ghazālī’s promotion of logic in *kalām*.

The difference between his views on this issue appears due, not to incoherence, but to pragmatism. It was mentioned that the *Tahāfut* and the *Qistās* represent the negativist function that al-Ghazālī assigns to *kalām*. The *Iqtisād* should be recognised as representing the second function, viz. persuasion. The proofs provided in the *Iqtisād*, he writes, act as remedies for hearts. They are directed primarily at intelligent men, plagued by doubts, who should be addressed by gentle argument, not severe argumentation. Some people will be persuaded (remedied) by traditional sayings, some by a simple argument, and others by the sort of theology found in the *Iqtisād*. Al-Ghazālī offers this last group (a manifestation, it seems, of an increasingly critical, sophisticated and eclectic age) more rigorous proofs (greater *taḥqīq*) than found in

*Della Vida Conferences* [Los Angeles, 1967], pp. 21–50, at p. 41). This argument involves listing all possible solutions to a given problem, and showing that some are inconceivable; if one remains, its truth will be certain (cf. al-Ghazālī, *Miʿyar*, pp. 156–8).

17 He writes: “That we combine two original views (*ašl*) in a different way, such as to say [etc.]”.

18 Which is the dialectical strategy whereby the arguer forces his opponent to accept a conclusion that he derives from premises that the opponent accepts, but which the arguer does not necessarily accept. The conclusion will normally be unacceptable, or problematic, to the opponent. Cf. al-Ghazālī’s explanation (*al-Iqtisād fī al-ʾitiqād*, ed. H. Atay et al. [Ankara, 1962], p. 17).


21 Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, pp. 11–2. Compare this to his approach in his negativist *kalām* works.
classical kalām. More inquisitive and critical readers are referred to the Miḥakk, and yet more demanding ones to the Miʿyār. Yet, at the level of the Iqtiṣād, logic is unnecessary. And the value of logic appears therapeutic, rather than intrinsic. Such is al-Ghazālī’s therapeutic pragmatism in his approach to kalām.

As for his more straightforward promotion of logic in the context of the Tahāfut and the Qistās, this too betrays pragmatism (here mainly dialectical, not therapeutic). An effective dialectical strategy may involve adopting the opponents’ own tools, or ones that are arguably superior, in refuting their views. In this case, promoting logic in kalām appears partly connected to defending orthodoxy against the falāsifa (hence, Miʿyār al-ʿilm), and the Ismāʿīlīs (hence, al-Qistās al-mustaqīm).

So how should we assess al-Ghazālī’s introduction of logic into kalām? Relevant to our present context are three accusations levelled at early mutakallimmūn by the falāsifa and others. First and second, they were accused of doing little more than dialectic (jadal) in two senses. One sense is “the ilzām and silencing of the opponent, when the dialectician (jadali) is the questioner and objector, and that [the dialectician] does not himself become subject to an ilzām by the opponent, when he is the one being questioned and who defends his view”. The second is the Peripatetic sense of relying on arguments that use admitted (musallamāt) and widely-accepted (mashhūrāt) premises, which, thereby, fall below the standards of demonstration. The third accusation is that many of the forms of argument used by the mutakallimmūn are flawed syllogistically and fall below the standards of philosophical demonstration; they are, therefore, non-apodictic.

Where does al-Ghazālī stand in relation to all this? First, his negativist kalām writings are thoroughly and admittedly dialectical in the first sense, to the extent that he even appears to have innovated a new ‘type’ of kalām that does little more than refutation. Second and third, he does not show interest, in

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22 Al-Ghazālī, Miʿyār, p. 60; Munqidh, pp. 94–5.
23 See n. 18 supra.
the *Iqtisād*, in downgrading, or abandoning, the use of so-called ‘admitted’ and ‘widely-accepted’ premises and of the traditional *kalām* forms of argument. Why, after all, abandon these types of evidence, if they fulfil their therapeutic function? In this respect, the *Tahāfut* has a more rigorous stance.

Subject to his primary soteriological concern, al-Ghazālī’s introduction of logic to *kalām* is by no means consistent or definitive, but pragmatic. It is not bold enough to revolutionise *kalām*; yet it paves the way for al-Rāzī’s bolder initiative. Thus, while al-Ghazālī attempts to produce a *kalām* theology that is somewhat superior to earlier *kalām*, it remains highly dialectical (in both senses of the word), and often appears even more thoroughly negativist.

*The Post-Ghazālian Milieu*

The influence of Ibn Sīnā, and falsafa in general, continued to spread in the Muslim east after al-Ghazālī, as is indicated by various sources from this period. Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631 / 1233), himself a theologian and philosopher, writes:

The fascination of the people of our time and the scholars of our age in studying the sciences of the ancients and in borrowing from old philosophers has increased, such that it led them away from studying Legal matters and religious issues. That passion may drive one of them to frequently display his recklessness, by omitting obligations and committing prohibited things, imagining that he is one of the firmly-grounded philosophers and erudite virtuous men (although he is the most ignorant of men in what he claims and the furthest among them from knowing what it involves), and fooled by the bombastic words and strange-sounding names that he hears, such as ‘hyle’, ‘element’ (*ustūqus*), ‘element’ (‘unsūr’), ‘matter’, ‘form’, ‘First Cause’, ‘Active Intellect’, Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle, Pythagoras, Proclus, Alexander of Aphrodisias, etc. The utmost of the most erudite among them is to have superficial knowledge of the words, instead of [knowing their] meanings.

Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī (more on whom below) writes that “the books and various doctrines of the *falāsifa* have become widespread” among Muslims. He continues:

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26 As we will see, al-Rāzī accuses al-Ghazālī of using dialectical premises in the *Tahāfut*. This is also one of the main themes in Ibn Rushd’s *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*.

Many Muslims have become inclined to accepting their claims and to studying the deviations that they include in their books. Such belief and inclination are increasing by the day – something that threatens to result in widespread corruption in faith. [. . .] Most of those inclined to accepting their claims believe that they affirm prophecy, the afterlife, a happy [end] for the good and a miserable [end] for the bad.28

He explains this inclination by several factors. Some people will study one of the philosophical sciences (e.g. arithmetic, geometry, or medicine), will find it rigorous and sound, and conclude that all other philosophical sciences are so. Others will deal with the discipline of disputation (khilāf) in the science of the principles of jurisprudence, and will hear that the falāsifa have their own discipline for scrutinising arguments. They will then study books on logic (which, according to Ibn Ghaylān, is a useful discipline), and come across examples from metaphysics and physics. Moreover, the falāsifa will often juxtapose logic with metaphysics and physics in the same works, motivating the student of logic to delve into those two disciplines.29 Others will study kalām, and find refutations of falsafī views. When they learn that these are the views of earlier philosophers, which Ibn Sīnā often contradicted, and that he developed a more rigorous philosophy, they will be tempted to read his books to be able to debate with the latest developments in falsafa.30

By the 6th / 12th century, falsafa had spread beyond the specialist falsafī circles criticised in the Tahāfut,31 to include mainstream Sunni religious scholars: both fuqahā’ and mutakallimūn. It seems, in fact, that al-Ghazālī himself had a role to play in this spread, e.g. by adopting logic and numerous falsafī sciences and views, his in-depth refutation of falsafa, and, paradoxically, his conclusion that the falāsifa become unbelievers only by upholding three doctrines (the eternity of the world, the denial of God’s knowledge of particulars, and the denial of bodily resurrection), which dispelled the notion that falsafa as such, and as a whole, is tantamount to unbelief. It

28 Ibn Ghaylān, Hudūth, pp. 7–9 [ = 335–6]; cf. p. 14 [ = 344].
29 The argument that logic is prohibited because it leads to falsafa became common. Ibn al-Šalāh (d. 650/1251) writes in his famous fatwā, “Logic is the introduction to falsafa; and the introduction to evil is itself evil” (ʿUthmān ibn ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn al-Šalāḥ, Fatāwā Ibn al-Šalāḥ, ed.ʿA. Qal’aji [Aleppo, 1983], p. 71).
30 Ibn Ghaylān, Hudūth, pp. 9–10 [ = 337–8].
31 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut, pp. 73 ff.
would have appeared, after him, that if one dealt with falsafa, while avoiding these views, one would more or less remain on the safe side.

Ibn Ghaylān’s description of his milieu is also of interest since it shows that many students of religious sciences, who became involved in falsafa, suffered from considerable confusion. On one hand, they had the works of Ibn Sīnā and other falāsifa, which often contradicted their orthodox belief. Ibn Ghaylān, as we will see, indicates that he himself faced this problem. On the other hand, they had al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut, which refuted very much the bulk of falsafī metaphysics. The average student of falsafa, in the first three quarters of the 6th / 12th century, who wanted to keep his orthodox belief, and who adopted the attitude that not all what the falāsifa say is false and tantamount to unbelief, was confronted simultaneously by Ibn Sīnā’s developed system and al-Ghazālī’s refutation thereof.

The only other main source available to this readership was Abū al-Barakāt al-Baġhdādi’s (d. 560 / 1164-5) Mu’tabar, which presented a serious falsafī alternative to, and criticism of, Ibn Sīnā. Yet, although Abū al-Barakāt’s philosophy had much influence in this milieu, due to its general agreement with the orthodox creed, it had serious limitations that disallowed it from becoming an ideal alternative. Most importantly, although the Mu’tabar addresses topics that are of primarily religious interest, it does not address them, as Ibn Sīnā’s works do, within an unambiguously Islamic context. Some even doubted whether Abū al-Barakāt’s conversion to Islam from Judaism was genuine.

None of the three main sources for philosophising fuqahā’ and mutakallimūn in this period (Ibn Sīnā’s works, al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut, and Abū al-Barakāt’s Mu’tabar) could have separately satisfied their interest. Yet, put together, they were irreconcilable. Whence the confusion in this developing eclectic milieu. We thus find ‘Alī ibn Zayd al-Baŷhaqī (d. 565 / 1170) starting by studying the traditional religious

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32 This view is promoted by al-Ghazālī (Munqidh, pp. 110–4).
33 E.g. Muḥammad ibn Maḥmūd al-Shahrāzūrī, Nuzhat al-arwāh wa-rāwdat al-afraḥ, ed. Kh. Ahmed, 2 vols. (Haydarabad, 1976), vol. 2, p. 148. There was also, of course, al-Shahrastānī (d. 548 / 1153). Yet it seems that his criticism of falsafa, particularly in Musāra’at al-falāsifa, had limited impact in this century. Also, his approach in Nihāyat al-aqḍām is akin to classical pre-Ghazālīan Ashʿarī kalām.
sciences, including classical kalām, then gaining interest in falsafī, and writing a book of falsafī biographies, Tatimmat Ṣiwān al-hikma, commentaries on Ibn Sīnā’s Najāt and Ishārāt, and a criticism of the Muʿtabar, while having much praise for al-Ghazālī and Ibn Ghaylān, who deem the falāsifa to be unbelievers.34

In this milieu, a so-far unrecognised anti-falsafī trend appeared, consisting of figures who embodied the Ghazālīan scholarly ethos; they were practitioners of fiqh, kalām, and some philosophical sciences, including logic, and their approach to falsafa took its inspiration mainly from the Tahāfut. The two most prominent representatives of this ‘Ghazālīan trend’ appear to be the following so-far obscure figures:

(1) The already mentioned Afdal al-Dīn ‘Umar ibn ‘Alī ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī (b. early 6th / 12th century, d. ca 590 / 1194), whom al-Rāzī calls al-Farīd al-Ghaylānī, and describes as being “very famous”.35 He writes that he initially studied fiqh, then logic, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, and continues:

These sciences motivated me to go into physics and metaphysics, since they are close to them. My heart then used to be very anxious because

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35 Al-Rāzī, Munāẓarah fī bilād mā warā’ al-nahr, in Fathallah Kholeif, A Study on Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and his Controversies in Transoxiana (Beirut, 1966), p. 59. Ibn Ghaylān’s date of birth can be estimated from his statement that he joined the Niẓāmiyya school in Marw to study fiqh in 523 / 1129 (Ḥudūth, pp. 10–11 [ = 339–40]; cf. Michot, “‘La pandémie avicennienne’”, pp. 289–92). As for Ibn Ghaylān’s date of death, we know that al-Rāzī was on his first visit to Bukhara in 582 / 1186, before he went to Samarqand, where he met him. In his debates, recorded years afterwards (Munāẓarah, pp. 21; 54; cf. Tony Street, “Concerning the life and works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī”, in P. Riddell et al. (ed.), Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society; A Festschrift in Honour of Anthony H. Johns (Leiden, 1997), pp. 135–46, at p. 142), al-Rāzī describes him in the past tense, which indicates that he is no longer alive (Munāẓarah, p. 59). Also, in one of the two MSS used in the edition, he is referred to with the epithet, “May God have mercy on him”. This could be part of al-Rāzī’s original text, omitted by a copyist, or an addition by a copyist (see also n. 83 infra).

they contradicted the religious creed that I used to believe in. I realised that it was possible to refute them by the science of kalām; so I began to study it, with the main purpose of comprehending the fallacies underlying the erroneous contentions with which they contradict truth. In kalām, I came across views of the falāsifa that Ibn Sīnā contradicted and refuted; thus my interest in reading his books and understanding what is in them increased, so that [my] objections to their claims and responses to their errors can be based on knowledge and understanding.36

This outlook is represented in his work Hudūth al-ʿālam, a response to an epistle in which Ibn Sīnā refutes the arguments of the mutakallimūn against the conceivability of a pre-eternal world and for the temporal origination of the world.37 While Ibn Ghaylān engages in a dialectic with Ibn Sīnā, largely to refute his “erroneous views and arguments” (shubha), he also attempts to argue positively for the temporality of the world, since Ibn Sīnā’s work is itself a refutation. In its style and approach, Ibn Ghaylān’s Hudūth al-ʿālam (as he himself states) is a kalām work, which argues with a particular opponent, by refuting his contentions and by predicting and addressing his objections. He writes that, in this book, he takes Ibn Sīnā alone, rather than the falāsifa as a whole, as his opponent (khaṣm), since his books are most influential.38 Therefore, after he presents the argument – that asserting both the pre-eternity of the world and the eternity of human souls simultaneously will entail that an infinite number of souls exist39 – he writes:

If it is said, “Human souls are not multiple, according to Plato; thus such an argument will not apply to him”, I will say: In this book, we only argue (ḥājja) with Ibn Sīnā, Aristotle and their followers. They reject this view, and will thus have to accept that an infinite number of souls exist.40

The influence of al-Ghazālī’s approach in the Tahāfut, which is kalām dialectic taken in its negativism to the extreme, is very apparent in Ibn Ghaylān’s work. It can also be detected in his quotations from the Tahāfut, his great praise for al-Ghazālī,41

36 Ibn Ghaylān, Hudūth, pp. 10–11 [ = 339–40].
38 Ibn Ghaylān, Hudūth, p. 15.
40 Ibn Ghaylān, Hudūth, p. 39.
41 Ibn Ghaylān, Hudūth, p. 9 [ = 336].
and his view that practicing kalām, in some circumstances, is a collective obligation.42

Among Ibn Ghaylān’s other works, which have a similar theme, are: (a) al-Tawṭ̄i’a li-al-takḥti’a, in refutation of Ibn Sīnā’s views on questions of logic and theology,43 (b) al-Tanbīh ʿalā ikhtilāf wa-al-tafāwut wa-al-tanāqūḍ fī Kitāb al-Adwiya al-mufrada min al-Qānūn, against Ibn Sīnā’s views in a section in his medical work the Qānūn,44 and (c) al-Tanbīh ʿalā tamwiḥāt Kitāb al-Tanbīḥāt, a refutation of parts of Ibn Sīnā’s al-Ishārāt wa-al-tanbīḥāt.45

(2) The second author is the significant, but still obscure, Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Mašʿūd al-Masʿūdī (d. ca 585 / 1189–590 / 1194). Al-Rāzī, who met him and debated with him in Bukhara around 582 / 1186, describes him as “a shaykh who is famous in falsafa and skilfulness.”46 He dealt with other disciplines, including usūl al-fiqh, astrology and mathematics.47 And his philosophical learning is confirmed by the appearance of his name in an interesting philosophical chain that al-Šafafī (d. 764 / 1363) provides:

The shaykh and imām Shams al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Ibrāhīm, known as Ibn al-Akfaṇī [d. 749 / 1348],48 [... ] related to me: I read the Išārāt of the

42 Ibn Ghaylān, Ḥudūth, p. 14 [ = 344].
43 Preserved in: Tehran, Majlis-e Shūrā-ye Millī Library, MS 599 (see Nasrollah Pourjavadī, Majmū‘ah-ye Falsafī-ye Marāghah; A Philosophical Anthology from Maraghā [Tehran, 2002], nūzde [p. 19]).
45 Mentioned in: Ibn Ghaylān, Ḥudūth, p. 11 [ = 340].
46 Al-Rāzī, Munāẓarāt, p. 31 (Kholeif’s translation, p. 55). It is noteworthy that al-Rāzī (Munāẓarāt, pp. 31; 35), Ibn Ghaylān and copyists of extant manuscripts of a work authored by al-Masʿūdī (Shukūk, fol. 99b) give his title as “al-Shaykh al-Imām”, which implies that he then enjoyed fame and respect. Regarding his date of death, he is referred to using the same past tense and epithet used in relation to Ibn Ghaylān (Munāẓarāt, pp. 31; 39; cf. n. 35 supra).

Al-Masʿūdī, too, betrays a clear Ghazālian influence, which is why al-Ghazāli’s views were at the centre of most of his debates with al-Rāzī. Ibn Ghaylān, who knew him personally, has much praise for him, and links his name to al-Ghazāli:

Not everyone who reads the books of the falāsifa, understands their arguments, and pursues their views should be suspected of having accepted them and abandoned the beliefs upon which he was raised. […] Indeed, one who is able to understand their claims with ease, to contemplate them with insight, who has a prodigious nature, an aptitude to distinguishing truthful claims from errors, who is quick to recognise the fallacies and hidden inconsistencies in them, especially if he has thorough knowledge of logic, firm grounding in kalām, a disposition to deal with rational matters, such as Ḥujjat al-Islām Muḥammad al-Ghazālī, the most respected shaykh and imām Sharaf al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Masʿūdī and other kalām specialists, who studied logic and metaphysics for the mentioned reason alone [i.e. refutation] – such misconceived suspicion should not be directed at them.

The most important book that al-Masʿūdī wrote on falsafa, to which Ibn Ghaylān refers, appears to be al-Shukūk wa-al-shubah ‘alā al-Ishārāt (Doubts [raised upon,] and Dubiosities [underlined in,] the Ishārāt). As its title indicates, this book consists of a criticism of a number of points made by Ibn Sīnā

49 See al-Ṣafadī, Wāfī, 2, 143.
50 The edition has Muḥammad, rather than ‘Ubār. The two words may be confused in some styles of handwriting.
52 Al-Ṣafadī, Wāfī, 2, 142–3.
53 Al-Rāzī, Munāzara, pp. 35; 40–2; 43–7.
54 Ibn Ghaylān, Ḥudūth, pp. 11–2 [ = 340–1]. Ibn Ghaylān also frequently refers to al-Masʿūdī’s works in his already mentioned Tawtīʿa (Pourjavady, Majmāʿa, nūzde [p. 19]).
in the physical and metaphysical sections of the *Ishārāt*. In the first instance, the Ghazālian influence is evident, not only in this critical theme, but also in al-Masʿūdī’s references to the *Tahāfut*, such as the following with which the book is concluded. He refers to Ibn Sīnā’s contentions that the First Cause knows Itself and other existents, and that It does not know particulars, and writes:

On each of these [contentions], serious doubts and objections can be raised. These have been presented by the felicitous Imām al-Ghazālī in the *Tahāfut* in such a way that cannot be enhanced; and there will be no benefit in reproducing them.56

A number of sections in the *Shukūk* only refute Ibn Sīnā’s arguments and/or conclusions, without providing alternatives. For example, to his argument – that a cause that is singular in all respects will produce only one effect – al-Masʿūdī responds that it is conceivable for such a cause to produce only one entity, or multiple entities of one species, and that Ibn Sīnā does not provide a proof for the former.57 Al-Masʿūdī also provides an argument *ad hominem* against Ibn Sīnā’s argument – that since the potential for destruction can only be found in matter, non-material entities, including the human soul, are indestructible. He argues that since the potential for the existentiation of the human soul appears in the human body, it follows that the potential for its destruction may also appear in the human body.58 He then addresses a possible reply to this objection.

The *Shukūk*, however, does not merely replicate the style of the *Tahāfut*, especially that it has another main inspiration, the *Muʿtabar* of Abū al-Barakāt, which is the only other work that al-Masʿūdī here cites.59 In a number of sections, al-Masʿūdī is not content with refutation, but attempts to offer alternative

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59 Al-Masʿūdī writes: “The division of perceivers into physical ones that perceive sensory objects only and non-physical ones that perceive intelligibles only is a commonly accepted view that the majority adhere to. None has contradicted them except the most excellent of the people of our time, upon whom God bestowed superior speculative [skills], the author of the *Muʿtabar*, may God grant him much reward for his efforts” (al-Masʿūdī, *Shukūk*, fol. 117b; cf. 118b; 122b). The *Shukūk* was thus written during the lifetime of Abū al-Barakāt (d. 560 / 1164–5).
conclusions to, or arguments for, Ibn Sīnā’s conclusions, sometimes introducing his positive views by the statement, “As for what has been reached through research (baḥīth) and rational reflection (naẓar) [. . .].” For example, he rejects Ibn Sīnā’s view that the combination of the humours is esteemed and preserved by the rational soul, and argues instead that the vegetative soul fulfils these functions. He also rejects his proof for the existence of prime matter, without rejecting the conclusion, for which he presents an alternative proof.

Notwithstanding these features and the influence of Abū al-Barakāt, the Shukūk still belongs to the genre of the Tahāfut, given its overall negativist theme and character, appreciated thoroughly by Ibn Ghaylān. It appears to represent a distinct nuance of the Ghazāliān anti-falsafī trend, that is more eclectic and more involved in falsafa than the criticisms of al-Ghazālī and Ibn Ghaylān. Unlike them, al-Masʿūdī does not direct accusations of unbelief towards Ibn Sīnā, whom he refers to as “the Shaykh, may God have mercy on him”.

The Shukūk in particular, and perhaps the new general approach that it represents, seem to be a major inspiration for al-Rāżī’s later approach – which I hope to show in detail when the book is published. Most immediately, al-Rāżī wrote a response to this book, which lies at the background of his and al-Ṭūsī’s commentaries on the Ishārāt. The Shukūk formed a crucial part of the maturing dialectic between the philosophical tradition and its Sunni theological critics, rather than part of the next dialectical phase that was looming. In a situation were the same people were interested in both falsafa and orthodox theology, what was most needed was an Islamic falsafa, not variations of anti-falsafī dialectical kalām. The breakthrough was to be presented by al-Rāżī.

In addition to Ibn Ghaylān and al-Masʿūdī, various scattered evidence from this poorly-documented milieu can be found, from which can be concluded: (a) an increasing interaction between kalām and falsafa during this century, (b) the
existence of this Ghazālian trend, and (c) a direct contact
between this trend and al-Rāżī. Some names present them-

selves, such as one of the main teachers of al-Rāzī and
al-Suhrawardī in kalām and falsafa, viz. Majd al-Dīn ‘Abd
al-Razzāq al-Jilī (d. ?), of whom we know only that that he lived
in Rayy, then moved to Marāgha, and that he studied
with Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā al-Naysābūrī (d. 548 / 1153),
al-Ghazālī’s student. Little is also known about ‘Umar ibn
Sahlān al-Sāwī, another significant figure in this milieu. A
fuller picture may be drawn once extant manuscripts of more
works from this period are unearthed.

We should now turn to the link between the Ghazālian trend
and al-Rāżī, best illuminated in his well-known collection of
debates, the Munāzaraṭ. These debates fall mainly under two
categories. Some (of no interest to us here) are with Ḥanafīs
and Ṭabarīdis on juristic and theological topics. Other debates
are with Ghazālīans – al-Masʿūdī and members of his circle in
Bukhara, and Ibn Ghaylān in Samarqand. It is noteworthy
that, alongside these Ghazālīans and their disciples, 4 in
number, al-Rāżī only mentions one other debater by name
(al-Nūr al-Ṣābūnī, a well-known Ṭabarīdī) – which suggests
that he was particularly interested in this group.

Worthy of mention also is that al-Rāżī, in much of the
Munāzaraṭ, appears very keen on criticising al-Ghazālī. For
instance, at one point, he says to al-Masʿūdī:

I was in Tūs once, and they put me in al-Ghazālī’s cell, and gathered
round me. I said to the people there, “You have wasted your lives in
reading the Mustasfā! I will give anyone, who is able to relate a proof
from among those, which al-Ghazālī cites from the beginning of the
Mustasfā to the end, and sets it out as it is written, without adding
another word, one hundred dinārs!”.

He frequently states that a given view expressed by al-Ghazālī
is “nothing of value”, or “extremely week”. Much of the book

64 Note, e.g., Ibn Ghaylān’s reference to al-Ghazālī, al-Masʿūdī and “other
kalām specialists, who studied logic and metaphysics for” the sole purpose of
refuting falsafa, in contrast to the usual students of falsafa (p. 154 supra).
65 Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Khalīkān, Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-anbāʾ abnāʾ
al-zamān, ed. M. Abd al-Hamīd, 6 vols. (Cairo, 1948), vol. 4, p. 250. An epistle
he wrote on logic, al-Lāmiʾ, was published recently (Pourjavadi, Majmūʿā,
p. 345–64).
66 Debates 1, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 15 and 16.
67 Al-Rāżī, Munāzaraṭ, p. 45 (Kholeif’s translation, pp. 67–8, with adjustments).
68 Al-Rāżī, Munāzaraṭ, pp. 35; 41; 42; 45.
appears as a criticism, not only of aspects of al-Ghazâlî’s intellectual legacy, but equally of those Ghazâlians, with some debates dedicated to criticising certain books: the *Tahâfut* in debate 9, some heresiographies, especially one by al-Ghazâlî against Ḥasan al-Ṣabbâḥ the Ismâ‘îlî in debate 10, and al-Ghazâlî’s juristic *Mustasţfâ* and *Shifâ‘ al-‘alîl* in debate 11.

Yet the problem is not personal (at least not primarily). Indeed, it will appear that some of the key tensions in that chapter of the historical dialectic in Islamic thought are, as it were, acted out in actual debates, a crucial recurrent theme in them being the dichotomy of dialectic (*jadâl*) and proper intellectual enquiry (*bâḥth*). This is clear from two debates in particular.

In one debate, al-Râzî first claims that astrology (one of al-Mas‘ûdî’s specialisations) is an ill-founded science. He writes:

When al-Mas‘ûdî heard these words, he was outraged and said, “Why do you say that astrology is an ill-founded science? And where is the proof?” I said that it was proved in two ways. In the first place, citation from the great philosophers, the chief of whom is Abû Naṣr al-Fârâbî. When the shaykh Abû ʿAlî ibn Sînâ praised him, he said that he was greater than almost all his predecessors. He composed a famous work to demonstrate the falsity of astrology. The shaykh Abû Sahl al-Masîlî was also among the most learned people, and he composed a book to demonstrate its falsity. The shaykh Abû ʿAlî ibn Sînâ wrote a long chapter to set out the falsity of astrology in the *Shifâ‘* and the *Najaţ*. Those are the most eminent philosophers and the most excellent scholars, and they all agree in censuring this art! The people of our own time, even if they have achieved a high status, are, in comparison to them, as a drop is to the ocean, and as a torch is to the moon!

Al-Râzî, a very critical thinker, cannot be serious about such otherwise naïve rhetoric. He rather appears to be provoking al-Mas‘ûdî, as if saying, “Don’t imagine that being one of the most famous specialists in these disciplines nowadays qualifies you to criticising those great philosophers!” We are told that al-Mas‘ûdî consequently got extremely angry. Al-Râzî then

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69 *E.g.* Paul Kraus writes of the *Munâzârat* that “the most astonishing fact [. . .] is the violent diatribe of Râzî against Ghazâlî. [. . .] Such an attitude as this, undoubtedly inspired by young Râzî’s jealousy of Ghazâlî, is not seen in any other work of his.” (“The ‘Controversies’ of Fâkhîr al-Dîn al-Râzî”, *Islamic Culture*, 12 (1938): 131–50, p. 150; cf. van Ess, “Logical structure”, p. 31).


portrays his debater refuting him on the basis of gross misinterpretations of his statements, against which he protests, saying: “When did you hear me say [so-and-so]? [...] Would that I had not come to Transoxiana so that I should not have heard such bizarre statements!”

Al-Raḍī al-Naysābūrī (d. 617/1221), a prominent student of al-Masʿūdī, who was present, then cites an argument ad hominem, from the Tahāfut, against the falsafī notion of the nature of celestial spheres. But al-Rāzī proceeds to show that this objection is invalid, since it relies on an unproven premise. Al-Masʿūdī, reportedly fuming with anger, retorts:

“What you say is purely dialectical; but intelligent men do not consider rejecting a purely rational problem with pure dialectic admissible.”

I [i.e. al-Rāzī] said, “I pray Almighty God, the Compassionate, to protect my mind and soul from this crooked philosophy (ḥikma muʿwajja)! For the faylasūf [viz. Ibn Sīnā] provided a proof in relation to the problem that he posed; then the objector [viz. al-Ghazālī] advanced a reductio ad absurdum (muʿāraḍa) against it. This reductio ad absurdum becomes complete only when the objector shows that all [the elements of the original argument] are accounted for in this objection. Otherwise, if he is unable to do so, this reductio ad absurdum becomes unsound and negligible talk worthy of no attention.73

Al-Masʿūdī changes his line of argument, and says: “All [sorts of] motion are equal qua motion; therefore, since a body could possess (qābil) a particular type of motion, it must possess all [types of] motion.” Both this argument and al-Ghazālī’s argument that al-Rāzī criticises initially, rest on the dialectical premise, widely-used by the mutakallimūn, that, in a given situation, if no particular quantity of something is more likely than another, one must either affirm an infinite number of quantities, or negate all quantities of that thing.74 Al-Rāzī replies, “If a mutakallim gives such an argument, various types of dubiosities will arise for him; so how [do you allow yourself to do so] when you are a philosopher!”75 He then shows that “al-Ghazālī is the one who needs to establish a proof for” the premise on which his refutation relies, while “it suffices the faylasūf to demand [al-Ghazālī] to present that proof”.76 By this, al-Rāzī shows that it is in fact al-Ghazālī who is the

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72 Al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut, pp. 105 ff.
73 Al-Rāzī, Munāẓaratī, pp. 36–7.
74 We return to this premise briefly below, p. 168.
75 Al-Rāzī, Munāẓaratī, p. 37.
76 Al-Rāzī, Munāẓaratī, p. 38.
dialectician, while he himself only aims to expose errors in al-Ghazālī’s dialectic. Hence al-Masʿūdī’s prior accusation, that al-Rāzī is a mere dialectician, backfires (which appears to be why al-Rāzī mentions the accusation in the story).

Despite its lighter side, the account of the debate, particularly the manner in which al-Masʿūdī’s stance is portrayed, is instructive (regardless of its accuracy). He is shown to be critical of views that he does not fully comprehend, to derive from them invalid implications, to rely on unfounded, but sometimes widely-accepted, dialectical premises and negativist forms of argument, and to be irascibly motivated by the defence of a person or a doctrine, rather than by a detached search for truth. As we will see, al-Rāzī considers these to be vices of the mutakallimūn, especially those with the Ghazālian leaning. Their anti-falsafī approach proves dialectical, and falls below the standards of proper intellectual inquiry (baḥīth).

The second relevant debate is with Ibn Ghaylān. Al-Rāzī writes:

I had heard that people read my books, such as the Mulakhkhas, Sharḥ al-Ishārāt, and al-Mabhāth al-mashriqiyya with him. I heard also that he had written a book on the temporal origination of the world.77 When we engaged in discussion, I said to him, “I hear that you have written a book on the temporal origination of the world.”

He said, “Abū ‘Alī ibn Sīnā has written a treatise replying to the arguments cited to refute [the notion of] a pre-eternal chain of events. I replied to that treatise, and proved that his argumentation (kalām) is weak.”

I said, “Good heavens! The notion that bodies are pre-eternal can be taken in two ways. First, one can say that a body was moving in pre-eternity, which is the view of Aristotle and his followers. Second, one can say that the body was initially at rest in pre-eternity, then it moved. Suppose you refuted the first interpretation, as is the view of Aristotle and Abū ‘Alī, this refutation alone would not prove that the body is temporal. So, what is the proof that the second interpretation is invalid [. . .]?”

Al-Farīd al-Ghaylānī said, “I dispute this problem with (atakallamu fı . . . ma’a . . .) none but Abū ‘Alī. When I refuted his doctrine of eternal motion, this was sufficient for me to prove the temporal production of bodies.”

I said, “If Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī were to come to you and say, ‘Be my witness that I do not believe that bodies were moving in

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77 Al-Rāzī, therefore, had not read the book then, and his objections appear to be based on his view of the general approach adopted by Ibn Ghaylān.
pre-eternity, but that they were at rest and then began to move in pre-eternity!' how would you refute his opinion […]?"

Al-Ghaylānī insisted on his statement, "I do not commit myself to proving the temporal origination of bodies, but I commit myself to refuting the opinion of Abū 'Alī."

I said, "In this case, this will not be intellectual, scientific inquiry (bāḥth), but a kind of disputation (muḥādala) with a particular person on a particular point." Then I said, "Suppose we content ourselves with this much; tell me the proof of the falsity of the notion of a pre-eternal chain of events".78

Ibn Ghaylān then argues that had there been an infinite number of events in the past, "something infinite" (mā lā nihāyata lahu) would have "come into being"; yet the coming of something infinite into being is inconceivable. Al-Rāzī retorts by showing that the latter, ambiguous premise either means the same as the conclusion, making the argument circular, or is meaningless and reliant on wordplay.

The crucial point of contention here is as follows. Ibn Ghaylān argues, as he also does in his book,79 that he authored that book as a response (jawāb) to Ibn Sīnā's argumentation (kālām) in relation to a particular topic. He does not show interest in arguing (yatakallam) with anyone else in that regard. As such, he is an ideal Ghazālian mutakallim, whose primary task is to battle against particular views until their erroneous natures are exposed. According to al-Rāzī, he is, by this, a mere dialectician, a pseudo-theologian, whose poor methods will not reach him to real knowledge.80 The accounts of both debates mark a crucial aspect of al-Rāzī's departure from previous kālām, namely his rejection of its thorough dialecticism, be it intentional, as in Ghazālian kālām, or presumed, mistakenly, to be proper critical intellectual enquiry (bāḥth), as in classical kālām.

A brief description of a debate that al-Rāzī had in Bukhara with an unnamed critic of Ibn Sīnā's Ishārāt can also be

78 Al-Rāzī, Munāẓarāt, pp. 60–1 (much use was made of Kholeif's translation, pp. 82–3).
79 See p. 152 supra.
80 Van Ess ("Logical structure", p. 25, n. 20) comments on this debate: "We may assume that Rāzī did not really want to support Ibn Sīnā in [his view of the pre-eternity of the world]; but his craving for intellectual superiority and a momentary ill humor made him reject those counterarguments as too naive although they supported his line of thinking. Unfortunately – and this is once more typical of the style of kālām – Rāzī does not deem it necessary to give his own solution of the problem". It should be clear by now that this traditional reading of the Munāẓarāt greatly trivialises al-Rāzī's position.
found recorded by the geographer Zakariyyā ibn Muhāammad al-Qazwīnī (d. 682 / 1283). Al-Rāzī addresses the critic’s objections individually and shows him that they rely on misinterpretations of Ibn Sīnā’s statements. It is not clear whether this critic is al-Masʿūdī, Ibn Ghaylān, or someone else.

In addition to the Munāzarāt and his response to al-Masʿūdī’s Shukūk, al-Rāzī’s dialectical involvement with those Ghazālians is indicated by an epistle entitled Jawāb al-Ghaylānī, apparently in response to something written by Ibn Ghaylān – and it is instructive that al-Rāzī rarely writes works dedicated to addressing the views of particular individuals (with the exception of Ibn Sīnā). Although, on the whole, al-Ghazālī and Ghazālians are rarely referred to by name in his theological and philosophical works, especially in comparison with his references to other Muslim intellectuals, their significance as part of his intellectual background cannot be underestimated. Also, as mentioned, al-Masʿūdī’s synthesis between the approaches of al-Ghazālī and Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī appears to have had a positive influence on al-Rāzī, leading to his definitive synthesis between falsafa and kalām.

Having defined the main dialectical outlines in al-Rāzī’s milieu, we should now explore the main developments, in terms of objective, method and substance, that he introduced into Islamic theology. The relevance of these developments to this milieu will become apparent.


83 Al-Rāzī mentions Ibn Ghaylān in Muḥaṣṣal Afkār al-mutaqaddimīn wa-al-mutā‘akhkhirīn, ed. H. Atay (Cairo, 1991), p. 228 (see editorial note 5). In some MSS, Ibn Ghaylān’s name is followed by “may God preserve him”, indicating that the book was written in his lifetime. Other MSS have various phrases indicating his death, later modifications by either al-Rāzī, in his revision of this work, or copyists.

84 He clearly deemed this group as intellectually inferior contemporaries, deserving only of being caricatured in the Munāzarāt. Nevertheless, it seems that when al-Rāzī refers to specific arguments that the mutakallimūn level at the fālāṣīfā, he has al-Ghazālī and Ghazālians in mind, either solely, or alongside previous mutakallimūn.
Al-Rāzī is proverbial in the wide variety of disciplines he delved into, especially ‘rational’ ones.85 He writes, “Know that I was a lover of knowledge, and I wrote something about everything, without restriction in either quantity or quality”;86 and, “I only intended to increase research and sharpen the mind”.87 While his main interests were kalām and falsafa, he wrote influential works on Qur’ānic exegesis, ʿusūl al-fiqh, medicine and the occult.

As a theologian, he started as a purely classical Ashʿarī mutakallim, as is clear from the substance and approach of one of the earliest books he authored, the Ishaʿara. He appears to follow the footsteps of his first teacher, his father, who was a committed Ashʿarī, and whom he frequently cites, calling him “the felicitous imām”.88 He refers to al-Ashʿarī as “our shaykh Abū al-Ḥasan, may God be pleased with him”.89 It is also related that he memorised al-Juwaynī’s lengthy kalām work, the Shāmil.90

Al-Rāzī’s interests then became more varied, and his theology more sophisticated, as is clear from his work Niḥāyat al-ʿuqūl, which contains more in-depth discussions of falsafa. He tells us, in an undated work, of this early transitory stage in his career:

At the beginning of our study of kalām, we became interested in familiarising ourselves with the works of [the falāsifa], so as to refute them. We spent a good part of our life in that [study], until God guided us to author books that contain refutations of them, such as Niḥāyat al-ʿuqūl, al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqīyya, al-Mulakhkhhas, Sharḥ al-Ishaʿara [and others]. All these books include [a] expositions of the fundamentals of religion, and [b] refutation of the fallacies of the falāsifa and other

89 Al-Rāzī, Iṣḥāra, fols. 3b; 36b; 62a.
90 Al-Ṣafadī, Wāfī, 4, 249.
opponents. Both supporters and opponents agree that no one among ancient or late authors wrote comparable works.91

The statement appears in the context of his defence against those who accuse him of departing from orthodox Sunni theology. As we will see, his description of the purpose of authoring these works is not entirely accurate in the case of the last three works, but accurate with respect to the Nihāya, in which he clearly aims to refute falsafa in defence of the Sunni creed. He writes in its introduction:

I included in it [discussions of] scientific and subtle matters that can hardly be found in any of the books of ancient or later authors of both supporters and opponents. My book is distinct from other books written in this subject in three ways:

First, the pursuit of questions and answers, and the deep delve into the oceans of problems, such that the benefit that the follower of each creed gains from this book of mine may be greater than the benefit he gains from the books authored by supporters of that creed itself. For I select from each discussion its cream, and from each investigation its best part. When I can no longer find any discussion that is of any value, or any view that is worthy of attention, in supporting their creed and proving their claims, I myself produce the utmost that can be put forth in proving that creed and completing the investigation (taḥrīr) of that topic. However, at the end, I will refute each view, except what is upheld by the followers of the sunna, and I will show, with strong proofs, that one ought to adhere to it.

Second, producing [...] demonstrations (burhān) that lead to true knowledge and complete certainty, rather than arguments ad hominem (ilzām), of which the whole purpose is to refute and defeat [the opponent].

Third, our novel approach [...] that requires he who commits himself to it to address all possible objections and doubts, and to avoid superfluity and prolixity.92

The book has the standard classical kalām objective of proving the religious creed of the author and refuting the views of opponents. Therefore, its table of contents has the general layout of a standard work on the principles of religion. Yet, significantly, its method is not a standard kalām method, since al-Rāzī decides to rely, not on dialectical arguments, most notably the argument ad hominem – central to classical and Ghazālian kalām – but on demonstrations.

He further elucidates his methods in the methodological section, “On Types of Evidence”, in the beginning of the Niḥāya. He first states that a rational proof requires two premises combined in a valid syllogistic form to produce a true conclusion, and then briefly lists standard Aristotelian syllogistic forms. He then dedicates a section to criticizing the “weak methods” of the mutakallimūn, “which do not lead to certainty”. The following methods are discussed:

(1) The argument ad ignorantiam. He writes:
Whenever they attempt to negate something that is not known immediately (bi-al-ḍarūra), they say: “There is no proof for it; and all that has no proof should be negated.” As for its having no proof, they show this by recounting the proofs given by its supporters, and then showing their fallacy.

In support of this type of argument, they argue, e.g., that affirming a statement that has no proof allows one to affirm an infinite number of statements without proof. Al-Rāzī argues at length against this form of inference, contending, e.g. that lacking proof for something does not entail the inconceivability of there being proof; indeed one may discover a rational or scriptural proof in the future. He argues: “There is no difference rationally between inferring negation through the lack of evidence for affirmation and inferring affirmation through the lack of evidence for negation – which is absurd.”

(2) Al-Rāzī considers analogical proofs (qiyaṣ) to be weak in the theological context, in which one is required to arrive at certainty, in contrast to fiqh, in which presumption is usually satisfactory. He writes:

Qiyaṣ consists of four elements: the original case (aṣl), the secondary case (far‘), the qualification (ḥukm) and the reason (‘illa). When we find that the qualification, in the case on which there is agreement, is due to a particular reason, and then find that same reason in an unresolved case, one will have to affirm the qualification in relation to it, and to ‘judge the unobservable in accordance with the observable’ (radd al-ghā‘ib ila al-shāhid).

The problem lies in showing that the qualification in the original case is due to the reason found in both cases. According to al-Rāzī, there are two ways to do so.

95 Al-Rāzī, Niḥāya, fol. 7b.
(a) “Coextensiveness and coexclusiveness” (al-ṭard wa-al-‘aks),\textsuperscript{96} or ‘concomitance’ (dawarān), which means that whenever the ‘illa exists, the qualification will exist or apply, and whenever the ‘illa does not exist, the qualification will not exist or apply.\textsuperscript{97} Al-Rāzī writes:

An example is what the Mu‘tazila say: “Inflicting harm without prior wrongdoing or subsequent compensation is bad in the observable [i.e. the human realm]. We then contemplate and find that whenever the act occurs and has such aspects it will be bad, and whenever it lacks any of these aspects it will not be bad. Since badness is concomitant with these considerations, in both existence and non-existence, we realise that the badness of wrongdoing is due to these considerations. Therefore, if a comparable act is performed by God, exalted, it will have to be judged bad, since it possesses the ‘illa of badness.”

Al-Rāzī rejects this form of inference, arguing that this concomitance does not necessarily indicate a causal link.

(b) ‘Investigation and disjunction’ (al-sabr wa-al-taqsīm).\textsuperscript{98} One may argue: “The colour black is visible because it exists. God exists. Therefore, He is visible.” One then proves the first statement by setting a disjunction (“The cause for the visibility of the colour black is its being black, or a colour, or an accident, or temporally originated, or existent”), and then investigating each possibility in turn, showing the inconceivability of all but the last, which is, consequently, concluded to be correct.\textsuperscript{99} Al-Rāzī argues:

This method is based on [the view] that what has no proof should be negated. For if it is said, “Why can the ‘illa not be something other than what you have listed?” they will then say, “There is no evidence for there being another possibility; so it should be rejected.” We have already discussed this.\textsuperscript{100}

(3) Another method is the argument \textit{ad hominem} (ilzām), which, according to al-Rāzī, is a type of \textit{qiyaṣ} that can have two forms. (a) The analogy of coexclusiveness (\textit{qiyaṣ al-‘aks}), in which the original case is positive and the secondary case negative, or vice versa. One example is:

\textsuperscript{98} See n. 16 supra.
\textsuperscript{100} Al-Rāzī, \textit{Niḥāya}, fol. 8b.
the Ashʿarī inference, in relation to the question of the creation of human acts, by arguing that had the servant been capable of existentiating (ījād), he would have been capable of re-existentiating (iʿāda), according to qiyās in relation to God, exalted. For, since He, exalted, is capable of existentiating, He is capable of [such] re-existentiating. But since the servant is incapable of re-existentiating, he will be incapable of existentiating.\footnote{Al-Rāzī, Nihāya, fol. 8b. See the argument in: 'Abd al-Malik al-Juwaynī, Kitāb al-Irshād, ed. A. Tamīm (Beirut, 1996), pp. 177–8.}

(b) The analogy of coextensiveness (qiyās al-ṭārīd), in which both the original and secondary cases are positive (e.g. the Ashāʿīra argue: We all accept that God wills by a will, so we should all accept that He knows by a knowledge), or negative (e.g. the Ashāʿīra argue: We all accept that remembering a line of reasoning (nazār) does not cause (wallada) knowledge, so we should all accept that reasoning itself does not cause knowledge).\footnote{Al-Rāzī, Nihāya, fols. 8b–9a.} Al-Rāzī considers that both types of the argument ad hominem lead to neither certitude nor proper refutation of the opponent, who may argue that the qualification in the original case is in fact due to a ‘illa that does not exist in the secondary case.

(4) According to al-Rāzī, in Nihāyat al-ʿuquūl, the mutakallimūn rely on scriptural evidence unsystematically and often in places where that is inadmissible. He distinguishes between three types of theological questions:

(a) Knowing the truth of some is prerequisite to knowing the truth of Revelation; e.g. the existence of the Creator, His being a voluntary agent, His knowing all things and the truthfulness of the messenger. These cannot be proved on the authority of revealed evidence.

(b) Some things can be known by revealed evidence alone, such as things that we know to be possible in themselves, while having no evidence for the existence or non-existence thereof.

(c) Some things may be known by either Revelation or unaided reason, and are not prerequisite for knowing the truthfulness of Revelation; e.g. God’s visibility, His oneness and some of His attributes. Now, al-Rāzī holds that if one finds a rational proof for something that contrasts with the literal, or ‘apparent’, (zāhir) meaning of a particular revealed statement, the latter should be interpreted metaphorically (taʾwīl). Otherwise, it may be understood literally. His discussion of this issue
is long and deserves a separate treatment. But, in short, it is clear that al-Rāzī gives precedence, in theology, to rational evidence over revealed evidence. Thus, in his discussions of theological questions of types \(a\) and \(c\), he will provide revealed evidence whenever that accords with rational evidence, merely as persuasive evidence that supports a demonstrative proof.

In addition to these four ‘weak’ forms of evidence, al-Rāzī mentions “two premises, widely-accepted among the mutakallimūn, on which they rely in addressing many an important question.” First, “when they want to negate a finite quantity [lit. number, ‘adad], or to affirm an infinite quantity, they will say: No quantity is more likely (awlā) than another quantity; therefore, one must either affirm an infinite number of quantities, or negate all quantities”. Second, “their deducing the absolute similarity of two things from their similarity in some respects”. He provides many examples for both premises, and rejects both as too weak, i.e. non-demonstrative.

In Nihāyat al-ʿuqūl, therefore, and following his initial, typical Ashʿarī stage, al-Rāzī departs from the methods of inference that remained the mainstay of kalām up until his time. The Nihāya, he states, is distinct from all previous works of kalām in this. Although some previous mutakallimūn did consider some of these methods weak, al-Rāzī is the first to downgrade them wholly, explicitly and systematically in kalām, and to replace them definitively with Aristotelian logic, which he began to consider as the standard for certitude. He, rather than al-Ghazālī, is responsible for the spread of logic in later kalām. The logical part of al-Ījī’s Mawaqqif is, thus, derived directly from the corresponding section in Nihāyat al-ʿuqūl.

Yet al-Rāzī’s fame as a dialectician (not in the Peripatetic sense) is not without justification, as can be seen from his novel method, which, al-Ṣafadī writes, was unprecedented. Certainty, according to him, depends on the combination of both a positive proof for a given position, with proofs for the

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103 Al-Rāzī, Nihāya, fols. 9b–10b.
104 Cf. al-Rāzī’s debate with al-Masʿūdī on al-Ghazālī’s argument (p. 159 supra).
105 Al-Rāzī, Nihāya, fols. 10b–11b.
106 Al-Ījī, Mawaqqif, 2, 17 ff. Al-Jurjānī even comments that some confusions in this part of the Mawaqqif are due to misunderstanding the Nihāya (Sharḥ al-Mawaqqif, [printed in the margin of al-Ījī’s Mawaqqif], 2, 35–6).
107 Al-Ṣafadī, Wāfī, 4, 249.
inconceivability of all other conflicting positions. He writes: "Complete certainty occurs only when all objections and fallacies are encompassed and addressed". Therefore, generally, when he begins to discuss a problem, al-Rāzī will attempt to provide an exhaustive disjunction (taqsīm) of all possible solutions and all possible variants of each, be they obsolete, and regardless of whether anyone ever accepted them. As he states in the Nihāya, he will then list the arguments given for each position, usually supports them with arguments of his own, then does the same with arguments against each position, and continues to examine possible counterarguments and replies, until he is satisfied to have exhausted all possible arguments for and against all possible positions. By this, he hopes to arrive at his own positive conclusion, having supported it with proofs, addressed all objections to it and refuted all conflicting positions. This method appears to combine the Aristotelian theory of demonstration with the ‘investigation and disjunction’ orientation of classical kalām.

Having examined all relevant demonstrations, he will often try to present as much weaker evidence as possible, including rhetorical, dialectical and scriptural arguments. If he had already arrived at a certain conclusion, these persuasive (iqnā‘ī) arguments may serve to confirm it. But if no certain conclusions have been reached, it may become vital to collect as much of this evidence as possible to arrive at a strong presumption, perhaps leading to a conviction that may come close to certainty.

Al-Rāzī’s exhaustive approach manifested in the great prolivelity of some of his discussions, and resulted in some later accusations that he wastes his efforts in discussing opinions (al-qīl wa-al-qāl), and that he shows more interest in explicating opponents’ positions than in discussing or defending the orthodox position. One can also imagine how it may have appeared that some topics in kalām reached a level of dialectical saturation with him.

108 Al-Rāzī, Nihāya, fol. 20a; cf. fol. 202b.
109 See p. 164 supra.
110 On this, see al-Rāzī, Al-Matālib al-ʿāliya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī, ed. A. al-Saqqā, 9 vols. (Beirut, 1987), vol. 1, p. 239.
Despite this crucial change in methodology, al-Rāzī's purpose in *Nihāyat al-ʾuqūl*, as he himself states explicitly in its introduction, remains the same primary purpose of many previous *mutakallimūn*, namely providing rational support to religious creed and refuting conflicting positions. In later works, however, al-Rāzī abandons such an explicitly apologetic objective, as he begins to view speculation as a means primarily to attaining metaphysical knowledge, rather than to defending the orthodox creed.\(^{112}\) This transition towards a more *falsafī* approach to metaphysical inquiry is noted by Ibn Khaldūn.\(^{113}\)

In the introduction of the *Mabāḥīth*, and after he briefly describes his thorough, critical approach, he severely criticises both those who insist on following previous *falāsīfa* blindly in whatever they say,\(^{114}\) and "those who dedicate themselves to refuting chief scholars and great *falāsīfa* in every[thing]," believing that they have reached a rank comparable to theirs and become some of them, when, in fact, they only manage to demonstrate their stupidity!\(^{115}\) Al-Rāzī writes that he himself adopts a middle position and selects the positive aspects of each side, declaring his purpose to be the explication of the views of the *falāsīfa*, the scrutiny of them, and the attempt to find solutions and alternatives to them when necessary.\(^{116}\) This work, therefore, is far from being an Ashʿarī or a *kalām* work; for al-Rāzī aims neither to explicate the principles of faith rationally, nor to refute deviant doctrines, but to arrive at knowledge through purely rational means, and (rather modestly) to comment on the views of the *falāsīfa*. And indeed the work has a structure fit for a *falsafī* work, albeit unusual in some ways, and its approach is much more akin to Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī’s approach than that of the *mutakallimūn*. From about the stage of the *Mabāḥīth* onwards, al-Rāzī will distinguish many of his works into ‘*kalāmī*’ and ‘*falsafī*’ ones.

\(^{112}\) This occurs apparently from the stage of *al-Mabāḥīth al-mashriqiyya*, which, in my opinion, was authored after the *Nihāya*, and was his first major *falsafī* work.

\(^{113}\) Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, pp. 389; 413.

\(^{114}\) Cf. Ibn Ghaylān’s description of his contemporaries.

\(^{115}\) Cf. what al-Rāzī says to al-Masʿūdī, p. 158 *supra*.

In the *Mabāḥith*, however, he appears still not to have full mastery of falsafa. Although this work contains much criticism of Ibn Sīnā, al-Rāzī frequently copies passages from his books and from the *Muʿtabar* of Abū al-Barakāt uncritically. The *Mabāḥith*, therefore, appears experimental and contains much confusion and contradiction, both internal and in relation to al-Rāzī’s usual views elsewhere. In a slightly later falsafī work, the *Mulakhkhas*, which is akin to the *Mabāḥith* in structure, but also includes a chapter on logic, his thought appears more consistent and independent from Ibn Sīnā. Interestingly, the reader is referred, in places in the *Mulakhkhas*, to al-Rāzī’s kalām works for topics that are better discussed in that context – which suggests that he now views his kalām and falsafa works as complementary. This work was followed by the commentary on Ibn Sīnā’s *Ishārāt*, which is al-Rāzī’s most complete dedicated criticism of falsafa. Yet the work, dubbed by some as a ‘diatribe’ (jarḥ), rather than a commentary (sharḥ), is generally not negativist in the style of the *Tahāfut* or al-Masʿūdī’s *Shukūk*. Rather, in addition to explaining Ibn Sīnā’s statements, al-Rāzī agrees with him on many issues, and continually attempts to provide philosophical alternatives to the views he disagrees with.

After spending ‘a good part of his life’ concentrating on falsafa, al-Rāzī’s attention apparently returns to kalām; he thus writes a number of works within the genre, most notably the *Arbaʿīn*, the *Muhāsṣal*, and the *Maʿālim*. These works, however, are very different from classical Ashʿarī works, including his early *Ishāra*.


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119 See p. 163 *supra*.

120 Which also finds expression in the later version of the book’s introduction, where al-Rāzī describes it as a summary (mukhtaṣar) in kalām (*Muhāsṣal*, p. 80).
eclectic orientation.\textsuperscript{121} The book, indeed, is highly eclectic in content, and contains discussions of a rich mixture of views and arguments from both \textit{kalām} and \textit{falsafa}. At the same time, its general framework and section structure show that it is \textit{kalām}-based, while having many fundamental modifications, also signs of its eclectic stance.\textsuperscript{122} Similar features can be found in al-Rāzī’s other later \textit{kalām} works, albeit to varying extents. As such, the \textit{Muḥaṣṣal} – still a \textit{kalām} work, though a very odd one among classical works in the genre – is one of the heights of al-Rāzī’s experimentalism, and marks the beginning of another major development that he introduced to the history of Muslim thought, namely the synthesis between \textit{kalām} and \textit{falsafa}. One begins to find much \textit{falsafa} in al-Rāzī’s \textit{kalām} works, and much \textit{kalām} in his \textit{falsafī} works. (It will require many studies to explore the numerous particular aspects of this synthesis, our concern here being with the underlying framework and methodology.) His last (and unfinished) major work, his philosophical and theological \textit{magnum opus}, the \textit{Maṭālib}, is truly representative of the stage at which al-Rāzī’s synthesis of the two disciplines becomes complete. In structure, it cannot be categorised as a book of either \textit{kalām} or \textit{falsafa}.

As mentioned, one of the indications of this synthesis is al-Rāzī’s adoption of a new objective for metaphysical speculation. At the early stage of \textit{Nihaṭat al-ʿuqūl}, he was interested, as were most Ashʿarīs, solely in apologetics. However, pursuing this concern had yet a further, ultimate objective. For previous \textit{mutakallimūn} viewed theological speculation as a form of action, to which a ruling may apply. To the question, “Why theological reflection (\textit{nazār})?”, most (al-Ghazālī not included) would respond, “Because it is obligatory (\textit{wājib})”, and would proceed to prove its obligatoriness. Al-Rāzī writes:

The commonly-accepted explanation of the obligatoriness of reflection is [as follows]. Knowing God, exalted, is obligatory, and it can only be attained through reflection. What is a basis for a categorical obligation, and falls within the capacity of the obligated agent (\textit{mukallaf}), is obligatory, as will be explained in the [science of] the principles of jurisprudence.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{121} This title was a phrase already present in the earlier version of the book’s introduction, as a description of its contents (\textit{Muḥaṣṣal}, p. 80, editorial note 2).
\textsuperscript{122} The section structures of some of al-Rāzī’s works will hopefully be examined in a future study.
\textsuperscript{123} Al-Rāzī, \textit{Muḥaṣṣal}, p. 130.
Both previous Ash‘arīs and al-Rāzī consider rational reflection obligatory, not intrinsically, but Legally. According to al-Rāzī (but not to many previous Ash‘arīs), this means that it is connected to considerations of afterlife reward and punishment. He writes:

Problem: The obligatoriness of rational reflection is based on scripture, contra the Mu‘tazila and some Shāfi‘ī and Ḥanafī fuqahā’. Our evidence is: [1] [God’s] saying, “We would not punish until we had sent a messenger”. 124 [2] Since the basis of obligation is [afterlife] reward and punishment, and since none of God’s acts can be [morally] bad, the mind alone will be unable to make conclusive judgements with respect to [afterlife] reward and punishment. Thus, it will not be possible to arrive [by the mind alone] at the obligatoriness [of reflection].125

Yet, from the stage of the Mabāḥith onwards, al-Rāzī considers the primary purpose of speculation to be attaining knowledge of the nature of being, which in turn is sought to attain happiness (sa‘āda) and perfection (kamāl). He does not negate its Legal dimension, but considers it secondary and aimed at affirming the primary objective. From this stage onwards, he will affirm: (a) the existence of the rational human soul, separate from the body; (b) an intellectual pleasure that man may experience at the spiritual, rather than the bodily, level; and (c) a spiritual afterlife, in addition to the physical one. These are views that he rejects earlier in the Nihāya, where he adopts traditional Ash‘arī views on these issues, e.g. that the ‘nature of man’ (ḥaqīqat al-insān) is purely material.126 With these later, primarily falsafī influences, his notion of the goodness (khayriyya) (rather than obligation) of metaphysical speculation and knowledge becomes that the soul is perfected by knowledge, and that it realises, by this acquisition, a happiness that surpasses all sensory pleasures. The soul also survives the death of the body, and experiences posthumous happiness or misery in accordance with its level of perfection or imperfection. As knowledge becomes the constituent of the soul’s perfection, the pursuit of knowledge, i.e. rational reflection, becomes almost intrinsically good.

In al-Rāzī’s later works, more emphasis is put on this perfectionist outlook, to the extent that even the phenomenon of prophecy becomes explained and justified with reference to it.

124 Qur. 17 (al-Isrā‘): 15; cf. Qur. 10 (Yūnus): 101, which al-Rāzī cites elsewhere.
125 Al-Rāzī, Muḥāṣṣal, p. 134.
126 Al-Rāzī, Nihāya, fols. 252b; 262b–263b.
He writes, in the *Maṭālib*, that we know that the human good lies in the attainment of perfection; and we know what human perfection, with its intellectual and practical aspects, is. Therefore, if we see a man who invites people to this perfection, we will know that he is a true prophet, whom we ought to follow.\(^{127}\)

Al-Rāzī also argues that since the purpose of Revealed Law is to perfect those imperfect, who are the majority of people, it should have a form and approach that serve this purpose. Thus, e.g., he insists that such invitation (*da‘wa*) should use a mixture of demonstrative and rhetorical arguments that inculcate fear and desire (*targhib wa-tarhib*), or that attract men to believe; and it should avoid both dialectical arguments and discussions of metaphysical truths that may confuse non-specialists and provoke doubts in their hearts.\(^{128}\)

This shows how far al-Rāzī moves away from his early *kalām* outlook. Theology is no longer viewed as being in the service of scriptural creed, by providing theoretical support. Instead, Revelation itself becomes primarily a means to the ultimate goal of intellectual perfection, rather than to communicating theological knowledge to men, whether explicitly or through metaphors. Scriptural theological statements serve their function in various ways, e.g. their style and rhetorical arguments; and, as such, they often should not be interpreted literally. Thus, Qur'ānic statements that seem to affirm human choice instil senses of responsibility and divine justice within believers’ hearts, whereas Qur'ānic statements that seem to affirm destiny emphasise a notion of God’s greatness – both ends being essential for piety. Yet, al-Rāzī argues, the two types of statement are irreconcilable from a formal theological standpoint; and to attempt presenting the average believer with a formal, demonstrative theological solution to the problem will both undermine the perfectionist objective of these statements and only instil doubts in his heart.\(^{129}\)

We saw that al-Rāzī mixes the topics of *kalām* and *falsafa*, while adopting the *falsafī* notions of the human good and (consequently) of the final objective of rational reflection. How does he then view the relation between the subject-matter of


\(^{128}\) Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 8, 116–8. This topic is examined at length in my forthcoming study on al-Rāzī’s ethics.

theology and its objectives? As classical books of kalām investigate the theological foundations of religion, they discuss the existence and nature of God and aspects of His relation to this world and human beings. Knowing the natures of created things has no soteriological value, except in their being signs for the existence of God. On this, Ibn Khalduṅ comments:

Recent mutakallimūn [ . . . ] mixed the problems of kalām with those of falsafa, because of the overlap in their topics and the similarity between kalām and metaphysics in subject-matter and problems. Both, thus, came to be as if one and the same discipline. They then changed the order in which the philosophers [had treated] the problems of physics and metaphysics, and they merged [kalām and falsafa] into one and the same discipline. So they first discussed general matters, then followed it by [discussing] corporeal things and what relates to them, spiritual things and what relates to them, and so forth to the end of the discipline. This is what the Imām Ibn al-Khatīb [al-Rāzī] did in al-Mabāḥith al-maṣhriqiyya, as well as all later mutakallimūn. Kalām thus became mixed with the problems of falsafa, and [kalām] works were filled with them, as if the purpose of their subject-matters and problems was one and the same.130

The Mabāḥith does indeed contain a physics section. Yet it is a book on falsafa with a strong influence from kalām, not, as Ibn Khalduṅ suggests, a book on kalām with a strong influence from falsafa, nor a synthesis of the two disciplines. The same is true of the Mulakkhas and Sharḥ al-Ishārāt. Al-Rāzī in fact does not include sections on physics in his kalām works; and the Maṭālib, the culmination of his synthesis between kalām and falsafa, deals with metaphysics, but not physics. This relative neglect of physics in the context of kalām appears due to al-Rāzī’s adoption, not of a classical kalām stance, but of a certain notion of human perfection.131

Let us consider first Ibn Sīnā’s notion of human perfection:

The perfection that is specific to the rational soul is for it to become an intellectual [micro]cosm imprinted with the form of the cosmos, the cosmic order, the good that emanates upon it from its Principle, down to the higher spiritual substances, to those which have some connection to

130 Ibn Khalduṅ, Muqaddima, pp. 413; cf. 389.
131 The appearance of sections on physics in some later kalām works is due to the influence of more than one of al-Rāzī’s works on some later Ashā’ira. The Mawāqif of al-Ījī is heavily influenced by the Mabāḥith, Niḥāyat al-’uqāl, the Muḥaṣṣal, the Arba’īn, and others, including, in some places, the Maṭālib. This later synthesis between al-Rāzī’s own works, including kalām and falsafī ones, regardless of their chronology, lead to the introduction of physics into kalām, referred to by Ibn Khalduṅ.
bodies, down to the higher bodies, their forms and powers, and so forth, until it fulfils, in itself, the form of being in its entirety, and becomes an intellectual [micro]cosm parallel to the existent [macro]cosm in its entirety, witnessing what is the absolute good and absolute beauty, united with it, and having its form engraved in it.\textsuperscript{132}

Attaining these cognitions will require the mastery of both metaphysics and physics, which entails that only a philosopher can attain this perfection. Al-Rāzī rejects this notion of perfection from an early stage. He writes, in the \textit{Mulakhkhas}, after refuting Ibn Sīnā’s proofs for intellectual pleasure (which occurs at the realisation of perfection):

We do not deny rational pleasure, nor that it is more effective than other [pleasures]. But this is not provable by logical proofs. Nevertheless, not all that cannot be proved in this way should be rejected. [...] The only way to definite belief in it is to experience it. The more one is drawn away from physical attachments, and attracted to divine knowledge, the greater will his share of it be. God has bestowed it upon me, in both sleep and wakefulness, once and again, after my belief in it strengthened and my soul became more attuned to it.

He then describes human perfection in Sufi terms; e.g. annihilation (\textit{fanā’}), love, remembrance (\textit{dhikr}) and spiritual experience (\textit{dhawq}). It is only the knowledge and love of the most perfect being, God, al-Rāzī insists, that constitutes this perfection. He continues:

What the dilettante think – that knowledge of any intellectual matter is a cause for intellectual pleasure – is false. Pleasure only results from knowing God, exalted, and from being immersed in loving Him. Therefore, since human intellects attain knowledge of God only by knowing His acts, the greater the knowledge of them, and the more complete the perception of His design, the more complete will loving Him and finding pleasure in loving Him be.\textsuperscript{133}

As such, knowing the world and its various parts does not constitute an essential aspect of human perfection. And the possibility of there being other routes to this end is not excluded; non-philosophers too can attain perfection and happiness.

The importance of this stance appears in two major ways. First, it downgrades sciences that are not directed immediately


at knowing God and that are considered by Ibn Sīnā as essential for human perfection, including most of physics. Instead, the route to human perfection will involve only those questions that relate to God’s existence, His attributes and acts, including creation, prophecy, and the afterlife, constituting what al-Rāzī terms the ‘science of divinity-proper’ (al-ilāhiyyāt al-mahḍa). The great overlap between these topics and those of kalām seems to have determined the nature of al-Rāzī’s synthesis, the most representative work of which is not the Mabāḥith, but al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī, which al-Rāzī introduces as follows: “This is our book on the science of divinity (al-ʿilm al-ilāhī), which is called in the language of the Greeks ‘theology’ (uthūlūjya).”

The second important feature of this notion of human perfection, as constituted of knowing God alone, rather than the universe and its parts, is that it demonstrates an inclination to Sufism. This marks a significant transition in al-Rāzī’s thought; for his earlier theological works do not show Sufi influence, and in fact contain criticism of some Sufi notions. At some stage after Nihāyat al-ʿuqūl, al-Rāzī adopts the view that there are two paths to knowing God: the path of theological speculation (naẓar) and that of spiritual discipline (riyāḍa). The Sufi influence on his thought thus combines to the falsafī influence – a subject that I will leave for future studies.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We saw that during the 6th/12th century, interest in philosophy spread within mainstream educated circles, most notably among students of fiqh and kalām. Many were introduced to falsafa through involvement in kalām, or, vice versa, resorted to kalām following their exposure to falsafa. Their most important literary inspirations were the philosophical writings of Ibn Sīnā and Abū al-Barakāt, and the intellectualist criticism of falsafa, the Tahāfut. Intellectual traditions existed in the eastern Muslim lands, alongside the written sources: falsafī and classical kalām traditions, as well as a new and vibrant Ghazālīan anti-falsafī trend. Yet this readership would not have been fully satisfied by these conflicting sources, given the lack of mature attempts to offer reconciliatory resolutions.

134 Al-Rāzī, Mabāḥith, 2, 448.
to the many conflicts between *falsafa* and mainstream theology; hence, the signs of intellectual confusion in this developing eclectic milieu.

This gap was to be filled by al-Rāzī, who, by his gradual synthesis of *kalām* and *falsafa*, presents, for the first time, an ‘Islamic philosophy’. This timely development was exactly what the milieu required: a mature philosophy, or philosophical theology, that was seen not to conflict with orthodoxy, and that did not approach *falsafa* in an essentially negativist manner.

Following his classical Ashʿarī starting point, al-Rāzī adopts an increasingly eclectic stance, while debating openly with all the philosophical and theological traditions that he came into contact with. He starts to define his position *vis-à-vis* existing intellectual trends, most importantly, as he points out in the *Mabāḥīth*, the dominant *falsafī* and anti-*falsafī* trends. His debate with these elements in his dialectical milieu provided the main outlines for his own thought – an influence that can be detected in his discussions with the *falāsifa* and their critics throughout his works. Although he does not normally name the critics, and refers to them generally as *mutakallimūn*, he had a rich and living anti-*falsafī* tradition to draw upon.

The impact of al-Rāzī’s innovations on later Muslim theology and philosophy cannot be exaggerated, and some of its main features are underlined by Ibn Khaldūn, who speaks of a later, post-Rāzī *kalām* tradition (*ṭarīqat al-mutaʻakhkhirīn*), distinct from earlier *kalām*. This influence is clear, not only in almost all subsequent *kalām* works, but equally from the remarks of critics, from a wide range of religio-intellectual traditions, Ibn Taymiyya’s (d. 728 / 1328) traditionalist criticism being one of the most outstanding. Najm al-Dīn al-Ṭūfī (d. 716 / 1316), a *mutakallim* who is often inclined to defending al-Rāzī, writes on his influence:

Since the emergence of Islam, Muslims derived the principles and details of their religion from the Book of their Lord, the *sunna* of their Prophet and the inferences of their scholars, until, at a later stage, some people appeared, who turned away, in that regard, from the Book and the *sunna* to pure rational investigations, mixing them with *falsafī* dubiosities and sophistic fallacies. This became firmly established to the extent that it became, as it were, true [by virtue of being] customary (*ḥaqīqa ʿurfiyya*), within [the discipline of] the principles of religion, such that [...] nothing else will be recognised as discourse (*kalām*) on the principles of religion. They were followed by people weak in
knowledge, who found a philosophical kalām, [...] and thus failed to come upon the [true] principles of religion. For, due to the customary predominance of [philosophical kalām], they did not know any other principles of religion. [...] I saw questions that someone put to a certain scholar, which included the following question. “Should people have principles of religion? If they should not, then how could a religion not have any principles? However, if they should have principles of religion, then are they those that are circulated among people, such as [in] the books of the Imām Fakhr al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb and his followers, and the like, or other ones?”

Al-Rāzī transformed Islamic theology to the extent that previous kalām seemed irrelevant and obsolete. Perhaps this partly explains the scarcity of information on the 6th/12th century intellectual activity examined here. Even Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī takes a step to the background, as his direct influence on later Islamic thought diminishes. Al-Rāzī’s place in later Muslim theology is somewhat comparable to that of Ibn Sīnā in falsafa. For it appears that almost all later theology, that of proponents and opponents alike, was done vis-à-vis his philosophical theology. This, however, is another story.

135 Sulaymān ibn ‘Abd al-Qawī al-Ṭūfī, Al-Ishārāt al-ilāhiyya wa-al-mabāḥith al-usūliyya, ed. H. Qutb, 3 vols. (Cairo, 2003), vol. 1, pp. 206–7. A comparable sentiment is echoed in the beginning of an anonymous book on theology (Awqāf Baghdād Library, MS 1712): “I have been hoping to find a comprehensive book on the principles of religion [...], but have been unable to find anything other than the theological books that are widely-circulated among people, which have been saturated with the principles of falsafa, so they provide nothing but doubt and confusion” (Muhammad As‘ad Tals, Al-Kashshāf ‘an Makhṭūṭat Khazā‘in Kutub al-Awqāf [Baghdad, 1953], p. 123). Al-Ṭūsī also writes, with some exaggeration: “No trace of the books that circulate among [people], in the science of the principles [of religion], has remained [...] except the Muḥāṣṣal, [...] [people] think that it is sufficient in that science, and that it cures the illnesses of ignorance and uncritical imitation” (Talkhīṣ al-Muḥāṣṣal, ed. A. Nurani [Beirut, 1985], pp. 1–2).