Conclusions

Pursuing reason ends in shackles,
    and most human plans in error’s tackles.
Our souls suffer from their bond to bodies,
    and this world yields but pains and follies.
All I’ve gained from life-long inquiries
    is collections of quotes in all varieties.
Many a man and power I’ve seen
    that all peaked, then perished and have been.
Many a summit has been climbed,
    by people long gone, leaving the mountain behind.¹

These verses are one of the best-known compositions of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, produced close to the end of his life, shortly before he was struck by a terminal illness leading to his death in the spring of 606/1210. They lament the fleeting nature and the futility of human endeavors, particularly those in “the pursuit of knowledge through reason” (iqdām al-ʿuqūl). Throughout his life, al-Rāzī wrote books in numerous religious and scientific genres, which together fill several feet of shelf-space. That, however, counted little for him at its end. In this study I have looked most closely at two books from the beginning of al-Rāzī’s writing career. These are his two comprehensive textbooks (summae) of philosophy, The Eastern Investigations (al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqyya), and The Compendium on Philosophy and Logic (al-Mulakhkhas fī l-ḥikma wa-l-mantiq), which together make up more than two thousand pages. They pose a problem that we find repeated with quite a number of authors in Islam’s post-classical period. They self-identify as Ashʿārite theologians (mutakallimūn) and sometimes they wrote—like Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī—small or monumental works in that discipline. Yet they also left us books in the genre of philosophy (ḥikma), where they argue in favor of a God who acts out of necessity and for a world that exists from pre-eternity—two teachings vehemently rejected in all works of Ashʿārite

¹ Ibn Abī Uṣaibī`a, ‘Uyūn al-anbā’, 2:28.21–25. For a slightly different version of the poem see e. g. al-Rāzī, Dhamm liḥdhāt al-dunyā, 262. Shihadeh, Teleological Ethics, 187, and Maʾṣūmī, “Imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and His Critics,” 367, produce English translations from which I have drawn.
theology.\(^2\) How can the difference between Fakhr al-Dīn’s books in kalām and the teachings in his two early summae of philosophy be reconciled?

My explanation takes its cue from al-Ghazālī’s solution to a similar, if slightly less fundamental problem: In my 2009 study on al-Ghazālī’s cosmology I concluded that the great Ash’arite theologian and philosopher held a position of cum-possibility when it comes to the conflict between occasionalism and secondary causality. Occasionalism is a set of teachings in cosmology that were developed within the Ash’arite school of Islamic theology, where each and every event is directly caused by God and no event in the created world is causally connected to another. In this model, we speak of causes and their effects only metaphorically, because all effects have only one cause, which is God’s activity as a direct creator of everything in this world. Al-Ghazālī grew up with this cosmology and he defended it in some of his books. Yet his education also acquainted him with the dominant cosmological model among the falāsīfā. Here, God’s activity as the ultimate creator of all things and all events is mediated by so-called secondary causes, meaning elements of causal chains which begin with God and end in the events we witness. The formation of a cloud, for instance, is a secondary cause in God’s activity to create rain, which, in turn, is a secondary cause in His activity to let corn grow and feed humans. In this model, God does not intervene in the causal chains that unfold from Him. Every element in these chains is an intended creation, just like in occasionalist cosmology. Al-Ghazālī believed, so I concluded in that study, “that neither revelation nor demonstration provides a conclusive answer as to how God acts upon his creation.”\(^3\) If neither the human capacity of reason—here expressed in the ability to formulate demonstrative arguments—nor God’s direct guidance in the Qur’an and the hadīth-corpus can help us decide this matter, then humans must remain agnostic about this question and admit that both cosmologies are equally possible, hence cum-possible.

In this book I have come to conclude that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī held the same position of cum-possibility when it comes to the question of whether God has a free will and chooses His creations from alternatives or whether God acts out of the necessity of his essence. These two alternatives mark the positions held among Muslim rationalist theologians (mutakallimūn) on the one hand and the followers of Avicenna (falāsīfā) on the other. In the introduction of this book I explained that the dispute about the world’s pre-eternity was in reality one about two different concepts of God. Scholars active in Islamic rationalist theology (kalām) have always argued that

\(^2\) On al-Āmidī and al-Abharī see above p. XXX. Al-Kātībī, who wrote a popular textbook on hikma, “identified with the Ash’arīs in his commentary on al-Rāzī’s works, referring to them as ‘our associates’ (aṣḥābūnā) (...).” Khaled El-Rouayheb in his art. “al-Kātībī al-Qazwīnī” in EI3.

\(^3\) Griffel, Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology, 122.
God has a free will and creates after making a choice (*ikhtiyār*) between alternatives. At the beginning of the world, God chose the alternative of creating over that of not creating. Influenced by a Neoplatonist reading of Aristotle’s works that developed in late antiquity, Avicenna denied that God has such a choice and maintained that He must be radically simple and cannot change. What’s more, God is necessary “in all His aspects” (*min jamī‘ jihātihī*) and whatever He creates follows with necessity from Him. For Avicenna, God *is* the principle of necessity that governs all processes in this world. There is nowhere, neither in God nor in His creation, any room for a free and—as Avicenna viewed it—arbitrary choice between alternatives. Rather, creation is a necessary and eternal process, determined by God’s essence, which is identical with His existence.

In this study I analyzed how, in a number of his works that he refers to as “philosophical books” (*kutub hikmiyya*), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī reconstructs Avicenna’s conceptualization of God and improves upon it. He does so without changing fundamental assumptions about the necessity of God’s actions and about the world’s pre-eternity. Given the fact that al-Rāzī published these philosophical books simultaneously with works where he defends the position of Ashʿarite *kalām* on the temporal creation of the world, I suggest that his position on the conflict between the God of philosophy and the God of Ashʿarite *kalām* was the same as al-Ghazâlî’s on the cosmology of these two scholarly traditions. I suggest that al-Rāzī believed a necessary God and one who has a free will are, with regard to human knowledge, cum-possible.

To be clear, this is neither a position that al-Ghazâlî shared, nor was it taken by any other Islamic thinker before Fakhr al-Dīn. Rather, it should be regarded as a genuine development on the side of al-Rāzī, born out of his realization that human epistemological capacities are too frail to decide this conflict. Al-Ghazâlî believed that such frailty of human knowledge applies to the question of how God acts upon His creation. For al-Ghazâlî, God creates either in accord with the occasionalist model or according to an explanation that employs a model of secondary causality. While God, of course, knows how He creates, He chose not to reveal this knowledge to humans, neither by signs in creation that would lead to conclusions through rational inquiry, nor in His revelation. Al-Ghazâlî did not believe, however, that there could be any indecision about God’s nature. In his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* he reproduces several arguments attempting to prove the impossibility of a world without a temporal beginning. These arguments were developed by the Christian philosopher John Philoponus (in Arabic: Yaḥyā al-Nabhī) of Alexandria, who presented them \ in the sixth century CE in works directed against Aristotle’s teaching of a pre-eternal world. Arabic authors in *kalām* became familiar with these arguments through translations
and they picked them up in their works. Al-Ghazālī, for instance, argues that there can be no addition to an infinite number of events in the past, nor can a number of infinite events be multiplied or divided. Here is an example of the kind of arguments al-Ghazālī makes in his *Tahāfut*:

The world’s past eternity is impossible because it leads to affirming circular movements of the heavenly spheres whose number is infinite and whose individual units are innumerable, even though they [divide into] a sixth, a fourth, a half [and so on]. For the sphere of the sun rotates [once] in one year, whereas Saturn’s rotates [once] in thirty [years], so that the rotations of Saturn are a thirtieth of those of the sun. The rotations of Jupiter are a twelfth of the rotations of the sun; for it rotates [once] in every twelve years. [Now,] just as the number of rotations of Saturn is [considered] infinite, so the number of solar rotations are [also considered], despite being thirty times as many (...).

Conceptual problems created by the assumption of an eternal number of events in the past led al-Ghazālī to the conclusion that a pre-eternal world is factually impossible. Hence, the world must have been created at one point in time and God must have been able to change from a non-creator to a creator. This, in turn, leads to a vindication of *kalām*-assumptions about God.

In contrast, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī did not believe in the validity of the kinds of objections that al-Ghazālī makes against an infinite past. Four generations after al-Ghazālī these objections are well-known among philosophers. Al-Rāzī refers to them as the “account of the even and the odd” (*hadīth al-shafʿ wa-l-watr*), a name that comes from an argument in al-Ghazālī’s *Tahāfut*. At any given time, so al-Ghazālī, the number of rotations of a celestial sphere must be either odd or even. If it is even, then the addition of one rotation would make it odd. Yet, the *falāṣīfa*, so al-Ghazālī, “are forced to uphold that [the number] is neither even nor odd,” which is an impossibility that does not exist.

Mathematical problems like these that stem from the conceptualization of the infinite led al-Ghazālī to conclude that a pre-eternal world is rationally impossible. That, however, is not the case for Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī. In his *Eastern Investigations* and his *Compendium on Philosophy*

---

4 On John Philoponus’ influence on Arabic authors see Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and Existence*, index; Adamson, *Al-Kindī, index*, and Wakelnig, “Al-Anṭāḵī’s use of the lost Arabic version of Philoponus’ *Contra Proclum*.”

5 Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-falāṣīfa*, 18.10–16; Marmura’s trans. adapted.

6 Ibid., 18–19.
and Logic he mentions the “account of the even and the odd,” but he also clarifies that this problem only applies to people who are unfamiliar with the mathematical concept of an infinite numbers. There are indeed some people, so al-Rāzī reports, who believe that the infinite “is not an object of rational thought (maʿqūl) because every number is either even or odd.” These people argue that even and odd numbers are both determined by subtracting one from the opposite, meaning the even and the odd depend on each other and allow no middle third. Similar, these people say that every number has a half, which must be less than itself. Half of an infinite, however, is not less than an infinite. “These two arguments,” says al-Rāzī his Compendium on Philosophy and Logic, “are not valid according to the method of the philosophers.” He fails to discuss this any further but later on says that the subject has been sufficiently dealt with. The whole matter seems to be for him a rather insignificant pseudo-problem in mathematics. In the last part of his Compendium on Philosophy and Logic, al-Rāzī discusses whether God’s knowledge can have an infinite number of elements. Some people say that an infinite number cannot be rationally conceived. Al-Rāzī’s rejects this by saying that, “the account of the even and the odd has already been dealt with. The [objection against] adding and subtracting to and from [an infinite number] is [merely] rhetorical.” “Rhetorical” here means that it makes an impression on non-philosophers, who may not be familiar with the issue, but has no bearing in philosophy. Evidently, John Philoponus’s arguments for the impossibility of conceptualizing an infinite number of events in the past made less an impression of on Fakhr al-Dīn than on al-Ghazālī. Al-Rāzī believed —at least “according to the method of philosophers”— that an infinite number can be divided, multiplied, subtracted from, and added upon, and that it is a valid number despite being neither odd nor even.

If an infinite number of events in the past is possible, then a pre-eternal world is also possible, and what is true for cosmology in al-Ghazālī is true for God’s nature in Fakhr al-Dīn. Al-Ghazālī believed that God did not give us knowledge about the way He creates. Al-Rāzī agreed with him on this point. For him, the two alternatives of occasionalism and secondary causality are closely connected with the cosmological concepts of atomism and hylomorphism. The latter is the doctrine that physical objects result from the combination of matter and form and are infinitely divisible. If we look at al-Rāzī’s œuvre we find works where he defends the teachings of occasionalist atomism and others where he argues for Aristotelian hylomorphism.

8 al-Rāzī, al-Mulakhkhas, fol. 249b.4.
In one of his latest works, al-Rāzī says that the conflict between hylomorphism and atomism cannot be resolved, meaning we do not know whether bodies consists of atoms or of matter and form. In al-Rāzī’s earlier works, the teaching of occasionalism happens in his books of kalām and that of hylomorphism in his philosophical books. As far as we can tell, many Islamic authors after Fakhr al-Dīn maintained this practice.

Al-Rāzī shared al-Ghazālī’s conclusion of a cum-possibility of kalām-models of cosmology with those of the falāsīfa. But he also went further: If a pre-eternal world is just as possible as one that is created in time, then God also did not give us knowledge about His nature. Given his conclusions about infinite numbers, al-Ghazālī did not consider these options are equally possible. For al-Rāzī, however, they are. He believed that God may act out of necessity—in which case the world is pre-eternal and the falāsīfa are right—or God may choose His creations among alternatives—in which case the world is created in time and the mutakallimūn are correct. I read the fact that Fakhr al-Dīn wrote long books in which he defended the former position and equally voluminous ones where he strengthened the arguments of the latter as an implicit acknowledgement that he was ultimately undecided about this question and thought that both solutions are possible to apply.

Fakhr al-Dīn, unfortunately, did not leave us a text explaining the relationship of his philosophical books to those he wrote in theology. He did not write a book like Averroes’s Decisive Treatise (Faṣl al-maqāl) where he deals with the connection between philosophy and more religious genres of literature, such as kalām and tafsīr. The books that al-Rāzī wrote in kalām and in philosophy were most probably employed in madrasa education where the context would have contributed much to clarify that relation. Al-Rāzī believed, for instance, that

---

9 al-Rāzī, Dhamm līdhdhāt al-dunyā, 255; cf. Shihadeh, Teleological Ethics, 183. On the suspension of judgment on this issue, see also Ibrahim, “Essentialism versus Phenomenalism,” 414.


11 Gardet, and Anawati, Introduction à la théologie musulmane, 327.
scriptural evidence (*dalāʾila naqliyya*)—meaning revelation—is generally inconclusive (*zannī*) and never certain. He says so in one of his works on *kalam*. Philosophy, however, claims to be a certain field of knowledge, or at least one that strives at certainty (*yaqīn, qaṭʿiyya*). This study shows that in his philosophical books, al-Rāzī never considered revelation as a source of knowledge.

There are a few rare passages in his works where al-Rāzī touches on the two alternative teachings about God’s nature and explains the decision he made. These do not come from the period when he was writing philosophical books but from the last period of his life. One such passage is in his commentary to Avicenna’s *Elements of Philosophy* (*ʿUyūn al-hikma*). Although it is a commentary on a work of philosophy, it cannot be subsumed under al-Rāzī’s “philosophical books.” Here, Fakhr al-Dīn comments as a *kalam* theologian and not as a follower of Avicenna who wishes to improve his teachings. The reason for this becomes clear close to the end of the book, in a chapter where al-Rāzī explains Avicenna’s teachings on the divine attributes, particularly on God’s omnipotence (*qudra*). Unlike his “philosophical books” of an earlier period, al-Rāzī here declares unambiguously:

Know that the teaching that God—Exalted—is a self-necessitated being is false.¹⁴

The world, therefore, is created in time and God has a free will that choses between alternatives. When it comes to the reasons for making such a clear decision, al-Rāzī presents three arguments but also acknowledges—implicitly at least—that there are equally strong arguments that oppose these three. He concludes the discussion with a personal reflection that should also be read as the decisive reason as to why he takes here the position of *kalam*:

This is a very noble issue that attracts the minds of those who wish to have insight into the majesty of the First Principle. I wrote a book for one of the great kings [of our age], where I said: Prudence leads to the acknowledgment [that God is] a choosing agent and to submission to [His] obligations. This is so because if this world has no maker at all or if it has a maker and that maker is necessary, or if that maker is a choosing agent but He does

¹² al-Rāzī, *al-Ma‘ālim fī l-usūlāyln*, 22. 10–14; Shihadeh, “The Mystic and the Sceptic,” 108. Like al-Ghazālī, however, al-Rāzī also believed that revelation conveys knowledge of a kind that reason cannot obtain (such as about divine attributes); see Shihadeh, *Teleological Ethics*, 133.

¹³ See above p. XXX.

not charge humans with any obligations at all, then salvation is available to all. If, however, the maker is omnipotent and charges [humans] with obligations, then whoever denies this deserves a grave punishment. This position is closer to prudence and better to adopt. This is as much as we say about this issue. It is the most enormous of the questions on divine matters (masāʿ il ilāhiyya) and we expand on this [subject] in others of our books.¹⁵

The argument is not based on epistemological consideration or even the truth about this matter. Rather, it is based on what might be called a consideration of benefits in the afterlife. It is, in fact, a version of an argument known in the Western philosophical tradition as “Pascal’s wager.” The seventeenth-century French philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–62) argued that humans should live under the assumption that God exists even if His existence cannot be proven. If God does not exist, then the assumption of His existence leads to limited harm in this world. If, however, He does exist then this positive assumption will lead to infinite benefit, namely everlasting reward in the afterlife. The infinite abundance of the latter position far outweighs the limited harm of the former.¹⁶

The argument leaves open whether any of the four options listed by al-Rāzī—(1) no creator, (2) a necessary creator, (3) a choosing creator who does not give reward or punishment, and (4) a choosing creator who does give reward and punishment—is more likely to be true than other alternatives. Here, al-Rāzī removes himself from the battleground of arguments for and against the God of the philosophers and enters into what must be called a consideration of personal benefit. One must also note that the argument fits neatly into his teleological ethics, where gaining reward in the afterlife is a moral ground for performing good actions in this world. Every rational actor weighs the potential benefits of his or her actions against the potential harms—and in such a wager the afterlife must play an important role. Ayman Shihadeh concluded that in al-Rāzī’s later kalām works this kind of consequentialist ethic replaced the more traditionally Ashʿarite, deontological ethic in his earlier kalām works.¹⁷

Shihadeh also coined the phrase “later pessimism,” characteristic of al-Rāzī’s final period as a writer.¹⁸ In 595/1199 or shortly before that, al-Rāzī began work on his monumental Qur’ān commentary. The bulk of the dateable work on that project (Suras 3–19 and 37–48) falls between

¹⁵ Ibid., 3:129.1–10; compared with MS Paris, BnF, fonds arabe 5802, fol. 65b.
¹⁶ Pascal, Pensées, §233.
¹⁷ Shihadeh, Teleological Ethics, 56–107, particularly 66–69.
¹⁸ Ibid. 155.
the years 601/1204 to 603/1207, when al-Rāzī worked in Herat at his madrasa. The Qur’an commentary was, however, still unfinished when al-Rāzī at hid death in the spring of 606/1210. At least three projects interrupted this writing: The first was his monumental compendium of kalām, *The Elevated Areas of Inquiry* (al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya), which was also left unfinished after his death. Here, we find the same argument as in the commentary on Avicenna’s *Elements of Philosophy* (Sharḥ ʿUyūn al-hikma). It is more prudent to adopt the position that God is a free actor and puts humans under legal, moral, and ritual obligations (taklīf) than to hold any of its alternatives. Indeed, *The Elevated Areas of Inquiry* must be the “book for one of the great kings” that al-Rāzī mentions in the passage from *The Commentary on the Elements of Philosophy* just quoted. He wrote it most probably for the Khwārazmshāh ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad, after al-Rāzī reentered his service in 605/1208. In *The Elevated Areas of Inquiry*, al-Rāzī shows himself deeply skeptical of the human ability to acquire knowledge about the nature of God. Here, al-Rāzī makes the case for adopting the most probable, plausible, or apt (awlā, akhlaq, ashab) belief or conviction, whenever our reasonable capacity is unable to attain certainty. In such cases we must acknowledge the tentative nature of our decision and recognize its fallibility. In 2002, Muammer İskenderoğlu followed al-Rāzī’s discussion of the world’s eternity in this book, stressing that it is inconclusive with regard to the two sources of rational inquiry as well as revelation. Al-Rāzī’s long discussion of rational arguments pro and contra the world’s pre-eternity ends in a conclusion that he puts in the mouth of a reader who is “perplexed and bewildered” by the balance of evidence. Such an observer rightfully says that, “the arguments are not clear and strong enough to dispel doubts (shakk), preclude excuses, and enlighten the minds with their strength and vividness. Rather, each betrays a degree of obscurity.” Despite this impasse of evidence, al-Rāzī teaches in his *Elevated Areas of Inquiry* the doctrine of kalām on the world’s temporary creation and rejects those of the *falāsifa*. The reason must be the argument about benefits in the afterlife.

19 Griffel, ʿOn Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Life,” 324–26; Altaş, ʿFahreddin er-Rāzī’nin eserlerinin kronolojisi,” 141–45.
20 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, 1:272.7–15. The wager argument also plays a role in al-Rāzī’s decision in *al-Maṭālib* that God knows all objects of knowledge (3:144) and that the soul survives after the death of the body (7:226).
21 I already speculated about such a connection in Griffel, ʿOn Fakhr al-Dīn’s Life,” 333–34.
The second project was the epistle Censure of the Pleasures of this World (Dhamm lidhhdhāt al-dunyā), where al-Rāzī’s skepticism from The Elevated Areas of Inquiry has grown to what Shihadeh calls “epistemological pessimism.”25 Here, he discusses the claim, put forward by Avicenna and other philosophers, that intellectual pleasures are superior to all others. These include insights into God, into the celestial intellects and spheres, as well as other most noble elements of His creation. “Yet who among us,” asks al-Rāzī rhetorically, “has reached the threshold of that lofty court, and who has ever smelled the fragrance of that holy eminence? All what [human] rationality (al-ʿuqūl) can reach is conjecture and uncertainty. The culmination of this pursuit is guesswork (awhām) and imaginations.”26

The third project for which al-Rāzī interrupted his work on the Qur’an commentary was his Commentary on the Elements of Philosophy (Sharḥ ʿUyūn al-ḥikma) where the argument similar to Pascal’s wager appears. Based on references to different parts of The Elevated Areas of Inquiry, Hayri Kaplan and Eşref Altaş date it to the three or four months before al-Rāzī became ill and bedridden.27 Fakhr al-Dīn’s terminal illness began in Muḥarram 606 / July 1209, eight months before his death. When he fell ill al-Rāzī dictated a later widely read testament (waṣiyya) where he says:

I have diligently explored the ways (ṭuruq) of kalām and the methods (manāḥīj) of falsafa and I did not find in it an equal to the benefit that I found in the Qur’an. (…) Preoccupation with objections and contradictions only teach us that human rationality (al-ʿuqūl al-bashariyya) comes to nought and fades away in these treacherous defines and hidden ways.28

The parallel listing of kalām and falsafa is echoed at the beginning of the testament where he addresses his followers as “my brothers in religion and my companions in the pursuit of certainty.”29 It throws us back to al-Rāzī’s earlier career when he wrote “philosophical books”

25 Shihadeh, Teleological Ethics, 181. See also the analysis there (pp. 181–89) and in idem, “The Mystic and the Sceptic,” 109–10.
26 al-Rāzī, Dhamm lidhhdhāt, 252.8–10; Engl. trans. adapted from Shihadeh, Teleological Ethics, 182.
28 Ibn Abī Ḥayyāna, ʿUyūn al-anbāʿ, 2:27.16–18; Engl. trans. adapted from Street, “Concerning the Life and Works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī,” 136, who translates the full document and analyses it (pp. 136–43).
29 Ibn Abī Ḥayyāna, ʿUyūn al-anbāʿ, 2:27.9.
and works of kalām. In those earlier works the argument of Pascal’s wager does not appear. Here, he is still searching for certainty on God’s nature and His attributes. This is particularly clear in

Fakhr al-Dīn’s major philosophical books. These are three in number: the two textbooks of philosophy Eastern Investigations and Compendium, as well as The Commentary on Pointers and Reminders. All of them were finished before 580/1185 or a few years later, when al-Rāzī was in his late thirties. In the earliest of these three books al-Rāzī briefly discusses whether one can, in the absence of a decisive argument (dalīl), adopt a conclusion that is the most apt (al-awlā). The occasion is similar to the one in the passage from Commentary on the Elements of Philosophy: Given the absence of a decisive proof for the falāsifa’s conviction that God knows only universals and not individuals, should one not simply jump to the assumption of the most apt and say that He is indeed familiar with individuals? The answer here is negative: “Adopting the most apt is not suitable in disciplines that deal with certainty.”

In the introduction to his most important work on kalām from the early period of his career al-Rāzī writes that that book is superior to all others in the field because it is unprecedented in the depth and thoroughness in which it takes all existing views on an issue into account. “It is quite possible that the benefits which the followers of each of the teachings [I report here] gain from the presentation in my book are greater than those they get from the books of their colleagues in their schools.” Al-Rāzī’s new technique of writing is a conscious rejection of the earlier practice of composing treatises and epistles where the authors argue for their own views and where they try to convince readers of their positions or their way of thinking. Rather, Fakhr al-Dīn aims at a comprehensive dialectical discussion of all relevant arguments and viewpoints. With regard to God’s nature, the most relevant views were those discussed in Ash’arite textbooks of kalām and in the works of Avicenna. Confronted with an irreconcilable difference in these two sets of teachings about God, al-Rāzī chose to write one group of books where he defends and improves the positions and the arguments of Ash’arite kalām and another group where he does

---

30 Altaş, “Fahreddin er-Rażi’nin eserlerinin kronolojisi,” 109–15. In addition to these three major philosophical books there are also other, smaller philosophical treatises and epistles, such as the Persian al-Risāla al-kamālīyya fī l-haqāʾiq al-ilāhiyya and Manzūmah-yi manṭiq va-falsafah as well as the Arabic Jawābāt al-masāʾ ilā l-bukhāriyya, and Lubāb al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt.

31 al-akhadhu bī-l-awlā mimmā lā yaʿāfu bī-l-qāʾīyyā; al-Rāzī, al-Mabāḥith, 2:505.18; see Shihadeh, Teletological Ethics, 193–94.


33 See above pp. XXX–XXX.
the same with Avicenna’s teachings.\textsuperscript{34} Behind this choice lies the realization of an epistemological impasse and the recognition of the bounds of human reason.

There is another feature why his books Raises above its competition, al-Rāzī says without much modesty in the introduction of his early book on kalām. This is their “amazingly neat and novel divisions which force those who commit themselves to this method to include all entryways of doubts and uncertainty and to avoid verbosity and exaggeration.”\textsuperscript{35} Indeed, in Eastern Investigation, Fakhr al-Dīn’s very first book on philosophy (ḥikma), he re-orders the subjects of philosophy in a radical way such as never been attempted since Andronicus of Rhodes in the first century BC. Al-Rāzī splits, for instance, the study of metaphysics into two parts. One he puts at the beginning of his book, the other at the very end.\textsuperscript{36} The more comprehensive and refined version of this re-ordering in The Compendium on Philosophy and Logic—now also including a part on logic—had a profound effect on the way both philosophy as well as kalām were studied in post-classical madrasas in Islam. During the seventh/thirteenth century, Arabic textbooks of philosophy and kalām adopted the ordering system from al-Rāzī’s two philosophical summae and carried this new syllabus of study into the nineteenth and twentieth century, when it was eventually replaced by completely different ideas about the study of philosophy that originating in Europe.

The methods of kalām and of philosophy are different in their approach to the argumentative move from what Muslim theologians called “the known” (al-shāhid) to the “unknown” (al-ghāʾib). The known is the world we experience, which is the object of our scientific and reasonable inquiries, whereas the unknown refers to God, His essence, attributes, and actions. In both disciplines, kalām and philosophy (ḥikma), Fakhr al-Dīn admits that comprehensive knowledge about God is unattainable. If we knew God’s essence, we would know everything there is to know about this world. In philosophy al-Rāzī discusses and develops rational arguments that move from the known to the unknown, and he tries to establish as much certain knowledge as possible. Avicenna taught that if God is an immaterial and radically simple being then He must be an intellect. Avicenna also taught that God’s essence is the same as His existence. Here, al-Rāzī objects and concludes—based only on philosophical arguments—that God has an essence different from His existence. God’s essence produces as concomitants (lawāzim) first God’s own existence and then the world’s existence. Al-Rāzī’s main argument for

\textsuperscript{34} One could argue that there is a third kind of book, where he compares those two sets of teachings. An example for that could be Muhāssal aflāk al-mutaqaddimīn wa-l-mutaʾakhkhirīn.

\textsuperscript{35} al-tartīb al-ʾajīb wa-l-talāfiq al-anīq; al-Rāzī, Nihāyat al-ʾuqūl, 1:100.1–2.

\textsuperscript{36} See above pp. xxx–xxx.
a distinction between essence and existence in God is the likeness of His existence to that of His creation. In order for us to have any understanding of God, so al-Rāzī, His way of existing must be similar to our way. Given that our existence is determined by the distinction between essence and existence, so must be God’s.\(^{37}\) The argument illustrates that the God of the philosophers (\(hukamā\)) is an immanent God, who is bound by some of the same limitations we are bound to. This immanence determines His absolute simplicity, for instance, and the fact that He is necessary “in all His aspects.”

In contrast, the God of \(kālām\) is transcendent and not bound to many of the restrictions that apply to us. He is, for instance, absolutely simple and still has positive attributes as parts in His essence. He is also not an intellect. God’s simplicity does not prevent Him to change from being a non-creator to becoming a creator. Resulting conceptual problems about divine simplicity, for instance, are answered—implicitly, at least—with the so-called \(bīlā-kayfā\) (“without-how”) argument. Ash’arite \(kālām\) claims that God is both absolutely simple, changes from non-creator to creator, and has several attributes that inhere as entities in His essence. Pressed on how all this together is possible, they answer that we know all this is true, yet we do not know how. Ash’arites accept the results of their inquiries into God “without asking how.” There is an epistemological gap between God and us that cannot be bridged. In his books of \(kālām\), al-Rāzī argues for a distinction between “the known” and “the unknown” and that things are possible for God that are simply not possible in His creation. That is a long-standing and time-tested strategy of Sunni Muslim theology in its response to both Mu’tazilism and falsafa.\(^{38}\)

In our study, this difference between an immanent God of \(hikma\) and a more transcendent one of Ash’arite \(kālām\) manifests itself in the different treatment of the principle of sufficient reason in these two kinds of books. In al-Rāzī’s books of \(hikma\) the principle of sufficient reason enjoys universal applicability, down from the lowest creation up to God’s essence. There cannot be at any stage an event that has no sufficient cause. This leads with logical consequence to the conclusion of an absolutely simple and necessary divine essence and of a pre-eternal world.\(^{39}\) In his books of \(kālām\), however, al-Rāzī agrees that the principle of sufficient reason is valid in all of God’s creation and that there are no chance events in it. Yet when it comes to God’s creative activity, the demand for sufficient causes no longer applies. God creates without sufficient reason, or rather: His sufficient reason is of a kind that is inaccessible to humans. Conceptual problems

---

\(^{37}\) See above pp. XXX–XXX.

\(^{38}\) Shihadeh, \(Teleological Ethics\), 33–34.

\(^{39}\) See above pp. xxx–xxx.
are again answered—implicitly, at least—with recourse to the bilā-kağfa argument. God creates without causes, yet how exactly that works cannot be discussed.

Much work needs to be done in order fully to understand the relationship of books of ḥikma and of kalām in Fakhr al-Dīn and the authors who follow him in making this distinction. One important step is to understand the distinction between falsafa and ḥikma that these authors make. In the second part of this book we could show that al-Bayhaqī dates the transition from falsafa to ḥikma to the second quarter of the sixth/twelfth century. Whereas a “faylasūf” was a faithful follower of Avicenna, a “ḥakīm” was someone who had also studied al-Ghazālī’s critique of Avicenna and reacted to that.40 The difference between these two Arabic words for “philosophy” can be expressed in a simple formula: After the fifth/eleventh century “falsafa” referred to Avicenna’s philosophy whereas “ḥikma” was philosophy still based on Avicennism but also informed by al-Ghazālī’s criticism and reacting to it. This is why al-Lawkarī, for instance, who never mentions al-Ghazālī or shows any knowledge of his arguments, produced falsafa, whereas al-Rāzī wrote books of ḥikma. In English, both falsafa and ḥikma translate, of course, into “philosophy.”

Numerous solutions al-Rāzī developed to address problems in ḥikma were also applied in kalām. Passages from his philosophical works frequently appear verbatim in al-Rāzī’s later works of kalām.41 This relationship, however, goes both ways. Solutions in ḥikma are also inspired and motivated by al-Rāzī’s familiarity with problems in kalām. This realization adds a new dimension to an insight that Robert Wisnovsky formulated more than fifteen years ago: Kalām and philosophy were “two strands of thought, which were so intertwined at the conceptual level that it is almost impossible to disentangle them without ripping apart the intricate tapestry of Islamic intellectual history.”42

Driving the innovation in Islamic post-classical philosophy was the confrontation between falsafa and Ash‘arite kalām. Tony Street recently remarked that when it comes to the development of Avicenna’s system of modal syllogistics in the post-classical period, “the main source for dynamism (…) is not a return to Alfarabi and his textual Peripateticism; it’s Ash‘arite theology.”43 Street doesn’t mean, however, that the logic of this period became Ash‘arite. Rather, the reconstruction of Avicenna’s philosophy by thinkers who were familiar with Ash‘arite

40 See above p. XXX.
41 Lammer, “Eternity and Origination,” 445, also observed this for al-Rāzī’s younger contemporary al-Āmidī.
42 Wisnovsky, “One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn,” 100.
43 Street, “Rescher on Arabic Logic,” 314.
theology led to the kind of changes that turned falsafa into hikma. Street’s insight can be applied more generally to the development of philosophy in Islam’s post-classical period: change to Avicennism comes not by re-reading earlier philosophers—or even by a return to Aristotle—but through the confrontation with Ash’arite theology. Again this does not mean that falsafa is turned into Ash’arism. Rather, it means that the major changes that Fakhr al-Dīn introduces to the epistemology and ontology of Avicenna’s philosophical system can be explained by his familiarity with Ash’arite criticism of falsafa. Most if not all of the places where Fakhr al-Dīn intervenes in Avicenna’s philosophical system had already been flagged as problematic by al-Ghazālī in his Tahāfut al-falāsifa.

One of those areas is Avicenna’s epistemology. The Grand Master had assumed that human knowledge consists of forms (ṣuwar) that are identical with their objects. These forms are abstracted from our sense perception in a process that involves several faculties located in the human brain. In Avicenna’s understanding there are “real” forms outside of the human mind that exist even if no human ever perceived them. Al-Ghazālī criticizes Avicenna’s application of epistemological realism to the modalities, here meaning the concepts of necessity and possibility. Whether something is possible or necessary is for al-Ghazālī merely “a judgment of the mind.” For him there is no reference to a real existence of necessity, for instance, in the outside world.\(^{44}\) In my earlier book on al-Ghazālī, I characterized this as a “nominalist criticism of Avicenna.”\(^{45}\) Recent work by İhsan Fazlıoğlu and others has shown that the tendency in the post-classical period clearly goes toward a nominalist concept of knowledge.\(^{46}\) The authors of the sixth/twelfth century are definitely part of that trend. They pick up a remark made by al-Ghazālī in his Tahāfut where, as an alternative to Avicenna’s concept of divine knowledge, he puts forward the idea that God’s knowledge is “a relational state” (ḥāla idāfiyya). In the first chapter of the third part of this book, I trace how al-Ghazālī’s remark led to a novel concept of epistemology in al-Rāzī’s two philosophical summae. Al-Rāzī clearly followed and promoted the nominalist trend.\(^{47}\)

A last word about the difference between al-Rāzī’s two books Eastern Investigations and The Compendium on Philosophy and Logic: A recently discovered catalogue of the library at the court of the Ottoman Sultan Bāyażīd II (reg. 886–918 / 1481–1512) lists around seven thousand book titles and orders them in groups according to their subject matter. The document was

---

\(^{44}\) al-Ghazālī, Tahāfut, 42.2.  
\(^{45}\) Griffel, Philosophical Theology, 211, see also 162–67.  
\(^{47}\) See above pp..xxx–xxx.
compiled in Istanbul during the first years of the sixteenth century and offers additional evidence that Muslim scholars of the post-classical period made a clear distinction between kalām and ḥikma. These two categories exist separately in the catalogue, almost at different ends. 48 Most curious, however, is that the roughly two hundred book-titles on philosophy are divided into two categories, a rather small group of fewer than a dozen books called “Islamic philosophy” (ḥikma islāmiyya) and the bulk of philosophical books, which falls into a category called in Arabic “ḥikma falsafiyya.” This study established that during the sixth/twelfth century in the Islamic east “falsafa” acquired the meaning of “Avicennism.” If we assume that this understanding—or some part of it—was still valid in the sixteenth century, then “ḥikma falsafiyya” is best translated as “Avicennan philosophy” or better: “philosophy related to Avicenna (and his predecessors).”

It is curious to note that al-ʿAṭūfī (d. after 926/1519), the Ottoman royal librarian and compiler of the catalogue, placed al-Rāzī’s two major compendia in two different categories of philosophy. Al-ʿAṭūfī notes the existence of eight copies of The Eastern Investigations and put this book in the large group of “ḥikma falsafiyya.” The catalogue also lists four copies of The Compendium on Philosophy and Logic, but these are put into the much smaller group of books on “Islamic philosophy.” 49 When it comes to the philosophical conclusions, however, we find no major differences between the two books. The Eastern Investigations is much more elaborate and much longer than The Compendium. In both books, however, al-Rāzī teaches the world’s pre-eternity and God’s necessity “in all His aspects,” denying free will, for instance. He also argues for the same kind of improvements to Avicennan philosophy, consisting mainly in a more nominalist epistemology and in a Deity that has a quiddity which is distinct from Its pure existence. If there is any difference between the two books, it is limited to the way they present these teachings: The Eastern Investigations is straightforwardly philosophical and does not mention how things are done in other disciplines, such as kalām. Here, The Compendium on Philosophy and Logic differs and on occasion reminds it readers that the arguments it presents are not valid in the field of kalām. 50 It also includes many skeptical remarks about the conclusions in ḥikma that cannot be found in The Eastern Investigations. This difference in presentation might have led to differences in how the books were perceived and used. The Eastern Investigations

48 MS Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, MS Török F. 59, pp. 56–68 and 339–63. See the facsimile reproduction of the manuscript in the second volume of Treasures of Knowledge.

49 MS Budapest, Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, MS Török F. 59, pp. 339–40, 356–57, 360. See also the list of authors and their books mentioned in the ḥikma section of this catalogue in Gutas, “Philosophical Manuscripts: Two Alternative Philosophies,” 915, 929.

50 See above p. xxx.
may have been viewed as part of the research literature that deals with “Avicennan philosophy” most broadly understood, whereas frequent comparisons with kalām and its overall much more cautious nature may have qualified The Compendium on Philosophy and Logic as a book on philosophy that could be used in a more distinctly “Islamic” context, such as madrasa education in Islamic theology.

The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in the Islamic East During the Sixth/Twelfth Century

Al-Ghazālī, however, was not the only forerunner of Fakhr al-Dīn in the formation of post-classical philosophy during the sixth/twelfth century. Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. c. 560/1165) was at least of equal importance. Until now he was an elusive member of the cast of philosophers in the Islamic east, hard to integrate into the narrative of its developments. In this study I suggest that he was a follower of al-Ghazālī, who responded to much of the latter’s criticism of Avicenna, but was unaffected by his Ash’arite agenda. Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī closeness to al-Ghazālī had been observed before, but the impact the latter had on his agenda has thus far been missed. Abū l-Barakāt combination of al-Ghazālī’s critical attitude together with a commitment to the tradition of philosophy makes him the re- animator of philosophy in the mid-sixth/twelfth century. Here, Abū l-Barakāt’s background as a philosophically self-taught Jew who did not go through the institutions of Muslim higher education is a crucial factor. He had no major teacher in philosophy and was not committed to a school. He picked up philosophy as a tradition that existed mainly in books. His attitude became the model for Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s approach in his own books of philosophy. Abū l-Barakāt fully accepted al-Ghazālī’s critique that Avicenna’s metaphysics is, despite the philosopher’s claims, not demonstrative. He introduced the “dialectical turn” into Islamic philosophy without which its post-classical tradition could have never formed. Abū l-Barakāt gives up on the ideal of apodeixis and demonstration in philosophy and develops a new method, referred to as “careful consideration” (i’tibār). Al-Baghdādī was also the first philosopher to engage in a widespread comparison of arguments from kalām with those developed in falsafa and who showed hardly any pre-determined notion about which one to follow. In that sense and in many others, Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī’s Carefully Considered Book

52 See above pp. XXX–XXX.
(al-Kitāb al-Mu’tabar) was a model for al-Rāzī, a text that should be viewed as the earliest work of post-classical philosophy in Islam.

Compared to Abū I-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, those who preceded him as philosophers in the first half of the sixth/twelfth century are far less important. Many, such as al-Lawkarī (d. after 503/1109), ‘Umar al-Khayyām (d. 517/1123–24), or ‘Umar ibn Sauhān al-Sāwī (d. c. 540/1145) were faithful followers of Avicenna who hardly reacted to al-Ghazālī’s criticism. Among the philosophers before Abū I-Barakāt only Taj al-Dīn al-Shahrastānī (d. 548/1153) reached a comparable level of critical engagement with Avicenna. Al-Shahrastānī’s critique, however, was inspired by his clandestine commitment to Ismā’īlīte theology which did not find an immediate successor in the sixth/twelfth century.

Around the middle of the 6th/12th century, there were two philosophers in Transoxania who were Ghazalians in the sense that they followed al-Ghazālī in his criticism of falsafa and prioritized revelation wherever they believed that falsafa came to non-apodictic conclusions. These were Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas‘ūdī (d. after 582/1186) and Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī (d. c. 590/1194). Both were heavily influenced by the developments in Abū I-Barakāt al-Baghdādī’s Carefully Considered Book. Al-Mas‘ūdī is the more interesting of the two because he went beyond mere criticism of Avicenna and tried to improve the latter’s philosophy. This is clear in his Inquiries and Doubts on Pointers and Reminders (al-Mabāḥith wa-l-shukūk ʿalā kitāb al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbiḥāt) and in his shorter commentary to Avicenna’s The Glistering Homily (al-Khuṭba al-gharrā). These two books are the earliest extant examples of the genre of philosophical commentary in Islam. I try to show how in the commentary on The Glistering Homily, al-Mas‘ūdī moves from a mere report of the falāsīfa’s teachings to an attitude that tries to improve Avicenna.53 These two poles—meaning report and improvement—together with criticism of Avicenna’s teachings form a triangle in whose center books of hikma developed during the sixth/twelfth century in the Islamic east. Al-Mas‘ūdī’s Commentary on the Glistering Homily showcases how the genre of hikma starts from al-Ghazālī’s Doctrines of the Philosophers (Maqāsid al-falāsīfa) and moves toward fully developed manifestations such as al-Rāzī’s two major philosophical works The Eastern Investigations and The Compendium.54

In the second half of the sixth/twelfth century, the Ghazalian attitude to falsafa led to a counter-reaction. With Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī (d. c. 588/1192) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī there emerged two highly influential philosophers who departed from Ghazalism even if

53 See above pp. XXX–XXX.
54 See above pp. XXX–XXX.
both were still heavily influence by the thought of al-Ghazālī. Al-Suhrawardī’s ōeuvre will become the starting point of iṣhrāqī philosophy in Islam. Its founding, however, should be places into the second half of the seventh/thirteenth century with the works of Ibn Kammūna (d. 683/1284) and Shams al-Dīn al-Shahrazūrī (d. after 687/1288). Hence, the proper development of a “philosophy of iṣhrāq” falls outside the scope of this history. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s contribution to philosophy had a much more immediate effect and established a new kind of engagement with the thought of Avicenna and al-Ghazālī.

Fakhr al-Dīn regarded Ghazalism as a methodological mistake and polemicized against it. It has already been said that in his own approach to philosophy, Fakhr al-Dīn followed Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī and like him he saw a need to engage with philosophy’s full tradition instead of only the demonstrative claims of Avicenna. Refuting Avicenna’s argument for the eternity of the world, for instance, makes no good philosophy, he hurled at Ibn Ghaylān.55 While sympathetic to the goals of the Ghazalians, he felt their approach was too limited. Robert Wisnovsky remarked that for al-Rāzī it was “not good enough if you happen to be right: you have to be right for the right reasons.”56

In the introduction to his earliest work on philosophy The Eastern Investigations, al-Rāzī complains about two groups of scholars, those follow “the predecessors” slavishly and those who think they are smarter than “the authorities among the philosophers” and criticize them in everything they say.57 With the latter, he means the Ghazalians, and particularly Ibn Ghaylān with his broad attacks on Avicenna. While Fakhr al-Dīn has a much more comprehensive understanding of philosophy than Ibn Ghaylān and al-Masʿūdī, his focus remains directed at Avicenna’s philosophical system. Avicenna is “the predecessor” as well as “authority” whom some follow slavishly and others attack relentlessly. Fakhr al-Dīn’s own philosophy amounts to a sympathetic reform of the Avicennan philosophical system. He defended some of Avicenna’s argument against the attacks of the Ghazalians but also developed his own critique. His two major philosophical summae are, together with his Commentary on Pointers and Reminders the earliest examples of fully developed, mature books of post-classical philosophy in Islam.

Where the works of al-Ghazālī, al-Masʿūdī, Ibn Ghaylān, and Abū l-Barakāt had brought the traditions of philosophy and kalām closer together, Fakhr al-Dīn’s two early summae on ḥikma initiated a new division. The two discourses of falsafa and kalām had always been committed to different, if overlapping, goals and different methods. Falsafa was “the open-ended

55 See above p. xxx.
57 See above p. XXX.
rational investigation of all reality” and hence committed to the force of the better argument.\textsuperscript{58} While it may have been guided by religious consideration to offer philosophical explanations of phenomena such as prophecy or God’s nature, falsafa did not prioritize revelation over any other source of knowledge. The discourse of kalām was equally committed to the strength of the better argument, yet at the same time it gave priority to arguments and information that come from revelation. Al-Ghazālī’s “Rule of Allegorical Interpretation” (qānūn al-ta ’wīl) illustrates this by allowing deviation from the literary sense (zāhir) of the Qur’an only if an apodictical argument proves its impossibility.\textsuperscript{59} In his works on kalām and Qur’an interpretation, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fully endorsed Al-Ghazālī’s rule.\textsuperscript{60} In his books on ḥikma, however, he disregards revelation as a relevant source of knowledge. Although there is a significant degree of overlap, kalām and ḥikma follow each its own method and develop its own type of rationality. The chapter in this book on the principle of sufficient reason shows how certain arguments that al-Rāzī makes in his works of kalām are inadmissible in his books of ḥikma.\textsuperscript{61} Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī developed ḥikma and kalām as two distinct academic discourses that argue for different sets of teachings. Future work on al-Rāzī’s œuvre must take this into account. We can no longer maintain—as many contributions in the past have—that there exists only one set of cohesive teachings in all of Fakhr al-Dīn’s texts.

What Was Philosophy in Islam’s Post-Classical Period?

My suggestion that there were two distinct discourses of ḥikma and kalām during the post-classical period of Islam is not in line with what is currently the most widespread interpretation of the relationship between philosophy and Islamic theology in this period. According to that, the tradition of philosophy in Islam—usually identified as falsafa—became part of the discourse of kalām. The prevailing model of how falsafa and kalām reacted to one another is still of a fairly recent date and owes much to Abdelhamid I. Sabra’s 1987-article “The Appropriation and Subsequent Naturalization of Greek Sciences in Medieval Islam,” mentioned in the introduction of this book.\textsuperscript{62} Whereas earlier Western scholars from the generation of Ignác Goldziher (1850–1921) taught that the ancient sciences (al- ‘ulūm al-awā ’īl) were contested among the scholars of

\textsuperscript{58} Gutas, “Avicenna and After: The Development of Paraphilosophy,” 43.

\textsuperscript{59} On this rule see Griffel, Philosophical Theology, 111–16.

\textsuperscript{60} Griffel, “Al-Ghazālī at His Most Rationalist,” 89–92.

\textsuperscript{61} See above pp. XXX–XXX.

\textsuperscript{62} See above pp. XXX.
Islam and finally disappeared, Sabra developed a different explanation for why the Greek sciences, and among them philosophy, were from a certain point in time no longer visible. According to him it is not the ancient sciences that had disappeared, but rather their foreignness. The dichotomy between the “sciences of the predecessors” (ʿulūm al-awāʾil)—meaning the Greek sciences—and “properly” Islamic sciences dissolved because the latter were integrated into the former.

The idea that falsafa was absorbed into kalām during Islam’s post-classical period, and as a result of this process disappeared as an independent sciences in Islamic societies has been widely expressed in publications of the past twenty years. In 2005, Sajjad H. Rizvi, for instance, spoke for many when in the Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy he wrote:

[A]-Ghazālī’s critique and condemnation of Neoplatonized Aristotelianism (falsafa) (...) did effect (...) a shift in both the conception of philosophy and the context of philosophical inquiry: falsafa was absorbed into the sophisticated philosophical theology that was kalām, (...)  

In Islam’s classical period, philosophy was falsafa. What was new during the post-classical period, scholars now argue, is that kalām should also be counted among the disciplines that make up philosophy. In a programmatic article about the abundance of philosophical texts in Islam’s post-classical period, published in 2004, Robert Wisnovsky suggested thinking “of post-classical falsafa and kalām as together constituting Islamic philosophy.” In 2013, Wisnovsky added the observation that, “Arabic philosophical production, when understood as also encompassing post-Avicennian kalām texts and commentaries, in fact expanded dramatically following the classical period.”

The now widespread notion of the integration of falsafa into kalām is also rooted in a more general understanding of an Islamic syncretism of all or at least most of the rational sciences. The latter idea was probably first expressed by Shlomo Pines, who already in 1937 wrote that Islamic philosophy distinguishes itself from European philosophy by the degree to which it integrated influences from various other philosophical traditions. This led to greater stability, Pines observed, which was due to

---

63 Goldziher, “Stellung der alten islamischen Orthodoxie zu den antiken Wissenschaften.”
the increasing syncretism of Islamic philosophy: having been subjected to various Oriental, Persian and Indian influences, Islamic civilization, even at the outset, included a larger number of elements of diverse origins than the European.\footnote{Pines, “Some Problems of Islamic Philosophy,” 80}

The integration of these diverse elements happened mostly in Islam’s classical period where it created different Arabic and Islamic discourses. The Arabic discourse of falsafa, for instance, developed out of the integration of Greek philosophy. In the post-classical period, so Pines, these different Arabic and Islamic discourses converged:

The trend towards syncretism reaches its culmination in the works of Fakhr ad-Dîn, Îji, Jurjâni, Šadr ad-Dîn ash-Shirâzî and others, which embrace Kalâm and Falsafa, Šûfism and, sometimes, ǧîkma ishrâqiyya.\footnote{Ibid.}

In the introduction of my 2009-book on al-Ghazâlî, I quote Pines’ analysis approvingly and I still believe that it holds true.\footnote{Griffel, Al-Ghazâlî’s Philosophical Theology, 6.} I also believe that Wisnovsky and Rizvi —and with them many of my colleagues—are right to argue that after Avicenna and al-Ghazâlî, kalâm became a philosophical discipline. Let me be clear: The fact that I suggest the formation of two distinct discourses of ǧîkma and kalâm in post-classical Islam does not mean that there was not also, parallel to this development, an integration of philosophical arguments and methods into kalâm. I believe that there was a growing together of philosophy and kalâm. When it comes to identifying philosophy in Islam’s post-classical period, we should include both ǧîkma and kalâm.

The question of what philosophy was in the Islamic world has always been a difficult issue, marred by the fact that unlike in the West there was no institutional distinction between philosophy and its adjacent rational disciplines. In the eleventh and twelfth century, European universities began with a division into two faculties, the lower artes faculty that taught the techniques of argumentation and of scientific inquiry, and the higher faculty of theology—available only to students who had mastered the artes. Over the centuries, this basic division became much more complex but the fact remains that in Europe there was always an institution devoted to the study of philosophy—most often the Faculty of Philosophy at a university.
Whatever philosophy was could be established by looking at that institution to see what kind of thought it promoted and what kind of texts it studied.

Such an institutional place did not exist in the Islamic world making determinations of what philosophy was much more fluid. We saw in this study that translations of Greek words such as falsafa give a mistaken impression of what philosophy was in the Islamic world. The field of Islamic intellectual history is currently engaged in a debate about the existence of philosophy in the different centuries of Islamic history, and if so, where it can be located. Wider interpretations of philosophy as they are put forward in Peter Adamson’s project of a History of Philosophy Without Any Gaps, for instance, clash with much narrower ones, such as that of Dimitri Gutas. For the latter, there was hardly any philosophy during Islam’s post-classical period but rather “paraphilosophy,” meaning something that appears to be philosophy or science, while in reality it was merely theology, or rather “theologizing.”

A recent milestone in the field of Islamic intellectual history is the 2012-publication of the first volume of Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie—Philosophie in der islamischen Welt, with its English translation of 2017. Its lead-editor Ulrich Rudolph defines philosophy as a distinct form of rationality which appears everywhere, or may appear everywhere. If one wanted to define its peculiar characteristics, one could say that it consists in a fundamental reflection on the structures of thought and being (...) as well as structures of action.

So defined, philosophy is understood as contributions to the three disciplines of epistemology, ontology, and ethics. In his review of the volume, Gregor Schwarb welcomes this definition of philosophy as not cultural specific but also asks why the tradition of Mu’tazilite kalām during the

---

70 See above pp. XXX–XXX.
71 Adamson, Philosophy in the Islamic World, and his podcasts, available on https://historyofphilosophy.net/.
72 Gutas, “Avicenna and After. The Development of Paraphilosophy,” 43. Gutas, however, is unaware of the existence of books of ḥikma, such as al-Rāzi’s two summae that continue Ibn Sīnā’s intellectual project. He believes that after Ibn Sīnā, “philosophy proper just dies out, and henceforth philosophy is discussed only as a historical body of work, mainly the works of Avicenna, with no contemporary representative of the discipline.” See Gutas “Philosophical Manuscripts: Two Alternative Philosophies,” 913 (emphasis in the original).
classical period is left out? Given that it makes vital contributions to epistemology, ontology, and ethics, the whole tradition of kalām from its inception in the second/eighth century should become part of the history of philosophy in Islam. Its often used strategy of justifying its rationally established finding with references to revelation should not distract from the fact that kalām was at its core a rationalist enterprise.  

Schwarb’s objection highlights that it is not sufficient to define philosophy—as Rudolph attempts to do—by its subject matter, combined with a specification of its method (“form of rationality”). There is indeed more at play when we use the word “philosophy,” namely an idea about a certain tradition. That Socrates and Plato have always been accepted as core members of that tradition while their contemporaries the Sophists were not is, from the point of view of subject matter and even of method, arbitrary. It is, however, part of a tradition that has evolved over centuries and millennia. Here, the field of Islamic intellectual history might learn from parallel debates about what “Islam” is. As early as 1986, the anthropologist Talal Asad suggested that Islam “should be approached as a discursive tradition that connects variously with the formation of moral selves, the manipulation of populations, and the production of appropriate knowledges.” What may inspire us is the idea of a “discursive tradition” that relates conceptually to a past and a future through present practices. “An Islamic discursive tradition,” so Asad, “is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with references to a particular Islamic practice in the past.” If one replaces all references to “Islam” in this quote with “philosophy” one might indeed arrive at a viable characterization of philosophy, at least when it comes to philosophy in Islam. Such a definition of philosophy is, like that of Rudolph, not culture-specific, at least not in cultures that connect themselves to an existing philosophical tradition, such as the Greek. The Islamic philosophical tradition certainly does that.

The difference between this Rudolph’s definition and, I would argue, its benefit is that it requires a volitional act to be part of that tradition. Just as Asad argues that not everything that Muslims say and do belongs to an Islamic discursive tradition, so not every rational argument and every rationalist thinker is part of the philosophical tradition in Islam. She or he has to want to make a contribution to that tradition by engaging with its past manifestations. Asad, for instance, insists on some reference to a normative Islamic discourse. Similarly, one would require a philosopher to make some kind of reference to the discursive tradition of philosophy. Now, in

76 Ibid. 20.
falsafa those references are abundant. Likewise, post-classical hikma and kalām engage closely with Avicenna and other participants of a philosophical discursive tradition and hence should both be regarded as a part of philosophy. Muʿtazilite kalām of the classical period, however, makes despite its rationalist character no attempt to reference works or arguments of the philosophical tradition. This remains true even in cases where it is influenced by Greek philosophical thought. The influence of Stoic arguments on early kalām has been noted for decades and yet there is not a single reference in classical works of kalām to Stoic thought or Stoic thinkers. Authors of kalām in Islam’s classical period did not express any desire to be part of philosophy’s discursive tradition. Hence one could even argue that it would be unjust to declare them posthumously to participants of a tradition they wanted to have nothing to do with.

Where does this leave us with the question of what philosophy was in Islam’s post-classical period? The idea of philosophy as a discursive tradition justifies currently prevalent notions that much of kalām after al-Ghazālī was part of philosophy in Islam. Al-Ghazālī’s Tahāfut al-falāsifah was the first work in the genre of kalām that makes extensive references to a discursive tradition of philosophy and consciously wishes to contribute to it. It was followed by many other books of kalām that do the same, even if they do not come even remotely close to the extent of the Tahāfut’s engagement or its impact on the philosophical tradition. If these books wish to refute Avicenna and by doing so refer to him or others members of the philosophical tradition, if they quote their works or their arguments and engage with them, then we are dealing with books of philosophy. There is still a question of quantity, I would argue, because not every text that has a one-line reference to Avicenna should be counted as part of the discursive tradition of philosophy. The general idea however should be clear, and details can be argued over with concrete examples at hand.

Why bother, some might say, over labels such as philosopher or theologian? If this distinction did not exist in Islamic intellectual traditions the way it existed in the West, then we can easily dispense with such terms. Why not simply call these people ḫukamāʾ and mutakallimūn and explain to our students what that means? That position is, of course, viable, particularly in academic discourse. In fact, it is probably the most accurate position to take toward our students and our academic audience. It fails, however, whenever we are asked to tell a non-academic audience that there was philosophy in Islam after 1200. Rejecting the notion that philosophy disappeared in Islam during the sixth/twelfth century has implications that must not be underestimated. The effects of the opposite view are tangible in ways that touch the lives of

77 For the Stoic influence on kalām see, e. g. van Ess, “The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology,” 35–50.
many today. Western research about philosophy in Islam has been used to justify colonialism, imperialism, and cultural hegemony. It plays a role in current debates about whether Turkey, for instance, should be admitted to the European Union or in discussions about the historical roots of the economical imbalance between North and South. How we speak credibly and convincingly about non-Western traditions of philosophy has far-flung repercussions on our collective perception of them and should be a matter of much concern in the field of Islamic Studies. This time we should get it right!