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Ash‘arism meets Avicennism: Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī’s Doctrine of Creation

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Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD

2017

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Abstract

It is now broadly recognised that, far from extinguishing the tradition of *falsafa* in the Islamic world, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), in his thoroughgoing critique of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics, actually inaugurated an era of greater interaction between *falsafa* and *kalām*. Indeed, post-Avicennan Ash‘arism was profoundly influenced by the legacy of Avicennism. Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233) is one post-Avicennan Ash‘arī versed in both traditions whose works represent their convergence. Primarily known for his jurisprudence, al-Āmidī's theological and philosophical works have not received due attention. This thesis takes the issue of the world's creation – traditionally a site of contention between Muslim philosophers and theologians – and considers how al-Āmidī's thought reflects the confluence of his influences.

It is argued that the philosophers' and theologians' respective doctrines of creation are embedded in contrasting frameworks rooted in distinctive worldviews. On the one hand, Ibn Sīnā's metaphysical distinction between the possible and necessary of existence is the basis of his conception of the world's pre-eternal emanation. On the other, for the *mutakallimūn*, the physical theoretical framework of atomism bolsters their view that God created the world from nothing, since by that framework, the temporal finitude of existents aside from God is proven.

The thesis therefore provides (in Chapter 1) a biography and overview of al-Āmidī's works, then (in Chapter 2) explains the aforementioned frameworks for the discussion of creation, before devoting a chapter each (Chapters 3 and 4) to al-Āmidī's reception of each framework, and finally studying (in Chapter 5) his own doctrine of creation. It emerges that al-Āmidī begins a committed Avicennist, before developing, by stages, a strong reaction to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's (d. 606/1210) integration of *falsafa* with *kalām*. The intellectual challenges he faces in incorporating Avicennism's most compelling theories without compromising core Ash‘arī beliefs indicate some of the key issues facing theologians of his era.

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Completing the thesis has been a true family effort, and so I thank: my parents and sisters, for unconditional encouragement, Yima and Baba, without whose care this would not have been possible, and my husband and children, who have borne the burden with me. Finally, the journey could never have started without God's help, nor could I have travelled a day without Him.

Transliteration

This thesis uses the following transliteration conventions:

ء	,	ٻ	ڙ
ا	â	ڦ	'
ٻ	b	ڦ	gh
ڦ	t	ڻ	f
ڻ	th	ڽ	q
ڇ	j	ڻ	k
ڻ	ڻ	ڻ	l
ڻ	kh	ڻ	m
ڏ	d	ڻ	n
ڏ	dh	ڻ	h
ڙ	r	ڙ	w/ ū
ڙ	z	ڙ	y/ī
س	s	ڻ	a
ش	sh	ڻ	u
ص	ڻ	ڻ	i
ڻ	ڻ	ڻ	aw
ٻ	ڻ	ڻ	ay

Additionally:

- Grammatical case endings are not represented in transliteration, except where possessive pronouns are added (so, *jawābu*).
- The *lām* of the definite article is always written, even before *shamsī* letters.
- In names, the *hamzat al-waṣl* is represented by dropping the initial 'a'. So *Abū l-Ḥusayn* (and not *Abū al-Ḥusayn*). This is also the case where conjunctions occur in an *idāfa* construction.
- The *tā' marbūṭa* is rendered as a final *a* (and not *ah*). So *sunna* and not *sunnah*. In *idāfa* constructions, the *tā' marbūṭa* is represented as *at*.

Translations are my own unless otherwise stated; Marmura's and McGinnis' translations of (respectively) the *Ilāhiyyāt* and the *Tabī'iyyāt* of Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-Shifā'* were frequently consulted.

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Introduction

Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233), known primarily for his talent as a jurisprudent, is also commonly recognised, and still revered among some modern Muslims, as an Ash‘arī theologian of great significance. Lesser known is his skill as an exponent of *falsafa*. Scholars of the continuing tradition of Avicennan philosophy in the post-Avicennan Islamic world have noted his contribution in this field in the form of his response to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s (d. 606/1210) commentary on Ibn Sīnā’s (d. 428/1037) *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*. Indeed, on the basis of his authorship of *Kashf al-tamwīhāt fī sharḥ al-īshārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, Gutas classes al-Āmidī as a ‘mainstream Avicennist’.¹ Yet al-Āmidī’s earliest work of *falsafa*, *al-Nūr al-bāhir fī l-hikam al-zawāhir*, is still barely known. The impetus for this thesis is the puzzle represented by al-Āmidī’s authorship of works of both Ash‘arī *kalām* and Avicennan *falsafa*. This is a puzzle precisely because of how little we yet understand of the complex interactions between these traditions in the post-Ghazālian Muslim world, traditions whose relationship has historically been presumed to be essentially inimical.

What is understood – this much has been broadly acknowledged for the past few decades – is that, far from somehow extinguishing the tradition of *falsafa* in the Islamic world, al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), in his thoroughgoing critique of the methods and doctrines of that tradition (and especially of Ibn Sīnā’s metaphysics), actually inaugurated an era of greater interaction between the traditions. And thanks to the flurry of scholarly activity provoked partly by Gutas’ two 2002 seminal papers on the Arabic-language philosophical output of the 13th century, and its maturation into a distinct field of Islamic studies, it is increasingly clear that post-Avicennan Ash‘arism was profoundly influenced by the legacy of Avicennism.² The philosophical and

¹ Gutas, ‘The Study of Arabic Philosophy’, 7. I will argue that this is based on a misreading of the objective of that work.

² Gutas, ‘The Study of Arabic Philosophy’ and ‘The Heritage of Avicenna’. Early contributions include Shihadeh’s 2005 paper, in which he argues that al-Rāzī was the first theologian to effect a genuine integration of philosophical methods into theological discourse (Shihadeh, ‘From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī’). Endress further demonstrated al-Rāzī’s pivotal role in bringing Ibn Sīnā’s teachings into the madrasa (Endress, ‘Reading Avicenna’). Brentjes, focussing on patronage of the philosophical sciences, proves that Avicennan philosophy became an accepted part of intellectual life across the Middle East (Brentjes, ‘Courtly Patronage’ and ‘Orthodoxy’); Eichner draws attention to the similarity

theological works of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī have been recognised for their significance in this general context by a number of scholars, but are yet to receive any extended analysis in this regard.³ Whilst one book length study of al-Āmidī's thought exists (and has been a useful source for the present study), it treats al-Āmidī's works of *kalām* to the exclusion of his philosophical works.⁴ In a general sense, the figure of al-Āmidī merits further study simply because his works belong to the intellectual history of this still under-researched but highly significant period. The diversity of his intellectual legacy, spanning, as it does, both of the major intellectual traditions of the Islamic world, furthermore makes him an ideal candidate for enhancing our understanding of how these traditions came to interact in this period. Al-Āmidī's thought also demands more focused attention on the basis of its impact on the course of Islamic theology, such as its well-established influence on the *Mawāqif* of ‘Adūd al-Dīn al-Ījī (d. 756/1355), itself a work of lasting importance for Islamic theological discourse through several centuries.⁵ And yet, I have already alluded to the fact that al-Āmidī's works of philosophy, most of which remain unedited, have barely been studied. Nor has the influence of his philosophical background on his works of theology received sustained attention.

between Ash‘arī and philosophical summae in the post-Avicennan period (Eichner, ‘Dissolving the Unity’). Each of these scholars also point to further research needed into the developing *falsafa-kalām* dynamic. Specific aspects of the Avicennan heritage have also been subject to serious research. Both Shihadeh and Wisnovsky treat the long tradition of commentary on Ibn Sīnā’s *Ishārāt* (Shihadeh, ‘Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Commentary’; Wisnovsky, ‘Avicennism and Exegetical Practices’). Others focus on paradigmatic philosophical questions (e.g. Eichner, ‘Essence and Existence’). Still others, on individuals important in the reception of Avicennan philosophy; Janssens, for instance, on two twelfth-century Avicennists (in Janssens, ‘al-Lawkari’s Reception’ and ‘Bahmanyār Ibn Marzabān’); Shihadeh has highlighted individuals including Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī and al-Mas‘ūdī (Shihadeh, ‘A Post-Ghazālian Critic’ and *Doubts*).

³ See for instance, Gutas, ‘The Study of Arabic Philosophy’, 7; Endress, ‘Reading Avicenna’, 408–410, where he characterises al-Āmidī as metacritic of al-Rāzī; Eichner, ‘The Post-Avicennan Philosophical Tradition’, 94–95, where she briefly considers the structures of two of al-Āmidī’s works of philosophy; Arif, ‘Al-Āmidī’s Reception of Ibn Sīnā’, on *al-Nūr al-Bāhir*. The relative lack of attention to al-Āmidī is partly due to the fact that his philosophical works have only recently become available.

⁴ Al-Shāfi‘ī, al-Āmidī. Weiss treats aspects of al-Āmidī’s theology pertinent to his jurisprudence in his study of al-Āmidī’s legal method (Weiss, *The Search*, Chapter 1). Shorter studies are Endress, ‘Die Dreifache Ancilla’, which treats al-Āmidī’s use of logic in his *Abkār al-aṣfār*; Janssens, ‘al-Āmidī and his Integration’, which concentrates on his doctrines of the soul and of the resurrection. The editors of al-Āmidī’s two works of *kalām* also provide useful studies of his life, works, and theological method.

⁵ See van Ess, *Die Erkenntnislehre*, 478–9 where he collates references from the *Mawāqif* which demonstrate the influence of al-Āmidī’s *Abkār*; Weiss, ‘al-Ījī’, 398.

The overarching objective of this thesis is to conduct a contextualising investigation of the encounter of philosophy and theology in the works of al-Āmidī, with the goal of contributing to our knowledge of this significant period of Islamic intellectual history. This objective subsumes several more specific aims. One is to ascertain the progression of al-Āmidī's intellectual commitments by considering the broad intellectual project which informs each of his works of theology and philosophy. Secondly, the thesis aims to establish the nature and extent of the Avicennan influence on al-Āmidī's thought, through a study of his adoption (or rejection) of Ibn Sīnā's philosophical theories, arguments and methods. The reason for the focus on Avicennan philosophy is that the *Nūr* indicates that it is Ibn Sīnā's thought which is the primary philosophical influence on al-Āmidī.⁶ A third major focus is the extent to which al-Āmidī endorses the methods and doctrines of classical Ash'arism, and the extent and character of departures he makes in this regard. This is significant because of the evolutions we know to have been occurring within the Ash'arī tradition in this period, the character of which needs more focused scholarly attention. Thus, at the background of each of these aims is the important comparative task of relating al-Āmidī's integrations of philosophy and theology to those of other post-Avicennan Ash'arīs of the 12th and 13th centuries. The purpose of this is to better understand the spectrum of post-Avicennan philosophical theology, and al-Āmidī's situation along that spectrum.

The method I have chosen for conducting the investigation summarised by these objectives is to study a particular topic in al-Āmidī's thought, since it is only through focused analysis of a specific issue that these broader questions can be thoroughly investigated. The thesis therefore finds its focus in the study of the major theological issue of the creation of the world. The topic has been selected because of its traditionally highly contentious status as a topic of debate between the philosophers and theologians of the Islamic world. In the creation debate, two

⁶ It is also more generally the case that Ibn Sīnā's works, though they built on the thought of previous Muslim philosophers including al-Farābī (d. 339/950), came to dominate the tradition of *falsafa* and were the primary focus of subsequent responses to the tradition. Michot, reflecting on Ibn Sīnā's towering significance, writes that 'a whole spectrum of positions... developed in relation to [Ibn Sīna] - totally or partly positive, mixed and hybrid, partly or totally negative' (Michot, '*al-Nukat wa-l-fawā'id*', 110).

antithetical visions of the God-world relationship clash: on the one hand, the philosophical theory of an emanated, pre-eternal world, on the other, the classical theological belief in the creation of the world from nothing by a voluntary creator. Analysis of al-Āmidī's discussions of the topic therefore promises to provide insight into his position in relation to each tradition, and with regard to his own conception of the relationship between the two traditions.

The particular doctrines of creation espoused by the philosophers and theologians respectively are, in fact, pinnacles of two worldviews fundamentally alien to one another. In Ibn Sīnā's conception, God's creation of the world is understood as the sheer necessity of his existence emanating existence onto all else. God thus understood may be seen as remote from the intricate, particular, processes of creation despite his unique efficacy in their occurrence. By contrast, the basic worldview of the Ash'arī theologians has God as a personal deity intimately involved, despite his absolute superiority, in the workings of the created order which He brought into being at a particular moment in time according to his will. These contrasting worldviews are developed within equally contrasting philosophical systems. The two traditions have their own approaches to defining the objectives of their investigations; to the ordering of topics within their respective investigations; to the methods of investigation pursued; and so on. This means that the question of how the world came to exist is pursued in different problem contexts, and using different investigatory methods, within each tradition. Therefore, analysis of al-Āmidī's thought on creation in relation to his dual heritage is more complex than a straightforward assessment of the opinion he holds on how the world came to be. This fact is reflected in the structure of this thesis.

In Chapter 1, I provide a biographical account of al-Āmidī, along with a chronology of his works of theology and philosophy. In Chapter 2, I present the two main conceptions of causation which meet in al-Āmidī's discussions of creation. I show how these derive from the distinct worldviews just mentioned, and that they are developed within very different philosophical frames of reference. On the one hand, Ibn Sīnā's understanding of God's production of the world by his existence alone is established within the metaphysical context of the analysis of the two categories of existent, necessary and possible. On the other, for classical Ash'arī

theologians, the world's creation was primarily proven within the physical theoretical context of discussion of the world's constituents. This is because of the way in which the theologians exhaustively dichotomised existents into the immaterial and eternal (God) and the material and impermanent (the world). Since all existents aside from God were believed to be utterly material, the establishment of the world's reliance on a cause was effected through demonstration of the finitude of the material world.⁷

The delineation of these two intellectual frames of reference in Chapter 2 informs the analysis of the subsequent two chapters. In Chapter 3, I treat al-Āmidī's reception of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics, specifically, his notion of the dichotomy between necessary and possible existents. A variety of Ibn Sīnā's works are considered, although it will become clear that his *Shifā'* and *Ishārāt* represent his most significant and influential contributions in this regard. This chapter provides an opportunity to investigate the aforementioned question of the nature and extent of the Avicennan influence on al-Āmidī's thought, a major component of the overarching objective of the thesis. Specifically, the analysis will concern the extent of al-Āmidī's adoption of Ibn Sīnā's distinction between the possible and necessary of existence. This includes investigation of al-Āmidī's perspectives on the nature of possibility, the meaning of God's being 'necessary of existence', and on the relationship between the possible and necessary of existence, specifically with regard to how possible existents are caused. The relevant classical *kalām* parallels for the discussion of such issues will be the essential context for the investigations here.

In Chapter 4, the thesis turns to focus on al-Āmidī's physical theory and its background in the tradition of his theological school. This allows for an investigation of the second major question posed by the thesis, namely, concerning the legacy of classical Ash'arism in al-Āmidī's thought. The investigation will focus on the extent to which al-Āmidī endorses classical Ash'arī physical theory, both in terms of his adherence to the theories themselves, and with regard to the function of physical theory within the broader theological project. Any departures from Ash'arī

⁷ My claim that the primary paradigm for classical Ash'arī discussions of creation is their physical theory is qualified in Chapter 2.

atomism will be qualified and their significance analysed. The thought of other post-classical Ash‘arīs on the same theories will be an ever-present context to the analysis.

The findings of Chapters 3 and 4 inform the final chapter, where I consider al-Āmidī’s doctrine of creation. Here, the central question of the thesis concerning the relationship between Avicennism and Ash‘arism in al-Āmidī’s thought is investigated. I will consider the respective relevance of the Avicennan metaphysical ideas discussed in Chapter 3, and of the physical theories treated in Chapter 4 for al-Āmidī’s understanding of the relationship between God and the world. The chapter will interrogate al-Āmidī’s position on the question of the world’s origins in each of his works of *falsafa* and *kalām*, how he establishes his positions in relation to the metaphysical and physical paradigms of his context, and what this tells us about the meeting of the diverse influences on his thought. Again, the study will contextualise al-Āmidī’s views, especially in relation to al-Rāzī’s discussions of creation, with the objective of placing al-Āmidī within his immediate intellectual context. This will be followed by broader conclusions.

The thesis is thus structured around a fundamental contrast between the two intellectual paradigms of Avicennism and Ash‘arism concerning their understandings of the nature of creation, rooted in distinct worldviews. However, it is true to say that it is what the two traditions have in common which makes their encounter most important. In the course of my investigations it will become clear that Ibn Sīnā, like the al-Ash‘arīs, is intent on demonstrating the absolute transcendence and superiority of God as he understands it – albeit that his conception of God’s superiority is alien to that of the Ash‘arīs. The thesis will show that it is because of Ibn Sīnā’s emphasis on God’s transcendence that aspects of his thought are so utterly compelling for *kalām* theologians like al-Āmidī. I will argue that the differences between the two doctrines of creation treated in the thesis reflect in part two very different manners of handling the tension between affirming God’s transcendence and maintaining that he is, as the Qur’ān maintains, a voluntary agent. Al-Āmidī’s thought on creation thus represents one post-Avicennan thinker’s response to two different resolutions of the same theological question. More broadly, his thought offers a window over the encounter between the two traditions in this highly significant era of Islamic Intellectual history, as we shall see.

Chapter 1

Al-Āmidī's Life and Works

*They envied the young man for they had not achieved like him
To him they were opponents, and his enemies⁸*

The background of al-Āmidī's life circumstances is highly pertinent to the development of his thought and to the various influences thereon, and therefore an important foundation of the investigations of the thesis. Providing a biography for al-Āmidī is not straightforward; there are considerable variations between the relevant accounts. Several scholars have focused attention on the accounts of al-Āmidī's biographers because of the fact that some of them suggest that he suffered persecution because of his pursuit of philosophy. Later in the chapter I review existing scholarship which interprets al-Āmidī's biography in relation to important questions surrounding the status of philosophy in the thirteenth-century Islamic world. I begin by reconstructing al-Āmidī's basic biography, extricating the core consensus of the available sources from additional, contradictory materials which are subject to analysis later in the chapter.⁹

1. Biographical Sketch

Alī b. Abī ‘Alī b. Muḥammad b. al-Sālim al-Tagħlibī was born in 551/1156 in Āmid, the largest town in the region of Diyarbakir, eastern Anatolia (the town itself is now called Diyarbakir),

⁸ Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, 7, 253. The verse, used of al-Āmidī, originates with Abū l-Aswad al-Du’alī (d.c. 69/689).

⁹ The key sources are those biographical accounts written by his near contemporaries, namely Al-Qiftī's (d. 646/1248) *Tārīkh al-ḥukamā'*; Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī's (d. 654/1256) *Mir'āt al-zamān*; Abū Shāma's (d. 665/1267) *al-Dhayl 'alā l-rāwḍatayn*; Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's (d. 668/1270) *‘Uyūn al-anbā'*; Ibn Khallikān's (d. 681/1282) *Wafayāt al-a'yān*; and Ibn Wāṣil's (d. 697/1298) *Mufarrīj al-kurūb*. However, the following later sources are also of interest in terms of which details of the narrative are crystallised: al-Fidā'a's (d. 731/1331) *al-Mukhtaṣar fi akhbār al-bashar*; al-Dhahabi's (d. 748/1347) *Tārīkh al-islām* and *Siyar a'lām al-nubalā'*; al-‘Umari's (d. 750/1349) *Masālik al-abṣār*; al-Şafadi's (d. 764/1363) *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*; al-Yāftī's (d. 769/1367) *Mir'āt al-janān*; Ibn Kathīr's (d. 774/1373) *al-Bidāya wa-l-nihāya*; the *Tabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya* of al-Isnawī (d. 772/1370), al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), and Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba (d. 851/1448); al-‘Asqalānī's (d. 852/1449) *Lisān al-mizān*; Ibn Tagħribirdi's (d. 874/1470) *al-Nujūm al-zāhirā*; al-Suyūṭī's (d. 911/1505) *Husn al-muḥāḍara*; Tashköprüzāde's (d. 968/1561) *Miftāḥ al-sa'āda*; al-Nu‘aymi's (d. 978/1571) *al-Dāris fi tārīkh al-madāris*; and finally, Ibn al-‘Imād's (d. 1089/1679) *Shadharāt al-dhahab*.

whence his appellation. Other epithets include *Abū l-Ḥasan*, *Abū l-Qāsim*, and, in recognition of the importance of his major work of *kalām*, *Ṣāḥib al-Abkār*. The sources tell us nothing about his family or social background, and after departing his hometown aged either 14 or 15 (c. 565/1170), al-Āmidī never returned.¹⁰ Before he left, al-Āmidī received a basic education; Qur’ānic memorisation and recitation, theology (*uṣūl al-dīn*) and Ḥanbalī law. On journeying to Baghdaḍ as a teen, al-Āmidī first continued his studies under the Ḥanbalī *Abū l-Fatḥ* Naṣr b. Fatyān b. al-Munī al-Ḥanbalī (d.?), whom he is said to have surpassed in skill at disputation. He then transferred to the Shāfi‘ī school, making acquaintance with and studying under *Abū l-Qāsim Yaḥyā* b. ‘Alī b. Faḍlān (d. 595/1199). Ibn Faḍlān was head of the Shāfi‘īs of Baghdaḍ and known for his skill at disputation (*khilāf*) and logic (*manṭiq*).¹¹ Two sources (Al-Qiftī’s *Tārīkh al-hukamā’* and the later, derivative source, Ṭashköprüzāde’s *Miftah al-sa‘āda*) also tell us that al-Āmidī learnt philosophy with a group of Christians and Jews in the Karkh region of Baghdaḍ.¹²

¹⁰ The editor of the *Abkār*, al-Mahdī, attributes al-Āmidī’s failure to return to Āmid to the humble standing of his family, on the basis that they do not feature in the biographical accounts, and that he is named after his place of origin rather than his family line (*Abkār*, 1, 16).

¹¹ Ibn Faḍlān was also the teacher of ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdaḍī (d. 633/1231), himself a philosopher whose autobiography Gutas has shown to shed important light on the presence of Avicennan philosophy in the mainstream *madrasa* institution of Baghdaḍ in the thirteenth century (as well as more generally among intellectuals outside the *madrasa*). The pursuit of philosophy is common to both disciples of Ibn Faḍlān, and it may be the case that al-Āmidī’s interest in Avicennan philosophy was stimulated in part by Ibn Faḍlān’s interest in the logic of the philosophers. In his autobiography, al-Baghdaḍī also describes a trend of using the logic of the philosophers in jurisprudence, which adds weight to the notion that al-Āmidī encountered philosophy in part through Ibn Faḍlān, an outstanding jurist (see Gutas, ‘Philosophy in the Twelfth Century’, 19). As‘ad al-Mayhanī (d. 523/1130), whose *Ta’liqa al-Ṣafadi*’s claims al-Āmidī studied, is also a possible influence in al-Āmidī’s encounter with *falsafa*. Al-Mayhanī, whom Griffel argues was a follower of al-Ghazālī, was a jurist skilled in the art of disputation, and also active in the philosophical tradition (Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 71-74). His works are not known to be extant.

I cannot determine the basis of Endress’ claim (‘Reading Avicenna’, 408; ‘Die Dreifache’, 122) that al-Āmidī transferred to the Ash‘arī tradition of theology at the time of his change of law schools. It is true, of course, that the Shāfi‘ī school was strongly associated with Ash‘arism, but this does not necessarily indicate that al-Āmidī maintained a commitment to Ash‘arī theology at this time. Indeed, as I will shortly discuss, the evidence of the chronology of the extant works is that al-Āmidī was not committed to Ash‘arī doctrines during his time in Baghdaḍ. Furthermore, the Shāfi‘ī school of the time seems to have been characterised by its openness to the rational sciences more generally, so that a change of allegiance to Shāfi‘ism was just as likely prompted by an interest in philosophy as by a theological interest. What does seem very likely is that Ibn Faḍlān mentored al-Āmidī in the skill of disputation, since both men are praised by the biographers for this skill, relevant to the study of philosophy and theology, as well as jurisprudence. Unfortunately, the one known extant MS of al-Āmidī’s work on disputation, *Ghāyat al-amal fī ilm al-jadal*, is undated.

¹² ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdaḍī’s autobiography parallels al-Āmidī’s here; he too claims to have studied Avicennan philosophy with a group of interested individuals, confirming its presence within private scholarly circles in Baghdaḍ at the time.

At some point during his 30s or early 40s, al-Āmidī left Baghdād. Al-Qiftī claims that al-Āmidī fled Baghdād, attributing this to his having been shunned, his doctrine defamed, by a group of jurists due to his interest in philosophy. As will become clear, the notion that al-Āmidī's engagement with the philosophical sciences provoked negative reactions and led to his frequent moves is a significant motif among his biographers.

Al-Āmidī arrived in Cairo in 592/1196 at the age of 42. Some of the sources mention a period before his journey to Cairo (of up to a decade) spent in Syria - possible at Aleppo or Ḥamā; Ibn Khallikān writes that during this period in Syria, al-Āmidī pursued his interest in the sciences of the ancients ('ulūm al-awā'il, normally a reference to the Hellenic philosophical tradition). An encounter with the illuminationist philosopher al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) around this time also appears in a small number of sources, and is said to have made a significant impression on al-Āmidī.¹³ If this encounter is historical, it would mean that al-Āmidī left Baghdād quite some time before arriving in Cairo in 592, since al-Suhrawardī died five years before that, but this is uncertain. Upon arrival in Cairo, al-Āmidī took up a position at the Shāfi'i Madrasa in al-Qarāfa al-Ṣughrā, where he frequently debated and lectured. He stayed in Cairo for a considerable period, lecturing and writing. Al-Qiftī writes that his works on the 'science of the ancients' became well known and were frequently copied during his time in Cairo. None of al-Āmidī's extant works of theology, philosophy or jurisprudence date from this period, although al-Shāfi'i suggests that unknown legal works, referred to vaguely in al-Āmidī's works of theology, may have been authored during this time.¹⁴

Several years after his arrival in Cairo, al-Āmidī fled for Syria. The year of this move is not known, but must have been before 605/1208 (when al-Āmidī was aged 53), by which time we know that al-Āmidī was receiving patronage from the rulers of Ayyūbid Syria. Here, the motif of the controversy of al-Āmidī's involvement in philosophy arises once more. Ibn Khallikān puts al-Āmidī's departure from Cairo down to his being hounded as a result of his interest in philosophy. According to him, a group of scholars accused him of following 'the way of the

¹³ Al-Ṣafadī, *al-Wāfi bi-l-wafayāt*, 21, 225; Tashköprüzāde, *Miftāḥ al-Sa'āda*, 1, 301.

¹⁴ Shāfi'i, *al-Āmidī*, 61-62.

philosophers' (*madhhab al-falāsifa*), and resultantly, having 'bad doctrine'. This anti-philosophy motif is crystallised in the later sources; al-Fidā', Ibn Kathīr, al-Dhahabī, al-Suyūtī, Ibn al-'Imād and Ibn Qādī Shuhba all relate the same account of al-Āmidī's departure from Cairo. There is also the hint of more personal reasons for al-Āmidī's troubles in that most of the biographical accounts which claim that al-Āmidī fled Cairo due to accusations relating to his philosophical interests also describe those who rallied against al-Āmidī as having been envious of him.

On arrival in Syria, al-Āmidī settled first in Ḥamā, where he enjoyed a period of stability under the patronage of al-Malik al-Manṣūr (r. 587-617/1191-1220), to whom his *Kashf al-tamwīhāt fi sharḥ al-ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* is dedicated. It seems to have been in Ḥamā that al-Āmidī first encountered the works of al-Rāzī. His time there also appears to have been extremely important in al-Āmidī's development as both philosopher and theologian; almost all his extant works in these sciences date from this period.

Later, in around 617/1220, aged 66, al-Āmidī travelled to Damascus, where he was given headship of al-Madrasa al-'Azīziyya, where he continued lecturing, writing many of his legal works during this time. Under al-Malik al-Mu'azzam (r. 615-624/1218-1227), al-Āmidī was well supported. However, during the reigns of al-Mu'azzam's successors, al-Malik al-Nāṣir (r. 624-626/1227-1229), and al-Malik al-Ashraf (r. 626-635/1229-1238), al-Āmidī seems to have become increasingly unpopular. Eventually, in 631/1233, al-Ashraf dismissed al-Āmidī from his position as head at the madrasa, and placed him under house arrest. He died just a few months later, on 4 Ṣafar 631/1233.

The biographical sources provide contradictory explanations of al-Āmidī's fall from grace. Al-Jawzī claims that the reason for al-Āmidī's dismissal from his position in Damascus was the Ayyūbid rulers' (specifically, al-Mu'azzam and al-Ashraf's) disdain for his use of 'logic and the sciences of the ancients'. According to al-Jawzī, al-Ashraf issued a *fatwā* against the teaching of any science other than *tafsīr* and *fiqh*. Ibn Kathīr later repeats this narrative, as does al-Nu'aymī, who comments that 'ancient philosophy was on the rise' prior to the issuing of this denunciation. The main alternative to the notion that al-Āmidī fell from grace because of his

philosophising activities is the idea that he lacked political tact and diplomacy. In particular, both al-Qiftī and Ibn Wāṣil (and, following them, al-Ṣafadī and Ṭashköprüzāde), relate an incident whereby when in 631/1233 the Ayyūbid ruler al-Malik al-Kāmil gained control of Āmid, al-Āmidī's hometown, he discovered that its previous ruler had requested that al-Āmidī take on Judgeship of the city. The sources vary as to whether al-Āmidī refused, or ostensibly accepted, but never actually went. In either case, it is agreed that al-Ashraf was not consulted, and that when he learnt of this, al-Āmidī was dismissed from his role as head of al-Madrasa al-'Azīziyya. The related motif of difficulties associated with al-Āmidī's personality also arises here; al-Jawzī and Ibn Kathīr relate that al-Mu'azzam disliked al-Āmidī; he is said to have announced 'my heart does not receive him'. Additionally, political factors outside of al-Āmidī's own influence are suggested in some of the sources. Both al-Jawzī and Ibn Wāṣil indicate a dispute between al-Ashraf and the previous rulers of Ayyūbid Damascus which may have had some bearing on al-Āmidī's standing in the Ayyūbid court upon al-Ashraf's rise to power.

A final important thread relates to al-Āmidī's personal encounters with Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and his students, in particular, Shams al-Dīn al-Khasrawshāhī. Ibn Wāṣil, who was a student of al-Āmidī in Ḥamā, is particularly interested in this matter. He stresses that al-Āmidī opposed al-Rāzī (and also al-Ghazālī) as an intellectual and 'proved the falsity' of many of his ideas in his works. He claims that al-Āmidī was envious of al-Rāzī and resultantly 'exaggerated in his defamations and slander of him'. He also claims that al-Rāzī was much more famous and wealthy than al-Āmidī, and that in scholarly gatherings in Damascus, the former came to be favoured by al-Mu'azzam to the detriment of al-Āmidī. There is a provincial overtone in this account in that Ibn Wāṣil stresses that the *a'jām* ('foreigners' or possibly 'Persians') rallied together against al-Āmidī, 'grieving him... because of their alliance and agreement with one another'.

2. Works

The present study uses all al-Āmidī's known extant works of *falsafa* and *kalām*, though he has hitherto been known primarily as a highly skilled jurist. Al-Āmidī's jurisprudential works post-

date his works of theology. The following is a chronological list of al-Āmidī's works of *falsafa* and *kalām* known to be extant, along with description of their contents. Further justification of my assessment of the works will be provided in the course of the thesis.

Al-Nūr al-bāhir fī l-hikam al-zawāhir (Brilliant Light on Splendid Wisdom)

Four of the *Nūr*'s five volumes are extant. The extant MS was printed in facsimile form by Fuat Sezgin in 2001. The copy dates from the year 592/1196. This dating concurs with al-Qiftī's reference to the circulation of al-Āmidī's philosophical works during his time in Cairo, where he moved in the same year. It suggests that the work was written either in Baghdād, or during al-Āmidī's first spell in Syria (if it is true that he spent time in Syria prior to his journey to Cairo). However, Arif concludes that the work was written shortly before al-Āmidī's death on the basis of a passage in the introduction in which al-Āmidī refers to 'the vigour of youth' having 'faded away'.¹⁵ The passage is, however, rhetorical in intent, and cannot be taken as evidence of the work's dating. The reference to the passing vigour of youth arises in the context of al-Āmidī's emphasis on his persistent endeavours in unravelling the 'secrets' of philosophy. He also refers to the lack of assistance he received in the project of composing the *Nūr*. The theme of intellectual toil against adversity is not uncommon to the introductions of medieval works of theology and philosophy, and against this background, al-Āmidī's complaint of weariness and lack of youthful vigour should not be taken as an indication of his age at the time of the *Nūr*'s composition.

The *Nūr* is a work of Avicennism modelled on the *Shifā'* in which al-Āmidī summarises, endorses and defends Ibn Sīnā's major doctrines. It is an early work reflective of a time in al-Āmidī's life, possibly during his encounter with philosophers at Baghdād, when he was a committed Avicennist. This may have coincided with his transfer from the Ḥanbalī to the more rationally oriented Shāfi'i school.

¹⁵ Arif, 'Al-Āmidī's Reception', 213, although this contradicts his acknowledgement earlier in the article that the extant MS is dated 592/1196. Endress also claims that the *Nūr* was composed in al-Āmidī's old age ('Die Dreifache', 136-7).

In the work, he responds to both the philosopher Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. c. 560/1165) and to Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (to whom he refers as *ṣāḥib al-tahāfut*) in their respective criticisms of Ibn Sīnā. I have not found any demonstration of awareness of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's reception of Ibn Sīnā in this work. Despite his overwhelming support for Avicennan doctrine in this work, al-Āmidī does object to some ideas, including, for instance, the notion that possibility (*imkān*) has extra-mental reality (as I will discuss in Chapter 3). Probably due to his commitment in this work to *falsafī* doctrines such as the eternity of the world, al-Āmidī nowhere mentions his authorship of the *Nūr* in his later works of *kalām*.

Kashf al-tamwīhāt fi sharḥ al-īshārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt (An Exposition of Errors in the Commentary on the Pointers and Reminders)

The *Kashf* was published in 2013 (and again in 2015), and exists in manuscripts in Istanbul and Berlin, the latter an autograph.¹⁶ It was written in 605/1208, and is dedicated to the ruler of Ḥamā, al-Malik al-Manṣūr (r. 587-617/1191-1220) where al-Āmidī was probably living by that time. Since the *Kashf* is a direct response to al-Rāzī, its dedication to al-Manṣūr suggests that al-Āmidī was in competition with al-Rāzī's followers (whom we know from Ibn Wāsil he encountered in the Syrian courts) for Ayyūbid patronage.¹⁷ The work must be read against this political background. It also represents the first extant evidence of al-Āmidī's intellectual encounter with al-Rāzī. I will pay greater attention to the question of the intellectual agenda of this work, since it is initially obscure, and because the various assessments of the nature of the work in recent decades have been significant in conclusions drawn about al-Āmidī.¹⁸

Al-Āmidī is explicit in his introduction that this is a response to al-Rāzī's *Sharḥ* on Ibn Sīnā's *Ishārāt*, aimed at redressing its 'errors and falsities' (*maghālīt wa-tamwīhāt*), and also the mingling into philosophy of that which is not a part of it (*adkhala fīhā mā laysa minhā*).¹⁹ The

¹⁶ MS Or. 8253 at the British Library is wrongly titled *Kashf al-tamwīhāt* and is in fact a copy of al-Rāzī's *Sharḥ*.

¹⁷ Ibn Wāsil, *Mufarrīj al-kurūb*, 5, 35-41.

¹⁸ The work has been variously assessed: al-Shāfi'i denies that it has any connection to al-Rāzī, understanding it to be a direct commentary on the *Ishārāt* (Shāfi'i, al-Āmidī, 81-83); Gutas acknowledges that it is directed at al-Rāzī but sees it as evidence of al-Āmidī's mainstream Avicennism (Gutas, 'The Study of Arabic Philosophy', 84 and 87).

¹⁹ *Kashf*, 2, 419.

work's contents validate this stated purpose. Despite the fact that a significant proportion of al-Rāzī's comments on the *Ishārāt* either elucidate Ibn Sīnā's meaning, or provide alternative proofs for his doctrines, al-Āmidī consistently comments only on parts of the *Sharḥ* in which al-Rāzī critiques inconsistencies or weaknesses in Ibn Sīnā's proofs. Since al-Rāzī does not point out objections in his discussion of every section, this makes the text of the *Kashf* extremely selective, and means that it does not at all represent the overall content of either the *Ishārāt*, or of the *Sharḥ*. For instance, al-Āmidī moves from a critique on the commentary on *Ishārāt* V, in which Ibn Sīnā discusses creation, directly to a critique of al-Rāzī's commentary on an aspect of the next book, on emanation, without indicating the transition. Furthermore, al-Āmidī pays no heed to al-Rāzī's imposition of structure on the text of the *Ishārāt*; al-Rāzī divides each *Namāṭ* into a number of *masā'il*, a practice which was to become highly influential on later readings of the work, but which does not appear to be of interest to al-Āmidī.

The nature of al-Āmidī's criticisms tells us more about the work's agenda. Frequently, al-Āmidī's criticisms of al-Rāzī have little or no bearing on the question of the validity of Ibn Sīnā's original arguments, meaning that they cannot be read as a defence of the *Ishārāt* (nor as evidence of al-Āmidī's 'Avicennism'). I will provide a number of examples. In the first, al-Āmidī criticises al-Rāzī on a point of logic which has no direct bearing on the argument of the latter, and is therefore of little relevance to the evaluation of Ibn Sīnā's doctrine. In fact, al-Āmidī's correction also suggests that he has misread al-Rāzī. In his opening comments on Ibn Sīnā's discussion of creation, al-Rāzī explains what is intended by Ibn Sīnā in his use of two distinct terms for creation: *ṣun'* and *ibdā'*. He writes that the former is said specifically of (*mukhtaṣṣ bi*) the possible existent whose existence is preceded by matter and time, while the latter is said of the possible existent whose existence is not preceded by matter and time.²⁰ This distinction accurately reflects Ibn Sīnā's own, expressed later in the chapter: in section 9, he argues by way of this distinction for the superiority of God's creative act (*ibdā'*) in the case of the pre-eternity of the world.²¹

²⁰ Al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 214.

²¹ Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, 2, 524-5.

Al-Āmidī takes al-Rāzī to be defining the terms, and points out what he perceives to be a logical problem in al-Rāzī's statement. He writes that the expression 'x is specific to (*mukhtaṣṣ bi*) y' means that x refers to y and nothing else. This means that al-Rāzī's statements '*ṣun*' is specific to x' and '*ibdā'* is specific to y', logically signify that *ṣun*' is x and *ibdā'* is y, i.e. that *ṣun*' is the possible existent whose existence is preceded by matter and time! He corrects al-Rāzī, writing that *ṣun*' means 'the bringing into existence of the possible which is preceded by matter and time', and *ibdā'* is 'the bringing into existence of that which is not preceded by matter and time'.²² This correction of what al-Āmidī understands to be a logical error on al-Rāzī's part is characteristic of a heavy focus on such concerns. There is no real conceptual concern underlying the correction, and Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of creation is not bolstered by al-Āmidī's critique.

Secondly, al-Rāzī's commentary sometimes provides charitable resolutions for apparent inconsistencies in the text of the *Ishārāt*. Al-Āmidī occasionally critiques al-Rāzī at the expense of Ibn Sīnā. For instance, in discussion of the title of *Ishārāt* IV, 'Existence and its Causes', al-Rāzī points out that God's existence, which is uncaused, is discussed within this book. Al-Rāzī suggests that 'Existence' here should be taken to mean the restricted sense of uncaused existence, and thus, the problem is solved (*fa-indafa'a al-su'āl*). Rather than accept this resolution, al-Āmidī objects without presenting an alternative. He agrees that the title must either apply to existents in a universal sense, or only to some. Al-Rāzī has made Ibn Sīnā's title apply only to caused existents, but this is against what Ibn Sīnā obviously intends (*khilāf al-zāhir min kalām al-shayk*). This is because Ibn Sīnā's third discussion within this *Namaṭ* deals with the Necessary of Existence.²³ Al-Āmidī is explicit in conceding that, due to al-Rāzī's failure to resolve the inconsistency, the problem identified remains (*al-ishkāl mutajjihān lā mahāla*).²⁴

A final example illustrates al-Āmidī's tendency to focus on undermining al-Rāzī's arguments without regard to the doctrinal implication of his criticism. In IV.10, as part of his proof for

²² *Kashf*, 2, 788.

²³ Al-Āmidī here appropriates al-Rāzī's division of the *Ishārāt* into *masā'il* without comment.

²⁴ *Kashf*, 2, 743-4.

God's existence, Ibn Sīnā asserts that the possible acquires existence from something outside itself.²⁵ Al-Rāzī complains that this is superfluous: since Ibn Sīnā has previously defined the possible existent as that which has neither existence nor non-existence by virtue of its own essence, this assertion has no benefit in the context of this proof for the existence of God.²⁶ This is a relatively minor point. Al-Rāzī is suggesting that Ibn Sīnā's argument is tautologous. If al-Āmidī's *Kashf* were primarily written with a view to defending Avicennan doctrine, we might expect him either a) to concede the point, since it has no bearing on the course of the argument or b) to further develop or explore the notion of possible existence.

He does neither. Rather, he defends the letter of Ibn Sīnā's argument, claiming that the statement does have value as an explanatory statement, for 'someone hearing this statement might be conceding the existence of possibility and asking for an explanation of its meaning'.²⁷ This is typical of his focus on the letter of the *Ishārāt* over its spirit. By contrast, at the same point in his commentary, al-Tūṣī develops Ibn Sīnā's notion that possible things acquire existence from outside their own essences, using the concept of preponderance (*tarajjuh*).²⁸ It seems once more that al-Āmidī is motivated by a desire to undermine al-Rāzī's criticism, rather than to develop or even defend the Avicennan doctrines under investigation.

There is little evidence that al-Āmidī has a commitment to Ibn Sīnā's philosophy in the *Kashf*. Though his criticisms of al-Rāzī normally entail a defence of the Avicennan statement under examination, we have seen that this is somewhat accidental to al-Āmidī's task. Al-Āmidī's goal is not the defence of Ibn Sīnā as such. Furthermore, there are philosophical inconsistencies between the *Nūr* and the *Kashf*. For instance, despite objecting to the notion that possibility has extra-mental reality in the *Nūr*, in his *Kashf*, al-Āmidī refutes al-Rāzī's arguments for the very same position. This reinforces the impression that the *Kashf* is not intended to represent al-Āmidī's own opinion, but is a dialectical exercise. This is no more than al-Āmidī says of his objective in the work. Furthermore, it accords well with the context of competition for

²⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, 2, 448.

²⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ*, 1, 195.

²⁷ *Kashf*, 2, 750.

²⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, 2, 448.

patronage. Al-Āmidī seems primarily concerned to prove his own mastery as reader of Ibn Sīnā and as a logician by undermining those of al-Rāzī, whom he tellingly describes in his introduction as the one who ‘has become famed among those heedful of [philosophy], and distinguished over his peers as one well versed in it’ (*man ishtahara min al-muntabihīn fīhā wā-yumayyaz ‘alā aqrānihi min al-mutarassimīn bihā*).²⁹ An ability to demonstrate al-Rāzī’s fallibility as reader of Ibn Sīnā would have served al-Āmidī in demonstrating his worth as a subject of courtly support. His intellectual commitments at this time cannot be ascertained through the *Kashf*.

***Al-Mubīn fī sharḥ alfāz al-ḥukamā’ wa-l-mutakallimīn* (The Expositor in Explanation of the Terms of the Philosophers and Theologians)**

This is a dictionary of philosophical and theological terms which is doctrinally neutral. It was first published in 1987. It is dedicated to a certain ruler who, though eulogised, is unnamed. It may be, given his patronage of the *Kashf*, that al-Malik al-Manṣūr is the individual in question. This, along with the dating of the work is, however, uncertain. The existence of the work demonstrates what is increasingly clear, namely, that interests in philosophy and theology were not considered incompatible.

***Daqā’iq al-haqā’iq fī l-hikma* (Subtle Truths on Philosophy)**

A comparison of the introduction of the *Daqā’iq* with that of the *Rumūz* (below) strongly suggests that the latter is an abridgement of the former. The intellectual project outlined by al-Āmidī in both is almost identical. This is supported by the fact that in his later works of theology, al-Āmidī frequently makes mention of the two works together. The works represent a middle phase in which al-Āmidī is committed to classical *kalām* doctrines such as the temporal origination of the world, but accommodates as much of the philosophical sciences as is not contradictory to core *kalām* belief. However, only the first volume of the *Daqā’iq*, on logic, is

²⁹ *Kashf*, 2, 419.

extant, in a MS at Princeton available digitally (MS 42b, Digital Library of Islamic Manuscripts, Princeton University).

Rumūz al-kunūz (Representing Treasures)

The *Rumūz* was completed in 610/1213, and the extant MS dates from 612/1215 (MS Neurosmaniye 2688, Suleymaniye Library, Istanbul).

In the introduction, al-Āmidī explains that many parts of *falsafa* do not contradict sound doctrine, and that his aim in the work is to show which parts may be accepted, and which should be rejected by the ‘Orthodox’ (*ahl al-ḥaqq*). He comments that most of the logic of the *falāsifa*, as well as their natural philosophy, can be accepted, and also some parts of their metaphysics.³⁰ The topics of the *Rumūz* are ordered according to Ibn Sīnā’s schema, beginning with logic and moving through natural philosophy and metaphysics. Al-Āmidī treats the premises which Ibn Sīnā provides in support of each doctrine and accepts those which present no contradiction with core *kalām* doctrine, but rejects those which do. I discuss this in Chapter 4 in relation to al-Āmidī’s view on the indivisibility of matter in the *Rumūz*. This is not a work of great originality, and many discussions are tantalisingly brief. Several inconsistencies are unresolved, and *kalām* doctrines insufficiently supported. Al-Āmidī makes frequent reference to both the *Daqā’iq* and the *Rumūz* in his theological works.

What is clear from the contents of the work is that a shift in doctrinal commitments occurred at some point between al-Āmidī’s writing of the *Nūr* and of the *Rumūz*. Al-Āmidī contradicts the commitment expressed in the *Nūr* to philosophical doctrines like the eternity of the world and the absolute simplicity of God as necessary of existence. As I have noted, the *Kashf* is not a reliable source for al-Āmidī’s doctrinal commitments, and it is therefore difficult to ascertain whether al-Āmidī arrived in Syria a committed Ash‘arī, or became convinced of the doctrine of the school during his time at the Ayyūbid court. It is clear, however, that al-Āmidī remained

³⁰ Al-Ghazālī makes a similar distinction between aspects of the philosophical tradition that present no challenge to sound doctrine, and those which must be rejected (*Tahāfut*, 5-7).

highly engaged with and impressed by many aspects of Avicennan philosophy at the time of writing the *Rumūz*.

***Abkār al-afkār fi ‘ilm al-kalām* (Unprecedented Thoughts on the Science of Theology)**

Two of the manuscripts of the *Abkār* date its completion to the year 612/1215. The work was edited and published in 2002 by Aḥmad Muḥammad al-Mahdī.

This is a work of Ash‘arī theology in five volumes. Al-Āmidī clearly identifies himself with the classical Ash‘arī tradition; within the opening four folios of his epistemological discussions, al-Ash‘arī, al-Bāqillānī, Ibn Fūrak and al-Isfara’īnī are all mentioned by name. Here, al-Āmidī is committed to both the doctrine and, in general, the methods of classical Ash‘arism, using, for instance, the classical method for defending the doctrines of God’s unicity and of creation *ex nihilo*. The work is marked by the comprehensiveness of al-Āmidī’s treatment of arguments for the positions he outlines. The degree of the work’s comprehensiveness is matched only by its dialecticism: the great majority of each discussion is devoted to refutation of erroneous opinions, and equally to the refutation of methods of proving al-Āmidī’s preferred opinion which fall short of his standards for demonstration.

As I will demonstrate, arguments devised or developed by al-Rāzī (though he is never named) feature particularly prominently as targets for al-Āmidī’s refutations. The work is also marked by its heavy criticism of Avicennan doctrines. In discussion of each topic, Ibn Sīnā’s view is frequently treated first in a manner which simplifies *falsafī* doctrines for presentation then refutation. This is not to say, however, that the positive influence of *falsafa* is not felt. In certain key respects which I will demonstrate, al-Āmidī’s theological thought is marked by an Avicennan influence.

What is clear is that a further shift in al-Āmidī’s intellectual commitments has occurred over a very short period during his time in Syria, between his completion of the *Rumūz* (in 610/1213) and of this, his *magnum opus*, two years later. Avicennan philosophy is no longer viewed with

sympathy, but the defence of Ash‘arī theology against the perceived threat of *falsafa* has become the priority.

***Ghāyat al-marām fī ‘ilm al-kalām* (Endpoint of Aspirations in the Science of Theology)**

There is some confusion over the dating of the *Ghāya*, but it is clear from the contents as well as from al-Āmidī’s references to the *Abkār* that the *Ghāya* is the later work.³¹ The work was edited and published in 2010 by Ḥasan Maḥmūd ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Shāfi‘ī.

This is a shorter work of theology, ostensibly an abridgement of the *Abkār*. This is suggested by al-Āmidī himself, as well as by references in the biographical literature to a single volume summary of the *Abkār* identifiable as *Ghāyat al-marām*. In fact, although the overall doctrinal positions of the works are the same, they are dissimilar on some important points, to be explored in subsequent chapters.

3. Interpreting Contradictions between al-Āmidī’s Biographers

We have seen that the most significant variations between the extant biographical sources pertain to the reason for al-Āmidī’s unpopularity and eventual dismissal from his position in Ayyūbid Damascus. At each juncture in al-Āmidī’s career, his biographers vary on the subject of what precipitated his moves from one city to another to another. Because of the suggestion by some biographers that al-Āmidī’s philosophising activities led to his persecution, his biography has attracted a relatively large amount of scholarly interest. For traditional scholars who took the view that philosophy was perceived as antithetical to Islam, and that it eventually died out at the pen of al-Ghazālī, al-Āmidī’s biography perfectly illustrated the issue. Goldziher saw al-Āmidī’s fall from favour in Damascus as ‘clear testimony’ of the anti-philosophical attitude of the era. This idea had longevity: Sourdel, in the Encyclopedia of Islam (1986) and even Weiss, in

³¹ For al-Shāfi‘ī’s assessment of this confusion, see Shāfi‘ī, *Al-Āmidī*, 95–97.

Some sources suggest that al-Āmidī wrote a commentary on al-Rāzī’s *al-Matālib al-‘āliyya*, entitled *al-Mākhadh ‘alā l-Matālib al-‘āliyya*. However, the MS present in the Institute of Manuscripts in Cairo (MS 3, *Tawhīd*), which bears the title is, in fact, a different work. I have not been able to trace the MS bearing the same title which is said to be present in Istanbul, Feyzullah Library (MS 1101). Al-Qiftī refers to al-Āmidī’s commentary on al-Rāzī’s *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* as *Kitāb al-Mākhadh* (*Tārīkh al-ḥukamā'*, 241). This may suggest confusion over which Rāzian works al-Āmidī commented on.

his extended study of al-Āmidī's jurisprudence, both perpetuated the notion that philosophy was 'in disrepute' and that al-Āmidī was 'ostracised and maligned' as a result.³² Though he contests the anti-philosophy trope of earlier scholarship, even Arif, as recently as 2003, accepts that al-Āmidī's fall from favour at Damascus was linked to the issuance of a *fatwā* against the study of philosophy.³³

Both Brentjes and Endress, as part of their respective re-examinations of the place of the philosophical sciences in the learning institutions of the Islamic world, contest a simplistic interpretation of al-Āmidī's biography. Brentjes rightly observes that the contemporary sources for al-Āmidī's life cannot be harmonised to provide a single history. She argues that the biographical accounts offer not history *per se*, but historical constructions, and that they must be read as such. She believes, furthermore, that accounts such as those concerning al-Āmidī have been used by scholars like Goldziher to create 'new myths for new purposes'.³⁴ Brentjes presents a multitude of counter-evidence against the notion that an anti-philosophical attitude prevailed in the post-Ghazālian Muslim world. Against this background, her own reading of the reason for al-Āmidī's dismissal from his position in Damascus is that it was primarily 'a story of conflicts in patronage relationships between a brilliant and self-confident scholar, his peers and his patrons'.³⁵ I fully concur with Brentjes that the available biographical accounts for the life of al-Āmidī resist a simple, unified reading. Despite the prevalence of the anti-philosophical motif, the political and personal aspects of the accounts are persistent and significant, though not always in agreement.

Endress argues for the importance of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī in causing 'Ibn Sīnā [to] enter the *madrasa*'.³⁶ He demonstrates that Avicennan philosophy was increasingly read, commented on, refuted and defended by jurists and theologians such that the distinct traditions came to

³² Weiss, *The Search*, 29.

³³ Arif, 'Al-Āmidī's Reception', 209.

³⁴ Brentjes, 'Orthodoxy', 38.

³⁵ Brentjes, 'Courtly Patronage', 422.

³⁶ Endress, 'Reading Avicenna', 398.

converge into an ‘epistemic community of ‘*ulūm ‘aqliyya*’.³⁷ In this context, he too challenges the traditional reading of al-Āmidī’s biography. He does not specifically address the issue of contradictory sources. Rather, his focus is on al-Āmidī as metacritic of al-Rāzī in his criticism of Ibn Sīnā, and more generally, as intellectual ‘competitor’ to al-Rāzī.³⁸ He also stresses the probable ‘struggle for influence’ at the Ayyūbid courts.

My own reading of the biographical sources, in conjunction with the evidence of the analysis of al-Āmidī’s works conducted in this thesis, follows the trajectory of the insights offered by both Brentjes and Endress. Firstly, the notion that al-Āmidī was persecuted on the basis of his philosophical interests alone is unlikely given what we know of the presence of philosophy in the mainstream learning institutions of his day across Middle East. This subject has been treated by several scholars including Endress and Brentjes, as well as Michot and Gutas. Gutas uses the autobiography of the philosopher ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādī to demonstrate the presence of philosophy in the scholarly environment of Baghdad at the time. He demonstrates that manuals of *hikma* were very much part of the curriculum at the al-Madrasa al-Nizāmiyya in the post-Ghazālian era. He shows that al-Ghazālī’s own philosophically oriented works, namely his *Maqāsid* and *Tahāfut*, were considered works of philosophy, and were studied alongside classical and Ghazālian works of *kalām*. Nizāmiyya professors were openly interested in Aristotelian, Avicennan philosophy. Furthermore, we know from al-Baghdādī that Ibn Sīnā’s works (namely, the *Shifā* and the *Najāt*) were in circulation in Baghdad.³⁹ It appears that opportunities to pursue philosophy were very much available in twelfth-century Baghdad, where al-Āmidī began his engagement with philosophy.

As both Endress and Brentjes have demonstrated, this is no less true of twelfth-century Ayyūbid Syria, where al-Āmidī composed the majority of his philosophical and theological works.

³⁷ Endress, ‘Reading Avicenna’, 372.

³⁸ Endress tends to accept the traditional assumption (based on al-Tūṣī’s comments) that al-Rāzī’s commentary on the *Ishārāt* is in fact an attack (Endress, ‘Die Dreifache’, 127; ‘Reading Avicenna’, 408; also Heer, ‘Al-Rāzī and al-Tūṣī’, 111; Gutas, ‘The Heritage’, 89). Wisnovksy (‘Avicennism and Exegetical Practices’); and Shihadeh (‘Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Commentary’) have recently challenged this trope. See Shihadeh, ‘Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Commentary’ for analysis of the structure of al-Rāzī’s *Sharḥ*, which demonstrates the numerous exegetical functions served by the text.

³⁹ Gutas, ‘Philosophy in the Twelfth Century’.

Indeed, Brentjes shows that the Ayyūbid dynasty gave comparatively greater patronage to scholars of the ancient sciences than other contemporary dynasties. On the basis of Ibn Abī Uṣaybī'a's biographical accounts of various scholars involved in the ancient sciences, she draws attention to Ḥamā and Damascus as sites of great interest in philosophical learning, and describes the importance of the availability of al-Rāzī's works at the Damascene court for debate on the heritage of Ibn Sīnā. In this context, it is unsurprising that some of al-Āmidī's biographers describe his time at Ḥamā as some of his most peaceful and productive years in pursuit of philosophy. His dedication of his *Kashf*, with its overtly philosophical orientation, to an Ayyūbid ruler suggests that his philosophical activities were conducted with the backing of the court. Furthermore, Brentjes shows that al-Ashraf, the very ruler at whose hands al-Āmidī was dismissed from his scholarly position, in fact continued to surround himself with scholars of the philosophical sciences.⁴⁰ In addition, we know that al-Rāzī's works continued to be freely circulated, and his students to enjoy courtly patronage, after al-Āmidī's demise. All this compounds the impression that al-Āmidī's fall from favour is not attributable to his engagement with the philosophical sciences.

My analysis of al-Āmidī's works confirms that the anti-philosophy trope of the biographical sources is unlikely to reflect reality. The trend of traditional scholarship to seize upon al-Āmidī as an exemplar of the persecuted philosopher does not make sense against the evidence of his extant works. Specifically, the notion that al-Āmidī was dismissed from his position in the *madrasa* at Damascus because of his interest in philosophy does not align with the attitude towards philosophy expressed in the works for which he is best known, and which would certainly have been known during his latter years in Damascus, namely his *Abkār al-afkār* and *Ghāyat al-marām*. I will show that despite the deep influence of Ibn Sīnā's most original metaphysical ideas on al-Āmidī's thought, these later works of theology represent a conservative reaction to the more comprehensive integration of *falsafī* doctrine and methods into *kalām* discourse represented by al-Rāzī. For instance, unlike his peer, al-Āmidī resists the restructuring of theology to allow for the separate treatment of matters pertaining to existence

⁴⁰ Brentjes, 'Orthodoxy', 24, fn 69.

per se. Al-Āmidī names al-Rāzī *mutafalsafat al-islām*, and this is not mere rhetoric, but a fundamental criticism of al-Rāzī's integration of the traditions. I will show that al-Rāzī's works are far more accommodating of Avicennan doctrine and method than al-Āmidī's most mature works. Given al-Āmidī's relative conservatism, it therefore seems unlikely that al-Āmidī's engagement with philosophy alone would have precipitated his ill-treatment at the hands of the Ayyūbid rulers.

To confirm this finding, I have also considered the evidence of the biographical accounts pertaining to 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī offered by those scholars who also provide accounts of the life of al-Āmidī. As Gutas has shown, al-Baghdādī was freely engaged in philosophy. The two scholars were contemporaries who both studied and worked in Baghdad and Damascus. Both studied Shāfi'i law under Ibn Faḍlān, and both were well known to Ibn Abī Uṣaybī'a, who writes of the friendship between his grandfather, uncle and father and al-Baghdādī, and between his father and al-Āmidī. Both travelled extensively and both are well known for their pursuit of philosophy. If al-Āmidī truly faced accusations of heresy and bad doctrine on the basis of his interest in philosophy alone, we might expect his biographers to record similar accusations against his peer. Unlike al-Āmidī, however, al-Baghdādī's interest in philosophy is never critiqued in the available biographical sources. His activities as a *ḥadīth* scholar are lauded, and the religious role thus assumed by him not described as compromised by his pursuit of philosophy. This makes it even less likely that al-Āmidī's difficulties are attributable to his philosophical interests alone.

Endress stresses the importance of al-Āmidī's opposition to al-Rāzī as a source of conflict in his life. The analysis of al-Āmidī's works of *falsafa* and *kalām* which constitutes the remainder of this thesis has revealed the fundamental importance of al-Āmidī's response to al-Rāzī for the course of his own intellectual career, thus extending Endress' insights. A key finding of this thesis is that al-Āmidī's intellectual opposition to al-Rāzī is the most pervasive, persistent feature of his thought. This observation applies as much to his *Kashf*, where his driving agenda is not the defence of Ibn Sīnā but the simple quest to undermine al-Rāzī as a reader of Ibn Sīnā, as to his *Abkār al-afkār*, where al-Āmidī repeatedly refutes arguments for doctrines which he

himself upholds, apparently simply because they have been devised by al-Rāzī. Of all his biographers, Ibn Wāṣil shows the greatest awareness of this fact, and I find his comments regarding the exaggerated nature of al-Āmidī’s opposition to and defamation of al-Rāzī to concur with the evidence of the works themselves. Specific examples of the way in which al-Āmidī receives al-Rāzī will be provided in the chapters to come. For now, suffice it to note that al-Āmidī consistently refers to his peer in a manner intended to undermine. We have seen that in his *Abkār*, al-Āmidī refers to al-Rāzī as ‘*mutafalsafat al-islām*’, and that despite the total dissimilarity of the *Kashf* to the *Abkār* in other respects, al-Āmidī’s goal there is to expose logical errors of ‘he who has become famous for drawing attention to [the philosophical sciences]’.⁴¹ This makes it likely that Ibn Wāṣil’s version of events surrounding al-Āmidī’s unpopularity at the Damascene court contains a core of truth. Al-Āmidī is certainly motivated by opposition to al-Rāzī, and this may well have been a factor in his difficulties in Ayyūbid Syria.

More speculatively, it seems possible that al-Āmidī’s character was a factor in his unpopularity (as implied by Brentjes). A persistent idea underlying many of the sources that al-Āmidī made enemies easily. Frequent references to ‘envy’ – either al-Āmidī’s own, or that of his opponents for his achievements – pepper the sources. The verse most commonly cited in connection with Āmidī reads:

.Hassadū al-fatā idh lam yanālū sa‘yahu
Fa-l-qawmu a‘dā‘un lahu wa-khuṣūmu⁴²

(They envied the young man for they had not achieved like him
To him they were opponents, and his enemies)

Al-Āmidī’s propensity to controversy may be owed partly to his having been a rather difficult individual. In combination with his intellectual opposition to an individual who turns out to have been more influential, this could have caused al-Āmidī quite significant problems. However, this suggestion must remain speculative. What can be argued more definitively is that the course of al-Āmidī’s career, especially in Ayyūbid Syria, was determined by issues surrounding patronage and support. The *Kashf* is perhaps the clearest testament to the fact that

⁴¹ *Kashf*, 2, 419.

⁴² Ibn al-‘Imād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, 7, 253.

al-Āmidī's intellectual opposition to al-Rāzī was motivated in part by competition over patronage and the struggle for influence at court. The fact of the work's dedication to an Ayyūbid ruler, in conjunction with its project of undermining al-Rāzī as an intellectual, together demonstrate this fact. Precisely how the competition for patronage featured in al-Āmidī's fall from favour in the court at Damascus cannot, however, be reconstructed.

Despite the conclusions drawn so far, which concur with those of Brentjes and Endress, the persistent anti-philosophy motif in the biographical accounts cannot be ignored. At this juncture, observations made by Brockopp, in his study of the multiple biographical accounts for the early Malikī scholar Sahnūn b. Sa‘id (d. 240/854), are relevant. Brockopp argues that biographical accounts of exemplary figures often contain contradictory information which reflect the concerns of the biographers, and that the mistake of modern readers is to treat such contradictions 'simply as problems to be resolved' in establishing the facts about an individual's life. He argues that the contradictory aspects of such accounts often represent the biographers' imaginary, indicating the ways in which their subjects have been perceived as exemplary.⁴³ Brockopp focuses on individuals who are positively idealised in contradictory ways, but his analysis is also important in the case of al-Āmidī. Though the anti-philosophical motif is not used to elevate al-Āmidī's status, we may well read its presence as part of a trend to make an example of al-Āmidī's life story in relation to ongoing tensions between the traditions of *falsafa* and *kalām*.

As I will demonstrate in the course of the thesis, al-Āmidī's thought is marked by his grappling for the appropriate balance between the integration of the most compelling aspects of the philosophical sciences, and the maintenance of the parameters of classical *kalām*. Although it is true that philosophy was entering the mainstream across the twelfth-century Middle East, this is not to say that its status as natural companion to *kalām* theology was settled. And although I have agreed with Brentjes *et al* that the accusations apparently levelled against al-Āmidī should not be taken at face value, their very presence in even the earliest sources suggests that the

⁴³ Brockopp, 'Contradictory Evidence', 116–7. The term 'imaginary' is used to refer to the collective picture formed by the sum of things imagined or believed, in this case, by biographers.

perceived tension between the traditions did not immediately cease to exist upon the entrance of *falsafa* into the *madrasa*. Though al-Ghazālī did not bring an end to philosophy in the Islamic world, al-Āmidī's biography testifies to the fact that the tension between the traditions persisted, albeit with greater complexity. The presence of an ongoing *Tahāfut* style trend of polemics against the philosophers, among scholars such as al-Balkhī, demonstrates this well.⁴⁴

It seems that it was still the order of the day to critique an intellectual with the language of the tension between *falsafa* and *kalām*. So whilst the traditional reading which sees al-Āmidī's experiences as testimony to the persecution of philosophically engaged intellectuals does not hold true, it may well be true that when al-Āmidī found himself in dispute with other scholars (whatever the cause), his contemporaries attributed those disputes to his engagement in philosophy. On this reading, the presence of the anti-philosophy motif, though not reflective of a general hostility towards philosophy, may indicate the ongoing ambiguity of the status of *falsafa* among contemporary (and later) intellectuals. The relationship between developments in philosophical theology in the Islamic world, and attitudes towards philosophy on the part of biographical historians of the Islamic world, is a subject worthy of research beyond this project. The ongoing presence of complexity in the relationship between the traditions of *falsafa* and *kalām* is, however, hardly surprising. Intellectuals like al-Āmidī, working at the boundaries of the traditions, dealt with major theological questions arising at the encounter of two alien worldviews. A specific instance of one such theological challenge, namely, the question of creation, occupies the remainder of this thesis.

⁴⁴ See Shihadeh, *Doubts*, 2-3.

Chapter 2

Concepts of Creation in al-Āmidī's Intellectual Context

*'If God's work is not voluntary,
God's personality is destroyed'*⁴⁵

A cardinal principle of Islamic theology, past and present, and in all its forms, is the deep conviction that behind the reality in which we find ourselves is a cause – a power singularly responsible for the existence of all else. This, of course, is the cornerstone of the Qur'anic worldview, the axiom of its chapter and verse. As is plain in present-day debates between literalist and progressive Creationists and theistic Evolutionists, however, what it means for the cosmos to be caused, and precisely what that cause is like, are ever subject to interpretation. The broadest landscape in which this thesis finds its home is the history of the quest for the identity of the world's cause, or in other words, the quest to account for what 'Creation' and the 'Creator' really are. Of course, the project is much more local than this expansive question. Yet it is helpful to keep this bigger picture in view.

The contribution of this thesis is a detailed analysis of a single theologian's integration of two distinct paradigms for the relationship between the world and its cause. My starting point is an introductory exposition of these paradigms. In this chapter I account for two antithetical visions of the God-World relationship. These are, on the one hand, the classical Ash'arī notion of creation, and on the other, Ibn Sīnā's. I argue that divergent notions of what determines an existent's need for a cause underly the disparity between these two visions.⁴⁶ I explain how these competing conceptions of creation are expressed within, respectively, a metaphysical framework - Ibn Sīnā's distinction between the possible and necessary of existence (Section 1), and a physical theoretical framework - Ash'arī atomism (Section 2). I also provide reflections on how these distinct doctrines of creation embrace, in their own ways, the Qur'anic worldview (in

⁴⁵ Goodman, 'Ghazālī's Argument', 81.

⁴⁶ For the sake of clarity and concision, and since the concept is central to this thesis, I use the word 'causedness' to refer to the state of requiring a cause.

Section 3). This analysis provides the appropriate framework within which to consider the situation of al-Āmīdī's thought with regard to the theologies of creation in his milieu.

1. Ibn Sīnā's Conception of Creation

I begin by explaining how Ibn Sīnā's belief in the world's eternity is grounded in his metaphysics, focusing on his *Shifā'*. Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of creation can be understood as the outcome of his theory on the different modes in which the world and its cause exist, and of his understanding of the relationship between the two kinds of existent. It is therefore his distinction between the possible and necessary of existence which is the primary context for his doctrine of creation.

Ibn Sīnā is rightly famed for his distinction between the existent whose essence determines neither its existence nor its non-existence, and which is therefore 'possible of existence by virtue of itself' (*mumkin al-wujūd li-dhātihī*), and the existent the essence of which determines that it must exist, and which is therefore 'necessary of existence by virtue of itself' (*wājib al-wujūd li-dhātihī*). The distinction is central to Ibn Sīnā's entire metaphysical system. It brings coherence to the various discussions subsumed within his study of the existent *qua* existent, uniting investigation of the Godhead with study of all other aspects of the existent, among which, for instance, unity and multiplicity and causality.⁴⁷ So fundamental is the distinction that in the *Ilāhiyyāt* of his *Shifā'*, it appears second only to the discussion of the existent itself.⁴⁸ It is difficult to overstate the significance of this concept for the coherent Islamic philosophical theology set forth by Ibn Sīnā. Indeed, Ibn Sīnā's applications of his theory include his proof for the existence of a being which is Necessary of Existence,⁴⁹ his identification of this being with

⁴⁷ On Ibn Sīnā's conception of the subject matter of the metaphysics and its context, see for instance Bertolacci 'Avicenna and Averroes', especially 73-78.

⁴⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, I.6, 29-34.

⁴⁹ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII.1-3, 257-273; *Najāt*, 2, 89-90; *Ishārāt*, IV.9-15, 2, 447-455; *Ta'līqāt*, 88-9; *al-Risāla al-'Arshiyya*, 2-3. For summaries of scholarship on Ibn Sīnā's proof, see Mayer, 'Ibn Sīnā's *Burhān*', 18-19; Bertolacci, 'Avicenna and Averroes', 78-79.

the Qur‘ānic God,⁵⁰ his defence of the uniqueness of God among the numerous pre-eternal beings of his Neoplatonic cosmology,⁵¹ and his doctrine of the pre-eternity of the world.⁵²

For the purposes of this thesis, it is Ibn Sīnā’s applications of his ontology within his doctrine of creation which concern us, and of which I now provide a preliminary account to be expanded upon in the next chapter. For Ibn Sīnā, the possible of existence is that whose essence does not determine its existence. This means that according to Ibn Sīnā, the world’s property of requiring a cause is a function of the possibility of the essences of which it is constituted. This position is contrastable with the classical *kalām* understanding that the world requires a cause for its existence because at one time, it did not exist. On Ibn Sīnā’s understanding, despite its posited eternity, the world is unlike God in that it is caused, since by virtue of itself, existence does not belong to it. God, by contrast, is uncaused not simply because he has always existed, but because non-existence is incompatible with his very essence.⁵³

According to Ibn Sīnā, the only valid relationship between the Necessary of Existence and the possible essences upon which he bestows existence is the relationship between a necessitating efficient cause and its effect. Ibn Sīnā holds that the effect relies on its efficient cause for its existence alone, and throughout the duration of its existence.⁵⁴ This is contrasted with the notion that the effect relies on its efficient cause only for the bestowal of existence after non-existence, which has led ‘some to think that a thing is in need of the cause for its origination alone, but that once it is originated... it no longer needs a cause’.⁵⁵

Having established that effects do not rely on their efficient causes for their origination and thus, that ‘true causes’ (*al-ilal al-haqiqiyah*) coexist with their effects, Ibn Sīnā posits a hierarchy of efficient metaphysical causes. He distinguishes between a form of causality in which the

⁵⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *Najāt*, 2, 89-94; *Ilāhiyyāt*, I.6-7, 29-38 and VIII.4-7, 273-298; *Ishārāt*, IV.16-29, 456-483. Wisnovsky aptly describes Ibn Sīnā’s notion of necessity as ‘the grab-bag of intransitive divine qualities’ (Wisnovsky, ‘Avicenna and the Avicennian Tradition’, 120).

⁵¹ Ibn Sīnā, *Ta’līqāt*, 28, 54.

⁵² Ibn Sīnā, *Najāt*, 2, 69-70, 75-76; *Ilāhiyyāt*. IX.1, 299-309; *Ishārāt*, V.1-9, 485-525.

⁵³ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, I.6, 29-34.

⁵⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, VI.1 and VI.2, especially 196-198 and 201-2.

⁵⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, VI.1, 198; c.f. *Tabī’iyāt*, I.12, 1, 80.

cause produces its effect from pre-eternity, and one in which the effect of the agent comes to exist after not having existed. The former he describes as the ‘pre-eminent [kind of] cause (*awlā bi-l-‘illiyya*) because it prevents the nonexistence of the thing absolutely’.⁵⁶ The next (and more controversial) step taken by Ibn Sīnā is to define this kind of causality as ‘Creation’ (*ibdā’*), with reference to the fact that it is the ‘giving of existence to a thing after absolute non-existence’ (*ta’yīs al-shay’ ba’d lays muṭlaq*), preventing non-existence entirely.⁵⁷ Despite the terminological difference (the theologians normally refer to *ijād al-shay’ ba’d al-‘adam*), the echo of language used by the theologians to express the primacy of God as Maker of a world created *ex nihilo* is clear and probably deliberate.

Later in the *Metaphysics*, Ibn Sīnā proves that the permanent, eternal efficient causation which he defines as ‘Creation’ is the only sound explanation for the manner of God’s existentialiation of the world. He first comments that the principles already established in relation to the nature of the Necessary of Existence, and of the efficient-cause effect relationship, ought to suffice the reader in understanding that the effect of the Necessary of Existence must co-exist with it pre-eternally. However, he proceeds to an extensive disjunction *ad absurdum*, by which he establishes that the world is pre-eternal. This is particularly to the exclusion of the scenario imagined by the theologians, in which, prior to God’s bestowal of existence upon the world, the world is actually non-existent. Ibn Sīnā contrasts the theologians’ view with his own, in which the Necessary of Existence, which permanently exists because its essence is to exist, permanently bestows, via that essence and without intermediary or delay, existence which is likewise permanent, that is to say, pre-eternal and perpetual.⁵⁸

Finally, and crucially for subsequent philosophical-theological discussions on creation, in his analysis of the nature of necessary existence, Ibn Sīnā Islamicises Neo-Platonic conceptions of the world’s cause in a manner not found in the thought of any predecessor. Since, for Ibn Sīnā, the Necessary of Existence is absolutely simple, God is entirely immaterial and therefore pure

⁵⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, VI.2, 203.

⁵⁷ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, VI.2, 203-204.

⁵⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, IX.1, 300-307.

intellect. In line with his absolute simplicity, God's intellect is identical with his existence.⁵⁹ And since God is unlike humans in that his knowledge is absolutely perfect, there is no distinction between his knowledge and his action (indeed, they are identical). Accordingly, Ibn Sīnā defines God's volition as the unhindered effect of his knowledge, identical with emanation itself.⁶⁰ Thus Ibn Sīnā is able to define the eternal necessitating cause of the universe as voluntary – a crucially innovative step for an Islamic philosopher, and one which would shape the course of subsequent debates. I will later show that in subsequent discussions, the question of whether or not the notion of permanent, essential, efficient causation envisioned by Ibn Sīnā is correctly described as 'creation' and as 'agency' causes a shift in the axis of Ash'arī discussions of creation.

Ibn Sīnā's doctrine that the world is eternal is, then, a function of his understanding of God as the metaphysical efficient cause of the world's existence.⁶¹ This means that the foundations of his doctrine of creation, and the primary philosophical framework within which it is set forth, are metaphysical. This can be contrasted in some respects with the primary framework within which the classical Ash'arī understanding of the world's creation is set forth.

2. The Classical Ash'arī Conception of Creation

The second of the two paradigms for the explanation of creation within al-Āmīdī's primary intellectual context is that of classical Ash'arism. For classical Ash'arīs, the physical theoretical model of atoms and accidents provided the main framework within which the world's dependence on its cause was established.

⁵⁹ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII.6, 284-5.

⁶⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII.7, 291-6, especially 295; and see Rahman, 'Ibn Sīnā's Theory', 49; and Adamson's study of Ibn Sīnā's characterisation of the Necessary of Existence with the qualities of the Islamic God, among which, his volition (Adamson, 'From the Necessary Existent').

⁶¹ On the Aristotelian background to Ibn Sīnā's notion of efficient causation, and on Ibn Sīnā's innovation in making God both final and efficient cause of the world, see Wisnovsky, 'Final and Efficient Causality'.

The following figure is derived from a passage in al-Anṣārī's (d. 512/1118) *al-Ghunya fī uṣūl al-dīn*, and neatly illustrates the overall ontology accepted by all classical Ash'arī scholars.⁶²

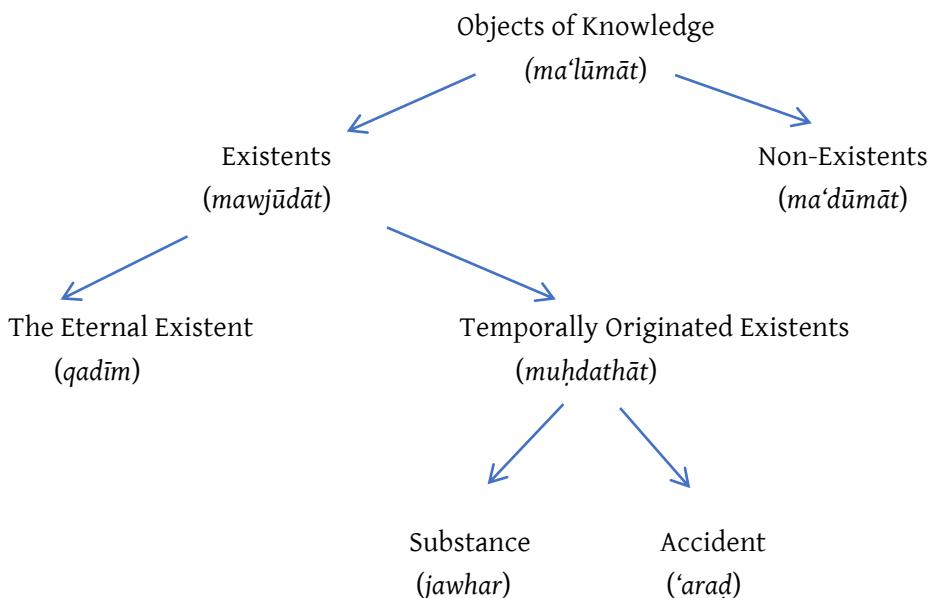


Figure 1.

Al-Ash'arī and his followers uphold two kinds of existent. The primary duality of existents is not, however, necessarily and possibly existent but the dichotomy between eternality and temporality. The extent to which Ash'arī *mutakallimūn* insisted on the distinction cannot be overstated. Ibn Fūrak cites al-Ash'arī as having claimed that 'a necessary property of the existent (*al-wājib fī ḥukm al-mawjūd*) is that it either has a beginning, or is beginningless.'⁶³ The eternal existent is described as 'the absolute existent' (*al-mawjūd al-muṭlaq*), with reference to the fact that it is not subject to non-existence, and contrasted in this regard with temporally originated existents.⁶⁴ Al-Isfara'īnī describes the eternal as that whose 'non-existence is impossible'.⁶⁵ This expression demonstrates the total identification of past eternality with necessity among classical Ash'arīs. By contrast, temporally originated existents are not absolute, being subject to actual non-existence. They are therefore not necessary, and so

⁶² Al-Anṣārī, *Ghunya*, 279-280.

⁶³ Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 32. He also writes of originatedness (*hudūth*) as 'one of the two predications of existence (*min waṣfay al-wujūd*) (27). On predication in Ash'arī *kalām*, see Frank, 'The Ash'arite Ontology', 178-181.

⁶⁴ Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 28.

⁶⁵ Isfara'īnī, 'Aqīda, 138.

inferior to the eternal existent. Within al-Ash‘arī’s system, temporal existents are those which require a cause. For al-Ash‘arī, the term *muḥdath* is synonymous with the term *makhlūq* (created). That which undergoes non-existence must be created if it is to exist at all.⁶⁶ On this understanding, the need for cause is associated with an actual state of non-existence (and not, as in Ibn Sīnā’s system, with mere susceptibility to non-existence). Within the Ash‘arī ontology, an existent’s need for a cause is entailed by its temporal impermanence.

The Ash‘arī notion of causedness thus far explained is metaphysical, which is to say that it is premised on the metaphysical postulate that that which comes to exist after not existing requires a cause. Nevertheless, among classical Ash‘arīs, the world’s need for a cause was almost exclusively established within a natural philosophical framework. For classical Ash‘arīs, the division of temporally originated existents into substance and accident was exhaustive.⁶⁷ Al-Ash‘arī defines the world as ‘all created things, both substances and accidents’ (*jumlat al-makhlūqāt jawāhiruhā wa-a’rāḍuhā*).⁶⁸ Given that the *jawhar* is defined as the space-occupying existent (*al-mutahayyiz*), and the accident as that which inheres in a substrate (namely, substance), the presence of temporally originated beings which do not exist in space (i.e. immaterial beings) is precluded.⁶⁹ That is to say that Ash‘arī atomism presents an entirely materialistic view of the realm of existence outside God. An obvious implication is that in order to prove the temporal origination (and therefore causedness) of the world, one need only prove the temporal origination of substances and accidents. This explains the high importance of the atomist doctrine in Ash‘arī expressions of the world’s contingency. Though the world’s causedness is an inherently metaphysical matter, the nature of atoms and accidents is absolutely fundamental to its establishment.

⁶⁶ Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 28.

⁶⁷ Early Ash‘arīs tended to discuss substance, accident, and body (*jism*) as categories of temporal existents. The body is an aggregate of substances, and therefore not a primary division. Al-Juwainī seems, however, to have been the first Ash‘arī *mutakallim* to uphold the primacy of the substance/accident dichotomy.

⁶⁸ Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 37; c.f. al-Juwainī, *Irshād*, 17.

⁶⁹ The existence of eternal immaterial beings other than God is precluded separately, in discussions of the impossibility of the existence of more than one creator, e.g. al-Ash‘arī, *Luma‘*, 20-21; al-Mutawallī, *Mughnī*, 9.

Ash‘arī atomism therefore provided the essential framework with which to prove the world’s creation *ex nihilo*, and thence its need for a cause. This was chiefly accomplished via the proof from accidents, the ‘*kalām* proof *par excellence*’ for the temporal creation of the world, or in al-Āmidī’s words, ‘the famous method of our school’ (*al-madhhāb al-mashhūr li-ashābinā*).⁷⁰ This proof, discussed in detail in Chapter 5, relies on several key tenets of Ash‘arī atomism, including the non-endurance of accidents, the impossibility of substance existing devoid of accidents, and the temporal origination of atoms. In the case of many works of classical *kalām*, the use of the proof from accidents is formalised to the extent that the atomist doctrine is defended exclusively in the context of this proof.

Ibn Fūrak, in his *Mujarrad*, claims that al-Ash‘arī said the following concerning the doctrine that matter is ultimately composed of indivisible parts:

Whoever claims monotheism (*al-tawhīd*) [but] denies this is equivalent, in his denial of matter’s indivisibility, to the non-believer.⁷¹

This association of anti-atomism with disbelief reflects the deep-rooted significance of Ash‘arī physical theory for the core theology of the tradition. Here, it is the finitude of matter in terms of its divisibility which is seen to entail its dependence on a cause. Yet the more important dimension of matter’s finitude for the Ash‘arīs is its temporal finitude, that is, its being originated from absolute non-existence. Within the atomistic vision of the universe, creation is not the realisation of some inherent potential, but the production of stuff from absolute nothingness. Accordingly, establishing the temporal finitude of the constituents of the world is fundamental to proving its need for a cause. It is only on the basis that matter comes to be from nothing that creation as understood in the tradition can be said to occur. Physical theory is thus paramount to the Ash‘arī theological project.⁷²

⁷⁰ *Abkār*, 3, 335. See Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 134–146 for a summary of uses of the proof.

⁷¹ Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 211.

⁷² The introduction to the *Ishāra*, the earliest *kalām* work of al-Rāzī, who I will show ultimately departs from the classical Ash‘arī understanding of causedness, confirms the theological function of physical theory: ‘the questions of this science are either creedal doctrines such as establishing the eternity and unicity of the Creator, or matters upon which these doctrines depend, such as matter’s composition of indivisible parts’ (*Ishāra*, 28).

A qualifying observation is in order. I have emphasised that atomism provides the primary basis for establishing the world's creation *ex nihilo*, and thence its causedness, among classical Ash'arīs. Yet the Ash'arī understanding of possibility is also a significant thread within the schools's conception of causedness. The concept of possibility as the presence of multiple synchronic alternatives allows the classical Ash'arīs to posit the need for a particularising agent (a voluntary Creator) to specify each of the attributes of the world, most prominently its creation at a specific moment in time. Thus, my stress on the dominance of physical theory as the framework within which Ash'arīs establish creation *ex nihilo* should not obscure the role of the classical Ash'arīs' own metaphysics of possibility. The importance of this observation will become clear in the next chapter, where al-Āmidī is shown to draw on the teaching of classical Ash'arism in his reception of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics of possibility. My claim is not, then, that classical Ash'arīs have exclusively physical theoretical foundations for their understanding of creation - I have stressed that the notion that the temporal origination of an existent determines its need for a cause is a metaphysical belief. My point is that Ash'arī physical theory provides the framework within which the world's causedness (via its temporal origination) is established. It can therefore be viewed as equivalent to Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics as a context for the development of a doctrine of creation.

In order to demonstrate the great consistency between generations of classical Ash'arīs with regard to the procedure for proving creation *ex nihilo*, I now provide a survey of arguments for creation employed within a selection of Ash'arī *summae*. The purpose is to illustrate the dominance of physical theory within the defence of creation. Secondarily, it will become clear that since classical Ash'arīs understood an existent's being caused as determined by its temporal originatedness, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* served as the crucial premise in proofs for a cause of the world. Furthermore, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* served, often simultaneously, to establish that the world's cause is possessed of volition (*irāda*).⁷³ In this regard, the importance of the principle of particularisation is also exemplified.

⁷³ The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* also serves the Mu'tazila in proving God's existence, and is also predominantly established among them via the proof from accidents; the first appearance of the proof among the *mutakallimūn*

Abū l-Ḥassan al-Ash‘arī (d. 324/936)

Despite being the eponymous founder of the tradition, there is greater discontinuity between al-Ash‘arī and subsequent classical Ash‘arīs in methodology than occurs at later stages of the tradition. Nonetheless, his extant works contain the seeds of the more technical systematic theology of his disciples, as I demonstrate with regard to the doctrine of creation on the basis of the discussion in *Kitāb al-Luma‘*.

No separate section is devoted, in the *Luma‘*, to proving creation *ex nihilo*. This is not because the doctrine is not present, but because it is established within al-Ash‘arī’s proof for God. The proof relies on the scripturally-inspired example of the origination of man from a drop of sperm.⁷⁴ It is argued that man is no more capable of conveying (*naqala*) himself from the state of a sperm droplet to that of a fully developed human than of conveying himself from old-age to youthfulness. Thus, there must be something which conveys (*nāqil*) man from one state to the next, identified as God himself.⁷⁵ This argument entails a denial of natural potency of any kind, demanding God’s constant intervention in physical processes, in line with al-Ash‘arī’s occasionalist commitments.⁷⁶ It also relies on the principle that the changing characteristics of existents require a particularising cause, being unable to self-differentiate from other possible characteristics. It is therefore to this point an argument proceeding from the changeability of the world’s constituents to the existence of an agent of change, and creation *ex nihilo* is not entailed. The need for an agent of change in the atoms of human bodies does not alone entail the temporal origination of the world, nor of the human race; one could postulate an infinite regress of the life-cycle sperm-human-sperm, maintained by God’s continual intervention.

However, al-Ash‘arī does hold that creation as a whole is temporally originated. He does not directly address the possibility of an infinite regress of temporally originated occurrences, but

appears to have been with Abū l-Hudhayl (cited by ‘Abd al-Jabbār in *Sharḥ al-uṣūl*, 95; c.f. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 134–5). For ‘Abd al-Jabbār’s version, see *Sharḥ al-uṣūl*, 95–115.

⁷⁴ Q23:12–14; 22:5; 32:7–9.

⁷⁵ Al-Ash‘arī, *Luma‘*, 6.

⁷⁶ See Davidson, ‘Arguments from the Concept’, 309, on the relationship between Ash‘arī proofs for God and occasionalism.

in response to an imagined opponent who suggests that mankind could have originated from a first, eternal drop of sperm, he argues that sperm must be temporally originated, since nothing which is subject to change is eternal. Furthermore, existents which cannot precede that which is temporally originated (in this case the atoms of the body, which cannot precede the sperm from which they are produced) are themselves temporally originated. Al-Ash‘arī adds that the proof from change against the eternity of sperm applies to all bodies.⁷⁷ Al-Ash‘arī’s view is that a world comprised entirely of temporally originated bodies must itself be temporally originated, the product of a particularising Creator. The principle that the existent which is not devoid of temporally originated existents must itself be temporally originated is central to the proof from accidents, as we shall see.⁷⁸

Al-Ash‘arī’s proof for God is premised upon the world’s inherent temporality, proven by its changeability. The argumentative strategy of the *Luma‘*, where defence of the existence of the Creator and of the temporal origination of the world appear as one, testifies to the close relation between the doctrines. The changeability of the human and of all bodies proves simultaneously the world’s originatedness, the existence of its cause, and the nature of its cause. The significance of reflection on the physical world in defence of its need for a cause is clear, and related to the more methodological treatments of this subject among later Ash‘arīs.

Early Classical Ash‘arism

Proofs for creation and the existence of God become formalised among Ash‘arīs of the next generation. The following discussion of the relevant parts of Muḥammad ibn al-Tayyib al-Bāqillānī’s (d. 403/1013) *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*, and ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī’s (d. 429/1037) *Uṣūl al-*

⁷⁷ Al-Ash‘arī, *Luma‘*, 7. I disagree with Davidson that this is a version of the proof from accidents (Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 136).

⁷⁸ A similar argument appears in al-Ash‘arī’s *Risāla ilā ahl al-thagr*, where, on the basis that ‘no changeable thing is eternal’ he ultimately concludes that ‘the change [which occurs to] bodies must terminate at temporally originated entities before which no bodies existed’, adding that this ‘proves a wise, powerful originator’ (*Risāla*, 144-6). Al-Ash‘arī does not provide an argument for his claim that a temporally originated world requires a cause (unlike subsequent generations of Ash‘arīs). This suggests that he holds that this is an item of immediate knowledge.

dīn illustrates the role of physical theory within their thought, and the intrinsic connection between the doctrines of creation *ex nihilo* and of the existence of a volitional Creator.

Despite differences in method, in each of the works, creation *ex nihilo* appears as an explicit premise of the proof for the Creator (and therefore, structurally, proof for creation precedes proof for the creator). Al-Bāqillānī uses the proof from accidents, which relies upon several tenets of *kalām* physical theory, to establish the world's temporal origination.⁷⁹ His proof for the Creator begins 'this temporally originated, well-designed world requires an originator and designer (*lā budd li-hādhihi l-ālam al-muḥdath al-muṣawwar muḥdith muṣawwir*)'.⁸⁰ For al-Bāqillānī, the world's origination at a particular point in time is one of a host of characteristics possessed by the world which in themselves are only possible, which is to say that they could be otherwise. The specification of the time of the world's creation in particular (for which the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is essential), as well as its characteristics of dimension, shape, and so on, all point to the existence of a volitional particulariser. This is because al-Bāqillānī holds it to be impossible for an occurrence for which there are multiple synchronic alternatives to cause itself. Since the world could have been originated five minutes before it was or five hundred years after, it cannot have caused its own origination, since there would have been no factor particularising the time of that origination.⁸¹

Thus, just as for al-Ash'arī the changing characteristics of humankind and the world, and their initial creation *ex nihilo* establish both the existence of a cause and its nature, so for al-Bāqillānī, the specific characteristics of the world, pre-eminently its originatedness at a given time, establish both the existence of the world's cause and its attribute of volition. The world is seen

⁷⁹ Al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, 22-23.

⁸⁰ Al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, 23.

⁸¹ Craig describes this as the 'principle of determination', and sees it as key to the 'unique genius' of the *kalām* formulation of the cosmological argument in establishing that the world's cause is a freely acting personal deity (Craig, 'Design and the Cosmological Argument', 34-339).

to depend both for its initial creation and for its ongoing particularised existence, upon a voluntary Creator.⁸²

For al-Baghdādī, too, creation *ex nihilo* is proven via the proof from accidents, and the existence of a voluntary creator on the basis of the world's creation in time.⁸³ He too argues that 'temporally originated things must have an originator', and in the subsequent discussion that such an originator must be possessed of volition, given the particularisation of the world's existence at one time over another, and the remainder of the world's particularised characteristics.⁸⁴

Late Classical Ash'arism

Al-Juwainī (d. 478/1085) is the most influential theologian of this period and the works of a number of other late classical Ash'arīs closely depend on his. Variations between al-Bāqillānī's version of the proof from accidents and al-Juwainī's have been well documented by Davidson and others.⁸⁵ For our purposes, it is sufficient to observe the predominance of the proof from accidents, with its reliance on atomist physical theory.⁸⁶ Like his predecessor, al-Juwainī

⁸² Al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, 23-4. Al-Bāqillānī uses three proofs for the Creator with this same premise. In a subsequent section, he writes: 'temporal occurrences only depend on an originator with respect to their temporal originatedness' (al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, 25). Elsewhere, proving God's entitative attribute of volition, he states: 'The existence of temporal occurrences, whose nature is [that they can not exist at one time and exist at another], has no greater priority than their non-existence except whether there is the intention of an intendor (*qasd al-qāsid*) and the will of a willer by whose will they exist in connection with his plan' (*Tamhīd*, 29). The dependence of his affirmation of a volitional Creator upon his notion of the world's temporal originatedness and ongoing changeability is clear. Davidson rightly observes that the reasoning of al-Bāqillānī's proof from particularisation 'is not really dependent on the proof of creation to which [he] joins it', since according to the principle of particularisation, the specific characteristics of even an eternal world would require a cause (Davidson, 'Arguments from the Concept of Particularisation', 301). However, it appears to me that the world's origination at a particular time is seen by al-Bāqillānī as its prime characteristic pointing to its need for a particulariser. This is seen in his analogy of a piece of writing requiring an author to particularise its origination over its non-existence.

⁸³ Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl*, 33-60 (proof from accidents); 68-69 (proof for the creator).

⁸⁴ Al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl*, 68.

⁸⁵ Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 143-6. One new feature is the way in which al-Juwainī establishes the existence of accidents. Al-Juwainī argues that the characteristics of things, being inherently possible, require a cause. Specifically, he argues that the behaviours and characteristics of substances in the world around us are only possible (*min al-mumkināt*). Thence, he argues that possibles (*al-hukm al-jā'iz*), if their existence is to be realised, require a necessitator, which he demonstrates to be the necessitating accidents inhering within substance (*Irshād*, 17-18). The Ash'arī conception of possibility, key to proofs for God, is embedded within al-Juwainī's proof from accidents for creation *ex nihilo*.

⁸⁶ Al-Juwainī, *Irshād*, 17-27.

premises his proof for the creator on creation *ex nihilo*. Although there is a sophistication in his thought not found among his predecessors, al-Juwainī makes no break with the conception of causedness and creation he has inherited.

He argues that ‘existence and non-existence are both possible (*jā’iz*) for that which is temporally originated’.⁸⁷ He then argues that an existent so characterised, if it does come to exist, requires a cause to particularise its existence over its continued non-existence. This articulates the classical Ash‘arī doctrine that temporal originatedness (*hudūth*), that is, the actual presence of non-existence prior to existence, is what determines an existent’s need for a cause. Next, he explicitly considers what the nature of the cause of a temporally originated world must be. He rules out the notion that a necessitating cause or a nature could be responsible for a temporally originated world on the basis that the effects of such causes must concur temporally with their causes (*al-‘illa tūjib ma'lūlaha 'alā l-iqtirān*).⁸⁸ Thus the action of such a cause would necessitate, in the case of the eternity of the cause, an eternal world (already disproven) or, on the assumption of the temporal origination of the cause, an infinite regress of temporally originated causes, which is impossible.⁸⁹ It must, then, be the case that a temporally originated world is the effect of a volitional agent (*fā'il mukhtār*). In al-Juwainī’s argument, the function of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in establishing both the world’s need for its cause, and the voluntary nature of that cause, is especially clear. This represents a peak in articulations of this conception of causedness and creation, shortly to be subjected to modification in light of Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of creation.⁹⁰

Although expressed with increasing sophistication from one generation of Ash‘arī scholars to the next, the conception of causedness and creation remains unchanged. This section has

⁸⁷ Al-Juwainī, *Irshād*, 28.

⁸⁸ Al-Juwainī, *Irshād*, 28.

⁸⁹ Al-Juwainī, *Irshād*, 29.

⁹⁰ Alongside the major twelfth-century development of the Ash‘arī treatment of creation at the pen of al-Ghazālī which is key context to this thesis, a strand of Ash‘arism continues which broadly imitates the methods of al-Juwainī and other classical Ash‘arīs. Al-Anṣārī’s (d. 511/1118) discussions of creation in his *Ghunya* are a prime example. His discussion of the physical theory of atoms and accidents occurs almost exclusively in the context of the proof from accidents (*Ghunya*, 1, 279-341).

illustrated the importance of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* among classical Ash‘arīs as a premise of proofs for God, and that the doctrine is consistently defended within the framework of Ash‘arī physical theory. Later in the thesis, I demonstrate that both the utilisation of physical theory, and the theological function of creation *ex nihilo*, are impacted heavily by the influence of Ibn Sīnā’s metaphysics among post-classical Ash‘arīs.

3. Theological Significance

Having discussed the major competing notions of creation and causedness within al-Āmīdī’s intellectual context, but before commencing a study of his reception of each, it is worth briefly reflecting on what is at stake theologically. The two doctrines of creation outlined possess wide theological significance, and, I will argue, correlate to two contrasting approaches to the resolution of a theological paradox implicit to the Qur’ān. These theological ramifications merit reflection because al-Āmīdī’s perspectives on creation represent his reception of the contrasting theologies implied.

All theological speculation can be said to be the quest for an understanding of the character of God, and of the God-world relationship. For the Islamic theologian, the Qur’ān is a key source of information about God’s character and his relation to the world. and apparent contradictions within the Qur’ān are a major stimulus for theological debate. Abrahamov discusses two prime examples of the way in which apparent contradictions feature in theological discussion, namely, the problem of Qur’ānic anthropomorphisms, and of divine pre-determinism. In relation to the question of anthropomorphisms, the theologian must reconcile the Qur’ānic insistence on God’s ‘otherness’ from his creation (‘there is nothing like unto him’ [Q 42:11]) with statements which describe him in human, and even corporeal terms (‘Everything will perish save his face’ [Q28:88]).⁹¹

⁹¹ Abrahamov, ‘Theology’, 420-421; and his ‘The *Bi-lā kayf* doctrine’ on various theological resolutions of anthropomorphisms within the Qur’ān.

Underlying the tension between anthropomorphic verses in the Qur'an and its simultaneous insistence on God's transcendence is a deeper paradox which, though it calls on the reader's attention less immediately, remains a major theological issue. It is the tension between the transcendence of God on the one hand, and his revealing himself in a way that is knowable and understandable to mankind, on the other. As well as being the underlying theological paradox behind the issue of anthropomorphisms, this tension is also the source of debate over the sense in which the Qur'ān is the word (*kalām*) of God, and the concomitant major theological issue of the createdness of the Qur'ān. Here, classical theologians and traditionalists were grappling to understand how the eternal, unchanging, transcendent God could reveal himself in the tangible, temporal words of the Qur'ān.⁹² In a very real sense, the paradox between God's transcendence and his knowability is, then, one which was at the background, whether implicitly or explicitly, of much Islamic theological speculation.

Kalām-falsafa polemics can be viewed from one angle to represent the battle for the most appropriate resolution of the paradox, even if the practitioners themselves did not articulate their debates in this way. Indeed, the two conceptions of causedness which are the subject of this thesis directly correlate to the way in which the Ash'arī theologians on the one hand, and Ibn Sīnā on the other, resolve the transcendent-knownable paradox. The encounter over the nature of creation is not an end unto itself, but one battle-ground for the identity of the Islamic God. Specifically, what is at stake in discussion of creation is what it means for God to be 'volitional' and 'powerful'. These terms, intelligible for us in relation to human agents possessed of volition and power, are nevertheless descriptors of the transcendent God who is supposed to be totally unlike anything in the created order.

The classical Ash'arī understanding of creation reflects the school's distinctive conception of what it means for the transcendent God to be 'voluntary' and 'powerful'. It could be argued that there is nothing which more definitively characterises Ash'arī doctrine as Ash'arī than its vision

⁹² As Martin puts it, this was 'essentially an argument about the ontology of divine speech in the human, creaturely context' (Martin, 'Createdness'). Watt interprets the Ash'arī doctrine of the Qur'ān's uncreatedness as a function of the school's emphasis on God's transcendence: 'for al-Ash'arī, this Eternal-in-history cannot be a creature merely, because of the otherness of creature from the Creator' (Watt, 'Early Discussions', 104).

of the nature of God's volition and power. This vision touches on the whole spectrum of Ash'arī beliefs, including its most historically peculiar. Essentially, the Ash'arī understanding of volition (*irāda*) is derived from human experience. Al-Ghazālī articulates the classical position when he defines volition as 'an attribute... the essence of which is to differentiate a thing from its like (*takhṣīṣ al-shay' 'an mithlihi*)' and provides the example of a man choosing between two identical dates.⁹³ On this understanding, God's relation to the effects of his power entails the presence of multiple synchronic alternatives for each given occurrence, and his selection of one over all others. This accords with the vision of creation as God's selection of a moment, chosen over all others, in which he brought the world into existence.

Yet characterising God's volition in apparently human terms would seem to run the risk of the anthropomorphism which many Islamic theologians were so keen to avoid. The distinctively Ash'arī solution used by classical theologians to preserve the transcendence of God whilst thus characterising him is to re-interpret volition and power in the case of humans. The Ash'arīs curtail human volition and power, through their famous doctrine of *kasb* (man's 'performance' of acts created by God).⁹⁴ Temporally originated volition and power (*al-irāda al-hāditha* and *al-qudra al-hāditha*), and the acts with which they are associated, may give man the illusion of total freedom over his own action, but are, in fact, created accidents. They are acts of God, created instant by instant as the result of his unrestricted freedom to will and act. Thus, volition can be defined in the case of both God and humans as an entity 'the function of which is to particularise one possibility over another'.⁹⁵ Yet the property (*hukm*) of God's volition is that it

⁹³ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 22-24. In his early work of *kalām*, the *Ishāra*, al-Rāzī also explicitly analogises from human to divine volition, arguing that the volition for something to occur cannot apply to something which already exists as follows: 'do you not see that we do not find in ourselves the exercise of the volition to do that which already exists?' (*Ishāra*, 63).

⁹⁴ Frank's study of *kalām* conceptions of moral obligation provides a clear analysis of the Ash'arī doctrine of human action (Frank, 'Moral Obligation', 207-215); also Abrahamov, 'A Re-examination'. On Ash'arī occasionalism as an expression of the school's emphasis on God's absolute superiority to his creation, see for instance, Fakhry, *Ash'arī Occasionalism*, 9.

⁹⁵ *Abkār*, 1, 301, a definition which he holds to be also applicable in the case of the created accident of human will (*Abkār*, 2, 459).

is eternal, and therefore uncreated, whereas all human volition is temporally originated, created directly by God and only acquired by the human agent.

The desire to preserve the singularity of God's volition and power can be seen as the impetus for a number of Ash'arī doctrines, including the application of the occasionalist doctrine to processes observed in nature, which entails the denial of secondary causality;⁹⁶ the Ash'arī response to Mu'tazilī theodicy, which prioritises defence of God's power and freedom of action over belief in the objectivity of justice;⁹⁷ and, most pertinently in the present context (but not exclusive to Ash'arism) the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. The classical Ash'arī understanding of causation is thus not isolated in its theological significance. Rather, the specific conception of God's relation to the acts of his power, a relation in which God chooses, through volition, and originates, by power, one alternative out of the multiple synchronic possible courses of action, is integral to the Ash'arī understanding of the identity of the Islamic deity. This is a personal deity characterised by terms understood in relation to humankind, but utterly transcendent especially in the sense that no other existent possesses his unrestricted freedom of action. This dearly held vision of God informs classical Ash'arī conceptions of causation and creation.

Although the Qur'ān does not have the same status within Ibn Sīnā's philosophical project as for the Ash'arīs, it is true to say that Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of creation accords with one interpretation of the Qur'ān's depiction of God. Indeed, there is a profound and deliberate theological potency in Ibn Sīnā's distinction between the being whose existence is necessary by virtue of its own essence, and beings whose existence is only possible by virtue of their essences. The description of the Necessary of Existence as 'the affirmation of existence' (*ta'akkud al-wujūd*) aligns powerfully with the Qur'ānic portrayal of God as ultimate and unique existentiator and sustainer of all that is.⁹⁸ By identifying the Qur'ānic God as Necessary of Existence, Ibn Sīnā gave philosophical expression to a major impulse of *kalām* rational theology – the desire to ascribe to God maximal glory and unique responsibility for the existence of everything else. Ibn Sīnā's

⁹⁶ See Frank, 'The Structure of Created Causality'.

⁹⁷ See e.g. Legenhausen 'Notes towards'; Ormsby, *Theodicy*, 17–25.

⁹⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, I.7, 36.

distinction between the necessary and possible of existence, though its historical origins are not Islamic, and though it had philosophical motivations, deliberately embraces an Islamic worldview in that it clearly complies with the aforementioned Qur'anic formulation '*laysa kā-mithlihi shay'* (there is nothing like unto Him) (Q 42:11). Ibn Sīnā's Necessary of Existence is unique and essentially superior to all other existents.

In turn, Ibn Sīnā's understanding of God's agency can be seen to reflect one resolution of the transcendent-knowable paradox - one which is distinctly unlike al-Ash'arī's.⁹⁹ His conception of God's transcendence means that for Ibn Sīnā, the words 'voluntary', 'powerful', and 'knowing' are only equivocally applied to both God and mankind. Whilst the Ash'arīs define volition and power in the same way in the case of human and divine agents, qualifying this in relation to the createdness of human volition and power, Ibn Sīnā defines volition and power in relation to a divinity whose determining characteristic is his transcendent existence. Rather than taking his definition of 'volition' from human experience, Ibn Sīnā begins from his premise of God's transcendent existence, and defines his volition accordingly, as we have seen, as the unhindered action of his existence in bestowing existence, that is, as emanation itself. The sense in which mankind is described as volitional is quite separate from this definition.¹⁰⁰

Against this background, it is unsurprising that when the creationist doctrine comes face-to-face with Ibn Sīnā's eternalism, it is the very issues of the nature of God's volition, power and agency which come to the fore, as I will demonstrate especially in Chapter 5. Since the Ash'arīs and Ibn Sīnā are in total agreement that the world indeed has a cause, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is transformed into a defence of the nature of the relationship between the world and its cause, and resultantly, of the character of God.

⁹⁹ The Ash'arī approach is normally contrasted with the Mu'tazilī preservation of mankind's free will. Yet in the post-classical context, an appropriate contrast is with Ibn Sīnā.

¹⁰⁰ See al-Rāzī's explanation of Ibn Sīnā's view that divine volition cannot be defined on the basis of human volition in *Matālib*, 3, 175.

My comments on the relation of Ibn Sīnā's understanding of God's volition to the Qur'ānic worldview are not intended to obscure the Neoplatonised Aristotelian background to his core conception of God's perfection as pure, unbounded, and simple existence. Rather, the aim is to emphasize the inevitability of its influence on the theological tradition, given its appeal to the Qur'ānic worldview.

Rahman writes of Ibn Sīnā:

‘Since he could not accept philosophically the idea of creation in time, advocated by orthodoxy, but also took the demands of traditional Islam seriously... the concept of contingency seemed to him to respond exactly to the demand of religion that God and the world cannot co-exist at the same level of being, that between God and the world there is a radical ontological dislocation.’¹⁰¹

It is certainly true that Ibn Sīnā’s version of eternalism, uniquely among those of his philosophical predecessors, responds to traditional theological and scripturalist demands. Rahman, typically of his generation of scholars, also believed that Ibn Sīnā ‘proved to be the *bête noire* of the orthodox, and al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī, and other orthodox representatives chose him as their unique target’.¹⁰² However, as I aim to demonstrate in relation to al-Āmidī, the Islamic appeal of aspects of Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of creation meant that he provoked a re-working of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* among generations of post-Avicennan Ash‘arī scholars. In particular, far from being a ‘target’ for al-Rāzī, Ibn Sīnā is a formative influence on his discussions of creation. These reflections on the theological significance of the two doctrines of creation which are the context to the study serve as a reminder of the issues at stake for al-Āmidī and others like him who inherited the debate.

4. Conclusion

Al-Āmidī, as a philosophical theologian working at the boundary of the traditions of *falsafa* and *kalām*, inherits two contradictory doctrines of creation. This much is a commonplace – the debate between philosophers and theologians across the religious traditions over the question of the world’s eternity is a well-known site of contention. I have demonstrated in this chapter, however, that much more is at stake in the discussion of creation than the question of how long the world has existed. In fact, al-Āmidī is faced with two highly differentiated interpretations of

¹⁰¹ Rahman, ‘Ibn Sīnā’s Theory’, 38.

¹⁰² Rahman, ‘Ibn Sīnā’s Theory’, 45.

the Qur'ānic doctrine of God's transcendence. Each originates in a distinct worldview, and each is developed within a distinct ontological framework. The one is a metaphysical framework, within which the doctrine of the world's eternity is justified on the basis of analysis of the two kinds of existent, possibly and necessarily existing. The other is a physical theoretical framework, by which the temporal finitude of all existents outside the realm of God is established.

Because Ibn Sīnā's and the classical Ash'arīs' doctrines of creation are formulated within such distinct frameworks, in order to understand how al-Āmidī's doctrine of creation represents the encounter of the two traditions, the thesis proceeds by considering his treatment of these two frameworks. For this reason, al-Āmidī's reception of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysical distinction between the possible and necessary of existence is the subject of the next chapter, Ash'arī physical theory the subject of Chapter 4. Finally, in Chapter 5, I demonstrate how the influence of Ibn Sīnā's notion of causedness causes a rupture in the content and function of the creation debate among post-classical Ash'arīs, and the situation of al-Āmidī's thought with regard to this development.

Chapter 3

Al-Āmidī's Conception of Possibility and Necessity

'There is nothing more true than the Necessary of Existence'¹⁰³

'In everything other than [that which is]
Necessary of Existence by its own essence, there is deficiency'¹⁰⁴

In the previous chapter, I argued that the primary conceptual paradigm within which Ibn Sīnā develops his vision of creation is his metaphysical distinction between the possible and necessary of existence. The theological appeal of this distinction proved undeniable for practitioners of a school of theology - Ash'arism - the driving force of which was the desire to exalt God to the greatest degree by demonstrating his uniqueness and superiority to his creation. And yet, as I have indicated, Ibn Sīnā's ontology of necessity and possibility was intrinsically enmeshed in a metaphysical system which was totally alien to Ash'arī ontology. I will demonstrate, furthermore, that Ibn Sīnā's natural philosophy undergirds his major metaphysical distinction in a manner which normally goes unappreciated. The distinction between the possible and necessary of existence and the concomitant metaphysics of causation and creation thus find their home within a comprehensive philosophical system including its particular conception of the material world – one which is alien to that of the Ash'arīs. More obviously, it is evident that for all its theological appeal, Ibn Sīnā's cosmological applications of his distinction were gravely problematic for those operating within the *kalām* tradition, in which denial of God's creation of the world *ex nihilo* (*ba'd al-'adam*) was traditionally tantamount to heresy.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII.6, 284.

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *Ta'līqāt*, 62.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Juwainī describes those who reject the first premise of the traditional proof for the temporality of the world as *al-mulhida* (infidels, atheists) (*Irshād*, 18). Al-Ghazālī is famous for including the doctrine among three counts upon which the *falāsifa* should be counted heretics (Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 7, 226; see Griffel, *Apostasie*, for a contextualising study).

In 2004, Wisnovsky commented on the 'daunting amount of scholarship' necessary for an understanding of the reception of Ibn Sīnā's key metaphysical doctrines by Sunni *mutakallimūn* (Wisnovsky, 'Avicenna and the Avicennian Turn', 132-3). In the decade since, much work has been done, but much remains, and this chapter situates itself within that field of research.

This chapter is therefore a case study at one juncture of the meeting of two complete philosophical systems in the thought of al-Āmidī. Because of its ubiquitousness across Ibn Sīnā’s philosophical system, his distinction between the possible and necessary of existence can be discussed from numerous angles. This chapter cannot comprehensively represent al-Āmidī’s reception of all aspects of the distinction. Rather, I am concerned with his views on features of Ibn Sīnā’s ontological distinction which arise at the meeting of the traditions as significant philosophical problems, and which relate to the discussion of creation. I have delineated and will treat a cluster of interrelated issues, namely: the distinction between the possible and necessary of existence as the most basic ontological dichotomy; the question of what it is that the attributions ‘possible’ and ‘necessary’ qualify (in relation to discussions of essence and existence); and the question of what possibility is, then two questions concerning the relation between a possible existent and its cause, namely; the question of what determines a possible existent’s reliance on its cause; and the question of how the cause of the possible existent is related to its non-existence. Together, these issues take us to the heart of al-Āmidī’s reception of Ibn Sīnā.

Firstly, I provide an exposition of Ibn Sīnā’s distinction, focusing on the issues just identified, then treat the comparable issues within the classical Ash‘arī metaphysics of possibility and necessity. I then take each issue in turn, accounting in each instance firstly for relevant post-Avicennan developments in Ash‘arī thought, then analysing al-Āmidī’s views in his works of *falsafa* and *kalām*. I demonstrate that classical Ash‘arī *kalām* is rich with resources for the discussion of the metaphysics of possibility and necessity, and that al-Āmidī is not a passive recipient of Ibn Sīnā’s ontology, but engages his thought using tools from the Ash‘arī tradition. Al-Āmidī appropriates aspects of Ibn Sīnā’s major metaphysical distinction, but in his most mature works, extricates it from its natural philosophical and theological contexts. He thus adopts its most theologically weighty applications, without ceding to undesired aspects of the worldview to which it belongs.

1. Ibn Sīnā on Possibility and Necessity

1.i On What is Attributed by the Terms ‘Possible’ and ‘Necessary’

In the previous chapter, I presented Ibn Sīnā’s dichotomy between the possible and necessary of existence as the major alternative to the classical *kalām* dichotomy between eternal and temporally originated existents. Although accurate, this way of comparing the traditions initially disguises their different conceptions of existence and essence. In fact, Ibn Sīnā’s understanding of essence and existence is fundamentally unlike that of classical Ash‘arism, and arises as an important philosophical problem when the two traditions meet over the discussion of possibility and necessity.

However, there is no consensus among contemporary scholars in the interpretation of the distinction between essence and existence in Ibn Sīnā’s thought, despite the very many important studies that have been devoted to his theory.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, early on in its reception, Ibn Sīnā’s essence-existence distinction was subject to a variety of readings. This is partly attributable to the presence of ambiguity and complexity in the way in which Ibn Sīnā himself expresses aspects of the distinction. The relevance of these observations for the present study is that already by the time of al-Āmidī, Ibn Sīnā’s theory was being mediated by its early interpreters. As I will demonstrate, al-Āmidī himself receives and critiques not Ibn Sīnā’s own theory of the relationship between essence and existence, but al-Rāzī’s. It is therefore important that I first present the diverse readings of the theory, explaining which I find closest to what Ibn Sīnā intended, in order, later, to differentiate between the original theory and its subsequent interpretation, especially by al-Rāzī. In this section, I concentrate mainly on

¹⁰⁶ Bertolacci’s contribution is the most recent. He points to the abundant, ‘long history’ of scholarship on Ibn Sīnā’s essence/existence distinction (Bertolacci, ‘The Distinction’, 258). Early studies include Goichon, ‘La distinction’; Jolivet, ‘Aux Origines’; Morewedge, ‘Philosophical Analysis’; Rahman, ‘Essence and Existence’. More recently, Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, Chapter 7-11; and ‘Notes on Avicenna’s Concept’; Lizzini, ‘*Wujūd/Mawjūd*’, 117-138; Druart, “Shay” or ‘Res’ (and on the reception of Ibn Sīnā’s theory, Wisnovsky, ‘Essence and Existence’; Eichner, ‘Essence and Existence’).

contemporary interpretations of Ibn Sīnā; al-Rāzī's reading is better accounted for later in the chapter.

Perhaps the most significant area of conceptual confusion and disagreement which arises in discussions of the essence-existence distinction relates to the question of whether or not Ibn Sīnā held to the division of existence itself into the modes 'necessary' and 'possible'. Broadly speaking, interpretations of Ibn Sīnā's theory on this point fall into two main groups. Firstly, many readers of Ibn Sīnā, both medieval and modern, attribute to Ibn Sīnā the view that the terms 'possible' and 'necessary' predicate existence itself, which is to say that there are two kinds of existence. This view concurs with the notion that Ibn Sīnā holds that God's essence is identical with his existence, his essence being no more and no less than 'necessary existence'. By contrast, the possible of existence is held according this reading to be a composite of essence, which determines the characteristics of the existent (what it is), and existence, which is 'super-added' to essence (to determine that it is). The existence which is added to the possible essence is, on this reading, qualitatively different to the existence of God.¹⁰⁷

The understanding that existence is 'super-added' to essence in the case of the possible of existence represents a particular interpretation of Ibn Sīnā's conception of the possible of existence. The theory that essence and existence are distinct in the possible of existence is very prominent in Ibn Sīnā's thought - on the basis of this view, he holds all beings aside from God to be composite (and therefore, caused). As he explains in the *Ishārāt*, using the example of a

¹⁰⁷ For instance, al-Suhrawardī claims that 'the Peripatetics' held the view that existence is super-added to essence in possibles; this has been taken to refer to al-Farābī and Ibn Sīnā (cited by Wisnovsky, 'Essence and Existence', 27). Aquinas writes that Ibn Sīnā held that 'existence is other than essence or quiddity' and that 'there exists a thing whose quiddity is its existence', and Germann adopts this reading, taking it to mean that '[God] is the only existent (*mawjūd*) whose essence is its existence' (Germann 'Avicenna and Afterwards', 92). McGinnis argues that Ibn Sīnā 'analyse[s] existence into its most basic modal structure, namely the conceptual categories of necessary existence and possible existence', thenceforth referring to Ibn Sīnā's 'modal metaphysics' (McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 165; 'Old Complexes, New Possibilities', 28); he also reads Ibn Sīnā as maintaining that God's existence is identical with his essence (*Avicenna*, 169-170). Alper reconstructs Ibn Sīnā's proof for God as being based on the distinction between necessary and possible existence. He cites Ibn Sīnā in the *Ilāhiyyāt* I.6: *inna al-umūr allatī tadkhul fi l-wujūd tahtamil fi-l-'aql al-inqisām ilā qismayn*, and reads this as entailing two types of existence: '[Ibn Sīnā] explains why necessary existence has no cause, but possible existence does' (Alper 'Avicenna's Argument', 134). The implications of the claim that Ibn Sīnā maintains the modality of existence for his understanding of essence are not always explored by commentators.

triangle: ‘Know that you could conceive of the meaning of a ‘triangle’ and yet question whether it was attributed with existence in particulars, or was not an existent’.¹⁰⁸ For Ibn Sīnā, essences can be characterised aside from particular instances of their existence. It is essences which determine the characteristics of a given existent, including whether it is necessary or possible that it exist. According to the reading under discussion, the distinction between essence and existence in the possible of existence equates to the view that existence is modally categorisable and determinate, super-added in the case of the possible of existence.

A second broad category of interpretations covers those which stress the inseparability of essence and existence in Ibn Sīnā’s thought. Wisnovsky stresses that the notion that existence is super-added to essence in the case of the possible is not inherent to Ibn Sīnā’s own ontology, but represents an interpretation of what he intends by describing essence and existence as distinct in the case of the possible of existence.¹⁰⁹ He challenges the assumption that the Peripatetics to whom al-Suhrawardī attributes the view that existence is additional to essence in the case of possibles include Ibn Sīnā: ‘to my knowledge, Avicenna never committed himself to the thesis that existence is something super-added to (*zā’id ‘alā*) a thing’s quiddity’.¹¹⁰ Lizzini describes Ibn Sīnā’s essence/existence distinction as a ‘paradox’, for ‘although essence and existence are to be conceived of as “distinct” and therefore responsible for compositeness in existent things, they prove to be inseparable from each other and hence resistant to any attempt to consider them separately’. This means that existence cannot be conceived of apart from the existent, and that it is therefore not existence *per se*, but the existent, which is either possible or necessary: it is in fact ‘the modal nature of essence’ which is responsible for the designation of existents as either possible or necessary.¹¹¹ Bertolacci emphasises even more

¹⁰⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, IV.6, 443.

¹⁰⁹ Wisnovsky, ‘Essence and Existence’, 28.

¹¹⁰ Wisnovsky, ‘Essence and Existence’, 28. It is Wisnovsky’s thesis that the view that existence is super-added to essence in the case of the possible stems from al-Rāzī’s development of Ibn Sīnā’s view into what he believed to be an ‘Avicennian’ ontology. This is revisited later in the chapter.

¹¹¹ Lizzini, ‘*Mawjūd/wujūd*’, 120.

that it is the mutual connection between essence and existence, and not their separation, which Ibn Sīnā promotes in his ontology.¹¹²

I find the latter reading of Ibn Sīnā to concur most closely with Ibn Sīnā's own treatments of the distinction in the metaphysical parts of his works, and will account for this view as a basis for my claim that al-Āmidī is (in his works of *kalām*) a commentator not on Ibn Sīnā's theory but on al-Rāzī's interpretation thereof.¹¹³ The manner in which Ibn Sīnā commences his discussions of necessity and possibility suggests that the term 'Necessary' in his construction 'Necessary of Existence' (*wājib al-wujūd*) does not predicate existence adjectivally, but refers to the way in which a being exists, which is to say that 'necessary' qualifies an existent, and not existence itself.¹¹⁴ There is nothing in Ibn Sīnā's definition of the subject of Metaphysics to suggest that

¹¹² Bertolacci, 'Essence and Existence', 270-275, and especially 275 for his evidence that Ibn Sīnā holds existence to be as extensionally broad as 'thing', particularly argued against those who read Ibn Sīnā to believe that 'thing' is logically prior to existent (such as Wisnovsky, 'Avicenna's Concept', especially 199, 218-219).

A further interpretation is maintained by Treiger. Treiger shows that Ibn Sīnā held the term 'existent' to be a modulated term on the basis of a passage in the *Maqūlāt* (1.2) in which Ibn Sīnā states that 'the meaning of existence... is one in many things but is different in them in another respect' ('Avicenna's Notion of Transcendent Modulation of Existence', 353-363).

Mayer also references Ibn Sīnā's notion of 'ambiguity of existence' (*tashkīk al-wujūd*), following Naṣīr al-dīn al-Ṭūsī's (d. 1274) interpretation of Ibn Sīnā's *Ishārāt* 4.9-15 (Mayer, *On Existence*, 123). According to Mayer's reading of the notion of *tashkīk al-wujūd*, Ibn Sīnā holds that that which is accidental to existence determines its division into distinct categories, but that existence itself is absolute (Mayer, *On Existence*, 66-70; c.f 90-91). This reading also implies (along with the first reading under discussion) that Ibn Sīnā holds that existence is predicable apart from specific existents, a view that Mayer expresses in discussion of Ibn Sīnā's proof for God (Mayer, *On Existence*, 125-126; 'Burhān' 22-23).

¹¹³ I have concentrated on *Ilāhiyyāt* 1.2-4, where Ibn Sīnā explains his view of the subject matter of Metaphysics; I.6-7, where he argues for his distinction and gives his first argument for the unicity of the Necessary of Existence; and VIII.4-5, where he discusses the relationship between essence and existence in the Necessary of Existence. The most relevant passages from the *Ishārāt* are IV.6-7, where he accounts for his distinctions between essence and existence and between possibly and necessarily existing essences; and IV.16-18, where he argues for the unicity of the Necessary of Existence.

¹¹⁴ Ibn Sīnā's novel use of the *idāfa* construction 'Necessary of Existence' (*wājib al-wujūd*) to identify God's essence is reflective of the subtlety with which he expresses his view of the relation between essence and existence. Translators have frequently translated the construction 'Necessary Existent' (For instance, Adamson, 'From the Necessary Existent', 170 and throughout; Marmura's translation of *Ilāhiyyāt*, I.6, 29, VIII.5, 279, and throughout; McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 164, paraphrasing *Ilāhiyyāt* I.7; Alper 'Avicenna's Argument', 137; Morewedge, *The Metaphysica*, throughout). A more accurate translation, which retains the obscurity of the expression in the Arabic, is 'Necessary of Existence'; Hourani early on employed this translation, arguing that despite its awkwardness in English, it best expresses Ibn Sīnā's meaning (Hourani, 'Ibn Sīnā on Necessary and Possible Existence', 75). Wisnovsky agrees that 'the more literal renderings better flush out Avicenna's philosophical choices and dilemmas' (Wisnovsky, 'Avicenna and the Avicennian Turn', 115). In any case, it is clear how Ibn Sīnā's use of language at points leaves his theory susceptible to a variety of interpretations.

he views existence as determinate, or predictable apart from existents. Rather, the philosophy of metaphysics is the study of the existent (*al-mawjūd*) and ‘things.. that accompany it inasmuch as it is an existent’. ‘The necessary’ and ‘the possible’ appear within a list of ‘proper accidents’ (*al-‘awārid al-khāṣṣa*) of the existent which also includes ‘the one and the many, the potential and the actual, the universal and the particular’. These are described as accidents which the existent ‘receives’.¹¹⁵ It seems from this account of the subject of metaphysics that if Ibn Sīnā should be understood to uphold the modal dichotomy of existence *per se* into ‘necessary and possible’, his ontology would also be subject to a matrix of other dichotomies applicable to existence *per se*: simple vs complex; potential vs actual; universal vs particular.

Aside from the fact that this is unlikely, we can observe more straightforwardly that existence *per se* is not mentioned here, but rather, the existent, studied according to the various states which occur to it on account of accidents inhering within it.¹¹⁶ A little later, delineating the subjects to be discussed within this study of the existent, Ibn Sīnā refers to ‘the state of necessity’ (*ḥāl al-wujūb*) and ‘the state of possibility’ (*ḥāl al-imkān*).¹¹⁷ This confirms the view that Ibn Sīnā understands necessity and possibility to be ways in which beings exist, rather than two kinds of existence belonging to concomitant categories of essences.

I also disagree that Ibn Sīnā holds that God’s essence is identical with his existence; though true in a particular sense, the assertion simplifies Ibn Sīnā’s position. In fact, what Ibn Sīnā repeatedly states is that God is uniquely distinguished by his ‘necessity of existence’, and elsewhere, ‘the affirmation of existence’ (*ta’akkud al-wujūd*) belonging to him alone.¹¹⁸ He argues

¹¹⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, I.2, 10.

¹¹⁶ Kukkonen shows that potentiality and actuality are ‘concomitant accidents’ of being in Ibn Sīnā’s thought, defined by Ibn Sīnā’s own logical definition as ‘terms that are inextricably bound up in the characterisation and analysis of all manner of beings, even though they do not disclose directly the essence of any one being’ (‘Potentiality’, Section 2).

¹¹⁷ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, I.4, 19.

¹¹⁸ E.g. Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt* I.6, 32, where he argues for the singularity of the Necessary of Existence on the basis that there can be no two existents which are alike in the ‘necessity of existence’ (*luzūm al-wujūd* or *wujūb al-wujūd*), I.7, 35, where necessity of existence is the ‘meaning’ (*ma’nā*) characterising such a being; VIII.4. 273-4, VIII.5, 279, and I.7, 36, where he defines necessity of existence as ‘nothing other than the affirmation of existence (*ta’akkud al-wujūd*)’; c.f. *Ishārāt* IV.18, 3 464, where he again argues that the specifying quality of the Divine is that he exists by necessity. The point is that Ibn Sīnā repeatedly characterises God by his unique quality of necessity of existence, which is not the same as identifying his essence with a type of existence which is necessary.

in the *Shifā'* that God's essence is uncaused on the basis that if one were to postulate the ‘addition (*ifāda*) of existence to the necessity of existence’, this would constitute ‘the addition (*ifāda*) of [that which is] a condition of his essence’, which is to say that the fact that God exists is a condition of his being ‘necessary of existence’, by virtue of his essence.¹¹⁹ This suggests that it is the necessity of existence, and not existence itself, which is identical with God’s essence. It is the fact that God exists which is his essence (since he could not not exist), and not his existence *per se*. This stands against the view that Ibn Sīnā holds that existence is determinate and predictable aside from individual existents. It also, therefore, counters the view that God’s existence is unlike the existence of the possible.

It is useful to acknowledge at this juncture that Ibn Sīnā’s statement of his position is not without ambiguity, which explains its various interpretations. For instance, in accounting for God’s attributes, Ibn Sīnā argues that God can only be characterised according to negations or relations because he ‘has no quiddity... He is pure existence, with the condition that privation and all other descriptions must be negated [in relation] to him’ (*lā māhiyya lahu...fa-huwa mujarrad al-wujūd bi-shart salb al-‘adam wa-sā’ir al-awṣaf ‘anhu*).¹²⁰ Ibn Sīnā may not be referring to a mode of existence, but to the fact that God’s essence is that he exists, as a basis for his argument that his essence is simple and without additional attributes. However, it is clear that this is open to interpretation, and that those who hold to the determinate status of existence in Ibn Sīnā’s thought are not without support for their position. This is important because it explains the variety of interpretations to which Ibn Sīnā’s distinction was subjected from its earliest reception.

Nevertheless, given my agreement with those who hold that Ibn Sīnā views existence as something intrinsic to the thing, and not determinate and additional to it, it remains to consider the sense in which essence and existence are truly distinct in his thought. For if existence and essence are inseparable; and if existence *per se* is not determinate; if all possible essences are existents, then in what sense is essence truly distinct from existence? This aspect

¹¹⁹ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, I.7, 36.

¹²⁰ *Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII.4, 276.

of Ibn Sīnā's distinction has concerned commentators throughout the long history of scholarship on the question. It is also of direct relevance to the present study, since post-Avicennan Ash'arī theologians were particularly interested in this question in relation to the classical Ash'arī belief that essence and existence are identical. Contemporary interpretations range from Goichon's 'realist' position, according to which Ibn Sīnā held essence to be real to the extent that existence is understood as accidental to essence, to those such as Morewedge who tend to interpret essence in Ibn Sīnā's thought as a logical, conceptual entity.¹²¹

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address this question comprehensively. Rather, I wish to highlight the importance of the broadly neglected natural philosophical context for Ibn Sīnā's conception of essence, and for its later reception.¹²² Ibn Sīnā's conception of potentiality, and the natural philosophy in which it finds its context, helps explain how essence is distinct from existence in his thought. It is also with respect to his understanding of potentiality that Ibn Sīnā's ontology and his related theory of causation and cosmology is most clearly distinguished from that of the classical Ash'arīs. Having come to understand that the natural philosophical underpinnings of Ibn Sīnā's theory of essence are crucial to the course of its later reception, I next discuss those natural philosophical foundations, focusing especially on his concept of potentiality.¹²³

1.ii On what Possibility Constitutes

Ibn Sīnā's theory of the principles of body is the natural philosophical underpinning of his metaphysical ontology. The theory of hylomorphism posits that body is the composition of

¹²¹ Goichon, *La Distinction*; Morewedge, 'Philosophical Analysis', esp 431-2. For recent summaries of the spectrum of positions on this question, see Wisnovsky, 'Avicenna's Concept', 200; Lizzini, 'Mawjūd/wujūd', 122.

¹²² Ibn Sīnā's distinction is normally discussed in a metaphysical context, e.g. Hourani 'Ibn Sīnā on Necessary and Possible Existence'; Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, Chapter 9; Wisnovsky, *Avicenna's Metaphysics*. Recent exceptions (upon which I have depended here) are McGinnis, 'What Underlies the Change'; and 'Making Something'; Shihadeh, *Doubts*, Chapter 4.

¹²³ Ibn Sīnā is explicit about the natural philosophical underpinnings of his ontology. Indeed, his philosophical system, modelled on Aristotle's, places Metaphysics after Physics on account of the fact that the study of existence relies on premises established within natural philosophy. For his discussion on the relation of Metaphysics to the other sciences, see *Ilāhiyyāt*, I.2, 7-13, and on the division of the sciences in general, *Madkhal*, I.2, 12-16. For discussions of the former, see Fakhry, 'The Subject Matter'; Genequand, 'Metaphysics', 785-7, and of the latter, Marmura, 'Avicenna on the Division'.

matter (*hayūla, mādda*) with form (*ṣūra*).¹²⁴ Despite the distinction, matter has no existence in actuality without the presence of form. In this sense, matter considered in itself is pure potentiality. This is a point made in the *Physics* and revisited at greater length in the *Metaphysics*.¹²⁵ The presence of form actualises matter, giving it existence as a constituent of body.¹²⁶ Privation (*al-‘adam*) is a further principle of the body in that it is subject to change. Ibn Sīnā gives the example of a robe whose colour changes from white to black. In this example, the privation of blackness is a principle for the change in colour, for the robe could not become black if it was already black.¹²⁷

A few short steps take us from this physical theory to Ibn Sīnā’s metaphysical distinction between the possible and necessary of existence, and his concomitant conception of the possible essence. Ibn Sīnā identifies the potency of matter, both implicitly and explicitly, with the possibility of existence. Actualised matter, within body, is associated with necessary existence.¹²⁸ The process by which form actualises matter can be understood as a process of necessitation. Furthermore, privation, far from being pure non-existence, is understood as the lack of a determinate form (for instance, the non-blackness of the robe in the example above). This understanding of privation informs Ibn Sīnā’s view of possible essence. The privation of a

¹²⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *Ṭabī’iyyāt*, I.2, 1, 14-15.

¹²⁵ Ibn Sīnā, *Ṭabī’iyyāt*, I.1, 1, 14, and *Ilāhiyyāt*, II.3, 57-63.

¹²⁶ On Ibn Sīnā’s understanding of prime matter, see Lizzini, ‘The Relation’; Shihadeh, ‘Avicenna’s Corporeal Form’, also dealing with its reception.

¹²⁷ Note however that Ibn Sīnā qualifies this understanding of privation, arguing that it cannot strictly speaking be a principle, being a non-existent. See *Ṭabī’iyyāt*, I.2, 1, 19; and McGinnis, ‘Making Something’, 558-9. See also McGinnis, ‘What Underlies the Change’, 261-2, for the grounding of this theory of the principles of body in Aristotle.

¹²⁸ Ibn Sīnā writes that *Metaphysics* includes discussion of ‘the state of possibility and its true nature (this being the same as the investigation of potentiality and actuality)’ (*Ilāhiyyāt*, I.4, 19).

As Davidson points out, potentiality and possibility both translate the Greek δύναμις (Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 16), indicating the association of the concepts in Aristotle. See Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, 9.8, on matter as potency; and Knuuttila, *Modalities*, 1-14 and 19-44 on Aristotle’s understanding of potency. On the relation between Aristotle’s theory of form and matter and his notions of potentiality and actuality, see Kukkonen, ‘Potentiality’, Section 1. Ibn Sīnā developed his own notion of possibility from materials already existing in the Arabic Aristotle, and it is clear that the Aristotelian conception of matter is a crucial aspect of that background (see Wisnovsky, *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, Chapter 11).

specific form is associated with a specific possibility (for instance, the possibility of blackness).

So the possibility of each occurrence is determinately related to that occurrence.¹²⁹

Against this natural philosophical conception of possibility, we are better able to understand Ibn Sīnā's conception of essence. Individual possibilities, being related to determinate privations, describe characterisable entities (for instance, 'blackness', or 'triangularity'). It is this that constitutes 'essence' (*māhiyya, dhāt*) in Ibn Sīnā's thought. And it is this that is described as either impossible, possible, or necessary. So far, then, it has become clear that Ibn Sīnā relates possibility and the possible essence to the specific, particularised, deprivations inherent in matter. This goes some way to explaining the sense in which the essence of a possible existent is genuinely distinct from its existence in Ibn Sīnā's ontology. In the course of one of his proofs for the world's eternity, the realism of Ibn Sīnā's notion of the possible essence becomes plain. The proof in question becomes an important site of debate over the nature of possibility in the post-Avicennan tradition and is therefore worth pausing over.

Early in his *Physics* (I.2), in discussion of the principles of body, Ibn Sīnā poses the question of whether the initial privation of a form (non-horseness, for instance), requires an associated substrate in order for the generation of the body to occur.¹³⁰ The metaphysical significance of this question is that if the generation of every generated existent requires the prior existence of a substrate, matter must be pre-eternal. The pre-eternity of matter entails the pre-eternity of the world as a whole (because matter cannot exist without form).

At I.2, Ibn Sīnā does not immediately answer his own question, stating that this is a question for metaphysics (*al-falsafa al-ūlā*). However, two books later (still within the *Physics*), Ibn Sīnā does enter expansively into the discussion, and eventually asserts that every generated existent

¹²⁹ Shihadeh shows that Ibn Sīnā distinguishes between the possibilities associated with matter ('dispositional possibility', or the possibility of coming-to-be) and those associated with form ('particular *per se* possibilities') on the basis of *Ilāhiyyāt*, IV.ii (*Doubts*, 111-2). These types of possibility closely correspond to each other in that the dispositional possibility inherent to the material substrate, which permits that it may come to be, to use Shihadeh's example, yellowish brown, corresponds to the privation of the specific form 'yellowish brown', which is possible in itself.

¹³⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *Tabrīzīyāt*, I.2, 1, 20.

is indeed preceded by a substrate of matter. Whilst in *Physics* I.2, Ibn Sīnā referred to the need for a substrate to which the privation of the determinate form of the body would be associated, by III.11, he refers to ‘the possibility of existence (*jawāz al-wujūd*)’ and its need for a substrate. This makes the metaphysical implications of the discussion plain.

In order to establish the need for a substrate in which possibility inheres, Ibn Sīnā must eliminate other ways of conceiving of possibility. He does so here in the *Physics* (III.11) by way of an argument that is later basically repeated in the *Metaphysics* (IV.2), where its applications for his doctrine of the pre-eternity of the world are clearer.¹³¹ The basic argument is as follows:

1. Prior to every non-existent, there is its possibility. This possibility is a realised thing (*amr muḥaṣṣal*), not non-existence in general.¹³²
2. Possibility cannot subsist in itself, since it is a relation (*muḍāf*, or *ma'nā idāfi*), intelligible in connection to something else. That which subsists in itself cannot be a relation.
3. Possibility is not the power of the efficient principle (in the *Metaphysics*, the ‘power of the agent’) to bring the thing into existence. Otherwise, the statement ‘that whose existence is not possible cannot be brought into existence’ would really mean ‘that which cannot be brought into existence cannot be brought into existence’, which is meaningless.¹³³
4. Being neither a substance in its own right, nor the power of the efficient cause, possible existence requires a substance in which to inhere. This substance is matter.¹³⁴

¹³¹ In the context of the *Physics*, Ibn Sīnā specifically poses the question of whether motions are preceded by a substrate of matter. The equivalent section in the *Metaphysics* (IV.2, 139-140) concerns the more general question of whether generated existents are preceded by a substrate of matter. The forms of the arguments and their metaphysical significance are, however, the same.

¹³² In *Ilāhiyyāt*, I.5, 24, Ibn Sīnā writes that ‘the existent (*al-mawjūd*), the established (*al-muthbat*) and the realised (*al-muḥaṣṣal*) are synonymous (*asmā' mutarādifa 'alā ma'nā wāhid*)’. Thus, when Ibn Sīnā refers to possibility as a ‘realised thing’ in this quotation, he has its existence in mind.

¹³³ In other words, defining possibility as ‘that which God can do’ trivialises God’s power, since it means that he is able to do only what he is able to do.

¹³⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *Tabī'iyāt*, III.11, 359-60; *Ilāhiyyāt*, IV.2, 139-140; c.f. *Ishārāt*, V.6, 507-513. For discussion of the argument, see e.g. McGinnis, ‘Making Something’; and ‘The Eternity of the World’; Acar, *Talking about God*, 186-88; Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 16-17 (who connects it to Aristotle’s argument from possibility for the eternity of matter).

In this proof, the materiality and objectivism of Ibn Sīnā’s notion of essence is made plain. Our conceptualisation of what can exist corresponds to determinate possibilities so real that they require a substrate of matter. This understanding of possibility is deliberately differentiated from alternatives in the course of this proof for the world’s eternity. Since for Ibn Sīnā, possibility requires a material substrate, the possible essence is not a mere concept in the mind. Just as matter cannot exist without form, so the possible essence is only actualised when it comes to exist. Yet just as body is a composite of matter and form, and as form does not exist aside from its material substrate, so the possible of existence is, inextricably, a composite of its existence and its essence. Essence, though it is the unactualised principle of the possible of existence, is nevertheless distinct and requisite to the possible of existence.

1.iii On the Causation of the Possible of Existence

Let us finally consider how Ibn Sīnā’s ontology of possibility and necessity features in his theory of causality. Ibn Sīnā holds that the possible of existence relies on a cause a) on account of its essential possibility; and b) for its existence alone, and throughout the duration of its existence. According to him, the non-existence of a possible essence is in no way associated with its cause. This theory is established *contra* the notion that causes are responsible for the origination (*hudūth*) of their effect from non-existence. If that were the case, the effect would act on the possible being during its non-existence to endow it with existence.¹³⁵ According to Ibn Sīnā, this is impossible, since existence cannot be causally related to non-existence. As he puts it, ‘the originating cause has no influence nor usefulness in [regard to its effect] having been non-existent’ (*laysa li-l-‘illa al-muḥditha ta’thīr wa-ghanā’ fi annahu lam yakun*)¹³⁶

Furthermore, the effect of an efficient cause must, according to Ibn Sīnā, concur with it temporally. There can be no delay. This position is opposed to the understanding that causes

¹³⁵ *Ilāhiyyāt*, VI.1, 197-202; *Ishārāt*, V.2-3, 487-499. The identity of Ibn Sīnā’s opponents ('the common people') is debated (see Marmura, 'The Metaphysics of Efficient Causality'; Shihadeh, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Commentary', 319-320; Richardson, *The Metaphysics of Agency*, 23-32). Suffice to note for our purposes the anti-*kalām* metaphysical implications of Ibn Sīnā’s theory as he develops them (namely, that a pre-eternal effect can be correctly described as originated).

¹³⁶ *Ilāhiyyāt*, VI.1, 199.

must be temporally prior to their effect – an understanding which Ibn Sīnā attributes to peoples’ confusing efficient causes with accidental causes. The example Ibn Sīnā gives is of the existence of a building. Many would consider the building’s builder to be its efficient cause, existing temporally prior to it, bringing it into existence, and having no subsequent relation to its continued existence. According to Ibn Sīnā, the existence of the building is actually the effect of its constitution of a combination of materials. This combination is temporally concurrent with the building, is responsible for its existence and not its origination, and exists as efficient cause to the existence of the building throughout its existence.¹³⁷

Ibn Sīnā’s understanding of the relation between the possible of existence and its cause entails the belief that a pre-eternally existing possible existent can be correctly described as caused, and thus, that a pre-eternal world can be described as ‘created’. A related opinion is that the cause whose effect is never non-existent is superior to the cause which does not prevent the absolute non-existence of its effect. The former kind of causation is described as *ibdā'*, or ‘absolute creation’.¹³⁸ On this understanding, a God who creates a pre-eternally existing world is more powerful and more noble than the one who gives the world existence after non-existence. Indeed, Ibn Sīnā’s understanding of the possible essence and of the nature of efficient causation allows him absolutely to disassociate possibility from God. In Ibn Sīnā’s thought, the Necessary of Existence is only associated with beings in their state of necessary existence which he bestows, not in the state of possibility which they possess of their own essences. He intellectually apprehends and enacts the possible of existence only in its actualised, necessitated state. Ibn Sīnā’s God is ‘necessitation itself’ (*nafs al-wājibiyā*), pure act, and can in no way be associated with privation.¹³⁹ His creation proceeds causally from him, and he cannot withhold any part of his action of necessitation. The nature of God’s power is that he exists, and by existing, bestows existence on every possible essence.

¹³⁷ *Ilāhiyyāt*, VI.2, 201-202. See Richardson, *The Metaphysics of Agency*, Chapters 1 and 2 on Ibn Sīnā’s understanding of the relation between the efficient cause and its effect.

¹³⁸ *Ishārāt*, V.9, 524-5.

¹³⁹ *Ta'līqāt*, 50.

In the preceding account, several aspects of Ibn Sīnā’s ontology of possibility and necessity have been signalled as key issues for its later reception. The significance of each of these will become clearer in what follows. I turn to demonstrate, more briefly, how Ibn Sīnā’s conception of possibility, possible essences, and their causation, is alien from Ash‘arī metaphysics. Only against this background can the post-Avicennan Ash‘arī reception of the ontology be properly appreciated.

2. The Classical Ash‘arī Metaphysics of Possibility and Necessity

There is an undeniable innovation in Ibn Sīnā’s coherent ontology of possible and necessary existence. I have explained that it was the dichotomy between eternal and temporally originated existents that formed the backbone of classical Ash‘arī theology, and the temporal origination of an existent which was understood to determine its need for a cause. In this major respect, classical Ash‘arī discussions of possibility do not bear the same theological weight as Ibn Sīnā’s. Nevertheless, pre-Avicennan *kalām* resources for the discussion of possibility are rich, and it is instructive to consider them, because the traditions’ distinct notions of what potentiality and possibility constitute underly their respective doctrines of creation. Ash‘arī discussions of possibility are embedded in a variety of *kalām* topics. In the following, I highlight a number of these in a bid to demonstrate that Ash‘arī theologians shared some common intuitions with Ibn Sīnā about the nature of possibility and necessity, but also held a deeply incompatible conception of God’s relation to possible existents.¹⁴⁰

I argued above that it is fruitful to analyse Ibn Sīnā’s distinction between the possible essence and its existence from the perspective of his understanding of potency and its inherence in matter. This way of approaching Ibn Sīnā’s ontology makes it readily contrastable with that of classical Ash‘arism. We have seen that classical Ash‘arism is distinguishable from both the *falsafī* tradition and from classical Mu‘tazilism in part by its insistence on stripping the world of all

¹⁴⁰ Mu‘tazilī discussions of possibility and necessity are also highly developed, but will only be touched on here in relation to Ash‘arī responses thereto. Frank’s excellent study of the Baṣran Mu‘tazilī conception of existents and non-existents deals with the Mu‘tazilī identification of the non-existent (*al-ma’dūm*) with the thing for which existence is possible (*jawāz al-wujūd*) (Frank, ‘*Al-ma’dūm wa-l-mawjūd*’).

potency. The school's understanding of the relationship between essence and existence is informed, like Ibn Sīnā's, by its understanding of potency. For classical Ash'arīs, the existent is no more and no less than its essence. This is normally expressed in terms of the relationship between the existent (*al-mawjūd*) and the thing (*al-shay'*). As al-Bāqillānī puts it, 'the existent is the real, generated thing, since the meaning of the thing[’s being a thing] according to us is that it exists' (*al-mawjūd huwa al-shay' al-thābit al-kā'in li-anna ma'nā al-shay' 'andanā annahu mawjūd*).¹⁴¹ Outside of the realm of existents, there is pure and absolute nothingness: 'the non-existent is nothing, [and] not a thing' (*al-ma'dūm muttaflaysa bi-shay'*).¹⁴²

The view that essence and existence are identical corresponds to the Ash'arī understanding of possibility. Since there is no potency outside of God, designating an event or existent 'possible' does not constitute a reference to a determinate, entitative possibility. There is some confusion in the secondary literature, however, about what exactly possibility does constitute according to classical Ash'arism. To clarify the issue, I turn to consider a number of contexts in which the discussion of possibility arises.

Discussions of possibility within Ash'arī *kalām* broadly occur in contexts in which a defence of God's power (*qudra*) is at stake. The most obvious Ash'arī defence of God's power is the occasionalist doctrine. God's constant intervention in creation entails his continual recreation of the endurance of the matter of the world, and of all other accidents inhering within matter.¹⁴³ This extends to all forms of action, both human and non-human. All capacity to act (*istiṭā'*) is produced by God at the moment of the action with which it was associated.¹⁴⁴ So in the example of the burning of cotton by fire, God produces the power of the fire to burn at the moment at which the fire comes into contact with the cotton. The Ash'arī doctrine strips the world of potency. Existents in the world do not have causal natures predisposing them to a

¹⁴¹ Al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, 15; c.f. al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 124. On the classical Ash'arī notion of existence see Frank, 'The Ash'arite Ontology', 65 and 172-177. Although existence is not independent of essence, the term 'existence' is used by the Ash'arīs as a univocal referent.

¹⁴² Al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, 15

¹⁴³ The classical Ash'arī conception of matter, accidents, and their endurance is treated in Chapter 4.

¹⁴⁴ E.g. Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 107-8; al-Bāqillānī, *Kitāb al-tamhīd*, 325.

particular behaviour. Rather, the potential for a given occurrence is associated with God's power of action.

It is incorrect, however, to equate the Ash‘arī association of potency with God's power to an absolute identification of possibility with God's power. McGinnis and Griffel both imply that pre-Avicennan Ash‘arīs held that an occurrence is possible only in the sense that God is able to enact it.¹⁴⁵ One implication of this reading would be that instances of non-existence cannot be described as possible (since possibility is God's capacity to act, which is not applicable to non-existence). Another implication is that nothing is impossible for God. This is because, since there is no sense in which a given occurrence is possible apart from with reference to God, describing an occurrence as ‘impossible’ in relation to God is technically meaningless.

The extant Ash‘arī sources in fact point to an alternative view. Al-Ash‘arī himself held that God is powerful over anything that can be enacted (*qādir ‘alā kull mā yaṣih h an yakūn maqdūran*).¹⁴⁶ This implies a limitation of God's power to that which is possible in itself, for there are also things which cannot be enacted, which are impossible in themselves. God's power is not limited by his inability to do what cannot be done - for instance, to create and destroy a given atom instantaneously.¹⁴⁷ The notion that occurrences are either possible or impossible in themselves implies a transcendent framework for determining what is and is not possible. We saw that Ibn Sīnā holds the same intuition, and that for him, possibility and impossibility are determined in relation to essences. The Ash‘arīs, however, held no such notion, since they

¹⁴⁵ McGinnis ('What Underlies the Change', 275; 'The Eternity of the World', 9); Griffel (*Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 162-3) McGinnis discusses Ibn Sīnā's argument against the definition of possibility as the power of the agent (mentioned above). He identifies the position which Ibn Sīnā opposes as the Ash‘arī *kalām* position (McGinnis, 'The Eternity of the World', 9). I believe this to be a misleading association. Griffel is less explicit, but suggests that al-Ghazālī 'shifts the whole debate away from what God can do to what can be affirmed or denied, that is, to the level of human judgements' (Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 163). This implies that al-Ghazālī's view was innovative, obscuring its *kalām* background. Kukkonen ('Possible Worlds', 494) also asserts that al-Ghazālī's notion that God cannot do the impossible (see e.g. *Tahāfut*, 175) is innovative. Shihadeh accounts for the Ash‘arī background of al-Ghazālī's response to Ibn Sīnā's ontology of possibility in *Doubts*, 120-124.

¹⁴⁶ Mujarrad, 101; see Gimaret, *La Doctrine*, 284.

¹⁴⁷ See Gimaret, *La Doctrine*, 154 and 285.

denied the concept of non-existent essences. The possibility of a given existent was thus a purely rational designation, with no non-existent ‘thing’ or ‘essence’ as its object.¹⁴⁸

A further crucial difference between Ibn Sīnā’s theory and the Ash‘arī conception of possibility arises in discussion of God’s attribute of knowledge. For the Ash‘arīs, what is known (*al-ma'lūm*) is divided into the existent and the non-existent. We find in al-Ash‘arī a defence of God’s knowledge of the non-existent. He writes that God both knows and is ‘powerful over what does not come to be’ (*‘alā mā lā yakūn*).¹⁴⁹ This implies that there are infinite unactualised rational possibilities. Indeed, the notion that the things that God knows (his *ma'lūmāt*), and the objects of his power (his *maqdūrāt*) are infinite is also an established Ash‘arī doctrine.¹⁵⁰ This is a key divergence from Ibn Sīnā’s theory, in which possibilities are always actualised. It highlights a central component of the Ash‘arī conception of God’s power and will. Though God does not enact every possibility, un-enacted possibilities are still within his power (that is to say that *al-maqdūr* covers both divisions of *al-ma'lūm*). This means that God is able to withhold power.¹⁵¹

Al-Ash‘arī expresses this point as follows: ‘the absence of that which can be enacted by power, despite [the presence of] the power of the enactor to enact it, does not entail deficiency in the enactor, given that it is impossible that anything other than [the enactor] could prevent its existence’ (*intifā' al-maqdūr ma' kawn al-qādir qādiran 'alayhi lā yūjib naqṣan li-l-qādir ma' istihāla an*

¹⁴⁸ By contrast, the Mu'tazili al-Khayyāṭ, citing Abū l-Hudayhl, defends the doctrine of the non-existent thing with reference to possibility. He writes ‘a person does not do any action except that a similar action is also possible for him... for not all of the things within his power today are brought into existence... for if no non-existent thing remained connected with his power to enact it, it would be impossible to say that the agent was powerful to enact something like [the thing that he did enact]’ (*Kitāb al-intiṣār*, 15).

¹⁴⁹ *Mujarrad*, 70, and for a Mu'tazili statement of God's power over that which he enacts and that which he chooses not to, see *Kitāb al-intiṣār*, 11.

¹⁵⁰ Gimaret, *La Doctrine*, 284.

¹⁵¹ The modern dominance of the notion of possibility as the presence of multiple synchronic alternatives is broadly attributed to Jon Duns Scotus’ *Lectura I* 39, ‘On Contingency and Freedom’ (see e.g. Knuuttila, ‘Time and Modality’). However, the statistical model of possibility in the realm of logic (in which a proposition is deemed a) necessary if it is always true, b) possible if it is sometimes true, and c) impossible if it is never true) predominated the Aristotelian tradition and is therefore the background to Ibn Sīnā’s understanding of possibility in the metaphysical realm. See Hintikka, *Time and Necessity*; and Knuuttila, *Modalities*, on medieval notions of possibility, specifically, Chapter 1 on Aristotle’s modal conception of possibility and necessity. Bäck (‘Avicenna’s Conception’ especially 226–229), however, argues that Ibn Sīnā departs from a purely statistical model of possibility.

yakūn mamnū'an bi-ghayrihi).¹⁵² That is to say that God's power is not restricted by the fact that he does not enact everything that he could, since it is he who prevents the existence of those things that do not come to be. The turn of phrase throws up the contrast between al-Ash'arī and Ibn Sīnā's notions of possibility. Whilst Ibn Sīnā describes the possible of existence as necessary through another (*wājib bi-ghayrihi*), for al-Ash'arī, certain existents are prevented by an agent, namely God. For Ibn Sīnā, there can be no such entities, since by God's act of necessitation, all possibilities are actualised. Ibn Sīnā's God cannot withhold power, whilst al-Ash'arī's most certainly can. The idea that God is responsible for both the non-existence and existence of the effects of his power informs the Ash'arī belief that he is responsible for the origination in time (*hudūth*) of the world. The contrast between this and Ibn Sīnā's notion that the efficient cause is responsible for the existence of its effects and must thus co-exist with its effects temporally should be evident by now.

In this account of Ash'arī discussions concerning possibility, I have deliberately focused on the tradition's founder, to demonstrate that such discussions are indigenous to Ash'arism. In the works of later Ash'arīs, discussions of possibility are developed. The famous proof from particularisation is firmly embedded in al-Ash'arī's conception of God's power and its extension to possibilities which never come to be. Specifically (as discussed in Chapter 2) the proof relies on the premise that things could be other than they are, and proceeds to prove that a voluntary particulariser must have selected the characteristics of this world (prominently, the time of its origination) over other possible characteristics.¹⁵³ In al-Juwainī's *Kitāb al-shāmil*, we find a clear discussion of necessity and possibility in context of this proof. At points, the discussion is strikingly similar to Ibn Sīnā's analysis of necessity and possibility. For instance, al-Juwainī states that God needs no particulariser in order to exist because his existence is of necessity (*min haythu wajaba lahu al-wujūd*).¹⁵⁴ Yet despite such superficial similarities, al-Juwainī's understanding is fundamentally Ash'arī. Al-Juwainī states that the 'single axis' around which proofs for the world's reliance on a particularising cause revolve is whether '[the existence of]

¹⁵² *Mujarrad*, 70.

¹⁵³ See Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 174–203 for an account of various versions of this proof.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 268.

that which comes to be after not having been... is necessary, or only possible.'¹⁵⁵ He proceeds to establish that both the ‘continued non-existence’ and the existence of such beings are possible, and thence that their existence requires a cause.¹⁵⁶ Al-Juwainī categorises the non-existent into that which is impossible, also described as ‘necessarily non-existent’, and that which is possible, but which does not exist. The non-existence of the former, being necessary, does not require a cause, since ‘the necessary is independent, in its necessity, of a particulariser (*al-wājib istaqbala fi wujūbihī ‘an al-mukhaṣas*)’. The non-existence of the latter, being possible, however, does require a particularising cause. This is because the property of that which is possible is that it requires a cause. Thus, both the non-existence and the existence of that which is possible can be attributed to a cause.¹⁵⁷

So for al-Juwainī, as for al-Ash‘arī, possibilities are synchronic conceptual alternatives, and there are an infinity of possibilities which are never actualised. Furthermore, existents are only designated possible in respect to the fact that there was a point in time at which they did not exist, and not by mere susceptibility to non-existence. In concluding the section, al-Juwainī writes that he has considered everything that has been said in ‘establishing that the temporally originated [existent] requires an originator.’¹⁵⁸ For classical Ash‘arīs, the determinant of causedness is temporal originatedness, and not possibility of existence. This clearly contrasts with Ibn Sīnā’s view. Post-Avicennan *mutakallimūn* had al-Juwainī’s analysis, and other earlier sources at hand when encountering Ibn Sīnā’s theory of possibility and necessity.¹⁵⁹ Perhaps there are also more resources for Ibn Sīnā’s own theory therein than have been discovered or appreciated to date.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 264.

¹⁵⁶ Al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 266.

¹⁵⁷ Al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 268.

¹⁵⁸ Al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 172.

¹⁵⁹ These may include non-extant sources. For instance, only one of al-Isfaraīni’s works is known to be extant.

¹⁶⁰ The debate over the potential *kalām* influences on Ibn Sīnā’s metaphysics of possibility and necessity is outside the scope of this study, but represents an important area of research. Wisnovsky has argued, for instance, for the importance of *kalām* debates over the divine attributes as background (e.g., *Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, Chapter 13; and “One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn”); Alper has considered the influence of the proof from particularisation for the existence of God on Ibn Sīnā’s proof (Alper, “Avicenna’s Argument for the Existence of God”).

Having accounted for the two theories of possibility inherited by al-Āmidī, and signaled the most significant points of difference between the systems, I turn to consider the reception of Ibn Sīnā’s distinction in al-Āmidī’s thought, focusing on the cluster of issues identified in the introduction. In each section, I discuss post-Avicennan precedents for al-Āmidī’s reception of Ibn Sīnā, specifically the thought of al-Ghazālī, al-Shahrastānī and al-Rāzī, selected for the influence they assert on al-Āmidī. In particular, I argue that al-Āmidī’s theological works show a strong reaction to al-Rāzī’s in questions pertaining to possibility and necessity.

In each section, I then consider al-Āmidī’s discussions of the issue at hand in his works of *falsafa*, primarily as background to his works of *kalām*. I treat three philosophical works, whose distinct intellectual projects inform their treatment of Ibn Sīnā’s theory of possibility and necessity. *Al-Nūr al-bāhir* receives most attention. As al-Āmidī’s longest extant work of *falsafa*, it gives the most insight into the nature of his reception of Ibn Sīnā. *Kashf al-tamwīhāt* and *Rumūz al-kunūz*, by contrast, serve primarily (respectively) dialectical and pragmatic purposes, and will be treated accordingly. Finally, and most significantly, I focus on al-Āmidī’s works of *kalām*.

3. Possibility as Determinant of Causedness

3.i The Post-Avicennan Context

The immediate context for al-Āmidī’s reception of this aspect of Ibn Sīnā’s ontology is an intellectual development already occurring among post-classical Ash‘arīs including al-Ghazālī, al-Shahrastānī and al-Rāzī. I firstly account for these thinkers’ receptions of the distinction at the most basic level of its importance as a dichotomy of existents, and with regard to the notion that it is possibility which determines causedness.

3.i.a. Al-Ghazālī

It is now commonplace to acknowledge that al-Ghazālī's thought is influenced by Ibn Sīnā's.¹⁶¹ Al-Ghazālī's acceptance of Ibn Sīnā's basic distinction between the possible and necessary of existence is attested across several works. He supports the distinction between possible and necessary logical propositions, as attested in his *Mī‘ar al-‘ilm*, and also the possibility/necessity dichotomy as a metaphysical distinction.¹⁶² In *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*, for instance, he writes that the specifying quality of divinity (*al-khāṣiyā al-ilāhiyyā*) is that it is ‘necessary of existence in its essence, [that] by which everything which is in possibility comes to exist’.¹⁶³ Elsewhere in the same work he describes all other existents as not having claim to existence of themselves (*ghayr mustaḥaqq al-wujūd bi-dhātihi*), but becoming necessary through God.¹⁶⁴

A closer examination of al-Ghazālī's reception of the distinction shows that he rejects key aspects of Ibn Sīnā's doctrine. In the *Iqtisād*, al-Ghazālī identifies the possible existent as the originated existent (the *hādith*), defined as ‘that which was non-existent, then came to exist’.¹⁶⁵ So for al-Ghazālī (as for his Ash‘arī predecessors), an existent is deemed to require a cause only if it was first actually non-existent.¹⁶⁶ Though al-Ghazālī describes this kind of existent as ‘possible’, this is not with the signification of Ibn Sīnā's expression ‘possible of existence by

¹⁶¹ See Frank, *Creation*, on al-Ghazālī's cosmological views, where his basic thesis is that ‘while rejecting several elements of Avicenna's cosmology, al-Ghazālī adopts several basic principles and theses that set his theology in fundamental opposition to that of the classical Ash‘arite tradition’ (*Creation*, 11). Marmura famously contested this thesis, claiming that nothing in al-Ghazālī's thought was incompatible with traditional Ash‘arism (especially ‘Ghazālian Causes’; and ‘Ghazālī and Ash‘arism’). Abrahamov, ‘Ibn Sīnā's Influence’, detected an Avicennan influence on al-Ghazālī's divisions of the intellect, and on his doctrines of man's knowledge and love of God. More recently, Griffel (*Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*); and Treiger (*Inspired Knowledge*) have offered monographs on the Avicennan influence on (respectively) al-Ghazālī's cosmology, and his theory of mystical cognition. Both conclude that al-Ghazālī's thought bears the deep impression of *falsafī* logic, epistemology, and ontology (though Griffel qualifies some of Frank's more radical conclusions). Shihadeh characterises al-Ghazālī's integration of Aristotelian logic into his *kalām* as largely pragmatic ('From al-Ghazālī', 144-148).

¹⁶² Al-Ghazālī, *Mī‘ar*, 118-121.

¹⁶³ Al-Ghazālī, *Maqṣad*, 47.

¹⁶⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Maqṣad*, 64 and 70; and see Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*, 16-27.

¹⁶⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, 25.

¹⁶⁶ Indeed, in defining the subject of *kalām* in his discussion of various sciences in his *Mustafā*, al-Ghazālī writes that it is the study of ‘the most general thing, the existent’, which is divided in a primary way into eternal (*qadīm*) and temporally originated (*hādith*), suggesting that this remains his basic distinction between God and other existents (*Mustafā*, 1, 5).

virtue of itself'. Al-Ghazālī's ready acceptance of Ibn Sīnā's terminology paved the way for the central role played by the possibility vs necessity distinction among later Ash'arīs. However, the impact of Ibn Sīnā here on his own thought is only surface deep. He adheres to the classical Ash'arī paradigm in his understanding of the world's need for a cause: namely, its subjection to actual non-existence.¹⁶⁷ He refuses to concede the notion of the world's 'ontological dependence' on God, believing it to have problematic implications for the nature of God himself; as Goodman puts it, this notion of causedness seems to imply to al-Ghazālī that 'God is the ground of being, but nothing more'.¹⁶⁸

3.i.b Al-Shahrastānī

Ibn Sīnā's distinction between the possible and necessary of existence is a mainstay of al-Shahrastānī's conception of the God-world relationship. According to al-Shahrastānī, God's precedence over the world is ontological (*fī l-wujūd*). God exists necessarily. No contingency or non-existence can ever be ascribed to him, these being incompatible with his essence. By contrast, the world exists derivatively. In itself, the world is only possible. Therefore, it depends for existentiation on something else. In his existence, then, God is prior to the world, and the world depends on God for its existence.¹⁶⁹

Unlike al-Ghazālī, but in keeping with Ibn Sīnā, al-Shahrastānī does not deem an existent possible in relation to an actual state of non-existence. Early on in his discussion, he establishes that: 'The world is possible of existence in relation to itself, whether we consider it spatially and temporally finite or infinite.'¹⁷⁰ Possibility, on this reading, is a mode in which a being exists,

¹⁶⁷ Al-Ghazālī is critical of many other aspects of Ibn Sīnā's distinction. For instance, he does not accept that God's existence entails that he has no real attributes (Ghazālī, *Maqṣad*, 50). Ormsby claims that al-Ghazālī accepts 'outright' Ibn Sīnā's notion that the contingency of the world 'denote[s] that which can be and not be, as well as that which is caused by another' (contrasting it with 'the notion of contingency which al-Ghazālī received from his theological predecessors [which] emphasised the nature of the world as the temporally caused product of an eternal cause') (Ormsby, 'Creation in Time', 261). By contrast, Frank observes, with reference to the *Maqṣad*, that in his use of the distinction between necessary and possible existence in that work, 'al-Ghazālī seems to do little more than borrow the language' of Ibn Sīnā (Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System*, 17). This seems true across the board of al-Ghazālī's works.

¹⁶⁸ Goodman, 'Ghazālī's Argument', 76-7. This is revisited later in the thesis.

¹⁶⁹ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 7-8, 15.

¹⁷⁰ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 12.

characterised by susceptibility to non-existence. This is a significant development in the reception of Ibn Sīnā's ontology, marking a new phase in discourse on creation. Causedness is, in al-Shahrastānī's view, a function of susceptibility to non-existence, and not of actual non-existence prior to existence. This means that the existence of the world's cause is no longer proven in connection with the world's actual non-existence. Rather, the world can be shown to require a cause with reference to its essential possibility, since 'the existence of every existent which is possible by its essence is bestowed by something else'.¹⁷¹ Indeed, for al-Shahrastānī (as I will demonstrate in Chapter 5) the fact that the world depends on a cause by virtue of its essential possibility makes the question of whether or not the world actually underwent non-existence somewhat secondary.

3.i.c. Al-Rāzī

To recap, I have shown that in al-Ghazālī's thought, God is described as 'Necessary of Existence', and the world as 'Possible', but that his understanding of these attributions does not depart from the classical Ash'arī conception thereof. For him, the fundamental distinction between God and the world remains that between eternal and temporally originated existence. For al-Shahrastānī on the other hand, the designations 'necessary' and 'possible' do indeed refer to states in which beings exist, the latter entirely derivative. In his thought, these designations replace the eternal/temporally originated dichotomy entirely.

Part of al-Rāzī's originality, and a key factor in his influential integration of *falsafa* and *kalām*, is his explicit and comprehensive comparison of key notions from each thought system. Unlike al-Ghazālī, he does not appropriate Ibn Sīnā's terminology of possibility and necessity whilst retaining an Ash'arī view of their meanings. Unlike al-Shahrastānī, he does not readily abandon basic *kalām* distinctions without expansive critical analysis. In the case of al-Rāzī's reception of Ibn Sīnā's notion of possible and necessary existence, this entails a critical comparison between

¹⁷¹ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 15.

this and the eternal vs temporally originated dichotomy of the theologians. I will survey a selection of works to demonstrate this point.¹⁷²

Despite the Avicennan orientation of the work, in his discussion of ‘Common Things’ (*al-umūr al-‘āmma*) in the *Mabāḥīth*, al-Rāzī includes both the Necessary/Possible and the Eternal/Temporally originated dichotomies, describing both as ‘primary divisions of existence’ according to ‘certain [different] considerations’.¹⁷³ The structure of the *Muḥaṣṣal*, which straddles the traditions and has less of an Avicennan orientation, reflects a similar methodology.¹⁷⁴ This explicit acknowledgement of the distinction between these two categorisations of existence allows for al-Rāzī’s critical analysis of the contentious question of which of these divisions best accounts for the causal relationship between one category and the other. In other words, it allows al-Rāzī, more precisely than his predecessors, to get to the heart of the contention over the nature of the world’s dependence upon God.

Structured as it is according to traditional *kalām* parameters, the *Arba‘īn* has no independent section dealing with the strictly metaphysical topic of existence and its divisions. Indeed, like most works of classical Ash‘arism, the work begins with a section establishing the world’s temporal creation. At first glance, this suggests that, like his pre-Avicennan school members, al-Rāzī primarily divides existents into Eternal and Temporally originated. However, by this point, the Necessity/Possibility distinction is established as al-Rāzī’s own accepted division of existents. In the preliminaries to his first section, a defence of creation *ex nihilo*, al-Rāzī writes:

‘[As] the theologians have said, the world comprises all existents other than God. And the [way to] establish this statement is to say that the existent is of two divisions, since the existent is either that which in itself is never susceptible to non-existence, or that

¹⁷² I consider four works, representative of the various orientations of his thought: the *Mabāḥīth*, committed to an evaluation of Ibn Sīnā’s *Metaphysics* and *Physics*; the *Arba‘īn* and *Muḥaṣṣal*, two middle-period works, the former reflecting a *kalām* orientation and the latter an experimental comparative critique of the two traditions; and finally, the *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī’s latest work, his fullest integration of *falsafa* with *kalām*.

¹⁷³ Al-Rāzī, *Mabāḥīth*, 1, 6.

¹⁷⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 93-116 and 117-118.

which in itself is susceptible to existence... [The former] is the Necessary of Existence by virtue of itself... [, the latter] the Possible of Existence by virtue of itself.¹⁷⁵

As will become clear, al-Rāzī's use of this terminology is not superficial, but reflects careful appropriation of key aspects of Ibn Sīnā's *Metaphysics*.

As in the *Arba'īn*, al-Rāzī's primary categorisation of existents in the *Maṭālib* is Necessary vs Possible.¹⁷⁶ Yet in this work, the product of a later stage in al-Rāzī's integration of the traditions, no longer does either the experimental comparative approach of the *Muḥaṣṣal*, or the *kalām* orientation of the *Arba'īn*, inform the work's organisation. Rather, al-Rāzī explains his procedure with reference to Ibn Sīnā's notion of necessary existence. In Volume 1, al-Rāzī justifies the priority given to discussion of the Divinity by arguing that God is the 'most noble' (*ashraf*) of subject matters.¹⁷⁷ One of his five reasons is that 'the Necessary of Existence is none other than [God], and everything other than him is Possible of Existence by virtue of itself, requiring a cause. This entails that everything other than Him depends upon Him.'¹⁷⁸ There is no reference in these preliminaries to God's eternity or to the temporal origination of the world, and it is quite clear that Ibn Sīnā's distinction has supplanted this as al-Rāzī's primary ontological distinction.

As Shihadeh has shown in discussion of al-Rāzī's commentary on Ibn Sīnā's *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, al-Rāzī is responsible for explicitly identifying possibility, in Ibn Sīnā's doctrine, as the determinant ('illa) of an effect's reliance on its cause.¹⁷⁹ Al-Rāzī's close critical analysis of Ibn Sīnā's conception of causedness is unprecedented, and a highly prominent theme across his philosophical-theological works. It is true to say of all the Rāzian works considered in this

¹⁷⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Arba'īn*, 1, 16.

¹⁷⁶ I have not been able to establish with certainty that al-Āmidī had access to the *Maṭālib*. Even if not, this last work of al-Rāzī's contains his fullest expression of the metaphysical doctrines he had long upheld, so that its treatment here (and throughout the thesis) is useful even for the purpose of clarifying the views with which al-Āmidī had certainly become acquainted through al-Rāzī's earlier works.

¹⁷⁷ Note the distinction between this and the *Mabāhith*, which follows the Avicennan precept of proceeding from that which is 'more general' (or 'universal') to that which is more particular (c.f. Ibn Sīnā's justification of his approach to metaphysics in the *Najāt*, 2, 47).

¹⁷⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 1, 37.

¹⁷⁹ Shihadeh, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Commentary', 321.

section that the determinant of the effect's reliance on its cause is held to be its essential possibility (i.e. its susceptibility to both existence and non-existence), and not its origination *ex nihilo*. In the first volume of the *Mabāḥith*, al-Rāzī asserts and establishes against imagined opponents that 'possibility is what requires a cause' (*al-imkān huwa al-mahūj ilā al-sabab*).¹⁸⁰ He also argues negatively, within his section in the same volume on eternity and temporal originatedness, against the notion that 'temporal origination could be a reason for the [effect's] need for a cause' (*al-hudūth yumkin an yakūn sababan li-l-hāja ilā al-sabab*).¹⁸¹ His position in the *Muḥaṣṣal*, *Arba‘īn*, and *Maṭālib* is the same.¹⁸²

For al-Rāzī, however, a second issue arises with regard to Ibn Sīnā's position. Accepting that the sole determinant of the effect's reliance on its cause is its possibility, al-Rāzī asks whether temporal originatedness ought nonetheless to be considered a condition (*shart*) of that reliance. That is to say that whilst the possible of existence requires a cause due to its essential possibility, must it also come to exist after not having existed in order to be considered dependent upon a cause? This becomes a crucial theme in many of his philosophical-theological discussions. Indeed, he writes in the *Mabāḥith* that 'the greatest of investigations into temporal originatedness and eternity is whether or not temporal originatedness is a condition of the effect's reliance on its cause'.¹⁸³ Later in the work, within his discussion of causality, al-Rāzī argues with ten proofs that causal action is not conditioned upon the preceding non-existence of the effect.¹⁸⁴ This understanding of the relationship between cause and effect is later used as a premise in the proof for the world's eternity which arises in the third volume of the work.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Al-Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, 125–128. This work was written before the *Sharḥ*, and this is perhaps reflected in the relative simplicity of the terminology used to examine and defend Ibn Sīnā's position.

¹⁸¹ Al-Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, 1, 134–5.

¹⁸² See al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 113–4; *Arba‘īn*, 1, 101; *Maṭālib*, 1, 200–202, 214 and 4, 31 and 231–239, where he presents fourteen proofs for this position.

¹⁸³ Al-Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, 1, 136.

¹⁸⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, 1, 485–492.

¹⁸⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, 2, 515–516, in a brief section entitled 'on the eternity (*dawwām*) of God's action'. The *Mabāḥith* does retain a note of uncertainty over this question characteristic of the presence of inconsistencies in this early work (see Shihadeh, 'From al-Ghazālī', 171). In presenting proofs for God's existence, al-Rāzī primarily relies on Ibn Sīnā's proof from possibility. However, he acknowledges that others have relied in their proofs for God on the doctrine that 'the determinant of the effect's reliance on its cause is its temporal originatedness alone', whilst others have said that it is 'possibility, [but] on the condition that the effect be something temporally originated'.

In the *Muḥaṣṣal*, al-Rāzī again holds that possibility alone, and not possibility conditioned upon temporal originatedness, determines an effect's reliance on its cause. He does present proofs for God's existence from the possibility of the world and from its temporal origination. However, his proofs from temporal origination rely on the premises 'every temporally originated existent is only possible by virtue of its own essence' and 'every possible of existence relies on a cause for its existence'. This means that it is possibility alone which determines dependence upon a cause. It is only in their essential possibility that temporal occurrences require a cause.¹⁸⁶

The same observations apply to al-Rāzī's proofs for God in the *Maṭālib*, where these premises are explored and defended in far greater depth. In that work, al-Rāzī also discusses proofs which aim to establish God's existence on the basis of the world's temporal originatedness without any reference to its essential possibility. He acknowledges that theologians using such proofs would argue either a) that the temporally originated existent's need for a cause is known immediately, or b) that it is proven by demonstration, identifying specific theologians with each position. He argues against both groups, re-iterating his own position that it is possibility which determines an existent's need for a cause.¹⁸⁷ As in the *Muḥaṣṣal*, the proof for God from temporal originatedness which he supports (and against which, as I demonstrate in Chapter 5, al-Āmidī argues) relies on the premise that all temporally originated existents are in themselves only possible - a premise he defends with several proofs.¹⁸⁸

Confusingly, he then adds: 'this final position is strong' (*Mabāḥith*, 2, 450-51). Nevertheless, al-Rāzī does not (in this work) develop proofs for God based on either of these latter positions. The overall commitment of the work is to the position that temporal originatedness is not a factor in an effect's reliance on its cause.

¹⁸⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 213-4.

¹⁸⁷ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 1, 207-214.

¹⁸⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 1, 200-206. The *Arba'īn* is anomalous when it comes to al-Rāzī's general departure from the classical Ash'arī emphasis on temporal originatedness in consideration of causedness. Al-Rāzī states: 'according to us, temporal originatedness (*al-ḥudūth*) is not a consideration in the establishment of [the effect's] reliance [on its cause], neither as its determinant, nor as a condition.' (*Arba'īn*, 1, 101). However, he also argues that all possible existents are temporally originated, on the basis that a cause acts on its effect at the point of its origination (a position against which he consistently argues elsewhere) (*Arba'īn*, 1, 52-53, 65). This implies that temporal originatedness is a condition of an effect's reliance on its cause. We will see the implications of this for al-Rāzī's views on creation in this work in Chapter 5.

The supplanting of the distinction between eternal and temporally originated existents in al-Rāzī's thought is a significant chapter in the history of Ash'arism.¹⁸⁹ It remains to consider how al-Āmidī's thought relates to this development.

3.ii Al-Āmidī's Works of *falsafā*

3.ii.a. *Al-Nūr al-bāhir*

Al-Āmidī's theory and uses of the distinction between the possible and necessary of existence in the *Nūr* broadly concur with Ibn Sīnā's. Al-Āmidī asserts that existents are divided into those which exist necessarily and those whose existence is possible at the end of his Book on causes and effects. Unlike Ibn Sīnā, he does not explore the basis of our knowledge of this division.¹⁹⁰ He defines the necessary of existence as that which 'has claim to existence by virtue of its own essence, and which, if its non-existence were postulated, an impossibility would be entailed'; the impossible as that which 'has claim to non-existence by virtue of its own essence, and which, if its existence were postulated, an impossibility would be entailed'; and the possible as that which 'has claim neither to existence nor to non-existence by virtue of its essence, and for which neither its non-existence nor its existence would result in impossibility'.¹⁹¹

Al-Āmidī employs the distinction in the next book, firstly, to prove the existence of the Necessary of Existence, and then each of his attributes. What marks out al-Āmidī's discussions methodologically from Ibn Sīnā's is that he asserts his proof for each of these doctrines (for instance, the existence of God) very briefly (in the case of his proof for God's existence, in less than one folio), then expends considerable discussion dealing with objections (treatment of

¹⁸⁹ Wisnovsky discusses this post-Avicennan development in terms of its relevance to *kalām* discussions of God's oneness and attributes in his 'One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn'.

¹⁹⁰ Ibn Sīnā argues that the concepts of possibility and necessity are primary concepts, and, as such, cannot be defined without circularity (*Ilāhiyyāt*, I.5, 27–28).

The brevity of al-Āmidī's explanation of the basic concepts may testify to its prevailing acceptance among post-Avicennan philosophers (even those, such as Abu l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, who had significant disagreements with Ibn Sīnā), and indeed, theologians. See *Mu'tabar*, 3, 20–23, where al-Baghdādī asserts the doctrine in commencing his own Metaphysics.

¹⁹¹ *Nūr*, 5, 173.

objections against the proof for God's existence covers five folios).¹⁹² The question of what determines an existent's reliance on its cause is articulated, according to Ibn Sīnā's own treatment of the question, as a response to those who wrongly 'thought that the dependence (*iftiqār*) of the effect on its cause is on account of [the effect's] origination after non-existence.¹⁹³ Unsurprisingly, al-Āmidī sides with Ibn Sīnā here, arguing that it is on account of the essential possibility of an existent that it relies on a cause.

Like Ibn Sīnā, al-Āmidī also employs the distinction to establish the pre-eternal emanation of the world,¹⁹⁴ the notion that efficient causes are essentially and not temporally prior to their effects,¹⁹⁵ the view (key to Neoplatonic cosmology) that multiplicity cannot proceed directly from God,¹⁹⁶ and a range of other doctrines. In each of these contexts, al-Āmidī deals with objections. Within his discussions of these objections, al-Āmidī demonstrates some critical evaluation of Ibn Sīnā's theory, leading to a modified theory, which will occupy us in the following sections.

3.ii.b. *Kashf al-tamwīhāt*

The *Kashf* stands alone in its commitment to the letter of Ibn Sīnā's *Ishārat*. It goes without saying, then, that the primacy of the distinction between possibility and necessity is supported. On the question of what determines an existent's need for a cause, al-Āmidī is more concerned with accusing al-Rāzī of misreading Ibn Sīnā than with the substance of the discussion. He responds to al-Rāzī's claim that Ibn Sīnā has failed to address the central question of whether it is essential possibility or temporal originatedness which determines an existent's need for a cause. He concedes al-Rāzī's point that this is, indeed, the central question in the debate between the two sides. However, he claims that Ibn Sīnā has, in fact, addressed this matter. He

¹⁹² *Nūr*, 5, 176-182.

¹⁹³ *Nūr*, 5, 143. There is no trace of the influence of al-Rāzī's articulation of this debate in terms of the determinant ('illa) of causedness, confirming the impression that at the stage of his authorship of the *Nūr*, al-Āmidī was not yet responding to al-Rāzī.

¹⁹⁴ *Nūr*, 5, 210-211.

¹⁹⁵ *Nūr*, 5, 143.

¹⁹⁶ *Nūr*, 5, 182 and 223.

cites Ibn Sīnā's words in V.3: '[the possible of existence's] not being necessary of existence by virtue of itself, but [by virtue of] something other than it can occur in two ways: the first, that it is always necessary of existence by virtue of something other than itself; the second, that it is necessary of existence by something other than itself at a particular time'.¹⁹⁷ He then explains that the meaning of this statement is that the eternal existent can be of the kind which relies for its existence on a cause, which is to say that Ibn Sīnā has, in fact, stated his position on what constitutes an existent's need for a cause, namely, its essential possibility.

But al-Rāzī has claimed that in making this statement, Ibn Sīnā has committed the logical fallacy of begging the question (*al-muṣādara ‘alā l-maṭlūb*), since he has not provided support for his conclusion. Al-Āmidī disagrees. The conclusion which Ibn Sīnā is aiming for is 'it is not impossible for the eternal [existent] to rely on a cause'. He has argued for this conclusion with the statement 'it is not impossible for that which relies on a cause to be eternal'. The two statements are not identical, rather, the latter is the opposite of the desired conclusion ('*aks al-maṭlūb*). It is, says al-Āmidī '[logically] sound to prove the veracity of a statement by the veracity of its opposite'. Al-Āmidī's defence of Ibn Sīnā here trivialises al-Rāzī's point, which is that Ibn Sīnā has not provided sufficient evidence that causedness may be attributed to eternal existents.

Al-Āmidī provides an additional tack which turns out to be no more substantial. He cites Ibn Sīnā's statement that '[the possible of existence's] connection to something other [than itself] is more general than its being temporally originated', a statement which al-Rāzī claims is the worst of Ibn Sīnā's begging of the question, Ibn Sīnā simply stating his desired conclusion without argument. Al-Āmidī defends Ibn Sīnā on the basis that the statement is not intended as an argument (*laysa dhālik madhkūran fī jihat al-dalāla hattā yakūn muṣādaran ‘alā l-maṭlūb*). Rather, says al-Āmidī, Ibn Sīnā is simply making a logical observation on his initial division of caused existents into eternal and possible, which is to say that an existent's state of being caused is a more general attribute than either of the states 'eternal' or 'temporally originated' with which

¹⁹⁷ Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, V.3, 494-5.

the existent can also be attributed. Al-Āmidī succeeds here only in attacking al-Rāzī's logic, and his arguments here should be taken as such, his stated aim in the work being precisely to expose the errors of his contemporary. We must look to other works for al-Āmidī's own developing opinions on Ibn Sīnā's ontology.

3.ii.c. *Rumūz al-kunūz*

As discussed in Chapter 1, in *Rumūz al-kunūz*, al-Āmidī distinguishes between aspects of *falsafa* which can be used in the defence of *kalām* doctrine, and those which must be rejected. The work is structured identically to the *Nūr*, and is remarkably accommodating of Ibn Sīnā's *falsafa*. Al-Āmidī strictly rejects only those parts of *falsafa* which directly contradict established Ash'arī doctrines, such as the doctrine of God's attributes. Because the topics are ordered according to the *falsafī* approach, the discussion of the distinction arises in the same contexts as in the *Nūr*. Al-Āmidī's theory is barely developed, despite his altered commitments. Essentially, he accepts the distinction between the possible and necessary of existence, using it, like Ibn Sīnā, to prove God's existence and attributes.

In this work, al-Āmidī does not specifically address the question of what determines causedness. However, in discussion of the notion that pre-eternal existents may be caused, al-Āmidī hints at his view on the question. He notes divergent opinions on the question of pre-eternal effects. Some have said that describing a pre-eternal existent as caused implies the 'bringing into existence of that which already exists' (*ijād al-wujūd*), an absurdity. Others (the *falāsifa*), say that the possible of existence relies on its cause during its existence in the sense that if it were not for the cause, it could not exist. This need not imply *ijād al-wujūd* in the way that the opponent imagines. Al-Āmidī's opinion is subtly stated. He writes that the truth of the matter is clear 'to the one who reflects on the fact that that which relies on a cause is possible by virtue of its own essence'.¹⁹⁸ He seems to imply here that the possibility of an existent is the

¹⁹⁸ *Rumūz*, f 104b.

determinant of its reliance on a cause (Ibn Sīnā's view), though as we will see later, he does not support the idea of the existence of eternal effects in this work.

Despite significant developments between al-Āmidī's works of *falsafa* with regard to his doctrinal commitments and intellectual projects, the distinction between the possible and necessary of existence, and the notion that it is on account of their essential possibility that existents require a cause, are consistent features of al-Āmidī's thought. In this respect at least, Ibn Sīnā's influence on al-Āmidī's philosophical thought is straightforward.

3.iii Al-Āmidī's works of *kalām*

Turning to al-Āmidī's *Abkār* takes us into an entirely new phase in his thinking. This phase is marked by overt and vehement commitment to Ash'arī *kalām* doctrines, and equally vehement opposition to the views of those he characterises as the *falāsifa*. Despite this opposition, al-Āmidī relies on many aspects of Ibn Sīnā's *falsafa*. It is clear by this stage that the resources, both *falsafī* and *kalām*, both pre-Avicennan and post, upon which al-Āmidī could draw for his theory of possibility and necessity in his own works of *kalām* were very rich. In this section I demonstrate that he appropriates both Ibn Sīnā's basic distinction, and his view that it is an existent's essential possibility which determines its need for a cause.

No reader of the *Abkār* or *Ghāya* can miss the centrality of the distinction between the necessary and possible of existence to the works. In the *Abkār*, the distinction is used to frame al-Āmidī's discussions of God and the world. In Volume 1, in a section entitled 'on the existent', al-Āmidī writes:

The existent is either that which it is impossible to imagine (*fard*) not existing with respect to itself, or that which it is not impossible to imagine not existing with respect to itself. The former is the necessary of existence by virtue of itself (*wājib al-wujūd li-dhātihi*).

The latter is the possible of existence (*jā'iz al-wujūd*). And we must discuss each one of these in turn.¹⁹⁹

On the basis of this division, al-Āmidī structures the entirety of the next three volumes. Nowhere does he justify this division of existents, nor discuss its epistemological foundations. The distinction between the possible and necessary of existence is taken as basic, that is to say, in need of no demonstration.

In *Ghāyat al-marām*, the distinction appears immediately after al-Āmidī's introductory comments, in the context of proving God's existence. Al-Āmidī frames the discussion in such a way as to narrow the gap between Ibn Sīnā's theory of the dichotomy of existents, and the traditional Ash'arī conception of God and the dependence of all other existents on him. He begins:

Insightful Muslims (*al-muhaqqiqūn min al-islāmiyyīn*), as well as the people of the religions of the past, and some of the metaphysicians, hold that the existence of a being whose existence is by virtue of itself (*wujūduhu lahu li-dhātihi*) is necessary: [a being] which depends on nothing other than itself for existence, and upon whose creation (*ibdā'*), the existence of everything else depends.²⁰⁰

Having framed the discussion, al-Āmidī proceeds to establish that existents in the world do not have existence 'by virtue of themselves' (*li-dhātihā*), and on this basis, to provide his proof for God's existence. His manner of introducing the distinction with an appeal to his *kalām* heritage illustrates an important point which can be reiterated here: the intuition that the world is contingent and that God, by contrast, is not, is of course embedded in *kalām* doctrine. It is for

¹⁹⁹ *Abkār*, 1, 220-1. Al-Āmidī uses the term *jā'iz* to refer to possible existence. This is the term used most commonly by previous *mutakallimūn* (e.g. al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 266; al-Ghazālī, *Al-qisṭās al-mustaqqīm*, 26). Al-Āmidī elsewhere uses the terms *mumkin* and *jā'iz* synonymously. He may use the latter term here by way of identifying the basic division with the *kalām* tradition. Perhaps he also favours the term *jā'iz* to refer to the logical permissibility of an existent, in which case, his use of the term can be seen to emphasise his tendency to view possibility in logical rather than substantial terms (to be discussed).

²⁰⁰ *Ghāya*, 9.

this reason that Ibn Sīnā's highly developed distinction between the possible and necessary of existence served his Islamic philosophical theology so well, and was subsequently so influential.

Also influential on al-Āmidī was Ibn Sīnā's use of the distinction in his proof for God. There is no trace in al-Āmidī's *kalām* of the traditional Ash'arī procedure of proving the world's origination in time, and inferring therefrom its need for a creator. Rather, in both the *Abkār* and *Ghāya*, the existence of God is proven on the basis of the possible existent's need for a preponderator to give it existence in place of non-existence.²⁰¹ Al-Āmidī writes that the possible of existence is that for which 'existence and non-existence are both possible' (*al-wujūd wa-l-'adam 'alayhi jā'iz*), and that for this reason, such an existent requires a preponderator (*murajjih*) to determine that it exists.²⁰² There is no reference to the actual non-existence of the possible of existence in relation to its need for a cause within al-Āmidī's proof for God.

Since the possibility of the existence of beings in the world is not inferred from their temporality, the traditional *kalām* identification of the possible of existence with temporally originated existents is not immediately made by al-Āmidī. Furthermore, in the *Abkār*, al-Āmidī's proof for God is separated (by two volumes) from his defence of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, as we shall see in Chapter 5, in both the *Abkār* and *Ghāya*, al-Āmidī infers the world's temporal creation from his proof for God's existence (and not the inverse, as in the traditional *kalām* procedure). Like al-Rāzī, al-Āmidī thus clearly concedes Ibn Sīnā's understanding that it is essential possibility, and not temporal originatedness, which determines an existent's need for a cause.

Despite adopting Ibn Sīnā's conception of possibility as the determinant of causedness, al-Āmidī expresses somewhat contradictory opinions on the same issue elsewhere in the *Abkār*. The confusion is brought about by his dialectical objective of undermining al-Rāzī. The issue arises in three dialectical contexts. Firstly, in defence of his proof for God, al-Āmidī counters a hypothetical opponent who denies that the possible of existence requires a cause. Al-Āmidī has

²⁰¹ *Abkār*, 1, 227-228; *Ghāya*, 9.

²⁰² *Abkār*, 1, 228.

an opponent argue that the possible of existence cannot rely on a cause because the need (*hāja*) for a cause is a real, existent (*thubūti*) attribute of the possible. Being an existent, the need for a cause must itself be either necessary or possible of existence. Yet it can be neither: it cannot be necessary of existence, because it is an attribute of the possible. But if it were possible of existence, an infinite regress of possible existents would be engendered.²⁰³ Al-Āmidī responds by writing that the existent's need for a cause is not itself an existent entity, but simply the fact that without the cause, the possible of existence would not exist. This diverts the discussion away from the question of whether possibility or temporal originatedness determine causedness. An existent's dependence on a cause simply reverts to the fact that without the cause, the existent could not exist. As such, its dependence on a cause need not be said to have a determinant ('illa).

This is clearly intended as a diversion from al-Rāzī's way of framing the discussion, though it does not represent a philosophical judgement on the question of causedness itself. The second context is al-Āmidī's refutation of al-Rāzī's *Arba'in* proof for creation *ex nihilo*, which is premised on the notion that all possible existents are temporally originated, and will be treated in Chapter 5. Suffice to note for now that in the context of responding to al-Rāzī's evaluation of this notion, al-Āmidī himself argues robustly that temporal originatedness does not determine causedness.²⁰⁴ Finally, in his defence of Ash'arī occasionalism, al-Āmidī presents and refutes his version of two Rāzian arguments which are premised on the notion that the determinant of causedness is possibility alone.²⁰⁵ He rejects the proofs on the basis that since possibility is not an existent entity, it cannot be the determinant of causedness. Instead, he argues, possibility is the condition (*shart*) of an existent's reliance on its cause.²⁰⁶

Compiling al-Āmidī's comments on this issue, we can surmise that he holds that temporal originatedness is not what determines the need for a cause, that the possible of existence always relies on a cause in the sense that without its cause, it would not exist, and that this

²⁰³ *Abkār*, 1, 236-7.

²⁰⁴ *Abkār*, 3, 314.

²⁰⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Arba'in*, 1, 333-335.

²⁰⁶ *Abkār*, 2, 236-8.

dependence upon a cause is conditioned upon its essential possibility. Thus, despite al-Āmidī's reluctance to articulate his position in the manner of al-Rāzī, it is clear that al-Āmidī endorses Ibn Sīnā's view on this point.

The overall importance of the distinction between the possible and necessary of existence for al-Āmidī's *kalām* is clear. To this extent, his thought bears an Avicennan stamp, for it is undeniable at least that never before Ibn Sīnā had the distinction been used so coherently nor so prominently. The integration of Ibn Sīnā's notion of what determines an existent's need for a cause in al-Āmidī's thought is also a very significant development, with considerable ramifications for the role of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, as we shall see in Chapter 5. Yet closer examination of what al-Āmidī intends by 'possible of existence' will reveal that the Avicennan influence is in other respects superficial. For his ontology of possibility, his understanding of where it inheres, and of how the possible of existence relates to its cause, al-Āmidī relies on his Ash'arī heritage, as I will show.

4. The Ontology of Possibility

Al-Āmidī rejects Ibn Sīnā's notions of what possibility is, where it inheres, and what the terms 'possible' and 'necessary' qualify. In Section 2, I showed that Ibn Sīnā's metaphysical discussions of possible and necessary existence are informed by his natural philosophy, and specifically, that he strongly associates the possible essence with unactualised matter. We saw that one of Ibn Sīnā's most prominent proofs for the pre-eternity of the world is based on this connection, Ibn Sīnā arguing that possibility requires matter as a substrate in which to inhere. In this section, I demonstrate al-Āmidī's rejection of the conceptualisation of possibility implied, taking account, firstly, of precedents for his view.

4.i. Post-Avicennan Ash‘arī Precedents

4.i.a. al-Ghazālī

In the First Discussion of his *Tahāfut*, al-Ghazālī presents Ibn Sīnā’s argument from the notion of possibility as the Fourth Proof in the philosophers’ defence of the pre-eternity of the world. In response, he asserts that possibility is a logical concept, rather than a metaphysical reality. He writes that possibility is merely a ‘rational proposition’ (*qaḍā’ al-‘aql*).²⁰⁷ He gives a number of arguments to undermine Ibn Sīnā’s notion of possibility. One is that human souls have ‘a possibility preceding their origination, but there is nothing [material] to which this possibility relates’.²⁰⁸ We will shortly see that al-Āmidī’s uses the same argument in his discussion of possibility in the *Nūr*.²⁰⁹

Al-Ghazālī consistently opposes Ibn Sīnā’s conception of possibility across the contexts in which it arises. The third discussion of the *Tahāfut* attempts to undermine the philosophers’ ability to prove that God is the maker of the world. Al-Ghazālī is highly critical of Ibn Sīnā’s emanationist cosmology, describing it as ‘darkness upon darkness’.²¹⁰ He opposes Ibn Sīnā’s explanation of the emanation of multiplicity from the simple First Intellect, which relies in part on the notion that the possibility of the essence of the First Intellect is the source of the matter of the outer celestial sphere.²¹¹ Al-Ghazālī argues that the possibility of the First Intellect cannot be the source of a further existent. He holds that if the possibility of the First Intellect is taken to entail plurality, then the same must be said of God’s Necessity of Existence, in which case ‘let one allow the emanation of multiple things from him because of this multiplicity’.²¹²

²⁰⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 43. See Dutton (‘al-Ghazālī on Possibility’, 27-45) on al-Ghazālī’s reduction of possibility to a logical concept and its implications for his theory of causality. McGinnis demonstrates that Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) also understood possibility in terms of ‘concept compatibility’. The problematic implications of viewing possibility in relation to matter were perceived by theologians across the traditions (McGinnis, ‘The Eternity of the World’, 12-13).

²⁰⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 45.

²⁰⁹ The argument also occurs in al-Shahrastānī’s *Nihāya*, 34. Al-Shahrastānī describes possibility as no more than ‘an estimation [made] in the mind’ (*taqdīr fi l-dhihn*), echoing al-Ghazālī’s (and the classical Ash‘arī) view.

²¹⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 68.

²¹¹ See fn 228 below for further explanation.

²¹² Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 69.

We will see that the echo of the *Tahāfut* is clear in al-Āmidī's own objection to Ibn Sīnā's cosmology in the *Nūr*. In discussion of emanation in the *Kashf*, al-Āmidī attacks al-Rāzī's objections on the basis that none of them are original, but rather, taken from 'Ṣāhib al-tahāfut'.²¹³ This reference to al-Ghazālī confirms the impression that al-Āmidī's discussions of possibility are, indeed, influenced by the *Tahāfut*. More generally, however, the *kalām* conception of possibility outlined in Section 3 is the backdrop to both al-Ghazālī's and al-Āmidī's critiques of Ibn Sīnā.

4.i.b. al-Rāzī

Al-Rāzī is thorough in his analysis and critique of Ibn Sīnā's ontology of possibility. Two features of his critique are relevant here; his treatment of Ibn Sīnā's essence/existent distinction in relation to his view of what the attributes 'possible' and 'necessary' qualify, and his insistence, against Ibn Sīnā, that possibility has no objective reality such that it should require a material substrate.

I argued earlier that the position that existence is determinate and super-added to the possible essence should not be attributed to Ibn Sīnā. In fact, its longevity as a reading of Ibn Sīnā is attributable to al-Rāzī. According to al-Rāzī, the logical upshot of Ibn Sīnā's notion that the Necessary of Existence is no more and no less than its existence, is that existence is equivocal (which is to say that it varies between existents), and that in the case of the possible of existence alone, existence is additional to essence. Al-Rāzī's own opinion, however, is that existence is entirely univocal (*mushtarik*), and additional to essence in the case of all existents, including God.²¹⁴ This is a position distinct both from Ibn Sīnā's, and from that of the classical

²¹³ *Kashf*, 2, 874.

²¹⁴ E.g. Al-Rāzī, *Mabāhith*, 1, 18–23 (that existence is univocal, proven here with an argument to the effect that existents are unalike, but that they have something in common not shared by the non-existent), 23–30 (that the existence of possible existents is additional to (zā'id 'alā) their essence), 30–41 (that the existence of the Necessary of Existence is identical with his essence); *Arba'in*, 1, 82–88, where these discussions are subsumed under the classical *kalām* debate over whether or not the non-existent (*al-ma'dūm*) is a thing (*shay'*). Eichner treats al-Rāzī's position and its reception in 'Essence and Existence'; Mayer also treats al-Rāzī's reading of Ibn Sīnā's *Ishārāt* expression of this doctrine in *On Existence*, 195–208; on the notion that existence is super-added in the case of possible existents as a Rāzian innovation, see Wisnovsky, 'Essence and Existence'.

Ash'arīs (for whom essence and existence are indistinct). According to al-Rāzī's understanding of the relationship between essence and existence, it is the essences of existents which are qualified as either possible or necessary, and not existence itself, which is entirely homogenous.²¹⁵

As well as disagreeing with Ibn Sīnā on the relation between essence and existence, al-Rāzī consistently opposes his notion of possibility as a real relation. His commentary on the *Ishārāt* exemplifies his view. Ibn Sīnā's proof for the pre-eternity of matter from his notion of possibility appears, more concisely, in the metaphysics of the *Ishārāt*, V.6.²¹⁶ In his commentary, al-Rāzī objects to the notion that possibility is ontologically real. Firstly, he challenges the idea that temporal occurrences have a determinate possibility associated with them prior to their existence (*laysa hunāk amr muta'ayyin mutamayyiz*). Rather, prior to a temporal occurrence, he argues, there is only its 'pure non-existence' (*al-nafi al-sirf*).²¹⁷ Secondly, he concedes that temporal occurrences are preceded by possibility, but argues that this possibility is not an 'affirmative thing' (*amr thubūti*).²¹⁸ This he supports with three arguments, to which al-Āmidī will respond in his *Kashf*. In the course of one of his arguments, al-Rāzī expands on his notion of possibility, claiming that it is an accidental attribute of the essence of a thing in relation to its existence. For instance, when I say that the existence of a chair is possible, I make a statement relating the essence of the chair to its existence in reality. The possibility is thus accidental to the chair.²¹⁹ Al-Rāzī thus presents possibility as a rational attribution referring to the compatibility of the existence of an occurrence with reality. In this regard, he shares the perspective of the classical Ash'arīs and of al-Ghazālī before him.

²¹⁵ Al-Shahrastānī also holds that existence is a factor common to the possible and necessary of existence (*amr yu'amm al-wājib wa-l-jā'iz*). This may be a precedent for al-Rāzī's position (al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 15).

²¹⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, V.6, 507-513.

²¹⁷ This corresponds to the Ash'arīs' absolute identification of 'thingness' with existence, though al-Rāzī is not expressing a commitment to the Ash'arī theory.

²¹⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ*, 2, 403-408. He comments: The sound minded man does not require that possibility has extra-mental existence, but [Ibn Sīnā] has required [this]', *Sharḥ*, 2, 407; c.f. *Arba'īn*, 1, 79-80.

²¹⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ*, 2, 406.

4.ii Al-Āmidī's works of *falsafa*

4.ii.a *al-Nūr al-bāhir*

In the *Nūr*, al-Āmidī upholds the doctrine that the world is pre-eternal, but rejects Ibn Sīnā's proof from possibility. He first presents his own version of the proof which the 'greatest minds (*al-jahābidha min al-fāḍilīn*) found reliable'. Having represented Ibn Sīnā's view, he rejects it, arguing that possibility is not existent (*wujūdī*), but negational (*salbi*). That is to say that when we describe something as 'possible', we simply mean that it is neither inconceivable for that thing to exist, nor for it not to exist (*salb al-muḥāl min fard wujūdihī wa-'adamihi*). Al-Āmidī thus views possibility in rational terms, as a reference to the compatibility of our conceptualisation of X with existence. If we describe X as possible, we only mean that we can rationally conceive of both its existence and its non-existence. He adds that rational, negational attributions do not require a substrate of matter in which to inhere.²²⁰

In order to disprove the affirmative existence of possibility, al-Āmidī presents two arguments. One is an argument *ad hominem*: since possibility precedes every temporal occurrence, it precedes human souls, which are immaterial. The opponent (Ibn Sīnā) has argued that the possibility preceding temporal occurrences requires a substrate of matter. Therefore, according to his argument, immaterial beings are preceded by a substrate of matter. This is impossible.²²¹ We have already seen the Ghazālian precedent for this argument.

Al-Āmidī anticipates a response to the objection. He acknowledges his opponent's claim that the possibility of the human soul inheres in the matter to which the soul is related (that is, the human body).²²² However, he argues *ad hominem* that if the possibility of the soul inheres in the body, Ibn Sīnā's thesis that the possibility of X cannot inhere in the agent of X (premise 3 of his argument above) collapses. This is because the body is the form which gives existence to the

²²⁰ *Nūr*, 5, 168-169.

²²¹ *Nūr*, 5, 168-170.

²²² This is Ibn Sīnā's own claim in *Ilāhiyyāt* IV.2, 137, where he writes 'as for the soul, it does not come into existence except with the existence of a bodily subject, at which point the possibility of its existence would be in that [body], subsisting in it because of that matter being specifically related to it.'

soul, making it the agent of the soul. If the possibility of the soul inheres in the body, the possibility of the soul inheres in its agent. Since this has been denied, the inherence of the possibility of the soul in the body cannot be maintained. Al-Āmidī completes the objection by arguing that if the possibility of the immaterial soul inheres in body, then the possibility of other immaterial substances, namely the intellects, must also be said to have a substance in which to inhere.²²³

Despite refuting this aspect of Ibn Sīnā’s understanding of possibility, al-Āmidī accepts the doctrine that the world is pre-eternal. To this end, he provides an alternative proof for the pre- eternity of matter, based on the *Ishārāt*’s first proof for the doctrine.²²⁴ Al-Āmidī’s critique of Ibn Sīnā’s understanding of possibility is not, then, doctrinally motivated. Rather, it results from his own separation of the concept from its natural philosophical context: implicit to his negation of Ibn Sīnā’s conception is a loosening of Ibn Sīnā’s association of matter with possible existence. Possibility is reduced to a logical, rational concept, removed from its natural philosophical connections.

Al-Āmidī’s discussions of potency and privation in the *Physics* of the *Nūr* illuminate this separation. In his exposition of the principles of nature, al-Āmidī, like Ibn Sīnā, describes *hayūla* as that which ‘does not exist in actuality’ without that which inheres in it.²²⁵ Similarly, he defines privation according to Ibn Sīnā’s definition as the absence of a determined form.²²⁶ However, this does not lead him (as it did Ibn Sīnā) to question whether or not a material substrate must precede this privation. Rather, al-Āmidī is preoccupied with refuting opponents (including Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, who held to an alternative conception of *hayūla*).²²⁷ In turn, the *Nūr* contains no equivalent to Ibn Sīnā’s III.11, in which he proves that the possibility

²²³ This overlooks the fact that Ibn Sīnā has argued that only existents generated from non-existence require a preceding substrate of possibility, distinguishing between temporal and pre-eternal existents in this regard (e.g. *Ta’līqāt*, 54).

²²⁴ *Nūr*, 5, 167–168, c.f. Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, V.4–5, 499–506.

²²⁵ *Nūr*, 3, 12.

²²⁶ *Nūr*, 3, 21.

²²⁷ E.g. *Nūr*, 3, 14. On Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī’s denial of prime matter as a substrate for body, see Shihadeh, ‘Avicenna’s Corporeal Form’, 5–6.

of motions precedes them and requires a substrate of matter in which to inhere. This means that the question of whether natural bodies are necessarily preceded by a substrate of matter is not addressed in the *Physics* of the *Nūr*. Neither are privation and potency explicitly associated with possibility. This helps explain why al-Āmidī's conception of the ontology of possibility is so different to Ibn Sīnā's when it arises in his *Metaphysics*. It is also clear that al-Āmidī has been influenced by al-Ghazālī's critique of Ibn Sīnā's conception of possibility, since his arguments closely concur with those found in the *Tahāfut*, discussed above.²²⁸

Ambiguities are raised with regard to al-Āmidī's reception of Ibn Sīnā's essence/existence distinction by his modification of Ibn Sīnā's theory of possibility. Al-Āmidī's notion of possibility in the *Nūr* is that it is a rational judgement relating to our ability to conceptualise a given occurrence in existence. Yet al-Āmidī endorses the essence/existence distinction throughout the *Nūr*.²²⁹ This distinction entails the opinion that the characteristics of things, including their possibility or necessity of existence, are determined by their essences. This means that the designation 'possible' is objective, in that it characterises the essence of the possible. We might ask how al-Āmidī reconciles 1) the view that things are designated possible according to our ability to conceptualise them and 2) the view that things are designated

²²⁸ Al-Āmidī rejects Ibn Sīnā's conception of possibility as a relation requiring matter in every doctrinal context in which it arises in the *Nūr*. One is Ibn Sīnā's emanationist cosmology, specifically, the question of how multiplicity in the world emanates from the Necessary of Existence, who is completely simple. In the *Nūr*, al-Āmidī presents his interpretation of Ibn Sīnā's explanation of multiplicity in the *Ishārāt* as follows: from the First Intellect's apprehension of God, the soul of the outermost sphere is produced. From its apprehension of itself, the form of the outer sphere is created. The possibility of the First Intellect produces the matter of the outer sphere. The necessity which the First Intellect derives from God produces a second intellect (Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, VII.39, 645–657). Al-Āmidī upholds the emanationist doctrine but objects to Ibn Sīnā's explanation for multiplicity. His most significant objection, for which he provides a *reductio ad absurdum*, is that possibility and necessity in the First Intellect are not existent attributes (*sifāt wujūdiyya*) such that they could cause the existence of anything else. Yet al-Āmidī proposes an alternative theory and defends it extensively (*Nūr*, 5, 226–7). Again, he critiques Ibn Sīnā's understanding of possibility and necessity (the *Tahāfut* precedents for which are discussed above) without any objection to the doctrine it is used to uphold.

²²⁹ E.g. *Nūr*, 5, 227 ('everything which is necessary by something other than it, its existence is additional to its essence'). Unlike al-Rāzī, al-Āmidī, in the *Nūr*, does not interrogate the distinction. Rather, he concurs with Ibn Sīnā in quite simple terms that only in the case of the possible of existence is existence additional to essence, since the essence of the possible does not demand that it exist, in contrast with the necessary of existence, the essence of which demands its existence (e.g. *Nūr*, 5, 173). As such, al-Āmidī does not attempt to further clarify this distinction in relation to questions such as the univocity (or otherwise) of existence. This seems to confirm al-Āmidī's lack of exposure to al-Rāzī's works at this early stage.

possible according to their essences? The answer is not provided by al-Āmidī. It is conceivable that he holds that our ability to conceptualise an essence in existence is what makes its essence possible, i.e. that the reality of essences consists in our conceptualisation of them. On this view, however, essences are no more than conceptual entities.

This, of course, is a major modification of Ibn Sīnā's theory as I have outlined it, in which essences are associated with specific material privations, and by which an essence is only deemed possible if an instance of it extra-mentally exists.²³⁰ The tension in al-Āmidī's view results from his dissociation of possible essences from potency in matter. We have seen that in Ibn Sīnā's view, the possibility of the possible of existence is associated with its essence, and inheres in a material substrate. Possibility and possible essences are thus fully objective and not determined by our ability to conceptualise them. Al-Āmidī has abandoned the material objectivity of Ibn Sīnā's notion of possibility, but not his distinction between essence and existence. He has not acknowledged the resultant weakening of Ibn Sīnā's notion of essence.

The classical Ash'arī conception of possibility as purely rational is consistent with the doctrine that things have no reality except as extra-mental existents. According to classical Ash'arism, until actualised as existents, possibilities are no more and no less than ideas in the mind. On the other hand, Ibn Sīnā's conception of possibility as a real relation corresponding to privations in matter is itself consistent with his own notion that essences are ontologically inseparable and yet distinct from existents. It is al-Āmidī's compromise between, on the one hand, accepting that the possible essence is distinct from its existence, and on the other, maintaining that possibility is the purely rational designation of synchronic alternatives, that confuses the matter. It becomes unclear what exactly determines the designation 'possible', and in what sense essences are any more than logical concepts. Al-Āmidī has, in his *Nūr* at least, succumbed to the obscurity inherent to the unresolved integration of two highly differentiated ontologies.

²³⁰ Ibn Sīnā goes so far as to say that essences have 'special existence' (*al-wujūd al-khāṣṣ*) (contrasted with 'affirmative existence' (*al-wujūd al-ithbātī*)), to emphasise the fact that they have a real ontological status apart from their existence (*Ilāhiyyāt*, I.5, 24).

4.ii.b. *Kashf al-tamwīhāt*

In response to al-Rāzī's critique of Ibn Sīnā's conception of possibility in his *Sharḥ* (discussed above), al-Āmidī argues in the *Kashf* for the opposing view (namely, Ibn Sīnā's view that possibility is a real existent). Al-Āmidī cites al-Rāzī's commentary on this topic almost in its entirety.²³¹ The details of al-Āmidī's arguments for the ontological reality of possibility do not concern us. Suffice to observe that al-Āmidī consistently opposes al-Rāzī's critique of Ibn Sīnā's notion of the existence of possibility. In discussion of the process of emanation, al-Rāzī argues, similarly to al-Āmidī in the *Nūr*, that none of the aspects of the First Intellect which Ibn Sīnā holds responsible for the emanation of other existents are sufficient causes. As part of this, he argues against the affirmative existence of possibility.²³² Al-Āmidī argues against him in this context, too, that possibility is an affirmative existent.²³³ There is a clear contradiction between al-Āmidī's stance maintained here in the *Kashf*, and his opinion expressed earlier in the *Nūr*. The project of the *Kashf* is to undermine al-Rāzī's arguments against Ibn Sīnā. As such, the theory presented is anomalous in relation to all of al-Āmidī's other extant works. Here we gain insight only into al-Āmidī's encounter with al-Rāzī's critical evaluation of Ibn Sīnā's theory.

4.ii.c. *Rumūz al-kunūz*

In the *Rumūz*, al-Āmidī's basic commitments have changed. As in his *Nūr*, the question of what possibility constitutes arises in al-Āmidī's treatment of the question of the pre-eternity of matter, within a section entitled 'On the generated (*al-hādith*) and the eternal (*al-qadīm*), and on what must precede generated things by way of time and matter'.²³⁴ In line with his overall commitment to *kalām* doctrine in this work, al-Āmidī rejects the doctrine that generated things are preceded by matter. However, al-Āmidī's conceptualisation of possibility and its relation to matter has not changed between the *Nūr* and *Rumūz*.

²³¹ *Kashf*, 2, 866–7.

²³² Al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ*, 2, 499–500.

²³³ *Kashf*, 2, 875–6.

²³⁴ *Rumūz*, f. 107b; c.f. *Nūr*, 5, 165. Indeed, as observed elsewhere, the *Nūr* and *Rumūz* are structurally identical, indicating al-Āmidī's heavy reliance on the former in composition of the latter.

Ibn Sīnā's proof from possibility for the eternity of the world is treated with extreme brevity; al-Āmidī presents the proof in five lines, and refutes it in two! He argues that Ibn Sīnā's proof from the need for a substrate in which the possibility of a temporal occurrence inheres before its existence 'is only correct if the preceding possibility is existent (*wujūdī*)'.²³⁵ He argues that the possibility is non-existent ('*adami*) as follows: the non-existence of the possible of existence is possible. Therefore, possibility is an attribute of non-existence. Existence cannot be an attribute of non-existence. Therefore, possibility is non-existent.²³⁶ Al-Āmidī does not expand on his notion of possibility, so it is unclear in what sense the possible non-existent is considered possible prior to its existence, and whether or not that possibility relates to a determinate essence. In any case, he certainly seems to understand possibility as a rational designation, as in the *Nūr*. Al-Āmidī also opposes Ibn Sīnā's explanation of the process of emanation in the *Rumūz*, strongly opposing the emanationist cosmology as a whole. As in the *Nūr*, his discussion includes refutation of the notion that possibility is an affirmative existent such that it could be a sufficient cause for a further existent.²³⁷ Despite changing theological commitments, there is no development in al-Āmidī's rejection of Ibn Sīnā's notion of possibility as a real relation requiring a material substrate.

The *Kashf*, with its dialectical agenda, represents the only exception to al-Āmidī's consistent opposition to Ibn Sīnā's ontology of possibility in his works of *falsafa*, with its clear background in the alternative conception of possibility dominant in his intellectual context.

4.iii Al-Āmidī's works of *kalām*

The discussions of *Abkār al-afkār* and *Ghāyat al-marām* alike follow traditional theological topics.²³⁸ As such, despite the prominent use of Ibn Sīnā's distinction between the possible and necessary of existence, al-Āmidī's ontology of possibility and his notion of where it inheres

²³⁵ *Rumūz*, f. 107a.

²³⁶ *Rumūz*, f.107b.

²³⁷ *Rumūz*, f.112b-113a.

²³⁸ In this respect, al-Āmidī's writings can be contrasted with al-Rāzī's. In particular, al-Rāzī initiates a trend (which al-Āmidī does not follow) of treating metaphysical questions separately from 'pure theology', as Eichner has demonstrated (e.g. Eichner, 'Dissolving the Unity', especially 150-154).

feature in traditional *kalām* contexts. In particular, the discussion of God's attributes of power and knowledge, and the discussion of existence and essence are important focal points for al-Āmidī's treatment of possibility, and will be treated in this section.

In line with his Ash‘arī commitments, al-Āmidī presents a sustained defence of God's eternal attribute of power (*al-qudra al-qadīma*). In Section 3, I made it clear that in al-Ash‘arī's view, God's power extends to 'that which can be enacted' (*mā yaṣīḥh an yakūn maqdūran*).²³⁹ Al-Āmidī writes that the meaning of an occurrence being within God's power (*maqdūr*) is 'nothing other than that in consideration of itself (*bi-l-naẓar ilā dhātihi*) it is possible (*mumkin*)'.²⁴⁰ Despite the Avicennan overtones of the reference to something being possible in itself, al-Āmidī's statement entails nothing more or less than al-Ash‘arī's. God's power extends to that which is possible, and not to that which is impossible. We must look elsewhere for al-Āmidī's understanding of what it means for an occurrence to be 'possible in itself'.

We saw that in Ibn Sīnā's proof for a substrate in which possibility inheres, he refutes the identification of the power of the agent with the possibility of that which it enacts (*al-qudra ‘alā l-ijād aw jawāz al-ijād laysa huwa jawāz al-wujūd*). He argues that if that which is possible is identified with that which is within the agent's power to enact, the power of the agent is trivialised.²⁴¹ This is because we are effectively saying that the 'agent can do what the agent can do'. We saw that McGinnis identifies this as the *kalām* view.²⁴² It is difficult to tell whether or not Ibn Sīnā had the *mutakallimūn* in mind when he formulated this argument. In any case, it is clear that the Ash‘arī view, which al-Āmidī here clearly adopts, does not equate possibility with God's power. Rather, possibility is a rational designation referring to the way something is in itself. It remains true, however, that God can enact all possibilities.²⁴³

²³⁹ *Mujarrad*, 101; see Gimaret, *La Doctrine*, 284. See pages 72-73 above.

²⁴⁰ *Abkār*, 1, 296-7.

²⁴¹ Ibn Sīnā, *Tabī’iyāt*, III.11, 1, 359-60; *Ilāhiyyāt*, IV.2, 139-140.

²⁴² McGinnis, 'The Eternity of the World', 279.

²⁴³ The association of possibility with God's power may, however, have some precedent in debates between Mu‘tazila and Ash‘arīs. Frank shows that for the Başran Mu‘tazila, the possibility of the existence of a thing corresponds to God's power to enact it. Nonetheless, the thing's possibility by virtue of its own essence is logically prior to God's power to enact it (see Frank, 'Al-ma‘dūm wa-l-mawjūd', 200-203; Adamson, 'Al-Kindī and the Mu‘tazila', 58). Abū Rashīd

So far, we observe that al-Āmidī views possibility as a rational designation - an opinion which concurs with that expressed in the *Nūr* and *Rumūz*. The question of whether or not possibility is also an objective designation, that is, whether the expression ‘in itself’ (*bi-dhātihi*) refers to an object called ‘self’ (*dhāt*), remains. Let us consider how al-Āmidī conceives of the notion of essence in his works of *kalām*.

The Ash‘arīs famously identified the reality of things exclusively with their existence, opposing the Mu‘tazilī view according to which both non-existents and existents could be described as ‘things’, the ‘thing’ being co-extensive with that which is known (*al-ma‘lūm*), rather than with that which exists (*al-mawjūd*).²⁴⁴ The Mu‘tazilī position can be seen to imply that the characteristics of things are independent of their creation by God. This is because non-existent things have not been enacted by God’s power, but can still be conceptualised and ascribed characteristics. In response to the Mu‘tazilī notion of the thing, the Ash‘arīs strongly assert that God is responsible for both the existence of things and their characteristics, since according to the Ash‘arī view, they have no characteristics except when they exist.²⁴⁵

Al-Āmidī fully defends the Ash‘arī doctrine, most expansively in a section in the *Abkār* on ‘the non-existent’. He opposes the notion, which he identifies with al-Jāhiẓ and the Başran Mu‘tazila, that the non-existent is a thing. He also refutes the view that ‘essences (*al-dhawāt*) are affirmed in their state of non-existence’. His use of the term *dhāt* may imply that he associates Ibn Sīnā’s conception of possible essences with the Mu‘tazilī view of the non-existent thing.²⁴⁶ One proof upon which he relies in disproving the Mu‘tazilī view is intended to show that belief in non-existent essences implies that ‘the Lord exalted is not the giver-of-existence (*mūjid*) or the

al-Niṣabūrī (d. after 415/1024), like Ibn Sīnā, argues against the idea that the possibility of an existent is grounded in God’s power to enact it (see Frank, ‘*Al-ma‘dūm wal-mawjūd*’, 208, citing Ziyādāt al-sharḥ, published in *Fī l-tawḥīd*, 287). This suggests that some real opponent made the opposing assertion.

²⁴⁴ See Frank, ‘*Al-ma‘dūm wal-mawjūd*’, 207 on the Mu‘tazilī position that before an existent there is negation (*al-nafi*), but not pure negation (*al-nafi al-ṣirf*), as the Ash‘ari’s hold.

²⁴⁵ For al-Shahrastāni’s discussion of this point, see his *Nihāya*, 157.

²⁴⁶ It is worth re-stressing, however, that though Ibn Sīnā held that possible essences are susceptible to non-existence, his view is unlike the Mu‘tazilī view in that for him, possible essences are co-extensive with possible existents. Thus, whilst the Mu‘tazila imagined a realm of unactualised possible things, Ibn Sīnā’s possible essences correspond to actual existents.

creator (*mukhtari*) – and this is disbelief (*kufr*). Its premise is that the power of God must have efficacy (*takün mu'athira*) in relation to its object. It is argued that if the Mu'tazilī affirmation of non-existent essences is upheld, God cannot be said to be the creator of essences when they do exist, since they are affirmed independently of God in their state of non-existence.²⁴⁷ Al-Āmidī upholds the doctrine of his tradition at some length.

At another point, al-Āmidī specifically critiques al-Rāzī's notion of essences. In a brief preliminary to his proof for God, al-Āmidī cites the notion that existence is univocal (*al-mafhūm min al-wujūd wāhid fī kull mawjūd*), and that it is additional to the essence of each existent (*zā'id 'alā dhāt al-mawjūd*).²⁴⁸ Elsewhere, he refers to this position as the one which 'the best of the later [scholars] (*afdal al-muta'akhkirin*) inclined towards'.²⁴⁹ He consistently opposes the view, arguing that though the word 'existence' is common to all existents, it has no unified reality. Rather, the essence of each thing is its existence, and its existence, its essence. This is a restatement of the classical Ash'arī understanding of the thing, presented in deliberate opposition to al-Rāzī. It is noteworthy that it is al-Rāzī's position on the relation between essence and existence, and not Ibn Sīnā's, that al-Āmidī addresses.

Given his sustained denial of the theory of non-existents essences, what, then, can we take al-Āmidī to mean when he describes an occurrence as 'possible in itself' (*bi-dhātihi*)? Al-Āmidī primarily designates an occurrence possible in relation to our ability to conceptualise its existence. Yet he also stresses that the realm of conceptual possibilities is identical with the scope of God's power. In refutation of proofs for the pre-eternity of the world, al-Āmidī discusses Ibn Sīnā's opposition to the notion that possibility is identified with the power of the agent.²⁵⁰ He responds to Ibn Sīnā that possibility can be associated with the power of the agent without the logical fallacy of defining power by power (*ta'lil al-shay' bi-nafsihi*). This is because though that which is possible of existence is correctly defined as that which can be enacted by the agent, among its concomitants are the fact that if we imagine the possible of existence in

²⁴⁷ *Abkār*, 3, 394.

²⁴⁸ *Abkār*, 1, 219-220.

²⁴⁹ *Abkār*, 3, 23.

²⁵⁰ *Abkār*, 3, 343.

existence, no absurdity results. What is possible can thus be determined in relation to our ability to conceptualise it as well as in relation to God's power.²⁵¹ Here, al-Āmidī equates the possible of existence with the objects of God's power (*al-maqdūrāt*), and defines these both in relation 1) to God's power, and 2) to our ability to conceptualise their existence. His statement does suggest that God's power to enact an existent is prior to our ability to conceptualise that existent as a determinant of the possibility of its existence. Yet the implications of this are not worked out, and in the remainder of the work, conceptualisation seems to be the primary determinant of what is possible. Nonetheless, both grounds enter into the definition of what is possible.

Al-Āmidī's designation of possibility in relation to our ability to conceive of a concrete instance of its existence is implied in his initial definition of the possible of existence as that which 'it is not impossible to posit (*fard*) not existing with respect to itself'.²⁵² The terminology of this statement echoes Ibn Sīnā's definition of the possible as that for which existence is not necessary when it is 'considered in itself (*idhā u'tubira bi-dhātihi*)'.²⁵³ The distinction between the two views of possibility is thus easily missed. It should be clear by now, however, that when al-Āmidī describes something as possible in itself in his works of *kalām*, this is not an objective designation, but a purely rational one.

A passage in al-Shahrastānī's *Nihāya* illuminates the *kalām* precedents for al-Āmidī's position. In the context of defending the Ash'arī doctrine that the non-existent is not a thing, al-Shahrastānī explains how the non-existent can be known (*ma 'lūm*), without being a thing. He writes:

²⁵¹ *Abkār*, 3, 356.

²⁵² *Abkār*, 1, 220-1.

²⁵³ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, 1.6, 30.

Knowledge is not connected with the non-existent *qua* non-existent except in relation to our conceptualisation of its existence. Absolute non-existence is [only] known and conceptualised in relation to absolute existence.²⁵⁴

Our knowledge of infinite possible non-existents relates to our conceptualisation of an instance of their existence. This clarifies how al-Āmidī can describe something as possible by virtue of itself without implying an essence distinct from the existence of the possible being. Al-Āmidī's understanding on this point has progressed from his works of *falsafa*, in which the designation 'possible' is viewed as a rational and objective designation describing the compatibility of an essence, viewed as a determinate entity, with existence. The connection of possible existence with matter, key to Ibn Sīnā's theory, is completely lost. This is indicative of the extent to which al-Āmidī draws upon and adheres to Ash'arī materials for his understanding of the possible of existence in his works of *kalām*, despite his appropriation of the distinction as a framework for discussion, and in his proof for God.

Al-Āmidī's discussion of the non-existent further illuminates his conception of the ontology of possibility. We have already seen that al-Āmidī upholds the Ash'arī view that the non-existent is not a thing. Yet he also divides the non-existent into categories, namely, the possible (*mumkin*), and the necessary (*wājib*), in relation to our ability to rationally conceive of them. The necessarily non-existent is that whose existence we cannot conceptualise. It is also called the impossible. Examples al-Āmidī gives are uniting two contraries (for instance, the same object being both hot and cold), uniting affirmation (*al-ithbāt*) and negation (*al-nafī*), and the presence of one atom in two places at one moment. On the other hand, the possible non-existent is exemplified by the world prior to its existence and by things which are presently non-existent, but whose existence is expected.²⁵⁵

Al-Āmidī engages a debate over the question of whether the non-existent is correctly described as known, which has *kalām* precedents in discussion of the nature of knowledge. He answers the

²⁵⁴ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 153; see Frank, 'Al-Ma'dūm wal-mawjūd', 190 for the contrasting Mu'tazilī position, namely, that a non-existent is known not in relation to its past or potential existence, but in its non-existence, as an entity.

²⁵⁵ *Abkār*, 3, 379.

Mu'tazilī Abū Hāshim, who claimed that the possible non-existent is known, but the impossible non-existent unknown.²⁵⁶ For his part (and in line with his Ash'arī predecessors), al-Āmidī argues that all categories of non-existents are known.²⁵⁷ If non-existents can be designated known, God must have knowledge of them. In his defence of God's attribute of knowledge, al-Āmidī firstly affirms the proper association of God's knowledge with 'everything that can be known (*ṣiḥḥat ta'alluqihī bi-kull mā yaṣiḥḥ an yu'lām*).'²⁵⁸ This entails affirmation of God's knowledge of all possible non-existents. He poses the question of whether or not the objects of God's knowledge are infinite. His answer is that they are 'infinite in possibility (*ghayr mutanāhⁱⁿ imkānan*)', as opposed to in actuality (*bi-l-fa'l*). He adds that whilst it is impossible for particularised existents (*al-mawjūdāt al-'ayniyya*) to be infinite, possibilities (*al-umūr al-imkāniyya*) may well be infinite.²⁵⁹ According to al-Āmidī, then, an infinity of possible non-existents are known to God. This is radically incompatible with Ibn Sīnā's view of possibility, in which all possibilities must be actualised, and God has knowledge of possibilities only in their actualised states. For al-Āmidī as for his Ash'arī predecessors, possibilities represent genuine synchronic alternatives which are infinite, and purely conceptual.

5. The relation of the Possible non-Existent to a Cause

I will demonstrate in Chapter 5 that the question of the relationship between the cause of the possible of existence and its non-existence comes to the fore as one of the most significant issues in post-Avicennan discussions of creation. It is around this axis that the debate over the characteristics of the world's cause revolves, as I will explain. In this section, for the purposes of completing my analysis of al-Āmidī's reception of Ibn Sīnā's conception of possible existence, I focus on the narrow question of how post-Avicennan Ash'arīs, and al-Āmidī himself, respond to

²⁵⁶ Indeed, impossibilities were not included within the category of *al-ma'dūm* by the Baṣran Mu'tazila (see Frank, 'Al-Ma'dūm wal-mawjūd', 189). Thus both *al-ma'dūm* and *al-ma'lūm* were broader categories for the Ash'arīs.

²⁵⁷ *Abkār*, 3, 382; c.f. al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 137-9.

²⁵⁸ *Abkār*, 1, 351; c.f. al-Ash'arī, *Mujarrad*, 70.

²⁵⁹ *Abkār*, 1, 351.

Ibn Sīnā's doctrine that the cause of the possible of existence has no relation to its non-existence. This will be taken up in the context of the creation debate in Chapter 5.

5.i Post-Avicennan Ash'arī Precedents

I begin by accounting for al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī's responses to the specific question of the relation between the non-existence of the possible of existence and its cause. In the course of his refutation of Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of creation in the *Tahāfut*, al-Ghazālī directly addresses the philosophers' claim that true causes are related exclusively to the existence of their effects, and not to their non-existence, or to their origination from non-existence. His response is to argue that agents are connected with their acts upon the moment of their origination. Al-Ghazālī in fact concedes that the agent has no direct relation to the prior non-existence of its effects. However, he holds that non-existence is a condition of the relation between agent and act. Therefore, according to al-Ghazālī, an eternal existent can never be described as 'enacted'.²⁶⁰ This becomes significant in later discourse, and will be treated in Chapter 5.

We have seen in discussion of al-Rāzī's view of what determines causedness that he holds that causal action is not conditioned upon the preceding non-existence of the effect. Rather, the temporally originated existent relies on a cause on account of its essential possibility alone.²⁶¹ In arguing for this position, al-Rāzī concurs with Ibn Sīnā that the non-existence of possible essences is not related to their cause. Indeed, he argues in his commentary on the *Ishārāt* that this is a non-issue, there being consensus over the fact that it is the existence of the effect which requires a cause.²⁶²

²⁶⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 62-63.

²⁶¹ Al-Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, 1, 485-492.

²⁶² Al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ*, 2, 387; see Shihadeh, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Commentary', 322-323.

5.ii Al-Āmidī's Works of *falsafa*

5.ii.a *al-Nūr al-bāhir*

Al-Āmidī fully embraces Ibn Sīnā's theory of efficient causation in this early work. Like Ibn Sīnā, al-Āmidī argues that possible beings are exclusively associated with their efficient causes during their existence.²⁶³ Furthermore, the effect of an efficient cause must concur with it temporally. Like Ibn Sīnā, al-Āmidī asserts that the cause whose effect is never non-existent is superior to the cause which does not prevent the absolute non-existence of its effect. The former kind of causation is described as *ibdā'*, or 'absolute creation', and the theological implication, that a God who creates a pre-eternally existing world is more powerful than the one who gives the world existence after non-existence, accepted.²⁶⁴ Just as the possible essence requires a cause in order to exist, so it requires a cause for its non-existence, since both states are possible for it. The cause of its non-existence is, however, none other than the absence of the efficient cause.²⁶⁵ Finally, the cause of that which is possible of existence impacts on its existence alone, and does not determine its essence.²⁶⁶

5.ii.b. *Rumūz al-Kunūz*

I showed in the previous section that al-Āmidī implies in the *Rumūz*, as in his other works, that the determinant of causedness is the possibility of an existent and not its temporal originatedness. His position on the relation between the possible non-existent and its cause in this work is not clear. Al-Āmidī holds that the possible of existence relies on a cause for the origination (*ibtidā'*) of its existence as well as for its continued existence (*dawām*), but does not explain how the non-existence of the effect is related to its cause.²⁶⁷ This ambiguity is typical of the *Rumūz* and is a product, in part, of the work's brevity.

²⁶³ *Nūr*, 5, 143-145, and see Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, 6.1, 11-17.

²⁶⁴ *Nūr*, 5, 145; Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, V.9, 524-5.

²⁶⁵ *Nūr*, 5, 181-2; Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, 1.5, 31.

²⁶⁶ *Nūr*, 5, 227.

²⁶⁷ *Rumūz*, f 104b.

Al-Āmidī also makes an elusive statement regarding the relation of the cause of the possible of existence to the ‘nature’ of its effect. He cites an opponent attempting to disprove that a possible being requires a cause. His opponent states that if the possible being relies on its cause for its existence, it ought also to rely on a cause for its nature (*haqīqa*). But this would imply that when the cause was absent, the possible non-existent had no nature. Al-Āmidī responds by conceding this point. The possible of existence, when it ceases to exist as a result of the absence of the cause, will also lose its nature (*al-khurūj ‘an al-haqīqa*).²⁶⁸ This point is not elucidated. However, it suggests the Ash‘arī theory, in which the characteristics of a thing are absolutely identified with a concrete instance of its existence. This is a progression from the *Nūr*, in which al-Āmidī concurs with Ibn Sīnā that the cause of that which is possible of existence is responsible for its existence but not its essence, to a more Ash‘arī-oriented notion of the cause’s responsibility for both the existence and the characteristics of its effect. It is frustrating that the position is not articulated clearly.

5.iii Al-Āmidī’s Works of *kalām*

For al-Āmidī as for his classical Ash‘arī predecessors, God, as a voluntary agent, is associated with both the world’s existence, and its non-existence. In al-Āmidī’s *Abkār*, this doctrine arises in response to the following question: ‘Is that which God exalted knows will not come to be still within his power (*maqdūr lahu*), or is it impossible for him?’²⁶⁹ Al-Āmidī writes that all agree that the impossible non-existent is not within God’s power. Over the subject of the relation of the possible non-existent to the power of God, however, there is some dispute. Al-Āmidī cites the Baṣrān Mu‘tazilī ‘Abbād ibn Sulaymān al-Šaymarī (d. 250/864) as having denied God’s power over the possible non-existent.²⁷⁰ However he writes that anyone who holds this view has

²⁶⁸ *Rumūz*, f 107a-b.

²⁶⁹ *Abkār*, 1, 296.

²⁷⁰ C.f. al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2, 236. Al-Ash‘arī also cites ‘Abbād’ on this question. Al-Āmidī has simplified al-Šaymarī’s position. According to al-Ash‘arī, al-Šaymarī said that God cannot be described as ‘powerful to bring into existence’ those things which never come to be, though he can be described as ‘powerful over them’. The reason for this distinction is that God’s power is associated with his knowledge. According to al-Šaymarī, describing God as powerful to bring into existence that which does not come into existence implies that his knowledge is flawed, for it is tantamount to the apparently contradictory statement that ‘God can do that which he knows will he will not do’.

simply misunderstood the meaning of possible existence. The possible is that which can be known but need not come into existence, and describing God as powerful to enact it does not imply that it must exist. Once the *maqdūr* is understood as that which is rationally possible, no contradiction is entailed by the statement that God is powerful over the possible non-existent.

In defence of God's attribute of power in the *Ghāya*, al-Āmidī coins an expression with its roots in the Ash'arī conception of God's power, but which bears the imprint of Ibn Sīnā's terminology. He describes the possible non-existent as 'impossible by virtue of something other than itself' (*mumtani'an bi-i'tibār ghayrihi*).²⁷¹ This elegantly expresses the classical Ash'arī view. Whilst God necessitates the existence of some possibilities, he also prevents the existence of others by the exercise of volition and power. Al-Āmidī's explanation of God's causal relation to non-existent possibilities is crucial to his doctrine of creation. In his proof for God, al-Āmidī presses Ibn Sīnā's notion of efficient causality into service in explaining how a voluntary agent is responsible for both actualised and unactualised possibilities. However, al-Āmidī's innovative discussions on this point must await analysis in Chapter 5, given their direct applications for the creation debate.

6. Conclusions

Several findings have emerged from this study of al-Āmidī's reception of Ibn Sīnā's original distinction between the possible and necessary of existence, both in relation to al-Āmidī's own intellectual project, and by extension, with regard to the encounter of Avicennism and Ash'arism in this period.

Firstly, concerning the basic development of al-Āmidī's commitments, I have demonstrated that he begins a committed Avicennist. In the *Nūr*, al-Āmidī advances and defends Ibn Sīnā's worldview, including his doctrine of the world's eternity. Accordingly, Ibn Sīnā's distinction between the possible and necessary of existence is, for al-Āmidī as for Ibn Sīnā, the backbone of the metaphysical system he presents. I have shown his *Rumūz* to represent a middle stage in al-

²⁷¹ *Ghāya*, 87.

Āmidī's thought in which his doctrinal commitments have changed, but his promotion of the essential metaphysical framework of Ibn Sīnā persists (despite ambiguities inherent to the brevity of the work). Finally, the extent of al-Āmidī's adherence, in his mature works of *kalām*, to the doctrines of classical Ash'arism, here the school's notion of possibility and its relation to God's power, has also become clear.

From a theoretical perspective, it has emerged that despite al-Āmidī's early commitment to Avicennism in the *Nūr*, he never fully embraces Ibn Sīnā's conception of possibility as a real relation between essences and their existence requiring a substrate of matter in which to inhere. In none of the doctrinal contexts in which this understanding of possibility is applied by Ibn Sīnā does al-Āmidī support this aspect of Ibn Sīnā's distinction. I have shown that this is in part because in the *Nūr*, al-Āmidī isolates the discussion of possibility from its natural philosophical context in a manner which is alien to Ibn Sīnā's own, integrated project. Unlike Ibn Sīnā, al-Āmidī never makes the connection between the potency of unactualised matter, and the possible essence. I have argued that this makes his own conception of what the possible essence constitutes ambiguous in the *Nūr*.

I have shown, furthermore, that as he turns to embrace a commitment to Ash'arī *kalām*, al-Āmidī's ontology of possibility becomes progressively alienated from Ibn Sīnā's. It is, instead, the rich resources of Ash'arī *kalām* upon which al-Āmidī draws to elucidate his own theory of possibility and necessity. In his later works, al-Āmidī rejects outright Ibn Sīnā's ontology of possibility, and the concomitant conception of essence as distinct from existence. Here, he denies the extra-mental reality of possibility. Instead, he fully endorses the Ash'arī understanding, in which the possibility of things being other than they are is no more than a conceptual fact, and essences are none other than concrete existents. I have highlighted the importance of the natural philosophical context here, and shown that Ash'arī beliefs concerning matter influence al-Āmidī's reception of Ibn Sīnā's notion of possibility to a significant extent.

Despite his rejection of Ibn Sīnā’s ontology of possibility and the concomitant conception of the possible essence, the impact of Ibn Sīnā’s metaphysics even in al-Āmidī’s most Ash‘arī-oriented works is unmissable. Most significantly, al-Āmidī accepts across his works that it is possibility, and not temporal origination, which determines an existent’s need for a cause. This marks a departure from the *kalām* understanding that beings are designated possible on the basis of their temporality, and is fundamental to al-Āmidī’s proof for God. In Chapter 5, I will demonstrate the significant impact of this aspect of the Avicennan influence on al-Āmidī’s doctrine of creation, especially in the re-orientation of the creation debate around discussion of the character of the world’s cause, the existence of that cause being established by the distinction between the possible and necessary of existence alone. More generally, al-Āmidī’s use of the distinction to structure his major work of *kalām* itself represents a departure from the conceptual paradigm of classical Ash‘arism.

Finally with regard to al-Āmidī’s reception of Ibn Sīnā’s distinction between the possible and necessary of existence, I have demonstrated the significance of the question of the possible non-existent’s relation to a cause. It is around this question that the distinction between Ibn Sīnā’s necessitating cause of the universe and the voluntary agent of the Ash‘arīs centres. Al-Āmidī accepts, in the *Nūr*, that the non-existence of possible essence is absolutely unrelated to a cause, but progresses to the view that a volitional agent can be responsible for both the non-existence and the existence of the objects of its power. Al-Āmidī’s explanation of this and its implications for his views on creation will be explored in Chapter 5.

From a contextual perspective, I have demonstrated the deep and ongoing significance of al-Āmidī’s intellectual opposition to al-Rāzī’s philosophical and theological project. The *Kashf* is the prime example of this motivation, with its agenda of undermining al-Rāzī’s method and doctrine, even where that involves al-Āmidī contradicting his own position, as in the case of his opinion on the ontology of possibility. More broadly, I have highlighted the centrality of al-Rāzī in the reception of Ibn Sīnā’s distinction between essence and existence. In appropriating Ibn Sīnā’s conception of the possible of existence, a central question for those belonging to the Ash‘arī tradition concerned the relation between essence and existence. Ibn Sīnā’s own position

is subtly expressed, and has been variously interpreted from the earliest days of its reception. Specifically, al-Rāzī reads Ibn Sīnā’s conception of essence as entailing the super-addition of existence in the case of the possible essence. Against that reading, he devises and promotes his own, innovative position. I have shown that it is al-Rāzī’s reading of Ibn Sīnā’s position against which al-Āmidī reacts. This confirms the prevalence of al-Rāzī’s readings of Ibn Sīnā.

A final finding arises from our observation of the extent to which of al-Āmidī conflates discussions taken from both intellectual paradigms in his treatment of possibility and necessity. Our appreciation of Ibn Sīnā’s elegant and coherent metaphysical system ought not obscure the presence of analyses of necessity and possibility in extant works of Ash’arī *kalām*. There can be little doubt that there are non-extant resources for the Ash’arī conception of possible existence, as reflected by al-Juwainī’s reference to the opinion of al-Isfaraīnī in this context. Al-Āmidī’s approach demonstrates that post-Avicennans had more than one source for the conception of God’s power as it relates to possibility, and that the integration of Ibn Sīnā’s most compelling ideas therefore entailed the need to grapple with some complex and interesting theological problems. We will see in Chapter 5 how al-Āmidī’s reception of Ibn Sīnā’s metaphysics of possibility and necessity relates to his defence of the classical *kalām* vision of creation.

Chapter 4

Al-Āmidī's Physical Theory

In Chapter 2, I demonstrated the role played by physical theory in classical Ash'arī doctrine. I argued that Ash'arī atomism provides the major framework within which the school's doctrine of creation is defended. In this chapter, my objective is to establish the extent to which al-Āmidī's works of *kalām* endorse classical Ash'arī physical theory, and whether or not he attributes to physical theory the significance conferred it among classical Ash'arīs. In context of the aims of the thesis, this chapter's investigations demonstrate the nature and extent of al-Āmidī's allegiance with classical Ash'arīsm, as part of the evaluation of the influences on his thought.

The chapter begins with an exposition of Ash'arī physical theory, detailing its most salient aspects, and demonstrating its place within theological discussion. For the purposes of this investigation, I define physical theory as a set of postulates pertaining to the categorisation, definition and configuration of the constituents of the world. In Section 2, I briefly indicate some of the key challenges brought to Ash'arī physical theory by Ibn Sīnā, arguing in particular that he challenges the conception of the role of discussion of the physical world maintained by classical Ash'arīs. In Section 3, I consider al-Āmidī's works of philosophy. I demonstrate that al-Āmidī begins (in the *Nūr*) a committed Avicennist with respect to physical theory. This entails staunch opposition to atomism, inspired by Ibn Sīnā's own refutation of the theory. Al-Āmidī's doctrinal commitments have changed by the time of his writing of the *Rumūz*, such that he supports major Ash'arī doctrines such as creation *ex nihilo*. Significantly, however, I show that in this work, he does not support classical Ash'arī physical theory, nor utilise physical theory in defence of theological doctrine. This, I argue, is important background to his approach to physical theory in his works of *kalām*, the analysis of which occupies Section 4.

In that section, I treat al-Āmidī's theories on substance, accident and body as expressed in *Abkār* and *al-afkār*. I find that al-Āmidī is committed to the letter of Ash'arī physical theory, which he

styles as a robust alternative to Avicennan natural philosophy. I argue that there is, however, evidence of a deep Avicennan influence in several key respects: firstly, in that the unity of physical theory and theology which was a hallmark of classical Ash‘arīsm is disintegrated. Physical theory is presented as a field of investigation in its own right, not merely as prop to theology proper. Secondly, I show that al-Āmidī expresses doubts over key tenets of Ash‘arī physical theory as a result of his exposure to Ibn Sīnā’s thought. I will also show that al-Āmidī’s intellectual opposition to al-Rāzī, coupled with a quest to demonstrate his own methodological superiority, is a consistent motivation in his discussions of physical theory. Finally, I note that al-Āmidī’s lack of attention to physical theory in the *Ghāya* indicates its declining theological significance for his intellectual project.

1. Classical Ash‘arī Physical Theory

The *kalām* theory of atom (*jawhar*) and accident (*‘arad*) has been somewhat side-lined in Islamic studies, in part because it seems both alien and outmoded in relation to modern physics.²⁷² However, as already demonstrated, classical Ash‘arī atomism was a physical theory of paramount metaphysical importance, and is of interest in this connection at least. The following account illustrates both the main contents of Ash‘arī physical theory – defined as in the introduction to this chapter – and, at once, its centrality to theology proper among classical Ash‘arīs.

1.i The Basic Ontology of Classical Ash‘arīsm

For classical theologians (Mu‘tazilī and Ash‘arī alike), all existents other than God are either ‘atom’ or ‘accident’. I have stressed the exhaustiveness of this division, and that classical

²⁷² Ess, in *60 years After*, suggests some reasons for the historical inattention to Islamic atomism in Western scholarship since Shlomo Pines’ *Beiträge zur Islamischen Atomlehre*. He attributes it partly to the historical and sociological emphasis of the study of Islamic theology in the West; atomism, he writes, was not exciting sociologically. Existing studies include Baffioni’s *Atomismo e Antiatomismo*; Gimaret’s discussions of atomism within his *La Doctrine*; Sabra’s two articles on *kalām* atomism (‘*Kalām Atomism*'; and ‘The Simple Ontology’); Dhanani’s book length study (*Physical Theory*) and his subsequent articles, focusing especially on Mu‘tazilī atomism, and more recently, Setia’s study of al-Rāzī’s treatment of atomism in the *Maṭālib*; and Atlas’ analysis of al-Rāzī’s *Risāla: al-jawhar al-fard*.

Ash‘arīs resolutely deny the existence of immaterial substances. Al-Bāqillānī, for instance, proves the existence of substance on the basis that ‘the elephant is larger than the grain of corn’, which is to say that mass, and the variable masses in the world around us, are explicable only on the basis that substance exists. Clearly, the only kind of substance al-Bāqillānī envisages is the material, mass-giving, kind.²⁷³ Indeed, one definition of substance common to the Ash‘arīs (although not al-Bāqillānī’s preferred definition) is the ‘space-occupying [existent] (*al-mutahayyiz*)’.²⁷⁴ Even if not so defined, space-occupation is considered by classical Ash‘arīs to be one of the essential attributes (*sifat al-nafs*) of substance, illustrating their absolute identification of substance with matter.²⁷⁵

The absence of immaterial substance in Ash‘arī ontology is not without far reaching theological implications. It entails, for instance, the denial of body-soul dualism: man is no more than the composite of atoms which form his body and the accidents of life, knowledge, faith, and so on, which inhere within those atoms.²⁷⁶ The opening statement of al-Bāqillānī’s proof for the world’s creation *ex nihilo* also confirms that the exhaustive classification of worldly existents into material substance and accidents is the proof’s first premise: ‘the entire celestial and terrestrial world does not exceed (*lā yakhruj ‘an*) the two categories ‘substance’ and ‘accident’, and these are [both] temporally originated’.²⁷⁷

Yet despite the theological significance of the denial of immaterial substances, it is remarkable that classical Ash‘arīs do not attempt specifically to disprove their existence rationally. This may be because the alternative natural theories they are intent on opposing, such as versions of the Ancient Greek notion of the world’s constitution of combinations of the four elements, do not entail the existence of immaterial substance as such.²⁷⁸ The closest classical Ash‘arīs get to a

²⁷³ Al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, 16-17.

²⁷⁴ E.g. al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 142.

²⁷⁵ Al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 157-158.

²⁷⁶ See Shihadeh, ‘Classical Ash‘arī Anthropology’, who shows (in pages 465-466) that the exhaustiveness of the atom-accident dichotomy proved problematic for classical Ash‘arīs in defining the human spirit (*rūh*) mentioned in the Qur’ān.

²⁷⁷ Al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, 22.

²⁷⁸ See al-Bāqillānī’s sustained denial of the theory of the four elements in *Tamhīd*, 37-41. Similarly, he attacks the notion that the world is essentially composed of light and darkness, denying the corporeity of light and darkness (60-

defined theory of immaterial substance is the contemporary Christian theory that God himself is substance. In refuting this, al-Bāqillānī re-asserts the position that the only kind of substance in the observable realm (*al-shāhid*) is the ‘space-occupying [entity which is] receptive to accidents’, arguing that if his opponent should claim that God is unlike observable substances, he should simply concede that God is not substance.²⁷⁹ Al-Bāqillānī thus denies that substance is anything other than space-occupying matter, without actually attempting to disprove that substance can be non-space-occupying. This reflects his primary concern to defend God’s status as transcending the categories applied to existents in the world; the focus is not on the question of immaterial substance *per se*. For the Ash‘arīs, the dichotomy between material and immaterial existents was entirely accounted for by the atom-accident disjunction. Thus, the notion of immaterial substance was something of a non-issue for most classical Ash‘arīs.

We will see later in the chapter that the lack of proofs against this category of existents leaves post-classical Ash‘arīs under-resourced for the encounter with Ibn Sīnā’s ontology, with its numerous intellects, souls, and other immaterial entities.²⁸⁰

1.ii The existence and nature of accidents

Despite the distinctiveness of the Ash‘arī conception of substance as indivisible parts of matter, it is the school’s theory of accidents which is both the most intriguing, and most theologically significant, aspect of its physical theory. Because of their denial of both natural forces and immaterial substances, Ash‘arīs had to explain all observable reality aside from matter itself, from the phenomenon of colour and its perception, to motion and rest, to the experience of

61). See Crone, ‘Ungodly Cosmologies’ for identification of many of opponents of the theologians as real historical groups, though note that the theologians often fail to sufficiently differentiate between these groups; see Genequand, ‘Philosophical Schools’, who shows (in agreement with al-Ghazālī’s assessment of the efforts of previous *mutakallimūn*) that the *kalām* characterisation of competing natural philosophies was often inaccurate.

²⁷⁹ Al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, 77; c.f. al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 571-575, who opposes the definition of substance purportedly favoured by the Christians, namely ‘the self-subsisting [existent]’, which permits for the existence of immaterial substance.

²⁸⁰ Ibn Sīnā’s was not the first ontology including immaterial substances known to the theologians – Neoplatonism was not new to the Muslim world. Yet classical Ash‘arīs did not focus on the question of immaterial substance, and Ibn Sīnā was the first to make the doctrine widely familiar. Shihadeh shows that al-Juwainī is the first theologian to directly address the problem, as part of his critique of the use of the argument from ignorance (Shihadeh, ‘The Argument from Ignorance’, 198-200). Yet this is not typical of the classical tradition.

pleasure and pain, through to the question of what it means to be human, in the terms of their doctrine of accidents.²⁸¹ Thus the non-corporeal category ‘accident’ covers all the visible characteristics of physical bodies (though the accident is held by the Ash‘arīs to inhere in individual atoms, not bodies), as well as invisible attributes such as knowledge, volition, life, and even death.

Al-Anṣārī gives a systematic account of the classical Ash‘arī classification of accidents. These include accidents of spatial occupation (*al-akwān*), taste (*ṭa‘m*), scent (*rā’iḥa*), heat (*harāra*), cold (*burūda*), moist (*ruṭūba*), dryness (*yubūsa*), softness (*līn*), roughness (*khushūna*), life (*hayāt*) and its associated accidents of knowledge (*ilm*), power (*qudra*), volition (*irāda*) and their contraries, pain (*alam*), pleasure (*ladhdha*), hearing (*sam‘*), sight (*baṣar*), and other accidents of perception and their contraries.²⁸² The existence of accidents is not taken for granted. Al-Juwainī defends the belief in accidents against some early Mu‘tazilīs and ‘a group of non-believers’ who denied their existence, and ‘claimed that there are no existents beside substances’.²⁸³ His proof is premised on observation of the body in motion. In sum, al-Juwainī holds that since it is logically possible (*min al-mumkināt*) either for the substance to remain in its original locus, or to move, there must be something additional to the substance which causes (*muqtadī*) motion. This he holds to be an accident of spatial location.²⁸⁴

The Ash‘arī conception of the nature of accidents supremely serves them in their denial of potency in the realm outside of God, because it is with their doctrine of accidents that the Ash‘arīs oppose alternative explanations of the characteristics and behaviours of physical bodies. Prominent among these is al-Nazzām’s theory that bodies possess certain latent

²⁸¹ The importance of the doctrine of accidents is taken from the Mu‘tazila. Ibn Mattawayh’s (fl. fifth/eleventh century) *al-Tadhkira fī aḥkām al-jawāhir wa-l-a’rād* illustrates well the scope of the doctrine of accidents; under the remit of the discussion of accidents, which spans part of the first volume and the entirety of the second, epistemological, psychological, physical theoretical, and a number of other themes are treated.

²⁸² Al-Anṣārī, *Ghunyā*, 1, 296-7.

²⁸³ This may be a reference to the early Mu‘tazilī, al-Asamm (d. ca 200/815), who denied the existence of accidents. Abū l-Husayn al-Baṣrī (d. 436/1044), a near contemporary of al-Juwainī who opposed the predominant Bahshamī Mu‘tazila of his day on several points of theology, also denied that accidents were objects, understanding accidents as changing states within the body. This is not obviously, however, the theory al-Juwainī has in mind here.

²⁸⁴ Al-Juwainī, *Irshād*, 18-19.

properties, the manifestation of which amounts to the unfolding of a set of causal processes begun by God's initial act of creation.²⁸⁵ Another important set of theories to which the Ash'arī doctrine of accidents responds are those upheld by *ashāb al-ṭabā'i'*, proponents of the notion of the world's constitution of a set of natures, or elements, whose configurations determine the properties of physical bodies and phenomena.²⁸⁶ More immediately, the Ash'arīs oppose the theory of *tawallud*, the generation of certain accidents from others, maintained among contemporary Mu'tazila. According to this theory, although all things are ultimately produced by agents, they can be indirectly produced by intermediate causes (*asbāb*).²⁸⁷

By contrast, the Ash'arīs firmly deny the capacity of one accident to cause another. In the course of al-Bāqillānī's response to the dualists, he stresses that accidents have no causal capacity, on the basis of the doctrine (established elsewhere) that true causes (*fā'il*) must be living, powerful and volitional, attributes existing within the cause. Accidents may not be so characterised, since accidents are not receptive to other accidents (*istiḥālat qubūl al-a'rād li-l-a'rād*).²⁸⁸ Thus the theory of accidents provides a vehicle by which al-Bāqillānī denies natural causal processes.²⁸⁹

Another way in which the doctrine of accidents is used by the Ash'arīs to oppose any degree of autonomy in the created order is through their insistence that accidents do not endure. Against the standard Baṣran Mu'tazilī position, the Ash'arīs insist that no category of accidents has endurance: Ibn Fūrak cites al-Ash'arī as having held that 'no accident can ever endure (*shay' min*

²⁸⁵ On al-Nazzām's theory of latency and manifestation, see Bennett, *The Spirit of Ahyopeimenonical Physics*, 61-70.

²⁸⁶ See Crone, 'Ungodly Cosmologies', 115-119, for identification of various positions subsumed within this general category. Important opponents included certain early Mu'tazila who maintained their own theories of natures. Al-Mu'ammar (d. 215/830), for instance, maintained that bodies had independent natures predisposing them to certain behaviours (see Frank, 'Al-Ma'nā', 257-259). Al-Nazzām also maintained the existence of natures, but held that they were not independent of God's creation.

²⁸⁷ See al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, 2, 86-92, for an account of various positions on the theory of *tawallud*; on the Mu'tazilī conception of intermediate causes (*asbāb*), see Frank 'Al-Ma'nā', 251.

²⁸⁸ Al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhid*, 25-26.

²⁸⁹ The denial of the causal capacity of accidents is of course one aspect of the occasionalist doctrine. Al-Ash'arī's insistence on God's exclusive agency in the creation even of human accidents of *qudra* is the apex; see Frank 'The Structure of Created Causality'. Both the causal capacity of accidents, and of the human in which they may be created, is denied.

al-a'rād lā yajūz 'alayhā l-baqā' bi-hāl)'.²⁹⁰ This means that the characteristics of the physical world have no inherent capacity to sustain themselves in existence, but are entirely impermanent and contingent.

The school's theory of motion also illustrates how the drive to eliminate potency from the world is expressed through the doctrine of accidents. Motion is understood to be an accident of spatial location characterising individual atoms instantaneously. Al-Ash'arī is said to have held that the motion of an atom from one locus to another is 'the [atom's] second coming-to-be in the second locus (*al-kawn al-thānī fī l-makān al-thānī*)'.²⁹¹ This conception of motion stresses the contingency of the physical world at each instant. This is because a new accident of motion is required for the change in the position of the atom at each instant, and because, in their denial of the Başran Mu'tazilī belief in the generation of certain accidents from others, the Ash'arīs held God to be the sole agent responsible for the creation of each accident at each instant. This deliberately opposes the notion that there is inherent continuity and compulsion in the unfolding of physical processes. The doctrine of accidents as developed by the Ash'arīs can be understood in general, then, to provide a physical theoretical framework for the exclusion of potency from the created order.

Furthermore, the doctrine that accidents exist and that they explain the behaviours and characteristics of material bodies is, obviously, essential to the proof from accidents for creation *ex nihilo*. So is the theory that accidents are temporally originated, expressed in terms of the accident's non-endurance as well as through arguments against an infinite regress of temporally originated accidents. Al-Juwainī describes establishing that accidents exist as 'among the most important objectives in proving the world's creation *ex nihilo*', and 'the first premise' of the proof for creation.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 248.

²⁹¹ Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 253.

²⁹² Al-Juwainī, *Irshād*, 19.

1.iii The existence of substance

The indivisible part (*al-juz' alladhi lā yatajazza'* or *al-jawhar al-fard*) is the corporeal component of *kalām* physical theory. Thus, though the theologians often use the same term as the philosophers to refer to substance (*jawhar*, from the Persian *gawhar*), for them, the term is restricted in scope to the corporeal atom.²⁹³ The defence of the classical Ash'arī conception of substance is particularly effected in opposition to competing early views according to which the world is constituted either of the mixture of irreducible 'property-bodies' (*al-Nazzām*), or of bundles of accidents (*al-Najjār*).²⁹⁴ Thus, for classical Ash'arīs, defending the existence of substance as a distinct ontological category was imperative. Al-Juwainī argues against these competing views, which he attributes to *al-Nazzām*, *al-Najjār*, and 'certain philosophers', with an argument which contests the notion that accidents can ever possess space-occupying properties.²⁹⁵

In line with his occasionalist worldview, al-Ash'arī claimed that, like accidents, atoms were inherently impermanent, not possessing of themselves the capacity to continue in existence. Ibn Furak writes that al-Ash'arī held that '[that which] endures only endures because it possesses [an accident of] endurance (*baqā'*)'.²⁹⁶ Thus, although it is maintained that matter does endure when an accident of endurance is created within it, matter itself is conceived of as inherently both spatially and temporally finite.²⁹⁷ Al-Juwainī cites the view in the name of 'the majority of the [Ash'arī] teachers', describing the accident of endurance (*baqā'*), as 'the condition of the continued existence (*shart istimrār al-wujūd*) [of substance].'²⁹⁸ Al-Bāqillānī modifies the belief: he is cited by al-Juwainī as having held that matter endures in itself as long as it is not devoid of a certain number of accidents. If matter ceases to exist, according to al-

²⁹³ See Dhanani on *kalām* and *falsafī* uses of the term (*Physical Theory*, 55-62).

²⁹⁴ On *al-Nazzām*'s theory, see Bennett, *The Spirit of Ahyphokeimenonical Physics*, 57-63 (the term 'property-bodies' is coined by Bennett); on the theory of the world's constitution of accidents, Dhanani, *Physical Theory*, 4-5.

²⁹⁵ Al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 148-153.

²⁹⁶ Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 247.

²⁹⁷ On the *kalām* ontology as a set of coordinates within which spatial and temporal occurrences occur, see Sabra, 'The Simple Ontology', 71, 77.

²⁹⁸ Al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 270-271, and 711-713.

Bāqillānī, this is as the direct result of the exercise of the agent's will for its non-existence.²⁹⁹

Nevertheless, even according to al-Bāqillānī's view, if God chooses not to recreate its set of inherent accidents, matter will cease to exist. So it remains true of all classical Ash'arīs that matter is continually dependent upon God's constant creation.

The doctrine of the indivisible part is considered a hallmark of Ash'arī physical theory. The classical *kalām* dialectical context for this was the alternative conceptions of matter just mentioned.³⁰⁰ And although it is still very much the case that the origins of *kalām* atomism are obscure, as Dhanani illustrates, the particular debate over the divisibility of matter is an ancient one.³⁰¹ Arguments both for and against the indivisible part of matter thus abounded and for classical Ash'arīs, the defence of the atom, often with multiple proofs, is integral to the physical theoretical project in which they are involved.

Despite the high prominence of the defence of matter's indivisibility, however, it is significant that the doctrine is not inherently requisite to the proof from accidents for creation *ex nihilo*. For this proof, all that is required is that substance exists, and that it cannot be devoid of the accidents inhering within it. It is true that atomism is characteristic of Ash'arī physical theory, and that it is an important focus for the school's refutation of alternative worldviews. We can also observe that the notion that matter is ultimately indivisible sits well with the classical Ash'arī understanding of the nature of the world's constant dependence upon God, in that it can be used to stress that matter is dependent upon a cause even for its apparent continuity within various observable bodies. And yet, atomism itself is not required to establish the world's temporal finitude, nor its dependence upon a cause. Nevertheless, classical Ash'arīs themselves never conceded the dispensability of atomism. The importance of these

²⁹⁹ Al-Juwaynī, *Shāmil*, 270.

³⁰⁰ The conception of substance held to by adherents of the philosophical tradition, in which matter was understood to be infinitely divisible, was not broadly addressed by classical Ash'arīs, whose primary focus in such questions were the Mu'tazila. The inverse is not true – as Endress shows in his study of Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's (d. 363/974) critique of atomism, Islamic philosophers were occupied with refuting atomism, in line with the commitments of Aristotle himself (Endress, 'Yaḥyā ibn 'Adī's Critique'). Ibn Sīnā was responsible for making hylomorphism of immediate concern to the theologians.

³⁰¹ Dhanani, *Physical Theory*, 5.

observations will become clear in the analysis which follows, where we will see that the doctrine was called into question by post-classical Ash‘arīs.

That substance can never be completely devoid of accidents is one of the central premises of the proof from accidents for creation *ex nihilo*, since it is on the basis of the temporal origination of accidents, and their necessary inherence in substance, that the temporal origination of substance is established. And yet most classical Ash‘arīs not only held that substances must at all times bear some accident or another, but that substances always bear at least one accident from each class of accidents or its contrary. Thus articulations of this doctrine are formulated both as responses to those proponents of the world’s eternity (*al-dahriyya*) who held that substance (*hayūla* or *mādda*) existed pre-eternally completely formless and devoid of accidents, and in the context of Ash‘arī-Mu‘tazilī debate over the classes of accidents from which substance could be devoid.³⁰² In the context of the proof from accidents, where it only need be proven that substance cannot be completely accident-free, the focus is on establishing that substance is never devoid of an accident of spatial occupation. These include aggregation (*ijtimā'*), separation (*iftirāq*), motion (*haraka*), rest (*sukūn*).³⁰³ We will see in Chapter 5 how al-Rāzī will develop a version of the proof from accidents which focuses on the impossibility of matter’s being devoid of both motion and rest, and of the pre-eternity of matter either in motion or at rest.

1.iv The Definition of Body

The most prevalent classical Ash‘arī definition of body is ‘the aggregate’ (*al-mu’allaf* or *al-mu’talif*). The school position was that the body was simply the sum of the atoms of which it was constituted, held together by individual atoms of composition (*ta’lif*), inhering in each atom. Classical Ash‘arīs did not believe that accidents could inhere in more than one atom, or in the body they constituted, bodies not being genuine unities. The Ash‘arī conception of body is a salient feature of the school’s occasionalist, theocentric worldview. The implications of the

³⁰² For instance al-Juwaynī, *Shāmil*, 204-215; *Irshād*, 23-35.

³⁰³ On accidents of spatial location in Mu‘tazilī *kalām* see Frank, *Beings and Their Attributes*, 98-104.

school's conception of body are far-reaching, as illustrated, for instance, in Shihadeh's study of Ash'arī anthropology. There are no unifying essences in classical Ash'arī anthropology, which means that there can be no genuine definitions. Rather, identifying the attributes of an elephant, for instance, will amount to no more than a nominal definition describing what is conventionally known as an elephant on account of its being distinct from other configurations of atoms and accidents.³⁰⁴ We will shortly see how Ibn Sīnā's conception of body is alien to this position, and the response of later Ash'arīs to this challenge.

1.v The Place of Physical Theory within Classical Ash'arism

In concluding this brief survey of classical Ash'arī physical theory, it is worth revisiting the question of what role that theory plays within the tradition, in anticipation of al-Āmidī's distinctive conception of the place of physical theory. We have seen, both here and in Chapter 2, the theological value attached to the major tenets of the school's physical theory. However, scholars are not united on the role of physical theory within *kalām* in general. Dhanani describes *kalām* as a 'philosophical tradition' on the basis of the predominance of the discussion of epistemology, cosmology, anthropology, and other strictly non-theological topics. He argues that questions of the nature and attributes of the things which constitute the world are a highly prominent field of enquiry within *kalām*, and sees this as evidence that *kalām* is not 'theology' *per se*, but a 'philosophical metaphysics' to rival that of the *falāsifa*.³⁰⁵ In this he concurs with Sabra, who discussed *kalām* physical theory as an aspect of the tradition's ontology, which he saw as a philosophical account of the world's constitution intended as an alternative to that of Hellenistic philosophical cosmology.³⁰⁶ On the other hand, Frank characterises *kalām* as theology, arguing that 'the primary function of *kalām* - its end and its activity - is to rationalise the basic beliefs of the Muslims as they are given in the Koran and the Sunna'.³⁰⁷ And although

³⁰⁴ See Shihadeh, 'Classical Ash'arī Anthropology', 438; Frank 'The Structure of Created Causality', 15.

³⁰⁵ Dhanani, *Physical Theory*, 2-3; also Bennett, who argues of Mu'tazilism that the 'interrelation of [the school's natural philosophy, theory of the divine attributes and of human action] amounted to a system of philosophy in its own right' (Bennett, 'The Early Mu'tazilites', 146).

³⁰⁶ See especially, Sabra, 'Kalām Atomism as an Alternative Philosophy'.

³⁰⁷ Frank, 'The Science of Kalām', 22; also Shihadeh, 'From al-Ghazālī', 144 on the objectives of *kalām* according to Ibn Fūrak.

he acknowledges the attention given to non-theological topics including physical theory, he argues that ‘*kalām* never had, or aspired to have, the universality that philosophy has traditionally claimed for itself.’³⁰⁸

It is outside of the scope of this study to contribute to this important discussion in a general way. Indeed, the classical *kalām* tradition, taken as a historical whole, is rather more heterogenous than either of the two positions outlined suggests. It would therefore be necessary to consider Mu‘tazilism separately from Ash‘arism in order to make a valid judgement on whether discussions of physical theory constitute a philosophical field of enquiry among the *mutakallimūn*.³⁰⁹ However, the role of physical theory in the theology of al-Āmidī’s most important classical Ash‘arī influences is significant context for the role it plays within his own theological project, and is therefore worth pausing over. For al-Āmidī’s classical Ash‘arī predecessors, physical theory was never more than a prop to theology proper, serving the peculiarly Ash‘arī vision of God and the God-world relationship. This is significant because the same cannot be said of al-Āmidi.

We know from Ibn Fūrak’s *Mujarrad* that al-Ash‘arī was heavily involved in the discussion of physical theory, engaging with the views of a variety of Mu‘tazila and developing his own positions on many questions. In that work, physical theory appears separately from strictly theological topics, under the category of ‘subtle questions’, although this, of course, is Ibn Fūrak’s manner of ordering al-Ash‘arīs thought. In many discussions of physical theory, the *Mujarrad* records clearly the theological significance attached to the questions at hand. So in

³⁰⁸ Frank, ‘The Science of *Kalām*’, 16. For more recent contributions on the question of the place of natural philosophy within *kalām*, see Dallal, *Islam, Science and the Challenge of History*, especially Ch 3; Morrison, ‘What was the Purpose of Astronomy’.

³⁰⁹ Indeed, it would be necessary to consider various phases of and trends in Mu‘tazilism separately in order to sufficiently answer the question, given the heterogeneity of early Mu‘tazilism in particular (on which, see Gimaret, *Mu‘tazila*; Bennett, ‘The Early Mu‘tazilites’, 144–145). Among early Mu‘tazilis (as we have seen) are real opponents of the atomist ontology which by the later classical period was the basic framework shared by all *mutakallimūn*. In the absence of general consensus on such questions, it may be that physical theory occupied a more significant space than it later would. And as Dhanani has shown, the evidence of the titles of early Mu‘tazili texts preserved in Ibn al-Nadīm’s *Fihrist* shows that there was a greater variety of text types, representing a significant non-theological aspect to *kalām*, in the early Mu‘tazili period (Dhanani, *Kalām and Hellenistic Philosophy*, 37–40). What is true of early Mu‘tazilism may not, however, be true of *kalām* taken as a historical whole, and the question needs further investigation.

recording al-Ash‘arī’s positions on the finitude of matter and its ultimate indivisibility, Ibn Fūrak asserts that al-Ash‘arī associated denial of these doctrines with disbelief.³¹⁰ And in defence of the notion that single accidents (for instance, accidents of human capacity [*qudra*]) are associated with single effects, Ibn Fūrak points out that al-Ash‘arī insisted that ‘he who disagrees with this cannot prove the unicity of God’s essence’.³¹¹ On questions such as the nature of height, width, depth, and weight, al-Ash‘arī’s doctrine, which accounts for these phenomena as functions of the accident of aggregation, and nothing more, can be seen to deliberately emphasise the lack of autonomy in the physical world.³¹² This is not to say that al-Ash‘arī’s interest in physical theory is restricted to topics with direct theological bearing, but that the major focus is on developing a version of atomist ontology which is, to the greatest extent possible, theocentric. In his *Kitāb al-Luma‘*, al-Ash‘arī is barely concerned with questions of physical theory, though they do arise somewhat haphazardly in connection with the defence of theological topics. For instance, his defence of his notion of human agency as a process of acquisition of capacity created directly by God, relies on his ontology, and specifically, on his understanding that one accident cannot inhere in another.³¹³ The role of physical theory as prop to theology proper is clear.³¹⁴

Among later school members, Ash‘arism is concerned in a more focused and exclusive way with properly theological discussions. There are no known Ash‘arī texts devoted to subjects outside of theology proper, and I agree with Gimaret that ‘it would be hard to imagine’ such texts occurring within the Ash‘arī tradition.³¹⁵ It is almost universally true among classical Ash‘arīs that physical theory is treated either a) within the context of establishing creation *ex nihilo*, or b) in the course of responding to alternative natural philosophies such as versions of the theory of the world’s constitution of four elements. The only exception of which I am aware is al-

³¹⁰ Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 211.

³¹¹ Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 214.

³¹² Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 214–215.

³¹³ Al-Ash‘arī, *Luma‘*, 94. In al-Ash‘arī’s *al-Ibāna*, physical theory is almost never discussed.

³¹⁴ On the original adoption of atomism by the Mu‘tazila as ‘an instrument of monotheism’, see Ess, *The Flowering*, 86–87. Regardless of whether or not the Mu‘tazili interest in physical theory was part of a broader philosophical system, it is true that atomism had always suited the theological project of *kalām*.

³¹⁵ Gimaret, *Mu‘tazila*. Gimaret draws a contrast between Mu‘tazilism and Ash‘arism in this regard.

Juwaynī's *Shāmil*, in which, after giving an exposition of Ash'arī physical theory in the conventional place of the proof from accidents for creation *ex nihilo*, al-Juwaynī later entertains significant discussions of the nature of accidents of spatial occupation. This involves extensive treatment of various positions including those of early Mu'tazilī figures, not all of which have obvious or direct theological implications.³¹⁶ However, this seems to be a function of the work's self-proclaimed comprehensiveness – in the *Irshād*, which becomes the basis for al-Anṣārī's *Ghunyā*, al-Juwaynī limits his discussion of physical theory to his defence of creation *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, even in the *Shāmil*, al-Juwaynī styles these discussions as part of the section of the work's *Kitāb al-tawhīd*, which is to say that he presents it as part of his establishment of God's being unlike anything in the physical world. In this context, he demonstrates some concern to establish the general theological significance of the physical theories under discussion. So before commencing his discussion of accidents of spatial location, he asserts that it is required in order to demonstrate that God is not in space.³¹⁷ Similarly, his discussions of body are presented as requisite to his demonstration that God is not body.³¹⁸

In describing *kalām* as a philosophical tradition, Dhanani mentions the later Ash'arī al-Ījī's *Mawāqif*, with its separate section on Physics. This he cites as an example of the attention given to physical theory as a field in its own right in *kalām*.³¹⁹ Similarly, Sabra uses the *Mawāqif* as evidence of his own thesis on *kalām* as philosophy.³²⁰ I will argue later in this chapter, however, that the conception of physical theory in that work is attributable to the Avicennan influence and is not indigenous to Ash'arism. Physical theory for al-Ash'arī and his classical disciples has no soteriological value of its own, and in the context of the objectives of classical Ash'arī *kalām*, this means that it is not a worthy field of enquiry except in relation to its value in supporting

³¹⁶ Al-Juwaynī, *Shāmil*, 447-509.

³¹⁷ Al-Juwaynī, *Shāmil*, 467.

³¹⁸ Al-Juwaynī, *Shāmil*, 408.

³¹⁹ Dhanani, *Physical Theory*, 2-3.

³²⁰ Sabra, 'Kalām Ontology'.

doctrines which do have such value.³²¹ This is significant for the present thesis because of departures al-Āmidī makes from this aspect of the conventions of his school.

2. The Challenge of the *falāsifa*

Later in this chapter, I show that al-Āmidī's deep familiarity with Avicennan philosophy impacts on his reception of Ash'arī physical theory. It is therefore necessary briefly to highlight, before treating al-Āmidī's own thought, the major ways in which Ibn Sīnā's thought represents a challenge to that physical theory. In many respects, Ibn Sīnā's approach to natural philosophy represents a continuation of his Aristotelian heritage, so that al-Āmidī's encounter with Ibn Sīnā in this context can be seen more generally as an encounter between *kalām* and Aristotelian approaches to the investigation of the material world. Nevertheless, since al-Āmidī's exposure to the latter tradition is via Ibn Sīnā, I describe the challenge as represented by him.

It is firstly worth commenting on Ibn Sīnā's conception of the purpose of Physics, and of its place within his broader philosophical project. I have demonstrated that for classical Ash'arīs physical theory is not a field in its own right, independent of theological discourse. For Ibn Sīnā, by contrast, and in keeping with his Aristotelian heritage, natural philosophy is a distinct science with its own subject matter, namely, the sensible body in so far as it is subject to change (*al-jism al-mahsūs min jihat mā huwa wāqi‘ fil-taghayyur*).³²² Since the purpose of philosophy is 'to ascertain the realities of all things', this makes the goal of natural philosophy for Ibn Sīnā ascertaining all realities connected with the body in its being subject to motion.³²³ The subject matter of this science is distinct from that of Metaphysics, and therefore, their goals are distinct, though both are seen as contributing to the ultimate objective of attaining true knowledge. The Deity, though not the subject matter of Metaphysics, is part of its

³²¹ See Shihadeh, 'From al-Ghazālī', 175.

³²² Ibn Sīnā, *Tabī‘iyāt*, I.1, 1, 3; c.f. *Najāt*, 1, 121; *Madkhal*, 14.

³²³ *Madkhal*, 12.

investigations; thus, theological topics are treated within the Metaphysics.³²⁴ This is not to say that natural philosophical subjects do not have theological implications – we saw, in Chapter 3, that Ibn Sīnā’s hylomorphic conception of body underlies his understanding of the nature of potency and possibility, with all its significance for his understanding of creation. And yet, the sciences are carefully delineated, natural philosophy being an independent science with its own merit and objectives. I will show later how this conception of physics, so at odds with that of the classical Ash‘arīs, impacts on al-Āmidī’s reception on the physical theory of his school.

The content of Ibn Sīnā’s ontology is also deeply at odds with Ash‘arī physical theory. This can be illustrated by considering how many of the tenets of the proof from accidents are challenged by aspects of Ibn Sīnā’s ontology. Most obviously, Ibn Sīnā’s belief in immaterial substances immediately nullifies the proof from accidents, since it is only on the assumption that the world is composed entirely of corporeal substance and its inherent accidents that its creation *ex nihilo* is established by the proof from accidents. For Ibn Sīnā, substance is defined (in the Metaphysics) as ‘the existent not inhering in any other thing (*al-mawjūd ghayr an yakūn fī shay’ min al-ashyā’*)’, incorporating material and immaterial substances.³²⁵ The belief in immaterial substances obviously also undermines the classical Ash‘arī belief that substance cannot exist devoid of accidents. Immortal substance, should it exist, cannot be proven always to have inherent accidents, and it is therefore impossible to prove its temporal origination in relation to that of accidents.

The Ash‘arī understanding of accidents is challenged by Ibn Sīnā’s notion of nature, by which he explains a whole spectrum of phenomena which, for the classical Ash‘arīs were explicable via the doctrine of the continual recreation of accidents. In defining ‘nature’, Ibn Sīnā writes that there are ‘actions and movements which proceed from [natural bodies] on account of [the bodies themselves] in such a way as they are not attributable to an external cause’. These include those actions which result from volition, but nature is specifically, ‘a power that brings

³²⁴ See *Ilāhiyyāt*, I.1, 3-4 for Ibn Sīnā’s explanation of why God’s existence cannot be the subject matter of Metaphysics.

³²⁵ *Ilāhiyyāt*, 2.1, 45.

about motion and change, and from which the action proceeds according to a single course, without volition'. Examples would be the cooling of water after a source of heat is removed, and the germination of a seed and its growth into plant.³²⁶ Ibn Sīnā's notion of matter as a substrate 'capable of acquiring some factor which it did not previously have', that is, as imbued with potency, also presents an obvious challenge to the Ash'arī doctrine of accidents, in which God's continual recreation of accidents is the sole reason for change in matter (and even for matter's continuation in existence).³²⁷

Ibn Sīnā's belief that matter is a continuum is perhaps the most obvious site of difference between his natural philosophy and Ash'arī atomism. It is a theory over which he directly challenges – indeed, refutes at some length – the opposing view of the theologians (though he does not name them).³²⁸ This is partly because as an Neoplatonising Aristotelian, he inherited the debate over the finitude of matter which had long featured in that tradition, between the Greek Atomists and their Neoplatonic, Stoic, and other opponents. Aristotle himself, for example, in his Physics (especially Book 4), refutes Democritean atomism. Ibn Sīnā's belief in matter's infinite divisibility is just one aspect of the worldview which also sees time and motion as infinitely divisible continuums, extending from pre-eternity, and by necessity. It is obvious how this package represents a challenge both to Ash'arī physical theory, and to its concomitant worldview, even if the infinite divisibility of matter alone does not necessarily entail the world's eternity.

Ibn Sīnā's conception of essences and, correspondingly, of real definitions, is deeply alien to the Ash'arī notion of body as 'the aggregate'. Whilst for classical Ash'arīs, there are no real definitions because complex entities are not genuine unities, we have already seen that for Ibn Sīnā, the way things are corresponds to real essences responsible for the characteristics and qualities of all existents in the world around us. Though Ibn Sīnā's theory of essences is a

³²⁶ *Tabī'īyāt*, 1.5, 1, 37-39.

³²⁷ *Tabī'īyāt*, 1.3, 1, 32.

³²⁸ *Tabī'īyāt*, 3.3-5, 2, 273-310.

metaphysical doctrine, the challenge that it signifies to the Ash‘arī conception of physical bodies as no more than the sum of their atomic parts is clear.

The purpose of this very brief survey has been to highlight some of the key issues that come to the fore at the encounter of classical Ash‘arī physical theory with Avicennan philosophy. I will demonstrate later in the chapter that al-Āmidī is deeply influenced by aspects of the Avicennan challenge to Ash‘arī physical theory in his works of *kalām*. First, I show how al-Āmidī regards *kalām* physical theory in his works of *falsafa*.

3. The Atomist Ontology in al-Āmidī’s works of *falsafa*

In this section, I briefly discuss al-Āmidī’s reception of *kalām* physical theory in two of his works of *falsafa*, *al-Nūr al-bāhir* and *Rumūz al-kunūz*. In the former, al-Āmidī is essentially an Avicennist, and this is reflected in his natural philosophy. In the latter, he presents as a theologian attempting to accommodate as much of Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy as does not contradict the essential tenets of *kalām*. This results in ambivalence towards the physical theoretical underpinnings of classical *kalām*. Al-Āmidī’s reception of Ibn Sīnā’s natural philosophy in these works merits close examination. However, that is not the subject of the present chapter. Rather, the intention is to demonstrate how, in his works of *falsafa*, al-Āmidī perceives the *kalām* physical theory of atoms and accidents.

In the introduction to the Physics of the *Nūr*, al-Āmidī states his commitment to the tradition of *falsafa*, specifically praising Aristotle (*al-mu’allim al-awwal*).³²⁹ He is critical of certain individuals who have attempted to explain Aristotelian philosophy, describing their efforts as falling short, and his stated task in this part of the work is to address such errors. He lists ‘Ancient [philosophers], [contemporary] philosophers, and practitioners of *kalām*’ as among those who have erred in their natural philosophies.³³⁰ Despite his direct allusion to Aristotle, it is Ibn Sīnā’s natural philosophy which is the subject of the volume. Indeed, al-Āmidī broadly

³²⁹ *Nūr*, 3, 2.

³³⁰ *Nūr*, 3, 3.

embraces Ibn Sīnā's natural philosophical doctrine in the *Nūr*. Thus, he is a hylomorphist, and so a natural critic of atomist physical theory. Ibn Sīnā's opponents are likewise al-Āmidī's. This leads him to critique post-Avicennan philosophers in their criticisms of aspects of Ibn Sīnā's natural philosophy, such as Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (*shayk al-yahūd*, with reference to his Jewish background).³³¹

More relevant for our purposes in this chapter, it leads him to a critique of the ontology of the *mutakallimūn*, focused in a refutation of the doctrine of the indivisible part. The *Physics* of the *Nūr* contains a refutation of atomism equivalent to the extended refutation sustained by Ibn Sīnā in the *Shifā'*.³³² Neither Ibn Sīnā nor al-Āmidī limit their critique to the *kalām* atomists: the opponents in question are not identified, and surely include ancient atomists like the Democriteans whose arguments were known to Aristotle. However, all of the pro-atomist arguments discussed in the *Shifā'* and *Nūr* feature in, and some are exclusive to, the *kalām* defence of atomism. Both Ibn Sīnā and al-Āmidī begin with proofs against the indivisible part. They then list proofs proffered by atomists in support of its existence. This is followed in both cases by a sustained refutation of each pro-atomist proof.

I will highlight one example, revisited later in the chapter in connection to its appearance in *Abkār al-afkār*. Ibn Sīnā briefly summarises a proof for the existence of an indivisible part of matter as follows:

³³¹ Al-Āmidī objects to Abū l-Barakāt's critique of Ibn Sīnā's notion that Prime Matter (*hayūla*) is entirely non-corporeal until actualised as body. He cites Abū l-Barakāt's accusation that Ibn Sīnā has misread the ancients (i.e. Aristotle) in their assertion that matter has no extension, shape, magnitude, or qualities of heaviness or lightness. Ibn Sīnā has taken this in support of his assertion that Prime Matter is devoid of corporeity, when in fact (argues Abū l-Barakāt) Aristotle simply intended that Prime Matter does not have determinate extension, though it is corporeal (see al-Baghdādī, *Mu'tabar*, 2, 12; and Shihadeh, *Doubts*, 160-164). Al-Āmidī writes that Ibn Sīnā did not in fact depend on this statement, and that he will provide demonstration of Ibn Sīnā's position in the metaphysical part of the work (*Nūr*, 3, 13). *Nūr*, 5, 36-37 is the relevant discussion, where al-Āmidī uses Ibn Sīnā's proof to establish his notion of Prime Matter as non-corporeal, but he does not directly reference Abū l-Barakāt and his arguments in that part of the work. On the identification of 'Shayk al-jahūd' with Abū l-Barakāt, and on his importance as a critic of Ibn Sīnā, see Michot, 'Al-Nukat wa-l-fawā'id', esp 111; Shihadeh, *Doubts*, 8-11 and throughout in relation to various Avicennan doctrines. Although not directly relevant to this chapter, al-Āmidī's refutation of Abū l-Barakāt is historically significant, confirming the importance of the latter for Ibn Sīnā's later reception.

³³² *Abkār*, 3, 155-170, following Ibn Sīnā, *Tabī'iyāt*, III.3-5, 2, 273-310.

They said that if the body were infinitely divisible, the parts of a mustard seed would equal the parts of an enormous mountain, which is absurd.³³³

Al-Āmidī expands the proof in *al-Nūr al-bāhir*, providing clarification. He explains that if all bodies, whether large or small, were divisible into infinite parts, then both the smallest body (exemplified by the mustard seed) and the largest (exemplified by the mountain) would contain an equivalent infinity of parts. But on the assumption that the number of parts of the mustard seed and mountain are equivalent, the two bodies must be of equivalent size. This is on the basis that the size of a body is related to the number of its parts.³³⁴ Both Ibn Sīnā and al-Āmidī subsequently refute this proof, as I later demonstrate in relation to its appearance in al-Āmidī's *Abkār*. It is clear, then, that al-Āmidī concurs with Ibn Sīnā's assessment of the atomist doctrine. This is hardly surprising given al-Āmidī's commitments in this work. There is no other direct comment, within the *Nūr*, on *kalām* physical theory, and this, too, reflects the work's orientation around the concerns of Ibn Sīnā's natural philosophical project.

We saw in the previous chapter that in his *Rumūz*, al-Āmidī aims to demonstrate that the majority of *falsafī* theories do not contradict orthodox Ash'arī doctrine. Indeed, he expresses support, in the introduction to the *Daqā'iq*, of which the *Rumūz* is an abridgement, for 'most of the Physics' of the philosophers.³³⁵ In the *Rumūz*, the creation of the world in time is established negatively, by refuting the proofs used by eternalists to establish their own doctrine.³³⁶ Thus, the *kalām* proof from accidents for creation *ex nihilo* does not feature. Indeed, in contrast to the writings of classical Ash'arīs, atomism has no place in discussion of any theological doctrine. As in the *Nūr* (following the *Shifā'*), the only aspect of Ash'arī physical theory which receives any discussion in the *Rumūz* is the indivisible part. Al-Āmidī presents a list of ten proofs against the indivisible part, the first of which is Ibn Sīnā's original proof (to be discussed later in the chapter).³³⁷ He then presents just four proofs for the indivisible part. This is followed by a brief

³³³ *Tabī'iyāt*, III.3, 2, 276.

³³⁴ *Nūr*, 3, 161; c.f. al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 146.

³³⁵ *Daqā'iq*, f. 2a. It is unfortunate that so little of the work is extant.

³³⁶ *Rumūz*, f. 112b.

³³⁷ On which, see Shamsi, 'Ibn Sīnā's proof'.

refutation of all four proofs for the indivisible part. Al-Āmidī stresses that matter is infinitely divisible in potential, rather than having an infinite number of actual parts. Proofs against the indivisible part are not refuted.³³⁸ The outcome of this discussion is that al-Āmidī endorses Ibn Sīnā's position on the divisibility of matter. More generally, *kalām* physical theory receives no support within this work. Rather, Avicennan natural philosophy is proffered as an explanation of the natural world.

Atomist physical theory, represented by the single, controversial doctrine of the indivisible part, is not supported in either the *Nūr* or the *Rumūz*. This is to be expected in the *Nūr*, given al-Āmidī's clear commitment to Avicennan natural philosophy. In the context of the intellectual project of the *Rumūz*, the lack of support for atomism results from al-Āmidī's overwhelming support for all aspects of Avicennism which do not directly contradict foundational Ash'arī theological doctrines such as creation *ex nihilo*. This is no insignificant development. It suggests the possibility that Ash'arī physical theory is not so indispensible to the theological project of the school, and its particular conception of creation, as had traditionally been understood. It lays the foundations of al-Āmidī's subsequent disintegration, in his works of *kalām*, of physical theory from theology proper. Al-Āmidī was, at an early stage in his career, a committed Avicennist. He seems then to have become convinced of the truth of theological perspective on the major questions of creation and of God's nature and attributes. And yet, at the point of writing the *Rumūz*, he remained impressed by philosophical theories and methods, pressing them into the service of *kalām*. At this stage, he was not concerned with defending *kalām* physical theory, since it did not seem central to the defence of core theological doctrines. This is a striking position for a committed theologian, indicative of a new era in the interactions between philosophy and theology.

³³⁸ *Rumūz*, f. 69a-70b.

4. Al-Āmidī's Physical Theory in *Abkār al-afkār*

Against the background of al-Āmidī's view of the atomist ontology in his works of *falsafa*, I turn to the main analysis. I consider how al-Āmidī receives, represents and defends atomist physical theory in his major theological work. I argue that al-Āmidī is conservative in his commitment to the letter of classical Ash'arī physical theory, which he presents as a natural philosophy worthy to rival that of the philosophers. However, I also demonstrate the significant Avicennan influence both on al-Āmidī's presentation of physical theory, and in terms of uncertainty he expresses over fundamental aspects of the theory of classical Ash'arism. I also demonstrate the significance of al-Rāzī as an intellectual competitor in these discussions. The analysis of this section puts us in the position, in the final chapter, to assess what role atomism plays in expression of the world's causedness and creation in al-Āmidī's works of theology.

4.1 Al-Āmidī's Conception of the Place of Physical Theory

Before discussing the theories themselves, it is important to consider how al-Āmidī conceives of the study of the physical world. I have demonstrated that Ibn Sīnā represents a challenge and alternative to the Ash'arī conception of physical theory as integral to their theological project. So, if on the one hand, for the classical Ash'arīs, physical theory is part and parcel of 'theology proper', and on the other, for Ibn Sīnā, natural philosophy constitutes a separate field with its own subject matter and objectives, what, for al-Āmidī, is the place of physical theory? I demonstrate that al-Āmidī is influenced by Ibn Sīnā's conception of natural philosophy as a field separate from metaphysics and theology. A preliminary consideration of key precedents for al-Āmidī's approach, namely those of al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī, demonstrates the intellectual context.

4.i.a Post-Avicennan Ash'arī Precedents

Despite his well documented and controversial interest in Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of causality, al-Ghazālī is far less interested in questions of physical theory than his classical Ash'arī

predecessors.³³⁹ In fact, he is overtly critical about the priority given to the discussion and defence of Ash‘arī physical theory among his predecessors. Even in his *Iqtisād*, where (as discussed in the next chapter), al-Ghazālī relies on the proof from accidents for creation *ex nihilo*, physical theory does not have the same prominence as for classical Ash‘arīs. For instance, though he agrees in this work with the classical Ash‘arīs that accidents exist and that substance cannot exist except with inherent accidents, he objects to the classical Ash‘arī priority given to the discussion of accidents, writing that ‘responses to [questions on the subject of accidents] were drawn out within the pages of *kalām*, though they do not merit such protraction (*qad tawwala jawābuhi fī taṣānīf al-kalām wa-laysa tastahiqq al-taṭwīl*)’. According to al-Ghazālī, no right-minded person denies the existence of accidents – for do we not all experience pain, hunger and thirst? And do we not all observe the changing states of other bodies in the world? Those who deny the existence and originatedness of accidents are simply obstinate.³⁴⁰ Accordingly, he does not entertain extensive physical theoretical discussions. Indeed, he describes physical theory for its own sake as being ‘extraneous to the [main] objective’ of his *Iqtisād*.³⁴¹

In other works, al-Ghazālī demonstrates a similar attitude. In his *Munqidh*, al-Ghazālī specifically criticises the theologians for having thought they were defending the faith by investigating ‘the realities of things’, delving into the investigation of ‘substances, accidents and their properties’ without it being relevant to their theology.³⁴² Indeed, in that work, he suggests that the majority of the Physics of the *falsāfa* is non-problematic for the theologian. This suggests that his own project does not involve investigation of physical realities for their own sake. His discussions in the *Tahāfut* occasion two critiques of proofs derived from atomist physical theory. In one instance, he writes simply that ‘the indivisible part is connected with geometrical matters, the discussion of which is too involved’.³⁴³ In the other, he cites a proof

³³⁹For a useful summary on the extensive scholarly history of debate over al-Ghazālī’s reception of Ibn Sīnā’s notion of secondary causality, see Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 179–183.

Dhanani aptly describes al-Ghazālī as ‘muted’ on the subject of atomism (Dhanani, ‘The Impact’, 79.)

³⁴⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, 27.

³⁴¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, 28.

³⁴² Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, 33.

³⁴³ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 187. See Nakamura, ‘Was Ghazālī an Ash‘arīte?’, 13–20, on al-Ghazālī’s position on atomism and its relation to his theory of the soul.

against the atom, and again, states that the discussion required to refute this proof would be too elaborate.³⁴⁴ His discussions in the *Tahāfut* especially, and elsewhere, show that he is far more interested in the metaphysics of the process of causation, given its theological implications, than in the formation and constitution of the physical world *per se*.

In al-Ghazālī's thought we see a radical reduction in the attention given to questions of physical theory, as compared with classical Ash'arism. Al-Ghazālī does not hold physical theory itself to have much place within theological discussion, nor in the refutation of views which he considers heretical. Neither is he interested in physical theory as a separate field of inquiry. He simply does not seem very interested in questions relating to the nature of matter and body. This makes sense against the background of his theological pragmatism – al-Ghazālī is interested in protecting the belief of ordinary folk by providing evidence for theological doctrine which is simple and convincing.³⁴⁵ For al-Ghazālī, natural philosophy is not an end unto itself, and the theologian should focus on matters which strictly serve the cause of defending sound doctrine.

In al-Rāzī's works, we see an evolving conception of physical theory. In his earlier works, the parameters of classical Ash'arism are upheld, and physical theory is integral to the theological project. Unsurprisingly, his *Ishāra* is structured much the same as al-Juwainī's *Irshād* and al-Bāqillānī's *Tamhīd*. The first topic after epistemological preliminaries is the defence of God's existence. The first premise of his defence of this doctrine is the temporal originatedness of bodies. In order to establish this premise, physical theoretical doctrines, including the impossibility of matter's existing devoid of accidents, are proven.³⁴⁶

Despite the considerable space devoted to physical theory in his *Nihāya*, the work is in fact mostly comparable to the *Ishāra* in terms of its conception of physical theory. Like the *Ishāra*, the *Nihāya* has no separate section for physical theory. Rather, although al-Rāzī does present a

³⁴⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 183.

³⁴⁵ On al-Ghazālī's therapeutic pragmatism see especially Shihadeh, 'From al-Ghazālī', 142–148. Marmura suggests of al-Ghazālī's approach in the *Munqidh* that his understanding of *kalām* as a therapeutic exercise means that he is not concerned with the investigation of the realities of things for their own sake (Marmura, *Ghazālī and Ash'arism*, 94–95).

³⁴⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Ishāra*, 53–59.

variety of proofs for the world's creation *ex nihilo* (discussed in Chapter 5), the proof from accidents appears first, and as part of its defence, several points of physical theory are established.³⁴⁷ For instance, in this context, al-Rāzī develops the classical Ash'arī notion that substance cannot exist devoid of accidents, specifically accidents of motion or rest. Here he also argues that establishing that motion is an existent, such that it is classified as an accident, relies on the establishment of the indivisibility of matter. This occasions presentation of proofs for the atom.³⁴⁸ Opinions on natural philosophical questions also arise when al-Rāzī treats alternative proofs for the world's creation *ex nihilo*; in his defence of a proof premised on the world's essential possibility (also treated in the next chapter), the physical theory of hylomorphism is treated.³⁴⁹ Thus, although this work is not typical of classical Ash'arism, engaging the philosophers to an unprecedented extent, al-Rāzī's conception of physical theory as integral to the defence of theological doctrine is, at this stage, largely that of his school.³⁵⁰

Al-Rāzī's *Mabāḥith* is distinct from his other works in its approach towards philosophy, and concomitantly, in the place of physical theory therein. The work's structure, although not ordered according to the standard Aristotelian pattern of Logic-Physics-Metaphysics, nevertheless reflects a basically *falsafī* orientation and objectives. Metaphysics, Physics and Theology are treated in distinct sections, and the objective of each science is the ascertainment of knowledge of reality, pertaining, in the first instance, to 'common things' connected with existence, in the second, to the world, and in the case of theology, to God and his attributes.³⁵¹ Significantly for al-Āmīdī's own approach in the *Abkār*, al-Rāzī accounts for the contents of Physics using Ibn Sīnā's distinction between the necessary and possible of existence, writing

³⁴⁷ Al-Rāzī, *Nihāya*, 1, 223-344.

³⁴⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Nihāya*, 1, 245.

³⁴⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Nihāya*, 1, 350-351. Al-Rāzī establishes the proof's first premise, namely that the world is only possible of existence, using an argument which he describes as *ad hominem* (*ilzāmī*) on the basis that it is premised on the physical theory of hylomorphism which he rejects, but the philosophers accept.

³⁵⁰ For Shihadeh's characterisation of the *Nihāya*, see Shihadeh, 'From al-Ghazālī', 163-170. Ibrahim writes of the *Nihāya* that 'it does not attempt to advance a positive or independent approach to the study of natural reality, but is primarily focused on defending Ash'arite creedal views' (Ibrahim, *Freeing Philosophy*, 210). Despite his focus on defending Ash'arī doctrine in this work, al-Rāzī does suggest innovative positions on physical theory which he will develop in later works; see Atlaş, 'An Analysis and Editio Princeps', 91 and 100, who shows that al-Rāzī already departs from the teaching of his school in suspending judgement over the indivisible part.

³⁵¹ On al-Rāzī's isolation of metaphysics from theology and its reception, see Eichner, 'Dissolving the Unity'.

that the second book, ‘concerns [all] categories of possible [existents]’. He holds that the possible of existence is further categorised exhaustively as either ‘substance’ or ‘accident’, and that each will be treated in turn.³⁵² Al-Rāzī endorses Ibn Sīnā’s natural philosophy in this work. Yet the classical *kalām* convention of organising discussion of physical theory around the substance-accident dichotomy is also present. Although he does not organise or define his natural philosophy in the manner of Ibn Sīnā, what is significant for our purposes is the departure from classical Ash‘arism marked by al-Rāzī’s treatment of questions of physical theory as constituting a field of inquiry in their own right, and not only as premises in support of theological doctrine.

In his more mature works, al-Rāzī’s approach to physical theory is distinct both from that of classical Ash‘arism, and from his philosophically oriented works. The programme of each is unique to it, according to his developing *falsafa-kalām* synthesis. The *Muḥaṣṣal* is described by Shihadeh as ‘one of the heights of al-Rāzī’s experimentalism’.³⁵³ It is structured in part around a comparative exposition of the major divisions of existents maintained within each tradition. So, after epistemological preliminaries, the work begins with discussions of necessary, and then possible existence, at an abstracted, metaphysical level. This is followed by an equivalent discussion of the notions of eternity and temporal origination by which the theologians categorise existents. Then, al-Rāzī discusses first the division of the possible of existence according to the philosophers, and second, the division of temporally originated existents according to the theologians. Here, many questions of physical theory arise. However, these discussions are highly eclectic, ranging from discussion of the philosophers’ understanding of the reality of time (with respect to the Aristotelian doctrine that measures are accidents), to *kalām*-oriented discussions on the topic of human agency (with respect to the notion that temporally originated power is an accident). This is followed by further extensive discussions of the schools’ respective conceptions of accidents and body, in which both purely natural philosophical and theological questions (like that of the creation of the world) are covered.

³⁵² Al-Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*, 1, 6.

³⁵³ Shihadeh, ‘From al-Ghazālī’, 172.

Only in the latter part of the work does al-Rāzī treat the major theological questions of God's existence and attributes. Al-Rāzī's experimentalism here results in an eclectic work of integrative philosophical theology. Physical theory accordingly arises in various contexts as the comparative project demands. It is not presented as a separate field, but neither is it discussed in the narrow context of classical *kalām* convention.

In his *Arba‘īn*, too, questions of physical theory are not treated in the restricted context of the proof from accidents, but nor does the work have a separate section devoted to the study of the natural world. Here, however, due to the more strictly theological orientation of the work, questions of physical theory arise in various contexts in which they are requisite to the defence of theological discussion. Yet this is not according to the conventions of classical *kalām*. This is partly because the physical theory of atom and accident does not provide the basic framing device for discussion of the world as it does in classical *kalām*. Instead, Ibn Sīnā’s category of the possible of existence provides the context for al-Rāzī’s treatment of creation. In discussion of this category, al-Rāzī treats the difference between space-occupying and non-space-occupying existents, as well as the question of whether or not non-space-occupying (immaterial) substances exist.³⁵⁴ Al-Rāzī’s approach here is obviously more eclectic than that of al-Bāqillānī, for instance, as necessitated by his greater accommodation of and interest in *falsafī* physical theories, especially as they relate to theological questions. Another example of al-Rāzī’s dynamic intertwining of natural philosophical and theological topics is his discussion of matter’s indivisibility. The discussion does not occur in his initial treatment of substance (where it would in a classical *summae*), since it is not requisite to the problem context in which that initial treatment occurs (the discussion of creation). Rather, it appears much later, prior to the discussion of the resurrection, because as al-Rāzī explains, ‘before we pursue the question of the resurrection, we must [first] establish two premises, one being knowledge of [the nature of] the soul, which itself relies upon knowledge of the indivisible part’.³⁵⁵ In the *Arba‘īn*, then, natural philosophy is not treated as a field in its own right. However, questions of physical

³⁵⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Arba‘īn*, 1, 3-6.

³⁵⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Arba‘īn*, 1, 253.

theory arise frequently and are explored thoroughly in their relation to theological questions, in a manner that anticipates *falsafī* alternatives to *kalām* physical theories.

The *Maṭālib* is a complex work, and physical theoretical discussions arise in various metaphysical and theological contexts throughout. For instance, questions of the nature of space occupation, motion and rest are key to al-Rāzī's exposition of proofs for creation *ex nihilo*, including his own version of the proof from accidents.³⁵⁶ Some parts of the work are devoted in a more focused manner to questions of physical theory. For instance, the sixth part of the work is entitled 'on prime matter (*fī l-hayūla*)', and al-Rāzī writes in his introduction that his intention is 'the explanation of the states of the body *qua* body, and the explanation of prime matter, from which the body is generated (*yatawallad*).³⁵⁷ Although this is somewhat comparable with Ibn Sīnā's account of the purpose of natural philosophy (as the study of the body insomuch as it is susceptible to change), al-Rāzī's treatment of questions of physical theory has its own character. This is not a straightforward quest for the knowledge of the realities of the physical world for their own sake. Rather, theological themes are expressed throughout. To give one example, before exploring the question of whether bodies are homogenous, in his section on the properties of body, al-Rāzī describes the question as 'a crucial foundation of Islamic principles (*asl azīm fī taqrīr al-uṣūl al-islāmiyya*)'. This is because the notion that bodies are homogenous provides a premise in proofs from particularisation for a voluntary agent who caused the world, and in establishing the miracles of the prophets.³⁵⁸ So despite al-Rāzī's departure from the convention of classical Ash'arism, in which physical theory is treated in restricted contexts, particularly that of the proof from accidents, his departure is not into the methods of Ibn Sīnā. Natural philosophical questions are part of an inquiry into the nature of reality, but the theological implications of the findings of this inquiry take priority. Natural

³⁵⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 4, 245-248.

³⁵⁷ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 6, 6.

³⁵⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 6, 189.

philosophical questions are synthesised with theology in such a manner that al-Rāzī's project is different in kind from that of the classical Ash‘arīs without imitating Ibn Sīnā's.³⁵⁹

Al-Rāzī's conceptions of physical theory and its place within philosophical and theological enquiry are as varied as the number of his works. As Shihadeh has pointed out, subsequent Ash‘arīs, who often included sections on physics in their theological compendia, had more than one of al-Rāzī's works for inspiration in this choice.³⁶⁰ It should be clear by now that by the time of al-Āmidī's own theological endeavours, major shifts were already occurring in the relationship between physical theory and theology among Ash‘arī scholars. I turn now to consider al-Āmidī's own conception of physical theory against this background.

4.i.b The Place of Physical Theory within *Abkār al-afkār*

Al-Āmidī's physical theory appears in the third volume of the *Abkār*. The volume is entitled 'on the existent [which is] possible of existence' (*fi l-mawjūd al-mumkin al-wujūd*), that is, all existents other than God. This follows his treatment of the strictly theological topics of God's existence, and his attributes and acts, discussed under the category 'the Necessary of Existence' within the previous two volumes. Although the creation of the world is typically a highly theological question, it is discussed in the third volume of the work, since al-Āmidī's defence of creation *ex nihilo* relies on the physical theories he establishes there.

The structure of *Abkār al-Afkār* is unique to it. There is a Rāzian inspiration: specifically, the influence of the *Mabāhith* is probable. As we have seen, the *Mabāhith* contains a natural philosophical section presented as the study of categories of 'the possible of existence'. This is a possible inspiration for al-Āmidī's isolation of topics relating to the physical world by way of the distinction between the necessary and possible of existence. Nevertheless, unlike al-Rāzī in his philosophically oriented works, al-Āmidī does not discuss metaphysics as an independent field. Rather, for him, the organising principle of the distinction between the necessary and

³⁵⁹ Ibrahim, *Freeing Philosophy*, 229, argues that al-Rāzī, in the *Maṭālib*, brings the natural philosophical insights of the *Mabāhith* and *Mulakhkhaṣ* 'into the service of spiritual insight and perfection'.

³⁶⁰ Shihadeh, 'From al-Ghazālī', 175.

possible of existence provides a new way of structuring a theological enquiry (and not an independent approach to philosophy). More significantly, and again unlike al-Rāzī in his philosophical works, although al-Āmidī presents physical theory as a distinct field of enquiry through his organisation of the work, this does not reflect endorsement of Avicennan natural philosophy. So whilst in the *Mabāḥith*, al-Rāzī's essentially positive attitude towards the major tenets of Ibn Sīnā's natural philosophy correlates with his conception of natural philosophy as an independent field, there is no such correlation in al-Āmidī's *Abkār*. Whilst he organises his theological project around the basic distinction between questions concerning God and his attributes, and questions concerning the world and its constituents, he will deliberately, consistently, and often starkly oppose Ibn Sīnā's beliefs about the natural world.

Indeed, al-Āmidī's distinction between theological and physical theoretical study in this work seems to be a deliberate methodological choice, designed to allow him to refute Ibn Sīnā's natural philosophy by presenting Ash'arī atomism as the true alternative. This is made obvious early in al-Āmidī's discussions of physical theory. He commences the volume with a preliminary section (*muqaddima*) in which he presents a summary of the philosophers' divisions of the possible of existence. He writes:

I know of no dispute between intellectuals on the exhaustive division (*haṣr*) of the possible existent into substance and accident.³⁶¹

He then provides the definition of substance which he identifies with the philosophers, namely 'the existent not in a subject'.³⁶² He proceeds to list the various divisions of substance according to the philosophers, along with their definitions. For instance, the intellect is the simple substance with no connection to a composite (i.e. material) substance. The human soul is the simple substance connected to the composite (i.e. the human body). There are two simple substances which form constituent parts of the composite substance, one of which inheres in the other. The simple substance which inheres in another to form composite substance is

³⁶¹ *Abkār*, 3, 7.

³⁶² *Abkār*, 3, 7; c.f. *Ilāhiyyāt*, II.1, 45, where Ibn Sīnā defines substance in this way.

corporeal form. That in which it inheres is corporeal matter. The composite substance (i.e. the composite of form and matter) is the body.³⁶³ In this way, based on analysis of a term (*jawhar*) common to the two traditions, al-Āmidī economically presents both the basic elements of Ibn Sīnā's natural philosophy (i.e. his conception of form, matter, and body), and other metaphysical aspects of his thought which diverge from the materialist ontology of the *mutakallimūn*, namely, his conception of immaterial intellects, souls, and so on. The procedure of listing the categories of substance is inspired by a very short passage in the Metaphysics of the *Shifā'*, by which Ibn Sīnā introduces his more in depth discussions of substance, and which al-Āmidī expands upon in his *Nūr*, and this probably provides the basis of his summary of philosophical positions here in the *Abkār*.³⁶⁴ He also refers his reader to two of his works of *falsafa*, namely *Daqā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq* and *Rumūz al-kunūz*, for further details of the philosophers' categories of substance and accident.³⁶⁵ Here in the *Abkār*, however, the philosophical view thus summarised will be directly contrasted with the *kalām* understanding of substance.

Thus the term *jawhar* serves al-Āmidī as a framing device, making highly disparate paradigms readily comparable. The same method is used by al-Rāzī in his comparison between the traditions. We have seen that, in the *Muḥaṣṣal*, al-Rāzī conducts an examination of the philosophical categories of possible existent, and then the theologians' categories of temporally originated existents. In discussing the philosophers' possible existents, al-Rāzī uses the method I have just described in relation to al-Āmidī. Al-Rāzī presents a basic dichotomy between 'substance' and 'accident', defines substance according to the philosophers (as 'that which is not in a subject'), then details the philosophers' divisions of substance. These include (as in al-Āmidī's presentation) form, matter, body, soul and intellect, though al-Āmidī's exposition is more expansive.³⁶⁶ This is an efficient method by which al-Rāzī finds focus for a comparison between two ontologies with widely divergent theories about the constituents of the realm

³⁶³ *Abkār*, 3, 7-8.

³⁶⁴ *Nūr*, 5, 35-36; Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, II.1, 48.

³⁶⁵ *Abkār*, 3, 11. In the *Rumūz*, f 96a-97a, al-Āmidī lists and endorses Ibn Sīnā's categories of substance and accident. It is likely that he provides further discussion in the *Daqā'iq*.

³⁶⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 125. This method is influential on later Ash'arīs: see al-Ījī's *Mawāqif*, 182.

outside of God. It is possible that al-Āmidī was influenced by al-Rāzī's method in his own work, as well as borrowing his summary of Ibn Sīnā's position from his own works of philosophy.

However, al-Āmidī's presentation of the philosophical categories of substance and accident does not serve the same purpose as al-Rāzī's. Al-Rāzī's exposition of the philosophical categories of substance and accident in the *Muḥaṣṣal* is a neutral account which serves his comparative project. He does present theological rebuttals to aspects of the philosophers' doctrines; for instance, he explains that for the theologians, measures (time, quantity, etc) are not accidents, since there are no relational accidents. He presents a proof to this effect.³⁶⁷ However, the account overall is explanatory, al-Rāzī not primarily concerned with undermining the philosophical positions entailed. By contrast, al-Āmidī is set on demonstrating the inferiority of Ibn Sīnā's ontology to that of classical Ash'arism.

Having presented the philosophical categories of possible existents, al-Āmidī refutes several of the definitions of the various kinds of substance he has presented. He begins: 'this division [of possible existents] although the best of the contemporary philosophers inclined towards it, is deficient'.³⁶⁸ What follows is not a comprehensive critique, but a rather haphazard targeting of individual doctrines. For example, al-Āmidī writes that the philosophers hold that the celestial bodies are categorised as 'simple substances not susceptible to generation or corruption'. He challenges this definition on the basis that he does not concede that there is any kind of substance which is not susceptible to corruption. This is a reference to the classical *kalām* doctrine which he will defend later in the work, that all substance ultimately ceases to exist.³⁶⁹ Though al-Āmidī does not expand on his refutation, it is clear that that there are theological implications to the view he is refuting. The notion that the celestial bodies are incorruptible accords with the doctrine of their pre-eternal and perpetual motion, and is therefore at odds

³⁶⁷ Al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 127.

³⁶⁸ *Abkār*, 3, 11.

³⁶⁹ *Abkār*, 3, 364-376. In this section, al-Āmidī prioritises critique of the philosophers' understanding of the perpetual existence of celestial bodies, their souls, and the intellects which are their principles.

with the *kalām* doctrine of creation. This may be an underlying factor in his selection of this aspect of the philosophical categorisation of substances for critique.

A second notion which is targeted is the belief that measures are accidents. Al-Āmidī rejects the doctrine using an argument *ad hominem* to show its theological implications for the philosophers. Measures refer to relations (*iḍāfa*) between existents. If measures are existent accidents, then God is characterisable as receptive to accidents, which are existent and additional to his essence. This is because the philosophers (and here it is obvious that Ibn Sīnā is the target) hold that God is characterisable according to relational and negational accidents. For instance, his attribute of power, according to Ibn Sīnā, reverts to the relational attribute of his necessity of existence bestowing existence on all else. Yet according to Ibn Sīnā, God's essence is absolutely simple, and he does not possess either entitative or accidental attributes.³⁷⁰ Al-Āmidī writes that 'there is no way for them to escape [this conclusion] except by contradicting one of their principles: either [by conceding that] God is characterisable by attributes additional to his essence, or [by conceding that] relation (*al-iḍāfa*) is not one of the classes of possible existents.'³⁷¹ Again, al-Āmidī targets a natural philosophical belief, this time in terms which deliberately highlight its theological implications. Specifically, it is probably no coincidence that al-Āmidī raises the question of God's attributes, for the Ash'arīs crucial to God's personality as they understood it. Al-Āmidī takes this rather unlikely opportunity to oppose Ibn Sīnā's conception of the divine essence, as well as his understanding of the nature of accidents.

In this part of his discussion, al-Āmidī clearly intends to undermine the *falsafī* tradition of natural philosophy as a preliminary to his own discussions of substance, accident and body. The equivocal term *jawhar* allows for comparison between the thought systems, for the ultimate purpose of proffering the *kalām* paradigm as a superior natural philosophy. It seems clear that a major motivation behind al-Āmidī's presentation of the discussion of physical theory as a separate field of enquiry is his staunch opposition to the philosophical tradition. By extracting

³⁷⁰ *Abkār*, 3, 14.

³⁷¹ *Abkār*, 3, 14.

classical Ash‘arī physical theory from its conventional theological context, al-Āmidī can economically pit that physical theory against the natural philosophy of the philosophers, characterised as opponents of sound doctrine. This way of framing the discussion styles Ash‘arī physical theory as a viable alternative to *falsafī* natural philosophy, not just an accidental addendum to, or set of premises in support of, theological discussion. And yet it is clear that despite this negative motivation, al-Āmidī is also subject to the influence of Avicennan philosophy in these choices. It is Ibn Sīnā’s dichotomy of existents into the categories ‘necessary’ and ‘possible’ which provides al-Āmidī with the structuring device of his major work of theology. And Ibn Sīnā’s pursuit of natural philosophy as a separate field also clearly informs al-Āmidī’s approach.

A word on *Ghāyat al-marām* is called for. In that later work of theology, in which al-Āmidī’s stated aim is to cover the most important theological topics with concision, attention to physical theory is conspicuous by its absence. The implications of this for al-Āmidī’s proofs for creation in that work will be discussed in the next chapter. At this juncture, it is simply worth reflecting on the break this marks with al-Āmidī’s Ash‘arī predecessors. The process of divorcing the fields of physical theoretical and strictly theological enquiry from one another in the *Abkār* leads al-Āmidī to dispense with the former entirely in his latest work. This is unprecedented in classical Ash‘arism and also in the thought of al-Āmidī’s closest contemporary and rival, al-Rāzī.

Physical theory often appears in later Ash‘arī works as a separate field, the most enduringly influential example being al-Ījī’s *Mawāqif*. This has been attributed to the influence of multiple Rāzian works, including the *Mabāhith*, in which Physics is separate from theological enquiry.³⁷² Al-Ījī’s *Mawāqif* appears to be influenced by the eclecticism of the *Muḥaṣṣal*, and by the structure of the *Mabāhith*, rather than by the *Abkār*. The third and fourth of al-Ījī’s seven *mawāqif* are devoted to a wide spectrum of natural philosophical questions (entitled, ‘on accidents’ and ‘on substance’) and together occupy a significant portion of the work. Structurally, the work is

³⁷² Shihadeh, ‘From al-Ghazālī’, 175.

comparable to the *Mabāhith* and *Muḥaṣṣal*, beginning with the discussion of metaphysical questions (under the title, ‘common things’), moving onto natural philosophy, and ending with strictly theological questions. A direct Āmidīan influence is therefore unlikely in this respect.

4.ii Al-Āmidī’s Conception of Substance

I turn to the content of al-Āmidī’s physical theory, beginning with his conception of substance. Al-Āmidī’s discussion of physical theory comprises five principles (*uṣūl*), the first three of which are relevant to this chapter, namely:

1. On substances and their properties (*aḥkām*)
2. On accidents and their properties
3. On the attributes of substances and accidents.

Although in classical *kalām* works, these topics are integrated with more properly theological discussions, al-Āmidī’s ordering of topics does reflect the standard classical *kalām* order. Each principle is divided into sub-discussions. Section 1 contains discussion of a) the properties of substances in general b) the properties of the indivisible part and c) the properties of bodies. Each sub-discussion in turn consists in a number of topics. For instance, sub-discussion a), on the properties of substances, contains seven topics, each treated at length. This illustrates the great comprehensiveness of al-Āmidī’s treatment of physical theory. It is not my aim to comprehensively replicate al-Āmidī’s theory of substance. Rather, I treat its most significant features, focusing on explicating the influences on his approach.

4.ii.a Defining Substance

It is clear that for al-Āmidī, the need for a robust definition of substance to differentiate his view from competing views is pressing. Discussion of the definition of substance occupies an extended section ‘On the nature of substance and its definition’.³⁷³ Apart from Ibn Sīnā’s competing definition, which, as we have seen, encompasses immaterials, another notion to be

³⁷³ *Abkār*, 3, 23–25.

refuted is the Mu'tazilī view. Given that, for the Mu'tazila, both non-existents and existents can be described as 'things', the substance may be a non-existent or existent thing. Thus one Mu'tazilī definition of substance, which al-Āmidī cites, is 'that which is space-occupying when it exists'.³⁷⁴ Al-Āmidī defines substance in accordance with Ash'arī doctrine, in deliberate contradistinction with both philosophical and Mu'tazilī views.

Consequently, much of this section is negativistic. Al-Āmidī's first tack is to refute the definition of substance he associates with the philosophers, namely 'the existent not inhering in a substrate'.³⁷⁵ He argues *ad hominem* that the definition would include God, since God, according to the philosophers, is a self-subsisting existent, not requiring a substrate.³⁷⁶ He anticipates a counter-argument derived from the philosophical distinction between God's essence and the essences of other existents. The objection is that substance is distinct from God in that its existence is additional to (*zā'id 'alā*) its essence. In God, by contrast, essence and existence are one. In this way, God is distinguished from substance.

This is not a hypothetical argument, but derived from one which al-Rāzī devises in the *Mabāhith* to safeguard the philosophical definition of substance and to distinguish clearly between the definitions of substance and of the Necessary of Existence. He argues that what is meant by 'the existent not in a substrate' in the case of substance is that if a certain essence comes to exist extra-mentally, it will not inhere in a substrate. However, such essences, he argues, prior to their existence, are universal forms inhering in a substrate, namely, intellect. By contrast, God's essence and existence are identical, so that there is no case in which God can be described as inhering in a substrate. Unlike the universal essences of substances, then, God is always self-subsisting.³⁷⁷ This argument relies upon al-Rāzī's reading of Ibn Sīnā on the relationship between essence and existence which, I have argued, is distinct from that of Ibn Sīnā. Al-Āmidī

³⁷⁴ *Abkār*, 3, 24; c.f. al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt*, 2, 8, for a comparable definition in the name of the Mu'tazila: 'the substance is that which, if it exists, bears accidents'.

³⁷⁵ *Abkār*, 3, 23.

³⁷⁶ Indeed, according to Ibn Sīnā, the Necessary of Existence requires no relation to any other existent (*Ilāhiyyāt*, I.6, 30). In the *Ishārāt*, Ibn Sīnā calls God *al-qayyūm* on the basis of his necessity. This Qur'ānic word is the most common expression of God's self-subsistence (*Ishārāt*, IV.9, 447; c.f. Qur'ān 2:255).

³⁷⁷ Al-Rāzī, *Mabāhith*, 1, 141-142.

does not represent the full argument, but it is clear that al-Rāzī's defence of Ibn Sīnā's definition of substance is the one he has in mind.

In response, al-Āmidī writes that the theory that essence and existence are distinct in substances is the one which the 'best of the latter day [philosophers] (*al-muta'akhkhirīn*) inclined towards', but that he has already refuted it in the course of the *Abkār*.³⁷⁸ This refers to a preliminary discussion of the nature of existence in volume 1, discussed in the previous chapter.³⁷⁹ Al-Āmidī there cites the 'philosophers' claim that existence is univocal (*al-mafhūm min al-wujūd wāhid fī kull mawjūd*), and that it is additional to the essences of existents. He strongly opposes this notion, writing that although the word 'existence' is common to all existents, it has no unified reality. Rather, the essence of each thing is its existence, and its existence, its essence. Thus existents do not have common existence. This is a restatement of the classical Ash'arī understanding of the thing.³⁸⁰ Thus, by affirming that essence and existence are one in all existents, al-Āmidī critiques al-Rāzī's conception of Ibn Sīnā's distinction between substance and God.³⁸¹ Ibn Sīnā's definition of substance is thus shown to be incapable of preserving God from the status of 'substance'.

In the same way, al-Āmidī also refutes the definition of substance he has ascribed to the Mu'tazila, namely 'that which is space-occupying when it exists'.³⁸² He shows that the definition is premised on the notion that the non-existent is a thing. Later in the *Abkār*, in the section on 'the non-existent', al-Āmidī will extensively refute the Mu'tazilī notion that the non-existent is

³⁷⁸ *Abkār*, 3, 23.

³⁷⁹ *Abkār*, 1, 219-220.

³⁸⁰ Al-Juwainī, in denying that existence is a mode (*hāl*), writes that 'the reality (*haqīqa*) of the essence is existence (*al-wujūd*) and existence is not something additional to the essence' (*Shāmil*, 129). Nevertheless, the term 'existent' is used univocally as a referent of all existents, since they all share in the attribute of being in actuality. It is in this sense that existents are alike; see Frank, 'Primary Entities', 165, 218.

³⁸¹ In his *Rumūz*, by contrast, al-Āmidī endorses al-Rāzī's defence of Ibn Sīnā's definition of substance (without naming his peer), stating that since, in God, essence and existence are one, God is distinguished in his self-subsistence from substance (*Rumūz*, f 96a). At this stage in his career, where his approach to *falsafa* is largely pragmatic, it seems that al-Āmidī uncritically accepts al-Rāzī's reading of Ibn Sīnā's theory of essence and existence.

³⁸² For a defence of the predominant classical Mu'tazili definition of substance, see al-Nīsābūrī's *Masā'il*, 37-47; also Dhanani, *Physical Theory*, 61.

a thing.³⁸³ If the non-existent is not a thing, then the Mu‘tazilī definition of substance is nonsensical.

Earlier, in the course of his preliminary discussions, al-Āmidī briefly offers a definition of the term *jawhar* to contrast with the Avicennan definition, namely ‘the possible existent not in a substrate (*al-mawjūd al-mumkin...lā fī maḥal*)’. This is deliberately differentiated from the philosophical definition he has given, which refers to the existent *per se*, defining substance as ‘the existent not in a substrate’.³⁸⁴ The former definition, which relies on Ibn Sīnā’s distinction between the possible and necessary of existence, accommodates the philosophical conception of substance as a category which includes immaterial possible existents. It is a definition upon which consensus could be reached. It does not permit the inclusion of God within the category ‘substance’, but nor does it specify the space-occupying property of substance. It seems to be offered by al-Āmidī as an improvement upon the philosophers’ own definition of substance, and yet, in the section under discussion, al-Āmidī will stress definitions of substance which emphasise the materiality of substance.

Al-Āmidī accommodates a number of definitions proffered by Ash‘arīs, including ‘that which is receptive to accidents’, ‘that which has some mass’, ‘that which cannot exist [where] a second substance [exists]’, and ‘that which is space-occupying’.³⁸⁵ Implicit to the latter three definitions is the denial of immaterial substances. Indeed, the third definition also constitutes a definition of ‘space-occupying’.³⁸⁶ This sets al-Āmidī’s ontology apart from Ibn Sīnā’s (in which immaterial substances appear), and the Mu‘tazila’s (in which the non-existent, and thus non-space-occupying, substance, is nonetheless a thing). It emphasises the Ash‘arī beliefs that 1) everything other than God is entirely material and 2) that apart from its existence, the world has no reality. Thus God is made the sole immaterial being in existence, and the sole source of

³⁸³ *Abkār*, 3, 387-404.

³⁸⁴ *Abkār*, 3, 16; c.f. Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, II.1, 45.

³⁸⁵ The first is favoured by al-Bāqillānī (*Tamhīd*, 17).

³⁸⁶ E.g. al-Juwaynī, *Shāmil*, 156; see Dhanani, *Physical Theory*, 63-64.

all reality apart from himself, in line with Ash‘arī theocentrism. Al-Āmidī’s definition of substance overtly establishes these distinct features of Ash‘arī ontology.³⁸⁷

The importance of Ibn Sīnā as opponent of Ash‘arī physical theory is clear in the attention and priority al-Āmidī gives to his definition of substance. And yet it is al-Rāzī’s reception of Ibn Sīnā which is the direct subject of critique. This speaks of the importance of al-Rāzī as a reader of Ibn Sīnā and as intellectual competitor for al-Āmidī. The Ash‘arīs’ more traditional opponents are also still in view.

4.ii.b Al-Āmidī’s View on the Indivisibility of Matter

Despite al-Āmidī’s insistent defence of Ash‘arī atomism as characterised thusfar, he has been influenced by Ibn Sīnā such that there are significant areas in which he expresses uncertainty over the Ash‘arī conception of substance. One of these is the doctrine that matter is ultimately indivisible. We saw in Section 2 that al-Āmidī’s earliest extant philosophical work, the *Nūr*, follows Ibn Sīnā’s *Shifā* in effecting a refutation of the doctrine of the indivisible part. Despite his clear change of allegiance within the *Abkār*, this background is keenly felt.

That the substance is an indivisible part of matter (*al-juz’ alladhī lā yatajazza’*) is not implied in al-Āmidī’s thirty-page long discussion of ‘the absolute properties of substance’ (*aḥkām al-jawāhir muṭlaqan*), nor does his definition of substance necessarily entail the indivisibility of substance. The ‘defence’ of the indivisible part (*ithbāt al-jawhar al-fard*) appears as an addendum to the discussion of substance, rather than as inherent to its definition.³⁸⁸ Al-Āmidī’s defence of the atom turns out not to be a robust defence at all. Rather, as a result of awareness of compelling proofs against the atom, al-Āmidī ultimately suspends judgement. This is no small break from his school.

Al-Āmidī’s procedure is firstly to present eight classical proofs for the atom, each of which he shows to be undemonstrative; secondly, to present two reliable proofs for the atom; thirdly, to

³⁸⁷ Dhanani shows how earlier theologians also deliberately defined substance in a manner that demonstrates the dissimilarity of their doctrine vis-à-vis the philosophical notion of substance (Dhanani, *Physical Theory* 55-6).

³⁸⁸ *Abkār*, 3, 53-74.

present sixteen proofs against the atom; and finally, to suspend judgement. To illustrate his influences, I discuss a number of these.

Refuting Traditional Proofs for the Atom

Of the eight *kalām* proofs for the atom refuted by al-Āmidī, two are discussed here. The first has already been mentioned in relation to its appearance in the *Nūr*. It is instructive to consider its appearance in the *Abkār* with respect to the relation between the works. It is the argument that on the assumption that all bodies are divisible into an infinity of parts, the number of parts of the mustard seed would not be greater than those of the mountain, which would entail the absurd result that neither mustard seed nor mountain would be greater in size.³⁸⁹ This is a well-established *kalām* proof; Dhanani infers from references found in al-Ash‘arī’s *Maqālāt* and al-Khayyāt’s *Intiṣār* that its *kalām* roots are in the work of the Mu‘tazilī Abū l-Hudhayl.³⁹⁰ In al-Āmidī’s closer context, al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī also have versions.³⁹¹

The argument is problematic in that it entails several unproven philosophical assumptions. The first is that the infinite divisibility of matter entails the existence of an actually infinite number of parts. Yet the conception of matter as infinitely divisible refers to a potential state, describing the characteristic of matter as continuous and not discrete. The opponent would not concur that the infinite division of matter could actually occur. Indeed, the opponent would argue that an actually infinite set is impossible, such that speaking of the ‘infinite number’ of the mustard seed and mountain’s respective parts is nonsensical. Ibn Sīnā, for his part, opposes the existence of an actually infinite set, maintaining that numbers in an ordered series, bodies, and magnitudes, cannot be infinite.³⁹² A further assumption, which, we will see, informs al-Āmidī’s rejection of the proof (as Ibn Sīnā’s), is that the size of a body is directly concomitant with the number of its constituent parts, as opposed to the size of those parts.

³⁸⁹ *Abkār*, 3, 56-7.

³⁹⁰ Dhanani, *Physical Theory*, 164.

³⁹¹ Al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhid*, 17-18; al-Juwaynī, *Shāmil*, 146.

³⁹² Ibn Sīnā, *Tabī’iyāt*, III.8-9, 2, 325-343.

Given the prevalence of the proof among classical theologians, al-Āmidī's refutation is a break with the tradition of his school. The source of his response is immediately traceable to his version of Ibn Sīnā's refutation as it appears in the *Nūr*. The starting point of the counter-argument in both *Abkār* and *Nūr* is to oppose the posited connection between the size of a body and the number of its parts. Al-Āmidī argues that things which can increase infinitely need not share the same magnitude. In support of this argument, he provides a mathematical example. We can potentially multiply a given quantity x by 10 *ad infinitum*. We could also multiply x by 100 *ad infinitum*. Yet x multiplied by 10 *ad infinitum* will never be equivalent to x multiplied by 100 *ad infinitum*. A further thought experiment concretes the argument. If one imagines doubling the size of the mustard seed *ad infinitum*, and also doubling the size of the mountain *ad infinitum*, the result would not be equivalence of size between the mountain and mustard seed.³⁹³ Similarly, dividing both *ad infinitum* would not result in their equivalence in size. The origin of this counter-proof is Ibn Sīnā's refutation of the proof, though al-Āmidī makes no acknowledgement.³⁹⁴ Al-Rāzī's *Mabāhith* records a similar refutation, arguing simply that the size of the parts of an elephant (exemplifying large bodies, as in al-Bāqillānī's *Tamhīd*) is greater than those of the mustard seed.³⁹⁵

Let us consider one further pro-atomistic proof. Here, al-Āmidī responds negatively to an argument which appears in classical Ash'arism, but which has been developed by al-Rāzī.³⁹⁶ The proof is based on the notion that the point at which a sphere placed on a flat surface contacts that surface must be indivisible.³⁹⁷ The point of contact between the sphere and the flat surface is conceptualised as a small surface, and it is argued that such a surface cannot be infinitely divisible. The proof appears in al-Shahrastānī's presentation of the atomism debate as follows: if the point at which a sphere meets a plane is divisible, the sphere must actually be angular. Since this is impossible, the point of contact must be an indivisible part.³⁹⁸ The assumption here

³⁹³ *Abkār*, 3, 57-8; *al-Nūr*, 3, 162-3.

³⁹⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *Tabī'iyāt*, III.5, 2, 304-5.

³⁹⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Mabāhith*, 2, 37.

³⁹⁶ On al-Rāzī's geometrical proofs for the atom in the *Maṭālib*, see Setia, 'Atomism vs Hylomorphism'.

³⁹⁷ *Abkār*, 3, 61-64.

³⁹⁸ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 508.

is that a genuine sphere is not simply a conceptual, geometrical possibility, but must exist in actuality.

In discussion of the indivisible part, al-Rāzī significantly develops this proof, and it is al-Rāzī's version which al-Āmidī cites. Al-Rāzī applies axioms from Euclidean geometry to develop three sub-proofs, of which I discuss one.³⁹⁹ The argument is as follows:

If one imagines a sphere rolling along a flat surface, one can postulate a straight line drawn between the points on the sphere at which contact occurs as the sphere rolls along (i.e. between the sphere's two points of contact with the surface at moments T1 and T2). According to Euclid, every straight line connecting two points falling on the circumference of a sphere must fall within that circle (fig. 2);

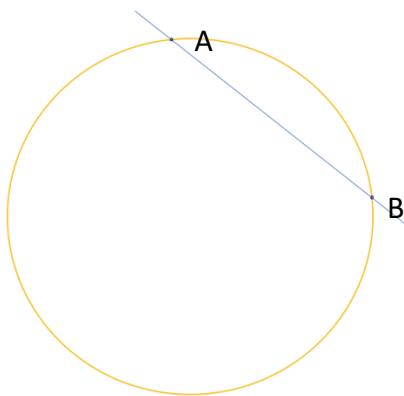


Figure 2.

Suppose points A and B are the points of contact between sphere and surface at moments T1 and T2. Take point A. If point A is divisible, a straight line traced from one division of that point to another must occur on the outside of the circumference. This is because all divisions of point A are simultaneously in contact with the surface. However, given Euclid's statement, this would necessitate that the straight line fall both within and outside of the circumference. This is inconceivable. Therefore, the sphere must be composed of indivisible parts.

³⁹⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Arba'īn*, 8; *Mabāhith*, 2, 28-30; *Maṭālib*, 6, 47-52 (in this latter work, a fourth sub-proof is appended).

In response, al-Āmidī does not directly refute the arguments set forth. Instead, he uses Euclidean principles to the opposite argumentative effect, that is, to prove that the infinite divisibility of matter follows from the existence of the sphere. He argues that a circle composed of indivisible parts is inconceivable, as follows. If we postulate a line composed of indivisible parts forming a circle, those parts must come into contact at the internal extremity of the line.

The external extremity of the line must be conceived of in one of two ways:

1. The indivisible parts come into contact at the external extremity of the line as well as the internal extremity (illustrated on the top half of fig. 3)
2. The indivisible parts do not come into contact at the external extremity, but only at the internal extremity (illustrated on the bottom half of fig. 3)

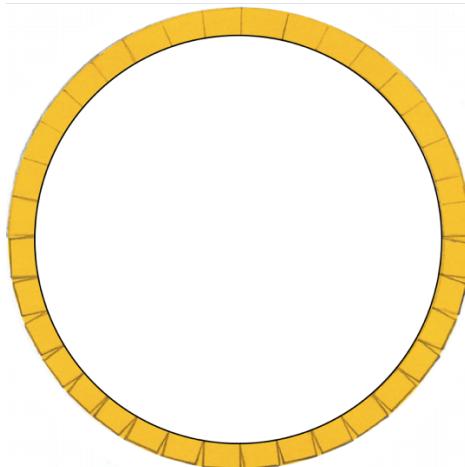


Figure 3.

Both possibilities are inconceivable because:

1. If the parts did come into contact on the internal and external extremities of the line forming the circle, this would make the surface extent of the inside of the line equal to the surface extent of the outside of the line. This would mean that a line forming a concentric circle traced immediately around the first circle would have an inner surface extent equal to the internal surface extent of the first line. The

more circles we postulate traced around the first, the more the inconceivability of this becomes apparent (fig. 4)

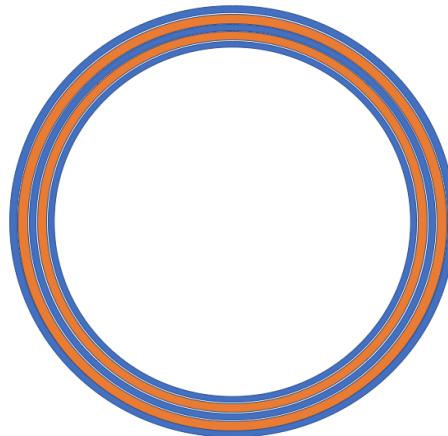


Figure 4.

2. If, however, the parts did not come into contact at the external extremity of the line, this would mean that the parts were divisible (there being one aspect in contact with other parts and another aspect without contact). It would also make the line of the circle angular; another inconceivability.

This counter-proof assumes the Ash‘arī conception of the atom as possessing magnitude, and therefore, as having distinct extremities (see Section 1 above), although to many atomists, including certain Mu‘tazila, the atom is point like and without extension. It is only on the assumption that atoms (and therefore lines) have distinct extremities that al-Āmidī’s refutation of al-Rāzī’s development of the original proof stands.

The geometrical intuition behind al-Āmidī’s counter-proof is not original. It appears within Ibn Sīnā’s own proofs against the atom. He writes:

The existence of atoms would necessarily entail that there be no circles, right-angled triangles, or many other [geometrical] figures, since the circle requires that the outside

circumference be larger than any inside circumference that is contiguous with it, but what is contiguous is equal to that with which it is contiguous, not larger.⁴⁰⁰

Once again, al-Āmidī opposes a *kalām* proof for the atom, this time one that has received sophisticated development. Conceptual inspiration for his counter-argument is present in Ibn Sīnā's anti-atomist arguments, and thus it is clear that al-Āmidī's encounters with *falsafa* have permanently shaped his approach.⁴⁰¹ The intellectual effort al-Āmidī expends on refuting al-Rāzī's proof seems surprising, given his ultimate suspension of judgement. It is an indication of his intellectual rivalry with al-Rāzī, confirming al-Rāzī's significance for al-Āmidī's intellectual project. More generally, it is characteristic of his dialecticism in this work.

A Reliable Proof for the Atom

Al-Āmidī presents two proofs for the atom which he considers reliable (*mu'tamad*). Both are markedly different in character from traditional proofs, formed in context of close engagement with the *falsafī* framework for investigation of matter.⁴⁰² Both are premised on denial of the notion that motion is a continuum, and on the necessity of correspondence between motion and matter in continuity or discreteness. I discuss one proof.

Al-Āmidī's argument is as follows: if substance were potentially infinitely divisible, a necessary correlate (*lāzim*) would be that motion would not exist. Since the correlate is impossible, substance must be indivisible. The proof of the proposed correlation (*al-mulāzima*) is that if matter were infinitely divisible, the parts of any distance must be likewise infinitely divisible. Any distance can be traversed by motion, and since the motion corresponds to the distance covered, the infinite divisibility of distances would entail the infinite divisibility of motion.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *Tabī'iyāt*, III.4, 2, 284-5.

⁴⁰¹ We should observe that al-Rāzī is well aware that Euclidean geometry relies on the concept of continuity. Indeed, he also lists a number of proofs against the atom based on Euclidean principles in *al-Maṭālib*, 6, 131-138. Perhaps al-Rāzī utilises Euclidean principles in defence of the atom in part to demonstrate that appeal to the authority of 'the ancients' was not the exclusive right of the anti-atomists. Atlaş discusses the use of geometrical arguments among theologians in 'An Analysis and Editio Princeps', 94-99, arguing that al-Rāzī's geometrical arguments are part of his demonstration of the limitations of geometry as a basis of philosophical argumentation.

⁴⁰² *Abkār*, 3, 65-66.

Next, al-Āmidī argues against the infinite divisibility of motion: the motion that occurred in the past and that will occur in the future can have no existence simultaneous with the motion occurring in the present. However, if the part of motion occurring in the present is susceptible to infinite division, then some of its divisions must occur prior to others, making some past occurrences, and some future occurrences. But these cannot have simultaneous existence, meaning that that which we have called the present part of motion does not exist. But without the present part of motion, no part of motion can exist, since that which is called the past part of motion is that which was the present part, and that which is called the future part is that which is anticipated in the present. The existence of motion is known necessarily; therefore, it can only be that motion is not a continuum. Matter, likewise, must be composed of indivisible parts. Al-Āmidī describes this proof as sound (*qawī*), demonstrative (*yaqīnī*), and correctly formed (*ṣaḥīḥ al-ṣūra*).⁴⁰³

The proof originates in the context of philosophical debates over the nature of time, particularly as developed by Ibn Sīnā. For Ibn Sīnā, time objectively exists, and is the magnitude of motion.⁴⁰⁴ The existence of time is not to be taken for granted, but established against those who deny it.⁴⁰⁵ In his own discussion of time, al-Āmidī appears ultimately to prefer the classical *kalām* understanding that time is the coordinate of events, but the majority of his discussion is preoccupied with the details of the debate as inherited from Ibn Sīnā.⁴⁰⁶ This includes presentation of proofs against the objective existence of time, including the following:

If time were existent, either it would be divisible, or indivisible.

⁴⁰³ *Abkār*, 3, 66.

⁴⁰⁴ On Ibn Sīnā's conception of time, see McGinnis, *Time and Time Again*, Ch 7-8; Lammer, *The Elements of Avicenna's Physics*.

⁴⁰⁵ See Lammer, 'Time and Mind Dependence', Section 1 for an account of the historical context for the philosophical debate over time's existence and essence. Lammer demonstrates the contrast between Aristotle, who is (perhaps deliberately) silent on the question of time's existence, and Ibn Sīnā.

⁴⁰⁶ *Abkār*, 3, 224-230. For a discussion, see Lammer, 'Time and Mind Dependence'. Al-Āmidī's own position on time is admittedly not explicitly stated. However, his focused and extensive account of Ibn Sīnā's conception of time is typical of the attention he gives to Avicennan natural philosophy in other parts of the volume, and his subsequent critique of aspects of Ibn Sīnā's theory of time should be read as a refutation. By contrast, al-Āmidī suggests and does not critique the *kalām* notion of time as the coordinate of events (*Abkār*, 3, 230), describing the position as 'not unlikely'. Although this does not represent a strong commitment, it appears to be al-Āmidī's preferred explanation.

If it was divisible, either [a] all of its parts would exist simultaneously, or [b] only some parts would exist in the present.

The former [a] is impossible, since this [would entail] that the past [parts of time] were simultaneous with the present [parts], which is impossible.

But in the case of [b] the parts [existent in the present] would either be divisible or indivisible. If [divisible], the disjunction [already conducted] would apply, entailing an impossible regress.

If [indivisible], this contradicts [the philosophers'] principles, because time corresponds in its parts to the parts of motion, and motion corresponds in its parts to the parts of distance (*al-masāfa*), and the parts of distance according to [the philosophers] are infinitely conceptually divisible.⁴⁰⁷

This is an argument *ad hominem* against the existence of time. On the basis that the opponent will not concede that distances are ultimately indivisible, the proof forces the opponent to concede that time cannot exist either as a continuum or as a succession of instants. This being an exhaustive division of the possibilities for time's existence, the opponent must concede that time does not objectively exist at all. This proof appears in the *Shifā*, the first in Ibn Sīnā's list of the 'Skeptical Puzzles' of those who deny time's existence.⁴⁰⁸ Its connection with the proof for the atom presented by al-Āmidī, just listed, is clear. On the basis that motion, time and distance must correspond to one another in continuity or discreteness, any argument which establishes either the ultimate indivisibility of the parts of motion or of time will also establish the indivisibility of distance, and thus the existence of an indivisible part of matter.

Yet al-Āmidī's use of the proof for the atom from the indivisibility of motion calls for further investigation. Nowhere does al-Āmidī make explicit the connection between establishing that time, should it exist, must be composed of indivisible parts, and this proof for the indivisible part. Although he acknowledges in his discussion of time that time, motion and distance must

⁴⁰⁷ *Abkār*, 3, 229.

⁴⁰⁸ *Tabī'iyāt*, II.10, 1, 220 (McGinnis' translation).

correspond to one another in indivisibility, his use of the term distance (*al-masāfa*), rather than substance (*jawhar*) or matter (*mādda*) in this context rather dissociates his discussion of time from his treatment of matter's divisibility. A clear contrast is in the thought of al-Rāzī, which suggests that al-Rāzī, and not al-Āmidī, may have been responsible for devising this proof from the indivisibility of motion for the indivisible part. The proof against time's objective existence discussed above appears in several of al-Rāzī's works, including the *Muhaṣṣal*. Unlike al-Āmidī, in the final stage of his presentation of the argument, al-Rāzī refers to 'the composition of bodies from a succession of points, which is [according to the philosophers] impossible'.⁴⁰⁹ This is a more explicit association of time's divisibility with that of matter.⁴¹⁰

Later in the *Muhaṣṣal*, the proof for the atom just discussed in relation to al-Āmidī's version appears.⁴¹¹ It is in the *Maṭālib*, however, where the connection between al-Rāzī's discussions of time, and his subsequent proof for the atom based on the nature of time, is clearer. The first section of proofs for the atom in the *Maṭālib* is derived from 'analysis of the states of motion and time'.⁴¹² In introducing this section, al-Rāzī is clear that if it is proven that motion is a succession of obtainments in space (*husūlāt muta'āqiba*), and that time is composed of successive instants (*ānāt mutatāliyya*), it can be established that body is likewise composed of indivisible parts.⁴¹³ The first proof he presents in this section is precisely the proof used by al-Āmidī, detailed above.⁴¹⁴ It seems likely that this proof was first devised by al-Rāzī in the context of his engagement with Ibn Sīnā's discussions of continuity. Al-Āmidī has found it convincing and replicated it, without explicit association with its original context, nor mention of its probable source - indeed he claims not to have found this proof in the work of any other thinker. The proof for the atom which al-Āmidī considers demonstrative is thus cleft from the conceptual framework in which it finds its inspiration. This is typical of al-Āmidī's approach to natural

⁴⁰⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Muhaṣṣal*, 131.

⁴¹⁰ Ibn Sīnā himself closely links discussions of the divisibility of time, motion, and matter: e.g. *Ṭabī'īyyāt*, III.6, especially 2, 311; *Ishārāt*, II.5, 2, 144.

⁴¹¹ Al-Rāzī, *Muhaṣṣal*, 165.

⁴¹² Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 6, 29-46.

⁴¹³ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 6, 29.

⁴¹⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 6, 30-32; c.f. *Sharḥ*, 2, 6-7.

philosophy in the *Abkār*. He tends to isolate problems and arguments because his investigations are conducted according to the parameters and conventions of classical *kalām*.

Proofs against the Atom

Al-Āmidī concludes his discussion by listing, without refutation, no less than sixteen proofs against the atom.⁴¹⁵ Their presentation is imprecise, and their ordering apparently random. For instance, the first and fifth proofs are almost identical. Proofs from a variety of sources are collated without reference to their original contexts.⁴¹⁶ This suggests that al-Āmidī's purpose is not critical engagement, but to demonstrate that considerable evidence exists which would undermine the existence of the atom. One brief example illustrates this point.

Al-Āmidī lists Ibn Sīnā's proofs against the atom without distinction among the other proofs listed. One is an innovative argument which is the main counter-atomistic proof in the *Ishārāt*, and the first of many in the *Shifā'*.⁴¹⁷ The proof draws on Aristotle's notion that an indivisible cannot possess distinct extremities. Ibn Sīnā writes that two atoms on either side of a third atom must either each have contact with the third atom at the same part of that third atom, or not. If they do, convergence is occurring, which is inconceivable, since it would mean that whatever the increase in the number of atoms, they could never create any magnitude. Yet if the points at which the two outside atoms contact the third atom are distinct, the third atom must be divisible (fig. 5). Al-Āmidī lists this proof in brief, and gives no counter-proof. He does not acknowledge its source.

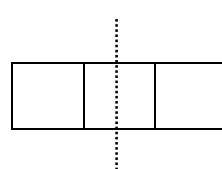


Figure 5.

⁴¹⁵ *Abkār*, 3, 66-73.

⁴¹⁶ For instance, three of the proofs against the atom were developed by al-Nazzām in support of his doctrine of the leap (*al-ṭafra*), that is, that it is possible for a body in motion to traverse a distance without moving through each of its parts (see Dhanani, *Physical Theory*, 160-1).

⁴¹⁷ Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, I.1, 2, 130-4; *Ṭabi'iyyāt*, III.4, 2, 282-4. Shamsi names this proof 'Ibn Sīnā's Argument' in recognition of the fact that it is not found before him (Shamsi, 'Ibn Sīnā's Argument').

The outcome of al-Āmidī’s list is a sense of the mass of proof against the atom; their sheer number is double that of the ‘weak’ proofs for the atom refuted by al-Āmidī. This leads al-Āmidī to overt suspension of judgement (*al-tawaqquf*) over the question of matter’s divisibility. He writes:

‘The final outcome of [this matter] is that these proofs necessarily contradict the proofs of the Orthodox, and [it is] necessary to suspend judgement on this question, following [the example of] a group of the most eminent theologians.’⁴¹⁸

It is unclear who the theologians in question are. However, there is a precedent for al-Āmidī’s suspension of judgement in the thought of al-Rāzī, whose discussions of atomism I have continually referenced. Al-Rāzī’s own stance on the indivisible part has evoked a variety of interpretations. Setia claims that even in his early philosophical works, al-Rāzī was critical of hylomorphism, and that by the time of writing his final work, the *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī was an ‘articulate, erudite and effective defender of atomism’.⁴¹⁹ In discussion of proofs for atomism described as ‘weak’ by al-Āmidī, we have already come across al-Rāzī’s extensive elaborations of traditional proofs. It is easy to see where Setia draws support for his conclusion.⁴²⁰ Earlier scholars claim that he went through an initial stage of rejecting atomism, followed by a period of ambivalence, finally returning to a self-critical acceptance of atomism.⁴²¹ Ibn Taymiyya claimed that he was simply confused!⁴²² More recently Ibrahim has advanced the theory that al-Rāzī’s apparent in clarity on this question actually reflects a broader philosophical methodology which denies that knowledge of the noumenal entities underlying natural phenomena is possible. Upon this reading, al-Rāzī rejects both hylomorphism and atomism on the basis that it

⁴¹⁸ *Abkār*, 3, 73.

⁴¹⁹ Setia, ‘Atomism vs Hylomorphism,’ 113; and ‘Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on Physics’, 169.

⁴²⁰ However, Setia overlooks statements which express uncertainty. For instance, he quotes al-Rāzī’s division of ‘the space-occupying existent’ into body and indivisible part, but fails to cite the end of al-Rāzī’s sentence, where he adds ‘according to those who affirm [the atom]’ (*‘and man yaqūl bi-ithbātihī’*) (Setia, ‘Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on Physics’, 169; c.f. *Maṭālib*, 4, 9).

⁴²¹ E.g. Zarkani, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, 425–7. Zarkani suggests that despite his various positions, belief in the atom was al-Rāzī’s true opinion. A more recent assessment also arguing for al-Rāzī’s ultimate support for atomism is Atlaş, ‘An Analysis and Editio Princeps’, 100–101.

⁴²² *Dar’ ta’ārud al-‘aql wa-l-naql*, 1, 157–8; see Zarkani, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī*, 425.

is not possible for humans to acquire knowledge of the nature of matter beyond the palpable, phenomenal body.⁴²³ A little known Rāzian text published by Shihadeh, entitled *Risālat dhamm ladhdhāt al-dunyā*, and which is his last work, quite explicitly records al-Rāzī' suspension of judgement on the question of the divisibility of matter.⁴²⁴ In this work, al-Rāzī records a compelling proof against the existence of the atom ('Ibn Sīnā's proof', discussed above), then his own original proof for the atom (related to a proof against time's existence, also discussed above). He comments:

These proofs are contradictory. And no satisfactory refutation can be found for either one. Yet we know that one [must be] true. So [the other] must contain a false premise, but our intellects instinctively affirm the veracity [of that premise], becoming convinced of it.⁴²⁵

Al-Rāzī is making a broader point about the limitations of human intellect (discussed in relation to his doctrine of creation in the next chapter) but the implication is clear - he is not convinced one way or another about the nature of matter. Despite the unprecedentedly extensive evidence al-Rāzī develops for the atom, this does not indicate his acceptance of the doctrine. Rather, it is typical of his method of adducing evidence for a variety of positions.⁴²⁶ Al-Rāzī's stance on the question of the indivisible part is clearly comparable with al-Āmidī's. Suspension of judgement on the divisibility of matter is an unsurprising conclusion for two thinkers who have both been deeply influenced by the thought of Ibn Sīnā, and encountered his critique of atomism.

Nevertheless, al-Āmidī's apparently favourable tone here in referring to the group of theologians who suspended judgement on the question of the atom is anomalous in relation to a large number of other references to al-Rāzī. This makes it seem unlikely that he is favourably claiming al-Rāzī's influence on his thought. One possibility is that al-Āmidī is shirking

⁴²³ See Ibrahim, *Freeing Philosophy*, 411-7.

⁴²⁴ See Shihadeh, *Teleological Ethics*, 11 for discussion of the date of the work.

⁴²⁵ Shihadeh, *Teleological Ethics*, 255; and 'Avicenna's Corporeal Form', 382, fn 80.

⁴²⁶ See Shihadeh, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Commentary', on al-Rāzī's method in his commentary on the *Ishārāt*. This methodology also explains the approach of the *Maṭālib*.

responsibility for his own departure from Ash‘arī doctrine at this juncture, by claiming to be following the example of his intellectual rival. This is impossible to establish with certainty.

There is no doubt that the suspension of judgement over matter’s divisibility marks a break with centuries of *kalām* doctrine, Mu‘tazilī and Ash‘arī alike. Discussions between these schools on a wide spectrum of theological topics had long assumed the existence of the indivisible part. Abandonment of belief in its existence would touch on a variety of questions, including the nature of man, human agency, and the question of secondary causation. Concession to the continuity of matter would demand at least that the relevant theories be re-framed. For instance, the occasionalist doctrine assumes the existence of the atom in that each accident is re-created at each instant in each atom. However, this is not to say that the existence of the atom is indispensable to occasionalism. It is conceivable that the doctrine could be reworked on the assumption of the continuity of matter, since it is the nature of the relationship between matter and the characteristics inhering within it, and not the nature of matter *per se*, upon which the occasionalist doctrine is premised. In fact, the doctrine of the indivisible part, despite providing the framework within which many classical doctrines were expressed, turns out not to be inherent to the doctrines themselves. Al-Āmidī’s uncertainty, though clearly a break from Ash‘arī custom, need not compromise creedal tenets of that tradition.

4.ii.c Immaterial Substances

Another area in which al-Āmidī’s thought exhibits the influence of Ibn Sīnā’s is the question of immaterial substance, the theological importance of which I have repeatedly stressed. It is clear from al-Āmidī’s primary definition of *jawhar*, namely the space-occupying existent, that immaterial substances have no place in his ontology. In his discussion of the space-occupying properties of substance, al-Āmidī expresses this by describing space-occupation as an essential attribute (*ṣifat al-dhāt*) of substance, claiming that it is impossible for us to conceive of a substance without conceiving of its space-occupation.⁴²⁷ He then cites an objection to his association of substance with space-occupation. The hypothetical opponent raises the

⁴²⁷ *Abkār*, 3, 26-29.

philosophical view that possible existents also comprise substances which do not occupy space, such as intellects and celestial and human souls. The existence of such beings would undermine al-Āmidī's view of substance, and must be disproven. Thus, al-Āmidī sets up a dialectical scenario in which we expect him to defend his notion of substance by refuting the existence of immaterial substances.

Al-Āmidī describes the question of immaterials as having 'perplexed the greatest theologians, and the most well-versed people, such that some were unable to respond'. He also claims that 'some have confused [this issue] in a manner which is not convincing to those who obtain [truth].'⁴²⁸ Al-Rāzī is a possible target of al-Āmidī's critique here. In his *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī is highly critical of the theologians, writing that though they deny non-space occupying possible existents, they present no proof for their claim. He points out that this compromises their proof for creation *ex nihilo* (namely, the proof from accidents), by which they establish only that material existents are temporally originated.⁴²⁹

Al-Āmidī presents two proofs proffered by Mu'tazilī and Ash'arī theologians against immaterials, describing them both as 'weak'. The first argues that it is impossible to prove by rational or scriptural proofs that immaterial substances exist. There is no evidence which compels one to believe in their existence, nor is their existence self-evident. If the existence of such substances cannot be proven, it must be the case that they do not exist. This proof is an argument from ignorance. Al-Āmidī describes it as an argument which 'denies [the existence of] the object of proof on the basis of absence of proof for it' (*nafī al-madlūl l-intifā' dalīlihi*). He writes that he has already refuted the validity of this type of proof, referring his reader back to the epistemological part of his work.⁴³⁰

⁴²⁸ *Abkār*, 3, 28.

⁴²⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 4, 12.

⁴³⁰ *Abkār*, 3, 28. The section to which he refers is 1, 208-210, within a broader section 'On that which they believed to be convincing proofs, but which are not' (*Abkār*, 1, 207-214). See Shihadeh, 'The Argument from Ignorance', who shows that al-Juwainī was the first to reject the argument from ignorance, and that al-Rāzī declared it a fallacy in the epistemological review in his *Nihāya*.

Having deemed the existing proofs deficient, al-Āmidī then makes a further reference to ‘a certain great [theologian]’, who introduced ‘confusion and fruitless discussions’ with respect to this question. Al-Āmidī writes that he will avoid such discussions in order to ‘save time’ by not mentioning that which has no benefit.⁴³¹ His own conclusion on the topic is rather uncertain. He writes that, as classical Ash‘arīs have rightly said, there is no rational proof which compels one to uphold the existence of immaterial substances. That for which there is no rational proof cannot be affirmed. That is to say that if the existence of immaterial substances cannot be disproven, at least it can neither be proven. This is tantamount to a suspension of judgement over the existence of such beings.⁴³² His final word on the subject within this section speaks of his own uncertainty. He admits that others might have something else to contribute in disproving immaterial substances, and advises his reader to endeavour to solve this problem (*al-ijtihād fī hall al-ishkāl*).⁴³³ It seems clear that al-Āmidī has no confidence either in previous attempts, or in his own, to disprove the existence of immaterial substances.

Al-Āmidī does have more confidence in his ability to refute the philosophers’ proofs for the existence of specific immaterial substances. He refers the reader to the section in which he has refuted the philosophers’ belief ‘in a creator other than God’.⁴³⁴ This section is his refutation of the emanationist cosmology. Here, al-Āmidī opposes the notion that the world emanates from God via a series of immaterial intellects. In his view, all existents are created directly by God. Thus, no immaterial substances operating in the realm between God and material existence need be posited. This represents one aspect of his defence of the comprehensiveness of his own ontology of God-Atom-Accident. However, nowhere does al-Āmidī disprove the existence of immaterial substance *per se*.

In general, al-Āmidī’s discussions of substance in the *Abkār* reveal overt and staunch opposition to Avicennan philosophy, but also the influence of that philosophy on his thought. Even in his two definitions of substance, a tension between the two thought paradigms is present, but not

⁴³¹ *Abkār*, 3, 29.

⁴³² *Abkār*, 3, 29.

⁴³³ *Abkār*, 3, 29.

⁴³⁴ *Abkār*, 2, 254-260.

fully explored. For in his preliminaries, and in response to Ibn Sīnā, al-Āmidī defines *jawhar* as the ‘self-subsisting possible existent’, whilst in his main discussion of substance, his definition is ‘the space-occupying existent’. The former definition demonstrates the centrality of Ibn Sīnā’s possible/necessary distinction to al-Āmidī’s thought; the latter represents his rejection of Ibn Sīnā’s inclusion of immaterial beings within the category ‘substance’.

The fact that al-Āmidī does not explore the relation between these two definitions is indicative of a more general tendency in the work. He has a strongly dialectical approach to the definition of substance, informed by opponents old and new. Yet he also fails to express certainty over the exhaustiveness of the material substance-accident dichotomy. We will see in Chapter 5 how this threatens al-Āmidī’s applications of Ash‘arī physical theory in defence of creation *ex nihilo*. Suffice it for now to observe the deep impression of Avicennan philosophy on al-Āmidī’s conception of substance, despite overt opposition to the philosophical notion of substance presented in his preliminaries.

4.iii Al-Āmidī’s Conception of Accidents

Like the term *jawhar*, the term translated ‘accident’ (*‘ard*) features in both *falsafa* and *kalām*. In this section I consider al-Āmidī’s approach to the discussion of accidents, arguing that he is motivated by his commitment to the letter of classical Ash‘arī doctrine (again in opposition to Avicennan natural philosophy), and by underlying opposition to the methods of al-Rāzī.

4.iii.a Framing the Discussion of Accidents

We have seen that in his preliminary discussion, al-Āmidī presents the philosophical division of existents according to the *kalām* substance-accident dichotomy. In the same section, al-Āmidī presents many of Ibn Sīnā’s metaphysical divisions under the category ‘accidents’.⁴³⁵ These include quantity (*kamm*), position (*wad‘*), relation (*mudāf*), quality (*kayf*), where (*ayn*), when (*matā*), having (*mulk*), action (*an yaf‘al*) and being acted upon (*an yanfa‘il*). Within each of these divisions, al-Āmidī includes sub-divisions which together account for the characteristics and

⁴³⁵ *Abkār*, 3, 8-11.

behaviours of beings. In concluding his brief summary, al-Āmidī observes that together with substance, these constitute ‘all genera of possible existents’ according to the philosophers, and advises the reader to consult his *Daqā’iq al-ḥaqā’iq* or *Rumūz al-kunūz*.⁴³⁶ The genera listed by al-Āmidī as classes of accidents are the Aristotelian philosophers’ Categories.⁴³⁷ This is in keeping with Ibn Sīnā’s description of the nine Categories other than substance itself as accidental (rather than substantial) characteristics of body.⁴³⁸ By describing these as accidents, without reference to the Categories, al-Āmidī once more renders Avicennan philosophy readily comparable with Ash‘arī physical theory. The purpose is to facilitate refutation of that competing philosophical framework. As in his refutation of the philosophical understanding of substance, al-Āmidī selects a number of points within the philosophers’ understanding of accidents for critique.⁴³⁹ Having done so, he proceeds to his main discussions of substance and accident, conducted according to the topics conventionally covered within works of Ash‘arī *kalām*. The overall impact is to dismiss Avicennan natural philosophy from the outset, clearing the way for Ash‘arī physical theory.

4.iii.b That accidents have no endurance

In order to characterise al-Āmidī’s approach to the doctrine of accidents, I consider his discussion of two key components of the classical Ash‘arī doctrine. The first is the doctrine that accidents have no endurance (*baqā’*). The reason for selecting this discussion is its significant theological applications within Ash‘arī *kalām*. One major application is in defence of occasionalism; another is within the proof from accidents. Al-Āmidī is overt about the theological importance of the belief:

⁴³⁶ *Abkār*, 3, 10-11. Al-Āmidī always cites these two works of philosophy, and never the *Nūr* or *Kashf*. This is probably because the latter two works do not evidence commitment to *kalām* doctrine.

⁴³⁷ For Ibn Sīnā’s list of categories, see ‘*Uyūn al-ḥikma*, 2-3; for extensive discussion of many of the Categories, *Ilāhiyyāt*, III, and the section on ‘al-Maqūlāt’ in the Logic of the *Shifā*, though note that the *Shifā* is the only work in which Ibn Sīnā discusses the Categories within the logic, given his contention against Aristotle that the Categories have no useful function within the logical process (see Gutas, ‘Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition’, 265-267).

⁴³⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, III.1, 71-73.

⁴³⁹ *Abkār*, 3, 13-16.

The doctrine of the rightly-minded Ash‘arīs (*ahl al-ḥaqq min al-ashā‘ira*) is that all accidents are without endurance. Rather, they are constantly renewed and God - exalted - has power to create every single one at any point of time he wills without [any external determining factor] specifying one time over another. And [our doctrine is] that [the accidents] he created at [any given] time, he could have created after that time or before it.⁴⁴⁰

Positions on the endurance of accidents among *mutakallimūn* ranged from the extreme occasionalism of al-Nazzām, who seems to have held that both accidents and the bodies in which they inhere cease to exist at every moment, through to belief in the endurance of certain classes of accidents and the non-endurance of others. The view that some accidents endure was held by most Baṣran Mu‘tazila, and is reported by al-Ash‘arī in the name of Abū l-Hudhayl and al-Jubbā‘ī.⁴⁴¹ We have seen that al-Ash‘arī’s view is in between: atoms endure by an accident of endurance (*baqā’*), but no accidents endure. The Baghdādī Mu‘tazilī view concurred with the Ash‘arī opinion.⁴⁴²

Al-Āmidī identifies al-Nazzām and al-Ka‘bī with the doctrine of the non-endurance of all accidents. He defends it against ‘the philosophers’, who held that all accidents besides time and motion endure, and against individual Mu‘tazila. Specifically, he identifies al-Jubbā‘ī, his son (Abū Hāshim), and Abū l-Hudhayl as having held that some classes of accidents, namely colours, tastes and scents, endure, whilst others, including will, knowledge, sound and speech, do not. Having briefly listed these views, al-Āmidī presents three ‘weak’ (*da‘if*) proofs for the Ash‘arī doctrine, followed by a proof from Abū Hāshim against the endurance of the accidents of sound and will. He refutes them all. One proof for the non-endurance of accidents is as follows:

postulate an atom possessing an accident of whiteness. All agree that it is within God’s power to

⁴⁴⁰ *Abkār*, 3, 164. On the question of matter’s endurance, al-Āmidī endorses al-Bāqillānī’s view that matter endures without the addition of an accident of *baqā’*, on the condition that God continues to recreate accidents within it (*Abkār*, 1, 440-449, 3, 36-38 and 164-175).

⁴⁴¹ Al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2, 47-48; see Dhanani, *Physical Theory*, 43-47.

⁴⁴² Al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt*, 2, 46-47. Al-Ash‘arī specifically identifies Abū l-Qāsim al-Balkhī (head of the Baghdādī Mu‘tazila, d. 319/931), Ibn ‘Alī al-Shaṭawī (d. 296/909), and Ibn Malik al-Asbahānī (d. ?) with this view.

create a second accident of whiteness at the second instant of the atom's existence. But if the initial accident of whiteness endured beyond the first instant of its existence, it would be impossible for God to create a second accident. This is because it is impossible for two identical accidents (*mithlayn*) to inhere in a single substrate at a single moment. Since nothing is impossible for God, the first accident must cease to exist after the first instant of its existence.

Al-Āmidī's brief refutation is as follows: when God creates the second accident of whiteness, it must be by causing the first accident to cease to exist. It is not possible for God to create a second accident without destroying the first, because as the opponent has said, no two homogenous accidents can exist in a single substrate at the same moment. So we agree that God, if he creates a second accident, causes the first to cease to exist. However, the possibility that the first accident ceases to exist (should God act to this effect) does not necessitate the impossibility of its endurance. Thus, this method fails to prove that accidents necessarily cease to exist after the first instant. Al-Āmidī subsequently provides his own proof, an extensive disjunction *ad absurdum* the detail-of which need not concern us.⁴⁴³ What is important for our purposes is to observe al-Āmidī's endorsement of one of the most distinguishing features of classical Ash'arī physical theory, with full regard to its theological significance. There is no indication of uncertainty brought about by Ibn Sīnā's opposing doctrine of natures. With regard to his method, we observe again al-Āmidī's insistence on the deficiency of previous arguments for a doctrine which he upholds, and his attempt to provide a proof which he considers superior.

4.iii.c That substances cannot exist devoid of accidents

The doctrine that substances cannot exist devoid of accidents is another premise of the proof from accidents for creation *ex nihilo*. This section reads like a compendium of defective proofs.⁴⁴⁴ Al-Āmidī ostensibly supports al-Ash'arī's view that atoms must always bear an accident from each class, or its contrary. These classes include the accidents of coming-to-be in space (the

⁴⁴³ *Abkār*, 3, 167-175.

⁴⁴⁴ *Abkār*, 3, 43-51.

akwān), the accidents responsible for sensible qualities of substances (their *mahsūsāt*), and accidents in living things accompanying the accident of life.⁴⁴⁵ Most generally, this doctrine is defended against ‘the eternalists’ (*al-dahriyya*), who according to al-Āmidī claim that substances can exist free from accidents, in accordance with their view of the pre-eternity of the world’s formless matter.⁴⁴⁶

Inevitably, al-Āmidī’s other opponents are Mu’tazila, holding various views, including the belief attributed to the Mu’tazilī al-Ṣāliḥī (d. end of C9th), as to the *Dahriyya*, that substances can be free from all accidents.⁴⁴⁷ Al-Āmidī claims that the Baṣrān Mu’tazilī view is that substances cannot be free from accidents of space-occupation, but can be devoid of other classes of accidents. By contrast, according to al-Āmidī, the view of the Baghdādī Mu’tazila is that substances cannot be free from an accident of colour, but that they may be free of other classes. In reality, there were variations within the Baghdādī and Baṣrān schools on this matter, many recorded by Ibn Mattawayh. He personally holds that ‘it is only impossible for substance to be free from [an accident of] space-occupation (*innamā nuhīl wujūdahu ‘ariyyan ‘an al-kawn*)’, but not from other accidents. However, he claims that both the Baṣrān figurehead, al-Jubbā’ī, and the Baghdādī leader, Abū l-Qāsim, believed that atoms could not be free from any class or its contrary. By contrast, the Baṣrān Abū Hāshim held that atoms could be free from accidents including colours and tastes on condition that they never possessed such accidents, but that once accidents of colour and taste inhered within the atoms, these would only be removed by the inherence of their contrary or by the destruction of their substrate.⁴⁴⁸ Al-Āmidī thus reduces Baghdādī and Baṣrān views to a simple dichotomy. Yet none of the Mu’tazila appear to

⁴⁴⁵ See Sabra, ‘The Simple Ontology’, 74–76 on accidents according to the *mutakallimūn*.

⁴⁴⁶ ‘Eternalists’ is a blanket term used by *kalām* theologians to refer to those who deny a creator’s involvement in the origination of the world. It is inspired by Qur’ān 45 v 5: ‘They say: ‘There is nothing but our worldly life, we live and die, and nothing destroys us but time (*al-dahr*)...’. As such, the term encompasses any kind of atheistic materialism. Al-Ghazālī, for instance, lists the eternalists as the first group among the philosophers, but attributes to them a different view, namely that ‘the world has always existed as it is by itself, without a creator, and that the animal has perennially come from sperm and sperm from the animal’ (*Munqidh*, 8); c.f. al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 204–209.

⁴⁴⁷ *Abkār*, 3, 43; c.f. al-Ash’arī, *Maaqālāt*, 2, 7 and 2, 246 (al-Ash’arī cites the view in the same name, in relation to God’s power to create an accident-free substance); al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 205. Al-Ṣāliḥī’s position stems from his extreme occasionalism: he ascribes power to God over everything short of contradictions, including the ability to create atoms devoid of accidents (see Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism*, 46; Goodman, ‘Ghazālī and the Philosophers’, 61–64).

⁴⁴⁸ Ibn Mattawayh, *Tadkhira*, 1, 52; c.f. al-Nīsābūrī, *al-Masā’il*, 23–57.

have held (as al-Āmidī claims that the Baghdādīs did) that atoms could ever be free from accidents of space-occupation. His representation is flawed, perhaps deliberately.⁴⁴⁹

In any case, al-Āmidī does not discuss their implications of each view. Rather, he deals with several invalid proofs against the generalised position that atoms can be free from some or all classes of accidents. His priority is to defend the doctrine that atoms cannot be accident-free. Al-Āmidī's favoured proof is as follows: postulate two atoms. These must either be joined to or separated from one another.⁴⁵⁰ Aggregation (*ijtimā'*) and separation (*iftirāq*) both determine the space-occupation of an atom. Attributes of space-occupation are accidents. The fact of an atom's existing in a particular place (*ikhtiṣāṣuhu fī ḥayz*) is an existing attribute (*ṣifa wujūdiyya*). Existent attributes are accidents. On this basis, al-Āmidī concludes that atoms can never be completely free from accidents.⁴⁵¹ This he describes as a proof against the *Dahriyya*, al-Ṣāliḥī, and the (purported) view of the Baghdādī Mu'tazila.⁴⁵² He defends the proof extensively.

Despite ostensibly upholding the classical Ash'arī view that atoms must always contain an accident from each class of accidents, nowhere does al-Āmidī specifically defend this position. This indicates that his primary intention is to defend the notion that all atoms must contain at least one accident - all that is required to establish the temporal origination of atoms.⁴⁵³ There is a comparison to be drawn between al-Āmidī's and al-Rāzī's approaches. In his *Muhaṣṣal*, al-Rāzī takes the stance of overtly disagreeing with classical Ash'arīs. According to him, bodies can be devoid of accidents of colour, taste and scents. By contrast, accidents from which bodies cannot

⁴⁴⁹ Confusion over the Mu'tazila's various views on this doctrine has precedents in al-Juwayni's *Shāmil*, where he writes that the Baghdādī and Baṣrān Mu'tazili schools disagreed (*iftaraqat*) over which classes of accidents atoms can be devoid of, but then ascribes to both groups the position that atoms cannot be free from accidents of spatial occupation (*al-akwān*), but can be free from all other kinds of accidents (*Shāmil*, 205). The editor of the *Shāmil* reads *iftaraqat* as *iqtarabat*, to account for the apparent contradiction. Al-Āmidī's reductive account may reflect inherited confusion.

⁴⁵⁰ For the sake of comprehensiveness, al-Āmidī lists two further alternatives for the configuration of these two atoms, which he quickly eliminates as absurd, namely that they could be both joined together and separated, or neither joined together nor separated (*Abkār*, 3, 46).

⁴⁵¹ Al-Juwaynī uses this proof specifically to refute the doctrine of the *dahriyya* (*Shāmil*, 205-6).

⁴⁵² *Abkār*, 3, 46-7. This proof is often used to establish the existence of accidents.

⁴⁵³ Towards the end of his discussion, al-Āmidī makes explicit the importance of the doctrine that atoms cannot be devoid of accidents, writing that those who claim that atoms can be free from accidents will have difficulty establishing the temporal origination of atoms (*Abkār*, 3, 50-51).

be devoid are those which are not removed except by the inherence of their contrary. For instance, the accident of motion remains but for the inherence of the accident of rest. According to al-Rāzī, accidents of colour, taste, and so on, do not require the inherence of their contrary for their removal. Indeed, such accidents are not required at all: here he points to the colourlessness of air as proof that bodies can be devoid of accidents of colour.⁴⁵⁴ By contrast, al-Āmidī ostensibly defends the classical Ash‘arī doctrine, yet without actually demonstrating that substance cannot be devoid of any class of accidents. This is typical of his conservative approach. Al-Āmidī presents himself as defender of orthodox Ash‘arism. Given what we know of al-Rāzī’s overt departures from aspects of the school’s doctrine, al-Āmidī may be reacting to his intellectual rival by overtly upholding all the tenets of their common school’s physical theory.

Al-Āmidī’s discussion of accidents is marked by conservatism and dialecticism. He upholds all the tenets of the classical Ash‘arī doctrine of accidents, confronts a variety of opponents, and extensively defends the proof he upholds against numerous hypothetical and real opponents. The theological significance of the physical theories at hand are also in full view in al-Āmidī’s analysis, and seem obviously to motivate their staunch defence. In his theory of accidents, then (in contrast with his theory of substance), there is little evidence of an Avicennan influence. This may be because Ibn Sīnā nowhere directly addresses *kalām* ideas on accidents. Whilst in his discussions of substance, al-Āmidī’s deep familiarity with (and past support for) Ibn Sīnā’s refutation of atomism clearly provokes uncertainty, here in the discussion of accidents, Ibn Sīnā’s alternative explanation of the non-substantial phenomena of nature has not impinged on al-Āmidī’s defence of classical Ash‘arī physical theory.

4.iv Al-Āmidī’s Conception of Body

Of the *Abkār*’s thirteen discussions under the heading ‘On the Body and its Properties’, no less than nine are exclusively devoted to refutation of *falsafī* doctrines, while the remaining four incorporate refutations of relevant philosophical views.⁴⁵⁵ For the purposes of this chapter, I

⁴⁵⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Muḥassal*, 189.

⁴⁵⁵ Doctrines which receive sustained refutation include for instance: the philosophical doctrine of the elements (*‘anāṣir*) (*Abkār*, 3, 130-133; c.f. Ibn Sīnā, *Al-kawn wa-l-fasad*, 6, 122-132; *Ilāhiyyāt*, 9.5, 334-338; and ‘Thesis Two’ on the

have selected just one discussion, namely, the definition of body. This is because al-Āmidī engages Ibn Sīnā’s conception of body here in a manner which illuminates the relationship between his encounter with Avicennan natural philosophy and his approach to classical Ash‘arī physical theory. Al-Āmidī’s treatment of Neo-platonic natural philosophy, however, merits further research in its own right, and the vast space occupied by anti-philosophical discussions must not go unobserved.⁴⁵⁶ I argue that in his discussions of body, al-Āmidī is primarily motivated by opposition to Ibn Sīnā, but that his earlier suspension of judgement over the indivisibility of matter renders his defence of the Ash‘arī definition of body ineffective.

Al-Āmidī’s definition of body occurs in context of his refutation of Ibn Sīnā’s hylomorphic conception of body. He cites Ibn Sīnā’s definition of body in the name of ‘the philosophers’.⁴⁵⁷ The definition is: ‘that in which one can posit three dimensions perpendicular to each other’ (i.e. length, breadth, and depth).⁴⁵⁸ This definition isolates body *qua* body from the actual dimensions present in particular bodies, by referring to posited dimensions. It intends thus to define the essence of corporeity, rather than to describe the phenomenal body. It also reflects Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine that body is constituted of two internal principles. One is Prime Matter (*al-hayūla al-ūla*). This principle is devoid of all corporeity. It is the passive recipient of the second, active principle, namely Corporeal Form (*al-sūra al-jismiyya*). Only together do these principles constitute body. That is to say that there is no corporeal substrate underlying palpable bodies;

four elements in his *al-Qanūn fī l-tibb*, 34-56); the view that all bodies contain a natural principle of motion (*Abkār*, 3, 123-125 and see Ibn Sīnā, *Ṭabī’īyyāt*, IV.12, 1, 485-496); and the view that a physical realm beyond the present universe is impossible, based on the impossibility of void space (*Abkār*, 3, 146-147; c.f. Ibn Sīnā, *Ṭabī’īyyāt*, II.8, 1, 177-209).

⁴⁵⁶ A brief example illustrates the general nature of these discussions. In refuting a natural principle of motion for bodies, al-Āmidī adduces the classical Ash‘arī position on motion. He argues that any repulsion (*madāfi*) or downward inclination (*thiql*) observed in natural bodies results from the creation of the power (*khalq al-qudra*) to remain or to move, and not from anything internal to the body (*Abkār*, 3, 118). He thus externalises all observable forces acting on natural bodies. This is typical of his approach in this section, where defence of Ash‘arī occasionalism is prioritised.

⁴⁵⁷ Somewhat disingenuously, al-Āmidī claims that the definition is one upon which ‘the philosophers agreed’ (*Abkār*, 3, 82). It is not the case that al-Āmidī was unaware of alternatives to Ibn Sīnā’s definition of body, found for instance in the works of Arabic Aristotelian predecessors such as al-Farābī’s *Kitāb iḥṣā’ al-‘ulūm*, 93-94, where he defines body as a substance constituted of component substances of matter and form, and in the form of challenges to Ibn Sīnā’s views from later philosophers including Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (*Mu’tabar*, 2, 10-12; and 3, 195-6 and 202-3; see Shihadeh, ‘Avicenna’s Corporeal Form’, 369-370) and al-Rāzī (e.g. *Sharḥ*, 2, 16-19). This tendency to stereotype the views of the philosophers is observed throughout the *Abkār*.

⁴⁵⁸ *Abkār*, 3, 82; c.f. Ibn Sīnā, *Ṭabī’īyyāt*, I.2, 1, 13.

rather, an entirely incorporeal substrate is imbued with particular forms for the creation of particular bodies. Corporeity itself is the combination of these two principles.⁴⁵⁹ In his exposition of this doctrine, al-Āmidī presents his version of the proof for Prime Matter and Corporeal Form found in Ibn Sīnā's *Ishārāt*.⁴⁶⁰ As Shihadeh shows, this had already become the most often debated of Ibn Sīnā's proofs for Prime Matter. I shall present al-Āmidī's simplified version of the original.

The original proof is premised on Ibn Sīnā's denial of matter's indivisibility. The infinite divisibility of matter is proven, in the *Ishārāt*, as a preliminary to the proof for Prime Matter. Nowhere does Ibn Sīnā imply that the divisibility of matter is known immediately. Rather, he states that his reader has 'come to know', through proofs, that matter is infinitely divisible.⁴⁶¹ However, al-Āmidī does not explicitly acknowledge that the divisibility of matter is a premise of Ibn Sīnā's proof for Prime Matter. This point is important for al-Āmidī's subsequent refutation of the proof.

Al-Āmidī has his opponent simply assert that body is susceptible to discontinuity (*infīṣāl*) and division (*inqisām*). He then presents the following disjunction: that within the body which is susceptible to discontinuity is either a) the dimensions of the body, or b) something other than the body's dimensions. It cannot be a) the dimensions of the body, because if the body is actually subjected to discontinuity and division, these dimensions do not remain, since dimensions express continuity. Thus, that which is susceptible to divisibility and discontinuity must be (b) something other than the dimensions of the body. This is matter (*mādda*), the material substrate of body. The dimensions by which bodies are differentiated from one another are imbued by Corporeal Form. Thus, body is the composite of matter and form.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁹ Shihadeh, in 'Avicenna's Corporeal Form', gives the first extended study of Ibn Sīnā's proof for Prime Matter. For explanation of Ibn Sīnā's doctrine, see especially 366-369.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, I.6, 2, 145-150; see Shihadeh, 'Avicenna's Corporeal Form', 375-378. Shihadeh also discusses alternative proofs for Prime Matter found in the *Shifā*, *Najāt* and 'Uyūn al-hikma (370-375).

⁴⁶¹ Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, I.6, 2, 145; for the proof of this doctrine, *Ishārāt*, I.1-4, 2, 130-143.

⁴⁶² *Abkār*, 3, 82-83.

There are strong precedents for the disputation and development of Ibn Sīnā’s proof for Prime Matter. Shihadeh has shown how Ibn Sīnā’s *Ishārāt* proof for this doctrine was critiqued by al-Mas‘ūdī in his *Shukūk*, likely inspired by Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī’s earlier critique in his *Mu‘tabar*. Both thinkers object to the notion that that within the body which is receptive to discontinuity (Ibn Sīnā’s Prime Matter) must be something other than that which is continuous (his Corporeal Form). For both thinkers, that which is receptive to discontinuity is corporeal matter, which remains unchanged despite alterations to its shape and dimensions brought about by changing forms.⁴⁶³ Particular bodies are the combination of corporeal matter and particular forms, but corporeity itself is inherent to matter. Al-Rāzī takes up the discussion in his commentary on the *Ishārāt*, where as well as highlighting deficiencies in Ibn Sīnā’s proof, he devises an alternative proof for Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine from a different premise, namely the unity of phenomenal bodies.⁴⁶⁴ It is clear from both the *Nūr* and the *Kashf* that al-Āmidī was aware of these precedents. In his treatment of Prime Matter in the *Nūr*, al-Āmidī addresses the objections of *Shaykh al-yahūd*, Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, to Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of Prime Matter.⁴⁶⁵ In his *Kashf*, he addresses al-Rāzī’s critique of the proof in his *Sharḥ*, and presents a defence of Ibn Sīnā. He fails, in the *Kashf*, to represent or respond to al-Rāzī’s proposed alternative proof, which is typical of the project of the work, where he presents al-Rāzī as a critic of Ibn Sīnā.⁴⁶⁶

Despite this extensive background, it is striking that in his *Abkār*, al-Āmidī completely overlooks previous engagements with the proof and takes his own, dialectical approach to undermining Ibn Sīnā’s conception of body. Specifically, al-Āmidī rejects Ibn Sīnā’s proof for Prime Matter. Firstly, he concedes that dimensions, when actually subjected to discontinuity and division, cease to be dimensions. However, he does not agree that this entails that corporeity is other than the dimensions of body. This is because, against Ibn Sīnā, he argues that upon the

⁴⁶³ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Shukūk*, 197-199; see Shihadeh, ‘Avicenna’s Proof’, 378-381; c.f. al-Baghdādī, *Mu‘tabar*, 2, 10-12 and 3, 195-6.

⁴⁶⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ*, 2, 19; see Shihadeh, ‘Avicenna’s Proof’, 379-393. The proof is original and interesting, but beyond the scope of this chapter, since al-Āmidī does not engage al-Rāzī’s discussions here.

⁴⁶⁵ *Nūr*, 3, 13-14; see fn 331 above.

⁴⁶⁶ *Kashf*, 2, 548-551. Al-Āmidī is typically scathing of al-Rāzī’s reading of Ibn Sīnā, claiming that al-Rāzī has shown ‘ignorance’, overlooking Ibn Sīnā’s clear intention (548).

destruction of the dimensions of body, it ceases to be body. That is to say, he does not uphold the notion that there must be a separate principle in body which is inherently subject to divisibility and discontinuity. This is because he does not hold to Ibn Sīnā’s notion that matter is infinitely divisible. Rather, in his view, a dimension is nothing other than an aggregate of atoms producing a continuous body (*‘andanā, lā ma’nā li-l-ba’d ghayr ittiṣāl al-jawāhir al-farda*). Upon the decomposition of the aggregate, dimensions cease, and so does corporeity.⁴⁶⁷

I pointed earlier to the fact that al-Āmidī fails to make the doctrine that matter is infinitely divisible an explicit premise of his opponent’s argument. Only in the course of his refutation does he address this point, treating it as an assumption, and presenting the doctrine of matter’s indivisibility as a counter-argument. That is to say that al-Āmidī fails to take Ibn Sīnā on his own terms. He does not contest Ibn Sīnā’s distinction between infinitely divisible matter and corporeal dimension. Rather, he simply denies matter’s infinite divisibility. Al-Āmidī here and elsewhere avoids serious engagement with the alternative conception of matter inherent to Ibn Sīnā’s conception of body, preferring an approach which pits the classical Ash’arī view of body against Ibn Sīnā’s.

It is within the context of this refutation of Ibn Sīnā that al-Āmidī gives his own definition of body, namely, ‘the aggregate’ (*al-mu’talif*), with reference to its being a composite of indivisible parts. This is the classical Ash’arī definition, and as al-Āmidī points out earlier in a preliminary discussion, also the normal lexical usage.⁴⁶⁸ One obvious issue here is that, just two sections previously, al-Āmidī suspended judgement over the question of the divisibility of matter. This seriously compromises his argument against Ibn Sīnā’s view of body, and also his own definition of body. Although he embraces the classical Ash’arī definition of body, he has not fully embraced the doctrine of the indivisible part upon which it is premised. This creates weakness in his physical theory.

⁴⁶⁷ *Abkār*, 3, 86.

⁴⁶⁸ *Abkār*, 3, 79-81.

Again, an illuminating contrast is with the equivalent discussion in al-Rāzī's *Maṭālib*, where he evaluates the philosophical opinion, particularly critiquing its claim to define the essence of body. In conclusion, al-Rāzī suggests that a definition of body should not attempt to ascertain its essence, but refer to what is observable in particular bodies. He suggests a modified version of the philosophical definition, namely 'the body is the expression ('ibāra) of this mass, and this thickness, and one of its characteristics is that three perpendicular dimensions can be obtained within it'.⁴⁶⁹ This conclusion better accords with a suspension of judgement over the indivisibility of matter. Neither hylomorphism nor atomism are implied by a definition of body which relies on reference to body as a phenomenon observable through particular bodies.

In his definition of body, al-Āmidī supports the classical Ash'arī conception of the nature of the physical world. Yet far more of his discussion is devoted to refuting erroneous views, and particularly Ibn Sīnā's conception of corporeity, than to exploring the implications of his own definition. Al-Āmidī does not acknowledge the inherent tension between his uncertainty over matter's divisibility, and his definition of body as the aggregate of indivisibles. In the context of the thesis, this finding is significant, since it demonstrates one aspect of the outcome of the conflicting influences on al-Āmidī's thought. It suggests that a greater dynamism than al-Āmidī's was required to successfully deal with issues, such as the doubt cast on the doctrine of the indivisible part, which arise at the encounter of Ash'arism with Avicennan natural philosophy.

5. Conclusions

The objective of this chapter was to establish the extent and nature of al-Āmidī's adherence to classical Ash'arī physical theory, as a case study of his mode of Ash'arism. Al-Āmidī begins, in the *Nūr*, without sympathy to the tradition of Ash'arism, manifested in his support for Avicennan hylomorphism and his outright opposition to a doctrine which is a hallmark of

⁴⁶⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 6, 15-8; c.f. Ibrahim, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī', 411-417. Unlike al-Āmidī, al-Rāzī is explicit about the premises of different positions on the nature of body: 'investigation into the... definitions of body reverts to [the question of] whether the body is composed of indivisible parts' (*Maṭālib*, 6, 9).

classical *kalām*, the existence of the atom. The *Rumūz* is a tantalisingly brief work which is an experiment in the accommodation of philosophy within a broader framework of commitment to the core doctrines of classical *kalām*. In it, we witness a kind of theology the approach and methods of which are alien to the paradigms of classical Ash‘arīsm. Ash‘arī physical theory does not feature as part of the theological project of the work. Avicennan natural philosophy receives general support, and the *kalām* doctrine of the indivisible part is treated with ambivalence at the most. Despite the brevity of the work, the way in which it disintegrates the classical Ash‘arī connection between physical theory and major doctrines such as the existence of God represents important background to the approach evidenced in the *Abkār*.

Paradoxical trends can be observed in al-Āmidī’s approach to the reception of Ash‘arī physical theory in that work. The most obvious feature of al-Āmidī’s approach to Ash‘arī atomism is his prevailing support for the doctrine as a whole. Substance, accident and body are all defined according to classical Ash‘arī definitions. Substance is ‘the space-occupying existent’, accident the transient characteristic inhering within it and determining its configuration and behaviour. Body is ‘the aggregate’. Moreover, the discussions supporting the Ash‘arī conceptions of substance, accident and body are formulated in overt opposition to the doctrines of opponents of the Ash‘arīs, primarily the Mu‘tazila and the philosophers. Indeed, the natural philosophical doctrines of those whom al-Āmidī groups together as ‘the philosophers’ feature much more prominently than in classical Ash‘arī works, and yet, as in the works of his predecessors, these doctrines appear as a set of anti-Orthodox beliefs to be subjected to robust refutation. There is no trace of overt concession to any Avicennan or other philosophical belief about the nature of the physical world.

However, in key areas of physical theory, al-Āmidī has been influenced by such beliefs, though the influence is not in the form of appropriation of philosophical doctrines. Rather, it is a negative influence. Engagement with Avicennan natural philosophical discussions leads al-Āmidī to deep uncertainty over doctrines traditionally considered fundamental to Ash‘arī physical theory. His suspension of judgement over the existence of an indivisible part of matter results from his exposure to Ibn Sīnā’s extended refutation of atomism, as evidenced in his own

philosophical works. His explicit hesitation over the existence of immaterial beings also reflects the prevalence of Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of substance in al-Āmidī’s milieu and in his own thought. The suspension of judgement on both questions is far from insignificant. Al-Āmidī’s failure to establish the indivisibility of matter creates incoherence in his subsequent definition of body as ‘the aggregate’, whilst his uncertainty over immaterial beings calls into question the comprehensiveness of the Ash‘arī division of existents, as well as threatening his use of the proof from accidents, as we shall see in the next chapter. There we will also see that in his final work of *kalām*, *Ghāyat al-marām*, al-Āmidī avoids all discussion of Ash‘arī physical theory. Furthermore, he explicitly acknowledges, in that work, the problematic implications of his inability to disprove the existence of immaterials. It will thus become increasingly clear that al-Āmidī’s difficulties in the reception of Ash‘arī physical theory are of no little consequence for his theological approach.

More broadly, al-Āmidī has been influenced by Ibn Sīnā’s conception of Physics as a science separate from metaphysics and theology. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, al-Āmidī is influenced by Ibn Sīnā’s distinction between the possible and necessary of existence to the extent that it replaces the eternal-temporally originated dichotomy of classical Ash‘arism within his thought. For this reason, physical theory is no longer integral to the defence of God’s existence, and therefore, can be presented as a distinct subject. Perhaps equally significantly, al-Āmidī’s driving opposition to the philosophers in this work is also a motive for his presentation of physical theory as an independent field. By styling physical theory thus, al-Āmidī more readily opposes Avicennan natural philosophy and presents the theories of his school as the correct alternative to the *falsafī* worldview.

This is a significant development in terms of the nature of post-Avicennan Ash‘arism. I argued in Section 1 that in classical Ash‘arism, physical theory is integral to theological argumentation. Yet in the post-Avicennan period, certain theologians are ‘dissolving the unity’ of Ash‘arī

kalām.⁴⁷⁰ Al-Āmidī is one such theologian: though he gives support to atomist physical theory, he presents it as a natural philosophy to rival Ibn Sīnā's, rather than as integral to theology. I observed that this is distinct from al-Rāzī's mature theological approach, in which, although physical theory does not appear according to the conventions of classical Ash'arism, it remains integrated into the discussion of theological topics, its interest primarily in this connection. Later Ash'arīs like al-Ījī were influenced in their separation of theology from natural philosophy by al-Rāzī's method in his more philosophically oriented works. And yet al-Āmidī's *Abkār* is also a precedent for the conception of physical theory as a distinct field of enquiry.

Al-Āmidī's conception of and approach to the discipline of *kalām* helps explain the paradox between his staunch opposition to *falsafī* doctrine on the one hand and the influence of that doctrine on the other. Upon analysis of al-Āmidī's arguments in defence of Ash'arī physical theory, it becomes clear that for him, *kalām* argumentation serves a defensive, apologetic objective. Classical definitions are defended by elaborate and extensive argumentation. Opposing opinions, such as Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of Prime Matter and its proof, or the doctrine that substance is no more than the aggregate of accidents, are represented, sometimes imprecisely, for the sole purpose of their subsequent refutation. This leaves little room for the kind of innovation required for a more genuine engagement with the alternative conception of the physical world implied. Rather, this intellectual project is characterised by a scholastic approach to knowledge.

Despite al-Āmidī's departure from the conventions of classical Ash'arism in the space he gives, in the *Abkār*, to physical theory as a distinct subject of discussion, his is not a genuine philosophical enquiry into the nature and attributes of the constituents of the world. Rather, his ends are apologetic. He does not advance a developed version of classical Ash'arī physical theory, nor do his uncertainties over that theory lead him to embrace either Ibn Sīnā's alternatives or to formulate his own. Rather, his focus is on refutation of alternative natural

⁴⁷⁰ I am borrowing the phrase Eichner uses in relation to the parallel separation of metaphysics from theology proper in al-Rāzī's thought, to highlight the fact that both Avicennism and Ash'arism were being transformed in multiple ways in this period.

philosophies. In a certain sense, al-Āmidī shares a perspective on physical theory that can be ascribed to some classical Ash‘arīs, in that he does not appear to believe that the natural world is of inherent interest to the theologian in its own right.

Al-Āmidī’s approach is readily contrasted with that of al-Rāzī, who tends to collect all opinions on a given doctrine and furnish each with as much evidence as possible, before effecting a critique in order to establish the correct doctrine, if that is possible. There is no doubting that al-Āmidī was aware of al-Rāzī’s discussions of both Avicennan and Ash‘arī natural philosophy. We have seen that he often includes proofs drawn from al-Rāzī’s works. At times, he subjects these to extensive critique (as in the case of al-Rāzī’s geometrical proof for the atom). In other instances, he appropriates al-Rāzī arguments without identifying their source. The strong distinction between the methods of the two thinkers, however, may suggest that al-Āmidī’s staunch conservatism and dialecticism in his own treatment of physical theory is in part a response to al-Rāzī greater concession to *falsafī* views and to his efforts to provide proofs for even those doctrines with which he disagrees. Al-Āmidī follows the more traditional *kalām* approach of representing the views of his opponents only in order to refute them, and there may be an inherent criticism of al-Rāzī’s alternative approach within al-Āmidī’s own method.

In Chapter 3, I characterised the nature of the Avicennan influence on al-Āmidī’s thought by means of a case study in his appropriation of Ibn Sīnā’s distinction between the possible and necessary of existence. Together with the findings of this chapter, that analysis serves the following chapter, in which I consider how al-Āmidī utilises Ash‘arī atomism on the one hand, and the distinction between the possible and necessary of existence on the other, as expressions of the causedness of the world, and examine how the theories function in his doctrine of creation.

Chapter 5

Al-Āmidī's Doctrine of Creation

'al-tawḥīd ifrād al-qadīm min al-hādīth'

[True] belief is to distinguish between the eternal and [that which is] originated.⁴⁷¹

Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī, in his treatise on the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, is zealous about its irreducibility as a foundation of true Islamic belief:

'If it is verified that the world was not, and then came to be (*lam yakun thumma kān*), then it becomes incontrovertible that its existence has a cause; for its existence is not from its own essence: and if [this were] not [the case], its existence would be eternal – so [it must] be by way of something other [than it]. [This] then leads to determining the attributes of that 'other', establishing that he is living, able, voluntary, knowing, seeing, hearing, speaking; [that] he sends prophets and verifies their authenticity through miracles; [that] he commands his servants [to do good] and prohibits [them from doing evil] at the tongues [of the prophets]; and that he rewards the obedient and punishes the disobedient – and the other fundamentals of religion, and branches of the revealed law. All of this only after verifying the existence of His essence – and this is only proven by establishing the temporal creation of the world – so this issue is the basis of the fundamentals (*aṣl uṣūl*) of religion'⁴⁷²

Al-Āmidī is as vehement as Ibn Ghaylān that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* must not be relinquished in the face of the eternalists. Yet I will argue in this chapter that in al-Āmidī's theological project, the doctrine is devoid of the significance attached to it in the classical Ash'arī tradition. It has become an end unto itself – a hallmark of *kalām*, no longer requisite to the defence of the particular Ash'arī vision of the character and workings of God.

⁴⁷¹ Al-Qushayrī, *Risāla* 4.

⁴⁷² Ibn Ghaylān, *Hudūth*, 3.

This chapter is built on the findings of the previous two chapters. In it, I treat only al-Āmidī's discussions in his works of *kalām*, since it is there that we find his original perspectives on creation.⁴⁷³ In the first section, I provide context to al-Āmidī's doctrine of creation through discussion of precedents in the thought of al-Ghazālī, al-Shahrastānī and al-Rāzī. I argue that, under the influence of Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of creation, and of his metaphysics of possibility and necessity, the defence of creation *ex nihilo* is increasingly orientated around a defence of God's volition and power, and not around proving God's existence. Against this background, in Section 2, I discuss the theological significance of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in al-Āmidī's thought using the findings of Chapter 3. I will argue that he depends not on that doctrine, but on analysis of necessary and possible existence, for his proof for the existence of God; and furthermore, that al-Āmidī also departs from the Ash'arī tradition in proving that God is voluntary and omnipotent aside from the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Together, these features of his thought render the doctrine superfluous to al-Āmidī's defence of the Ash'arī vision of God.

In Section 3, I consider the place of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics in al-Āmidī's discussions of creation. The focus is on al-Āmidī's reception of a proof for creation *ex nihilo* developed by al-Rāzī which relies on Ibn Sīnā's notion of causedness. I argue that al-Āmidī rejects the adoption of Ibn Sīnā's notion of possible existence for the defence of creation *ex nihilo*. However, I also demonstrate his concession to key aspects of Ibn Sīnā's theory of efficient causality. In Section 5, against the background of Chapter 4, I consider al-Āmidī's reception of proofs for creation *ex nihilo* dependent on physical theoretical premises. I will show that though, in the *Abkār*, al-Āmidī clings to Ash'arī physical theory to establish creation *ex nihilo*, in his *Ghāya*, he rejects the use of physical premises to establish the doctrine and shows no indication of a commitment to atomism. I argue that this is indicative of the decline of aspects of the classical Ash'arī paradigm for explaining the God-world relationship, suggesting the dwindling theological utility of Ash'arī atomism.

⁴⁷³ The objective of determining the progression of al-Āmidī's commitments across his works was satisfied in previous chapters.

1. The Doctrine of Creation *ex nihilo* among post-Avicennan Ash‘arīs

Before treating al-Āmidī’s doctrine of creation, I trace its immediate context in the thought of post-Avicennan Ash‘arīs of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. I will argue in this section that in the thought of al-Ghazālī, al-Shahrastānī and al-Rāzī, we observe a fundamental shift in the theological significance of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, brought about by the impression of Ibn Sīnā’s distinction between the possible and necessary of existence. My approach is to treat these thinkers’ responses to Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of creation, and specifically his belief that creation is God’s efficient causation of the world through the process of emanation. My central argument is that the defence of creation *ex nihilo* comes to constitute a defence of God’s character as conceived of in the Ash‘arī tradition (in deliberate distinction to Ibn Sīnā’s theology), but no longer functions in defence of his existence.

1.i. Al-Ghazālī

In Chapter 3, I argued that al-Ghazālī’s concession to Ibn Sīnā’s modal ontology is only skin-deep. I showed that despite his adoption of Avicennan terminology to describe God and the world, al-Ghazālī remains committed to the classical Ash‘arī conception of contingent existence. Specifically, he holds that a possible existent’s reliance on its cause is determined by its temporal origination, and not by existential contingency. This means that in his thought, the world’s creation *ex nihilo* remains fundamental to the defence of God’s existence.⁴⁷⁴ I will now argue that though al-Ghazālī advances the classical Ash‘arī understanding of creation, the creation debate is re-oriented in his thought around the question of God’s attributes of volition and power. This is in response to Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of necessary causation, and lays an important precedent for subsequent school members.

In the *Tahāfut*, al-Ghazālī very famously rejects Ibn Sīnā’s notion that the God-World relationship is the pre-eternal necessary relationship between efficient cause and effect. God’s

⁴⁷⁴ As Goodman puts it, for al-Ghazālī, ‘theism itself stands or falls with the doctrine that being once emerged from nothingness’, and ‘eternalism is tantamount to atheism’ (Goodman, ‘Ghazālī’s Argument’, 67).

causation of the world by necessity is vehemently denied, and an eternal world seen as a logical impossibility.⁴⁷⁵ Instead, al-Ghazālī holds that God exercised volition in the creation of the world, and defends this extensively. Across his works, al-Ghazālī holds that volition is ‘an attribute the function of which is to differentiate between a thing and its like’, and on this basis, defends God’s selection of a given time for the origination of creation.⁴⁷⁶ In the *Iqtisād*, he applies this definition in arguing for creation by God’s exercise of volition. Having already established the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, he writes that temporally originated existents (*al-hawādith*) are only possible in themselves in that their existence is as likely as their continued non-existence (*istimrār al-‘adam*). It is impossible that the divine essence alone determines either the existence or non-existence of such beings. This is because the divine essence, unlike the attribute of volition as al-Ghazālī has defined it, has a single, undifferentiated relation to opposing alternatives.⁴⁷⁷ In response to Ibn Sīnā, al-Ghazālī denies that the causal relationship between the Necessary of Existence and the world can be necessary and essential. Rather, an attribute of volition must feature in the causation of the world. This totally accords with the classical doctrine of his school.

I discussed in Chapter 2 the manner in which Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of eternal creation Islamicises a philosophical conception of the relationship between the world and its cause. That is to say that Ibn Sīnā claims that the necessary efficient causal relationship that he has posited between God and the world can be correctly described as a Creator-creation relationship, and the cause described as ‘voluntary’. In the third discussion in the *Tahāfut*, al-Ghazālī seeks to undermine the Islamic credentials of this belief, as part of his demonstration that proponents of the doctrine of the eternal world are heretics.⁴⁷⁸ He claims that his opponents have only cloaked

⁴⁷⁵ Al-Ghazālī’s refutation of the philosophers on this topic occupies the whole of the first discussion (Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 12–46). He argues for the impossibility of an eternal world using proofs for the impossibility of an infinite regress of motions (18–20).

⁴⁷⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 22.

⁴⁷⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, 101; see Ormsby, *Creation*, 253.

⁴⁷⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 55–77.

their doctrine in the terminology of the theologians in order to endear themselves to the Muslims.⁴⁷⁹

Al-Ghazālī holds that a cause can only be named an ‘agent’ if ‘it wills, chooses, and knows what it wills’.⁴⁸⁰ He claims that the philosophers’ necessary cause of the world, being free from attributes, causes by compulsion, without any capacity to choose, and cannot be described as an agent. He points out that in the philosophers’ view, it is impossible for God to act otherwise, and sees this as a nullification of genuine agency.⁴⁸¹ In the second part of his discussion al-Ghazālī argues that an effect can only be described as an ‘act’ if it undergoes non-existence and is then brought into existence.⁴⁸² Thus, only a temporally created world can be described as the act of God. Here al-Ghazālī directly addresses the philosophers’ claim that efficient causes, which they deem ‘agents’, are responsible exclusively for the existence of their effects (named ‘acts’), and not for their non-existence, nor for their origination from non-existence. His response is to argue that agents are connected with their acts upon the moment of their origination. Thus, although he accepts that the agent has no direct relation to the prior non-existence of its effects, he holds that non-existence is a condition of the relation between agent and act. Therefore, according to al-Ghazālī, an eternal existent can never be described as an act.⁴⁸³ Al-Ghazālī does not deny that eternal effects (such as God’s ‘being a knower’, as the effect of his knowledge) exist. His objection is to their being characterised as acts. This becomes significant in later discourse.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁷⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 59. As Dutton writes, ‘it is a leitmotif of the *Tahāfut* that God is a voluntary agent who acts by the free choice of his will’ (‘Al-Ghazālī on Possibility’, 34–35).

⁴⁸⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 55.

⁴⁸¹ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 56. In the course of his refutation, al-Ghazālī demonstrates awareness of Ibn Sīnā’s claim, most clearly articulated in the *Ishārāt*, that the term ‘act’ (*fī'l*) is more general than either voluntary agency (*al-fī'l bi-qasd*) or natural action (*al-fī'l bi-tab'*) (Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, V.2, 488–490). He strenuously denies this, arguing that the expression ‘he acted by choice’ is tautologous, and therefore that action entails will (al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 57). See Swanstrom, *The Metaphysics*, 65–67, for explanation of how Ibn Sīnā’s views God’s emanation of the world as an act of voluntary creation.

⁴⁸² Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 62; c.f. the *Iqtisād*, where he also asserts that an ‘act’ (*fī'l*) is that which is exposed to non-existence and then existence (*Iqtisād*, 104).

⁴⁸³ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 62.

⁴⁸⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 63.

Al-Ghazālī's denial of the agency of Ibn Sīnā's necessary cause of the world is directly premised on the classical Ash'arī distinction between agent causes (*fā'il*) and determinants ('*illa*, or *ma'nā mujib*). Agents, according to the classical Ash'arīs, act by volition and are responsible for the origination (*hudūth*) of their effects, but not for their ongoing existence. God is for the Ash'arīs, of course, the prime agent cause, but humans, acting according to God-given accidents of volition and capacity, are also considered agents in a particular sense. By contrast, determinants act by necessity, are responsible for the existence of their effects, and temporally concur with their effects. Examples of determinants are God's attributes (God's being a 'knower' is the effect of his attribute of knowledge) and accidents (the created accident of motion is the determinant for the existence of motion in its material substrate). Indeed al-Juwainī's proof for accidents, which is taken up by later Ash'arīs, relies on the distinction between agent causes and determinants. As al-Mutawallī puts it, accidents must exist, because motion cannot be the effect of an agent, on the basis that 'the [already] existent is not enacted: rather, it has no need, in its existence, for an agent'.⁴⁸⁵

Neither agent causes nor determinants have, according to classical Ash'arīs, efficacy in relation to the non-existence of their effects. In the case of the determinant, the absence of an effect reverts to the absence of its cause.⁴⁸⁶ In the case of agent causes, the non-existence of the effect reverts not to the absence of the agent, nor to the absence of its power or volition to enact its effect. Rather, volition is understood as an attribute the very nature of which is to particularise the timing of the existence of its effect, such that it can precede its effect in existence.⁴⁸⁷ Al-

⁴⁸⁵ Al-Mutawallī, *al-Mughnī*, 5–6; c.f. al-Juwainī, *Irshād*, 19, 'the existent, in its endurance (*al-bāqī*), is not enacted.'

⁴⁸⁶ In a section on 'what can and cannot be caused', al-Juwainī clearly asserts that 'among that which cannot be caused (*yu'allal*) is non-existence'. He is referring here specifically to determinants, to the exclusion of agent causes (*Shāmil*, 686).

⁴⁸⁷ This conception of volition is embedded within the *kalām* proof from the principle of particularisation. Al-Bāqillānī defends the compatibility of eternal attributes of volition and power with a temporally originated world against the 'naturalists'. He writes: 'according to us, [God's volition] is the volition for the delayed origination of its effect (*kawn al-fil 'alā l-tarākhi*)' (*Tamhīd*, 36). The attribute of volition is, in al-Bāqillānī's account, emphatically not the determinant, or necessitating cause of its effect (*laysat 'illa li-wujūd al-murād*). Rather, volition is a distinct attribute which, when present in the agent, permits the particularisation of the agent's acts.

Nevertheless, al-Bāqillānī's manner of expressing the classical Ash'arī notion that non-existent possibilities are within God's power is somewhat ambiguous in terms of the relation between the non-existence of the possible and its agent cause. Al-Bāqillānī writes that 'the non-existent object of God's power (*al-ma'dūm al-madqūr*) is that which can enter into existence' (*Tamhīd*, 36). Al-Juwainī also notes of al-Bāqillānī that he holds that when substances cease

Ghazālī, then, is simply asserting this conception of agency, articulating it in response to Ibn Sīnā in terms of the non-existence of the effect as a condition of its being enacted.

The clear emphasis in al-Ghazālī's defence of the core theological doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is on demolishing Ibn Sīnā's radical re-interpretation of the Qur'ānic characterisation of God as voluntary and possessed of power. This is crucial for the subsequent history of post-Avicennan Ash'arī discussions of creation.

1.ii. *Al-Shahrastānī*

I explained in Chapter 3 that al-Shahrastānī embraces Ibn Sīnā's notion that the world's existence, in contrast to God's, is derivative. I showed that this, and not the eternal-temporal distinction, constitutes his central dichotomy between God and the world. I will now argue that this results in the orientation of his response to Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of creation around the question of God's volition. Al-Shahrastānī's contribution to the creation debate is unique, and under-appreciated in present scholarship. It deserves attention both in its own right, and because of its influence on subsequent theologians including al-Āmidī.⁴⁸⁸

Despite accepting that the world's causedness is determined by its essential possibility, like al-Ghazālī, al-Shahrastānī does not accept Ibn Sīnā's conception of the necessary causal relationship between God and the world. Al-Shahrastānī has a distinctive approach to disproving Ibn Sīnā's conception of the God-world relationship. He argues that Ibn Sīnā has conflated two distinct classes of precedence within his notion of essential precedence. For Ibn

to exist, they do so as the direct result of God's action (*bi-i'dām Allah*), meaning that the non-existent possibility is non-existent as a result of God's power and will for its non-existence (*Shāmil*, 270). For his part, al-Juwaynī holds that the non-existence of a possibility is explicable not by God directly acting to produce non-existence, but by his not acting to produce existence (specifically, in the case of substances which cease to exist, by his not producing an accident of endurance) (*Shāmil*, 270). The problem of the creation of non-existence is a theme of debates with the Mu'tazila, many of whom, because of their doctrine of the endurance of accidents, posited God's creation of an accident of cessation (*fanā'*) to explain the destruction of substance. See al-Āmidī's own treatment of the problem in *Abkār*, 3, 364-374 (*fī fanā' al-jawāhir wa-l-a'rād*).

The question of the relation of God's volition to the non-existence of its effects is highly prominent in al-Āmidī's discussions of creation, as we shall later see.

⁴⁸⁸ Davidson treats al-Shahrastānī's discussion of creation in 'Arguments from the Concept'; Lammer has a forthcoming paper on the subject ('Two Sixth/Twelfth-Century Hardliners on Creation') to which, however, I obtained access too late to consider it here.

Sīnā, the precedence of God's essence (which is Necessary of Existence) over the world's (which is only possible of existence) is one and the same as God's causal precedence over the world as necessary cause of its existence. Al-Shahrastānī argues that two distinct types of precedence are being conflated by Ibn Sīnā.⁴⁸⁹

Al-Shahrastānī examines the philosophers' five categories of precedence, posteriority and concurrence, namely, 1) temporal, 2) spatial, 3) in rank or honour (e.g. the precedence of the knowledgeable over the ignorant), 4) essential (e.g. the precedence of the cause over its effect), and finally, 5) natural (e.g. the precedence of the number one over the number two).⁴⁹⁰ He specifically contests the notion of essential precedence. Firstly he asserts that by 'essential precedence', the philosophers are really referring exclusively to causal precedence, citing their examples of the precedence of the motion of the hand over the ring that it bears, and the precedence of the sun over its rays. He writes:

When using the expression 'essential [precedence]', they [really] mean 'causal' [precedence]: but 'essential' is more general than 'causal', so they ought really to have said 'causal precedence'.⁴⁹¹

Thence, he proposes a sixth category, namely ontological precedence (*al-taqaddum bi-l-wujūd*). For him, the relation between the numbers one and two is an example of this kind of precedence, rather than of 'natural precedence' (as Ibn Sīnā claims). The number two is posterior to the number one in that its existence could not occur without the number one. However, number one is not 'essentially prior' to number two as the philosophers understand essential priority, since number one is not the cause of number two.⁴⁹² Thus al-Shahrastānī

⁴⁸⁹ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 7.

⁴⁹⁰ C.f. Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, IV.1, 124-6; *Najāt*, 2, 74-5.

⁴⁹¹ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 7.

⁴⁹² For Ibn Sīnā, the priority of '1' over '2' is natural, not causal: 'it is not a condition for the existence of [the number one] that plurality should exist, whereas it is a condition for the existence of plurality that the one should exist. This is not a matter of whether or not the one bestows existence on plurality, but only that it is needed so that through the combination of it plurality would have existence' (Marmura's translation, *Avicenna on Causal Priority*, 74; see the same article for discussion of Ibn Sīnā's classes of precedence and their theological applications).

Al-Shahrastānī stresses the ontological precedence of the number one over plurality, in the sense that the existence of plurality is impossible without the existence of the number one. His emphasis is on the fact that despite plurality

proposes a kind of precedence which is neither causal nor temporal. Precedence in existence does not necessarily entail (as he accuses Ibn Sīnā of assuming it must) causal precedence.

In this way, al-Shahrastānī wrenches apart two notions which in Ibn Sīnā's conception of creation are inseparable. For Ibn Sīnā, the superiority of God's existence over the world's derivative existence is one and the same as his causal priority over the world. God's existence, being necessary, necessitates the existence of the world. God's essential precedence over the world is precisely his precedence as necessary cause of the world. For al-Shahrastānī, by contrast, one can agree that the world's existence is derivative, and therefore that the world is ontologically posterior to God, without affirming that God caused the world by necessitation.

Like al-Ghazālī, al-Shahrastānī argues that creation is a volitional act. He proceeds directly from establishing that the world relies on a cause for its existence (*wujūduhu bi-ijād ghayrihi*), to establishing that the causal relationship between necessary and possible existents must be that of a voluntary agent and its acts. He does so negatively, by presenting several arguments against the philosophers' thesis that the Necessary of Existence causes by its essence.⁴⁹³ His conclusion is that 'existentialiation by choice (*al-ijād al-ikhtiyārī*) has been established, and this is what we wanted to show.'⁴⁹⁴

Al-Shahrastānī's first objective was, then, to establish God's ontological priority over the world – God's being prior in existence is, for al-Shahrastānī, the true sense of the expression 'God was, and the world was not'.⁴⁹⁵ Secondly, he has focused on undermining the notion that God's ontological priority entails the causation of the world by necessity, thereby affirming the

being derivative, it is not caused by the existence of the number one. Ibn Sīnā would agree. However, al-Shahrastānī would broaden this category. For him, such ontological priority does not only occur in the case of naturally ordered existents such as numbers, but also to the God-world relationship, where God's existence is superior to the world's. By describing God's precedence as exclusively ontological, the necessary causal connection between God and the world is eliminated.

This articulates al-Ghazālī's notion of God's ontological priority over the world in Avicennan terms. In the first discussion in the *Tahāfut*, al-Ghazālī states that 'God has existence without the world (*li-illah wujūd wa-lā 'ālam ma'ahu*)', and stresses that this entails neither temporal nor necessary causal precedence (*Tahāfut*, 35).

⁴⁹³ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 15–16; c.f. *Muṣāra'a*, 110–114. I discuss some of these arguments in detail later in the chapter in relation to al-Āmidī's reception thereof.

⁴⁹⁴ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 17.

⁴⁹⁵ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 10.

presence of volition and power in the world's creation. Davidson has understood al-Shahrastānī's proof also to entail the world's creation in time.⁴⁹⁶ And yet, this does not accurately reflect al-Shahrastānī's unique conception of the meaning of origination from nothing. According to al-Shahrastānī, the very notion of creation *ex nihilo* needs to be reinterpreted by philosophers and theologians alike. When interrogated by a hypothetical opponent of his proof, who argues that his proof for God's ontological priority over the world and its creation by his attributes of volition and power does not imply creation *ex nihilo* (*al-hudūth 'an al-'adam*) al-Shahrastānī pronounces his understanding of creation *ex nihilo*. According to him, the expressions 'it came to exist from, or after non-existence ('*an al-'adam aw ba'd al-'adam*)', or it was preceded by non-existence (*sabaqahu al-'adam*)', denote, in the common imagination, an existent 'before'. But since time is bound up in the existence of the world, there is no time before the world. Rather, the true meaning of origination *ex nihilo* (*hudūth al-shay' 'an al-'adam*) is 'the existence of something from nothing (*wujūd al-shay' lā min shay'*)'.⁴⁹⁷ It is in the sense that it is a changeable, temporal entity, susceptible to non-existence, that the world 'has a beginning', and it is in this sense the world is reliant on the timeless God.⁴⁹⁸

Indeed, for al-Shahrastānī, when we ask whether or not the world is eternal, we are asking the wrong question. He disagrees with the philosophers who claim that the world is 'eternal with God', not primarily because of the implication that the world is without beginning, but because temporal concurrence between God and the world implies God's being subject to time. As he puts it 'if the Most High was eternally existent (*dā'im al-wujūd*) with the eternity of the world... either the existence of the Most high would be temporal, or the existence of the world would be essential, and both are false'.⁴⁹⁹ Rather, God's eternality (*dawām*) is precisely his necessity, his

⁴⁹⁶ Davidson reads al-Shahrastānī's argument against the world's essential origination as a version of the proof from particularisation, and holds that it establishes that the world's agent 'could not have acted from eternity' (Davidson, 'Arguments from the Concept', 307).

⁴⁹⁷ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 17-18.

⁴⁹⁸ This advances a theme of al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut*, where, responding to the philosophers' accusation that creation *ex nihilo* implies a finite period of time between God's existence and the world's, he argues that God is 'outside time'. Instead, he sees God as being prior to the world in 'existence'; in his words, 'God has existence without the world (*lā illah wujūd wa-lā 'ālam ma'ahū*)', regardless of time (*Tahāfut*, 31-36). A similar idea is present among Christian theologians such as Augustine (d. 430) and Anselm (d. 1109).

⁴⁹⁹ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 19; c.f. *Muṣāra'a*, 115-117.

being, essentially, ‘the beginning without beginning (*al-awwal bi-lā awwal*)’. The world’s eternity, on the other hand, is ‘a temporal eternity (*dawām zamānī*), susceptible to possibility and to non-existence, to decrease and increase, to continuation or cessation.’⁵⁰⁰ For al-Shahrastānī, the world could not be anything but temporally eternal, because it is meaningless to speak of a beginning in time for time itself.

Al-Shahrastānī does deny the possibility of an infinite regress of motions, and argues for this point against Ibn Sīnā specifically. Yet because the existence of time is bound up in the existence of the world, this does not imply for al-Shahrastānī the world’s beginning ‘in time’.⁵⁰¹ Nor would the possibility of an infinite regress of motions contradict God’s priority in existence over the world. As al-Shahrastānī puts it, ‘the supposition of an infinitely extended body, though we know it to be impossible, would not entail God’s concurrence with the world in space; and in the same way, the supposition of an infinite regress of motions would not entail God’s concurrence with the world in time.’⁵⁰² And since, for al-Shahrastānī, God’s ontological priority over the world entails his exercise of volition and power in its creation, the existence of an infinite series of motions would not negate his exercise of power and volition. As such, the notion that the world’s motion does not regress infinitely, though upheld, has nothing of the significance to al-Shahrastānī in terms of the world’s need for a cause that it held among classical Ash’arīs. For him, the world has an eternity of its own, because through the creation of the world, time itself exists. But this does not make the world beginningless, since its beginning is precisely the fact that by virtue of its own essence, it would not exist, or in other words, that it is preceded essentially by its own non-existence and therefore entirely dependent upon God.

With al-Shahrastānī, there is a decisive shift in the creation debate that in important respects is related to subsequent discourse. Most crucially, for al-Shahrastānī, establishing 1) the mode of God’s priority over the world, and 2) the presence of volition in the relation between God and

⁵⁰⁰ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 19.

⁵⁰¹ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 19 and 23-30.

⁵⁰² Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 10.

the world take centre stage in refuting the philosophical doctrine of God's eternal necessitation of the world. This is because the causedness of the world is known by analysis of the nature of its existence, and is an area of consensus between the philosophers and theologians.

Furthermore, proving that the world has a beginning in time is not merely secondary to the agenda of proving the presence of volition in its creation, it is meaningless because of the world-bound nature of time itself. Al-Shahrastānī, we will see, is both an important target and a significant influence in al-Āmidī's discussion of creation.

1.iii. Al-Rāzī

Al-Rāzī's discussions of creation are extensive and thorough. I will show later in the Chapter that al-Āmidī's response to al-Rāzī significantly informs his own discussions of creation. Thus, al-Rāzī's discussions require the most attention here. I explained in Chapter 3 that al-Rāzī is like al-Shahrastānī in his acceptance of the notion that the effects of God's power depend on their cause because of their existential contingency, and not because they are temporally originated. In light of this fact, the importance of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* for al-Rāzī's theology is a point of interest. Iskenderoğlu, in his study of al-Rāzī's doctrine of creation, has argued that he suspends judgement on the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*.⁵⁰³ I will argue that al-Rāzī upholds the doctrine, and that its significance for him primarily pertains to his understanding of God's character.

Only in his *Mabāhith* (in line with its Avicennan orientation) does al-Rāzī express support for Ibn Sīnā's doctrine that creation consists in the Necessary of Existence's eternal bestowal of existence on the world.⁵⁰⁴ In his other works, al-Rāzī opposes Ibn Sīnā on the world's eternity. Al-Rāzī does not, however, deny the possibility of a necessary, eternal relationship between a cause and its effect. Rather, he openly acknowledges its conceivability but denies its applicability to the God-world relationship. That is, al-Rāzī denies that God is the kind of cause which would produce its effect eternally.

⁵⁰³ Iskenderoğlu, *Fakhr al-Dīn*, 72-73.

⁵⁰⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Mabāhith*, 2, 515-516. The work, which explains Avicennan philosophy, may not represent al-Rāzī's own opinion, in which case he nowhere supports the doctrine.

This is expressed clearly in passages in both the *Sharḥ* and the *Muḥaṣṣal*. In the *Sharḥ*, the point arises in critique of Ibn Sīnā’s proof for the world’s eternity. Al-Rāzī argues that Ibn Sīnā’s argument assumes that proving the plausibility of an eternal cause–effect relationship is the key premise in establishing that the world is eternal. He writes:

The theologians agree [with the philosophers] that the world’s being eternal does not in itself contradict its being caused, but [they hold that] the doctrine of the efficient cause–effect [relationship between God and the world] is false. But they ...argue this in relation to their doctrine that the cause (*al-mu’aththir*) of the world’s existence must be possessed of power. And as for the philosophers, they agree [with the theologians] that an eternal world cannot be the effect of an agent who acts solely by intention and will.⁵⁰⁵

Here al-Rāzī re-articulates al-Ghazālī’s insistence on the classical Ash‘arī distinction between causes (*‘illa*) and agents (*fā’il*).⁵⁰⁶ He stresses that the theologians are not ignorant of the distinction between causes in general, and causes which are called agents because their causation results from volition. As we saw al-Ghazālī explain, the theologians do, indeed, uphold the existence of eternal determining causes such as God’s attribute of knowledge as determinant of his being knowing. But these do not possess the true agency which must, according to the theological worldview, be attributed to God. Ibn Sīnā’s error, claims al-Rāzī, is to focus, in proving the world’s eternity, on establishing that causes can act on their effects eternally – a point on which there is consensus. Instead, he ought to have focused on the question of whether or not a voluntary agent can act eternally. This observation underlies al-Rāzī’s approach to the defence of creation *ex nihilo* in the *Muḥaṣṣal* and *Maṭālib*. Al-Rāzī explicitly re-centres the debate over the world’s creation. The key question, according to al-Rāzī, is not

⁵⁰⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ*, 2, 394–5; c.f. al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 119, where a very similar statement is made, al-Rāzī citing the theologians’ assent to the notion that God’s eternal state of knowing is an essential, necessary effect of his eternal attribute of knowledge; c.f. al-Juwainī, *Shāmil*, 194, where in the context of arguing for the impossibility of the non-existence of the eternal, he expresses the *kalām* view that that which is eternal cannot be the product of a powerful cause (*maqdūr*).

⁵⁰⁶ Due to their concession to forms of secondary causation, the Mu’tazilī category for non-agent causes (*asbāb*) is broader than the Ash‘arī category ‘*illa*. Al-Rāzī probably has both concepts in mind.

whether or not an eternal effect is possible, but whether or not the world is, in fact, the effect of a necessitating efficient cause.⁵⁰⁷

In Volume 3 of the *Mabāhith*, al-Rāzī readily describes the Necessary of Existence's eternal causation of the world as his 'action' (*fā'ilīyya*).⁵⁰⁸ Even in subsequent works where he defends creation by volition and power, and unlike al-Ghazālī, al-Rāzī sees the philosophers' use of the terms 'agency' and 'act' to describe eternal causation by essence as no more than a semantic issue.⁵⁰⁹ The real question, according to al-Rāzī, is not whether an eternal world produced necessarily by its cause is correctly described as the act of an agent, but whether or not the world's cause is, in fact, a necessitating cause. In an equivalent discussion in the *Muḥaṣṣal*, al-Rāzī claims that although the philosophers deem their cause of the world an 'agent', they would in fact agree with the theologians that an agent acting by choice could not produce an eternal world (*law i'taqadū fīhi kawnahu fā'ilan bi-l-ikhtiyār la-mā jawwazū kawnahu mawjad li-l-'ālam al-qadīm*).⁵¹⁰ That is to say that though the philosophers (namely, Ibn Sīnā) describe the world's necessitating cause as an 'agent', and attribute to that agent 'volition' as they understand it, they do not claim that such an agent acts by choice – and moreover they would agree that the presence of choice on the part of the cause of an eternal world is impossible.

The notion that an agent acting by choice cannot cause an eternal world is not explicitly proven by al-Rāzī, but his use of the term 'choice' (*ikhtiyār*) makes his argument clear. The presence of choice on the part of the world's cause entails the selection of one out of multiple synchronic alternatives. The cause of an eternal world does not select the point of its origination, and therefore is not possessed of the capacity to choose. According to al-Rāzī, no one would dispute this. This is a crucial axis around which all of al-Rāzī's discussions of creation revolve. It means that the real question is not (as he claims Ibn Sīnā believes) whether an eternal world can be deemed caused, but whether or not the world's cause is possessed of choice.

⁵⁰⁷ In the *Maṭālib*, too, al-Rāzī defends the notion that the doctrine that the world is eternal does not negate its being caused (though ultimately he disagrees that the world is such an effect, as we shall see) (al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 4, 231–239).

⁵⁰⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Mabāhith*, 3, 515.

⁵⁰⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 119.

⁵¹⁰ Al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 120.

Al-Rāzī argues, in both the *Muḥaṣṣal* and the *Maṭālib*, that the God-world relationship is not that of a necessitating cause and its effect. In both works, al-Rāzī presents multiple proofs for creation *ex nihilo* (as well evaluating proofs for the world's eternity). However, the ultimate argument employed by al-Rāzī in both works is that the world's cause is a voluntary, wise and omnipotent agent, and that the effect of such an agent can only be a temporally created world.⁵¹¹ Establishing the nature of the world's cause has become the central concern in al-Rāzī's discussions of creation in these works, given the agreement with Ibn Sīnā that the fact of the world's causedness is established apart from the issue of its creation *ex nihilo*.

In the *Muḥaṣṣal*, opening his discussion of creation, al-Rāzī writes: 'when we affirm a wise creator (*al-ṣāni‘ al-hakim*) we necessarily concede the temporal origination of the world'.⁵¹² In the ensuing discussion, he presents his original proof for creation *ex nihilo* from motion and rest (to be explored).⁵¹³ He then refutes philosophical proofs against creation *ex nihilo*.⁵¹⁴ His closing statement on the debate in this work responds to an imagined opponent who observes that if the world is caused essentially, it must be eternal. He responds simply 'we shall prove, God willing, that the Most High is a voluntary agent'.⁵¹⁵ The doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is taken in this work as expression of the fact that the world's cause is a freely acting Creator.

The discussion in the *Maṭālib* is more complex and the train of al-Rāzī's thought more difficult to follow. Indeed, in many respects the *Maṭālib* follows a unique programme for theological investigation. This has led İskenderoğlu to argue, from a preliminary discussion in al-Rāzī's treatment of creation, that he suspends judgement on the world's eternity and believes that 'the theory of the eternity of the world is not contrary to the main principles of religion, in which case it might have to be rejected, but an alternative theory to the theological

⁵¹¹ On al-Rāzī's expression of this point as a development of the classical *kalām* principle of particularisation, see Davidson, 'Arguments from the Concept of Particularisation', 307-8.

⁵¹² Al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 174.

⁵¹³ Al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 176-181.

⁵¹⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 184-185.

⁵¹⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 185.

formulation'.⁵¹⁶ However, al-Rāzī's view in the *Maṭālib* is, in fact, entirely consistent with the view expressed in the *Muḥaṣṣal*.

Al-Rāzī's discussions of creation must be understood in the context of certain epistemological considerations discussed in the first volume of the work. These therefore require comment. In a passage entitled 'On whether or not the human intellect can obtain absolute certitude in the science [of divinalia]', al-Rāzī presents a number of arguments establishing the limits of human reasoning in relation to the knowledge of God's essence. The outcome of the discussion is that though God's essence cannot be truly known by the intellect, it is the responsibility of the rational minded individual to grapple with the evidence and settle on the 'most likely' (*awlā*) and 'most compelling' (*akhlaq*) solution to theological questions.⁵¹⁷ In discussing creation in the *Maṭālib*, al-Rāzī will arrive at the conclusion that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is indeed the 'most likely' position and therefore the doctrine he defends.⁵¹⁸

The preliminary discussion treated by İskenderoğlu, rather than resulting in suspension of judgement over the world's eternity (as İskenderoğlu claims), is a comment on the limits of both scriptural evidence and human rationality pertaining to this question, fully in step with the epistemological observations of Volume 1.⁵¹⁹ Al-Rāzī argues that there is no clear scriptural

⁵¹⁶ İskenderoğlu, *Fakhr al-Dīn*, 72-73.

⁵¹⁷ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 1, 44-46. This is repeated in the context of the discussion of God's knowledge in relation to creation in 3, 108, where al-Rāzī comments that the very title of the work is intended to reflect the fact that the subjects investigated go beyond our human capacity to fully ascertain them. In illustrating the limits of human reason, al-Rāzī identifies several philosophical questions about which a satisfactory solution cannot be obtained. These are the nature of time and place, and the question of matter's divisibility, as well as certain geometrical questions; see Abrahamov, 'Knowability', 217-8, on the arguments presented by al-Rāzī in Volume 1 to this effect. Al-Rāzī's epistemological caution has generally gone undetected: for instance, in Heck's study of scepticism in Islamic theology, he describes al-Rāzī, 'albeit a complex thinker', as having '[secured] for the mind the role of arbiter of all truths both human and divine' (*Skepticism*, 157). However, Shihadeh discusses al-Rāzī's view, expressed in the *Maṭālib*, that a moderate degree of scepticism is appropriate in theological enquiry. Here scepticism is not an end unto itself, but a non-satisfactory situation where al-Rāzī is not convinced of his own ability to achieve certainty. He permits, however, that the most probable view be affirmed, and allows for the possibility of progress by other thinkers (Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics*, 189-203).

Thus, when al-Rāzī does not make his own opinion obvious on a given issue, this does not necessarily reflect a straightforward suspension of judgement in response to compelling evidence on either side, but a more fundamental restraint about the nature of human knowledge. This is certainly the case in the creation debate, as I will show.

⁵¹⁸ E.g. al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 327.

⁵¹⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 4, 29-33.

evidence demanding either the eternity of the world, or creation *ex nihilo*. He also focuses on what scripture does demand, namely the presence of power and volition in God's creation of the world.

Al-Rāzī treats terms used in the Qur'ān to describe God's creation of the world, showing that though none demand that he created *ex nihilo*, all demand that he created by volition and power. For example, he discusses Q 36:83 'Surely His Command, when He wills a thing, is only to say to it: Be! and it is'. He argues that the imperative 'be' (*kun*) signals the exercise of power and will, but that this alone does not demand the conclusion (*al-maṭlūb*) drawn by the theologians, namely the creation of the world *ex nihilo*. Rather, it implies that God formed (*kawwana*) the world by power, and that 'whatever he willed', he formed.⁵²⁰ According to al-Rāzī, none of the scriptural expressions he discusses necessarily contradict the eternity of matter.⁵²¹

The outcome of this passage is two-fold: 1) al-Rāzī establishes that scriptural evidence is not sufficient in proving the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* – indeed, that the theologian who uses scripture in support of creation *ex nihilo* is really begging the question.⁵²² He also establishes 2) that scripture does demand the creation of the world through the exercise of power and volition.⁵²³ This passage is therefore primarily a comment on the limits of scripture in the creation debate, and not on the validity of either doctrine. Al-Rāzī concludes by stating that the absence of a clear scriptural statement on the question of the world's eternity proves that 'the question is... the very greatest difficulty', expressing hesitation over man's ability to draw a reliable conclusion about the topic.⁵²⁴ Despite this note of tentativeness, al-Rāzī proceeds to a

⁵²⁰ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 4, 30-31.

⁵²¹ Al-Ghazālī himself stresses that the Qur'ān demands the existence of a Creator (*sāni'*, *fā'il*) on account of the evidence of design in the world, and does not claim that Scripture implies creation *ex nihilo* (Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, 1, 96; see Goodman, 'Ghazālī's Arguments', 69).

⁵²² For instance, he criticises a hypothetical theologian who would claim on the basis of the Qur'ānic expression '*kun fa-yakūn*' that God created *ex nihilo*, asking rhetorically, 'is this not the very site of contention' (*hal al-niza'* *ilā fihi*)? (*Maṭālib*, 4, 32). His argument here is that use of the verbal root *k-w-n* does not itself entail either the origination in time of the thing which comes to be, nor its eternity, but rather, its originatedness *per se*, in the sense that it depends on something external to itself.

⁵²³ For instance, in interpreting Q6:1, 'Praise be to God who created the heavens and the earth', al-Rāzī argues that the meaning of 'create' (*khalqa*) is 'to enact by power' (*al-taqdīr*) (*Maṭālib*, 4, 29).

⁵²⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 4, 33.

fully-fledged rational enquiry into the question. His comments on the limitations of scriptural evidence, and on the difficulty of this question, should not be taken to permit either view. Rather, just as he expresses the difficulty of obtaining knowledge of God's essence before proceeding to an in depth philosophical-theological investigation into that very topic, whose objective is to establish the most convincing doctrine attainable to the human intellect, so too he proceeds to apply rational enquiry to the question of the world's creation. This is the course pursued in the remainder of al-Rāzī's discussion.

Al-Rāzī supports the doctrine that the world's cause is possessed of volition and power, using both scriptural evidence and evidence 'taken from the principles of the philosophers'.⁵²⁵ A key question to be addressed, then, is whether or not the creation of the world by power and volition entails its creation *ex nihilo*. It is my view (*contra İskenderoğlu*'s) that in the *Maṭālib* as much as in other earlier works, al-Rāzī upholds the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, in large part because he believes that creation by volition does entail creation *ex nihilo*.⁵²⁶ Although al-Rāzī comprehensively supplies proofs for both the doctrine of the world's eternity and its creation *ex nihilo*, his most conclusive statements (those which receive no subsequent counter-critique) support the latter doctrine. Most significantly, he is very clear on his belief that the creation of the world by a voluntary agent does demand a temporal beginning of that effect.⁵²⁷

Most explicitly, al-Rāzī closes a teleological proof for God's volition and power with the following statement:

⁵²⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 4, 325. The first section of the third volume of the *Maṭālib* (7-100) relates to the definition of power. Al-Rāzī holds that the effect of an agent consists in the power to act and the presence of motivation (*al-dā'i*) based on the knowledge that some benefit or avoidance of harm will result (especially 7-12 and 37-43). In Volume 4, al-Rāzī extensively presents a variety of teleological, scriptural and other proofs which establish God's identity as voluntary, omnipotent creator (325-360).

⁵²⁶ E.g. al-Rāzī, *Muhaṣṣal*, 174 and 185.

⁵²⁷ See for instance, al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 4, 270-271 and 273-4, referring to 231-239. Here, as part of his presentation of proofs for an eternal world, he presents fourteen arguments to the effect that an eternal effect is possible, but emphasises that these arguments only apply in the case of necessary causation, and not in the case of the voluntary agent (232). He claims that the philosophers agree that necessitating causes, but not voluntary agents, may produce eternal effects. In responding to a similar objection later in the discussion, al-Rāzī simply states 'it is clear that every act of a voluntary agent is temporally originated' (*Maṭālib*, 4, 304-305).

If we contemplate the heavens and the planets, the states of the four elements, the celestial signs, minerals, plants and animals – but most especially mankind, we discover grand organisation, and dazzling proofs... It is clear that these considerations are most convincing (*awlā*) as proof of the existence of a voluntary agent, who is wise and merciful. And when a voluntary agent is proven, the temporal origination of the world is also proven by necessity.⁵²⁸

In al-Rāzī's thought more than in the thought of any previous theologian, the creation debate is re-orientated around a defence of God's attributes of volition and power. Belief in creation *ex nihilo* is somewhat secondary, a function of the doctrine that God is a voluntary creator.⁵²⁹ The debate with the philosophers is no longer primarily over whether or not an eternal world can exist (indeed al-Rāzī stresses its hypothetical possibility), but over whether or not the world's cause is a voluntary, omnipotent agent. The conclusion is that it is, and thus that the world has a beginning. Thus, the identification of the divinity which is at the heart of classical Ash'arism and of *kalām* more broadly is preserved through this view of the origins of the world.

A brief consideration of the *Arba'in* brings this point into greater relief. We saw in Chapter 3 that al-Rāzī holds, in that work, that possible existents are all temporally originated, and the implication that temporal originatedness is in fact a condition of the effect's reliance on its cause. In that work, the place of God's exercise of volition in creation is not emphasised.⁵³⁰ The defence of creation *ex nihilo* there centres around the world's need for a cause *per se*, and not around the voluntary and omnipotent nature of that cause. It is only in those works where al-Rāzī fully abandons the classical *kalām* association between causedness and temporal

⁵²⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 4, 327. Al-Rāzī's teleological proofs for the doctrine that the world's cause is a voluntary, omnipotent agent acting by intention and design span a large part of this volume, covering extensive evidence of design in the characteristics and benefits of the sun, the moon, the planets, minerals, plants, animals and humans (al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 4, 325-252). These discussions serve to establish that the world's cause acts by design and power. Ultimately, in al-Rāzī's view, it is this, and not the impossibility of an eternal effect, which proves that the world is created *ex nihilo*. Note the use of the term '*awlā*' in this passage. Here al-Rāzī expresses his own view, but his restraint is evident in that he holds that this is the 'most likely' position, which accords with view on the limits of intellectual enquiry.

⁵²⁹ This is, of course, comparable to al-Shahrastānī's take on the debate.

⁵³⁰ Al-Rāzī, *Arba'in*, 1, 52-53.

origination that the defence of creation *ex nihilo* becomes a defence of God's volition, design and power. This is because the other major function fulfilled by the doctrine among classical Ash'arī's, namely in establishing the existence of a cause for the world, is no longer relevant to al-Rāzī's defence of the temporal origination of the world.

2. The Doctrine of Creation *Ex Nihilo* in al-Āmidī's Theology

I argued in Chapter 2 for the indispensability of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* for classical Ash'arīs in proofs for both the existence of God, and for their specific vision of what it means for God to be voluntary and possessed of power. I have just explained that among certain post-classical Ash'arīs, the former of the classical theological functions of the doctrine came to be satisfied through Ibn Sīnā's distinction between possible and necessary existence, meaning that the creation debate now hinged on important differences regarding the nature of the world's creator.

I turn at last to al-Āmidī's own doctrine of creation, and focus initially on its theological significance within his works of *kalām*. I argue that al-Āmidī, like al-Shahrastānī and al-Rāzī, does not require the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* for his defence of God's existence. This results from his acceptance of one of Ibn Sīnā's most compelling metaphysical propositions, namely the idea that causedness is a function of the inherent possibility of the existence of beings other than God (demonstrated in Chapter 3). I will also demonstrate that al-Āmidī, following al-Shahrastānī's precedent, does not depend on creation *ex nihilo* for his defence of the Ash'arī conception of the attributes of the world's cause either.

2.i. Structure

The structure of al-Āmidī's works of *kalām* is a clear indication of the place of the defence of creation *ex nihilo* in relation to other doctrines. As mentioned in Chapter 4, *Abkār al-afkār* is primarily structured around the basic dichotomy of the necessary and possible of existence. After epistemological preliminaries, al-Āmidī categorises the objects of knowledge (*ma'lūmāt*), and proceeds to his treatment of the existent (*al-mawjūd*), which occupies the majority of the

first three volumes. God's existence and his attributes (Volume 1) and his unicity, action and the nature of his causation of events in the world (Volume 2) are discussed under the category 'the necessary of existence'. Discussion of the world, including its categorisation into substance and accident, the definition and nature of substance, accident and body, and its origination *ex nihilo*, are treated in Volume 3 under the heading 'the existent which is possible of existence (*al-mawjūd al-mumkin al-wujūd*)'.

This structure is, to my knowledge, unique to the *Abkār*. It represents an original attempt to maintain the key components of the Ash'arī procedure for theological discussion, and at once to incorporate the most theologically compelling of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysical distinctions. The procedure of commencing with a discussion of knowledge ('ilm) and rational speculation (*nazar*), then continuing to elucidate the categories of objects of knowledge, is typical of classical Ash'arī theological compendia. Al-Bāqillānī's *Tamhīd*, al-Juwaynī's *Shāmil*, and al-Anṣārī's *Ghunyā* all follow this schema.⁵³¹ Al-Āmidī's use of the divisions of the objects of knowledge to frame the greater part of his theological *summa* reflects identification with the broad parameters for rational speculation established within the classical Ash'arī tradition.⁵³²

Yet within the category 'the existent', the basic dichotomy is not between eternal and temporally originated existents, as is consistently the case in the works of the theologians just mentioned.⁵³³ Rather, it is that between the necessary and possible of existence. God's existence is proven as part of the investigation of the necessary of existence. The world's origination is established in discussion of the possible of existence. This means that these two topics, classically intertwined and inseparable, are cleft apart, isolated from one another within the work by two volumes. It is clear how this represents a break with the theological procedure of generations of Ash'arīs set out in Chapter 2.

⁵³¹ Al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, 6–16; al-Juwaynī, *Shāmil*, 97–139; al-Anṣārī, *Ghunyā*, 1, 221–287.

⁵³² Identification with the school and its methods is also firmly established in that within the opening four pages of his treatment of the definition of knowledge, al-Ash'arī, al-Bāqillānī, Ibn Fūrak and al-Isfara'īnī are all mentioned by name (*Abkār*, 1, 73–5).

⁵³³ Al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd*, 16; al-Juwaynī, *Shāmil*, 139; al-Anṣārī, *Ghunyā*, 1, 287. See also al-Ghazālī, *Mustaṣfā*, 1, 5.

The structure of *Ghāyat al-Marām* is directly comparable to the *Abkār* with respect to the places of the two doctrines of God's existence and creation *ex nihilo*. The first subject treated in the work, without even the epistemological preliminaries of the *Abkār*, is the proof for God's existence. This is followed by proofs for each of his attributes and for his unicity, proofs against God being substance, body, or existing in place or time, and the discussion of God's acts, including the defence of Ash'arī occasionalism. Only after all this does the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* receive its defence. Again, the two topics are cleft from one another in accordance with the truncated theological significance of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in al-Āmidī's thought. It is also immediately noteworthy from the topics present within *Ghāyat al-Marām* that unlike in the *Abkār*, physical theoretical topics are not treated at all. The significance of this for al-Āmidī's defence of his understanding of creation will be discussed later in the chapter.

2.ii. The Proof for God's Existence

I will now demonstrate that al-Āmidī does not premise his proof for God's existence on the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Furthermore, al-Āmidī's analysis of the relationship between the necessary and possible of existence within his proof for God is the context for his establishment of God's attributes of volition and power.

Al-Āmidī's proof for God is summarisable as follows:

1. Existents in the world are possible in themselves;
2. The possible of existence require a preponderator (*murajjih*) in order to exist;
3. A series of possible existents each of which is caused by a further possible existent regressing infinitely is impossible;
4. Therefore, the world of possible existents must originate in an existent which is necessary in itself.⁵³⁴

⁵³⁴ *Abkār*, 1, 227-8 (the proof); an extensive discussion of one of its premises, namely, the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes (229-235); objections from al-Āmidī's imagined opponents; and responses (235-251). The *Ghāya* version of the proof appears on pages 9-23.

Al-Āmidī's two works of theology do not differ in regard to this procedure. As is clear from this summary, the essential possibility of existents has supplanted the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* as the foundation of the proof for God. This accords with my finding from Chapter 3 that al-Āmidī holds the determinant of causedness to be essential possibility. Al-Āmidī's proof for the existence of God is premised on the understanding of the nature of causedness which he has inherited from Ibn Sīnā. There is no reference, within the establishment of the world's dependence on a cause, to its temporal finitude.

We saw that al-Ghāzālī's *Tahāfut* diatribe against the eternalists stems in part from his conviction that God's characteristic of voluntary agency, so central to the Ash'arī vision of the Creator, is irrevocably premised on the temporal finitude of the world. I have also argued that al-Rāzī holds that the world is created *ex nihilo* because he believes this to be the only way in which a voluntary, omnipotent agent could have caused the world's existence. It emerges, within al-Āmidī's defence of his proof for God, that his analysis of the relationship between the necessary and possible of existence provides him with sufficient evidence of God's voluntary agency. Typically of his approach in the *Abkār*, al-Āmidī uses the dialectical method of classical *kalām* to unravel the implications of his conviction that the possible of existence relies on its cause, and in particular, to differentiate his view from competing views. In defence of the second premise of his proof for God (that the possible of existence require a preponderator), al-Āmidī's understanding that this preponderator is a voluntary particularising agent is made plain.

Al-Āmidī has a hypothetical opponent argue that the possible of existence does not rely on a cause for its existence, on the basis that this would entail that it also relies on a cause for its non-existence.⁵³⁵ This is because neither existence nor non-existence is a more likely state for the possible. However, argues the opponent, the possible essence cannot rely on a cause in its non-existence for three reasons. Firstly, because non-existence cannot be said to be an effect.

⁵³⁵ This is precisely the procedure of al-Juwainī in his own defence of God's existence. The crucial difference is that for al-Juwainī, the discussion centres around the temporally originated existent's need for a cause, and not that of the possible existent *per se* (*Shāmil*, 268-272).

Rather, causes can only produce existent effects. The second reason is presented as a disjunction. Either the cause of the non-existence of the possible is a) identical with the cause of its existence, or b) a separate cause. It is impossible for the cause of the existence and non-existence of the possible to be the same. This is because it is impossible that a cause which necessitates the non-existence of an essence should also necessitate its contrary, namely, the existence of the same essence. Also, because neither non-existence nor existence is more probable for the possible essence, and therefore there would be nothing to determine that a necessitating cause bestow existence at one time on the possible essence, and non-existence at another. The assumption here is that the cause of the possible of existence acts on its effect by necessity, and is therefore unable to particularise one of two equally likely alternatives, as al-Āmidī will later discuss. Finally, if the cause of the existence of the possible is other than the cause of its non-existence, neither outcome will be realised, since neither cause has greater priority of action than the other in relation to the possible of existence.⁵³⁶ Again, this assumes that the causes in question are necessary causes, but also, more problematically, that all necessitating causes are totally undifferentiated from one another in relation to the potential effects of their power.

Another reason, according to al-Āmidī's hypothetical opponent, that it is impossible for the possible of existence to rely on a cause, is that such a cause can neither act on its effect eternally, nor after not having acted on it. This is because the eternal action of the cause on its effect would entail the eternal existence of the possible essence. This would exclude the temporal origination of possible existents. Yet some possible existents do not exist eternally. However, it is impossible that the necessary cause comes to act on its effect after not having acted on it. This is because transformation of the cause from its state of non-action on its effect to its state of acting on its effect itself requires a cause. This entails an infinite regress of causes, which al-Āmidī has earlier disproven.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁶ *Abkār*, 1, 235-236.

⁵³⁷ *Abkār*, 1, 236. This argument is problematic. In Ibn Sīnā's understanding of efficient causation, God is eternally the ultimate metaphysical efficient cause of all possible existents (via the proximate efficient cause, namely, the Agent Intellect), but this does not entail the existence in eternity of all possible existents. This is because possible existents

Al-Āmidī's responds by agreeing that it is impossible for the possible of existence to be produced by its causes by necessity, and arguing instead for the presence of volition and power in causal processes.⁵³⁸ Firstly, he agrees with his opponent that the possible requires a cause for both its existence and its non-existence (if it were otherwise, then the postulated possible would, in fact, be either necessary, or impossible by virtue of itself). In response to the opponent's first objection, namely that pure non-existence cannot be the effect of a cause, al-Āmidī argues that the determinant ('illa) of non-existence is not said to be a 'cause' with the meaning that it is an entity (*shay'*), but in the sense that without the cause, the effect would exist. On this understanding, the determinant of the non-existence of the possible is the absence of the cause of its existence. This does not entail the fallacy of an existent producing a non-existent.

More significantly for our interests, al-Āmidī now argues that the cause of both the existence and the non-existence of the possible is one and the same. According to him, this is only impossible in the cause of necessary causation by essence. This is because the non-existence of the possible whose existence proceeds from the essence of its cause would entail the absolute non-existence of that cause. However, on the assumption that the possible is caused by the volition and power of its cause, the non-existence of that possible is only entailed by the 'absence of the application (*ta'alluq*) of the power to bring [the possible] into existence (*al-qudra bi-ijādihī*) and of the will to particularise its [existence] at that point (*al-irāda bi-takhṣīšihī fī dhālik al-waqt*)'.⁵³⁹ On this understanding, it is correct to say that the non-existence of each possibility

also have immediate efficient causes, either natural or voluntary. Such causes produce their effects when all impediments are removed. There are multiple intermediary causal links in the chain, so to speak, between God and the possible existents in existence today. So God's eternal existence as ultimate efficient cause of the universe only necessitates the eternity of the universe as a whole, and not of all individual possible existents. See Ibn Sīnā, *Ilāhiyyāt*, VIII.1, and for explanation of Ibn Sīnā's understanding of the hierarchy of efficient causation, Richardson, 'Avicenna's Conception', 230-231.

⁵³⁸ *Abkār*, 1, 243-4.

⁵³⁹ *Abkār*, 1, 244; c.f *Ghāya*, 21.

which subsequently comes into existence is dependent on an eternal power and eternal volition which together differentiate and enact its existence at the appropriate moment.⁵⁴⁰

This facilitates al-Āmidī's response to the second objection, regarding the impossibility of either the pre-eternity or time-boundedness of the causation of the effect. The eternity of the power and volition to cause the possible do not entail the eternity of their object, since power is that which particularises existence over non-existence, not that which entails existence by necessity. So it is correct that the effects of the power and will of the cause are time-bounded despite the pre-eternity of those attributes.⁵⁴¹

In these discussions, al-Āmidī can be seen to develop the classical Ash'arī distinction between agent and determinant causes in a unique response to Ibn Sīnā's conception of efficient causality. We saw earlier the background to this in the classical Ash'arī conception of volition as the attribute by which an agent particularises one possibility over another. Specifically, al-Bāqillānī stresses that the attribute of volition is not a determinant cause ('illa) such that it must temporally concur with its effect.⁵⁴² Al-Ghazālī takes this up as a crucial aspect of his defence of creation *ex nihilo* in the *Tahāfut*, stressing that volition is the capacity to choose between like alternatives. Al-Āmidī supports the doctrine of his school, but accounts for the action of volition in terms which level the debate between the theologians and philosophers by incorporating a notion of necessary causation. This is to say that he explains the delayed effect of volition by introducing a determinant cause into the process of a volitional act. This is the application, or connection (*ta'lluq*) of the agent's volition to a particular event. It is this application, and not the attribute of volition, which is the determinant cause of the origination of its object. On this understanding, the presence of volition in pre-eternity alongside the non-

⁵⁴⁰ Classical Ash'aris articulated this with reference to God's volition specifying the delayed creation of the world ('alā l-tarākhī), such that despite the eternity of God's volition, its effect is temporally instantiated; e.g. al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhid*, 36.

⁵⁴¹ *Abkār*, 1, 243.

⁵⁴² See fn 487 above.

existence of its effect is explained as the result of the absence of the determinant cause of the origination of the effect, namely, the application of the volition to its object.⁵⁴³

Al-Āmidī's explanation of agency is, to my knowledge, unique to him. It represents his full endorsement of his school's insistence that it is part of the definition of volition that it can particularise one possibility over its equivalent. However, it is also heavily influenced by Ibn Sīnā's conception of causality. For classical theologians, agent causes have little in common with determinant causes, and there is no need to posit any kind of necessity in the causal relation between the world's cause and its origination. The voluntary agent occupies a category of its own. Furthermore, the voluntary cause is unique in being responsible for the origination, and not the continued existence, of its effect. For al-Āmidī, the world's origination must have a determinant cause. To this extent, he is influenced by Ibn Sīnā's notion that the non-existence of an effect is only explicable as the result of the absence of a determinant for its existence, and its ongoing existence, as the result of the presence of the determinant. Yet the agency of God as understood among classical Ash'arīs is fully preserved by al-Āmidī in that the world is the necessary effect not of God's essence, but of the application of his volition and power to its origination at a particular moment which he, according to his absolute freedom of action, selects above all others.⁵⁴⁴

We have seen that another salient feature of al-Āmidī's discussion is the total absence of reference to the origination of the whole world from nothing in support of the free and voluntary nature of its cause. Al-Āmidī has already posited the world's need for a cause, due not to its temporal origination, but its essential possibility. He argues for the voluntary nature of that cause not on the basis of creation *ex nihilo*, but rather, by positing that the only valid configuration for the relationship between the necessary and possible of existence is one in

⁵⁴³ See Frank, 'Some Reflections', 252, on the difficulty of the change of state in God which seems to be implied by the origination of new objects of his power. He shows that the Mu'tazilī 'Abd al-Jabbār explained this with reference to a change of state in the object of God's power.

⁵⁴⁴ This whole argument, repeated in *Ghāyat al-Marām*, also accommodates the classical occasionalist position of al-Āmidī's school, since it allows for the claim that God's eternal attributes of will and power are associated with all temporal effects (*Ghāya*, 9–23, especially 20–22). I have shown elsewhere that al-Āmidī fully endorses classical Ash'ari occasionalism.

which the necessary of existence possesses volition. To this extent, his approach is shared with al-Shahrastānī, whom we saw argues for the world's creation by a voluntary cause by refuting the possibility of its creation by the essence of its cause. In al-Āmidī's case, however, this also facilitates his doctrine that the world was created from non-existence, since the attributes are seen to be characterised by their freedom to act on their effects after not having acted on them.⁵⁴⁵ It is not the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, then, but the analysis of the relationship between the possible and necessary of existence, which both provides al-Āmidī with his proof for the Creator God of classical Ash'arism, and also permits for his doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. The transformed theological significance of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is clear, as is the respective importance of the notion that the world relies on a cause on account of its possibility.⁵⁴⁶

I have demonstrated so far that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* does not serve al-Āmidī's defence of God's existence, nor of his volition and power. I turn in what follows to his discussion of the doctrine itself. The discussion of creation in the *Abkār* is arranged as follows: definitions of the terms 'world', 'eternal', and 'originated' (297-309); presentation of six contemporary proofs for creation *ex nihilo* which al-Āmidī deems undemonstrative and refutes (309-335); presentation of the proof from accidents for creation *ex nihilo* (335-336); objections to the proof from accidents followed by fourteen proofs for the world's eternity (337-349); responses to these objections and refutations of the proofs for eternity (349-363). In *Ghāyat al-Marām*, al-Āmidī structures his discussion into two main parts. The first lists and critiques proofs proffered by theologians past and contemporary against the eternity of the world (247-

⁵⁴⁵ We saw that for al-Shahrastānī, the concept of 'creation from nothing' is reinterpreted as referring to the world's ontological inferiority to its cause. Al-Āmidī's discussion does not reflect al-Shahrastānī's on this point.

⁵⁴⁶ In a review of the *Abkār*, Griffel argues that al-Āmidī's reconciliation of *falsafa* and *kalām* 'leans more towards *falsafa* than Ash'arism, a fact evidenced... by his insistence that God's "will" is part of his essence' (Frank, 'Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī', 46). However, al-Āmidī's stridently and consistently defends God's attribute of will as understood in classical Ash'arism in this work. The error is a misreading of al-Āmidī's statement that God 'wills with a will inhering in (*irāda qā'imā bi*) his essence'; this is the standard classical Ash'arī position, the inherence of God's entitative attribute of will in his essence not entailing the identification of God's will with his essence. Al-Āmidī immediately proceeds to describe God's will as 'pre-eternal, perpetual, existent and singular (*qadīma, azaliyya, wujūdiyya, wahīda*)', in which there is no multiplicity, [and which is] connected with all possibilities, infinite in respect to itself, and not its objects' (*Abkār*, 1, 298). This is not a *falsafī* perspective.

257). The second does the same for proofs for temporal creation (258-263). Following this, al-Āmidī presents a proof which he claims achieves both refutation of the world's eternity and establishment of its temporal finitude simultaneously (263-4), before dealing with objections from the eternalists (265-274).

My aim in what follows is not to exhaustively replicate al-Āmidī's discussions. Rather, the focus is thematic. I represent the major thrust of al-Āmidī's doctrine of creation by analysing, first, the role of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics therein, and secondly, the place of Ash'arī physical theory.

3. Avicennan Metaphysics in al-Āmidī's discussion of Creation: Critiquing al-Rāzī's Proof from Possibility

Against the background of Chapter 3, I first consider the role of Ibn Sīnā's ontology in al-Āmidī's discussions of creation. As we saw in that chapter, al-Āmidī does not devote separate space in his works of theology to the discussion of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics. He generally prefers to pursue the classical *kalām* procedure for theological investigation. In the case of his discussions of creation, this means that aspects of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics arise within the context of al-Āmidī's critique of proofs for creation *ex nihilo* which take impetus from Ibn Sīnā's ontology. In particular, al-Āmidī critiques a proof from possibility developed by al-Rāzī for his defence of creation *ex nihilo*. In this section, I therefore consider al-Āmidī's treatment of this proof.

My analysis focuses on two main questions. Firstly, I examine how al-Āmidī here receives Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of efficient causation. Secondly, I interrogate his attitude towards the use of Avicennan metaphysics as a framework for the defence of creation *ex nihilo*. We have already seen that al-Āmidī in fact concurs with many tenets of Ibn Sīnā's notion of efficient causality. In analysis of this proof it emerges that as a result of his adoption of aspects of Ibn Sīnā's doctrine, al-Āmidī allows for the hypothetical possibility that God could have created an eternal world through the exercise of his volition – a belief that is foreign to classical Ash'arism and which we shall see is seized upon by later commentators as the hallmark of al-Āmidī's doctrine of creation. I will argue, however, that al-Āmidī's concession to the possibility of an eternally

willed world must be understood in the context of his opposition to al-Rāzī. Finally, and crucially, we shall see that al-Āmidī is more generally opposed to al-Shahrastānī's and especially al-Rāzī's dynamic integration of *falsafa* with *kalām*, and specifically, to their applications of Ibn Sīnā's notion of possible existence in defence of the classical *kalām* doctrine of creation.

The Proof from Possibility for Creation Ex Nihilo

The proof in question appears within al-Āmidī's list of arguments for creation *ex nihilo* which he deems undemonstrative (the first in the *Abkār* and the fourth in the *Ghāya*). In *Ghāyat al-Marām*, al-Āmidī criticises those who use this proof for having 'abandoned [classical proofs] which have no value in favour of [new proofs] which have no benefit'.⁵⁴⁷ I first outline the proof as it appears in the *Abkār*. Secondly, I demonstrate how al-Āmidī uses the proof as a vehicle to express his opinion on a number of metaphysical postulates. Finally, I consider the importance of his opposition to al-Rāzī for al-Āmidī's reception of Avicennan metaphysics in the discussion of creation.

The proof is premised on the world's essential possibility. Different versions of the proof appear in al-Shahrastānī's *Nihāyat al-aqdām* and al-Rāzī's *Nihāyat al-‘uqūl* and *Kitāb al-arba‘īn*. Al-Āmidī amalgamates these versions.

Minor premise: The world is possible of existence by virtue of itself

Sub-proof 1: The world's particulars ('ayyān) are changeable; that which is changeable is possible of existence by virtue of itself (al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 15)

Sub-proof 2: The world is a composite of parts. That which is composed of parts cannot be necessary of existence by virtue of itself (al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 15; al-Rāzī, *Nihāya*, 1, 344-5 and 350-1; *Arba‘īn*, 1, 52)

⁵⁴⁷ *Ghāya*, 252.

Sub-proof 3: The world's existence is additional to its essence; this characterises the possible of existence (al-Rāzī, *Nihāya*, 1, 345-350)

Major premise: That which is possible of existence by virtue of itself is created by a voluntary agent, and is therefore temporally originated

The possible existent cannot be produced by the essence and existence of its cause:

- a) Because existence is univocal in all existents. Existence is said to produce the effect, but is identical in both the posited cause and its posited effect. Therefore the posited cause has no greater claim to cause the posited effect than the inverse, since it has no attributes or qualities which are distinct from the existence of the posited effect (al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 15-16)⁵⁴⁸
- b) Because all possibilities are homogenous, and an essential cause cannot differentiate between likes (al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 16)
- c) Because if we postulate two essences with no relation nor likeness between them, one cannot have proceeded from the other. Since the Necessary of Existence is totally unlike all other existents, it is impossible that anything could have proceeded directly from his essence (al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 16)

Therefore, the world must be originated by an agent possessed of volition and power (al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 17; al-Rāzī, *Nihāya*, 1, 352-353. For al-Shahrastānī, the proof ends here).⁵⁴⁹

That which creates by volition and power can only act on its effect at the point of its origination (al-Rāzī, *Nihāya*, 1, 353; *Arba'īn*, 1, 52-53)

⁵⁴⁸ Ibn Sīnā in fact anticipates this objection to his notion of causation by essence in *Ilāhiyyāt*, IV.2; see Marmura, 'Avicenna on Causal Priority', 72, on his response.

⁵⁴⁹ As demonstrated earlier in the chapter, al-Shahrastānī has a unique conception of creation *ex nihilo*. The goal of his version of this proof is therefore only to establish the presence of volition and power in God's creation. Al-Āmidī obscures this fact.

Conclusion: The world is temporally originated.⁵⁵⁰

Al-Āmidī's presentation of this proof is best understood in terms of his dialecticism. Overall, the form of the proof, including the number and ordering of its sub-proofs, closely concurs with al-Shahrastānī's version. At points, the wording is identical. And yet, as I showed earlier in this chapter, al-Shahrastānī's is not a proof for the temporal origination of the world, but for its creation by a voluntary agent; in closing his proof, al-Shahrastānī explicitly states: 'existentialiation by choice (*al-ijād al-ikhtiyārī*) has been established, and this is what we wanted to show'.⁵⁵¹ It is al-Rāzī who uses this proof to establish (in *Nihāyat al-‘Uqūl*) the temporal origination of the physical bodies (*ajsām*) of the world, and (in his *Arba‘īn*), the temporal origination of all existents besides God. Furthermore, adjustments al-Āmidī makes to Shahrastānī's proof in the form of an additional sub-proof, and the final argument that that which is originated by volitional is temporally originated, reflect al-Rāzī's proof. It is typical of al-Āmidī in the *Abkār* to misrepresent the arguments of his intellectual opponents, as he has here, forcing al-Rāzī's version of the proof into the mold of al-Shahrastānī's, despite the fact that the latter never intended to prove the world's temporal origination in this manner. This may account for al-Āmidī's general failure to name his opponents.

Another aspect of al-Āmidī's dialecticism is that he raises objections which could be levelled at his own later defence of creation *ex nihilo* (in the *Abkār*) via the proof from accidents. In discussion of the first sub-proof in support of the minor premise, which appears in al-Shahrastānī's version but in neither of al-Rāzī's, al-Āmidī claims that the opponent has failed to prove that the world is only possible of existence because he has not dealt with the problematic question of immaterial existents. Al-Shahrastānī has argued that since the world is manifestly changeable, it cannot be necessary of existence, since that which exists necessarily cannot change. Al-Āmidī argues that this applies only to things 'visible to the eye', but that there may be a class of existents other than God which is 'unseen, as the opponents (*al-khuṣūm*) claim', and

⁵⁵⁰ *Abkār*, 3, 309.

⁵⁵¹ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 17 and see page 193 above.

whose characteristics are therefore unknown.⁵⁵² By amalgamating the arguments of al-Shahrastānī and al-Rāzī, al-Āmidī muddies the waters and implies weaknesses in al-Rāzī's argument which are not present, since al-Rāzī does not argue for the world's essential possibility on the basis of its changeability.

The proof is also a vehicle by which al-Āmidī expresses a number of beliefs concerning tenets of Avicennan metaphysics. Al-Āmidī of course agrees that the world is only possible by virtue of its own essence, and that the possible of existence can only be created by the necessary of existence via attributes of volition and power. He objects, however, to several metaphysical postulates underlying the proof, among which, al-Rāzī's insistence that a world created by a voluntary agent cannot be eternal. I will delineate four key metaphysical beliefs expressed by al-Āmidī in the course of his critique.

Existence and Essence are Identical

The third sub-proof in support of the world's possible existence (the first premise) is based on the ontological principle that in the possible of existence, existence is additional to essence. It is argued that the world's existence is additional to its essence. This sub-proof alone does not appear in al-Shahrastānī's version of the proof, but only in al-Rāzī's, where it is defended at length. As shown in Chapter 3, the notion that existence is additional to the essences of things is al-Rāzī's reading of Ibn Sīnā's notion of possible existence, and an integral part of his own metaphysics. Al-Rāzī holds that existence is additional to essence in all existents, including God.⁵⁵³

Al-Āmidī takes the opportunity of this proof to oppose this notion as he did in discussion of existence in the first volume of the *Abkār*, presenting his belief that existence and essence are one in all existents as a re-articulation of the classical Ash'arī belief that the 'thing' (*shay'*) and

⁵⁵² *Abkār*, 3, 312.

⁵⁵³ Al-Rāzī's commentary on the *Ishārāt* is a focus for his articulation of his understanding of existence. See especially *Sharḥ*, 2, 353-362, commenting on Ibn Sīnā, *Ishārāt*, IV.17. At the background to al-Āmidī's opposition to al-Rāzī here in the *Abkār* is his reception of al-Rāzī's position on this subject in his *Kashf*, where he refutes each of al-Rāzī's arguments in turn. See *Kashf*, 2, 759-762.

the existent (*al-mawjūd*) are co-extensive.⁵⁵⁴ Al-Āmidī implies here that his opponent has departed from Ash‘arī doctrine; this will become more explicit later in the discussion. Al-Āmidī’s own belief that the world’s existence is only possible is not founded on concession to essence/existence dualism, and it is to this that he objects.

The Possible of Existence Derives Existence and Necessity from its Cause

In *Ghāyat al-marām*, al-Āmidī presents and critiques a sub-proof belonging to al-Shahrastānī which is not treated in the *Abkār*. The proof is for the belief that the necessary of existence cannot cause the possible of existence by its essence (key to the second premise), and entails an important critique of Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of efficient causation. Al-Āmidī’s response reflects his endorsement of Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of efficient causality against al-Shahrastānī.

Al-Shahrastānī argues, against Ibn Sīnā, that the world derives its existence, but not its necessity, from its cause. He defends this belief as follows: for the possible of existence, existence and non-existence are equally likely (*jā’iz al-wujūd wa-jā’iz al-‘adam*). The essence of the possible therefore requires a preponderator of its existence. It is contradictory, however, to say that for the possible of existence, necessity and possibility are equally likely (*jā’iz al-wujūb wa-jā’iz al-imtinā’*), and that the possible existent requires a preponderator of its necessity. This is because possibility is essential to the possible existent, whilst the necessity bestowed upon it when it comes to exist is accidental to its existence. According to al-Shahrastānī, necessitation and the bestowal of existence must be strictly distinguished, and the latter identified as the reason for the world’s reliance on the Necessary of Existence. If we understand that the world relies on its cause for its existence alone, then the basis of Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine of necessary causation by essence is undermined. This is because the doctrine relies upon the notion that though cause and effect exist simultaneously, one is known to be the cause of the other on account of the fact that the effect acquires necessity through its cause. On this understanding, the process of necessitation is requisite (and not merely accidental) to the bestowal of existence. If the notion of necessitation is discarded here, it is unclear how the effect relies on

⁵⁵⁴ *Abkār*, 3, 313; see 1, 220 for his first statement of his position on the equivocality of existence.

its essential cause despite their co-existence. This objection to Ibn Sīnā occurs both in the *Nihāya*, and in al-Shahrastānī's focussed refutation of Avicennan metaphysics, *Kitāb al-Muṣāra'a*.⁵⁵⁵

Al-Āmidī sharply criticises al-Shahrastānī. He writes that his predecessor's argument 'shows a failure to grasp the meaning of the opponent when he describes the world as 'necessary of existence through the Necessary of Existence''.⁵⁵⁶ He argues that the phrase 'necessary of existence' is used equivocally. It can refer to a) the necessity belonging to an existent by virtue of its essence (in the case of God alone), b) the necessity possessed by an existent which is conditional upon something external to its essence (*mashrūt bi-amr khārij 'an al-dhāt*), including i) the necessity which is conditional upon existence itself (*mashrūt bi-nafs al-wujūd*) (as intended when we say that 'Zayd's existence is necessary when he exists) and ii) the necessity which is conditional upon the presence of a cause of existence (*mashrūt bimā huwa muta'alliq 'illat al-wujūd*) (as intended when we say that 'the effect necessarily exists when its cause is present'). In the last sense, we understand the existent to be necessary by virtue of its cause in the sense that if the cause of the existent is present, it is impossible for its effect not to exist. In this sense alone, the necessitation of the effect through its cause is understood to be prior, and requisite to, the bestowal of existence; and the necessity bestowed essential, and not accidental to, the possible existent.

Al-Shahrastānī has, al-Āmidī argues, confused the latter two categories, which is to say that he has conflated the two ways in which a possible existent can be said to be 'necessary'. It is true that the necessity belonging to Zayd by virtue of the fact that he exists is accidental to his existence. But it is false to suggest that necessity is therefore only ever accidental to the existence of the possible existent. Rather, according to al-Āmidī, in the second sense, the very essence of the possible existent becomes necessary of existence, by virtue of its cause. It becomes impossible for the essence of the possible not to exist on the assumption of the existence of its cause. Thus, necessity is essential to the possible existent when its cause is

⁵⁵⁵ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 19-22 and *Struggling*, 110-111.

⁵⁵⁶ *Ghāya*, 255.

present. This means that al-Shahrastānī's proof is unsound, since Ibn Sīnā's theory of the process of necessitation stands.⁵⁵⁷

Al-Āmidī agrees with al-Shahrastānī that the world is not caused by necessity. However, he agrees with Ibn Sīnā that the effect of an efficient cause must exist simultaneously with it, and that it becomes necessary through its cause. Yet for him (as we have seen) the efficient cause of the world is not God's essence but the application (*ta'alluq*), at a particular point in time, of his eternal volition and power to its instantiation. Al-Āmidī holds that God's volition and power are unlike his essence in that they can be associated with both the existence and the non-existence of their effects, since it is the nature of God's volition either to withhold or to assert the causal efficacy of his power. Yet this does not undermine the understanding that the non-existence of an effect is impossible upon the presence of its efficient cause. It is not the absence of God's volition and power, but the absence of their application to their effects which prevents the existence of those effects. Al-Āmidī's point here is that al-Shahrastānī's critique of Ibn Sīnā is unsound, and cannot be used to undermine the doctrine of the world's eternity. Al-Āmidī supports Ibn Sīnā's understanding of efficient causation despite his opposition to the idea that the world's efficient cause is God's essence.

Ibn Sīnā's Categories of Precedence are Comprehensive

That al-Shahrastānī's response to Avicennan metaphysics is a target for al-Āmidī is confirmed when, in *Ghāyat al-Marām*, he identifies 'Muhammad al-Shahrastānī' as the deviser of another concept which he critiques in this latter work alone.⁵⁵⁸ We came across the notion earlier in this chapter. We saw that al-Shahrastānī is critical of Ibn Sīnā's five categories of precedence, specifically accusing him of conflating the categories 'causal' and 'existential' precedence within the category 'essential precedence'. Al-Shahrastānī argues that there is a kind of precedence which relates to the mode of one being's existence in relation to another, regardless of any causal relationship between the two. He uses the notion to argue that though God is not

⁵⁵⁷ *Ghāya*, 255.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ghāya*, 258.

temporally nor positionally prior to the world (since he is not in time or space), he is ontologically prior in the sense that his existence is in no respects concomitant with or equivalent to that of the world.⁵⁵⁹ This argument functions as proof against God's necessitation of the world.

Al-Āmidī writes that al-Shahrastānī devised a method which he thought would have allowed 'his predecessors to win [the creation debate]' (*ḥāz bihā qaṣb sabaq al-mutaqaddimīn*), a claim which is al-Shahrastānī's own.⁵⁶⁰ Al-Āmidī objects to al-Shahrastānī's suggestion that there is a sixth category of precedence. He writes that the opponent could argue that the 'ontological precedence' of an existent is not distinct from other kinds of precedence. An existent may, indeed, have derivative existence and therefore be ontologically posterior to the existent whose existence is necessary. Yet two such existents must also be characterised according to one of the following configurations: 1) there is a period of time between the ontologically posterior existent and the ontologically prior existent, so that the ontologically posterior existent is also temporally posterior; 2) the two existents exist simultaneously in time and either a) the ontologically posterior existent relies for its existence on the ontologically prior existent (causal posteriority) or b) there is no causal relationship but the ontologically posterior existent is posterior i) by virtue of a characteristic of its essence (posteriority of honour); or ii) by virtue of an external factor (posteriority of space or rank).⁵⁶¹ This means that an Avicennan can defend the comprehensiveness of Ibn Sīnā's categories, and that al-Shahrastānī cannot refute Ibn Sīnā's doctrine in this way.

As I have repeatedly stressed, al-Āmidī is in total agreement that the world is not a product of God's essence. His understanding that the world is caused by the application of God's volition and power allows him, however, to fully endorse Ibn Sīnā's categories of precedence and his concomitant theory of efficient causation. For al-Āmidī, the application (*ta'alluq*) of God's power to the instantiation of the world is both ontologically and causally prior to the existence of the

⁵⁵⁹ *Ghāya*, 258; al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 7-10; c.f. al-Shahrastānī, *Struggling*, 114-117.

⁵⁶⁰ *Ghāya*: 258; c.f. al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 9.

⁵⁶¹ *Ghāya*, 260.

world. Yet this does not entail the world's eternity, since the efficient cause in question is not God's essence.

An Eternal Will Could Produce an Eternal Effect

In critiquing the proof's second premise, al-Āmidī rejects the notion that an existent created by the volition of its cause is necessarily temporally originated. This is one of the most distinctive features of his discussion, and becomes an important hook upon which later commentators hang their readings of al-Āmidī on creation, particularly contrasting his position with that of al-Rāzī.

In presenting objections to the final premise of the proof, al-Āmidī claims that one could argue that the will to create the world co-existed eternally with the world itself (*qaṣduhu lahu muqārinan li-wujūdihī*). He defends this on the basis that prior to the existence of a temporally originated world, it was eternally non-existent. This non-existence could not be deemed necessary, given the world's subsequent existence. Therefore, the eternal non-existence of the world was only possible, and like all possibilities, required a preponderator 'whether a preponderator by essence (*murajjih bi-dhāt*) or by choice (*murajjih bi-l-ikhtiyār*)'. This, he writes, undermines the view that 'that which depends on a preponderator must be temporally originated.'⁵⁶² This would mean that the temporal origination of a world created by volition is not more likely than its eternal existence through that cause. There is an aspect of confusion here in that though al-Āmidī uses the term *murajjih* to conclude his argument, he must be referring specifically to a voluntary preponderator, since his opponent has claimed that the effect of such a preponderator (and not of preponderating causes *per se*) must be temporally originated.

The background of al-Āmidī's opposition to al-Rāzī is crucial here. Al-Āmidī's expression of this point occurs in the context of his critique of every premise of al-Rāzī's proof from possibility – including premises which he supports. For instance, we have seen in this context that al-Āmidī

⁵⁶² *Abkār*, 3, 314.

refutes arguments for the world's essential possibility, writing: 'what prevents us from saying that the world is necessary?'.⁵⁶³ And in discussion of the notion that the world cannot be produced by the essence of its cause, he questions each of his opponent's arguments against causation by essence.⁵⁶⁴ Both the world's essential necessity and its creation by the essence of its cause are blatantly contradictory to al-Āmidī's own view, so that his suggestion that the world could be eternally willed must also be received with caution.

It is, however, true, that al-Āmidī's proof for God can also be taken to entail concession to the possibility of an eternally willed world, though this remains implicit. We saw in the previous section that he maintains there that the world's creation *ex nihilo* is impossible on the assumption of necessary causation. This, he argues, is because the cause which acts by necessity must produce its effect as long as the cause exists. If the world's cause is the essence of God, its effect can only be a pre-eternal world. It is partly on this basis that al-Āmidī constructs his argument that the world's cause must act by volition. The inverse, however, is not true. That is to say that whilst al-Āmidī holds that the world's creation *ex nihilo* is precluded by necessary causation, he does not argue that the world's eternity is precluded by voluntary creation. He holds that in the case of causation by volition, the absence of the effect is attributable to the absence of the application of volition to the existence of the effect (and not to the absence of the volition).⁵⁶⁵ Although al-Āmidī himself does not stress this point in this part of the work, his theory here does not necessarily preclude the application of volition to its effect in pre-eternity. Thus, when he writes elsewhere that 'the existence of an eternal power and volition does not entail (*lā yalzam*) the eternity of that which is particularised by them', the expression '*lā yalzam*' permits for the possibility of an eternally willed world.⁵⁶⁶

Despite the significance of this notion, it is not one which al-Āmidī develops in his doctrine of creation. This seems in large part to be because he firmly upholds creation *ex nihilo* as traditionally understood. Later commentators, however, perhaps beginning with al-Ījī, tend to

⁵⁶³ *Abkār*, 3, 312.

⁵⁶⁴ *Abkār*, 3, 313-314.

⁵⁶⁵ See pages 208-210 above for detail of the entire argument.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ghāya*, 21.

stereotype al-Āmidī's doctrine of creation with reference to this particular point of his discussion. Al-Ījī, following al-Rāzī, writes of the consensus between the philosophers and theologians on the impossibility of an eternal world's creation by a voluntary, powerful agent (*al-qādir al-mukhtār*). Like al-Rāzī, he holds that the theologians do not deny that if the world were the product of a necessitating cause, it would be eternal. He goes on: 'as for [an eternal world's] dependence upon a voluntary [agent], al-Āmidī permitted this, arguing that precedence [in the case of] existentiation by intention is the [same as] precedence [in the case of] existentiation by necessity: just as [the precedence of the necessary cause is] essential, not temporal, the same is possible in the case [of the voluntary cause]'.⁵⁶⁷ This he contrasts directly with the view of al-Rāzī, and opposes the former at length.

Al-Ījī's reading of al-Āmidī here takes at face value his concession to the world's hypothetical eternity in the context of his critique of al-Rāzī, then interprets this position according to al-Āmidī's own account of the process of creation by volition. Al-Āmidī has argued that a temporally originated world is the product of a necessitating determinant cause (the application of God's volition to its existence at a particular point). By extension, al-Ījī takes al-Āmidī's concession to the eternity of a world enacted by volition to imply the view that God's volition is essentially prior to the world such that it could have been the cause of an eternal world. This reading of al-Āmidī appears to have become standard, appearing again in 'The Precious Pearl (*al-durra al-fākhira*)' of the fifteenth-century Ṣūfī 'Abd al-Rahmān al-Jāmī (d. 897/1492), where he repeats al-Ījī's statement of al-Āmidī's view almost verbatim.⁵⁶⁸ Endress also claims that 'among the characteristic opinions of al-Āmidī is that the effect of a divine act of will can be eternal, contrary to the prevailing conception of the *falsāfa* that the necessarily acting cause alone can be eternal'.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁷ Al-Ījī, *Mawāqif*, 74-5.

⁵⁶⁸ Edited and translated by Heer as *The Precious Pearl*, 57-58, 'the priority of bringing-into-existence by intention (*qasdān*) to the existence of the effect (*al-mā'lūl*) is just like the priority of bringing-into-existence by necessity (*ijāban*). Just as the priority of necessary bringing-into-existence is an essential rather than a temporal priority (*sabq bi-l-dhāt lā bi-l-zamān*), so also it is possible here for intentional bringing-into-existence (*al-ijād al-qasdī*) to be contemporaneous with the thing intended (*al-maqṣūd*), but to be prior to it in essence.'

⁵⁶⁹ Endress, 'Die Dreifache', 128. Endress does not expand on this claim.

Yet it seems that the importance of this aspect of al-Āmidī's discussion for his own doctrine of creation has been exaggerated, partly due to the importance of al-Rāzī's belief that the effect of a voluntary cause must be created *ex nihilo* for subsequent debate. Given the significance of this Rāzian theory, it is those aspects of al-Āmidī's discussion which appear to present an alternative which have been isolated and generalised as representing al-Āmidī's most significant comment on the creation debate. However, although al-Āmidī's theory allows for the possibility of an eternally willed world, he does not himself make this a significant theme in his discussion. It is true to say that al-Āmidī holds the application of God's volition to the world's creation to be essentially, and not temporally prior to the world. However, it is a misreading of his position to suggest (as al-Ījī does) that al-Āmidī holds God's volition itself to be essentially prior to the world. Rather, he holds that God's volition is temporally prior to the world (existing from pre-eternity), but comes to act on its effect in time through the determinant cause of its application to its effect. This, he holds, according to the doctrine of his school, is within the very nature of volition.

Though al-Āmidī writes, in this context, that 'the existence of an eternal power and will does not entail (*lā yalzam*) the eternity of that which is particularised by them' (which implies, as we have seen, the hypothetical possibility of an eternally willed world) the following statement clarifies al-Āmidī's own view: '[we argue rather for the world's] dependence on an eternal power which determined its non-existence, and on an eternal will which determined the particularisation (*iqtadat takhsis*) of its non-existence at that time, just as it determined the particularisation of its existence at another time: and the preponderator of both [its non-existence and existence] is one, with no multiplicity, even if the objects to which it is applied (*muta'alliq*) are multiple.'⁵⁷⁰ Al-Āmidī is quite clear that though God's volition is eternal, its effects are not. Though his theory allows for the possibility of an eternally willed world, al-Ījī's interpretation of his theory generalises this view as representing al-Āmidī's main contribution

⁵⁷⁰ *Ghāya*, 21.

to the creation debate, and in doing so obscures al-Āmidī's firm commitment to creation *ex nihilo*, and the implicit and underdeveloped nature of his comments on this point.⁵⁷¹

Although his concession to the notion of an eternally willed world is not, in fact, as significant for al-Āmidī's doctrine of creation as later commentators suggest, it is the opinion which most decidedly marks out al-Āmidī's thought from that of his Ash'arī predecessors and peers. I have shown that for al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī, the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is important primarily because it preserves the understanding that the world's cause is possessed of will. I showed how the axis around which al-Rāzī's defence of creation revolves is the notion that though eternal effects are possible, God's being a voluntary agent entails that the world must have been created *ex nihilo*. Al-Āmidī here disagrees, allowing that it is plausible that the world's cause is an agent possessed of an attribute of volition by which he determined the eternal existence of the world.

Al-Āmidī's final comments on the proof from possibility in the *Abkār* underline his intellectual project. He argues that the use of a metaphysical proof for the world's creation *ex nihilo* by his opponent (this being al-Rāzī), is problematic in relation to the Ash'arī doctrine that God's attributes of knowledge, power, volition, etc, are entitative. This is because the opponent's

⁵⁷¹ Indeed, as Heer points out, al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390), in his *Sharh al-maqāṣid*, claims that al-Āmidī does not make this statement in his *Abkār* (Heer, *The Precious Pearl*, 82). Early on, theologians were having difficulty finding the source of al-Ījī's reading of al-Āmidī.

A contrast is the thought of Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, who narrows the gap between causation by volition (*bi-l-irāda*) and causation by 'power' or 'nature' (*quwwa aw ṭabi'a*, or *bi-ghayr al-irāda*) by claiming that in both cases, a delayed effect is impossible. He sees both as kinds of necessary causes (*al-asbāb al-mūjiba*), the existence of the effects of which must, in the absence of impediments, occur without delay (*Mu'tabar*, 3, 34–35). My thanks to Andreas Lammer for giving me access to his discussion of this passage, which appears in his forthcoming 'Two Sixth/Twelfth-Century Hardliners on Creation'.

Al-Āmidī was probably aware of Abū l-Barakāt's thought on creation, given his references to the philosopher in his *Nūr*. His acknowledgement of the hypothetical possibility of an eternally willed world may result from his awareness of Abū l-Barakāt's position. It may even be that al-Āmidī's theory that the application (*ta'alluq*) of God's volition to its effects is the efficient cause of their existence is inspired by Abū l-Barakāt's conception of volitional and non-volitional creation as types of necessary causation. In this case, al-Āmidī's theory could represent a counter-critique of Abu l-Barakāt, whose objective is to insist that whether or not creation occurs by volition, the world must be eternal. By identifying the application of God's volition, and not God's volition itself, as the necessary cause of the world's existence, al-Āmidī denies the necessity of the world's eternity.

However, al-Āmidī does not discuss his peer's theory, nor reference his views of creation, and it is therefore difficult to establish a direct influence. Al-Āmidī's more immediate opponent is al-Rāzī.

proof from the nature of possible existence entails establishing that only a single existent whose existence is of necessity can exist, and that everything outside this existent must be temporally originated. This is a reference to the second sub-proof for the minor premise, namely that a composite of parts cannot be necessary of existence by virtue of itself. Al-Rāzī argues for this point on the basis that the parts of the composite cannot be necessary of existence by virtue of themselves, because there can be no two beings which necessarily exist. But if the parts of the composite are only possible, the composite they produce cannot be necessary of existence. The argument for the impossibility of the necessity of the existence of the parts is the same as used in Ibn Sīnā's proof for the unicity of the Necessary of Existence, adopted by al-Rāzī in his own works of theology.⁵⁷² However, the use of this notion to prove that God's essence alone is eternal calls into question the notion that there are eternally existing attributes additional to the essence of the necessary of existence itself.

In this part of the discussion, the nature of al-Āmidī's opposition to al-Rāzī is most transparent. Al-Āmidī believes al-Rāzī's attempted integration of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics into the defence of the *kalām* doctrine of creation to have failed. He writes: 'it may be that the proponent [of this proof] does not uphold the existence of entitative attributes additional to the essence of God'. However, he continues, 'on the assumption that the proponent of this proof (*al-mustadill bi-hādhihi l-ṭarīqa*) is an Ash'arī who upholds the existence of additional attributes, he is forced to [deal with this matter]'.⁵⁷³ According to al-Āmidī, his opponent must admit either to having failed to prove that God has entitative attributes, but succeeded in proving creation *ex nihilo*, or the inverse. Al-Rāzī himself is conscious of this problem in his *Arba'in* version of the proof, writing that 'it is a difficult question, for the resolution of which we must seek God's help'.⁵⁷⁴ What is important for our purposes is al-Āmidī's explicit suggestion that his contemporary's use of the Avicennan inspired metaphysical paradigm for establishing creation *ex nihilo* compromises his defence of core Ash'arī doctrine. As conclusion to the discussion, this supports

⁵⁷² Al-Rāzī, *Arba'in*, 1, 52. For al-Rāzī's use of this proof for *tawhid*, see for example his *Arba'in*, 1, 312; *Ishāra*, 262-264; *Maṭālib*, 2, 119-123. For its origins in Ibn Sīnā, see *Ishārāt*, IV.16-20, 456-472; *Ilāhiyyāt*, I.6, 32-34; and Adamson, 'From the Necessary Existent', 177-181; Mayer, *On Existence*, 165-194.

⁵⁷³ *Abkār*, 3, 319.

⁵⁷⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Arba'in*, 1, 65.

the view that al-Āmidī looks unfavourably on al-Rāzī’s departure from the classical Ash’arī physical theoretical paradigm for the defence of creation.⁵⁷⁵ This paves the way for his own assertion (in the *Abkār*) of the sufficiency and superiority of the classical Ash’arī proof from accidents.

Al-Āmidī’s theory of causality is primarily expressed in evaluation of proofs for and against creation *ex nihilo*, and its detail is therefore ascertained only through careful attention to these dialectics. My discussion of al-Āmidī’s treatment of the proof from possibility for creation *ex nihilo* has revealed some distinguishing features of al-Āmidī’s theory. Al-Āmidī opposes Ibn Sīnā’s notion of the duality of essence and existence as mediated by al-Rāzī, emphasising the validity of the classical Ash’arī conception of the thing. However, he is highly accommodating of Ibn Sīnā’s theory of efficient causation. Al-Āmidī fully supports Ibn Sīnā’s notion of essential precedence as entailing both the ontological superiority of cause over effect and its causal priority in necessitating the existence of its effect. For him, Ibn Sīnā’s categories of precedence are thus comprehensive and his explanation of the process of causal efficacy via necessitation sound. Al-Āmidī distinguishes his own view from Ibn Sīnā’s, however, by arguing that it is not the essence of God which is the necessitating cause of the world, but the application of his attributes of power and volition. I have also argued that despite its importance for later characterisations of al-Āmidī’s views on creation, his concession to the hypothetical possibility of an eternally enacted world is not significant for his own doctrine.

In this era in the history of *kalām*, the metaphysical analysis of the nature of existence was inescapably integral to the discussion of creation. Indeed, the evaluation of Ibn Sīnā’s modal ontology and his conception of efficient causation occupies the majority of al-Āmidī’s treatment of proofs for creation in *Ghāyat al-marām*. Al-Āmidī is, however, concerned with defending the sufficiency of classical *kalām* proofs. In this objective, al-Rāzī, ‘the philosophising Muslim’, is his primary intellectual opponent.

⁵⁷⁵ Similarly, in his preliminary discussions of the meaning of the term ‘originated’, al-Āmidī ascribes a definition proffered by al-Rāzī to ‘a certain philosophising Muslim’ (*ba’q mutafalsafat al-islām*) (*Abkār*, 3, 302). This is surely a jibe against al-Rāzī’s integration of *falsafa* with *kalām* in the discussion of creation.

4. Ash‘arī Physical Theory in al-Āmidī’s Discussion of Creation

4.i. Physical Theory in post-Avicennan Ash‘arī Discussions of Creation

In this section, I consider al-Āmidī’s use of the physical theory of classical Ash‘arism in defence of creation *ex nihilo*. Here, the findings of Chapter 4 will be relevant. I begin by considering how physical theory features in the discussions of creation of the three post-classical theologians whose works form the immediate context for al-Āmidī’s.

4.i.a. Al-Ghazālī

As I have argued, in keeping with his insistence on the *kalām* conception of causedness as pertaining to the temporal originatedness of an existent, al-Ghazālī must prove the world’s creation *ex nihilo* in support of his proof for God. The Ash‘arī physical theoretical framework remains al-Ghazālī’s essential frame of reference in his proof for a freely acting creator.

However, he also reacts against the priority given by classical Ash‘arīs to physical theory.

Al-Ghazālī argues in the *Iqtisād* that in order to establish the world’s creation *ex nihilo*, one must prove the temporal origination of space occupying existents and the accidents inhering within them. He maintains that the world is ‘every existent other than God’, exhaustively categorised as ‘bodies and accidents’. As we saw in Chapter 4, unlike his classical Ash‘arī predecessors, al-Ghazālī does not spill much ink in defence of his ontology. He is not concerned with extensive physical theoretical deliberations with regard to the nature of body and accident. He simply states that there are space occupying existents, which, when unaggregated, are called substances, and when aggregated, bodies. Non-space occupying existents are either those which inhere within body, or God, the sole self-inhering immaterial existent according to al-Ghazālī’s ontology.⁵⁷⁶ Al-Ghazālī insists that this much is known by basic sense perception, and does not, therefore, require demonstration. He is critical of what he sees as unnecessary debate

⁵⁷⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, 24-5.

over the existence and nature of body and accident, and of immaterials. According to him, a reasonable minded person is convinced of the existence of bodies and accident by sensory data.

Proof for the existence of immaterials, on the other hand, being unattainable via sense data, must be the subject of rational enquiry. Al-Ghazālī sees his proof for God as just that – a demonstration of the existence and nature of existents extraneous to the world which, for him, amount to a single existent responsible for the existence of everything else. He writes: ‘As for the existent which is neither a body nor an accident, this is not known by sensory perception. And we claim that [such an existent] does exist, and that the world exists through Him and by his power. And this is known by proof, not by the senses.’⁵⁷⁷ That is to say that rather than attempting to disprove the immaterial intellects and souls of the philosophers’ ontology, al-Ghazālī will provide positive proof for the existence of a sole immaterial being responsible for the creation and sustainment of the world. He believes that this will eliminate, by default, the existence of innumerable other immaterials, since there is no room, within the resultant ontology, for such beings.⁵⁷⁸ To al-Ghazālī’s mind, then, the ‘problem’ of immaterials is not a problem at all.

Therefore, al-Ghazālī can use a version of the proof from accidents in his defence of the origination of the world *ex nihilo*. He structures the proof as a syllogism based on the two premises 1) no body can be devoid of temporally originated existents (*hawādith*) and 2) that which is not devoid of temporally originated existents is itself temporally originated. The first premise he proves by arguing that a body must either be at rest or in motion. He then deals with objections to a) the existence of accidents of rest and motion and b) their temporal origination. This part of the discussion occasions a second critique of the excessive discussions of accidents among previous theologians (*qad ṭawwala jawābuhi fi taṣānif al-kalām wa-laysa tastahiqq al-taṭwīl*). According to al-Ghazālī, no right minded person can deny the existence of

⁵⁷⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, 24–34, quotation from 25.

⁵⁷⁸ Al-Ghazālī generally fails to be daunted by the posited existence of immaterials. This is reflected, for instance, in his comments on Ibn Sīnā’s theory of the world’s emanation via the intellects: ‘What you have mentioned are arbitrary assertions which, when truly ascertained, constitute [nothing but] darkness atop darkness. If a human were to relate this as something seen in sleep, one would infer from it the illness of his temperament’ (*Tahāfut*, 66–68, Marmura’s translation).

accidents – for do we not all experience pain, hunger and thirst? And do we not all observe the changing states of other bodies in the world? Those who deny the existence and originatedness of accidents are simply obstinate.⁵⁷⁹

Al-Ghazālī does effect a defence of his proof, all the while complaining that furnishing that which is immediately known (*al-wādihāt*) with proof creates greater obscurity, and not clarity. This entails a response to objections such as that of the opponent who holds that motion is not temporally originated, but latent (*kāmin*) in the body at rest. Here al-Ghazālī writes: ‘if we concerned ourselves with topics outside the [main] objective in this work, we would first disprove latency and emergence in the discussion of accidents, but we are not bothered by that which does not undermine our [main] objective’. Therefore he concedes the existence of latency but argues that even latent motion within a body is temporally originated.⁵⁸⁰ Al-Ghazālī is explicit about his pragmatism here, and this entails something of a critique of classical Ash‘arism. Despite the familiar framework he uses for discussion of creation and of God’s existence, al-Ghazālī is unlike his Ash‘arī predecessors in being unconcerned with elaborate physical theoretical questions, since he believes them to be either settled through sense data and therefore not the subject of his rational investigations, or tangential to his overriding theological concerns.

4.i.b. Al-Shahrastānī

We have seen that al-Shahrastānī proffers a metaphysical proof for the world’s origination by a voluntary, omnipotent agent. The process that leads him to promote this proof reveals his attitude towards the classical Ash‘arī paradigm. Before presenting his metaphysical proof, he lists four classical proofs, first among which is the proof from accidents, the proof which ‘most of the theologians’ used. Other proofs are two which al-Shahrastānī identifies with al-Ash‘arī, and a version of the proof from particularisation for the creator identified with al-Juwainī.⁵⁸¹

⁵⁷⁹ Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, 27.

⁵⁸⁰ Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, 28.

⁵⁸¹ Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 11-14.

Despite developing this latter proof, he comments after citing these classical proofs that they rely on premises which may be hard to verify. These include proving that bodies are finite in dimension, establishing the existence of a void (such that the world can accurately be attributed the possibility of a position other than its actual position in support of the proof from particularization), and proving that existents other than God are exhaustively categorised into body (*jirm*) and that which inheres in body. With regard to this last premise, he points out that the opponent affirms existents outside these categories which ‘eternally exist [by virtue of] something other [than their own essences]’, that is, eternal immaterials such as the intellects.⁵⁸² Thus, he casts doubt on the sufficiency of the physical theoretical premises of classical Ash‘arī proofs for creation by a voluntary agent. His preference for a metaphysical proof leads to his neglect of physical theory in this regard.

4.i.c. Al-Rāzī

Two main objections to the use of the *kalām* physical theoretical framework for establishing creation *ex nihilo* can be found in al-Rāzī’s thought. The first, which we came across in the previous section, relates to the contentious question of the existence of immaterials. In the preliminaries of his discussion of creation in the *Arba‘īn*, al-Rāzī argues that both classical and contemporaries theologians (*al-awwalūn wa-l-ākhirūn*) have relied on proofs for creation which prove only the temporal origination of bodies and accidents, relying on the exhaustive division of existents other than God into these categories. However, such proofs are deficient if there are immaterials other than God. He cites the theologians’ ‘strongest proof’ against the existence of immaterials, and shows that it is not demonstrative.⁵⁸³ From the outset, then, al-Rāzī casts doubt on the sufficiency of Ash‘arī physical theory as a paradigm for the defence of creation *ex nihilo*. These comments are echoed in his latest work, the *Maṭālib*, also within his preliminary discussions.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸² Al-Shahrastānī, *Nihāya*, 14.

⁵⁸³ Al-Rāzī, *Arba‘īn*, 1, 22-23.

⁵⁸⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 4, 12.

The second of al-Rāzī's objections, which appears in the *Maṭālib*, is more general, and concerns the theologians' mode of inferring knowledge about creation from the nature of the physical world. As we have seen, al-Rāzī presents several proofs from the nature of body for creation *ex nihilo*, of which he styles his own proof from motion and rest as the most superior. However, at the close of this discussion, al-Rāzī unfavourably compares *kalām* proofs for creation *ex nihilo* which are premised on the nature of physical body with philosophical proofs for eternity premised on the nature of the world's cause. The basis of this unfavourable comparison is logical. Al-Rāzī argues that proofs which demonstrate the grounds of the thing proven (*burhān al-lima*, literally 'demonstration of the why', in this case, demonstration that the world is eternal because of the nature of its cause) are superior to those which simply demonstrate that something is the case (*burhān al-anna*, literally, 'demonstration of the that', in this case, demonstration that the world is created *ex nihilo* on the basis of observation of the world itself, without relating this to the grounds of its originatedness).⁵⁸⁵

This functions as a statement against the classical Ash‘arī physical theoretical framework for the discussion of creation. Subsequently, al-Rāzī will focus on teleological proofs for the creation of the world *ex nihilo* which have their foundation in the metaphysical theory that that which is created by will and power must be temporally originated – that is to say, they are proofs inferred from the nature of the world's cause. Despite his considerable efforts at refining the proof from accidents, at the background to this is al-Rāzī's clear understanding that such proofs can only ever establish the temporal origination of the physical world to the exclusion of immaterials. He is aware that the impossibility of disproving the existence of immaterials will undermine any proof for creation premised on the nature of physical body. This is why he ultimately prefers proofs based on the nature of God. Like al-Shahrastānī before him, and unsurprisingly given his own reception of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysical framework for the relation between the world and its cause, al-Rāzī moves away from the physical theoretical model for establishing the world's creation *ex nihilo*.

⁵⁸⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Maṭālib*, 4, 322.

4.ii. Al-Āmidī on Physical Theoretical Proofs for Creation Ex Nihilo

I will argue in this section that al-Āmidī also ultimately abandons the physical theoretical model for the defence of creation *ex nihilo*. It is necessary to treat the *Abkār* and *Ghāya* distinctly, since al-Āmidī's position evolves between the works. I begin with the *Abkār*. Al-Āmidī's discussion of the proof from accidents for creation *ex nihilo* is the focus.⁵⁸⁶

4.ii.a. Al-Āmidī's use of the Proof from Accidents

For all the impression Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics has made on his thought, and despite his high level engagement with the innovative use to which his contemporaries put this philosophy in defence of creation *ex nihilo*, in the *Abkār*, al-Āmidī prefers to use the physical theoretical framework of classical Ash‘arism. I argue that this stems from the desire to show the sufficiency of that framework, and of the school of thought it represents, in the face of a radically different way of viewing the world.

Al-Āmidī identifies the proof as ‘the famous method of the Ash‘arīs’ (*al-maslak al-mashhūr li-l-ashāb*).⁵⁸⁷ It is presented as follows:

Minor Premise: The world is a composite of temporally originated parts.

Major Premise: That which is a composite of temporally originated parts is itself temporally originated.

Conclusion: The world is temporally originated.

This presentation formalises the proof from accidents according to Aristotelian conventions for demonstration, like both al-Ghazālī’s and al-Rāzī’s *Nihāya* versions of the proof.⁵⁸⁸ There is an

⁵⁸⁶ It is worth noting, however, that in this section al-Āmidī extensively critiques al-Rāzī’s version of the proof from accidents, which focuses on the impossibility of motion or rest in eternity (*Abkār*, 3, 327–335). Although al-Āmidī is indeed opposed to al-Rāzī’s use of the metaphysical framework for discussion of creation (as shown in the previous section), the fact that he critiques his opponent’s refined version of the proof from accidents, demonstrates that he is primarily opposed to al-Rāzī as an intellectual. See al-Rāzī, *Nihāya*, 1, 223–344 for al-Rāzī’s version of the proof from accidents and his careful and extensive critique and defence, which leads to his proof from motion and rest, found in, e.g. *Arba‘in*, 1, 32–37, defended 37–49; *Maṭālib*, 4, 245–256.

⁵⁸⁷ *Abkār*, 3, 335.

⁵⁸⁸ Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, 24; al-Rāzī, *Nihāya*, 1, 223.

adjustment in al-Āmidī's version, namely that the major premise refers to the temporal originatedness of that which is composed of temporally originated parts. Both the classical version and al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī's formalised versions refer instead to the temporal originatedness of that which is not devoid of temporally originated parts, a principle which al-Āmidī subsumes within the minor premise. Though this adjustment seems innocuous enough, it actually reflects a departure from the parameters of classical Ash'arī ontology, as I shall explain.

Al-Āmidī writes that the minor premise relies on a further syllogism whose premises are a) the categorisation of existents in the world into substance and accident and b) the temporal originateness of both substance and accident. Al-Āmidī writes that he has already proven each of these premises, as part of his discussion of 'the possible existent', in the course of his physical theoretical discussions. This refers to his having already established the following premises: the exhaustive categorization of the possible existent into material substance and accident (premise 1); the existence of accidents; their non-endurance; that substance cannot be devoid of accident; the impossibility of an infinite regress of temporal occurrences; and that things which cannot be devoid of that which is temporally originated are themselves temporally originated (premise 2). The importance of al-Āmidī's defence of Ash'arī physical theory, discussed in Chapter 4, is unmissable.

In proving the second premise, al-Āmidī argues that if all the parts of the world are temporally originated, the 'unifying structure' (*al-hay'a al-ijtimā'iyya*) of the world must also be temporally originated, a fact he claims is known immediately. This argument is straightforward in itself, though the notion that composite existents possess a unifying principle is alien to classical Ash'arī ontology. In classical Ash'arī ontology, no existent amounts to more than the sum of the atoms of which it is composed. On the assumption of this ontology, the major premise in this argument is superfluous: all that needs to be proven is that the world's atoms and accidents are temporally originated. It is only when the composite is held to be other than the sum of its parts that the major premise is required. The addition of this premise is surprising given that

al-Āmidī nowhere departs from the Ash‘arī ontology elsewhere in the work: we saw (in Chapter 4) that he embraces the atom-accident dichotomy of classical Ash‘arism.

However, the ambiguity of his position regarding the status of complex entities is also reflected, for instance, in his discussion of the nature of the human. Classical Ash‘arīs held that the human was not a genuine unity, but simply the aggregate of its atoms.⁵⁸⁹ Shihadeh shows how this stems from the theocentric ontology of the Ash‘arīs.⁵⁹⁰ Al-Āmidī does not endorse any alternative (such as the body-soul dualism of the philosophers). However, he ultimately suspends judgement on the question.⁵⁹¹ This creates room for speculation about his position on complex entities, which he nowhere clarifies.

The ambiguity may reflect a Rāzian influence. In his epistemological discussions, al-Rāzī makes a basic division between complexes and simples, and holds that the unifying structure (*al-hay'a al-ijtimā'iyya*) of a complex entity (*haqīqa murakabba*) is one of the parts of which it is composed.⁵⁹² Ibrahim argues that al-Rāzī holds a phenomenalist understanding of the nature of scientific knowledge – which is to say that he believes that we may not have access to knowledge regarding the noumenal entities of which bodies in the natural world are composed, but only pertaining to complex phenomenon.⁵⁹³ Al-Āmidī borrows the terminology of al-Rāzī's discussions of body here in his own proof from accidents without reflection on the associated epistemology.

Following the proof, al-Āmidī presents several objections. Strikingly, these are mostly formal, which is to say that al-Āmidī is primarily concerned to defend the logical validity of the proof. The critique of the form of the proof is also found in al-Rāzī's discussion in the *Nihāya*.⁵⁹⁴ One example will suffice. As one objection to the form (*ṣūra*) of the proof, al-Āmidī has his opponent

⁵⁸⁹ Within this general position, there were debates as to the constitution and location of the human soul. Al-Āmidī reviews many of these positions (*Abkār*, 4, 274-276).

⁵⁹⁰ See Shihadeh, 'Classical Ash‘arī Anthropology', 474-475.

⁵⁹¹ *Abkār*, 4, 302.

⁵⁹² Al-Rāzī, *Nihāya*, 1, 111.

⁵⁹³ See Ibrahim, 'Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī', especially 401-2.

⁵⁹⁴ Al-Rāzī, *Nihāya*, 1, 229-234.

examine the statement made in the major premise: ‘the composite of temporally originated parts (*al-mu’allaf min al-ajzā’ al-hāditha*) is temporally originated.’ The opponent argues that the subject (‘the composite of temporally originated parts’) must refer either to a) only certain composites, or b) all such composites, in which case it is taken to include the world as a whole. If the scope of the subject is taken to be limited to certain composites, it does not produce the conclusion desired by the proof (*lā intāj*), because of the possibility that the composites to which the predicate ‘are temporally originated’ applies do not include the world.

However, if the subject in this minor premise (‘the composite of temporally originated parts’) is taken to refer to all composites of temporally originated parts, this entails the logical fallacy of assuming the conclusion of the argument within one of its premises (begging the question, *al-muṣādara ‘alā l-maṭlūb*), since the major premise ‘the composite of temporally originated parts is temporally originated’ contains the concealed claim that ‘the world is temporally originated’.⁵⁹⁵

Al-Āmidī’s response to this objection to the form of his proof begins with a definition of the logical fallacy *al-muṣādara ‘alā l-maṭlūb*. He writes that a proof only contains this fallacy if the proof’s conclusion is found concealed within one of the premises of the syllogism. The proof he has presented does not fit this characterisation. This is because the major premise, ‘the composite of temporally originated parts is temporally originated’ does not contain the conclusion, as the opponent has argued. Rather, the conclusion is derived from the premise in that the world is only deemed temporally originated with respect to its composition (*ta’lif*), and not *per se*. That is to say that the minor premise provides the condition by which the world is deemed temporally originated, i.e. with respect to its being composed of temporally originated parts.⁵⁹⁶

Al-Āmidī deals with several such objections, all of which appear to be hypothetical. It seems that his intent is to show that the classical Ash‘arī proof has all the logical rigour required in the post-Avicennan age of *kalām*. With regard to his hypothetical opponent’s critique of the

⁵⁹⁵ *Abkār*, 3, 336-7.

⁵⁹⁶ *Abkār*, 3, 350; c.f al-Rāzī, *Nihāya*, 1, 229-230.

veracity of the proof's premises, al-Āmidī simply refers his reader back to the earlier physical theoretical discussions, where he says these premises have been established.⁵⁹⁷

4.ii.d. Problems with the Proof from Accidents

In the *Nūr*, al-Āmidī the philosopher critiques the proof from accidents, attributing it to 'a certain genius from among the opponents' and describing it as 'far from demonstrative' (*ba'ida* 'an *al-taḥṣīl*).'⁵⁹⁸ His refutation is brief and focused on one fatal flaw in the proof, namely, its inability to disprove the eternity of immaterial existents. It is strange, then, that within the *Abkār*, where al-Āmidī relies upon this proof in establishing the world's temporal creation, this flaw persists. Al-Āmidī has acknowledged at several points in the *Abkār* the difficulty of disproving the existence of immaterials aside from God, as discussed in Chapter 4.⁵⁹⁹ Indeed, we even observed that his first criticism of the proof from possibility, discussed above, concerned its failure to account for immaterials.

There is a deep tension here between al-Āmidī's desire to prove the sufficiency of the classical Ash'arī physical theoretical framework for the defence of creation *ex nihilo*, and his insecurity in the face of an alien ontology, which he once himself endorsed, and which undermines the very framework he is keen to uphold. Al-Āmidī must surely have been aware of this issue with his use of the proof from accidents. His failure to address it is perhaps symptomatic of his driving intellectual agenda in this work, which is to provide a conservative reaction to al-Rāzī's radical rethinking of the boundaries between *falsafa* and *kalām*. He seems so intent on undermining the methods of al-Rāzī (and the doctrines of Ibn Sīnā) that he fails to sufficiently address key issues at the encounter of the ontologies. Thus, he employs a physical theoretical framework for the defence of creation which has lost its overriding theological significance, and been severely

⁵⁹⁷ *Abkār*, 3, 329 (the objection); 351-2 (al-Āmidī's response).

⁵⁹⁸ *Nūr*, 5, 220.

⁵⁹⁹ *Abkār*, 3, 29 and 4, 294 (although, see 4, 298, where, shortly after claiming that it is difficult to disprove the existence of immaterials, al-Āmidī writes that their existence has been 'disproven' earlier in the work. Al-Āmidī's hesitation is plain).

compromised by his inability to sufficiently disprove the alternative ontology proffered by Ibn Sīnā.

These inconsistencies remain unresolved in the *Abkār*, but we will see how the *Ghāya* approach reflects al-Āmidī's acknowledgement of the issues at hand.

4.iv. *Ghāyat al-Marām: The Abandonment of Atomism*

Commitment to Ash‘arī physical theory in al-Āmidī's later work of theology is conspicuous by its absence. This alone speaks volumes about the declining significance of that frame of reference for a coherent Ash‘arī theology in the post-Avicennan era. Al-Āmidī's stated subject matter in the work is ‘the essence of the necessary of existence, his attributes, his actions and his concomitants’.⁶⁰⁰ This is, of course, the universal and central quest of the true theologian, and certainly for his Ash‘arī predecessors. But whilst for al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī and other classical Ash‘arī greats, physical theory was integral to the project of establishing the nature of God, for al-Āmidī it manifestly is no longer. It goes without saying, then, that the proof from accidents is not al-Āmidī's favoured proof for creation *ex nihilo* in this work. Indeed, he will discuss two proofs whose premises are borrowed from physical theory and explicitly critique them.

The first proof premised on physical theory treated by al-Āmidī is al-Ash‘arī's proof from aggregation and separation. The proof (as al-Āmidī explains) establishes the world's reliance on a cause in the first instance, and secondarily, the exercise of that cause in creating the world *ex nihilo*. Al-Ash‘arī's belief is that there must be an aggregator and segregator of the world's parts. The fact that the world's substances (for al-Ash‘arī, indivisible parts) must exist either in composites or in isolation from one another (thanks to accidents of aggregation [*ijs̄timā*] and separation [*iftirāq*]) indicates their dependence on a cause of either state.⁶⁰¹ Al-Āmidī presents a formalised version of this proof. He postulates that substances exist in a state of aggregation or separation by virtue of their own essences. This, however, is impossible, since that which

⁶⁰⁰ *Ghāya*, 4.

⁶⁰¹ Ibn Fūrak, *Mujarrad*, 211.

belongs to the essence of a thing is unchanging. It is manifestly true that substances transform from a state of aggregation to a state of separation and vice versa. Therefore, the cause of these states must be external to the substances.⁶⁰²

Al-Āmidī's criticism of this proof is multi-faceted. Firstly, he observes that the 'opponent' in this discussion does not deny the outcome of the proof thus far, namely, that the world relies on a cause. This demonstrates that for al-Āmidī, the opponent in question is a theistic eternalist, rather than an atheistic materialist, most probably Ibn Sīnā himself. Nevertheless, he writes, it is worth establishing this agreed belief through evidence, not least to repel the 'objections of the obstinate' (*shaghab al-mu'ānid*).⁶⁰³

The aspect of his critique of the proof which particularly concerns us relates to the relevance of Ash'arī physical theory to his discussion of creation. He writes: 'establishing the veracity of the outcome of this proof depends upon the substance and the existent being confined to that which is susceptible to aggregation or separation. But the opponent might claim the existence of substances devoid of matter, and of matter's concomitants, which are not susceptible to aggregation or separation, and which cannot be described as 'aggregated' or 'separated', since they are pure intellect.'⁶⁰⁴ Here is al-Āmidī's clearest statement of the sticking point between the classical Ash'arī worldview and the philosophers' cosmology. Because of the immanence of an ontology totally unlike the atom-accident dichotomy of the Ash'arīs, any proof relying on that framework no longer suffices.

This, of course, also applies to the proof from accidents, and in the second part of his discussion of creation, al-Āmidī concedes the deficiency of that proof because of its reliance on physical theoretical premises which are difficult to establish. Here he describes the proof rhetorically as 'that upon which the theological greats and eminent ones of the past relied upon: the famous and renowned method.'⁶⁰⁵ The method al-Āmidī present is as follows:

⁶⁰² *Ghāya*, 248.

⁶⁰³ *Ghāya*, 248.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ghāya*, 248.

⁶⁰⁵ *Ghāya*, 261.

- 1) The world is exhaustively categorised into material substance and accident
- 2) The existence of the accidents of motion and rest is proven
- 3) The temporal origination of motion and rest is proven
- 4) An infinite regress of accidents of motion and rest is shown to be impossible
- 5) That substances cannot exist devoid of motion or rest is proven
- 6) It is argued that that which cannot be free from what is temporally originated is temporally originated.

The premises presented here seem to reflect al-Ghazālī's explanation of the proof from accidents in his *Iqtisād*, where he bases his discussion on the accidents of motion and rest. Al-Āmidī's critique of the proof is also targeted, in the first instance, at al-Ghazālī. Al-Āmidī first lists a limited number of physical theoretical premises required for establishing the proof, namely: the existence of accidents; their being additional entities to substances; and that the qualities of substances are not latent (*kāmin*) within them, nor simply transferred from one substance to another. These are precisely the only physical theoretical premises which al-Ghazālī does discuss in his own defence of the proof.⁶⁰⁶ Al-Āmidī writes that 'even if it is possible to prove these premises' there are others which are more difficult.⁶⁰⁷ This suggests an implicit critique of al-Ghazālī for his failure to treat the other physical theoretical proofs al-Āmidī has in mind.

The physical theoretical premises which al-Āmidī claims are more problematic are the impossibility of substances existing devoid of accidents and that all accidents of motion and rest are temporally originated. It is immediately striking that al-Āmidī himself, as discussed in Chapter 4, has expended considerable effort in his earlier theological compendium in proving the very physical theoretical premises he here decries. It seems that physical theory is absent from *Ghāyat al-Marām* not only because of the work's focus on 'the noblest of all things', but because al-Āmidī has lost confidence in the reliability of that theoretical framework.

⁶⁰⁶ Al-Ghazālī, *Iqtisād*, 27.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ghāya*, 262.

Apart from his criticism of al-Ghazālī, al-Āmidī's treatment of this proof also bears a cloaked critique of al-Rāzī's refined version of the proof from accidents (his proof from motion and rest), worth considering briefly here to demonstrate the continued, unstated, importance of al-Rāzī as intellectual opponent to al-Āmidī. Al-Āmidī argues that an opponent of the proof from accidents could deny the impossibility of the bodies of the world being at rest in pre-eternity until motion occurred. Al-Āmidī now cites a defender of the notion that the eternal rest of physical bodies is impossible. That defender argues that if rest were eternal, it could never cease. If it ceased, this would require a cause. That cause could not be a) the rest itself, since that which belongs to a thing by virtue of itself cannot cease. Neither could the cause of the cessation of rest be b) an agent possessed of power, since the effect of power cannot be a non-existent (the cessation of rest being a non-existent). Neither could the cause of the cessation of rest be either c) an obstacle (*māni'*) preventing the rest from continuing nor d) the removal of a condition (*shart*) which had hitherto maintained the rest. In both cases, both the eternity of the obstacle or of the condition and their temporal originatedness are impossible. Therefore, the eternity of rest is impossible because the cessation of eternal rest is impossible. This argument features in al-Rāzī's proof from motion and rest in different versions in the *Arba'īn* and the *Maṭālib*.⁶⁰⁸

Al-Āmidī opposes the argument. He introduces an attribute of volition into the scenario proposed, and suggests that the presence of volition makes the cessation of rest after its pre-eternal presence possible. He argues that it is conceivable that rest could have existed from pre-eternity, caused by the exercise of an eternal attribute of volition, but that at a given point, the connection of the volition to the state of rest could have been withdrawn. This would have caused rest to cease, without entailing the exercise of power on a non-existent (as suggested in the original argument).⁶⁰⁹ Thus al-Āmidī suggests that God's freely functioning attribute of volition could have determined the exercise of power even in eternity. This concurs with his

⁶⁰⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Arba'īn*, 1, 36; *Maṭālib*, 4, 282-298, especially 297. For a precedent, see al-Rāzī's discussion of the proof from accidents in the *Nihāya*, where he establishes, more generally, that accidents of spatial occupation are temporally originated, in a very similar manner (al-Rāzī, *Nihāya*, 1, 224-227).

⁶⁰⁹ *Ghāya*, 263.

concession to the possibility of the exercise of volition in eternity in the separate dialectical context of critique of the proof from possibility. His response may demonstrate his focus on protecting the status of God's volition as entirely autonomous and utterly unrestricted. However, once again, the importance of these statements lies primarily in their direct opposition to al-Rāzī's views, since they are not developed in al-Āmidī's own conception of creation.

Al-Āmidī's closing comments in relation to the proof from accidents reveal his motivation here. He writes that 'the intention here is simply to be fair, and to avoid unsatisfactory methods – otherwise we would not concern ourselves with the investigation of such obscurities, nor with exposing these details.'⁶¹⁰ This is a thinly veiled attack on al-Rāzī's involved and incredibly thorough discussion of such questions as the eternity of accidents of spatial occupation, and his method of gathering multiple defensible arguments for a given belief. Al-Āmidī is deliberately signalling the difference of his approach, with its focus on determining the single most convincing proof for a given doctrine, for the pragmatic purpose of demonstrating the soundness of classical Ash'arī belief.

Despite having endorsed the proof from accidents in his *Abkār*, in al-Āmidī's most mature thought, physical theory is extraneous to theology proper, not robust enough to serve its classical purpose in demonstrating the world's creation *ex nihilo* in the face of Ibn Sīnā's ontology. Now al-Āmidī, having both opposed the use of metaphysical proofs for God and abandoned the physical theoretical proof of his school, presents his alternative.

5. Al-Āmidī's Original Proof for Creation *Ex Nihilo*

For al-Āmidī, proofs against the eternity of the world (whether physical theoretical or metaphysical in basis) achieve little. This is because even if they are found to be demonstrative, al-Ash'arī's proof from aggregation and rest, and al-Shahrastānī's proof from possibility only rule out the necessity of the world's eternity. That is to say that by establishing that the world

⁶¹⁰ *Ghāya*, 263.

requires a cause (al-Ash‘arī’s Aggregator) which does not cause by necessity (as shown by al-Shahrastānī), one only disproves a) that the world is eternally self-sufficient and b) that the world is eternally caused by the essence of its cause. Al-Āmidī comments that these outcomes are already entailed by the doctrines that God is voluntary and possessed of power; doctrines which he has independently established. Yet the world’s cause being voluntary and omnipotent does not automatically entail the world’s being preceded by non-existence. Therefore, its temporal finitude must be established separately.⁶¹¹

Al-Āmidī describes his method as ‘elegant’ for its simplicity. His argument for creation *ex nihilo* is a proof for the impossibility of an infinite series of motions. He refers the reader back to his proof for God, where he showed that an infinite series of causes and effects is an impossibility. He writes that the proof he presented applies to any series of individual items, including motions and moments of time. There is no need, he writes, to restate the argument, but it is sufficient for proving the world’s temporal origination. The proof as it appears earlier in the work is as follows: in any series of existents, each individual item is only possible of existence by virtue of itself, which is to say that it relies for its existence on something external to its essence. It is impossible for such a series to regress infinitely. There are two possibilities for the configuration of a series of existents: either a) they exist successively or b) their existence is simultaneous. Only the former is relevant to al-Āmidī’s proof for creation *ex nihilo*, since he must prove that an infinite temporal regress of motions is impossible. He argues that the existence of each item in a successive series cannot come about without the existence of the previous item. But if every item in the series is conditioned upon the existence of the previous item *ad infinitum*, there being no first item, then the existence of the series is inconceivable.⁶¹²

⁶¹¹ *Għāya*, 257. Although al-Āmidī critiques al-Shahrastānī for not having established the world’s creation *ex nihilo* using his proof from possibility for the world’s creation by a volitional agent, the accusation is unjust. As we saw, al-Shahrastānī’s understanding of creation *ex nihilo* is that God is ontologically prior to the world, and he does, in fact, establish this through his proof from possibility. Furthermore, al-Shahrastānī (in fact, like al-Āmidī) explicitly establishes the finitude of the world’s motion separately. Al-Āmidī wishes to present his own method as superior, and rather obscures the similarity of his method with that of al-Shahrastānī.

⁶¹² *Għāya*, 13.

Despite Al-Āmidī's claim to originality here, the basic form of this argument is of course highly familiar as belonging to a group of arguments from the impossibility of an infinite number. Arguments for creation *ex nihilo* from the impossibility of the infinite motion of the planets in particular are common to classical *kalām* refutations of the world's eternity. They have their remote origins in the works of the Alexandrian Christian John Philoponus (d. 54/570), whose arguments against the pre-eternity of the world were influential on the philosopher al-Kindī (d. 260/873) and on many theologians after him.⁶¹³ More immediately, they are a key part of al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut* critique of the eternalist doctrine.⁶¹⁴ Indeed, they are foremost among the proofs which al-Āmidī himself refutes in the context of his support for the world's eternity in his *Nūr*.⁶¹⁵ Furthermore, we have seen al-Shahrastānī similarly argue against the infinite regress of motion in his *Nihāya*. One explanation of al-Āmidī's preference for this proof is his desire to differentiate his own approach from that of al-Rāzī, who does not use proofs of this variety.

Al-Āmidī is specifically concerned with undermining Ibn Sīnā's Neoplatonist cosmology, something which, he has held in this latter work of theology, the proof from accidents and others of its ilk are incapable of doing. At the forefront of the discussion is the question of immaterial substance. Al-Āmidī proves that all the existents of the philosophers' ontology apart from the necessary of existence, material or immaterial, must be temporally originated. He argues that since an infinite series of motions is impossible, it is impossible for the celestial sphere to be eternal. This is because, by the 'opponent's' own admission, the planets cannot be free from motion inhering within them. The same principle entails that the immaterial intellects which are the principles of the celestial sphere must be temporally originated, since these intellects cannot exist without instantiating the planets of which they are the principles. Finally, the First Effect, from which the immaterial intellects issue, must itself be temporally originated. This is because according to the opponents' ontology, the intellects issue from the First Effect by essential necessitation. That which is essentially necessitated cannot come to

⁶¹³ See Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, Chapter 4 on Philoponus' influence on the *mutakallimūn*.

⁶¹⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut*, 18-19. As Davidson notes, 'The train of thought animating proofs of creation from the impossibility of an infinite number was such that arguments could easily proliferate' (Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 122).

⁶¹⁵ *Nūr*, 5, 213-215.

exist after the existence of its cause, but must exist simultaneously. Thus, if the effects of the First Effect exist after having not existed, the First Effect must be likewise. The conclusion is that everything which is caused by the Necessary of Existence is originated after its non-existence. In closing his argument, al-Āmidī once more calls into use Ibn Sīnā's own principle. If everything aside from the First Cause is temporally originated, the cause must be acting by volition, since the effect of the necessary cause must exist concurrently with its cause.⁶¹⁶

Here, al-Āmidī concedes Ibn Sīnā's understanding of efficient causation, but turns it against his doctrine of the world's eternity. That is to say that he permits, as elsewhere, that causes can act on their effects by their essence alone, and that such causes must co-exist with their effects. However, he argues, this does not entail the eternity of the world since he has proven the effects observable in the world (the series of motions which unfold around us) to have a beginning in time. Furthermore, against the background of his concession of his inability to prove the existence of immaterial beings, al-Āmidī here postulates a scenario in which the immaterials of Ibn Sīnā's ontology do indeed exist, but are not eternal. The purpose of this is therapeutic: al-Āmidī is concerned with proving that even on the assumption that the classical Ash'arī atom-accident dichotomy is false, the world can be shown to be temporally originated. Al-Āmidī is preoccupied with the sole objective of proving that the world was created *ex nihilo*. This, though it does not amount to rejection of Ash'arī physical theory, is a clear acknowledgement that it is not sufficiently robust to counter Ibn Sīnā's competing worldview, and must be abandoned as a framework for the defence of the key Ash'arī dogma of the world's creation *ex nihilo*.

6. Conclusion

This chapter was built on the findings of Chapters 3 and 4. Its aim was to assess the respective applications of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysical distinction between the possible and necessary of existence, and of Ash'arī atomism, within al-Āmidī's discussions of creation in his works of

⁶¹⁶ *Ghāya*, 264.

kalām. This was designed as a case study in the amalgamation of al-Āmidī's major intellectual influences on his theological thought. Initially, the immediate context for al-Āmidī's thought was discussed. I argued that under the influence of Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of creation, a very significant shift occurred among Ash'arī theologians with respect to the theological significance of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. This begins with al-Ghazālī, who strongly objects to the notion that a cause which brings the world into existence pre-eternally via emanation can be described as an agent. It is in the thought of al-Shahrastānī and al-Rāzī, however, that the shift really takes place. For al-Ghazālī, the world's temporal origination is what determines its causedness; for these later theologians, the notion that the world requires a cause because of its essential possibility supplants the classical Ash'arī notion. For this reason, the question of the character of the world's cause takes centre stage for these theologians in their own doctrines of creation.

Al-Rāzī's reflections on scripture lead him to the position that both Qur'ān and Torah demand belief in an omnipotent, voluntary creator. His rational investigations lead him to the belief that the existence of such a being requires the doctrine that the world was created *ex nihilo*. Thus, though he debates the scriptural basis of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, he ultimately finds it requisite to the defence of God's character as he understands it. The doctrine has no role, however, in his defence of God's existence. For al-Shahrastānī also, it is not the existence of a cause for the world, but the personality of that cause, that is at stake in the debate over the world's origination. He holds that God's precedence over the world is ontological, but that this does not entail the world's emanation by necessity from God. Unlike al-Rāzī, however, al-Shahrastānī lays an important precedent for al-Āmidī in maintaining that establishing God's attributes of volition and power does not itself prove the finitude of the world's motion. He argues only secondarily for this point.

It is not an exaggeration to describe the shift away from reliance on the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* in support of other doctrines as touching on the heart of Ash'arism. Central to classical Ash'arism is the belief that the world's absolute inferiority to its Creator is primarily its impermanence. This penetrates the spectrum of Ash'arī beliefs, nowhere more obviously than

in Ash‘arī occasionalism, and explains the status of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* as a foundation (*aṣl*) of Ash‘arī doctrine, the first item (for instance) in al-Isfara‘īnī’s creed. It is the notion that the world has a beginning that informs the Ash‘arī interpretation of the Qur’ānic depiction of God’s transcendence. God is totally unlike his creation primarily because there is no beginning to his existence; the world, by contrast, is characterised by the perpetual instability of its existence: having once not existed at all, the start of its existence was utterly dependent on God, just as its continued existence relies on his continued intervention.

And yet, in the post-classical period, there are outside influences so compelling that they ultimately pervade the personality of Ash‘arī theology. Transformations surrounding the doctrine of creation result, I have shown, from both the positive, and negative influences of Ibn Sīnā’s thought. The positive aspect is the impression of Ibn Sīnā’s theologically ground-breaking metaphysical proposition that the world relies on a cause because of the essential possibility of its existence, and not because of its temporal origination. This idea fits Qur’ānic transcendentalism so well that it is fully embraced by many post-classical Ash‘arīs. The negative aspect is the reaction to Ibn Sīnā’s depiction of God’s creation of the world as a force of inevitable necessitation; it is this idea that results in the heavy emphasis on the presence of volition and power in the creation of the world.

The transformation in the significance of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* occurring among post-classical Ash‘arīs is the immediate context for al-Āmidī’s own views. With regard to al-Āmidī’s own thought, I therefore focused firstly on the theological function of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. I demonstrated that al-Āmidī’s position recalls al-Shahrastānī’s. Like both al-Shahrastānī and al-Rāzī, he upholds Ibn Sīnā’s notion of causedness. It is therefore the distinction between the possible and necessary of existence, and not the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, which provides al-Āmidī with the grounds of his proof for God’s existence. Unlike al-Rāzī, however, al-Āmidī also relies on analysis of the relationship between the possible and necessary of existence in establishing the character of the world’s cause, and specifically, that God is possessed of attributes of volition and power. This is proven through a set of arguments by which al-Āmidī establishes that the necessary of existence cannot produce its effect by its

essence alone. Al-Āmidī's support for the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is not, then, a premise of his support for the more foundational doctrines of God's existence and character. Instead, the doctrine is upheld independently and in its own right, against the eternalists. Al-Āmidī does not explore the scriptural grounds of the doctrine, focusing only on rational proofs for creation *ex nihilo* and against the world's pre-eternity. Therefore his intellectual or theological motive for upholding the traditional Ash'arī conception of creation cannot be determined, in contrast to the thought of al-Rāzī, for whom the doctrine's renewed importance in relation to God's voluntary, wise, omnipotent character is clear.

The chapter next focused on al-Āmidī's discussions of creation themselves, firstly with regard to the Avicennan influence. I was interested specifically in this connection with two theoretical aspects of al-Āmidī's thought on creation. One of these was al-Āmidī's perspective on the appropriation of Avicennan metaphysics in general in defence of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. The second was the extent of al-Āmidī's concurrence with or departure from Ibn Sīnā's theory of efficient causality in discussion of creation. Because of al-Āmidī's methods of discussion, the most viable angle from which to address these questions was through analysis of his discussion of a proof for creation *ex nihilo* premised on the world's essential possibility. With respect to al-Āmidī's general perspective on the adoption of Avicennan metaphysics in support of creation *ex nihilo*, I demonstrated his reluctance, in both of his major *kalām* works, to utilise the notion of possible existence to establish the world's beginning in time. I argued that a significant motivation in this was al-Āmidī's opposition to al-Rāzī's greater integration of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics in general, and specifically in his own defence of creation *ex nihilo*.

With respect to al-Āmidī's reception of Ibn Sīnā's notion of efficient causality in his discussion of creation, I demonstrated that al-Āmidī in fact concurs with the major tenets of that theory. He upholds the notion that an efficient cause cannot be responsible for the non-existence of its effect, and also concurs with Ibn Sīnā that an efficient cause must be temporally simultaneous with its effect. However, he emphasises against Ibn Sīnā that God's essence is not the efficient cause of the world. Instead, the application or connection (*ta'alluq*) of God's pre-eternal attributes of volition and power to the origination of the world is ontologically and causally

prior to the world, and is the efficient cause of its creation. Thus al-Āmidī expresses in Avicennan terms the conviction that God creates by volition and power, and also safeguards his thought against objections regarding the impossibility of an eternal attribute coming to have efficacy after not having acted. Though not the focus of the chapter, al-Āmidī's theory here extends to an absolute denial of causation by essence, and therefore of all secondary causal processes. The applications of God's pre-eternal volition and power to their objects are understood in the mature thought of al-Āmidī as the efficient causes of everything that comes to exist. Al-Āmidī's expression of his school's doctrine of creation and causality in terms which borrowed from Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics serves the pragmatic purpose of making Ash'arī doctrine watertight against critique by its main opponents, since there is no concession at all here to the substance of Ibn Sīnā's understanding of creation.

Another distinguishing feature of al-Āmidī's thought on creation is that he implies that God could have produced, through his eternal volition and power, an eternal world. This is expressed in terms of the possibility of his application of those attributes in pre-eternity. I argued that this view is not, for al-Āmidī himself, central to his doctrine of creation. Rather, it arises primarily in the context of opposition to al-Rāzī, who maintains that the effects of a voluntary agent must be temporally originated, and becomes a standard reading of al-Āmidī among later commentators. The possible implications of the theory are, however, fascinating. This may be one of the reasons for its interest for later commentators. The notion that an eternal world could be the product of God's volition inverts the classical Ash'arī reliance on creation *ex nihilo* for the establishment of God's existence and of his freedom of action. If it is possible to dispense with the theological functionality of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, that doctrine can be taken to imply a limitation on God's power and autonomy. The latent suggestion, not at all developed, however, by al-Āmidī, is that a voluntary agent who willed the world eternally is in fact, more powerful and more beneficent than one who allowed the non-existence of the world for a time. Whilst al-Āmidī himself firmly upholds creation *ex nihilo*, the hypothetical possibility of an eternally willed world within his notion of creation by volition is

a significant outcome of the influence on his thought of Avicennan metaphysics. Nevertheless, it is not central to his own views on creation.

The second main thread of this chapter's analysis concerned the presence of Ash'arī physical theory in al-Āmidī's discussions of creation. I demonstrated first the waning utility of atomism in each of al-Ghazālī's, al-Shahrastānī's and al-Rāzī's discussions of creation. For al-Ghazālī, the proof from accidents remains important in defence of creation *ex nihilo*, but an excessive interest in physical theory is extraneous to theology's main concerns. Al-Shahrastānī and al-Rāzī share a concern with the limitations of physical theory in establishing creation *ex nihilo*. Specifically, the difficulty of disproving the existence of immaterial substances looms large for both thinkers in their assessment of proofs for creation premised on physical theory. In the thought of al-Āmidī, I demonstrated a progression with respect to the use of physical theory. In the *Abkār*, al-Āmidī demonstrates conservatism, using the proof from accidents and expending considerable effort in defence of its demonstrative capacity. This seems part of a general motivation, within this work, to present classical Ash'arism as a philosophical system methodologically capable of countering Ibn Sīnā's. It is, however, compromised by al-Āmidī's acknowledgement of his inability to disprove the existence of immaterial substance.

It is for this reason that in *Ghāyat al-marām*, al-Āmidī abandons physical theory in defence of creation, preferring his version of a proof from the impossibility of an eternal series of motions. Al-Āmidī can be understood here to be rejecting both the application of Avicennan metaphysics in discussion of creation and of classical Ash'arī physical theory. His general attitude of opposition towards al-Rāzī and towards his integration of *falsafa* and *kalām* leads him to reject proofs for creation which rely on propositions appropriated from Ibn Sīnā. And yet, the pervasive influence of Ibn Sīnā's thought on his physical theories also leads him, apparently more by necessity than by choice, to a rejection of the proof from accidents and others of its ilk. For these reasons, he prefers to defend creation *ex nihilo* in a manner which he claims is innovative, but which in fact continues a trend of arguments against the eternity of the world which pre-date the *kalām* tradition altogether.

In general, al-Āmidī's thought on creation is marked by a tension between the curtailed theological significance of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, and a vehement quest to defend both the doctrines and methods of classical Ash'arism. It is through the distinction between the possible and necessary of existence that al-Āmidī supports the vision of God's personality which is at the heart of Ash'arī theology. And so the notion that the world has a beginning becomes devoid of its traditional theological significance. Nevertheless, al-Āmidī defends this hallmark doctrine. And not only that, but at first (in the *Abkār*), his conservatism is so great that he insists on using the physical theoretical framework of classical Ash'arism in its defence. This, we have seen, is deeply problematic because of uncertainties which al-Āmidī expresses over key aspects of that physical theory. The abandonment of physical theory in *Għayat al-Marām* is, then, no small thing.

The progression in al-Āmidī's thinking between these two works may be symptomatic of a broader shift in Ash'arī theology, namely the decline in physical theory as a paradigm for the defence of theological postulates. We saw in Chapter 4 that among post-classical Ash'arīs, physical theory comes to be isolated from theology proper, in reflection of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics-natural philosophy dichotomy. In al-Āmidī's defences of creation, we witness the uncertainty produced by this change. The Ash'arī tradition turned out to be flexible enough to incorporate the most philosophically compelling ideas available, most markedly here, Ibn Sīnā's possible-necessary dichotomy. And yet, in al-Āmidī's thought, the insecurities inevitable to such a transition are plain to see. Deeply important questions relating to the core of the Ash'arī tradition underly the inconsistencies both within the *Abkār* treatment of creation and between al-Āmidī's two works of theology: Which features of classical Ash'arism can be dispensed with without losing the identity of that tradition? How important is it to preserve the methods, as compared to the doctrines, of the school? To what extent should Avicennan metaphysics come to dominate the contents, and structures, of Ash'arī theological *summae*? And is the physical theoretical framework of classical Ash'arism still fit for purpose as a theological tool?

Al-Āmidī's grappling with these questions is played out in his strong reaction to the innovations of his peers, most prominently, al-Rāzī. A master dialectician, we see him effect a thorough

evaluation of a variety of positions towards each of these questions, primarily through the detailed evaluation of proofs for and against classical Ash‘arī doctrines. Huge changes were sweeping the landscape of Ash‘arism in this important period. Whilst al-Āmidī’s thought on creation may not be that of the most innovative of post-Avicennan Ash‘arīs (that status is without doubt reserved for al-Rāzī), in it, the real tensions arising from the collision between two traditionally alien worldviews is laid bare.

Conclusion

The obscurity of the figure of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī with respect to his intellectual involvements as philosopher cum theologian was the impetus for the preceding study. The thesis began with the puzzle of – on the one hand - al-Āmidī's authorship of the *Kashf*, in which he appears to redress what has until recently been understood as al-Rāzī's ‘attack’ (*jarḥ*) on Ibn Sīnā’s philosophical system, and on the other, al-Āmidī’s enduring legacy as an Ash‘arī theologian. I set out to investigate the nature of the meeting of *falsafa* and *kalām* in al-Āmidī’s thought against the background of the historically antagonistic relationship between adherents of the traditions. The study’s objective was to analyse the respective influences of Avicennism and classical Ash‘arism in each of al-Āmidī’s works of *falsafa* and *kalām*. This was approached through the case study of al-Āmidī’s discussion of creation, and its groundings in what I have argued are the two major paradigms within which creation was discussed in his intellectual context. This manner of approaching al-Āmidī’s philosophical and theological thought has revealed particular facets of the encounter between the two traditions as present therein. The findings of the thesis are conceived of as a contribution to our rapidly expanding knowledge of the early post-classical period of Islamic intellectual history.

Firstly, the thesis has shown that al-Āmidī’s works of *falsafa* and *kalām* can be characterised according to three major stages in his reception of and attitude towards Avicennan *falsafa*. *Al-Nūr al-bāhir* is incompatible, in terms of the doctrinal commitments evidenced within, with all al-Āmidī’s other extant works of philosophy and theology. In the work, probably a product of al-Āmidī’s early encounters with philosophy in Baghdađ, where we know Ibn Sīnā’s works were circulating widely and under heavy debate, he embraces Avicennan philosophy. His stated intellectual project, born out in the contents of the work, is not the development of philosophical ideas, but their defence against an array of critics. The great majority of each discussion within the work is taken up with this project, following brief statements of Ibn Sīnā’s essential positions across the sciences. Identifiable opponents are Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī and al-Ghazālī, representing between them philosophical and theological criticisms of Ibn Sīnā. At this stage in

his thought, I have not found evidence of an awareness of al-Rāzī's works. Despite the overwhelming support for Avicennan philosophy in this work, there are some minor departures from his methods of establishing certain doctrines, relevant to the discussion of creation and reflective of al-Āmidī's familiarity with and concession to aspects of alternative metaphysical belief systems, to which I will return.

Despite its very different intellectual project, al-Āmidī's *Kashf al-tamwīhāt* may also be classed as a product of an early stage of interest in *falsafa*, in this case, however, after al-Āmidī's first exposure to the thought of al-Rāzī. However, unlike the *Nūr* and contrary to what might be expected of such a work, the *Kashf* is not a defence of Ibn Sīnā, but an attack on al-Rāzī's reading of Ibn Sīnā. Neither is it a true representation of al-Rāzī's reading of Ibn Sīnā in the *Sharḥ*, which we now know to be a fair assessment of the *Ishārāt*, advancing Avicennan philosophy in several respects. Rather, al-Āmidī deliberately targets only al-Rāzī's criticisms of Ibn Sīnā, and this in a rather *ad hoc* manner, such that many of the contents of the *Sharḥ* are not covered in the work. Furthermore, al-Āmidī's criticisms of al-Rāzī are often philosophically inconsequential, suggesting that al-Āmidī's primary agenda is to undermine al-Rāzī's capabilities as a logician rather than to oppose him doctrinally. It is thus best characterised as a metacriticism of the *Sharḥ*, as al-Āmidī's own introduction affirms. This makes it unreliable as an indicator of al-Āmidī's own intellectual commitments at this time.

It would be highly desirable to be in the position to ascertain the catalyst for al-Āmidī's entrance into the second stage of his reception of Avicennan philosophy. It is unfortunately impossible to explain the fundamental change of intellectual commitments which occurs between his authorship of the *Nūr*, and of *Rumūz al-kunūz* and *Daqā'iq al-ḥaqā'iq*, in which he expresses adherence to the major doctrines of classical *kalām*. It seems possible, however, that the existence of the *Kashf* represents relevant evidence, in that the work clearly demonstrates the impact of al-Āmidī's encounter with al-Rāzī's works, probably early in his time in Syria. Al-Rāzī is a philosophically engaged Ash'arī theologian, to whom al-Āmidī finds himself opposed. Whilst the *Kashf* does not offer any evidence of al-Āmidī's own emerging Ash'arī commitments, the simple fact of al-Āmidī's close engagement with his contemporary's reception of philosophy may

suggest that al-Āmidī was also influenced by and provoked to develop a response to the theological perspectives of his peer. However, this does not go far in explaining what amounts to a complete change of allegiance in al-Āmidī's thought - perhaps there was some manner of conversion apart from his exposure to al-Rāzī's thought which goes undetected in the biographical sources.

Setting this question aside, I have established that the *Rumūz*, and apparently also the work of which it is an abridgement, the *Daqā'iq*, are the products of a middle phase in al-Āmidī's thought in which, despite his commitment to the theological worldview and its major beliefs, he remains impressed by Avicennan philosophy. He is broadly accommodating of the aspects of Ibn Sīnā's beliefs which he perceives not to represent a direct threat to *kalām* doctrines such as the notion that God is a voluntary agent possessed of power, and the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Philosophical beliefs which al-Āmidī accommodates in this work, against the traditions of classical *kalām*, include Ibn Sīnā's belief in secondary causation and the majority of his natural philosophical theories. The *Rumūz*, then, represents an assessment of Avicennan doctrine in terms of its compatibility with theological belief. Al-Āmidī departs from his early phase of wholesale endorsement of Avicennan philosophy to a stage of adoption to the extent possible without contradiction of core theological positions, and critique only over those issues. Since the focus is on distinguishing between acceptable and problematic Avicennan beliefs, in this brief work (anomalously in relation to most others), al-Āmidī is not overly interested in other contemporary responses to Ibn Sīnā. However, there is evidence of his awareness of al-Ghazālī's criticisms and al-Rāzī's readings of Ibn Sīnā, indicating their continued importance for his own intellectual development.

It is the products of al-Āmidī's mature stage in the reception of Ibn Sīnā which have occupied the majority of the analysis of this thesis, primarily because these works (*Abkār al-afkār* and *Ghāyat al-marām*) represent his most independent thought, and also the culmination of developments in his thinking in his earlier works. It is hardly surprising that in these later works, al-Āmidī never acknowledges his authorship of *al-Nūr al-bāhir*, since his commitments and attitudes towards the Avicennan philosophical tradition are totally inverted between that early work and his mature

theology. In these later works, the influence of al-Āmidī's background in Avicennism is keenly felt, and yet he overtly represents that tradition as alien to the theological tradition, and wrong-minded in its understanding not only of God's personality, his action, and his creation, but also in its view of the workings of the natural world. Al-Rāzī is a very prominent intellectual opponent in al-Āmidī's works of *kalām*, although al-Āmidī disguises his interest in his peer by never naming him or acknowledging the source of arguments which originate with al-Rāzī. More broadly, al-Āmidī leans heavily towards a dialectical, even scholastic approach to theological enquiry in this work, and is preoccupied with the refutation of arguments which he deems undemonstrative, wherever they originate (frequently among classical theologians). His skill at disputation (*jadal*), often referenced by his biographers and evidenced in the work he dedicates to the subject, is manifest in these later works.

Al-Āmidī's, then, is an intellectual career in stages. This is in itself an interesting observation in relation to the history of the relationship between *falsafa* and *kalām*. In al-Āmidī's thought, there is evidence of experimentalism in regard to the ways in which the traditions do, or ought to, intersect. It appears that a thinker of al-Āmidī's era was no longer bound to a straightforward commitment to the approaches of either of the traditions of philosophy or theology. Rather, propelled by the intellectual circumstances of the widespread circulation of Avicennan philosophy, and of the heritage of al-Ghazālī's rather radical reassessment of the Ash'arī mode of theology, along with his heavy criticism of aspects of Ibn Sīnā, intellectuals of the time had more complex work to do. Al-Āmidī's responses to al-Rāzī's more thoroughgoing and innovative experimentalism remind us that his endeavours at the *falsafa-kalām* interface were not isolated, and speak of the towering prominence of al-Rāzī's new mode of philosophical theology. Yet al-Rāzī was not to be emulated by al-Āmidī, and the particular dynamic of the respective influences of Ibn Sīnā and of classical Ash'arism on al-Āmidī's thought is unique to him.

Having provided evidence of the development of al-Āmidī's general position with respect to Avicennan philosophy, the thesis has secondly established several more specific findings concerning the influence of Ibn Sīnā on al-Āmidī's thought. Most markedly, as discussed in Chapter 3, al-Āmidī's exposure to Avicennan philosophy impacts on his approach to, and

structuring of his theological project in his mature works of *kalām*. Ibn Sīnā's distinction between necessary and possible existents provides al-Āmidī with his key differentiator between God and his creation. And despite the great variation between al-Āmidī's works, his adoption of this distinction is a consistent feature of his thought. I also demonstrated the immediate intellectual context for al-Āmidī's ready adoption of the distinction in his theology, namely its acceptance in the thought of al-Shahrastānī, al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī, itself partly explicable against the background of notions of the necessity of God's existence in classical *kalām*.

The prominence of the distinction in al-Āmidī's *kalām* informs the structure of his works, especially in the *Abkār*, where he distinguishes between questions relating directly to God, his existence, his attributes and actions, treated under the category 'the Necessary of Existence', and those pertaining to the world and its constituents and origins, under the category, 'the Possible of Existence'. More significant than the structural impact of the adoption of the distinction is its impact on al-Āmidī's proofs for God's existence and attributes of volition and power, treated in Chapter 5. As well as accepting that God is most fundamentally distinct from all other existents because of the necessity of his existence and the possibility of theirs, al-Āmidī (unlike al-Ghazālī but like al-Shahrastānī and al-Rāzī) also accepts that the world requires a cause on account of the possibility of its existence, and not as a result of its having a temporal beginning. This notion is part of a transformation occurring within post-classical Ash'arism, in which the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* is no longer requisite to the defence of God's existence. Furthermore, al-Āmidī utilises analysis of the relationship between the necessary and possible of existence to establish the view, *contra* Ibn Sīnā's, that the necessary of existence must cause the world by attributes of volition and power. Thus, the belief in creation *ex nihilo*, though defended by al-Āmidī as a standalone doctrine, is not required for establishing the Ash'arī vision of God. Al-Āmidī's concession to the hypothetical possibility of an eternally willed world (though not as significant for his doctrine of creation as later commentators suggest) makes this abundantly clear.

Ibn Sīnā's thought not only leads al-Āmidī to develop Ash'arī doctrine. A second major aspect of the influence of the Avicennan legacy in al-Āmidī's thought, demonstrated in Chapter 4, is a negative impact. Al-Āmidī expresses uncertainty over traditionally foundational *kalām* beliefs

such as the exhaustive division of existents apart from God into the categories of substance and its inherent accidents, and over the existence of an indivisible part of matter. Again, there is a certain observable continuity between his works in this regard, despite the development in his overall commitments. In the *Nūr*, al-Āmidī follows Ibn Sīnā's lead in presenting a strident critique of atomism. More generally, he embraces Ibn Sīnā's ontology, including the immaterial substances which are so problematic for the classical *kalām* worldview. In the works of his middle intellectual stage, despite his commitment to that worldview, al-Āmidī's position in relation to such physical theoretical questions broadly concurs with the views expressed in the *Nūr*. And although he ostensibly supports Ash'arī physical theory in his works of *kalām*, I have shown that deep and (in the *Abkār*) unresolved inconsistencies result from his lack of certainty over these key questions. His elimination of physical theory from arguments for theological doctrine in the *Ghāya* is the ultimate outcome of the undermining of Ash'arī physical theory which begins with his authorship of the *Nūr*. Against the background of Chapter 2, where I showed the consistency between generations of classical Ash'arīs with regard to their reliance on physical theoretical tenets in establishing theological doctrine, the relative novelty of al-Āmidī's approach should be clear.

The next major concern of the thesis was with the comparative influence of al-Āmidī's classical Ash'arī heritage on his thought. It has emerged that in the thought of mature al-Āmidī, it is a commitment to the doctrines of classical Ash'arism (and in many cases, to its methods) which drives his intellectual project to a far greater extent than the respective Avicennan influence. For even with regard to al-Āmidī's adoption of the distinction between the necessary and possible of existence, it is the metaphysics of classical Ash'arism which informs his notions of what possibility constitutes, and of how the necessary of existence is causally related to the effects of his power (as demonstrated in Chapter 3). Specifically, al-Āmidī promotes the normative Ash'arī perspective on potentiality, which is to say that he denies the existence of potency in the created order, and understands God's creation not as the actualisation of already present potential, but as the making of stuff literally from nothing. Ibn Sīnā's understanding of creation as the actualisation of possible essences which are already potential is strongly opposed. Possibilities

are understood as multiple synchronic conceptual alternatives to the course of action deliberately particularised by God. In this, al-Āmidī is doing little more than clarifying and articulating within a renewed metaphysical framework the classical Ash‘arī conception of God’s relation to the effects of his power.

Furthermore, it has emerged that even in his earliest work of philosophy, the *Nūr*, al-Āmidī’s understanding of what possibility constitutes is not entirely Ibn Sīnā’s. I highlighted the importance of the natural philosophical connection here, and in particular, the grounding of Ibn Sīnā’s notion of possible existence in his conception of *hyle* as the potent principle of body, only actualised by its inherent forms. It is significant that, in his *Nūr*, al-Āmidī isolates the relevant natural philosophical discussions from their metaphysical significance, and accordingly, consistently opposes Ibn Sīnā’s notion of possibility itself as entitative and requiring a substrate of matter in which to inhere. I explained this as the result of the impact of al-Āmidī’s engagements with al-Ghazālī’s critique of Ibn Sīnā’s notion of possibility on his own reception of Ibn Sīnā. As he progresses towards a commitment to Ash‘arī *kalām*, al-Āmidī’s understanding of possibility is increasingly alienated from Ibn Sīnā’s. Thus, despite the prominence of the necessary/possible distinction as a framing device and with respect to the question of what determines an existent’s need for a cause, it is the classical Ash‘arī metaphysics of possibility which drives al-Āmidī’s vision of the God-world relationship.

The second major evidence of al-Āmidī’s commitment to advancing the paradigms of classical Ash‘arism (demonstrated in Chapters 4 and 5) is his full endorsement, in the *Abkār*, of Ash‘arī physical theory, and of its utility in establishing the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. The topics treated within al-Āmidī’s discussions of physical theory concur with those of classical Ash‘arism and he defends most tenets rigorously. This is despite the uncertainties brought about by his background in Avicennism, and also contradicts his earlier claim in the *Rumūz* that Avicennan natural philosophy is not incompatible with *kalām* theology. As well as seeing Ash‘arī atomism (in the *Abkār*) in terms of its traditional utility in the defence of theological doctrine, al-Āmidī also clearly conceives of his tradition’s physical theory as a robust set of postulates equivalent to Ibn Sīnā’s natural philosophy as a field in its own right, and more valid as an explanation of the

physical world. This can be seen as a further aspect of the Avicennan influence on his thought, given the clear distinction between metaphysics and natural philosophy in Ibn Sīnā's philosophical system, and also as evidence of al-Āmidī's driving commitment to classical Ash'arism in all its facets. It also distinguishes al-Āmidī's thought from that of his post-Avicennan Ash'arī predecessors and contemporaries, particularly al-Ghazālī, who derides the classical theologians for their excessive interest in questions of physical theory, and generally avoids recourse to the use of atomism in defence of theological doctrine. Yet the tension between the respective influences of Ibn Sīnā's opposition to atomism on the one hand, and al-Āmidī's commitment to that theory as a valid natural philosophy means that his support for atomism cannot be maintained. In *Ghāyat al-marām*, we witness the outcome of this in the collapse of atomist physical theory as a paradigm for the defence of creation *ex nihilo*, and more generally, in al-Āmidī's side-lining of physical theory from his theological project.

In analysis of the respective influences on al-Āmidī's thought, a major additional finding has been made with regard to the centrality of the figure of al-Rāzī as intellectual opponent to al-Āmidī. Evidence of al-Rāzī's importance for al-Āmidī accumulates through the chapters of the thesis, beginning with the evidence of the biographers, which, though ambiguous and obviously not free from fabrication, already identifies al-Āmidī's encounters with al-Rāzī's disciples in Syria as a factor in his controversy as an intellectual. The evidence of the works themselves confirms al-Rāzī's towering significance in al-Āmidī's thought, which takes several forms. Firstly, it is clear that, from the time of his writing of the *Kashf* and onwards, al-Rāzī stands as an important mediator in al-Āmidī's reception of Ibn Sīnā. A key instance of this phenomenon is al-Āmidī's responses to the theory of the relationship between essence and existence in the possible which he consistently attributes to 'the philosophers', but which is, in fact, al-Rāzī's reading of Ibn Sīnā's own metaphysical theory. This is an intriguing finding, since we know that al-Āmidī had directly and independently engaged with Ibn Sīnā's theories, on the evidence of the *Nūr*. It was not for lack of access to or knowledge of Ibn Sīnā's works that al-Āmidī preferred to treat al-Rāzī's readings of the philosopher. Rather, al-Āmidī's emphasis on Rāzian readings of Ibn Sīnā seems to suggest the rapidly increasing circulation and popularity of al-Rāzī's commentaries on and

interpretations of Ibn Sīnā in the intellectual milieu of twelfth-century Syria, and perhaps beyond.

Secondly, a consistent thread in al-Āmidī's discussions of proofs for Ash'arī doctrines (including the existence of the indivisible part and creation *ex nihilo*) in his works of theology is the critique of proofs devised or developed by al-Rāzī. Al-Āmidī seems intent on undermining his opponent's capacity to defend Ash'arī doctrine, especially where al-Rāzī's defence is innovative in its utilisation of Avicennan metaphysical principles to support the ends of *kalām*. This suggests that al-Āmidī may be partially motivated, in his own conservative approach to the defence of Ash'arī doctrine, seen for instance in his use of the proof from accidents for creation *ex nihilo* in the *Abkār*, by a reaction to his peer's greater radicalism and willingness to abandon the conventions of their common school.

And yet, a third aspect of the Rāzian influence on al-Āmidī's thought is in al-Āmidī's adoption of certain of al-Rāzī's proofs, such as his proof for the indivisible part derived from the nature of time and motion. Instances of the appearance of al-Rāzī's proofs in al-Āmidī's thought are marked by the fact that they find their proper context in al-Rāzī's more integrative discussions of the issues at hand, a context which they lose in al-Āmidī's works. Al-Āmidī also consistently fails to acknowledge the source of arguments which are Rāzian, even occasionally claiming originality. Al-Āmidī had a complex and perhaps troubled relationship with the work of his peer. Impressed by specific arguments his contemporary devised, al-Āmidī nevertheless seems to have opposed al-Rāzī's dynamic integration of *falsafa* with *kalām*. Furthermore, he seems to have been in competition with al-Rāzī's disciples for patronage. Against the background of both these figures' close engagement with Avicennan philosophy, it appears that al-Āmidī willed to demonstrate firstly that he was a more skilled logician than his peer and better able to provide demonstrative proofs for school doctrines, and secondly that his peer had strayed in some of the more innovative aspects of his integration of *falsafa* into *kalām*. We can only speculate regarding other more personal motivations for the contention between the individuals, to which some of the biographical sources allude.

In summary, the theological and philosophical works of al-Āmidī offer a window over an unique trajectory of the influence of Ibn Sīnā on the post-classical tradition of Ash‘arī *kalām*. Al-Āmidī’s response to Ibn Sīnā in his theological thought is equivalent neither to the *Tahāfut*-inspired diatribes of theologians like Ibn Ghaylān al-Balkhī, with their narrowly polemical intent, nor to al-Rāzī’s evolving philosophical theology, which incorporates by stages so much of the Avicennan philosophical approach. Hallmarks of al-Āmidī’s approach in his mature thought include the considerable extent to which he evidently prizes the tradition of classical Ash‘arism, and is reticent in relinquishing its conventional physical theoretical paradigm for the discussion of creation, despite the fact that his encounter with Avicennism has led him away from that framework. It is this affinity with classical Ash‘arism which produces a second characteristic feature of his later works, namely, his tendency to present Avicennan philosophical doctrines as aspects of a competing and erroneous worldview, opposed to sound doctrine. This leads him consistently to present and refute Ibn Sīnā’s positions on a whole spectrum of metaphysical, theological and natural philosophical questions, and this refutation often appears as a kind of preliminary to the exposition and defence of the sound theological view. Though this recalls the approach of scholars like al-Balkhī, it serves the more positive theological purpose of allowing al-Āmidī to demonstrate his familiarity with Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy and at once to side-line his beliefs as a way of clearing the ground for Ash‘arī opinions on the same questions.

Of course, the very priority given to the discussion of Avicennan doctrines, even with this negativistic agenda, speaks of Ibn Sīnā’s influence on al-Āmidī’s mature theological thought, and we have seen that this is the natural outcome of his history of close engagement with his opponent’s philosophy, including a stage of straightforward commitment to that tradition. A further hallmark of al-Āmidī’s thought is the positive influence of Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy. His background in Avicennan philosophy affects the way in which al-Āmidī differentiates between God and the world, his notion of the nature of the world’s dependence on God, his approach to the structuring of a theological enquiry, and his increasing departure from his school’s reliance on physical theory in the defence of theological doctrine. It even causes him to account for the purpose of *kalām* in highly Avicennan terms, in relation to the pursuit of knowledge - in this case,

of the Divinity, the most worthy goal of all knowledge - as part of the process of the completion and perfection of the human. It is true that al-Āmidī's *kalām* does not manifest the same level of integration between the traditions as al-Rāzī's, a fact which I have suggested represents in part a conservative reaction to al-Rāzī's approach. And yet this ought not disguise the considerable influence of *falsafa* on al-Āmidī's thought, an influence which makes al-Āmidī's mode of Ash'arism something quite distinct from that of his classical predecessors.

Al-Āmidī's thought, especially in the *Abkār*, is also tainted by certain inconsistencies which result from the tension between his determination to preserve the paradigms of classical Ash'arism, and the Avicennan influence. This is historically useful to us, since in some of its facets, al-Āmidī's thought in the *Abkār* can be understood as a work in progress, an experiment at the interface of the traditions. Where, in the *Ghāya*, al-Āmidī resolves some of these inconsistencies, we witness the choices made in balancing the competing influences at work in his thought.

The light shed on al-Āmidī the philosopher-theologian in this thesis is a contribution to a more nuanced and variegated understanding of the interactions between the traditions of *falsafa* and *kalām* in the aftermath of Ibn Sīnā's watershed contribution and its critique at the hands of al-Ghazālī. Al-Āmidī died almost two centuries after Ibn Sīnā, yet it is clear that despite this considerable time lapse, many of the theological issues provoked by the latter's philosophy were far from settled. There were a number of theological responses to Ibn Sīnā's views, along a spectrum from pure negativism to profound acceptance and accommodation. Al-Āmidī lies somewhere along the spectrum, deeply impressed by the more theologically potent aspects of Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics, swayed in his commitment to Ash'arī physical theory by the strongest aspects of Ibn Sīnā's critique thereof, and yet, ultimately, firmly committed to classical Ash'arī doctrine and therefore, by his own definition, opposed to the school of thought in which competing doctrines originate and are furnished with new proofs. This situation is just one instance of the gradual and intricate process of absorption of and response to Ibn Sīnā's philosophy occurring among Ash'arī theologians in the long shadow of his ground-breaking work - work which so Islamises philosophy that it was bound to have an irreversible impact on the theological tradition of the Islamic world.

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