

The Moral and Epistemic Foundations of Faith: A Study on Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī’s
Concept of *Īmān*

by

Muhammet Saygi

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Department of Theology and Religion
School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion
College of Arts and Law
University of Birmingham
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ABSTRACT

Māturīdism, one of the two major schools of rational theology (*kalām*) in Sunni Islam, has not received the attention it deserves in Western academic circles, often being overshadowed by its counterpart, Ash‘arism. This study aims to contribute to the understanding and appreciation of Māturīdī theology by focusing on one of its prominent representatives, Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī (d. 508/1115), who is considered by many contemporary scholars to be the most outstanding figure in the school after its eponym, Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944). The main focus of the study centred on the analysis of Nasafī’s interpretation of religious faith (*īmān*) within the context of the ‘Ethics of Belief’ debate, a philosophical discussion that emerged in Anglophone circles in the late 19th century. The first chapter addresses introductory themes, including the theoretical framework of the study, Nasafī’s life and background, a brief history and development of Māturīdism, and an overview of the current state of the field. Chapter two examines Nasafī’s epistemology, his proofs for the existence of God, and two different methods he proposes for acquiring evidence for religious beliefs: one for the learned or experts (*‘ulamā’*) and the other for the laymen or followers (*muqallid*). Chapter three analyses Nasafī’s arguments in favour of the possibility and reality of prophecy (*nubuwwa*), as well as their implications for his interpretation of faith. Chapter four explores Nasafī’s perspective on the relationship between knowledge (*‘ilm* or *ma‘rifa*), assent (*taṣdīq*), and human free will (*ikhtiyār*) in forming religious beliefs. Chapter five delves into Nasafī’s intellectual legacy and his contributions to the Māturīdī school of thought. The final chapter of the study summarises its findings and highlights Nasafī’s significance for properly understanding the Māturīdī school. One of the main findings of this study is that, according to Nasafī, evidence or, more broadly, epistemic reasons cannot be

ignored in forming beliefs if one aims to be morally justified in holding religious faith. Nasafi and his moderate or ‘sensible’ Evidentialism deserve serious attention within the ‘Ethics of Belief’ debate and potential future *kalām jadīd* projects. Without understanding Nasafi’s theology and his contributions to the Māturīdī school, our evaluation of the tradition he is part of would remain deficient.

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unparalleled. Her sacrifices and belief in me have made this accomplishment possible, and for that, I am eternally grateful. This achievement is as much hers as it is mine.

DEDICATION

In Loving Memory of my Father...

TRANSLITERATION OF ARABIC WORDS

Letters of the Alphabet

ا	’ (see Note 1)	ز	z	ق	q
ب	b	س	s	ك	k
ت	t	ش	sh	ل	l
ث	th	ص	ṣ	م	m
ج	j	ض	ḍ	ن	n
ح	ḥ	ط	ṭ	ه	h
خ	kh	ظ	ẓ	و	w
د	d	ع	‘	ي	y
ذ	dh	غ	gh		
ر	r	ف	f		
Short:		Long:		Doubled:	
اَ	a	اِ or اِي	ā	اِيِي	ī
اِ	i	اِي	ī	اِيِي	ū
اُ	u	اُو	ū		

Note 1: (’) *hamza* is omitted at the beginning of a word.

Note 2: (ة) *tā’ marbūṭa* is transcribed as the letter ‘a’ when it is at the end of a word. However, if the same letter is part of the original letters of the word, it is transcribed as the letter ‘h’.

Note 3: When (ة) appears at the end of a word, which is the first term of an *iḍāfa* construction, it is transliterated as ‘t’.

Note 4: The definite article (ال) is capitalised as “Al-” only at the beginning of an Arabic phrase.

Note 5: All Ottoman Turkish names and materials are transcribed using the modern Turkish orthography.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AÜİFD	Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi [Journal of the Faculty of Divinity of Ankara University]
b.	born
bk.	book
ch.	chapter
d.	died
DEÜİFD	Dokuz Eylül Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi
fn.	footnote
İFAV	(Marmara Üniversitesi) İlahiyat Fakültesi Vakfı
JFES	Ankara University Journal of Faculty of Educational Sciences
JIUFT	Journal of Istanbul University Faculty of Theology
KSiÜİFD	Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi
MÜİFY	Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Yayınları
n.d.	no date (sine nominee, when publisher is unknown)
n.p.	no publisher
SÜİFD	Sakarya Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi
TDVY	Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı Yayınları
TTKY	Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları

vol. volume

vols. volumes

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INTRODUCTION

In the ever-evolving landscape of Islamic theology, the pursuit of knowledge has consistently been driven by a quest to comprehend the intricate doctrines and principles that underpin Sunni Islam. However, despite its significance, one of the major schools of rational theology (*kalām*) in Sunni Islam, Māturīdism, has not received the attention it merits in Western academic circles, eclipsed by its counterpart, Ash‘arism. This thesis aims to contribute to the understanding and appreciation of Māturīdī theology by focusing on one of its eminent scholars, Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī (d. 508/1115). He is regarded by many contemporary researchers as the most significant figure in the school after its eponym, Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944). The study scrutinises Nasafī’s interpretation of religious faith (*īmān*) within the context of the ‘Ethics of Belief’ debate, a philosophical framework that addresses the moral implications and responsibilities associated with forming religious beliefs under certain doxastic considerations.

The central research question of this study is: What is Nasafī’s interpretation of religious faith within the framework of the ‘Ethics of Belief’ debate? To answer this question, the study adopts a library-based research approach, analysing primary and secondary sources to explore Nasafī’s theological writings and their implications for understanding his concept of religious faith. The methodology involves a rigorous examination of Nasafī’s texts, using analytical language to dissect and interpret his arguments, definitions, and conclusions on the topic. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of Nasafī’s perspective on religious faith and its significance within the broader context of Māturīdī theology and the ‘Ethics of Belief’ debate.

The structure of the study is designed to guide the reader through a logical progression of ideas, starting with the fundamentals of Nasafī's theology and culminating in his understanding of religious faith, particularly the analysis of the relationship between evidence, assent, and human freedom, with each chapter building upon the last to construct a cohesive argument.

Chapter one lays the foundational themes for our exploration and analysis of Nasafī's interpretation of religious faith. It introduces the theoretical framework of the study, provides an overview of Māturīdism—including its historical development and its place within Sunni *kalām*—and contextualises Nasafī within the broader intellectual milieu of his time. Additionally, it surveys the current state of scholarship on Māturīdism, with a particular focus on Nasafī. Chapter two delves into Nasafī's epistemological framework and his arguments for the existence of God. It also explores Nasafī's differentiation between the learned (*'ulamā'*) and the laymen (*muqallid*), along with the respective methods Nasafī advises for each group to acquire religious knowledge and form beliefs. In chapter three, Nasafī's arguments regarding the possibility and reality of prophecy (*nubuwwa*) are examined. This chapter also explores Nasafī's views on the nature and significance of prophetic messages in shaping religious beliefs, highlighting their implications through the lens of the study's theoretical framework. Chapter four analyses the relationship Nasafī establishes between knowledge (*'ilm* or *ma'rifa*), assent (*taṣdīq*), and human free will (*ikhtiyār*) in the act of believing. Chapter five is dedicated to Nasafī's intellectual legacy and his contributions to the Māturīdī school of thought. It traces the influence of Nasafī's ideas on subsequent generations of Māturīdī theologians and assesses his significance in shaping the trajectory of Māturīdī thought. The concluding chapter summarises the findings of the study, emphasising Nasafī's importance for an accurate understanding of the

Māturīdī school and the relevance of his moderate or ‘sensible’ Evidentialism for future *kalām jadīd* projects and broader contemporary discussions of religious epistemology.

CHAPTER 1: SETTING THE STAGE: FRAMEWORK AND BACKGROUND

1. Theoretical Framework

The term ‘Ethics of Belief’ traditionally refers to a philosophical debate that has occurred in Western philosophical circles over the past few centuries.¹ The central focus of the debate revolves around the question of what sorts of reasons justify our beliefs. Are there specific reasons or conditions that must be adhered to in order to justify our beliefs or render them morally acceptable? Is it possible to establish certain norms or rules that regulate the process of forming and maintaining justified beliefs, or abandoning unjustified ones? Are there epistemic standards that should shape our doxastic attitude? In brief, philosophers in this field seek to understand and establish certain principles that would guide individuals in developing their beliefs in a morally and intellectually responsible manner.

Notwithstanding my brief synopsis of the debate, the ongoing discussion on the ethics of belief is remarkably intricate and detailed, much like other topics in contemporary Western philosophy. The complexity arises from the use of specialised terminology and careful distinctions. Before getting into the specifics of the debate, I propose to accept the idea that it is reasonable to assume Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, who describes imitators (*muqallids*) as sinners for holding religious beliefs without using their mental faculties, might have had an interest or consideration in the ethical aspects of beliefs. In addition, I acknowledge that my following interpretation of the debate might seem oversimplified or lacking in nuance to an expert in the field. However, my primary goal is not to present a thorough and detailed treatment of the debate

¹ Andrew Chignell, ‘The Ethics of Belief’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring Edition 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/ethics-belief/>.

but rather to establish a framework for analysing Nasafi's position on the matter. Therefore, my presentation strategy should align with the broader purpose of the thesis —namely, to be concise enough to maintain focus on Nasafi's ideas without being overwhelmed by detail, yet detailed enough to clearly elucidate his position on the ethics of belief.

Philosophers in the ethics of belief traditionally recognise three types of values or reasons that shape our doxastic attitudes or belief formation processes: epistemic, prudential, and moral.² Some argue that only a single type of value, typically epistemic value, is sufficient to establish doxastic norms. Evidentialists take this position and assert that only evidence, or in a broader sense, epistemic reasons —those supporting the truth of a proposition '*p*'— can justify a person (or subject '*S*') in believing that *p*. This group not only claims that evidence is necessary but also

² Among contemporary scholars, there is ongoing debate regarding the existence of norms beyond those derived from traditionally accepted values that influence our doxastic attitudes (our attitudes towards beliefs). Some suggest the presence of certain 'social' norms that could significantly impact our doxastic attitudes, particularly when occupying specific societal roles such as lawyers, priests, psychiatrists, friends, or parents. Additionally, others propose the existence of 'aesthetic' and 'political' norms. Furthermore, some argue that these proposed additional norms can be understood within traditional categories. For instance, in a legal context, individuals closely associated with a defendant, such as close friends, lawyers, or relatives, may believe in the defendant's innocence due to moral or prudential considerations rather than social norms. In other words, their belief can be explained by ethical or practical considerations rather than social norms. The discussion regarding the existence and influence of these additional norms on our doxastic attitudes is ongoing, and it seems it has not yet reached a consensus. Therefore, to maintain conciseness and align with the broader purpose of the study, I need to narrow the focus of the discussion to traditionally accepted values and the norms derived from them. For more on other proposed norms and whether they can be interpreted through the traditionally accepted values, see Keller Simon, 'Friendship and Belief', *Philosophical Papers* 33, no. 3 (2004): 329–351; Jason Kawall, 'Friendship and Epistemic Norms', *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 165, no. 2 (2013): 349–370; Scott F. Aikin, 'Evidentialism and James' Argument from Friendship', *Southwest Philosophy Review* 24, no. 1 (2008): 173–180; Sarah Stroud, 'Epistemic Partiality in Friendship', *Ethics* 116, no. 3 (2006): 498–524.

argues that no other factor besides evidence is sufficient to determine whether *S* is justified to believe that *p*. The Evidentialist principle can be formulated as follows:

S's belief that *p* is justified only if *S* has sufficient evidence (or, more broadly, epistemic reasons) supporting the belief that *p*.³

The second group, which I term as “non-Evidentialists,” rejects the mentioned Evidential principle.⁴ Proponents of this position argue that there are situations where prudential⁵ and moral reasons,⁶ alone or in tandem, carry more weight and provide stronger justification for holding a

³ Cf. Dennis Whitcomb, ‘Can there be a Knowledge-First Ethics of Belief?’, in *The Ethics of Belief: Individual and Social*, ed. Jonathan Matheson and Rico Vitz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 90–91; Jonathan E. Adler, *Belief's Own Ethics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Bradford, MIT Press, 2002), 3–6; Earl Conee and Richard Feldman, *Evidentialism: Essays in Epistemology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 83; Kevin McCain, *Evidentialism and Epistemic Justification* (New York, London: Routledge, 2014), 3; William P. Alston, *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1989), 81–114.

⁴ I find the term ‘non-Evidentialist’ fitting to describe positions that do not solely rely on evidence or epistemic reasons for justifying beliefs because, as we shall discuss later, it suitably encompasses theories that integrate both prudential and Kantian moral perspectives as foundations for justification, without being strictly bound to evidence or epistemic reasons.

⁵ In this context, ‘prudential’ refers to actions or decisions considered wise, sensible, or practical, particularly from the perspective of one’s own well-being, advantage, or self-interest. Prudential considerations often involve making choices that are likely to lead to positive outcomes or to avoid harm. For more on prudential reasons and whether they can justify *S*'s belief that *p*, see Andrew Reisner, ‘The Possibility of Pragmatic Reasons for Belief and the Wrong Kind of Reasons Problem’, *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 145, no. 2 (2009): 257–272; Andrew Reisner, ‘Weighing Pragmatic and Evidential Reasons for Belief’, *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 138, no. 1 (2008): 17–27.

⁶ The acts of doing what is morally right, promoting the moral good, and contributing to the overall moral well-being of society can be cited as instances of moral ends. For more on moral reasons and whether they can

belief compared to solely relying on evidence. In other words, if holding a specific belief aligns with a person's prudential goal or end (*E*), and if having that belief is expected to contribute to achieving that *E*, then there exists a prima facie justification for the person to hold that belief.

This perspective can be formulated as follows:

If there is a prudential or moral *E*, either separately or in combination, for *S*, and believing that *p* is likely to assist *S* in achieving that *E*, then *S* is prima facie justified in believing that *p*.

Some non-Evidentialists might agree that for *S* to be justified in believing that *p*, it is expected for *S* to possess a valid epistemic reason. However, they never accept that merely having an epistemic reason guarantees or always leads to the justification of *S*'s belief that *p*. In other words, they are sceptical about the direct correlation between having an epistemic reason and the belief being justified; yet, in certain circumstances, one might be expected to have an epistemic reason for one's belief.

The third and final group, which I call "anti-Evidentialist," represents the fideist or dogmatic position on the ethics of belief. Fideism or dogmatism is a doctrine that firmly asserts the supreme power of faith over intellect in the domain of religious epistemology. According to this perspective, faith is the superior path to religious truth. Religious beliefs are devoid of evidence or epistemic reasons and rely solely on faith as their foundation. This idea has been associated with figures like Tertullian (d. 220 AD),⁷ a Christian theologian in the early Church,

be considered evidence for belief, see Michael Pace, 'The Epistemic Value of Moral Considerations: Justification, Moral Encroachment, and James' "Will to Believe"', *Noûs* 45, no. 2 (2010): 239–268.

⁷ He famously asked, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" This was posed to emphasise the distinction between the intellectual tradition of Athens (classical Greek philosophy) and the teachings of Jerusalem

and Blaise Pascal, a 17th-century French mathematician and philosopher. Another notable figure is the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (d. 1855), perhaps the most famous thinker associated with fideism. He argued for the requirement of a “leap of faith” to attain authentic religious belief, as he believed that religious truth could not be arrived at through rational means alone.⁸ The principle of anti-Evidentialism can be expressed as follows:

Even if *S* has no epistemic, prudential, or moral reasons, and even if there is sufficient epistemic evidence contradicting that *p*, *S*'s belief that *p* is justified solely on faith.

The fundamental difference between anti-Evidentialist and non-Evidentialist perspectives lies in their approach to epistemic reasons. While non-Evidentialists do not entirely dismiss epistemic reasons, they argue that, in certain circumstances, practical and moral considerations can also serve as valid justifications for certain beliefs. In contrast, anti-Evidentialists assert that beliefs can be justified solely on the basis of faith, irrespective of epistemic, prudential, or moral considerations. Proponents of the anti-evidentialist position maintain that all men have the freedom to embrace certain beliefs, especially religious ones, purely on faith, even in the face of contradicting evidence.⁹ It seems that finding common ground between the anti-Evidentialist

(religion). See Ronald Herzman, “‘Confessions’ 7.9: What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?”, *The Journal of Education* 179, no. 1 (1997): 49.

⁸ For an analysis of Kierkegaard’s understanding of religious faith, see Charles S. Evans, *Kierkegaard on Faith and the Self* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2006), 6–25. For modern defences of the fideist position, see Charles S. Evans, *Faith beyond Reason* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

⁹ I need to limit the discussion of this group to focus on the primary goal of the study, but it should be emphasised that although we cannot discuss them in detail here, they should not be perceived as advocating a lack of justification for beliefs. Ultimately, they argue that belief in something can be justified solely through

position and that of Nasafī—who argues, as we will discuss later, that nothing can be a sufficient ground for faith (*īmān*) other than evidence (*dalīl*)—is not possible. Therefore, in this section, my emphasis will be on the first two groups, namely, the Evidentialist and non-Evidentialist positions.

William Kingdon Clifford’s work, *The Ethics of Belief*, published in 1877, not only named the debate but also presented a strict form of the Evidentialist attitude. In this article, Clifford tells us a story that includes a shipowner deciding to sell tickets for a transatlantic journey despite having doubts about the ship’s condition. At some point, the shipowner becomes aware that the ship might be in poor condition, raising concerns about its safety. Despite being aware of the potential problems and the need for costly repairs that could result in delays, the shipowner persuades himself that the ship is safe and seaworthy. The shipowner, confident in the ship’s safety, continues with the plan, selling tickets, bidding farewell to passengers, but tragically, the ship sinks in the middle of the ocean with no survivors. And following the tragedy, he quietly claims the insurance money without disclosing the true condition of the ship before the voyage.¹⁰

faith, particularly if the individual genuinely holds that belief. Faith is not only adequate but sometimes even more effective than reason, especially concerning religious beliefs. Some suggest that a belief can be considered justified if it appears or seems true to the individual. Others argue that for a belief to be fully justified, the individual should not be aware of any compelling reasons against it. Yet, even if there are no strong counterarguments against the belief in question, the mere absence of such counterarguments is still not seen as positive evidence in its favour. Evidentialists, of course, do not consider a mere feeling that something is true as sufficient evidence to justify beliefs. See Chignell, ‘Ethics of Belief’; Conee and Feldman, *Evidentialism*, 166–241.

¹⁰ William K. Clifford, ‘The Ethics of Belief’, in *Lectures and Essays*, ed. Leslie Stephen and Frederick Pollock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 177–78.

Clifford, himself a survivor of a shipwreck, uses this story to analyse the moral implications that arise when individuals form beliefs and act upon them without sufficient evidence. He judges the shipowner's belief to be morally wrong because, even though the shipowner sincerely believed in the ship's safety, he lacked the right to hold such a belief because of the insufficiency of evidence.¹¹ The shipowner's belief was not earned through careful and honest investigation but rather by suppressing or ignoring doubts, which, according to Clifford, is an unjustifiable way of forming beliefs. As a result, Clifford's words at the end of the story transformed into a maxim and became a classic representation of the strictest version of Evidentialism: "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."¹²

Despite initially restricting the role of evidence to the period right before a belief is formed, as the essay progresses, Clifford strengthens the tone of his Evidentialist stance. He argues that the relationship between evidence and belief does not cease with the formation of a belief but persists and remains relevant throughout one's lifetime. In other words, individuals should not limit their consideration of evidence solely to the initial formation of their beliefs. Instead, they ought to continuously re-evaluate and adjust their beliefs in light of ongoing and newly emerging evidence. Clifford goes even further and describes one's life as a continuous wrongdoing against humanity if they deliberately choose to remain ignorant of arguments that challenge their established beliefs. With the following words, he emphasises the importance of being willing to revise or abandon beliefs when new evidence arises:

¹¹ Clifford, 'Ethics of Belief', 178.

¹² Clifford, 'Ethics of Belief', 186.

If a man, holding a belief which he was taught in childhood or persuaded of afterwards, keeps down and pushes away any doubts which arise about it in his mind, purposely avoids the reading of books and the company of men that call in question or discuss it, and regards as impious those questions which cannot easily be asked without disturbing it—the life of that man is one long sin against mankind.¹³

To sum up, in the ethics of belief, Clifford is recognised as an iconic figure representing the most stringent form of Evidentialism. He strongly underscores the moral duty or obligation for individuals to base their beliefs on evidence that is not only sufficient but also directly accessible to them. According to him, beliefs need to be supported by internal or first-hand justification; second-hand or testimonial knowledge alone cannot be considered sufficient grounds for one's beliefs.

The response to Clifford came from William James, who found Clifford's principle overly strict and harshly criticised it in his essay *The Will to Believe*. James argued that Clifford's principle imposes an odd and impractical demand, stifling human emotions, instincts, and courage. According to James, to align with Clifford's principle, individuals ought to act as if religion were not true until extensive evidence is gathered. This command appears to him as “the queerest idol ever manufactured in the philosophic cave.”¹⁴

As an alternative to Clifford's evidentialist stance, James proposes a more permissive approach, which I have previously termed as non-Evidentialist. James argues, “we have the right

¹³ Clifford, ‘Ethics of Belief’, 186–187.

¹⁴ William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover Publications, 1956 [1896]), 11. For more on the debate between Clifford and James and its recent analysis, see Scott Aikin, *Evidentialism and the Will to Believe* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

to believe at our own risk any hypothesis that is live enough to tempt our will,”¹⁵ even in the absence of sufficient evidence and when we are consciously aware of this shortfall. In certain cases, individuals are not just permitted but are, in fact, obligated to form beliefs without sufficient evidence. According to James, failing to form beliefs in such instances is considered a failure in terms of prudence, rationality, or even morality.¹⁶

The cases in which James tolerates, and even advocates for, deviating from strict reliance on evidence are especially relevant in scenarios where compelling or entirely convincing evidence is absent for either side of an argument or proposition. Should compelling evidence favour the opposite side, and if his additional conditions are not met, James might lean towards a more broadly Evidentialist perspective and argue that belief without sufficient evidence cannot be justified.¹⁷ One such condition is that the belief in question must be a “genuine option,”¹⁸ which is genuine only if “it is of the forced, living, and momentous kind.”¹⁹ In the case of a forced option, there is no neutral ground. Put another way, a forced option represents an unavoidable decision. In such instances, not choosing is, in fact, a choice in itself. Furthermore, the option must relate to a momentous issue and be among “live” hypotheses, meaning it must be a viable possibility within the believer’s mental framework. For example, belief in the ancient Greek gods is not a live option for us in today’s modern world.²⁰ Additionally, there must be a

¹⁵ James, *The Will to Believe*, 11.

¹⁶ James, *The Will to Believe*, 10–11.

¹⁷ See Aikin, *Evidentialism and the Will to Believe*, 79–98; Nishi Shah, ‘A New Argument for Evidentialism’, *The Philosophical Quarterly* (1950-) 56, no. 225 (2006): 495–497.

¹⁸ James, *The Will to Believe*, 11–12.

¹⁹ James, *The Will to Believe*, 11.

²⁰ Chignell, ‘Ethics of Belief’.

significant level of urgency and a strong personal interest in the matter, making it either impossible or highly imprudent to refrain from forming a belief. Essentially, these particular situations demand an immediate decision from us due to their importance, rendering the suspension of belief an unwise option.²¹

Imagine, for example, a person who has read in psychology literature that individuals have a higher chance of surviving cancer if they possess a strong belief in their survival. Now, this person has been diagnosed with cancer. Given that their primary objective is survival, it would be prudent for this individual to maintain the belief that they will survive for the sake of their own well-being, even if they are aware there is no sufficient evidence supporting this belief. In such cases, James asserts that “faith in a fact can create the fact.”²²

In summary, according to James, it is sensible or wise to hold a belief if it leads to positive outcomes. The value of holding a belief lies in its practical benefits, and this value persists even in the absence of sufficient evidence, even if the believer is aware of this lack of evidence. In situations where there is a genuine option that cannot, by its nature, be decided through intellectual means alone, James states, “Our passionate nature not only lawfully may, but must, decide an option.”²³ Lastly, despite the seeming permissiveness towards deviating from

²¹ James, *The Will to Believe*, 26–27.

²² James, *The Will to Believe*, 25. Another example can be given as follows: Suppose someone, fully aware of the statistical likelihood of marriages ending in divorce, consciously chooses to believe, despite evidence to the contrary, that they will remain forever faithful to their partner at the moment of getting married. For more examples of this kind in support of the pragmatic stance, see Marušić Berislav, ‘Promising against the Evidence’, *Ethics* 123, no. 2 (2013): 297–298.

²³ James, *The Will to Believe*, 11.

evidence, his stance is not an endorsement of blindly accepting falsehoods.²⁴ In other words, his pragmatic belief system is not about recklessness but rather about the practical advantages of holding certain beliefs in specific situations and under certain conditions.

The term ‘Ethics of Belief’ and its formal usage in the debate may have originated in the 19th century, but discussions on similar themes predate Clifford and James. Earlier scholars, both in the West and in other traditions, have addressed the ethical dimensions of belief, either explicitly or implicitly. The Evidentialist perspective on the ethics of belief has been prominent among both early modern and contemporary philosophers in the West.

Descartes (1596–1650), for instance, in his *Meditations* (1641), stresses the foundational role of intellect in the process of forming beliefs.²⁵ According to him, one should prioritise seeking knowledge before placing faith in anything. He states, “...whenever I have to make a judgement, I restrain my will so that it extends to what the intellect clearly and distinctly reveals, and no further, then it is quite impossible for me to go wrong.”²⁶ That being said, clear and distinct perceptions naturally lead to belief. In other words, there is a direct link between epistemic reasons and believing; sufficient evidence causally leads to belief.

Descartes acknowledges, nevertheless, that there are circumstances, particularly in matters of custom, where beliefs should be formed even in the absence of such clarity about truth. And even in these instances, he argues that before assenting to a proposition, it is still

²⁴ James, *The Will to Believe*, 10–11, 29.

²⁵ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. and trans. John Cottingham, revised edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 40–43; See also Michael A. Conway, ‘Faith and Reason in René Descartes (1596-1650): An Appreciation and Critique from Maurice Blondel’, *Gregorianum* 83, no. 1 (2002): 111–130.

²⁶ Descartes, *Meditations*, 43.

necessary to possess some kind of evidence, at least in favour of the most probable option. Put differently, while Descartes recognises the impossibility of certainty in all matters, he suggests taking sides and embracing beliefs or opinions that appear most probable. This point is articulated as a piece of advice in a letter written to Princess Elisabeth:

Even if we cannot have certain demonstrations of everything, we ought nevertheless to take a side and embrace the opinions which seem to us the most true, concerning all those things which come into play, in order that, when there is a question of action, we will never be irresolute. For it is irresolution alone that causes regret and repentance.²⁷

John Locke (1632–1704), a seminal figure in the Enlightenment, similarly espouses a strict Evidentialist stance on the ethics of belief. In his influential work, “An Essay Concerning Human Understanding,” Locke asserts that reason and faith are not contradictory concepts, yet faith ought to be guided and controlled by reason. Neglecting to use our discerning faculties appropriately in matters of faith essentially amounts to, in a sense, disobeying God, who has bestowed such capacities upon us. Believing based on epistemic reasons is, according to him, what God expects of us:

He that believes without having any reason for believing, may be in love with his own fancies; but neither seeks truth as he ought, nor pays the obedience due to his Maker, who would have him use those discerning faculties he has given him, to keep him out of mistake and error.²⁸

²⁷ René Descartes, ‘Descartes to Elisabeth (15 September 1645)’, in *Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes: The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and René Descartes*, ed. and trans. Lisa Shapiro (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 113.

²⁸ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Roger Woolhouse (London: Penguin Books, 2004 [1690]), 931.

According to Locke, there is a possibility that one might accidentally stumble upon the truth, even if they do not apply their discerning faculties. However, he harbours doubts about whether finding the truth by chance can serve as a valid excuse for a person's inconsistent and unmethodical way of thinking when arriving at a decision. Nevertheless, one thing remains certain: those who fail to employ reason and consequently fall into error are indisputably accountable for their errors. On the other hand, those who earnestly seek truth through their intellectual faculties will find satisfaction in fulfilling their duty as rational beings and will not be deprived of the reward for their efforts, even if they do not always attain the truth. This is because they govern their assent correctly. In contrast, those who act against reason in matters of faith violate their own inner guidance or "light," and misuse the faculties given to them by the "Maker." These intellectual faculties are, according to him, bestowed upon us with the purpose of seeking truth and following more accurate evidence; accordingly, one should always opt for the option that holds greater probability. Governing assent in this manner, through the pursuit of truth and reliance on clearer evidence, represents the correct approach in matters of faith.²⁹

Locke's assertion that there should be proportionality between the evidence one has and the strength of their belief is another point that merits mention when addressing the ethics of belief. According to Locke, the more evidence or compelling reasons there are for a belief, the more justified and stronger that belief can be.³⁰ If the evidence is weak or inconclusive, one can adopt the belief with a proportional degree of certainty. Owing to his strict adherence to a divine command theory of ethical rightness, forming beliefs without sufficient evidence and holding

²⁹ Lock, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 931–932.

³⁰ Lock, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 887–888. For a recent defence of this idea, see Roger White, 'Epistemic Permissiveness', *Philosophical Perspectives* 19 (2005): 445–459.

them with unwarranted certainty is not just epistemically incorrect but also morally wrong.³¹ The idea of proportionality in belief also implies a necessity to revise or adjust one's beliefs when faced with new and potentially more convincing evidence, as noted when discussing Clifford.

As for non-Evidentialists, before James, too, there were scholars who adopted a similar non-Evidentialist methodology, focusing on prudential reasons.³² Blaise Pascal (1623–1662), for example, asserts clearly in his *Pensées*: “Faith is different from proof. One is human, the other is a gift of God.”³³ However, according to him, this does not mean that religion is contrary to reason; some truths can be known through reason, while others are known through the heart. The truths of faith cannot be known and proven by reason alone. One should use the heart to seek God, and reason should rather be employed to remove the obstacles on the path to faith.³⁴ Pascal asserts that all men seek happiness, and without faith, they can know neither true good nor justice.³⁵

Pascal's reasons for belief are grounded in prudential or practical considerations rather than epistemic ones.³⁶ His prudential rationality calls for belief in God even in the absence of

³¹ John Lock, *The Reasonableness of Christianity: As Delivered in the Scriptures Works*, ed. John C. Higgins-Biddle (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 156–157, fn. 3; Chignell, ‘Ethics of Belief’.

³² For recent arguments in favour of pragmatic or prudential reasons for belief in God, see Reisner, ‘Pragmatic and Evidential Reasons’, 17–27.

³³ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony Levi, trans. Honor Levi (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999 [1670]), 11–12.

³⁴ Pascal, *Pensées*, 12, 35.

³⁵ Pascal, *Pensées*, 51.

³⁶ See Alan Hájek, ‘Waging War on Pascal's Wager’, *The Philosophical Review* 112, no. 1 (2003): 27–56.

sufficient evidence, aligning with James's position discussed earlier.³⁷ Yet, Pascal takes a more assertive position than James, arguing that prudential rationality mandates belief in God even when such faith does not create the 'fact'. According to him, individuals are compelled to make a 'wager' in favour of faith, meaning they are urged to believe in God because it is in their best interest to do so.³⁸ The potential benefits of belief outweigh the risks, even if the belief itself does not guarantee or establish the 'fact' that God exists.³⁹

Immanuel Kant can be cited as another representative of the non-Evidentialist approach. He does not ignore epistemic reasons; but rather, emphasises the third type of traditionally accepted norms for our doxastic attitudes —namely, moral considerations. In his discussion of belief, Kant takes a stance against the Lockean principle that dictates assents must always be guided by evidence. His rejection of this principle particularly arises when dealing with matters of utmost importance or “maximal concernment”.⁴⁰ Religious beliefs properly can be included in this category. For Kant, justification for a certain belief, even in the absence of sufficient theoretical evidence, are often, though not exclusively, based on moral considerations. If there is not sufficient evidence to support or refute p , and if someone has established a moral E that necessitates taking a stance on the truth of p , and if any available evidence leans towards supporting the truth of p in an inconclusive way, then it is acceptable (and in some cases, even

³⁷ For an analysis of the relationship between Pascal's Wager and the Jamesian Wager, as well as the defence of the latter as a sound argument in support of theistic beliefs, see Jeff Jordan, *Pascal's Wager: Pragmatic Arguments and Belief in God* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 7–36.

³⁸ Pascal, *Pensées*, 154.

³⁹ Pascal, *Pensées*, 153–158.

⁴⁰ Andrew Chignell, 'Belief in Kant', *The Philosophical Review* 116, no. 3 (2007): 325.

obligatory) for one to take that *p* to be true.⁴¹ In simpler words, even if the epistemic reasons in support of a certain belief are not conclusive or sufficient, one's aimed moral end associated with the belief in question can properly justify it.

Nevertheless, one should not miss the point that under these circumstances, assent (*Fürwahrhalten*), or more literally, "holding-for-true," is justified on moral, not theoretical, grounds.⁴² In brief, according to Kant, in certain cases, a person is permitted to "sufficiently" (*zureichend*) adopt a positive propositional attitude—or "holding-for-true" (*Fürwahrhalten*)—for *p*, and this attitude is considered as "belief" (*Glaube*) or "acceptance" (*Annehmung*) rather than "knowledge" (*Wissen*), as it relies on "sufficient non-epistemic merits" but not sufficient epistemic theoretical reasons.⁴³

According to Booth's study, the positions discussed in this section had already been adopted in various forms by Muslim scholars as well before the debate formally developed in the 19th century. The Mu'tazilites, renowned for their rigorous commitment to reason (*'aql*) in theological matters, adopted a strict Evidentialist position.⁴⁴ They argued that all beliefs, including religious ones, must be grounded in evidence, as only *'aql* is capable of arriving at correct beliefs. In their view, humans possess an inherent responsibility to exercise their rational faculties, and failure to reach true conclusions about God and morality rendered them morally at fault. The emphasis on the primacy of reason was so central to their theological framework that

⁴¹ Brian A. Chance, 'Kantian Non-Evidentialism and its German Antecedents: Crusius, Meier and Basedow', *Kantian Review* 24, no. 3 (2019): 359–384; Chignell, 'Belief in Kant', 359–360; Chignell, 'Ethics of Belief'.

⁴² Chignell, 'Belief in Kant', 324ff.

⁴³ Chignell, 'Belief in Kant', 331–336, 342–344, 356; Chignell, 'Ethics of Belief'.

⁴⁴ See Anthony R. Booth, *Islamic Philosophy and the Ethics of Belief* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 2016), 12–18.

they believed even individuals who had never been exposed to the teachings of the Quran could still be held morally responsible if they failed to arrive at beliefs similar to those found in the Quran.⁴⁵ This is because they viewed reason and revelation as being in harmony with each other; therefore, rational thought should lead to conclusions that align with Quranic principles. Given their conviction that reason could independently lead to correct religious beliefs, they asserted that reason should take precedence over revelation. Thus, they believed that when there was an apparent inconsistency between reason and the Quran, the latter should be interpreted in accordance with the former. Figures like al-Kindī (d. 252/866 [?]), known for opening the doors of Greek philosophy to Muslim scholars, further illustrated this by arguing that Islamic beliefs derived from the Quran could endure philosophical scrutiny, as truths uncovered through reason would inevitably align with Quranic teachings.⁴⁶ In addition to the precedence of reason over revelation, the ideas of divine justice and human free will also lie at the core of their theological framework. According to them, human beings, as rational agents, have the capacity to make autonomous choices, which renders them fully accountable for the moral consequences of their actions. Moral responsibility is inseparable from volition because a just God would neither dispense punishment nor reward arbitrarily. Divine recompense is predicated upon the conscious choices individuals make—whether to transgress through sinful behaviour or to adhere to righteousness. Consequently, belief transcends mere intellectual or cognitive assent and is fundamentally linked to one's actions and dispositions. Genuine belief, in their view, requires alignment between one's conduct and the ethical imperatives of Islam.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 16.

⁴⁶ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 17–18.

⁴⁷ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 14.

Nevertheless, the Mu‘tazilite position and the way it was put into practice were not free of dilemmas. Firstly, despite their insistence on the connection between belief and action, the Mu‘tazilites adopted a position of prudence when adjudicating the ultimate fate of those guilty of grave sins and maintained an intermediary stance on whether such individuals could still be regarded as true believers.⁴⁸ Secondly, despite their strong emphasis on individual reasoning, the Mu‘tazilites were notably intolerant of those who did not reach the same conclusions in matters of faith as they did. For them, reason was considered properly used only if it led to conclusions aligned with their own doctrinal positions. This rigidity was manifest in their enforcement of the *mihna*, a state-sponsored inquisition designed to ensure adherence to their doctrine of the created nature of the Quran.⁴⁹ Thirdly, the concept of divine justice becomes particularly problematic when addressing individuals who die before having the opportunity to exercise free will in matters of belief and moral action. This issue is exemplified by the famous problem of the three brothers, one of whom dies before being able to make volitional choices. The Mu‘tazilites’ strong emphasis on moral responsibility through free will appears to struggle when addressing how divine justice can be applied to those who have not had the chance to act freely.⁵⁰ Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the Mu‘tazilites’ strong emphasis on reason raises questions about the role of prophecy. If belief in God is based purely on evidence and reasoning derived from investigating the world around us, it seems possible to arrive at correct religious belief without consulting divine scriptures or prophecy.⁵¹ This raises the question: if reason alone is sufficient

⁴⁸ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 14.

⁴⁹ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 16.

⁵⁰ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 16–17.

⁵¹ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 17.

to lead to correct religious beliefs and moral actions, even in the absence of Quranic teachings, what is the function of prophecy if we can reason our way to the straight path?

In summary, the Mu‘tazilites’ rationalist approach to the ethics of belief positions them as strict Evidentialists. Although their views on divine justice, free will, and moral responsibility have significantly influenced Islamic theology, their rigorous enforcement of Mu‘tazilite doctrines—through the *mihna*—to ensure their adoption by others, along with the difficulties related to the principle of divine justice (how can God be just if people die before having the chance to act freely?) and the role of prophecy (if reason alone is sufficient, why is prophecy needed?), complicates the consistency of their principles and their sincerity to them.

The Muslim philosophers known as the *falāsifa*—al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), Avicenna (d. 428/1037), and Averroes (d. 595/1198)—while having different views on certain details, collectively adopt a similar perspective on the ethics of belief, which can be categorised as ‘moderate Evidentialism.’⁵² According to the *falāsifa*, beliefs should be grounded in evidence, but reaching absolute certainty in religious matters is beyond the limits of human intellect. In al-Fārābī’s view, for example, absolute certainty (*yaqīn*) is attainable only by prophets, while ordinary individuals must rely on justified beliefs grounded in available evidence, which is always limited. This reliance on limited evidence does not guarantee the truth of the propositions we hold as true. Instead, our knowledge remains contingent and probabilistic, subject to the limitations of human reasoning and perception. In contrast, prophetic knowledge transcends these limitations and provides an epistemic certainty that is inaccessible to anyone except the prophets. According to al-Fārābī, prophets hold such certainty because they possess a much more

⁵² See Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 18, 20–21.

advanced faculty of imagination than ordinary humans. This faculty allows them to grasp truths that others cannot, as it is preordained by God and is part of divine knowledge.⁵³

Al-Fārābī's idea of certainty in knowledge can be better understood through Aristotelian demonstration, which includes an element of understanding why and how knowledge works—what is often referred to as 'knowledge-*wh*.' For example, when al-Fārābī states that prophets have certainty, he means that they not only know that first principles—like the principle of non-contradiction—are true, but they also understand why they are true and how their minds can grasp such truths.⁵⁴ Therefore, prophets possess a 'higher-order knowledge' that can be conceptualised through the idea of 'K-K knowledge' (Knowing that one Knows).⁵⁵ This higher-order knowledge, al-Fārābī argues, is what sets prophets apart from ordinary humans, as they not only grasp truths but also know that they know those truths, namely, why and how they know them.

According to al-Fārābī, prophets' advanced faculty of imagination grants them two additional abilities. First, it enhances their rhetorical skills, enabling them to explain complex ideas by breaking them down into simpler concepts that ordinary individuals can understand. Second, it equips them with practical skills, allowing them to apply their knowledge effectively to everyday life situations. From this, two important conclusions can be drawn: (i) human

⁵³ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 20.

⁵⁴ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 19–20. A major concept in later Islamic philosophy, known as 'the unity of being' (*wahdat al-wujūd*), posits that everything in existence is interconnected and coherent. This idea is essential for understanding how the universe functions as a unified whole. Prophets, due to their superior imagination, are able to perceive this unity of being more clearly. This ability enables them to understand how human intellects can intuitively grasp (*hads*) abstract truths. See Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 20.

⁵⁵ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 19–20.

perfection involves both theoretical perfection—knowledge of abstract truths—and practical perfection—the ability to apply those truths effectively; (ii) prophets, because they possess both theoretical and practical perfection, are the ideal political leaders, capable of guiding people in both theoretical and practical matters.⁵⁶

Al-Fārābī accepts that there are no fixed rules for determining what is good or bad in every situation. Therefore, practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is required—the ability to apply general moral knowledge to specific cases and make the right decisions. This approach is known as ‘particularism,’ meaning that moral decisions depend on particular circumstances rather than universal rules.⁵⁷ In al-Fārābī’s view, humans are imperfect and generally lack practical wisdom. However, prophets possess infallible *phronesis* due to their superior intellectual and moral capacities. Since there are no universal moral rules that guarantee moral behaviour in all situations, humans need divine revelation and its application by prophets. Even with prophetic guidance, the knowledge we gain, as mentioned earlier, does not reach the level of absolute certainty, and thus we cannot fully control our desires and are prone to sin. As a result, due to the lack of certainty and the strength of our desires, our ability to put this knowledge into practice is flawed, leading to *akrasia*—a weakness of will where we fail to act on what we know is right. Prophecy provides a guide that helps us learn how to control our desires and offers the theoretical and practical knowledge required to live according to moral principles.⁵⁸

In short, prophecy teaches humans how to live morally and control their desires, so beliefs can sometimes be justified by prudential reasons rather than just epistemic ones. Certain

⁵⁶ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 20–21.

⁵⁷ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 20.

⁵⁸ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 20, 21–22.

beliefs are necessary for us to act in the way that prophecy or moral teachings prescribe.

However, even if our evidence lacks absolute certainty in the sense of K-K knowledge, we should still hold epistemic reasons that provide justified true beliefs, the truth of which can only be known with certainty by prophets. Therefore, holding certain beliefs is necessary, but not purely for epistemic reasons (i.e., it is not because the beliefs are certainly true); instead, we need these beliefs more for prudential or practical reasons to lead a moral life, which is why the *falāsifa* should be categorised as moderate Evidentialists.⁵⁹

In Islamic theology, the Ash‘arites are known for advocating voluntarism in relation to the source of moral norms. Voluntarism is the idea that moral values are determined by God’s will, not by human reasoning or free will. In other words, what is right or wrong is based on what God commands, rather than being something inherent in things that humans can understand through reason. In line with this understanding, where good is good because God wills it, the Ash‘arites believe that the correct religious beliefs are those that God wills us to have. Therefore,

⁵⁹ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 24. Avicenna and Averroes hold similar views; therefore, their positions also fall under this categorisation. For further clarification, Avicenna, for example, believes that prophecy can actually bring forth new knowledge. However, for al-Fārābī, prophecy does not create new knowledge but helps one fully comprehend and confirm already existing beliefs that are justified and true. As for Averroes, religion based solely on intellect is inferior to a religion that combines intellect and revelation. Through prophecy, God has provided figurative representations of truths that people could otherwise only learn through scientific or philosophical reasoning. Since ordinary people lack the time and appropriate means for such endeavour, prophecy is necessary. However, because prophecy is not based on proper theoretical knowledge, it cannot, by itself, lead to *eudaimonia* (the ultimate human good). Therefore, theoretical science and revelation must work together to guide us toward the ultimate human good. The key difference is that, for Averroes, humans can achieve the highest form of knowledge through philosophy, whereas for al-Fārābī, only prophets can attain true certainty. See, for the minor differences between the *falāsifa*, Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 22–25.

the Ash‘arites adhered to a form of ‘anti-Evidentialism,’ meaning that beliefs are justified simply because they are willed by God, not because there is any evidence to prove them true.⁶⁰ Even though beliefs are justified by God’s will, this does not mean that the Ash‘arites consider evidence to be irrelevant. God could will that people believe based on sound evidence. However, even in this case, it is still God’s will that serves as the true source of justification, not the evidence itself. The evidence only matters because God commands it.⁶¹ Therefore, for the Ash‘arites, it is acceptable to use reason and philosophical methods to support and explain divine revelation. They see reason as a tool and reject the Ḥanbalitic view that we should rely solely on the Quran as the only source of religious truth. However, the Ash‘arites do not claim that reason is more important than revelation; instead, they view reason as a tool to demonstrate why revelation is necessary and true. Reason is there to support revelation, not replace it.

In short, the Ash‘arites are generally seen as opposing the Evidentialist perspective and are labelled as ‘anti-Evidentialist.’ This is because, ultimately, it is God’s will, not evidence or reason, that is the ultimate authority in determining what is true or false. Religious propositions should be believed simply because God has decreed them to be true, not because we have evidence that proves them. However, according to Booth, the notable Ash‘arī thinkers al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) can be seen as ‘moderate anti-Evidentialists’ due to their stronger recognition of the significance of epistemic reasons compared to those of their fellow Ash‘arīs.⁶²

⁶⁰ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 27.

⁶¹ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 27.

⁶² For an analysis of the aforementioned theologians’ positions, see Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 30–33.

In Ḥanbalī theology, there is a unique kind of exceptionalism regarding the evidence provided by the Quran. For them, the testimony of the Quran is a form of evidence that cannot be matched or replaced by any other type of evidence. The Quran is seen as the ultimate and sole source of truth, one that cannot be accessed by other means, such as reason or other forms of knowledge. Therefore, according to them, the teachings of the Quran should be seen as statements of fact about reality and treated as infallible truth. According to Booth, the Ḥanbalī position corresponds to a strict version of Evidentialism,⁶³ where beliefs are justified solely by evidence. In Booth's understanding, for the Ḥanbalīs, prophetic testimony constitutes that evidence. However, his reading of the Ḥanbalī position seems open to question, as it appears to be based on an overinterpretation of the concept of 'epistemic reason' or 'evidence' as understood by Evidentialists. By these terms, Evidentialists typically refer to formal philosophical arguments that can be defended objectively in public discourse. Thus, the fact that the Ḥanbalīs accept the Quran as the most definitive form of evidence does not mean their claim would be accepted as 'epistemic reason' or 'evidence' in an objective manner in public discourse. Therefore, it seems more accurate to describe the Ḥanbalīs as anti-Evidentialists, since they argue that reason and philosophical argumentation hold no value in the face of divine revelation, which is regarded as the ultimate and sole source of truth—one that cannot be accessed by any other means. This position seems to suggest a more fideistic attitude.

When we return to our analysis of the 'Ethics of belief' debate, we find that the key difference between Evidentialists and their opponents—both non-Evidentialists and anti-

⁶³ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 26–27.

Evidentialists—lies in the latter’s claim that one can choose to believe that p at will,⁶⁴ independent of evidence that supports or goes against it. In other words, individuals possess such control or power over their will that they can freely accept that p as true without being solely restricted by evidential considerations. Evidentialists, on the other hand, maintain that one can only believe that p if there is evidence to support it; therefore, believing at will is impossible.

The idea of believing something at will —sometimes referred to as ‘voluntarism’ and defended by scholars such as Descartes⁶⁵— is widely considered to be untrue, “at least as a contingent, psychological matter of fact about ourselves,”⁶⁶ in contemporary academic circles.⁶⁷ Moreover, some scholars argue that the very nature of belief itself makes it impossible to believe

⁶⁴ There are some convincing examples supporting the possibility of ‘believing at will,’ though such instances are rare or nearly non-existent in real life. For specific examples and a defence of ‘believing at will’ against five Evidentialist arguments, see Rik Peels, ‘Believing at Will is Possible’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 93, no. 3 (2015): 524–541. For arguments on both sides, see Richard Foley, *Working Without a Net: A Study of Egocentric Epistemology* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). And for a noteworthy distinction between ‘belief’ and ‘faith,’ and the assertion that while the former is involuntary, the latter is voluntary, see Robert J. Hartman, ‘Involuntary Belief and the Command to Have Faith’, *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 69, no. 3 (2011): 181–192.

⁶⁵ See Brian Weatherson, ‘Deontology and Descartes’s Demon’, *The Journal of Philosophy* 105, no. 9 (2008): 540–569. Some suggest that even Locke, despite being known as a strict Evidentialist, entertains this notion. However, interpreting Locke as a voluntarist fails to align with his understanding of the intellect’s relation to the will. For more on this, see Mark Boespflug, ‘Only Light and Evidence: Locke on the Will to Believe,’ *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2021): 1–21.

⁶⁶ Booth, *Islam and Ethics of Belief*, 7.

⁶⁷ For psychological evidence and its interpretation demonstrating that our belief formation is influenced by, or emerges prior to, epistemic considerations, see Jennifer Nagel, ‘Knowledge as a Mental State’, *Oxford Studies in Epistemology* 4 (2013): 275–310; Timothy Williamson, *Knowledge and its Limits* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 33, fn. 7, 47–48. See also Julien Musolino, Joseph Sommer, and Pernille Hemmer, eds., *The Cognitive Science of Belief: A Multidisciplinary Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

something at will. Both of these arguments are often used by proponents of evidentialist view of epistemic justification to support their position against the claim that believing at will is possible.⁶⁸

For instance, in Shah's view, belief is more about responding to external epistemic stimuli. Put differently, what one believes is shaped by external evidence. In his own words:

When we deliberate whether to believe some propositions, e.g., whether to believe that it is snowing outside, we feel immediately compelled to look for evidence of its truth: we look outside. ...only evidence can be a reason for belief. Although evidentialism does not follow directly from the mere psychological truth that we cannot believe for non-evidential reasons, it does follow directly from the normative conceptual truth about belief which explains why we cannot do so.⁶⁹

In short, according to the Evidentialist stance, beliefs are not something that can be intentionally and freely chosen at will. Beliefs are formed in response to the available epistemic reasons. The inability to shape beliefs at will is true not only from a psychological perspective but also inherent in the fundamental nature of belief. As a result, Shah argues, there cannot be non-epistemic obligations to believe that *p*.⁷⁰

In response to this, voluntarists assert that if the doxastic involuntarist claim holds true — namely, that belief formation is not under our control— then attributing responsibility for our

⁶⁸ Nishi Shah and J. David Velleman, 'Doxastic Deliberation', *The Philosophical Review* 114, no. 4 (2005): 497–534; Jonathan Bennett, 'Why is Belief Involuntary?', *Analysis* 50, no. 2 (1990): 87–107; Anthony R. Booth, 'Belief is Contingently Involuntary', *Ratio* 30, no. 2 (2017): 107–121.

⁶⁹ Shah, 'Argument for Evidentialism', 481.

⁷⁰ Shah, 'Argument for Evidentialism', 481–484; Shah and Velleman, 'Doxastic Deliberation', 501, 512–513, 522. For its criticism, see Reisner, 'Possibility of Pragmatic Reasons', 257–272.

beliefs becomes challenging.⁷¹ Given the difficulty of attributing responsibility under doxastic involuntarism, these philosophers suggest that individuals might indeed have direct control over specific beliefs to preserve accountability. Alternatively, some argue that individuals might not have control over all beliefs but could, at least, manage which beliefs to suspend or relinquish.⁷² Nasafi, as we shall discuss, although arguing for the necessity of epistemic reasons for religious faith, encounters no such difficulties in assigning responsibility to individuals for their religious beliefs. This is because he distinguishes between two types of assent: one that comes involuntarily from knowledge and another that arises voluntarily from our faculty of will, specifically in terms of a commitment to the truth of a proposition. The first is involuntary and thus cannot constitute faith, but the second is both voluntary and grounded in evidence or, more broadly, epistemic reasons, both of which are necessary for Nasafi to justify a belief morally and intellectually. Nasafi's approach to responsibility in religious faith will be explored further in Chapter 5 of the study.

Evidentialism, whether in its strict or moderate forms, has been the dominant theory among both early modern and contemporary philosophers and has been used to explain the moral and epistemic foundations of beliefs.⁷³ In contemporary academia, Roderick M. Chisholm, Jonathan E. Adler, Earl Conee, Richard Feldman, and Nishi Shah stand out as significant figures

⁷¹ Alston, *Epistemic Justification*, 74–75, 87, 90, fn. 16.

⁷² Weatherson, 'Deontology and Descartes's Demon', 540–543. See also Carl Ginet, 'Deciding to Believe', in *Knowledge, Truth and Duty*, ed. Matthias Steup (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 63–76.

⁷³ Chignell, 'Ethics of Belief'.

defending the Evidentialist perspective.⁷⁴ However, despite its popularity, when Evidentialism is applied in its very strict or inflexible form —often associated with Clifford’s interpretation of Evidentialism— it becomes the target of significant criticism.

When belief pertains to religion, there is no exception; the central tenet of Evidentialism, as stated earlier, argues that one should form their religious beliefs —that *p* (for instance, that there is a God)— exclusively on the basis of pertinent evidence. This evidence must be available to the believer and directly related to the truth of that *p*.⁷⁵ As noted earlier, some philosophers, such as Locke, Hume, and Clifford, further propose that the strength of the belief should be proportionate to the quantity and quality of evidence one possesses.⁷⁶ It is argued by some philosophers that a strong belief should be held only when there is ‘sufficient’ evidence, where sufficiency implies that the evidence is robust enough for the belief to qualify as *knowledge* if proven true.⁷⁷ Moreover, it is asserted that one should know, or be in a position to know, that they hold evidence for the belief in question. Additionally, it is argued that one should be cognizant of the fact that the amount of evidence they have is sufficient to support the initial

⁷⁴ See Roderick M. Chisholm, *Perceiving: A Philosophical Study* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1957); Adler, *Belief’s Own Ethics*; Conee and Feldman, *Evidentialism*; Shah, ‘Argument for Evidentialism’, 481–498.

⁷⁵ Chisholm, *Perceiving*, 3–21; Adler, *Belief’s Own Ethics*, 3–4; Conee and Feldman, *Evidentialism*, 3; Shah, ‘Argument for Evidentialism’, 482.

⁷⁶ According to Nasafi, belief, when related to religion, must carry perfect or maximum certainty to qualify as faith (*īmān*), as we shall discuss later.

⁷⁷ Conee and Feldman, *Evidentialism*, 1–7.

belief they hold.⁷⁸ In other words, a rational or justified belief should be founded on both sufficient evidence supporting it and an awareness of that evidence's sufficiency.

According to standard interpretations, Clifford is considered the strictest Evidentialist of the kind discussed in the previous paragraph. He asserts that the Evidentialist principle should apply universally and without exception. One issue with this extremely strict version of Evidentialism is the problem of infinite regress. If a strict Evidentialist insists that there should be sufficient evidence for all beliefs, this can lead to an endless chain of justifying beliefs, where each belief necessitates another subsequent belief. Alvin Plantinga, for instance, often associated with a broader philosophical movement known as Reformed Epistemology, criticises this form of Evidentialism. He argues that Evidentialism itself fails to meet the rigorous criteria it sets forth. In other words, Evidentialism lacks sufficient evidence or unquestionable proof to support its foundational principles. There are, for instance, certain mathematical truths that we inherently know without requiring external evidence because they are self-evident. This strict form of Evidentialism contradicts our intuitive acceptance of certain truths by demanding proof even for beliefs that are inherently self-evident and thus self-justifying. Instead, Plantinga proposes that

⁷⁸ For more on these positions and their critics, see Michael Huemer, 'Epistemological Egoism and Agent-Centered Norms', in *Evidentialism and its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 17–33; Jonathan Kvanvig, 'The Rational Significance of Reflective Ascent', in *Evidentialism and its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 34–54; Keith Lehrer, 'Evidentialism and the Paradox of Parity', in *Evidentialism and its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 55–68.

“it is perfectly rational to accept belief in God without accepting it on the basis of any other beliefs or propositions at all”, since “belief in God is properly basic.”⁷⁹

After selecting a principle of this nature, the level of strictness in a particular Evidentialist position is determined by the number of exceptions it permits. Stephen Wykstra, for instance, proposes ‘sensible evidentialism’ as a rival to the idea of strict Evidentialism. Wykstra illustrates his idea of ‘sensible evidentialism’ with the example of belief in electrons. According to him, one can rationally justify their belief in the existence of electrons, and this justification still does not necessarily require inferential grounding. The stipulation is that, while individuals can justify their beliefs without inferential grounding on a personal level, within a community setting, a link to a specialist is necessary to provide this essential inferential grounding.⁸⁰

Wykstra also draws attention to the concepts of internal and external justification, which are widely discussed in epistemology. Internal justification pertains to the reasons and evidence that are directly accessible to the person holding a belief. If you believe it will rain because you see dark clouds in the sky and feel a drop of rain, your belief is internally justified based on your direct sensory experiences and observations. External justification, on the other hand, involves reasons or evidence that may not be directly accessible to a person but are grounded in sources or authorities external to the person in question. If you believe in a scientific theory because it is supported by extensive empirical evidence and is accepted by the scientific community, your

⁷⁹ Alvin Plantinga, ‘Is Belief in God Properly Basic?’, *Noûs* 15, no. 1 (1981): 42. For more on this argument, see also Alvin Plantinga, ‘Reason and Belief in God’, in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, ed. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2004), 47–63.

⁸⁰ Stephen J. Wykstra, ‘On Behalf of the Evidentialist – a Response to Wolterstorff’, in *Philosophy of Religion in the 21st Century*, ed. Dewi Z. Phillips and Timothy Tessin (Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 75–76.

belief is externally justified. The justification comes from sources beyond our personal experience or reasoning. It seems Wykstra suggests that defenders of Evidentialism can offer a second way of justifying religious beliefs for non-specialists. He also notes a similarity between how Evidentialists can provide external justification for our inferential dispositions and the external justification for basic beliefs—those that do not depend on prior reasoning but are foundational in one’s cognitive framework—as offered by Reformed epistemologists.⁸¹ In other words, if it can be philosophically demonstrated that religious beliefs fall into the category of basic beliefs, then external justification for the religious beliefs of non-specialists is established. Proponents of the evidentialist perspective could adopt a similar approach, concentrating on evidence or formal philosophical arguments that would offer external justification for non-experts who are connected to them in a community setting.

It must be acknowledged that defending a strict version of Evidentialism across all beliefs poses a challenge, yet arguing that Evidentialism should be disregarded in every context encounters an even greater challenge. In contrast to the strict version, moderate Evidentialism recognises situations where individuals are reasonably allowed to form beliefs in the absence of sufficient evidence. This moderate stance may still apply the strict principles of Evidentialism, such as those advocated by Clifford, in certain critical scenarios, like judgments pertaining to ‘matters of life and death,’ where the consequences are extremely significant. In less critical situations, moderate Evidentialists may find it acceptable to loosen the strict standards for ordinary beliefs, where the consequences are not particularly significant, either morally or

⁸¹ Wykstra, ‘On Behalf of the Evidentialist’, 76ff. See also Adler, *Belief’s Own Ethics*, 2; Axtell Guy, ‘From Internalist Evidentialism to Virtue Responsibilism’, in *Evidentialism and its Discontents*, ed. Trent Dougherty (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 71–87.

prudentially. Wykstra's concept of 'sensible evidentialism' permits individuals to form beliefs in various fields beyond their expertise while still ensuring these beliefs are morally and intellectually justified. Nasafi appears to share a similar viewpoint, particularly regarding the justification of religious beliefs held by laymen (who generally rely on testimony or authority rather than personal inquiry), which will be further explored in the forthcoming chapter.

Robert Audi, who explores testimony-based belief and its implications for the ethics of belief, argues that one should acknowledge that there is no "comprehensive rational prohibition" against accepting religious testimony.⁸² This is because:

Testimony is both globally and focally essential in our lives; it is indeed of virtually unlimited breadth in its epistemic power: nearly anything that can be known firsthand can also be known on the basis of testimony. Testimony is a source of basic knowledge; it is normally the starting point of everyone's conceptual learning; it is... as natural a source of knowledge and justification as any of the others...⁸³

Much more can be said about what justifies beliefs morally and epistemically within the context of the 'ethics of belief' debate. For instance, what constitutes evidence? Or, what qualifies as 'sufficient' evidence? What is the process of basing beliefs on such evidence? And what does it mean to believe something, in the first place? However, the constraints of the current context prevent me from addressing these critical discussions in depth. Before concluding this section, I acknowledge that one might question whether the use of such modern

⁸² Robert Audi, 'The Epistemic Authority of Testimony and the Ethics of Belief', in *God and the Ethics of Belief: New Essays in Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Andrew Dole and Andrew Chignell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 196–197.

⁸³ Audi, 'Testimony and Ethics of Belief', 197.

philosophical terminology is anachronistic to the study at hand. Despite this potential concern, I still find the application of the modern ethics of belief framework valuable in analysing Nasafi's understanding of religious faith. Doing so can shed light on implicit positions Nasafi may hold. Indeed, I propose that the form of evidentialism advocated by Nasafi deserves serious consideration in contemporary discussions about the ethics of belief.

2. The History and Development of Māturīdī School

Sunni Islam, following the partial decline of Muʿtazilī influence, had established its stability and defined its orthodoxy by the end of the fifth/eleventh century.⁸⁴ This orthodoxy was structured around the four established schools of law and the two main schools of rational theology: the Ashʿarites and the Māturīdites.⁸⁵ However, the influence of the Muʿtazilites, while

⁸⁴ Lutz Berger, 'Interpretations of Ashʿarism and Māturīdism in Mamluk and Ottoman Times', in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 693–695; Christine D. Baker, *Medieval Islamic Sectarianism* (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2019), 17–18; Maria De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, al-Ghazālī and Ibn ʿArabī* (London, New York: Routledge, 2014), 6.

⁸⁵ Philipp Bruckmayr, 'The Spread and Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām and Underlying Dynamics', *Iran and the Caucasus* 13, no. 1 (2009): 60; De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination*, 6. Traditionalists or Atharī theology are also recognised as one of the main Sunni schools of Islamic theology. It emerged among Ḥadīth scholars who coalesced into a movement known as Ahl al-Ḥadīth, led by Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal (d. 241/855). They are characterised by their strict adherence to the Quran and Sunna. They emphasised textual literalism over rationalistic Islamic theology in interpreting the Quran and Ḥadīth. Traditionalists believe that the literal (*ẓāhir*) meaning of the Quran and Ḥadīth are the ultimate authorities in matters of belief (*ʿaqīda*) and law (*fiqh*). They reject rational disputation and metaphorical interpretation (*taʿwīl*) of anthropomorphic descriptions and attributes of God, instead accepting the literal meanings without attempting to rationalise or conceptualise them (i.e., *bi lā kayf*). For more information on this topic, see Binyamin Abrahamov, 'Scripturalist and Traditionalist Theology', in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 263–279; John Hoover, 'Early Mamlūk Ashʿarism

partially waned due to the loss of their political support, still remained present and continued to contribute to the theological debates of the time.⁸⁶

During this period, Ḥanafite judges and official witnesses (*shuhūd*), who sympathised with the Mu‘tazilite doctrines, were compelled to acknowledge the fallacy of Mu‘tazilite beliefs, and the practice of teaching speculative theology (*kalām*) was rigorously restricted.⁸⁷ Following the decline of the Mu‘tazilī influence, generally speaking, the Māturīdities became more prominent within Ḥanafī circles in the field of creed (‘*aqīda*’).⁸⁸ Simultaneously, the Ash‘arites became the dominant theological understanding among followers of the Shāfi‘ī and Mālikī legal schools. The Ottomans accorded Ḥanafite legal tradition a privileged status by adopting their doctrine as the official legal system of the state. Additionally, the Māturīdite school of *kalām*, which was embraced by the majority of Ḥanafite jurists (*fuqahā*) on matters of ‘*aqīda*’, was endorsed by the Ottomans as an equal alternative to Ash‘arism.⁸⁹ However, it is important to note that Ottoman scholars demonstrated loyalty to the Māturīdiyya only nominally, despite the state’s support for the school.⁹⁰ Consequently, during the Ottoman period, Ash‘arī views gained

against Ibn Taymiyya on the Nonliteral Reinterpretation (*Ta’wīl*) of God’s Attributes’, in *Philosophical Theology in Islam: Later Ash‘arism East and West*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh and Jan Thiele (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2020), 195–230; Ishraq Ali and Khawla Almulla, ‘Philosophy Versus Theology in Medieval Islamic Thought’, *HTS Theological Studies* 79, no. 5 (2023): 1–8; Baker, *Islamic Sectarianism*, 27–36.

⁸⁶ De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination*, 6; Sabine Schmidtke, ‘The Mu‘tazilite Movement (III): The Scholastic Phase’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 159–180.

⁸⁷ Wilferd Madelung, ‘The Spread of Māturīdism and the Turks’, *Biblos (Coimbra)* 46 (1970): 112.

⁸⁸ Madelung, ‘Māturīdism and Turks’, 109.

⁸⁹ Madelung, ‘Māturīdism and Turks’, 109.

⁹⁰ M. Sait Özervarlı, ‘Theology in the Ottoman Lands’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 568, 575; Yusuf Ş. Yavuz, ‘Māturīdiyye’, in *TDV*

prominence in scholarly works, and Ash‘arī treatises were taught in *madrasas*. Nevertheless, this should not diminish the significant influence of the Māturīdī school, as “... the School of al-Māturīdī has steadily penetrated the School of al-Ash‘arī and even the professed Ash‘arite at the present time is, to a greater or less extent, a Māturīdite.”⁹¹

Despite the significant impact of Māturīdism on shaping the Ottoman and Turkish identities, the recognition and acknowledgement of al-Māturīdī’s contributions and significance have been lacking in historical records, particularly in biographical dictionaries.⁹² In contrast to al-Māturīdī, the founder of Ash‘arism, even during his lifetime, has attracted the attention of Mu‘tazilites and other theologians and even gained their opposition. Despite this opposition, Ash‘arism has spread from Baghdad, where it was born, towards the east, especially Nīshāpūr which is the metropolis of Khurāsān, and many other regions. When we arrive at the Seljūq era, Ash‘arism became the most dominant theological school among followers of the Shāfi‘ite and Mālikite schools of Islamic jurisprudence.⁹³

İslām Ansiklopedisi, 46 vols (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2017), 28:167. Bruckmayr similarly highlights this point. Despite certain claims, the Timurids, Mughals, and Ottomans should not be regarded as genuine adherents of the Māturīdī school of thought. The evidence supporting the argument that these empires were not truly Māturīdī can be found in the *madrasa* curricula they promoted. See Bruckmayr, ‘Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām’, 64ff.

⁹¹ H. A. R. Gibb and J. H. Kramers, eds., ‘Al-Māturīdī’, in *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953), 363.

⁹² The medieval Arabic sources, notably the famous Islamic heresiographers such as ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037), Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1064), al-Shahristānī (d. 548/1153), and Ibn Khaldūn (d. 808/1406), do not mention the name of al-Māturīdī. Rudolph also notes this point, see Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand*, trans. Rodrigo Adem (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 2–3.

⁹³ Madelung, ‘Māturīdism and Turks’, 109–110.

Māturīdism, in contrast to Ash‘arism, did not capture the attention of other theological circles for more than a century after the death of its founder.⁹⁴ During this period, no Mu‘tazilite, Ash‘arite or traditional theologian even took the trouble to formulate a refutation (*raddiyya*) of the Māturīdites. The oldest non-Māturīdite source, in which Māturīdite doctrine is mentioned, thus far is the Ash‘arite scholar Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. Muḥammad Ibn Fūrak (d. 478/1085-6)’s work *Kitāb al-Nizāmī*. According to the author’s words, he wrote these lines in 465/1072, which corresponds to almost one and a half centuries after the death of al-Māturīdī.⁹⁵

These two different attitudes towards al-Māturīdī and al-Ash‘arī are an important point which needs to be clarified. Al-Ash‘arī, after withdrawing from the Mu‘tazilite circle, spread his new doctrine in Baghdad, which could be characterised as the heart of the Islamic world at that time, where the leading scholars of Islam lived. There, many different aspects of Islamic thought were being represented by various leading minds, and these different ideas were also in active competition with each other. On the other hand, al-Māturīdī lived in the province of Samarqand, in the eastern border of Transoxiana or Mā warā’ al-Nahr (the land which lies beyond the river). Ḥanafism had already been the predominant school in this region for a long time, therefore there was no serious opposition to compete with. The authors of the school were describing their doctrines as those of the scholars of Samarqand. As a consequence of this local character of the

⁹⁴ Wilferd Madelung, ‘The Westward Migration of Ḥanafī Scholars from Central Asia in the 11th to 13th Centuries’, *AÜİFD* 43, no. 2 (2002): 42; Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 2; Muhammed b. Tāvīt at-Tancī, ‘Abū Mansūr al-Māturīdī’, *AÜİFD* 4, no. 1–2 (1955): 1.

⁹⁵ Madelung, ‘Māturīdism and Turks’, 111. This scholar (d. 478/1085-6) was often mistaken for the renowned Ash‘arite theologian Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015). In fact, the individual mentioned here is the grandson of Abū Bakr ibn Fūrak and wrote this work after being appointed by Nizām al-Mulk as a preacher at the Nizāmiyya *madrassa* in Baghdad. See, Lütü Doğan, *Ehli Sünnet Kelamında Eş‘arī Mektebi* (Ankara: Rüzgarlı Matbaa, 1961), 87.

school, the doctrine did not spread to the western centres of learning, and hence, there were no occasions to make other Muslim theologians aware of the doctrine.⁹⁶ Another reason why al-Māturīdī's name was not mentioned in the early sources is that the authors of the school preferred to use certain labels, such as 'Ahl al-Sunna' or 'Aṣḥāb Abī Ḥanīfa' instead of Māturīdiyya.⁹⁷ Presumably, the fact that al-Māturīdī was an individual theologian who had not yet gained a broad reputation had a significant impact on this preference. Since the labels mentioned above have considerable prestige, as Abū Ḥanīfa's reputation and dignity had already spread throughout the Islamic world at that time, describing the school with those labels was a great opportunity to be more easily accepted in other circles.⁹⁸

The same applies to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī. He, too, insisted on the idea that he was a follower of Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, who was regarded as one of the leaders (*imām*) of Ahl al-Sunna and held in remarkable esteem by many. Therefore, for al-Ash'arī, Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal provided a solid foundation through which he could easily garner support for his opinions. It appears that he chose to base his school, as Māturīdī scholars did, on a name that held considerable prestige in the Islamic world.

⁹⁶ Madelung, 'Māturīdism and Turks', 111–112; Ulrich Rudolph, 'Ḥanafī Theological Tradition and Māturīdism', in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 280–284.

⁹⁷ See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 2, 73ff.; Bruckmayr, 'Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām', 61.

⁹⁸ It is known that there was a close relationship between Transoxanian scholars and Abū Ḥanīfa. Many scholars from Transoxiana travelled to Kufa to consult Abū Ḥanīfa on various legal and creedal matters, and upon returning to their homes, they brought back Abū Ḥanīfa's teachings as the fruit of their travels. See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 27.

Nasafī also carefully associates his school with the name of Abū Ḥanīfa and presents him as the leader of the school.⁹⁹ He reports that the majority of theologians of his era, including those from the Sūfīyya tradition around Samarqand, followed Abū Ḥanīfa in matters of creed.¹⁰⁰ As for al-Māturīdī, Nasafī regards him as an outstanding representative of the same tradition rather than a founder of it. Nasafī credits the spread of the tradition in Samarqand to al-Māturīdī's efforts and notes that al-Māturīdī himself reaped the fruits of his labour during his lifetime.¹⁰¹ Nasafī frequently praises his predecessor al-Māturīdī, for example, he describes him as “the most knowledgeable man of the doctrines of Abū Ḥanīfa” (*a'raf al-nās bi-madhāhib Abī Ḥanīfa*).¹⁰² Despite his deep respect for al-Māturīdī, Nasafī does not attribute the school to al-Māturīdī; instead, he deliberately uses other labels such as “the people of the tradition and the community” (*Ahl al-Sunna wa-al-Jamā'a*), “the people of truth” (*Ahl al-Ḥaqq*), “our friends” (*Aṣḥābunā*), and “the scholars of Transoxiana” (*'Ulamā' Mā warā' al-Nahr*).¹⁰³ Nasafī not only claims that his school belongs to Ahl al-Sunna but also emphasises that they represent a distinct school of thought from the Ash'arites, whom he describes as “our opponents”, although he acknowledges their close views in many matters of creed.¹⁰⁴

Abū al-Yusr al-Pazdawī (d. 493/1100), also a prominent figure of the Māturīdī school like Nasafī, regarded al-Māturīdī as an exemplary representative of the same long-standing

⁹⁹ Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Hüseyin Atay and Şaban A. Düzgün, 2 vols (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 1993–2003), 1:468.

¹⁰⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:467.

¹⁰¹ See Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:471–473.

¹⁰² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:210.

¹⁰³ See Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:262, 405, 470, 2:137, 139, 336. This attitude of Nasafī will be extensively discussed in the final chapter of the study.

¹⁰⁴ For Nasafī's hostile statements and denunciations of the Ash'arites, see Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:306, 362, 412ff.

theological tradition, rather than its founding father. He describes al-Māturīdī with the following titles: “the ascetic leader” (*al-imām al-zāhid*), “one of the leaders of the people of Sunna and the community” (*kāna min ru’asā’ ahl al-sunnah wa-al-jamā’a*), and “the possessor of miraculous acts” (*ṣāhib al-karāmāt*).¹⁰⁵ Indeed, al-Māturīdī himself, too, adopts a similar approach. In his *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, he frequently cites Abū Ḥanīfa’s views, endeavouring to reinforce them with both rational (*‘aqlī*) and scriptural (*naqlī*) evidence.¹⁰⁶ In short, early Māturīdite theologians believed that Abū Ḥanīfa provided the correct responses to essential creedal questions. Their role, as they perceived it, was to expand upon Abū Ḥanīfa’s answers and ensure their transmission to succeeding generations.¹⁰⁷

Prior to the era of Nasafī in Samarqand, the Murji’a also held significant influence alongside Ḥanafism.¹⁰⁸ It is known that Abū Ḥanīfa, whom Māturīdite scholars often associate themselves with, showed tendencies towards Murji’a beliefs.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the fact that Māturīdite scholars held views similar to those of the Murji’a in discussions on the legal status of

¹⁰⁵ See Abū al-Yusr al-Pazdawī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Hans P. Linss (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 1963), 2–3.

¹⁰⁶ See Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, ed. Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammed Aruçi (Istanbul: Maktabat al-Irshād, 2007), 349, 392, 467, 480.

¹⁰⁷ Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 4–5, 23–24, 27–29; Rudolph, ‘Ḥanafī Tradition and Māturīdism’, 280–84.

¹⁰⁸ Wilferd Madelung, ‘The Early Murji’a in Khurāsān and Transoxiana and the Spread of Ḥanafism’, *Der Islam* 59, no. 1 (1982): 32–39; Sönmez Kutlu, *Türklerin İslamlaşma Sürecinde Mürcie ve Tesirleri* (Ankara: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2000).

¹⁰⁹ See Abū Ḥanīfa, ‘Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā ‘Uthmān al-Battī’, in *İmām-ı A’zam’ın Beş Eseri*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, trans. Mustafa Öz, 13th ed. (Istanbul: İFAV, 2017), 78–85. Page numbers refer to the Arabic text. Also see Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 28–42; Rudolph, ‘Ḥanafī Tradition and Māturīdism’, 282.

sinnners supports the idea that the Murji'a was one of the influences that shaped the Māturīdī school.¹¹⁰ The Murji'a advocated that new converts, upon accepting Islam, should be granted equal status with other Muslim citizens of the state and be exempted from the *jizya* (a yearly tax historically imposed on non-Muslims). The Murji'a believed that a sincere acceptance of Islamic faith in one's heart and its declaration by the tongue were enough for one to be recognised as a Muslim, without the need for detailed knowledge of Islamic practices.¹¹¹ This perspective was also adopted by Abū Ḥanīfa and became a prevalent view among the Māturīdites.¹¹² Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb Ibrāhīm al-Anṣārī al-Kūfī (d. 182/798), commonly known as Abū Yūsuf, one of Abū Ḥanīfa's prominent students, was appointed as chief judge (*qāḍī al-quḍāt*) during the reign of the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid. One of his major contributions was the authoring of the book *Kitāb al-Kharāj*. This book is a classic text on *fiqh*, written at the request of Harun al-Rashid. The implementation of the principles outlined in *Kitāb al-Kharāj* led to significant social changes. With the publication of *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, all individuals openly declaring themselves as Muslims were treated as equals to their senior Muslim counterparts, and unjust practices of taxing new converts —justified by their unfamiliarity with Islamic practices and rituals— were abolished.¹¹³ This resulted in a notable leaning towards Ḥanafite-Māturīdite views among new Muslims and contributed to the rapid dissemination of the school.

¹¹⁰ Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 23ff.

¹¹¹ Ahmet Ak, *Büyük Türk Âlimi Maturîdî ve Maturîdîlik*, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2017), 88–89; Madelung, 'The Early Murji'a', 33.

¹¹² Abū Ḥanīfa, 'Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā 'Uthmān al-Battī', 80. Ak, *Maturîdî ve Maturîdîlik*, 89.

¹¹³ See Abū Yūsuf, *Kitāb al-Kharāj*, ed. Muḥib al-Dīn al-Ḥāṭib, 6th ed. (Cairo: al-Maṭba'at al-Salafiyya, 1976), 186. Also see Ak, *Maturîdî ve Maturîdîlik*, 89; Kutlu, *Mürchie ve Tesirleri*, 156.

The limited influence of the Murji'a on the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī school, however, should not lead us to conclude that they were merely an extension of the Murji'a. Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Māturīdī distinguish between two different forms of the Murji'a. While they appreciate the Murji'a belief that a person who commits a major sin should not be declared an unbeliever (*takfīr*), they criticise and blame (*dhamm*) the Murji'a for their deterministic stance (*jabr*) on human actions.¹¹⁴ Therefore, the first form of the Murji'a must be accepted as part of Ahl al-Sunna, since both Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Māturīdī sympathised with their certain fair-minded views. However, Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Māturīdī embraced certain beliefs of the Murji'a not because they were aligned with the entire Murji'a ideology, but because they recognised the fairness or inherent truth in those specific beliefs. In other words, their acceptance of some Murji'a views does not imply they were merely followers of the Murji'a school, but instead highlights their opposition to any form of biased or sectarian conservatism (*ta'aṣṣub*), indicating their openness to ideas based on merit rather than solely on sectarian affiliation.

It has been demonstrated that Māturīdism played a pivotal role in the conversion of the Turks to Islam.¹¹⁵ After their conversion, the Turks in Transoxiana became closely associated with the Ḥanafite school in the 4th/10th century. The concept of treating all Muslims equally, whether they are new converts or seasoned believers well-versed in religious obligations — advocated by the Murji'a and embraced by Hanafī-Māturīdī scholars — was influential in their acceptance of Islam and the Hanafī-Māturīdī tradition. By the time of the Seljūqs, the Turks

¹¹⁴ Abū Ḥanīfa, 'Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā 'Uthmān al-Battī', 80; al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 450, 479–482; Also see Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 32, 50, 65; Rudolph, 'Ḥanafī Tradition and Māturīdism', 282; Ak, *Māturīdī ve Māturīdīlik*, 117.

¹¹⁵ See Madelung, 'Māturīdism and Turks'; Madelung, 'Westward Migration'; Bruckmayr, 'Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām'; Ak, *Māturīdī ve Māturīdīlik*.

recognised Māturīdism as Islamic orthodoxy (Ahl al-Sunna), and senior politicians of the state held great respect for Māturīdite scholars. Many Māturīdī scholars were appointed to key positions as judges, preachers, and teachers by Turkish rulers. They served as advisors in state affairs and were sent on diplomatic missions as envoys.¹¹⁶ Under Ghaznavid patronage, support from official circles continued, and the Māturīdite doctrine flourished further. This policy of prioritizing Māturīdite doctrine encouraged scholars to embark on a steady stream of migration westward, expanding their influence from Central Asia to western Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, and Anatolia.¹¹⁷

Bruckmayr identifies three significant factors that played crucial roles in spreading Māturīdism: (i) The legal tradition that emerged from Transoxiana became dominant within the Hanafī school of jurisprudence, allowing scholars from Transoxiana to significantly contribute to the expansion of Māturīdism in areas where Ḥanafism prevailed.¹¹⁸ (ii) The deep cultural affinity, particularly within Ottoman and Mughal societies, for the practices and traditions of

¹¹⁶ Madelung, ‘Westward Migration’, 43; Ak, *Māturīdī ve Māturīdilik*, 95.

¹¹⁷ Madelung, ‘Westward Migration’, 43; Bruckmayr, ‘Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām’, 62–63.

¹¹⁸ As noted by many researchers, scholars from Transoxiana were involved not only in legal studies but also in Māturīdī theology and its transmission. Therefore, the influence of these jurists on the popularization of Māturīdī thought should not be dismissed. See Eyyup Said Kaya, ‘Continuity and Change in Islamic Law: The Concept of Madhhab and the Dimensions of Legal Disagreement in Ḥanafī Scholarship of the Tenth Century’, in *The Islamic School of Law: Evolution, Devolution, and Progress*, ed. Peri Bearman, Rudolph Peters, and Frank E. Vogel (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 28; Dale J. Correa, ‘Testifying Beyond Experience: Theories of Akhbār and the Boundaries of Community in Transoxanian Islamic Thought, 10th–12th Centuries CE’ (PhD diss, New York University, 2014), 2–3; Aron Zysow, *The Economy of Certainty: An Introduction to the Typology of Islamic Legal Theory* (Atlanta, GA: Lockwood Press, 2013), 2–5. Also see Najah Nadi, ‘Theorising the Relationship between Kalām and Uṣūl al-Fiqh: The Theological-Legal Epistemology of Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390)’ (PhD diss., Oxford, University of Oxford, 2018).

Central Asian Islam further contributed to the dissemination of Māturīdism. (iii) The Naqshbandiyya Sufi Order, especially its Mujaddidi Branch led by Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1034/1624), significantly contributed to the spread and acceptance of Māturīdism. The combined influence of these factors contributed significantly to the dissemination and lasting impact of Māturīdism within Islamic theological discourse.¹¹⁹ Today, the Māturīdite doctrine has prevailed over a vast territory, particularly in Turkey (or Anatolia), North Africa, the Central Asian Turkish republics, India, Pakistan, and Malaysia. It is also prevalent in the North Ural-Volga region, Kazakhstan, Eastern Europe, Rumelia, Bosnia, and South and Southeast Asia, especially in the Malay-Indonesian world, Kurdistan, and the North Caucasus.¹²⁰

The narrative thus far has aimed to elucidate the emergence of the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī tradition within the broader context of Islamic intellectual history and its subsequent dissemination across various regions of the Islamic world. However, upon examining the content of its theology up to the present day, the historical narrative can be segmented into four distinct periods. Each period represents significant shifts, developments, and changes in the school's doctrines, methods, or influence. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that the development of the school did not always follow a straightforward path, with each new stage completely replacing the one before it. Instead, there were instances where certain elements or characteristics from earlier stages persisted alongside new developments. In other words, the evolution of the school was not strictly linear. Nevertheless, I find this attempt valuable as it

¹¹⁹ See Bruckmayr, 'Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām', 61, 77ff.

¹²⁰ See Madelung, 'Māturīdism and Turks'; Madelung, 'Westward Migration'; Bruckmayr, 'Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām'; Yavuz, 'Mātūrīdiyye', 28:174.

furnishes us with the general picture necessary to comprehend how this tradition has evolved to its present state.

Considering the content of Ḥanafī-Māturīdī theology up to the present day, it is possible to identify the following four distinct periods: (i) **Formative Period** — second half of the 2nd/8th century to the end of the 5th/11th century, (ii) **Classical Era** — end of the 5th/11th century to the 8th/14th century, (iii) **Post-Classical Era** — 8th/14th century to the end of the 13th/19th century, (iv) **Modern Era** — End of the 13th/19th century to the Present Day.

2.1. Formative Period — Second Half of the 2nd/8th Century to the End of the 5th/11th Century:

This period can also be called early Ḥanafī creedal/doctrinal era. Its most distinguishing characteristic is its creed-based theology. Before the emergence of al-Māturīdī, theological writings were relatively simple and straightforward, as evidenced by Rudolph's study. This began with the adoption and transmission of Abū Ḥanīfa's creedal views, particularly his correspondence with 'Uthmān al-Battī (d. 143/760 [?]), followed by the texts of his pupils, such as the *Kitāb al-Ālim* and the *Fiqh Absaṭ*.¹²¹ This development established a specific religious orientation which, during the third/ninth century, diverged into two main paths: one closely

¹²¹ Māturīdism and eastern Ḥanafism were commonly viewed as one unified entity. This unity is best illustrated by examining the chains of transmission of particular works, such as the pre-Māturīdī Ḥanafī theological work *al-Ālim wa-al-Muta'allim* and al-Māturīdī's Quranic commentary, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*. Analysing these chains of transmission would reveal the close connection and collaboration between Māturīdism and eastern Ḥanafism in the dissemination of these texts. See Bruckmayr, 'Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām', 61–62.

aligned with Abū Ḥanīfa's own school, as prominently seen in the *Kitāb al-Sawād al-A'zam*,¹²² and another marked by asceticism and a focus on piety, influenced by Ibn Karrām. These views were shared to a significant extent by Makḥūl al-Nasafī, who was Abū al-Mu'īn's grandfather.¹²³

The intellectual transformation of the Ḥanafī theological tradition occurred through the efforts of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī. He elaborated on and completely reformulated Ḥanafī theology, particularly by defending it against challenges posed by various other theological movements, especially the Mu'tazilites.¹²⁴ Al-Māturīdī's ground-breaking work, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, reshaped the entire tradition that followed. Unlike previous works solely concerned with outlining and confirming established beliefs, al-Māturīdī's work represents a genuine effort in speculative theology. This means that Transoxiana largely entered the history of *kalām* due to al-Māturīdī and his work. The difference is evident in al-Māturīdī's methodology; he did not limit himself to restating accepted doctrines in their traditional forms but sought to provide proofs for his teachings and derive new theses from existing ones whenever possible. This approach

¹²² Al-Ḥakīm al-Samarqandī (d. 342/953) and his work, *Kitāb al-Sawād al-A'zam*, served as an official catechism in Sāmānid territory. While it represented the teachings of a few scholars, it functioned as a "public text," expressing a broad theological consensus. The format of *al-Sawād al-A'zam* remained consistent with earlier Ḥanafites who had not yet deeply delved into rational theology. See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 97ff.

¹²³ Muḥammad 'Abd al-Ḥayy al-Laknawī, *al-Fawā'id al-Bahiyya fī Tarājim al-Ḥanafīyya*, ed. Muḥammad Badr al-Dīn al-Na'sānī (Cairo: Dār al-Sa'ādah, 1324), 216. See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 313–314; Rudolph, 'Ḥanafī Tradition and Māturīdism', 281–285; Joseph Schacht, 'New Sources for the History of Muhammadan Theology', *Studia Islamica* 1 (1953): 24–25.

¹²⁴ Rudolph, 'Ḥanafī Tradition and Māturīdism', 280–281. For an account of the Mu'tazilite influence on al-Māturīdī's construction of his rational theology, see Şükrü Özen, 'IV. (X.) Yüzyılda Mâverâünnehir'de Ehl-i Sünnet-Mu'tezile Mücadelesi ve Bir Ehl-i Sünnet Beyannamesi', *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi* 9 (2003): 49–85.

distinguished him from his predecessors in Transoxiana, none of whom had employed such methods before him.¹²⁵

Although al-Māturīdī became the head of the Dār al-Jūzjāniyya *madrasa* during this early period and his students and followers began to transmit his teachings, his distinctive synthesis was not immediately widely embraced in Samarqand and its surroundings. Notable figures among al-Māturīdī's followers who transmitted his teachings include Abū al-Ḥasan al-Rustughfanī (d. 345/956), who authored several influential books, and Abū Bakr al-ʿIyāḍī (d. 361/972), the son of al-Māturīdī's teacher, Abū Naṣr al-ʿIyāḍī (d. the second half of the third/ninth century).¹²⁶ Additionally, it must be mentioned among these figures are the famous al-Ḥakīm al-Samarqandī (d. 342/953) and Abū Salama al-Samarqandī (d. the second half of the fourth/tenth century). The former wrote the well-known *al-Sawād al-Aʿzam*, an official catechism in the Sāmānid period, while the latter composed a concise summary of al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* titled *Jumal min Uṣūl al-Dīn*, which still exists today.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 314–315.

¹²⁶ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:122, 470–471, 479; Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 139, 142–143, 319–320; Philip Dorroll, 'The Universe in Flux: Reconsidering Abū Maṣūʿ al-Māturīdī's Metaphysics and Epistemology', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 27, no. 2 (2016): 122; Ramon Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World: A Māturīdī Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 38–39; Özen, 'Ehl-i Sünnet-Muʿtezile Mücadelesi', 49–50.

¹²⁷ Abū Salama al-Samarqandī, *Jumal min Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Istanbul: Süleymaniye Lib., Şehid Ali Paşa sect., MS 1648/1). There is also another manuscript that appears to be a commentary on the aforementioned work. See Abū al-Ḥusayn Muḥammad ibn Yaḥyā al-Bashāgharī, *Sharḥ Jumal Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Istanbul: Süleymaniye Lib., Şehid Ali Paşa sect., MS 1648/2). Both manuscripts have been edited and published, see Abū Salama al-Samarqandī, *Jumal min Uṣūl al-Dīn: wa-yalīhi sharḥuhu li muʿallif majhūl*, ed. Ilhām Qāsimī (Lebanon: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2015). For the identity of the latter work's author, see Yusuf Arıkaner, 'Şerhu Cümeli Usūli'd-Dīn'in Ebü'l-Hüseyn Muhammed b. Yahyâ El-Beşâğarî'ye Aidiyeti Meselesi', *Mevzu: Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 4 (2020): 37–63.

Despite having a significant number of students and followers, al-Māturīdī's influence did not extend across the entire Transoxanian Ḥanafite scholarly community. Many Ḥanafite scholars in the region continued to adhere to traditional religious interpretations, rather than embracing al-Māturīdī's innovative theological synthesis. Scholars such as Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī (d. 373/983) exemplify this commitment to the traditional creed-focused Ḥanafī theological tradition, as evidenced by the works he authored, including *Sharḥ al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ*, *Bayān 'Aqādat al-Uṣūl*, and *al-Nawāzil*.¹²⁸ Even as late as the second half of the fifth/eleventh century, figures like Abū al-Shakūr al-Sālimī (d. late 5th/11th century) from Samarqand made no mention of al-Māturīdī in their works.¹²⁹ This absence suggests that during the late fourth/tenth century, one could still be considered a devout Ḥanafī without deeply engaging with speculative theology (*kalām*), likely due to the absence of significant theological challenges in Transoxiana during that period.¹³⁰

2.2. Classical Era —End of the 5th/11th Century to the 8th/14th Century:

The rise of al-Māturīdī to prominence within the tradition is notably observed during the classical period. This shift seems to have emerged as a result of encounters between Transoxanian scholars and Ash'arism in Transoxiana. In debates, particularly concerning God's attribute of *takwīn* (God's creative act), Transoxanian scholars found themselves unable to

¹²⁸ For a discussion of Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī's theological output, which focused more on creedal matters than rational theology, see Abdur-Rahman Mangera, 'A Critical Edition of Abū 'l-Layth al-Samarqandī's *Nawāzil*' (PhD diss., SOAS, University of London, 2013), 40–41.

¹²⁹ See Angelika Brodersen, 'New Light on the Emergence of Māturīdism: Abū Shakūr al-Sālimī (Fifth/Eleventh Century) and His Kitāb al-Tamhīd fī Bayān al-Tawḥīd', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 31, no. 3 (2020): 329–357.

¹³⁰ Rudolph, 'Ḥanafī Tradition and Māturīdism', 290, 321.

prevail solely with a creed-based theology against their Ash‘arī counterparts. Consequently, they turned to al-Māturīdī, who had skilfully integrated rational theology into Abū Ḥanīfa’s creedal statements, providing a robust intellectual framework within the tradition.

In response to the competition from Ash‘arism, scholars such as Abū al-Yusr al-Pazdawī and Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī shifted their focus to al-Māturīdī as the central figure of their school.¹³¹ In their writings, al-Māturīdī is given significant prominence, surpassing any other theologian from Samarqand, despite the continued importance of the earlier tradition as a source of theological knowledge. For instance, as mentioned earlier, al-Pazdawī names al-Māturīdī as one of the leaders of *Ahl al-Sunna wa-al-Jamā‘a* and describes him as a possessor of saintly miracles.¹³² As for Nasafī, his description of al-Māturīdī is the most profound. As we will discuss in detail later, in his *Tabṣira*, he places al-Māturīdī at the forefront of the school among the scholars who contributed to their tradition. For example, the following quote from his *Tabṣira* clearly shows the exceptional position of al-Māturīdī within the tradition: “If there were no one among them except the Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (may Allāh have mercy on him)... this

¹³¹ Māturīdī scholars opposed Ash‘arites as vehemently as they opposed Mu‘tazilites, and during that time, neither school considered the other as part of Ahl al-Sunna. For instance, Nasafī, in his work *al-Tamhīd fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, strongly criticises Ash‘arites, particularly regarding the attribute of *takwīn*, even going as far as to claim that they have fallen into infidelity (*kufūr*). See Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, *al-Tamhīd fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. ‘Abd al-Ḥayy al-Qābīl (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1987), 29, 30, 34. Al-Pazdawī also notes the disagreement between them and Ash‘arites on some issues, see al-Pazdawī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 2. For further details on the relationship between Māturīdism and Ash‘arism throughout history, see Mehmet Kalaycı, *Tarihsel Süreçte Eşarilik-Maturidilik İlişkisi* (Ankara: Ankara Okulu Yayınları, 2013), 129–339.

¹³² Al-Pazdawī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 2–3.

alone would have been sufficient.”¹³³ Nevertheless, it can be observed that these scholars still remained loyal to Abū Ḥanīfa and continued to associate their traditions with his name.¹³⁴

As a result of this development, Māturīdism emerged as a well-established school of kalām by the late fifth/eleventh or early sixth/twelfth century. According to Rudolph, this development was the result of the efforts of key Transoxanian theologians, including Abū al-Yusr al-Pazdawī, Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, Abū Ishāq al-Ṣaffār al-Bukhārī (d. 533-34/1139), and Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142).¹³⁵ However, the most influential scholar in this process, as argued in the final chapter of the study, was Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī. Abū al-Mu‘īn, especially through his masterpiece *Tabṣira*, which became a model for later theological manuals within the tradition, ensured that there would be no return to the traditional creed-based theology that was dominant before and after al-Māturīdī. Notably, the first and one of the most important attempts to write a creedal text, typically signifying the end of the formative period of a theological school, is a reiteration of the statements found in Nasafī’s *Tamhīd*, a summary of his larger work, *Tabṣira*. This creed, authored by Abū al-Mu‘īn’s well-known student Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī and known as *al-‘Aqīda al-Nasafīyya*, became one of the most significant creedal texts within the Sunni theological tradition, attracting numerous commentaries. Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī’s (d. 792/1390) commentary on it is particularly famous, serving as a subject for further super-commentaries (*hawāshī*), and is still studied in madrasas today.

This period of the Māturīdī tradition is characterised by its dialectical approach to *kalām*. In this method, scriptural evidence and rational arguments are utilised to defend a preferred

¹³³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:471–472.

¹³⁴ See al-Pazdawī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 155; Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:210; Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 16–17.

¹³⁵ Rudolph, ‘Ḥanafī Tradition and Māturīdism’, 280–281.

theological interpretation against rival views. The theologians (*mutakallimūn*) engage in arguments based on the challenges presented by their opponents. They assume certain beliefs or ideas are shared between them and their opponents, and then they focus on refuting the positions held by their opponents rather than solely defending their own views.¹³⁶

2.3. Post-Classical Era —8th/14th Century to the End of the 13th/19th Century:

After several centuries, the Ash‘arī school, particularly its famous theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), known for his synthesis of *kalām* and *falsafa*,¹³⁷ once again played a significant role in influencing the development of the Māturīdī school. Al-Rāzī’s scholarly debates (*munāẓarāt*) with Māturīdī scholars, especially with Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī (b. 580/1184), in Transoxiana led them to begin incorporating philosophical concepts derived from Avicennian philosophy into their later theological works. As evident from al-Ṣābūnī’s words, before encountering al-Rāzī, he and the Transoxanian scholars were committed to the classical method best exemplified by Abū Mu‘īn al-Nasafī.¹³⁸

As any student of Islam will be familiar with, it is widely accepted that with al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), philosophy entered into the domain of theology and radically altered the subsequent theological tradition. Yet, according to Wisnovsky, the distinction between two

¹³⁶ See Josef van Ess, ‘The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology’, in *Kleine Schriften by Josef van Ess*, ed. Hinrich Biesterfeldt, 3 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 1:240–243.

¹³⁷ Ayman Shihadeh, ‘From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī: 6th/12th Century Developments in Muslim Philosophical Theology’, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 15, no. 1 (2005): 178.

¹³⁸ “I have read the *Kitāb Tabṣīrat al-Adilla* by Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, and I believe that nothing surpasses that book in verification (*taḥqīq*) and meticulousness (*tadqīq*),” as transmitted by al-Rāzī. See Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī fī Bilād Mā warā’ al-Nahr*, ed. Fathalla Kholeif, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1984), 23–24.

groups of Sunni theologians referred to as ‘early’ or ‘ancient’ (*mutaqaddimūn*), who are committed to the classical method, and ‘late’ or ‘modern’ (*muta’akhhirūn*), who are committed to the philosophical method, lies not with al-Ghazālī, as commonly thought, but with Avicenna himself. Thus, the shift in Sunni theological discourse towards philosophical theology was, in fact, Avicennian, not Ghazālīan.¹³⁹ Under the influence of Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and al-Ghazālī’s treatment of Ibn Sīnā’s philosophy, al-Rāzī gradually transformed Islamic theology to such an extent that earlier theological frameworks became no longer relevant.¹⁴⁰

As a result of this development, theology in this era was shaped by its epistemological reliance on the ideas and methods developed by Ibn Sīnā. The theologians’ reliance on Ibn Sīnā’s conceptual tools and methods led them to begin their *kalām* manuals with discussions of general principles (*al-umūr al-‘amma*)¹⁴¹ and to use logical terms to construct demonstrative arguments

¹³⁹ Robert Wisnovsky, ‘One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Theology’, *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2004): 65–66. He also claims that within the Māturīdī school, the origin of the tendency toward philosophical theology, which was triggered by Ibn Sīnā, can be traced back to Abū al-Yusr al-Pazdawī. See Wisnovsky, ‘Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Theology’, 65.

¹⁴⁰ Shihadeh, ‘From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī’, 179; Robert Wisnovsky, ‘Towards a Genealogy of Avicennism’, *Oriens* 42 (2014): 326; Dimitri Gutas, ‘Avicenna and After: The Development of Paraphilosophy’, in *Islamic Philosophy from the 12th to the 14th Century*, ed. Abdelkader Al Ghouz (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2018), 50–51; Gerhard Endress, ‘Reading Avicenna in the Madrasa: Intellectual Genealogies and Chains of Transmission of Philosophy and the Sciences in the Islamic East’, in *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed. James E. Montgomery (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 398–399.

¹⁴¹ It refers to the introductory section of post-classical theological works where metaphysical concepts and universal principles are discussed. This introductory section is the key element that distinguishes the *kalām* of the late theologians (*muta’akhhirūn*) from that of the earlier scholars (*mutaqaddimūn*). These metaphysical topics and concepts were incorporated into *kalām* after Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s engagement and interaction with *falsafa*. Before al-Rāzī, theologians discussed metaphysical concepts such as existence (*mawjūd*), non-existence (*ma’dūm*), essence (*māhiya*), eternal (*qadīm*), created or contingent (*muḥdath*), and thing (*shay’*)

(*burhān*), rather than relying on dialectical arguments (*jadal*).¹⁴² These demonstrative arguments were believed to lead to valid syllogisms based on true propositions, resulting in genuine agreement with truth. This is contrasted with dialectical arguments, which were seen as leading to agreement based on common consent (*‘umūm al-i ‘tirāf*) rather than truth.¹⁴³ In this era, this new method was frequently employed in commentaries on important creedal texts, such as *al-‘Aqīda al-Nasafiyya*, *al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ* (also known as *al-Fiqh al-Akbar II*), and *al-‘Aqīda al-Ṭahāwiyya*. This development led to the integration of core doctrines from earlier periods with later philosophical elaborations. In other words, despite the adoption of the new method, the purpose of post-classical theologians remained unchanged, and they endeavoured to preserve the fundamental doctrinal positions outlined in earlier creedal texts and classical-era *kalām* manuals.

informally, without organising them into a dedicated chapter in their works. Al-Rāzī was instrumental in elevating the significance of *al-umūr al-‘amma* by systematically addressing these topics in a separate section, integrating philosophical insights into theological discourse, and establishing a structured approach that influenced later theologians. After al-Rāzī, theologians extensively reconsidered and explored these and other related metaphysical concepts such as necessity (*wujūb*), possibility or contingency (*imkān*), cause (*‘illa*), and effect or the caused (*ma ‘lūl*) in their works, using al-Rāzī’s framework as a foundational basis for further theological discourse and analysis.

¹⁴² Walbridge John, *God and Logic in Islam: The Caliphate of Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 117–119.

¹⁴³ Tony Street and Nadja Germann, ‘Arabic and Islamic Philosophy of Language and Logic’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring Edition 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/arabic-islamic-language/>. While there was a claim that this new method aimed to establish certainty and genuine agreement with truth, Gutas suggests that it may not have been significantly different from the dialectical approach. Additionally, this new method might not have been more beneficial for *kalām* compared to the traditional dialectical method. See Gutas, ‘Avicenna and After’, 46–47.

After their significant engagement with Ash‘arite theology, Transoxanian scholars such as Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (d. 722/1322) and Ṣadr al-Sharī‘a al-Thānī (d. 747/1348) began to embrace this new approach. The latter was well-versed in the works of Ibn Sīnā and authored *Ta‘dīl al-‘Ulūm*, which synthesised elements of logic, *kalām*, and astronomy.¹⁴⁴ Following these scholars, other notable figures emerged who continued this intellectual trajectory. For instance, al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), renowned for his commentary on *al-Mawāqif* by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), and Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, celebrated for his commentary on *al-‘Aqāida al-Nasafīyya* by Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī.¹⁴⁵

Another significant development during the late classical era was the promotion of Sunni Muslim unity by the Zangids, Ayyubids, and especially the Mamluk and Ottoman dynasties among their subjects. This endeavour towards Sunni unity led to a trend of theological reconciliation between the Māturīdī and Ash‘arī schools of Islamic theology. Theologians from both the Māturīdī and Ash‘arī traditions began to minimise their doctrinal differences, sometimes incorporating teachings from both schools into their theological discourse.¹⁴⁶ One prominent scholar who exemplified this trend of bridging theological gaps between Māturīdī and Ash‘arī doctrines was Ibn Kamāl Pāshā (d. 940/1534). Serving as Shaykh al-Islām under Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (r. 926/1520–974/1566) of the Ottoman Empire, Ibn Kamāl Pāshā authored *Masā‘il al-Ikhtilāf bayn al-Ashā‘ira wa-al-Māturīdiyya*, wherein he identified and discussed twelve key doctrinal differences between the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī theological

¹⁴⁴ Ahmad S. Dallal, *An Islamic Response to Greek Astronomy: Kitāb Ta‘dīl Hay‘at al-Aflāk* of Ṣadr al-Sharī‘a (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 2–3, 8–10.

¹⁴⁵ Endress, ‘Reading Avicenna in the Madrasa’, 416, 420.

¹⁴⁶ Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 9–11.

traditions. Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), an Ash‘arī scholar from an earlier period, also emphasised the minimal doctrinal disparities between the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī schools, suggesting that they primarily diverged on thirteen theological issues, with only a few of these being substantive in nature. In other words, they concluded that the disagreement between Māturīdites and Ash‘arites is not doctrinal or based on matters of content (*ma‘nawī*), but rather linguistic or terminological (*lafzī*).¹⁴⁷ Al-Taftāzānī, a significant scholar of Sunni theology during this era, composed a commentary on the Māturīdite creed *al-‘Aqīda al-Nasafīyya* that integrated viewpoints from both the Ash‘arī and Māturīdī theological frameworks.¹⁴⁸ His commentary became a pivotal text that received extensive analysis and commentary throughout subsequent centuries, up to the modern era. Certain theological texts, representing a form of Sunni orthodoxy without specific affiliations to particular theological schools, have become widely distributed and accepted throughout the Muslim world.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 8–11; Bruckmayr, ‘Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām’, 60; Özervarlı, ‘Ottoman Lands’, 568ff. Despite the prevalence of this trend, there was a smaller opposing movement within the school that aimed to return to earlier sources. For example, Kamāl al-Dīn al-Bayāḍī (d. 1097/1687), an Ottoman theologian, authored *Ishārāt al-Marām min ‘Ibārāt al-Imām*, whose title implies a return to Abū Ḥanīfa’s teachings. Harvey notes that with this title, al-Bayāḍī aimed to undermine the commonly held Ash‘arī-Māturīdī theological framework of his time by reverting to the foundational ideas of Māturīdī thought derived from the teachings of Abū Ḥanīfa. See Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 44–45.

¹⁴⁸ See Earl E. Elder, ‘Introduction’, in Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam: Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī on the Creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī*, trans. Earl E. Elder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), xii-xiv.

¹⁴⁹ Bruckmayr, ‘Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām’, 60.

2.4. Modern Era —End of the 13th/19th century to the Present Day:

The current era of Māturīdī theology can be viewed as part of a broader movement known as *kalām jadīd*, which entails the modern reinterpretation and re-examination of theological concepts within Islam. The challenges posed by modernity, including colonisation and the subsequent post-colonial period, have prompted efforts within Islamic theology to reassess, modify, and update traditional theological beliefs in response to new circumstances. Towards the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a notable demand for theological writings that addressed emerging issues and re-examined existing ones, particularly in light of contemporary Western philosophical ideas. Key figures who played pivotal roles during the initial phase of this movement include Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d. 1905) from Egypt, Shiblī Nu‘mānī (d. 1914) from India, and ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Kharṣūṭī (d. 1916) and İzmirli İsmail Hakkı (d. 1946), both from Turkey. These scholars contributed significantly to the modernisation and adaptation of Islamic theology in response to the challenges of their time.¹⁵⁰

For example, ‘Abduh suggests that excessive investment of time and energy in theological disagreements and complex theoretical debates among different schools of theology is unnecessary. He argues that certain theological discussions should be limited as they surpass the capacity of the human mind for full comprehension. Instead, he proposes a focus on observing and contemplating God’s creations rather than delving deeply into the nature or essence of God. This approach, he believes, is more beneficial and practical in fulfilling religious

¹⁵⁰ M. Sait Özervarlı, ‘Attempts to Revitalize Kalām in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries’, *The Muslim World* 89, no. 1 (1999): 94–100; Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 45.

obligations and addressing human spiritual needs.¹⁵¹ ‘Abduh also places significant emphasis on prophecy and divine revelation. He supports the need for prophecy and revelation by citing reasons such as the universal human desire for eternal life or eternity (*baqā’*), a belief common to most major religions and philosophers, which, he asserts, points to the existence and reality of prophecy and divine revelation. ‘Abduh further justifies the need for prophets by emphasising their essential role in fostering morality, virtue, and ethical values necessary for individuals to coexist harmoniously within society.¹⁵²

Al-Kharpūtī, in his most significant work, *Tanqīḥ al-Kalām fī ‘Aqā’id Ahl al-Islām*, states that he wrote this work with the goal of developing a fresh approach for a modern *kalām* manual. Al-Kharpūtī organises his work into an introduction (*muqaddima*), three main chapters (on divinity, prophecy, and eschatology), and a concluding section (*khātima*). He mentions at the beginning of the work that after he began teaching theology at Dār al-Funūn al-‘Uthmāniyya, he sought a classical source to follow but found no work adequate for addressing contemporary theological challenges.¹⁵³ Consequently, he wrote his own work to tackle these issues. He notes that classical works, which were written primarily to refute the innovations (*bid‘a*) of their time and to respond to views and movements that emerged from ancient Greek philosophy, do not contain sufficient answers to new innovations and contemporary philosophical challenges.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Muḥammad ‘Abduh, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Muḥammad Rashīd Riḍā, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Manār, 1947), 108–12.

¹⁵² ‘Abduh, *Risālat al-Tawḥīd*, 141ff.

¹⁵³ ‘Abd al-Laṭīf al-Kharpūtī, *Tanqīḥ al-Kalām fī ‘Aqā’id Ahl al-Islām* (Istanbul: Najm al-Istiqbāl Maṭba‘a, 1330), 4.

¹⁵⁴ Al-Kharpūtī, *Tanqīḥ al-Kalām*, 5. See also Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 45–49; Özervarlı, ‘Attempts to Revitalize Kalām’, 94.

These significant early efforts to establish a new *kalām* inspired by the Māturīdī tradition have transitioned, by the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century, into a fresh phase of academic exploration within modern universities. Al-Māturīdī's theological teachings hold significant importance in present-day Turkish academia, particularly through the efforts of a group led by Bekir Topaloğlu at Marmara University, who have played a crucial role in publishing al-Māturīdī's surviving works and clarifying their complex language.¹⁵⁵

Similar to the trend in Turkey, there has been a slow and deliberate movement within English-speaking Western academia to reintroduce and revive Māturīdī theology. Mustafa Cerić is a significant figure in this trend, exploring key concepts from al-Māturīdī's work *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and advocating for the relevance of Māturīdī's ideas in modern theological discourse in his book *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islam*.¹⁵⁶ His comments on encouraging Muslim scholars for contemporary *kalām* projects are noteworthy:

It is not only that a few Muslims today are able to offer new theological ideas to the world arena of thought, but also that few of them are really familiar with the greatness of their own past. Of course, some Muslims glorify this historic legacy of Islam day and night, but benefit little from that great experience of their predecessors. They sometimes go so far into the past that they lose the track to come back to the present and to plan for the future. If Muslims are ever to get out of their present intellectual stalemate, they must learn from their past legacy rather than blindly and meaninglessly glorify it. They must live, think and work as their predecessors did in their given times.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 48–49.

¹⁵⁶ Mustafa Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islām: A Study of the Theology of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995), 234–335.

¹⁵⁷ Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology*, 234.

Ramon Harvey's book, *Transcendent God, Rational World: A Māturīdī Theology*, follows a similar path to Cerić's work but draws from a broader range of philosophical ideas. Harvey seeks to demonstrate the relevance of diverse philosophical ideas to an updated or modernised version of Māturīdī theology, arguing that such a project, incorporating a variety of philosophical sources, will significantly contribute to today's wider academia. For instance, he argues that there is an implicit orientation in al-Māturīdī's work that could be further developed by integrating the MacIntyrean concept of "tradition-constituted enquiry".¹⁵⁸ To my knowledge, Harvey's work represents the latest attempt to launch a contemporary project of *kalām* based on Māturīdī theology.

This brief overview of the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī tradition seems to be sufficient for placing the current study into context. Now, let us look at the life and academic milieu of our scholar, Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī.

3. The Life and Academic Milieu of Abū al-Muʿīn al-Nasafī

Nasafī's life, similar to that of his predecessor al-Māturīdī, is not well-documented in commonly referenced bibliographical dictionaries of the field. The biographical accounts found in classical dictionaries often provide the same basic remarks about Nasafī without much elaboration. Nonetheless, due to their rarity and the absence of alternative sources, it is valuable to repeat them here, as these meagre statements serve as the only references outlining Nasafī's life.

¹⁵⁸ Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 55.

As per the sources, the full name of our scholar is Abū al-Mu‘īn Maymūn bin Muḥammad bin Muḥammad bin Mu‘tamad al-Nasafī.¹⁵⁹ While some authors record his *kunya* as Abū al-Ma‘īn, al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) asserts that it should be pronounced as Abū al-Mu‘īn.¹⁶⁰ It is reported that his father and grandfather were scholars affiliated with the Ḥanafī school of thought and made significant contributions to the Ḥanafī tradition.¹⁶¹ ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (d. 539/1144), one of Nasafī’s leading students, similarly introduces his teacher as a prominent scholar who made important contributions to Ahl al-Sunna and the Ḥanafite School, in the fields of Islamic theology (*kalām*) and jurisprudence (*fiqh*), respectively.¹⁶²

Nasafī was born in Nakhshab (or Nasaf)¹⁶³ into a family renowned for producing prominent scholars.¹⁶⁴ The Arab geographer Yāqūt (d. 626/1229) describes Nasafī’s birthplace,

¹⁵⁹ Khayr al-Dīn al-Ziriklī, *al-A‘lām: Qāmūs al-Tarājim*, 6th ed., 8 vols (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li al-Malāyīn, 1984), 7:341; Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Dhahabī, *Tārīkh al-Islām wa-Wafayāt al-Mashāhīr wa-al-A‘lām*, ed. Bashār ‘Awwād Ma‘rūf, 15 vols (Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2003), 11:119; Abū al-Fidā’ Zayn al-Dīn Abū al-‘Adl Qāsim ibn Quṭlūbughā, *Tāj al-Tarājim fī Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyya*, ed. Muḥammad Khayr Ramadān Yūsuf (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1992), 308; al-Laknawī, *al-Fawā’id al-Bahiyya*, 217; Ismā‘īl Pāshā ibn Muḥammad al-Baghdādī, *Hadiyyat al-‘Ārifīn Asmā’ al-Mu‘allifīn wa-Āthār al-Muṣannifīn*, ed. Mahmut Kemal İnal and Avni Aktuç, 2 vols (Ankara: Milli Eğitimi Bakanlıği, 1955), 2:487.

¹⁶⁰ Abū ‘Abd Allāh al-Dhahabī, *al-Mushtabih fī al-Rijāl: Asmā’uhum wa-Ansābuhum*, ed. ‘Alī Muḥammad al-Bajāwī, 2 vols (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā’ al-Kutub al-‘Arabiyya, 1962), 2:607.

¹⁶¹ Al-Laknawī, *al-Fawā’id al-Bahiyya*, 217; Al-Baghdādī, *Hadiyyat al-‘Ārifīn*, 2:487.

¹⁶² ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, *Sharḥ Ta’wīlāt al-Qur’ān* (Istanbul: Süleymaniye Lib., Hamidiye sect., MS 176), fol., 1b.

¹⁶³ Minorsky records the name of the city as ‘Nakhshab’, yet he notes that Arab geographers refer to it as ‘Nasaf’. See, V. Minorsky, ‘Nakhshab’, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman et al., 2nd ed., first published online 2012. Consulted online on 18 October 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_5775.

¹⁶⁴ Muammar İskenderoğlu, ‘Nasafī, Abū’l-Mu‘īn’, in *The Biographical Encyclopaedia of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Oliver Leaman (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015); Yusuf Ş. Yavuz, ‘Nesefi, Ebū’l-Mu‘īn’, in *TDV*

Nasaf, as a settlement between the Āmū Daryā (the river Oxus) and Samarqand, noting that this region has produced various influential scholars.¹⁶⁵ His well-known student, Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142), reports that Abu al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī most likely died in Bukhārā, a city in present-day Uzbekistan, in 508/1115.¹⁶⁶ Ibn Quṭlūbughā (d. 879/1474) agrees with this date and further states that Abu al-Mu‘īn passed away at the age of 70,¹⁶⁷ which suggests that his year of birth was 438 AH (Islamic Hijri calendar). Wensinck regards Abu al-Mu‘īn as one of the *mutakallimūn*, whose scholastic position is between that of the early period, as represented by ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429/1037–38), and the younger *mutakallimūn*.¹⁶⁸ This assessment seems accurate, given that Abu al-Mu‘īn was a contemporary of al-Ghazālī, who significantly transformed the content of Islamic theology by integrating philosophy (*falsafa*) and theology (*kalām*), according to the commonly accepted view.

The specifics of Nasafī’s education, including the scholars under whom he studied, have not been clearly documented in the sources. However, based on available information, it is surmised that he likely received his training from Ḥanafī-Māturīdī scholars, particularly those associated with the *nisba* or epithet of ‘Nasafī’, in the cities of Samarkand and Bukhara.¹⁶⁹ These

İslām Ansiklopedisi, 46 vols (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2017), 32:569; Mustafa S. Yazıcıoğlu, *Māturīdī ve Neseфі’ye Göre İnsan Hürriyeti* (Ankara: Otto Yayınları, 2017), 26.

¹⁶⁵ Yāqūt ibn ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥamawī, *Mu‘jam al-Buldān*, 5 vols (Beirut: Dār Şādar, 1977), 5:285; Also see B. Spuler, ‘Āmū Daryā’, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman et al., 2nd ed., first published online 2012. Consulted online on 18 October 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0051.

¹⁶⁶ Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, al-*Aqā’id* (Istanbul: Hacı Muharrem Efendi Matbaası, 1847), 12.

¹⁶⁷ Ibn Quṭlūbughā, *Tāj al-Tarājim*, 308.

¹⁶⁸ A. J. Wensinck, ‘al-Nasafī’, in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma et al., first ed., first published online 2012. Consulted online on 18 October 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2214-871X_ei1_COM_0093.

¹⁶⁹ Yavuz, ‘Neseфі’, 32:569; İskenderoğlu, ‘Nasafī, Abū’l-Mu‘īn’.

cities, which will be elaborated on later, are renowned for their historical significance as hubs of Islamic scholarship.

His well-known students include ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (d. 539/1144), Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142), Maḥmūd b. Zayd al-Lāmishī (d. end of the first half of the 6th/12th century), and Burhān al-Dīn al-Balkhī (d. 547/1152).¹⁷⁰ Yavuz enumerates among Nasafī’s students Aḥmad al-Pazdawī, Ismā‘īl bin ‘Adī al-Ṭālaqānī, Aḥmad bin Faraḥ al-Sughdī, and Abū al-Ḥasan al-Balkhī.¹⁷¹ However, despite diligent research, I have been unable to find any information about them in classical sources.

The most significant work of Nasafī is his magnum opus, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*. The critical edition of *Tabṣira* was first undertaken in 1977 by Muḥammad al-Anwar Ḥāmid ‘Īsā, as a doctoral project at Al-Azhar University in Cairo. It was later edited by Claude Salamé and published in Damascus in 1993. Another critical edition of *Tabṣira* was completed by Hüseyin Atay and Şaban Ali Düzgün, published in Ankara, with the first volume in 1993 and the second in 2003. *Tabṣirat al-Adilla* is widely recognised by contemporary scholars as the most important reference for the Māturīdī school of thought, following al-Māturīdī’s *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.¹⁷² *Tabṣira*

¹⁷⁰ ‘Abd al-Majīd Turkī, ‘Muqaddima’, in Maḥmūd b. Zayd al-Lāmishī, *Kitāb fī Uṣūl al-Fiqh*, ed. ‘Abd al-Majīd Turkī (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1995), 11; Ibn Abī al-Wafā’ al-Qurashī, *al-Jawāhir al-Muḍī’a fī Ṭabaqāt al-Ḥanafīyya*, 2 vols (Hyderabad: Maṭba‘at Majlis Dā’irat al-Ma‘ārif al-Nizāmiyya, 1913), 1:320.

¹⁷¹ Yavuz, ‘Nesefi’, 32:569; Cf. Abdulgaffar Aslan, ‘Kelâm İlminin Gelişimine Türklerin Katkısı -Ebu’l-Muin en-Nesefi Örneği-’, in *International Symposium on the Contribution of Turkish World to Islam*, ed. İsmail Hakkı Göksoy and Nejet Durak (Isparta: Fakülte Kitabevi, 2007), 481–483.

¹⁷² Fathalla Kholeif, ‘Muqaddima’, in Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Fathalla Kholeif (Alexandria: Dār al-Jāmi‘ā al-Miṣriyya, 1970), 5; Daniel Gimaret, ‘Nesefi’ye Göre İnsanın Fiilleri Meselesi = Théories de l’Acte Humain en Théologie Musulmane’, trans. Sefa Bardakcı, *Marife: Dini Araştırmalar Dergisi* 10, no. 1 (2010): 201; Ak, *Māturīdī ve Māturīdilik*, 152.

was highly esteemed by later Māturīdī scholars, with Nūr al-Dīn al-Şābūnī being a prime example. Additionally, the remarks of the renowned Ash‘arite scholar Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), known for his scholarly debates in Transoxiana, suggest that *Tabşira* was a key reference for subsequent Māturīdī scholars.¹⁷³ According to some researchers, Nasafī developed a so-called ‘semantic method’ in this seminal work, a technique not widely adopted or further developed by his followers,¹⁷⁴ which will be discussed in detail in the last chapter. The work also has a bibliographic character, providing detailed information about the early history of the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī tradition and its notable figures. It sheds light on the early period of the school, delineating the connection between Abū Ḥanīfa and the scholarly tradition in Transoxiana. Thus, *Tabşira* may hold a wealth of significant data on the early history of Māturīdī *kalām*, which is perhaps unrivalled elsewhere.¹⁷⁵

Nasafī also authored smaller theological treatises, one of which is *al-Tamhīd fī Uşūl al-Dīn*. This work comprises thirty-three sections and indeed appears to be a summary of *Tabşirat al-Adilla*. In this treatise, Nasafī occasionally refers the reader to *Tabşira* for additional details on the discussion. The work was edited and published by Ḥabīb Allāh Ḥasan Aḥmad (Cairo, 1986) and ‘Abd al-Ḥayy Qābīl (Cairo, 1987). *Kitāb al-Baḥr fī al-Kalām*, another work penned by the author in his youth, is a concise theological treatise he composed for the laypeople of his era. It

¹⁷³ Al-Rāzī, *Munāzarāt*, 23; Yazıcıoğlu, *İnsan Hürriyeti*, 28.

¹⁷⁴ See Hüseyin S. Erdem, ‘Tabsire’ye Semantik Yaklaşım’ (PhD diss., Ankara, Ankara Üniversitesi, 1988), 1–2.

¹⁷⁵ See Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 1:356ff.; Yazıcıoğlu, *İnsan Hürriyeti*, 28–29.

has been published in Istanbul (1328), Konya (1329), and Tunisia (1986). To date, this theological tractate is the only work of Nasafî that has been translated into English.¹⁷⁶

Alongside Nasafî's hometown of Nakhshab, the entire regions of Transoxiana (*Mā warā' al-Nahr*) and Khurāsān were major centres of scholarly activities in the Islamic world between the 7th and 12th centuries.¹⁷⁷ It is known that scholars who grew up in Anatolia during the Ottoman period journeyed to centres such as Samarqand and Bukhara, located in this region, to expand their proficiency and specialise in rational sciences, particularly philosophy and theology. Conversely, they preferred Syria, Iraq, and Egypt for other disciplines such as *tafsīr*, *ḥadīth*, and literature. This region has played a crucial role in shaping many leading Islamic scholars such as al-Fārābī or Alfarabius (d. 339/950), Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), and al-Bīrūnī (d. 453/1061 [?]).¹⁷⁸

Transoxiana was economically prosperous compared to other regions in Central Asia, as it was traversed by the Great Silk Road and the Spice Trade route, which also served as a bridge of culture and civilisation between the East and West. The Qarakhānids (also spelled İlek

¹⁷⁶ See, Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafî, 'A Theological Tractate, the Baḥr al-Kalām', in *A Reader on Islam: Passages from Standard Arabic Writings Illustrative of the Beliefs and Practices of Muslims*, ed. and trans. Arthur Jeffery (s-Gravenhage [The Hague]: Mouton, 1962), 375–456.

¹⁷⁷ Osman G. Özgüdenli, 'Mâverâünnehir', in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 46 vols (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2017), 28:178–179; W. Barthold and C.E. Bosworth, 'Mā warā' al-Nahr', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman et al., 2nd ed., first published online 2012. Consulted online on 17 October 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0592; Madelung, 'Westward Migration', 443.

¹⁷⁸ İsmail H. Uzunçarşılı, *Osmanlı Devletinin İlimiye Teşkilâtı* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1965), 227; Yazıcıoğlu, *İnsan Hürriyeti*, 19; Metin Yurdagür, 'Kurucusundan Sonra Maturidiyye Mezhebinin En Önemli Kelamcısı Ebu'l-Muin En-Nesefî'nin Hayatı ve Eserleri', *Diyanet Dergisi* 21, no. 4 (1985): 31, 36.

Khāns), a Turkic dynasty, ruled in Transoxiana during the period of 999–1211.¹⁷⁹ They converted to Islam during the reign of Satūq Bughrā Khān (r. 942-955), and their realm became the first Muslim Turkish state.¹⁸⁰ The region became a significant centre of Islamic civilisation. Satūq Bughrā Khān then fought against other non-Muslim Turks and became an influential figure in the spread of Islam among Turkish circles.¹⁸¹ The government in Transoxiana supported scholars financially by providing them with funds to meet their basic needs and to support their academic pursuits.¹⁸² This support likely facilitated scholarly activities, including research, teaching, and participation in intellectual debates. Nasafī, being a scholar of the time, probably benefited from this financial assistance provided by the state, which enabled him to focus on his scholarly endeavours. During this period, Nasafī received various titles and honours in recognition of his dedicated scholarship and his success in scholarly debates (*munāzarāt*).¹⁸³

During this era, a charitable foundation was established with the aim of providing financial support for a *madrasa* and a hospital, both of which were founded by Satūq Bughrā Khān himself. The documents that have been passed down from this charity offer valuable insights into the intellectual and scholarly climate of that historical period. One example of notable accounts from these documents about the scholarly environment of this era reads as follows:

¹⁷⁹ C.E. Bosworth, 'Ilek-Khāns or Karakhānids', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, ed. P. Bearman et al., 2nd ed., first published online 2012. Consulted online on 18 October 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0360.

¹⁸⁰ Yurdagür, 'Kurucusundan Sonra,' 35; Bosworth, 'Mā warā' al-Nahr'.

¹⁸¹ Abdülkerim Özeydin, 'Karahanlılar', in *TDV İslam Ansiklopedisi*, 46 vols (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2017), 24:405–406.

¹⁸² Yurdagür, 'Kurucusundan Sonra,' 32, 39; Bosworth, 'Mā warā' al-Nahr'.

¹⁸³ Aslan, 'Türklerin Katkısı', 481.

In the event of the chief administrator's passing away, a new appointment must be made for the position. This appointment is determined by a faculty member who is a *faqīh* (jurist), along with other qualified scholars who can provide *fatwā* (legal opinions) in Samarqand. If there is no faculty member available, the governor of Samarqand assumes responsibility for making the appointment. It is strictly prohibited for the Sulṭān to carry out this appointment.¹⁸⁴

Apparently, the aim of this practice was to foster an environment conducive to scholarly work, free from political pressures. It can then be said that this suitable academic environment was a hallmark of the period before the birth of Nasafī. This atmosphere allowed for the flourishing of ideas and the advancement of knowledge, setting a precedent for the scholarly pursuits that Nasafī would later be known for. His works reflect the rich scholarly tradition of his time, which leads us to believe that the environment in which he was active nurtured intellectual freedom.

Although Nasafī's life and scholarly contributions may be sparsely documented in classical sources, similar to his master, Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, his significance within the school is well-recognised in modern studies. Nasafī is widely regarded as the most important Ḥanafī-Māturīdī theologian from Central Asia after al-Māturīdī. His position within the Māturīdīte school, owing to his valuable contributions, is seen as parallel to the positions of al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013) and al-Ghazālī in the Ash'arite school.¹⁸⁵ Rudolph describes him as the “most brilliant and influential theologian” of the early stage of the Māturīdīte School, emerging

¹⁸⁴ Saffet Bilhan, ‘900 Yıllık Bir Türk Öğretim Kurumu Buğra Han Tamğaç Medresesi: Vakıf Belgesi I’, *JFES* 15, no. 2 (2019): 124. Unless noted otherwise, all translations belong to the author.

¹⁸⁵ Balqāsım al-Ghālī, *Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī: Ḥayātuhū wa-Ārā’uhū al-Aqdiyya* (Tunis: Dār al-Turkī, 1989), 19–20.

from a scholarly family with intellectual qualifications.¹⁸⁶ Al-Ṭanjī, a Moroccan scholar renowned for his studies in the field of Islamic philosophy and theology, notes that Nasafī has made significant contributions to the establishment and dissemination of Māturīdism by studying, developing, and teaching al-Māturīdī's works to his disciples.¹⁸⁷ As we will discuss in detail later, the problematic and ambiguous parts of al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* can only be understood with the help of Nasafī's seminal work, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*.¹⁸⁸

The information we possess about Nasafī's life and scholarly achievements, gathered from existing sources, is limited to this extent. We will examine his role within the school more thoroughly in the last chapter of the study. Before concluding this section, it seems fitting to correct an error found in the literature related to Louis Massignon, a French Catholic scholar of Islam.

Yazıcıoğlu mistakenly notes that Nasafī is incorrectly depicted by Massignon as a theologian associated with Ibn Karrām (d. 255/868). He then speculates that the reason for Massignon's assumption could be the connection of Nasafī's great-grandfather, Abū Muṭī' Makḥūl ibn al-Faḍl al-Nasafī (d. 318/930), with Ibn Karrām. Furthermore, he surmises that the fact that Makḥūl al-Nasafī was a student of Yaḥyā ibn Mu'adh al-Rāzī (d. (d. 258/872), known as the most distinguished disciple of Ibn Karrām, might have led Massignon to this

¹⁸⁶ For more information about Nasafī's scholarly predecessors within his family, see Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 81.

¹⁸⁷ At-Tancī, 'Māturīdī', 2–3.

¹⁸⁸ Yazıcıoğlu, *İnsan Hürriyeti*, 32.

misunderstanding.¹⁸⁹ Yazıcıoğlu bases his claim on the following statements made by

Massignon:

En outre, la classification des hérésies adoptée par les hérésiographes hanéfites, par exemple Nasafî (3), dépend directement d'Ibn Karrâm (4).¹⁹⁰

(3): Descendant direct, d'ailleurs, de Makhoûl Nasafî.

(4): Même définition du *shakk*, de l'*irjâ'* du *jabr* condamnation de Marîsî.¹⁹¹

This study by Massignon, which Yazıcıoğlu refers to, has been translated into English, and the lines in question read as follows:

Furthermore, the classification of heresies adopted by the Ḥanafite heresiographers, for example Nasafî (139), depends directly on Ibn Karrâm (140).

(139): Who, besides, is a direct descendent of Makhûl Nasafî.

(140): He [Nasafî] gives the same definition of *shakk*, *irjâ'*, *jabr*; and makes the same condemnation of Marîsî.¹⁹²

From the text, it is clear that Massignon does not explicitly state whether Nasafî was a disciple or student of Ibn Karrâm. He merely indicates that the categorisation of heresies adopted

¹⁸⁹ Yazıcıoğlu, *İnsan Hürriyeti*, 27. The same assertion is reiterated in his earlier study, see Mustafa S. Yazıcıoğlu, 'Mâtürîdî Kelâm Ekolü'nün İki Büyük Siması: Ebû Mansûr Mâtürîdî ve Ebu'l-Mu'în Neseî', *AÜİFD* 27, no. 1–4 (1985): 287.

¹⁹⁰ Louis Massignon, *Essai sur les Origines de Lexique de la Mystique Musulmane* (Paris: Geuthner, 1922), 238.

¹⁹¹ Massignon, *Mystique Musulmane*, 238, fn. 3, 4.

¹⁹² Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, trans. Benjamin Clark (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 180 and fn. 139, 140. The numbers in parentheses '(139), (140)' and '(3), (4)' refer to footnotes in the English translation and the original French text, respectively. Since the content of the footnotes is closely related to the topic being discussed, I have included them after the main text and retained the original numbering for easy cross-referencing. Specifically, '(3)' in the French text corresponds to '(139)' in the English translation, and '(4)' to '(140).'

by Nasafî and other Ḥanafî heresiographers was directly influenced by Ibn Karrām. Massignon's observations do not elaborate on the nature of their relationship or whether Nasafî specifically identified himself as a follower of Ibn Karrām. Regrettably, this misunderstanding about Massignon's views on Nasafî was later repeated in numerous studies, with Yazıcıoğlu being referenced as the source.¹⁹³

However, setting aside Yazıcıoğlu's misinterpretation of Massignon's remarks, there is no doubt about Nasafî's opposition to Ibn Karrām, as emphasised by Yazıcıoğlu.¹⁹⁴ In numerous sections of his *Tabşira*, Nasafî openly criticises Ibn Karrām and his followers on various topics such as human freedom, God's attribute of speech, and the nature of faith. Based on these views, Nasafî has even accused them of being 'extremely ignorant' and 'heretics.'¹⁹⁵

4. The State of the Field

Although the study of al-Māturīdī and the theological school associated with his name had been neglected and overshadowed by the study of the Ash'arī school in the past, studies on Māturīdī theology have gradually begun to flourish in Western academia. Historically, the Māturīdī school, founded by Abū Manşūr al-Māturīdī in the 9th–10th century, represents a major Sunni rationalist theology emphasising the use of reason in the interpretation of sacred texts. While it shares many similarities with the Ash'arī school, it maintains distinct approaches to creed and reason. The Māturīdī school traditionally held sway in regions influenced by the Ḥanafî school of jurisprudence and was prevalent in areas like Transoxiana and later the

¹⁹³ For example, see Yavuz, 'Nesefî', 32:569.

¹⁹⁴ Yazıcıoğlu, *İnsan Hürriyeti*, 27–28; Yazıcıoğlu, 'İki Büyük Sima', 287–88.

¹⁹⁵ See Nasafî, *Tabşira*, 1:13, 65, 177, 255, 452, and 2:405, 413, 435.

Ottoman and Mughal empires. Limited access to sources of the Māturīdī school hindered scholarly investigation in the past. However, increased accessibility to its central works has now allowed for a comprehensive exploration of its doctrines and historical context. It is now recognised as a significant and historically influential strand of Sunni rational theology, alongside the more extensively studied Ash‘arī school.

Rudolph’s monograph, *Al-Maturidi und die Sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand*,¹⁹⁶ is a seminal contribution to the recognition and understanding of Māturīdī theology in the West. In this landmark study, Rudolph meticulously reconstructs the intellectual and cultural milieu in which al-Māturīdī thrived, delving into the circumstances that shaped his scholarly endeavours. One notable revelation from Rudolph’s research is the profound influence of the Mu‘tazilite school, particularly Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī or al-Ka‘bī (d. 319/931), on al-Māturīdī’s thought. Despite al-Māturīdī’s criticisms of the Mu‘tazilite school, Rudolph highlights the debt owed by al-Māturīdī to these thinkers, shedding light on a complex and often overlooked aspect of his intellectual development.¹⁹⁷ Another noteworthy finding of Rudolph’s study is the pivotal role played by Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, the subject of the current thesis. Nasafī emerges as a key figure in shaping and advancing the school from its nascent or formative stages into a fully developed theological institution. Rudolph’s article, in which he summarises and further clarifies

¹⁹⁶ Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī und die Sunnitische Theologie in Samarkand* (Leiden, New York: E. J. Brill, 1997). It was translated into English and Turkish, see Ulrich Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and the Development of Sunnī Theology in Samarqand*, trans. Rodrigo Adem (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Ulrich Rudolph, *Semerkant’ta Ehl-i Sünnet Kelamı*, trans. Özcan Taşçı (Istanbul: Litera Yayıncılık, 2016).

¹⁹⁷ Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 158ff.

his findings from his earlier work, should also be mentioned here.¹⁹⁸ In both works, Rudolph emphasises Nasafī’s profound influence within the school, going so far as to designate him as the “real founder” and “highest authority” during its classical period.¹⁹⁹

Cerić’s study, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islām*, stands as another significant contribution to the field.²⁰⁰ With a comprehensive analysis of al-Māturīdī’s *kalām* method, theory of knowledge, and theological ideas concerning the world and the relation of God to man, Cerić offers valuable insights into al-Māturīdī’s thought. His study covers a range of topics, including the transition from reason (‘*aql*) to true faith and from scriptural texts (*naql*) to rational ethics, providing a thorough examination of al-Māturīdī’s contributions to the broader Sunni rational theology.

A number of studies conducted by Madelung also deserve mention here for their significant contributions to understanding various aspects of the early development of the school. His research has shed light on the influence of the early Murji’a in Khurāsān and Transoxiana on the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī school, particularly in shaping certain doctrines. Notably, Madelung highlighted how Murji’a doctrine, which advocated for the equality of new Muslim converts and challenged the Umayyad administration’s unjust imposition of the *jizya* tax, influenced the Transoxanian understanding of religious faith (*īmān*) and its relation to deeds (*a‘māl*). Furthermore, Madelung’s investigations into the spread of the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī school from Central Asia to other central Islamic regions also demonstrated the pivotal role played by the

¹⁹⁸ Ulrich Rudolph, ‘Ḥanafī Theological Tradition and Māturīdism’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 280–296.

¹⁹⁹ See Rudolph, ‘Ḥanafī Tradition and Māturīdism’, 291; Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 184.

²⁰⁰ Mustafa Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology in Islām: A Study of the Theology of Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944)* (Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1995).

Turks, particularly the Seljuks, in this expansion. In addition to the geographical dissemination of the school, Madelung has also delved into the theological dynamics and relationships between the Māturīdī and Ash‘arī schools, offering valuable insights through the lens of Abu al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī’s works.²⁰¹

Pessagno shed light on al-Māturīdī’s specific theological themes and key concepts, including intellect (‘*aql*), assent (*taṣdīq*), will (*irāda*), free choice (*ikhtiyār*), power (*qudra*), acquisition (*kasb*), and evil (*sharr* or *qabīḥ*).²⁰² In Dhanani’s conference presentation, Nasafī’s theory of atomism is compared with that of his predecessor, al-Māturīdī, revealing that al-Māturīdī opposed the atomism theory adopted by Mu‘tazilites and Ash‘arites, instead favouring a position akin to that of the philosophers (*falāsifa*).²⁰³ Interestingly, Nasafī, despite being a follower of al-Māturīdī, embraced the dominant atomism theory of *kalām* developed by Mu‘tazilites and Ash‘arites rather than adhering to his predecessor’s position. Dhanani suggests that this divergence impeded the spread of the philosophical approach endorsed by al-Māturīdī

²⁰¹ See Wilferd Madelung, ‘The Early Murji‘a in Khurāsān and Transoxiana and the Spread of Ḥanafism’, *Der Islam* 59, no. 1 (1982): 32–39; Wilferd Madelung, ‘The Westward Migration of Ḥanafī Scholars from Central Asia in the 11th to 13th Centuries’, *AÜİFD* 43, no. 2 (2002): 41–55; Wilferd Madelung, ‘The Spread of Māturīdism and the Turks’, *Biblos (Coimbra)* 46 (1970): 109–168; Wilferd Madelung, ‘Abu l-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī and Ash‘arī Theology’, in *Studies in Honour of Clifford Edmund Bosworth*, ed. Ian Richard Netton, Clifford Edmund Bosworth, and Carole Hillenbrand (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 318–330.

²⁰² J. Meric Pessagno, ‘Intellect and Religious Assent’, *The Muslim World* 69, no. 1 (1979): 18–27; J. Meric Pessagno, ‘Irāda, Ikhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb. The View of Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104, no. 1 (1984): 177–191; J. Meric Pessagno, ‘The Uses of Evil in Maturidian Thought’, *Studia Islamica* 60 (1984): 59–82.

²⁰³ See Alnoor Dhanani, ‘Al-Māturīdī and al-Nasafī on Atomism and the Tabā‘ī‘’, in *Büyük Türk Bilgini İmâm Mâtürîdî ve Mâtürîdîlik. Milletlerarası Tartışmalı İlmi Toplantı (22–24 Mayıs 2009, İstanbul)*, ed. İlyas Çelebi (Istanbul: İFAV, 2012), 65–76.

within the school, prompting the author to question the reasons behind this development and seek a reasonable answer. Dorroll's article also presents an elaborate analysis of key metaphysical and epistemological concepts found in al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.²⁰⁴ It particularly focuses on al-Māturīdī's use of terms such as 'natures' (*tabā'i*), 'state' (*ḥāl*), and 'aspect' (*jiha* or *wajh*). Dorroll's analysis shows that al-Māturīdī developed a metaphysical framework centered on the notion of 'continuous flux' (*taqallub*) within the created universe. Remarkably, these foundational elements of al-Māturīdī's theological system appear to have been overlooked in later systematic formulations of the school's *kalām* manuals.

Bruckmayr's study builds upon the groundwork laid by Madelung, delving deeper into the processes and factors that have contributed to the spread and enduring influence of the Māturīdī school of thought across significant regions of the Muslim world.²⁰⁵ Bruckmayr's paper seeks to unravel the reasons behind the resilience and continued presence of Māturīdism in regions where Ash'arism had been dominant. One significant finding of this study is the association of the Māturīdī school with the worldwide Sufi tradition, especially the Naqshbandiyya order and its Mujaddidi branch, led by Aḥmad Sirhindī (d. 1034/1624). Bruckmayr demonstrates how Sirhindī emphasised in his writings his preference for the teachings of al-Māturīdī.²⁰⁶ Following in the footsteps of the master, the Mujaddidiyya placed particular stress not only on adherence to Islamic law but also on holding correct beliefs (*'aqā'id*), which are taught to prospective adepts before they embark on the spiritual journey.

²⁰⁴ Philip Dorroll, 'The Universe in Flux: Reconsidering Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī's Metaphysics and Epistemology', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 27, no. 2 (2016): 119–135.

²⁰⁵ See Philipp Bruckmayr, 'The Spread and Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām and Underlying Dynamics', *Iran and the Caucasus* 13, no. 1 (2009): 59–92.

²⁰⁶ Bruckmayr, 'Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām', 77.

These true *'aqā'id* are mostly derived from Māturīdī *kalām*, which further strengthened the school's influence in the Ural-Volga region and Kazakhstan during the 18th and 19th centuries.²⁰⁷

Özervarlı has also significantly contributed to our understanding of the field, particularly through his research on key Māturīdī texts and the later developments within the school. His paper,²⁰⁸ originally derived from his Turkish master's thesis,²⁰⁹ played a pivotal role in verifying the authenticity of the only manuscript, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, housed at Cambridge University. Özervarlı's meticulous investigation largely dispelled doubts surrounding the authenticity of al-Māturīdī's masterpiece. Drawing from Abu al-Mu'īn's *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*, Özervarlı convincingly demonstrated that the content of the manuscript, either verbatim or in meaning, is present within al-Nasafī's *Tabṣira*. Furthermore, another of his papers revealed the later developments of the Māturīdī school, particularly its evolution from the inception of the Ottoman Empire onward.²¹⁰ Additionally, his exploration of early modern *kalām jadīd* projects²¹¹ provided further depth to our understanding of this aspect of Islamic intellectual history.

²⁰⁷ Bruckmayr, 'Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām', 79.

²⁰⁸ Mehmet S. Özervarlı, 'The Authenticity of the Manuscript of Māturīdī's Kitāb al-Tawhīd: A Re-Examination', *İslam Araştırmaları Dergisi* 1 (1997): 19–29.

²⁰⁹ Mehmet S. Özervarlı, 'Ebü'l-Muīn En-Nesefī'ye Ait Tebsiratü'l-Edille'nin Kaynakları' (Master's thesis, İstanbul, Marmara Üniversitesi, 1988).

²¹⁰ M. Sait Özervarlı, 'Theology in the Ottoman Lands', in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 567–586.

²¹¹ Mehmet S. Özervarlı, 'Attempts to Revitalize Kalām in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries', *The Muslim World* 89, no. 1 (1999): 90–105.

Another noteworthy study is Wisnovsky's paper,²¹² in which he identifies a significant shift towards philosophical theology in the intellectual development of Islamic theology, attributing it to the influence of al-Māturīdī. He pays particular attention to the impact of Abū al-Yusr al-Pazdawī, one of al-Māturīdī's prominent followers in the classical era, and the apparent influence of Ibn Sīnā's ideas on his theology. Wisnovsky's analysis challenges the commonly held idea that the philosophical turn in Islamic theology was solely the result of al-Ghazālī's efforts. Instead, he demonstrates that this trend can be traced back to the era of Ibn Sīnā and his intellectual heirs, among whom al-Pazdawī, a contemporary of Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, stands out.

Although Aron Zysow's primary area of focus is *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of Islamic jurisprudence), his work is significant and merits attention in understanding the historical development of Māturīdī *kalām*.²¹³ Zysow's research effectively demonstrate how the study of *uṣūl al-fiqh* assists in comprehending the evolution and progress of Māturīdī theological discourse over time. While Zysow concentrates on Central Asian Ḥanafī jurists, particularly al-Samarqandī (d. 539/1144), his work transcends regional boundaries. By examining doctrines from all major Islamic legal schools, Zysow challenges the perception that Ḥanafī legal theory is inherently legalistic compared to the more theological nature of Shāfi'ī legal thought. Instead, Zysow concludes that Central Asian Ḥanafī jurists were equally theological in their approach.²¹⁴

²¹² Robert Wisnovsky, 'One Aspect of the Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Theology', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 14, no. 1 (2004): 65–100.

²¹³ See Aron Zysow, *The Economy of Certainty: An Introduction to the Typology of Islamic Legal Theory* (Atlanta, GA: Lockwood Press, 2013).

²¹⁴ Zysow, *Economy of Certainty*, 1–5.

In his book, Zysow explores particularly Abū Ḥanīfa’s perspective, which holds significant authority among followers of the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī legal and theological school. According to Abū Ḥanīfa, while there may exist a single ideal answer to a legal question in the mind of God, human jurists are not necessarily obligated to know or adhere to this singular truth. This notion suggests that within the framework of Islamic law, the jurist retains the freedom to reason, interpret, and make legal judgments, as the ultimate truth is known only to God. This stance blends elements of both ‘infallibilism’ and ‘fallibilism’, presenting an infallibilist ethic — acknowledging the existence of one correct answer— while embracing a fallibilist theology that recognises the jurist’s freedom from being bound to that answer.²¹⁵ Later Ḥanafī jurists, known as formalists, influenced by Abū Ḥanīfa’s perspective, rejected the notion of constructing a legal system solely on certainty. They viewed their materialist opponents, who insisted that the law is only valid when it is certain, as ‘ignorant’, disingenuous, and characterised by ‘stupidity’, ‘self-deception’, and ‘eccentricity’.²¹⁶ Through this exploration, Zysow sheds light on the nuanced theological and jurisprudential debates within the Ḥanafī-Māturīdī tradition that shaped its historical development.

Najah Nadi’s study, building on Zysow’s insights, examines the intellectual endeavours of Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, a prominent Persian theologian and jurist known for synthesising Ash‘arī and Māturīdī tendencies.²¹⁷ Focusing on the integration of philosophical theology (*kalām*) and Arabic logic (*manṭiq*) into Islamic legal interpretation (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), Nadi’s research

²¹⁵ Zysow, *Economy of Certainty*, 267–268.

²¹⁶ Zysow, *Economy of Certainty*, 291–293.

²¹⁷ Najah Nadi, ‘Theorising the Relationship between Kalām and Uṣūl al-Fiqh: The Theological-Legal Epistemology of Sa‘d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī (d. 792/1390)’ (PhD diss., Oxford, University of Oxford, 2018).

unveils pivotal inquiries regarding the categorisation of these epistemological introductions within Islamic thought. It sheds light on whether they belong to Islamic sciences like *kalām* or non-Islamic sciences like logic. Furthermore, Nadi's study offers original perspectives on the unique characteristics of al-Taftāzānī's intellectual pursuits. A notable conclusion drawn from the research is the distinctiveness of al-Taftāzānī's thinking, particularly evident in his emphasis on verification (*taḥqīq*) and his deliberate avoidance of affiliations with specific legal schools (*madhhab*). This distinctive approach complicates definitive classification and challenges attempts to categorise him solely as either an Ash'arī or Māturīdī. Through meticulous examination, Nadi's work enriches our understanding of the intricate relationship between theological and legal epistemologies within Islamic thought.

Correa's study²¹⁸ also warrants attention, particularly for its analysis of the ideas of our scholar Abū al-Mu'īn, albeit to a limited extent, as her primary focus lies in examining the theory of the epistemological value of reports (*akhbār*) developed by Hanafī scholars in Transoxiana.²¹⁹ Using the texts by Ḥanafīte scholars from the 10th to the 12th centuries in ancient Central Asia, she, similar to Zysow and Nadi, illustrates how the school's theological doctrines formed the basis of Ḥanafīte scholars' legal theories. Correa contextualises her discussion within contemporary philosophical discussions of testimonial knowledge, identifying two primary perspectives: one that is 'reductionist' and another that is 'non-reductionist' or 'fundamentalist'.²²⁰ Subsequently, Correa examines how Muslim jurists and theologians within

²¹⁸ Dale J. Correa, 'Testifying Beyond Experience: Theories of Akhbār and the Boundaries of Community in Transoxanian Islamic Thought, 10th-12th Centuries CE' (PhD diss., New York University, 2014), 45–47.

²¹⁹ See, for example, Correa, 'Testifying Beyond Experience', 45–47.

²²⁰ Correa, 'Testifying Beyond Experience', 4–5.

the Transoxanian school discussed *akhbār* as a means of acquiring knowledge, revealing through her analysis that their discussions contain both reductionist and non-reductionist elements.²²¹

In his pursuit of a revised Islamic theology (*kalām jadīd*) for present-day needs, Harvey's study²²² skilfully bridges the fields of Islamic theological tradition, contemporary phenomenology, and analytic philosophy. By juxtaposing al-Māturīdī's theological ideas with the philosophical inquiries of figures such as Edmund Husserl and contemporary analytic philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre and Alvin Plantinga, Harvey constructs a promising framework for the possibility of a modern Muslim theology. Central to his thesis is the idea of challenging the settled foundationalist epistemological framework of classical *kalām*,²²³ a task he undertakes by drawing inspiration from different intellectual strands. This will be addressed later in the study, as Harvey's claim encompasses our theologian Abu al-Mu'īn, the most prominent figure of the school in the classical era. Harvey suggests that al-Māturīdī's seminal work, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, contains an implicit orientation suitable for theoretical expansion, particularly through the lens of MacIntyre's theory of 'tradition-constituted enquiry'.²²⁴ This approach, Harvey argues, not only grounds theological discourse in rich intellectual traditions but also fosters the development of a systematic theology unencumbered by historical constraints — specifically classical *kalām* foundationalism in epistemology.

²²¹ Correa, 'Testifying Beyond Experience', 192–195.

²²² Ramon Harvey, *Transcendent God, Rational World: A Māturīdī Theology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

²²³ Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 4, 18, 49–55.

²²⁴ Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 53–55.

Lastly, concerning the scholarship in the Anglophone world, an edited volume titled *Māturīdī Theology*²²⁵ should be mentioned here, as it stands as the first reader on the Māturīdī school ever produced in a Western language.²²⁶ The book features selections ranging from the founder, al-Māturīdī, to key texts from the broader Māturīdī tradition up to the 18th century. Each selection includes the original Arabic text and an annotated English translation, preceded by a short introduction. The volume also contains a translated excerpt on prophethood by Hülya Alper, taken from our theologian Abū al-Mu‘īn’s *Tamhīd*,²²⁷ which is a smaller treatise summarising his voluminous work *Tabṣira*.²²⁸

²²⁵ Lejla Demiri, Philip Dorroll, and Dale J. Correa, eds., *Māturīdī Theology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022).

²²⁶ Lejla Demiri, ‘Introducing the Volume’, in *Māturīdī Theology*, ed. Lejla Demiri, Philip Dorroll, and Dale J. Correa (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 25. Although certain Ḥanafī-Māturīdī texts, such as Abū Ḥanīfa’s *Fiqh al-Akbar I*, Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī’s *al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafīyya*, and Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī’s *Baḥr al-Kalām*, have been made accessible to Western readers thanks to Arthur Jeffery’s efforts in his work *A Reader on Islam*, which focuses on Islam in general rather than specifically on the Māturīdī school, Demiri’s statement seems accurate as it is specifically dedicated to the Māturīdī school of thought. See *A Reader on Islam: Passages from Standard Arabic Writings Illustrative of the Beliefs and Practices of Muslims*, ed. and trans. Arthur Jeffery (’s-Gravenhage [The Hague]: Mouton, 1962). Lejla Demiri’s recent publication, *‘Ubayd Allāh al-Samarqandī (d. 701/1301) on Servanthood and Repentance: A Critical Edition and Translation*, is also worthy of mention here as it represents an important contribution to the growing body of literature on Māturīdī studies and exemplifies ongoing efforts to engage with Māturīdī theology in contemporary scholarship. This critical edition focuses on the works of Rukn al-Dīn ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Samarqandī, specifically his treatises on two important theological concepts: servanthood (*‘ubūdiyya*) and repentance (*tawba*). The edition is particularly valuable as it makes the works of al-Samarqandī, a significant yet often underrepresented scholar in the Māturīdī tradition, available, allowing for greater accessibility and appreciation of Māturīdī scholarship in the Anglophone world. See Lejla Demiri, *‘Ubayd Allāh al-Samarqandī (d. 701/1301) on Servanthood and Repentance: A Critical Edition and Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Muslim College Press, 2023).

²²⁷ See, *Māturīdī Theology*, 105–120.

²²⁸ For a detailed presentation of Māturīdī studies in Arabic, Persian, and European languages, see Dale J. Correa, ‘An Overview of the Current Scholarship on Māturīdī Kalām in Arabic, Persian and European

As for Turkish scholarship, the number of scholarly investigations into the Māturīdī school in Turkey is enormous, making it impossible to mention every single contribution here, even just by name, although many are utilised throughout the study.²²⁹ Over the past quarter of a century, Turkey has witnessed a proliferation of scholarly endeavours, including monographs, edited volumes, articles, conferences, theses, and dissertations, all devoted to Māturīdīte studies. These enterprises, which number in the hundreds, are richly documented in resources such as the İSAM and YÖK thesis centre databases, providing access to articles, texts, and serving as a repository for theses and dissertations. Furthermore, considering that notable works published in languages such as Arabic, German, French, English, Russian, and Uzbek have been translated into Turkish, it would be appropriate to say that nearly the entire global body of knowledge on the subject is now available in Turkish. Therefore, given the enormity of the scholarly attempts in Turkey, we will content with a selective overview of notable works, particularly those relevant to the present discussion.

The topic of free will in Māturīdism has been studied by Yeprem and Yazıcıoğlu.²³⁰ The former focuses exclusively on al-Māturīdī, while the latter also examines Abū al-Mu‘īn’s views. Considering the complexity of al-Māturīdī’s language and the consensus among scholars that a comprehensive understanding of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* and his overall theology is only possible

Languages’, in *Māturīdī Theology*, ed. Lejla Demiri, Philip Dorroll, and Dale J. Correa (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 3–13.

²²⁹ Dorroll calls this period ‘The Māturīdī Renaissance’ due to the abundance of scholarly works in Turkey. Philip Dorroll, ‘Māturīdī Studies in Turkish: Historical Outline and Main Contributions’, in *Māturīdī Theology*, ed. Lejla Demiri, Philip Dorroll, and Dale J. Correa (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 16.

²³⁰ See Mustafa S. Yeprem, *İrāde Hürriyeti ve İmām Mâtürîdî* (Istanbul: İFAV, 1984); Mustafa S. Yazıcıoğlu, *Mâtürîdî ve Nesefti’ye Göre İnsan Hürriyeti* (Ankara: Otto Yayınları, 2017 [1992]).

through Abū al-Mu‘īn’s *Tabşirat al-Adilla*, it can be argued that the latter study follows an ideal path.

Another notable Turkish scholar, Hanifi Özcan, published a monograph on al-Māturīdī’s epistemology,²³¹ in which he describes al-Māturīdī’s theory of knowledge as ‘realistic’. Özcan also authored another monograph on the theme of religious pluralism in al-Māturīdī’s thought.²³² He argues that al-Māturīdī explicitly advocated a form of ‘partial pluralism’, suggesting that the great historical religions based on revelation, or Abrahamic religions, essentially share the same truth and validity. Another study by Adil Bebek explores the concept of sin in al-Māturīdī’s thought, with a limited discussion on that of Abū al-Mu‘īn.²³³ These three studies approach al-Māturīdī’s theology through the lens of contemporary philosophical debates in ethics and discuss the extent to which his work can be utilised in contemporary debates concerning ethics and the preservation of Muslim identity.

Kutlu’s edited volume,²³⁴ an anthology focused on al-Māturīdī and the background of his school, has wielded significant influence over the trajectory of academic publications in Turkey concerning Māturīdī studies. Through meticulous curation, Kutlu brought together a diverse range of scholarly perspectives, bridging the gap between Turkish and international scholarship. With contributions from eminent scholars such as Bekir Topaloğlu, Hüseyin Atay, Wilferd Madelung, and W. Montgomery Watt, among others, the volume broadened the scope of inquiry on Māturīdī studies and also aroused considerable interest for the field within Turkish scholarly

²³¹ Hanifi Özcan, *Mâtürîdî’de Bilgi Problemi*, 3rd ed. (Istanbul: İFAV, 2012 [1993]).

²³² Hanifi Özcan, *Mâtürîdî’de Dini Çoğulculuk* (Istanbul: İFAV, 1999).

²³³ Adil Bebek, *Matürîdî’de Günah Problemi* (Istanbul: Rağbet Yayınları, 1998).

²³⁴ Sönmez Kutlu, ed., *İmam Maturidi ve Maturidilik*, 3rd ed. (2003; repr., Ankara: Otto Yayınları, 2018 [2003]).

circles. By providing biographical insights and personal anecdotes, the anthology offers a comprehensive understanding of al-Māturīdī's life and teachings, enriching the scholarly discourse on his theological legacy.

Another notable contribution to the field of Māturīdī studies in Turkey is Ak's study,²³⁵ which could be considered the Turkish equivalent of Rudolph's seminal monograph on al-Māturīdī and his school, with a particular focus on its formative period. This study was initially prepared by Ak as his doctoral dissertation in 2006, later published in 2008, and underwent a second edition in 2017. Ak's work explores the life of al-Māturīdī and the historical context that shaped his emergence in the milieu of Islamic intellectual history. Beyond merely chronicling biographical details, Ak provides comprehensive analyses of al-Māturīdī's methodology, certain theological concepts, and his significance within Sunni Islam. With meticulous attention to historical detail, the work traces al-Māturīdī's journey to becoming a prominent figure in Sunni Islam, shedding light on his understanding of God and his views on politics.

Alpyağıl's edited volume²³⁶ is also worthy of mention here as it brings together the Māturīdī tradition and the framework of modern philosophy of religion, aiming to inspire potential *kalām jadīd* projects. Alpyağıl compiles selections from the classic works of Māturīdī scholars such as al-Māturīdī himself, Abū al-Yusr al-Bazdawī, Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, and Nūr al-Dīn al-Şābūnī, along with their Turkish translations. Additionally, the volume presents Turkish translations of contemporary scholarship by distinguished international scholars,

²³⁵ Ahmet Ak, *Büyük Türk Âlimi Mâturîdî ve Mâturîdîlik*, 2nd ed. (Istanbul: Ensar Neşriyat, 2017).

²³⁶ Recep Alpyağıl, ed., *Din Felsefesi Açısından Mâturîdî Gelen-Ek-i. Klasik ve Çağdaş Metinler Seçkisi* (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2016).

including Angelika Brodersen, Mustafa Cerić, Richard Frank, Daniel Gimaret, and Josef van Ess, among others.

Terzioğlu's study,²³⁷ examines al-Māturīdī's interpretation of Quranic verses, particularly those related to women, through the lens of his Quranic exegesis, *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*. It focuses on al-Māturīdī's views on the nature of women's existence and the wisdom inherent in their creation. According to al-Māturīdī, both men and women share the same ultimate purpose in life: attaining knowledge of God for eternal happiness.²³⁸ The study further probes al-Māturīdī's stance on various aspects related to women, including their contributions to family as mothers, and society on a broader scale, occupying several roles. While acknowledging the influence of societal norms of that time on al-Māturīdī's views, the study underscores his holistic approach, integrating cultural context with wisdom and compassion. An excerpt from *Ta'wīlāt* cited in the introduction of the book encapsulates al-Māturīdī's respect for women: "They act arrogantly towards girls and even bury them alive. It is said to them, 'How can you be so arrogant towards girls? Your beloved wives are among them. The sons and grandsons you cherish are from them. The helpers and servants, all from them...'"²³⁹

In addition to studies focusing on the historical development of the school and the perspectives of its eponym al-Māturīdī, there is also a rich body of literature dedicated to Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī. Among these works, Şaban's study²⁴⁰ stands out, focusing on a comparative

²³⁷ Hülya Terzioğlu, *Mâtürîdî'de Kadın Algısı: Te'vîlâtü'l-Kur'an Bağlamında Bir İnceleme* (Istanbul: Gökkuşbu Yayınları, 2018).

²³⁸ Terzioğlu, *Mâtürîdî'de Kadın Algısı*, 17–32.

²³⁹ Terzioğlu, *Mâtürîdî'de Kadın Algısı*, 145.

²⁴⁰ See, Şaban A. Düzgün, *Nesefî ve İslâm Filozoflarına Göre Allah-Âlem İlişkisi* (Ankara: Akçağ Yayınları, 1998).

analysis of Nasafî's approach alongside that of Muslim philosophers regarding the relationship between God and the cosmos. In this study, the author carefully examines fundamental concepts such as *wujūd* (being or existence) and *'adam* (non-being or privation, in Aristotelian terms), as well as God's act of creation, particularly in the context of creation *ex nihilo* (the *mutakallimūn*'s position) or creation *ex materia* (the *falāsifa*'s position).²⁴¹ Through this analysis, Şaban illuminates the converging points in their perspectives, shedding light on the shared attitudes and differences between Nasafî and the Muslim philosophical tradition.

Sönmez's study,²⁴² another comparative analysis, focuses on Nasafî and the Ash'arite scholar Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 631/1233). Sönmez meticulously explores Nasafî's views on the necessity and proofs of prophethood (*nubuwwa*) and juxtaposes them with those of al-Āmidī.²⁴³ In addition to this, studies conducted by Aslan²⁴⁴ and Baloğlu²⁴⁵ focus on Nasafî's epistemology. These studies are followed by several others which are more relevant to our discussion. Among these, Ak's paper²⁴⁶ examines the relationship between religious faith and deeds (*a'māl*), but his work appears to be more of a brief compendium of Nasafî's views, whereas Nasafî is known for

²⁴¹ Düzgün, *Nesefî ve İslâm Filozofları*, 263–271.

²⁴² See, Vecihi Sönmez, *Nübüvvet Tartışmaları ve Ebu'l Muîn en-Nesefî ile Seyfuddin el-Āmidî'nin Nübüvveti İspat Metotları* (İstanbul: Gündönümü Yayınları, 2005).

²⁴³ Sönmez, *Nübüvvet Tartışmaları*, 315–344.

²⁴⁴ See, Abdulgaffar Aslan, 'Nesefî'de Bilgi Problemi', *Araştırmalar: İnsan Bilimleri Araştırmaları* 1, no. 1 (1999): 195–211.

²⁴⁵ See, Adnan B. Baloğlu, 'Doğru Bilgi Tanımına Ulaşma Çabası: Ebu'l-Mu'in en-Nesefî Örneği', *DEÜİFD* 18 (2003): 3–20.

²⁴⁶ See, Ahmet Ak, 'Ebu'l-Muîn en-Nesefî'ye Göre İman-Amel İlişkisi', *Dini Araştırmalar* 8, no. 24 (2006): 245–52.

his abundance of theological discourse. Then we have Akkuş's work,²⁴⁷ which focuses on Nasafî's response to the problem of certainty in faith. Additionally, the same author has another study that delves into Nasafî's thoughts on the question of whether imitation (*taqlîd*) is a valid method for acquiring faith.²⁴⁸ In another study, Altıntaş compares the views of Nasafî and the master al-Mâturîdî on the definition of *îmān* and its relation to *a'māl*.²⁴⁹ Although this study is somewhat more comprehensive than the aforementioned studies, it also cannot save itself—for the most part—from falling into the same category mentioned above, in which works are simply in the form of a compendium of Nasafî's thoughts, lacking analytical language and efforts to reconstruct or fill the gaps in his interpretation of faith.

Mert's study²⁵⁰ also merits attention for its examination of the relationship between faith and knowledge as perceived by Nasafî. Notably, Mert explores this issue within the contemporary framework of the philosophy of religion, particularly focusing on concepts articulated by Tillich and Plantinga.²⁵¹ By contextualising Nasafî's perspectives within the discourse of contemporary philosophical thought, Mert not only enriches our understanding of Nasafî's theological views but also provides potential grounds for a fruitful dialogue between classical Islamic thought and modern philosophical inquiry.

²⁴⁷ See, Süleyman Akkuş, 'Ebû'l-Muîn en-Nesefî'ye Göre Mahiyet, Artma ve Azalma Yönüyle İman', *SÜİFD* 9, no. 15 (2007): 69–89.

²⁴⁸ See, Süleyman Akkuş, 'Ebû'l-Muîn en-Nesefî'ye Göre Taklidin İnanç Boyutu', *SÜİFD* 10, no. 18 (2008): 99–128.

²⁴⁹ See, Ahmet Altıntaş, 'Ebû Mansur Muhammed al-Mâturîdî ile Ebu'l-Mu'în en-Nesefî'nin İman Görüşü', *KSÜİFD* 16, no. 32 (2018): 311–355.

²⁵⁰ Muhit Mert, 'Nesefî'de İman Bilgi İlişkisi', *Dini Araştırmalar* 3, no. 9 (2001): 109–128.

²⁵¹ Mert, 'Nesefî'de İman', 125, 127, 128.

Özervarlı's master's thesis²⁵² on the sources of Nasafi's *Tabşirat al-Adilla* is a major contribution to our understanding of the origins of Nasafi's intellectual legacy. As noted earlier, Özervarlı's subsequent publication of some of his findings derived from this study in English played a pivotal role in dispelling doubts surrounding the authenticity of the only manuscript copy of *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, the foundational text in the Māturīdī corpus. In the original version of the study, Özervarlı shows that many passages in *Tabşira* reflect, either literally or in meaning, not only the works of al-Māturīdī but also the creedal texts attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa. This study has greatly facilitated our work in the final chapter, in which I examine the background and formative influences that shaped Nasafi's intellectual legacy.

Erdem's dissertation²⁵³ also needs to be mentioned here, in which he posits that Nasafi utilised methods similar to those found in contemporary 'Linguistic Semantics' and 'Philosophical Semantics' to address theological issues. Erdem argues that Nasafi's extensive use of linguistic analysis in constructing his arguments positions him as a forerunner figure in contemporary semantics. This assertion will be discussed in detail when examining Nasafi's legacy in the final chapter.

In addition to these studies, there is a wealth of PhD dissertations and Master's theses focused on Nasafi's contributions to Māturīdism. For example, Tahirova's study²⁵⁴ compares Nasafi's views with those of the renowned Mu'tazilī scholar Qādī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1025) on prophethood, shedding light on their differing interpretations. Another doctoral research,

²⁵² Mehmet S. Özervarlı, 'Ebu'l-Muîn En-Nesefî'ye Ait Tebsiratü'l-Edille'nin Kaynakları' (Master's thesis, Istanbul, Marmara Üniversitesi, 1988).

²⁵³ Hüseyin S. Erdem, 'Tabsire'ye Semantik Yaklaşım' (PhD diss., Ankara, Ankara Üniversitesi, 1988).

²⁵⁴ Adile Tahirova, 'Kâdî Abdülcebbâr ve Ebu'l-Muîn en-Nesefî'ye Göre Nübüvvetin Gerekliği' (PhD diss., Istanbul, Marmara Üniversitesi, 2005).

conducted by Yüce,²⁵⁵ explores Nasafi's epistemological framework and presents the intellectual underpinnings of Nasafi's theology. Additionally, recently completed theses by Yüksel²⁵⁶ and Direk²⁵⁷ underscore a sustained scholarly interest in Māturīdī studies within Turkish academia and signal an enduring commitment to exploring Māturīdī theology for years to come. Turkey's academic databases, such as İSAM and YÖK thesis center as previously mentioned, show numerous ongoing doctoral and master's studies devoted to exploring the Māturīdī legacy. This provides further evidence that Māturīdism will continue to attract scholarly interest in Turkish academia. Nonetheless, acknowledging the limitations of the present study, a comprehensive examination of the field must, regrettably, conclude at this juncture.

²⁵⁵ Mustafa Yüce, 'Ebü'l-Muîn en-Nesefî'de Bilgi Teorisi' (PhD diss., Ankara, Ankara Üniversitesi, 2007).

²⁵⁶ Fatıma R. Yüksel, 'Ebu'l-Muîn en-Nesefî Bağlamında Māturīdī Gelenekte Mu'tezile Karşıtlığı' (Master's thesis, Ankara, Ankara Üniversitesi, 2019).

²⁵⁷ Şeyma N. Direk, 'Ebü'l-Mu'în en-Nesefî'de Burhân-ı Temânû'' (Master's thesis, İstanbul, Marmara Üniversitesi, 2021).

CHAPTER 2: EPISTEMOLOGY AND FAITH

1. What is Knowledge?

According to Nasafī, the initial step a person should take, if they want to determine what they can know and to what extent, is to examine the concept of knowledge (*‘ilm* or *ma‘rifa*) itself. In other words, before one endeavours to acquire knowledge, a clear definition of knowledge should be in place. For this reason, he starts explaining his theory of knowledge by examining definitions of knowledge that were proposed before him, all in pursuit of ultimately determining an authentic and accurate definition.

Nasafī first reports that there was no consensus among earlier Muslim theologians regarding the definition of knowledge.²⁵⁸ He then proceeds to analyse and critique the various definitions of knowledge put forth by prominent theologians from various Islamic theological schools, including the Mu‘tazilīs and Ash‘arīs.²⁵⁹

Subsequently, he presents the definitions proposed by the scholars of his own school. He reports that some theologians of his school define knowledge as follows: “Indeed, knowledge [is] an attribute [by which] ignorance, doubt, conjecture, and error are removed from the living.”

²⁵⁸ Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 1:9.

²⁵⁹ In his *Tabşira*, Nasafī discusses nearly a dozen different definitions of knowledge. However, examining each of these definitions in detail within the current study would divert attention from its primary purpose. For the aforementioned definitions, see *Tabşira*, 1:9–19. For a discussion on Nasafī’s treatment of these definitions, see Mustafa Yüce, ‘Kelamcıların Bilgi Tanımları ve Nesefi’nin Semantik Tahlili’, *Harran Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 24, no. 24 (2010): 111–126; Baloğlu, ‘Doğru Bilgi’, 3–20.

(inna al- 'ilma şifatur yantafī bihā 'an al-ḥayyi al-jahlu wa-al-shakku wa-al-zannu wa-al-sahwu).²⁶⁰ Nasafī's assessment of this definition is that it is influential and has merits.²⁶¹

However, according to Nasafī, the most precise definition of knowledge was proposed by Abū Manşūr al-Māturīdī, the founder of the school whom Nasafī greatly respects. Nevertheless, Nasafī explicitly notes that the definition he is about to present is not an exact copy of al-Māturīdī's wording or original formulation (*wa-lam ya 'ti bihādhihī al- 'ibārati 'alā hādhā al-naẓm wa-al-tartīb*).²⁶² Therefore, we can say that the definition being discussed is probably Nasafī's interpretation or synthesis of al-Māturīdī's various statements and general perspectives on epistemology. The definition that Nasafī claims to belong to al-Māturīdī can be translated as follows: "Knowledge [is] an attribute [by which] the *madhkūr* (literally, 'the thing which is uttered'; in this context, 'the object of knowledge') becomes apparent to the person in whom this attribute [of knowledge] is present." (*al- 'ilmu şifatur yatajallā bihā liman qāmat hiya bihī al-madhkūr*).²⁶³ In a less literal translation, knowledge is an attribute by virtue of which the reality or truth of the object is manifested or reflected in the mind of its possessor. At the end of his

²⁶⁰ Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 1:19. Nūr al-Dīn al-Şābūnī (d. 580/1184), a later representative of the Māturīdī school, similar to Nasafī, attributes the same definition to some theologians of his school, using the phrase "our companions" (*aşhābunā*). See *al-Kifāya fī al-Hidāya* (Beirut, Istanbul: Dār Ibn Ḥazm, Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi (İSAM), 2014), 47.

²⁶¹ Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 1:19.

²⁶² See Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 1:19.

²⁶³ Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 1:19. Alternative translations of this definition by Franz Rosenthal and Harvey as follow: "Knowledge is an attribute through which the object mentioned (remembered?, *madhkūr*) becomes revealed to him in whom (that attribute) subsists." See Franz Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 59. It is "a quality that, by it, the thing mentioned is realised for the one whom it is established within" See Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 21.

discussion on the matter, Nasafī declares that his master’s definition is most valid and strong enough to withstand any potential objections.²⁶⁴

Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī, a later representative of the Māturīdī school, also attributes this definition to al-Māturīdī. Like Nasafī, he praises the definition, regarding it as the most favourable one. Additionally, he notes that those who came later among their companions (*muta’akhhirūn*) relied on this particular definition.²⁶⁵ Furthermore, the later influential scholar al-Taftāzānī, known for both his Māturīdī and Ash‘arī tendencies, notes the definition in his commentary on *al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafīyya* as follows: “Knowledge is an attribute of the knowing subject by means of which any object referred to becomes revealed (*yatajallā*) to him ...” and he adds this comment: “... that is to say, it becomes clear and evident and capable of being described by words, and this is the case regardless of whether that object is something existing (*mawjūd*) or something non-existing (*ma’dūm*).”²⁶⁶

Apart from the two mentioned definitions of knowledge, there is yet another definition that Nasafī regards as valid. This third definition is found in his briefest theological treatise, titled *Baḥr al-Kalām* and he credits this definition to *Ahl al-Sunna wa-al-Jamā‘a*, the mainstream orthodoxy of Islam. According to this definition, knowledge is “to grasp something as it truly is” (*ma’rifat al-ma’lūm ‘alā mā huwa bihī*).²⁶⁷

²⁶⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:19.

²⁶⁵ Al-Ṣābūnī, *al-Kifāya*, 47.

²⁶⁶ Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī, *A Commentary on the Creed of Islam: Sa’d al-Dīn al-Taftāzānī on the Creed of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī*, trans. Earl Edgar Elder (New York: Columbia University Press, 1950), 15.

²⁶⁷ Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, ed. Muḥammad Sāliḥ al-Farfūr, 2nd ed. (Damascus: Maktabat Dār al-Farfūr, 2000), 61.

Nasafī, after presenting these three definitions of knowledge that he considers correct or acceptable, notes that they are intended to define knowledge as it pertains to human beings, who are inherently finite and limited. On the other hand, God’s knowledge is fundamentally distinct from human knowledge. God and all His divine attributes are unique and infinite, and thus cannot be adequately articulated by these definitions.²⁶⁸

After examining existing definitions of knowledge, one might naturally expect Nasafī, known for the abundance of his words within the Māturīdī school, to formulate his own definition in his voluminous theological work, *Tabṣira*. However, contrary to this expectation, Nasafī does not attempt to provide his own definition of knowledge in any of his theological writings. One possible explanation for this could be his awareness of the inherent difficulties in formulating a universally accepted definition of knowledge. In philosophy, defining knowledge is as intricate as defining other fundamental concepts, such as truth and beauty. These fundamental concepts are not straightforward to define in a way that everyone would agree upon, as evidenced by the multitude of differing opinions on what they truly are. According to some Muslim scholars, as Rosenthal articulates, defining knowledge is an impossible task. Any attempt to define it ultimately becomes a piece of knowledge in itself, leading to circular reasoning or a paradox.²⁶⁹ When we define ‘knowledge’, we are essentially creating a piece of knowledge about what knowledge is. Since any definition we provide is itself an instance of the very thing we are attempting to define, knowledge may indeed be the most elusive concept to define with clarity.

²⁶⁸ For more detailed explanations from Nasafī regarding the apparent distinctions between God’s and creatures’ knowledge, see *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 61–62.

²⁶⁹ Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 48–49.

As previously mentioned, Nasafī examines over a dozen existing definitions of knowledge proposed by early scholars. He may have concluded that adding his own definition would make no significant difference, other than merely extending an already extensive list. Instead, he focused on reviewing these definitions and endorsing the ones he found accurate. Among these, he most praises the definition by his teacher, al-Māturīdī, for whom he expresses loyalty at every opportunity. Nasafī’s decision not to endorse a single definition of knowledge as the absolute truth has been discussed in Turkish academia by Baloğlu and Yüce. They suggest that Nasafī’s acceptance of different definitions shows his reluctance to confine himself to a single perspective, especially when dealing with such a complex issue. He was an open-minded scholar to different opinions as he aimed to reach the most accurate position on the matter at hand by examining what had been told before.²⁷⁰

Traditionally, since Plato, “justified true belief” has been the dominant definition of knowledge in philosophical circles. According to the “justified true belief” (JTB) theory of knowledge, for something to be considered knowledge, it must meet the following three criteria: (i) The individual must believe that a particular proposition is true. (ii) The proposition must actually be true in reality; in other words, the belief must correspond to the objective facts of the world. (iii) The belief must be justified or supported by good reasons, evidence, or arguments. Justification is what distinguishes mere belief from knowledge. Although the JTB theory has been adopted by many thinkers, it has not been exempted from criticism. One of the key criticisms is known as the “Gettier problem.” Philosophers like Edmund Gettier have proposed counterexamples where someone may have justified true beliefs but still fail to have genuine

²⁷⁰ Baloğlu, ‘Doğru Bilgi’, 18–19; Yüce, ‘Nesefi’nin Semantik Tahlili’. 123–124.

knowledge due to certain unexpected circumstances.²⁷¹ This is an ongoing debate in contemporary epistemology, and my intention is not to address it in detail.²⁷²

Despite Gettier's objections, it seems the current definition (JTB) will still be appealing to many philosophers unless a superior alternative is proposed. Even though Nasafi does not explicitly mention his own definition of knowledge, I propose that it can be inferred from the basics of his epistemology that his understanding aligns with the JTB theory of knowledge. Later in the study, I will explore two distinct aspects or dual dimensions of 'assent' or 'belief' (*taşdıq*) when analysing Nasafi's understanding of religious faith. In the first dimension, which corresponds to knowledge (*ma'rifa*), assent or belief should be justified by evidence (*dalil*) and demonstrate the truthfulness or accuracy (*sihha*) of the proposition. In other words, it should align with reality. As a result, Nasafi's account of knowledge aligns with all three conditions of the JTB theory. As we will see in more detail later on, according to Nasafi, before someone chooses to follow a particular religion, faith ought to be based on true assents or beliefs that are supported by evidence; only in this case is one's faith morally and intellectually justified.

After discussing the definitions of knowledge, Nasafi begins to question whether the external world truly exists and whether it is possible to attain knowledge about it. In short, he

²⁷¹ Edmund L. Gettier, 'Is Justified True Belief Knowledge?', *Analysis* 23, no. 6 (1963): 121–123.

²⁷² In response to the Gettier problem, many contemporary epistemologists have formulated sophisticated theories, such as "reliabilism" and "virtue epistemology." These theories aim to overcome the limitations of the traditional JTB definition of knowledge. For more on this, see Alvin I. Goldman, 'What is Justified Belief?', in *Justification and Knowledge: New Studies in Epistemology*, ed. George S. Pappas (Boston, London: D. Reidel, 1979), 1–25; Ernest Sosa, 'The Raft and the Pyramid: Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (1980): 3–26; Linda T. Zagzebski, *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

concludes that the external world undeniably exists, as we constantly perceive it through our senses. According to Nasafī, our sensory perception yields “necessary knowledge” (*al-‘ilm al-ḍarūrī*) about the external world, which is entirely certain, irrefutable, and beyond any doubt.²⁷³ Therefore, anyone with sound, functioning senses will naturally acknowledge the reality of the external world. Although he views sensory perception as the essential and primary source of knowledge about the external world, he does not suggest that our knowledge is limited only to what we perceive. In addition to sensory experience, further knowledge of the external (*shāhid*) and hidden (*ghā’ib*) worlds can be attained through reason and inference. In our forthcoming discussion of Nasafī’s opinions on the sources of knowledge, we will explore how self-evident principles can serve as foundations for expanding our body of knowledge. For Nasafī, human reason, through inference based on these foundational beliefs, can uncover further essential truths.

The following quotation offers a concise and clear articulation of his stance on ontology and epistemology: “The realities of things [or objects] are fixed, and knowledge about them is real [or attainable]” (*ḥaqā’iqu al-ashyā’i thābitatun wa-al-‘ilmu bihā mutaḥaqqiqun*).²⁷⁴ Nasafī thereby argues not only for the existence of an objective reality but also for the human capacity to accurately comprehend it. In other words, human knowledge of things is not subject to personal beliefs or assumptions. We have direct access to things as they truly are in themselves. If different individuals, who possess healthy and functioning minds and senses, examine a specific thing to understand its true nature, they will all arrive at the same conclusion.²⁷⁵ In

²⁷³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:20.

²⁷⁴ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 2; *Tabṣira*, 1:20.

²⁷⁵ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:23.

philosophical terms, this aligns with the ‘realist’ view, which posits that reality exists independent of our thoughts or beliefs. In other words, our understanding of the world is not merely a subjective interpretation but corresponds to real, objective facts. As a result, Nasafi’s stance represents an optimistic view of human epistemology and ontology, suggesting a harmonious relationship between the nature of existence and our capacity to comprehend it.

Yet, it seems Nasafi’s understanding of sensory perception is in complete opposition to Plato’s, as Plato was sceptical about the reliability of sensory perception as a means to access ultimate reality or truth. He believed that the physical world perceived through the senses was a realm of imperfection and illusion, known as the world of appearances. Plato famously used the allegory of the cave in *The Republic* to illustrate his views on perception. In this allegory, people are depicted as prisoners chained inside a cave, facing a wall where shadows cast by objects outside the cave are their only perception of reality. The shadows represent the physical world perceived through the senses, which Plato considered to be a mere reflection or copy of a higher reality. For Plato, true knowledge could only be obtained through reason and intellect, not through sensory experience. He argued for the existence of a separate realm of ‘Forms’ or ‘Ideas’, which are eternal, immutable, and perfect essences of things, existing beyond the physical world. According to Plato, the senses can only perceive the imperfect manifestations of these Forms, leading to a distorted understanding of reality.²⁷⁶

Nasafi also refers to the Sceptics, whom he perceives as a threat to the epistemic principles he holds. He reports that although the majority, who properly use their reason and

²⁷⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, ed. G. R. F. Ferrari, trans. Tom Griffith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), bk.6, 508c–d, 509d, bk.7, 517b–c, 529b–c, 532a.

senses, agree that the external world is a reality and that attaining knowledge about it is possible, there existed a group among the ancients (*tā'ifa min al-'awā'il*) who ignorantly asserted that humans cannot possess any knowledge whatsoever. According to him, this group, by denying the possibility of knowledge, has essentially elected to remain at a primitive or animalistic level of existence. They have chosen not to pursue knowledge and intellectual advancement, which would lead to competence and a higher level of perfection (*kamāl*).²⁷⁷ According to Nasafī, one cannot deny the reality and knowledge of it without falling into self-contradiction, as for someone to deny the existence of anything, there must be, at the very least, one reality or existence—the denier himself—to perform the act of denial.²⁷⁸

If it is indeed impossible to acquire knowledge, then it becomes illogical for someone to make a claim about it, as making such a claim necessitates knowledge.²⁷⁹ Put simply, they are utilising knowledge to argue against the existence of knowledge. Moreover, it is impractical and impossible to live one's life as if we cannot have any knowledge about the world in the first place. The mere fact that the individuals making this claim are alive implies that they possess some knowledge about how to survive and maintain their lives. These individuals must be knowledgeable about basic survival necessities, such as what to eat, how to find shelter, and how to protect themselves from danger—how to avoid poisonous and predatory animals, and so on.²⁸⁰

²⁷⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:20.

²⁷⁸ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 2–3.

²⁷⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:21.

²⁸⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:21–22.

Nasafi reports that these individuals attempt to justify their views by raising objections, particularly against sensory knowledge. The sceptics believe that sensory data are contradictory (*tanāquḍ*) and thus unreliable. For instance, a person suffering from a high fever may perceive honey as bitter, whereas a healthy individual finds it sweet and delicious. Similarly, someone afflicted with diplopia sees two images of a single object. Consequently, since the senses can yield contradictory results, they cannot be deemed reliable.²⁸¹ Nasafi, however, argues that this stance is self-refuting too. The scepticism expressed by this group regarding the senses actually demonstrates that they possess certain knowledge or awareness of concepts such as perception and contradiction. Thus, for Nasafi, every time this sceptical group attempts to provide evidence to disprove a particular phenomenon, they inadvertently undermine their own argument.²⁸² According to him, as we address later, our senses are a reliable source of knowledge under certain conditions.²⁸³

Lastly, Nasafi believes that the group in question behaves as they do due to their stubbornness. If these individuals were subjected to torture or physical suffering to test the sincerity of their beliefs, they would eventually acknowledge the reality of pain. He invites us to envisage a scenario in which this group is deprived of food and water for extended periods. Inevitably, as they become weaker and more desperate, they will be compelled to request food and water for survival. When this group, driven by starvation, pleads for sustenance, they are met with the assertion that hunger and thirst are neither real nor true experiences, but merely

²⁸¹ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:22.

²⁸² Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:22.

²⁸³ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:22.

assumptions and delusions.²⁸⁴ Only in such an extreme scenario might they finally abandon their stubborn denial and accept the truth.

2. Sources of Knowledge

Nasafī categorises knowledge into three based on their sources: (i) knowledge derived from sensory perception (*al-ḥawāss al-khams*), (ii) knowledge derived from testimony or reliable reports (*al-khabar al-ṣādiq*), and (iii) knowledge derived from reason, namely, our capacity for rational thought and logical deduction. This classification of knowledge applies only to contingent or temporally originated (*muḥdath*) knowledge and thus does not pertain to God’s knowledge. As mentioned earlier, God’s knowledge is infinite and eternal, and thus cannot be categorised in any way.²⁸⁵

Nasafī identifies five external senses: smell, taste, hearing, touch, and vision. Each of these senses is reliable and valid within its specific domain. For instance, the sense of taste is valid for evaluating flavours, while the sense of touch is appropriate for sensing physical contact. Nasafī regards knowledge acquired through the senses as necessary and undeniable. In other words, it is impossible (*mustahīl*) to reject the truth of such knowledge when it is obtained under certain conditions.²⁸⁶ When a person perceives something through their senses, the knowledge of that perception occurs immediately, spontaneously, and indubitably. Aside from the earlier mentioned group (sceptics), all individuals with sound minds universally acknowledge the senses as a trustworthy and valid source of knowledge. Nasafī reiterates his previous argument

²⁸⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:22.

²⁸⁵ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 3; *Tabṣira*, 1:24.

²⁸⁶ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 3.

regarding individuals who doubt sensory knowledge. When these individuals are subjected to torture, their physical responses show that, despite their verbal denials, they ultimately rely on their senses.²⁸⁷

Knowledge derived from testimony or reliable reports (*al-khabar al-ṣādiq*) can be categorised into two types. The first includes reports (*akhbār*) narrated by a large and diverse community of people, known as mass-transmitted reports (*al-khabar al-mutawātir*). The key point here is that it is virtually inconceivable for such a vast community to unanimously conspire to disseminate false information. These reports furnish us with knowledge in various fields, such as history and geography. They illustrate, for example, the existence of great rulers who lived in the past or distant lands, even if we have never personally witnessed or experienced these phenomena.²⁸⁸ According to Nasafī, the widespread consensus on such reports renders them highly reliable, elevating them to the level of undeniable knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-ḍarūrī*), equivalent to the certainty associated with sensory knowledge.²⁸⁹

The second type of knowledge obtained through testimony is the reports given by prophets who are supported by miracles performed by God, and these miracles serve as evidence for the truth of their messages (*khabar al-rasūl al-mu‘ayyad bi al-mu‘jiza*).²⁹⁰ These miracles are not random occurrences; rather, they are intended to provide unmistakable proof that the individuals claiming to be prophets are indeed chosen by God and are conveying His messages. The stories of these miraculous events come through mass-transmitted reports, indicating that

²⁸⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:24.

²⁸⁸ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 3.

²⁸⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:26; *Tamhīd*, 3.

²⁹⁰ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 3.

they are not isolated incidents but are widely known and accepted within communities. Nasafī argues that because these stories are so widely and consistently shared, the knowledge derived from them is as reliable and certain as if someone had directly witnessed the miracles themselves. Therefore, the knowledge gained from these reports also yields ‘necessary knowledge’ (*al-‘ilm al-ḍarūrī*); that is, it is undeniable, beyond doubt, and as certain as the knowledge gained through direct sensory experience.²⁹¹

Nasafī, in his discussion of reports delivered by prophets, makes an important distinction, which holds paramount importance for the analysis we will undertake in the following chapter on prophecy. It is, therefore, essential to make it clear here. Nasafī argues that there is a significant distinction between two types of knowledge: *al-‘ilm al-ḍarūrī* and *al-‘ilm al-istidlālī*.²⁹² However, *al-‘ilm al-ḍarūrī* in this context, although it is also irrefutable and certain (*ḍarūrī*), should not be confused with the previously mentioned ‘necessary knowledge’. In fact, *al-‘ilm al-ḍarūrī* being referred to here aligns with what Islamic philosophers (*falāsifa*) call *al-‘ilm al-badīhī*.²⁹³ It is the type of knowledge that is self-evident. In other words, it does not require any reasoning or intellectual effort to be understood or acquired because it is immediately apparent and evident to the individual. On the other hand, *al-‘ilm al-istidlālī* corresponds to ‘inferential

²⁹¹ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 3.

²⁹² Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 3.

²⁹³ The latter, ‘self-evident knowledge’ (*al-‘ilm al-badīhī*), refers to intuitive or self-evident propositions that do not require reasoning, deduction, or intellectual effort to acquire. An example of this is the principle of non-contradiction, which states that contradictory propositions cannot both be true at the same time and in the same sense. This type of knowledge is immediate and clear, often forming the foundations upon which ‘inferential knowledge’ (*al-‘ilm al-istidlālī*) can be built or developed.

knowledge,' which requires individual effort, reasoning, deduction, or inference from primary sources of knowledge.

The teachings conveyed by prophets to humanity originate from a unique type of knowledge bestowed upon them by God, known as 'divine revelation' (*wahy*)—an exceptional modality of God's communication with His creatures. However, according to Nasafī, prophets do not passively receive divine revelation; rather, they actively participate in its reception. They must exert some level of intellectual effort or use their rational faculties to comprehend and convey the knowledge they receive from God. Therefore, the knowledge gained by prophets through divine revelation falls under the category of 'inferential knowledge' (*al- 'ilm al-istidlālī*). This knowledge, acquired through reasoning or intellectual effort, contrasts with self-evident knowledge (*al- 'ilm al-ḍarūrī/istidlālī*).²⁹⁴

An important implication of this idea is that only prophets possess first-hand epistemic justification for the propositions received from God. The epistemic reasons or evidence for these propositions are directly accessible solely to the prophets. In other words, only they have internal justification, whereas the rest of humanity can hold only indirect or external justification for the propositions delivered by prophets.²⁹⁵ The discussions to be addressed in the present chapter will lead us to characterise Nasafī as an advocate of a 'strict evidentialist' position, an epistemic and moral duty he personally assumes within the ranks of the epistemic elite or the privileged (*'ulamā'* or *al-khwāṣṣ*), in contrast to the masses or the ordinary people (*muqallid* or *al- 'awām*). However, my characterisation of Nasafī as a strict Evidentialist is contingent upon the analysis to

²⁹⁴ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 3.

²⁹⁵ See pp. 11, 24–26.

be undertaken in this chapter, particularly on the topic of the establishment of theism. The strict evidentialist stance I attribute to Nasafi will require modification in light of his forthcoming considerations regarding prophecy in the following chapter. For now, it is prudent for us to reserve a more detailed analysis of this point for the subsequent chapter.

Returning to the matter at hand, Nasafi argues that the objection to testimony as a legitimate source of knowledge is logically flawed. Initially, to assert that reports are not a source of knowledge, one must employ language or speech.²⁹⁶ Considering that individuals acquire their languages through transmission, it logically follows that reports are indeed a source of knowledge. Therefore, this objection to reports as a source of knowledge is self-refuting, as the very act of formulating such objections depends on language.²⁹⁷

Al-Jāhiz (d. 255/869), a distinguished Muslim scholar and philosopher during the Islamic Golden Age, also pointed out the importance of reliable reports. He thought of their content to be a trustworthy form of knowledge. In his remarks below, he indicates that such knowledge can be a source of certainty for everyone, regardless of their intellectual background. This holds equally true whether one is a member of the scholarly elite or part of the masses adhering to traditional practices through *taqlīd*:

One can acquire knowledge about things that they personally have not witnessed but were observed by others. The method to attain this knowledge is

²⁹⁶ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:25; Correa, ‘Testifying Beyond Experience’, 140.

²⁹⁷ Nasafi maintains that understanding a language cannot be deduced or speculated upon; merely hearing it does not equate to comprehending it. Those who dismiss the significance of reports in transmitting knowledge paradoxically utilise language, which they have themselves acquired through reports, to articulate their argument. Language, serving as the medium of communication and understanding, is predominantly acquired through reports —be it from parents, teachers, or native speakers. For a more detailed presentation of this argument, see Correa, ‘Testifying Beyond Experience’, 140–142.

through reports or accounts from multiple witnesses [*al-akhbār al-mutawātira*], regardless of whether they are friends or foes, righteous individuals, or villains. These accounts are so extensively circulated that for those who hear them, there is no hurdle in believing [*taṣḍīq*] their validity. In this method of obtaining knowledge through reports, both the educated [*al-‘ālim*] and the uneducated [*al-jāhil*] stand on an equal footing.²⁹⁸

Correa, who examined *akhbār* in her doctoral thesis focusing on the Ḥanafī scholars of Samarqand and their use of reports as a source of knowledge, notes at the outset of her study the significant role of reliable reports in shaping their *‘aqīda* (articles or propositions of faith) and in providing certainty for their knowledge of them. She observes that Nasafī and his fellow Muslim scholars from Transoxiana “knew with certainty that God exists, that Muḥammad was His prophet, and that Muḥammad brought the message of the Qur’ān, even though they were not witnesses to the events of Muḥammad’s life.”²⁹⁹

In contemporary philosophy, the key role of reports or testimony in the transmission of knowledge is only now, in recent decades, being recognised. We often rely on reports to understand what is happening around us and what has happened in the past. In a similar manner, by using *akhbār*, these scholars harboured absolute certainty about fundamental religious beliefs, despite not having directly witnessed the events underpinning them. Correa, noting the influence of this mode of knowing on broadening our body of knowledge, and drawing a parallel between this mode of knowledge and religious beliefs, concludes:

²⁹⁸ The translation belongs to Tarif Khalidi, see *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 106; al-Jāhiz, ‘Risālat al-Ma‘ād wa-al-Ma‘āsh’, in *Majmū‘ Rasā’il al-Jāhiz*, ed. Muḥammad Ṭāhā al-Ḥājirī (Beirut: Dār al-Nahḍa al-‘Arabīyya, 1983), 144.

²⁹⁹ Correa, ‘Testifying Beyond Experience’, 1.

It is remarkable, too, that this epistemology for reports is based on the mundane functions of human behaviour and language. If reports work for everyday affairs and historical circumstances, and if humans rely on the words of others in general, then religious reports must appeal to the same human impulses.³⁰⁰

The third and ultimate method of acquiring knowledge is through intellect (*'aql*) or reasoning (*naẓar*), as it is through these faculties that other sources of knowledge are endowed with value.³⁰¹ When a person engages in reasoning, adhering to its rules and prerequisites, this process inevitably results in the formation of new knowledge.³⁰² Successful reasoning illuminates the soul about the object of knowledge, and fills the soul with a sense of absolute certainty. This sense of certainty in the soul itself substantiates that reasoning is, indeed, a legitimate source of knowledge. For example, if a person knows that two individuals share the same birthdate and that one of them is currently twenty years old, they necessarily deduce with certainty that the other individual is also twenty years old. Knowledge acquired through analogical reasoning or syllogism (*qiyās*) also leads to necessary knowledge (*al- 'ilm al-ḍarūrī*), characterised by irrefutable certainty. Should someone attempt to doubt it, they will find it an impossible endeavour due to its compellingly convincing and incontrovertible nature.³⁰³

Knowledge acquired through intellect is also of two kinds. The first is knowledge that arises in the mind effortlessly and spontaneously. An example of this is the recognition of self-evident truths, such as 'the whole is greater than its part.' This type of knowledge is immediately obvious, axiomatic, or self-evident. Although Nasafi initially described this kind of knowledge

³⁰⁰ Correa, 'Testifying Beyond Experience', 195.

³⁰¹ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:27.

³⁰² Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:28.

³⁰³ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:27–28.

as *al-‘ilm al-ḍarūrī* in his discussion of reliable reports by prophets, he now uses the philosophers’ term *al-‘ilm al-badīhī*. Clarifying a potential confusion, he states that this type of knowledge, *al-‘ilm al-badīhī*, is indeed *al-‘ilm al-ḍarūrī*. However, it is *ḍarūrī* not only due to its irrefutable certainty but also because of its effortless acquisition.³⁰⁴ Essentially, this knowledge is always present or readily available in our minds, requiring no active reasoning to be accessed. Nasafī compares its certainty to that of sensory knowledge.³⁰⁵ As for the second type, it is *iktisābī* or *istidlālī* knowledge as it is obtained through inference (*istidlāl*) and, as such, requires effort, forming a stark contrast to the effortless nature of *al-‘ilm al-badīhī*.³⁰⁶

Having discussed the nature of knowledge and its sources, Nasafī argues that it is possible for human beings to acquire knowledge not only about things that are manifest or observed but also about things that are veiled or unobserved. The method of gaining knowledge about the former requires the use of analogical reasoning or inference (*bi al-shāhid ‘alā al-ghā’ib*)³⁰⁷—drawing conclusions about the veiled (*al-ghā’ib*) by comparing them to the manifest (*al-shāhid*). To put it simply, the properties or characteristics of the world around us enable us to reason about the existence and attributes of God. Much like how smoke is a sign of an actual fire somewhere, or where there is thunder, there is likely to be rain. Similarly, from the known (*al-shāhid*), through inference, one can reach the unknown (*al-ghā’ib*), particularly the Creator. It is God who, out of His divine wisdom (*ḥikma*), has equipped human beings with the means to interpret signs in worldly phenomena, of which He is the source, yet from which He remains

³⁰⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:27–29; *Tamhīd*, 4.

³⁰⁵ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:27; *Tamhīd*, 4.

³⁰⁶ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 4.

³⁰⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 39.

profoundly distinct and transcendent. Nasafī, nevertheless, acknowledges that this method does not allow for a perfect or complete correlation between the manifest and the veiled. Nasafī's master states that analogy can only infer a single aspect or characteristic of a cause from its effect. Writing, for instance, indicates the presence of a writer but cannot specify its essence, be it angelic, human, or jinn.³⁰⁸

Harvey's analysis of al-Māturīdī on this matter accurately elucidates the distinction between the knowledge of "isness", or existence, and "whatness" or essence:

I suggest he [al-Māturīdī] is saying that, from the standpoint of human knowledge, to speak about a thing's isness is to affirm that it exists, while to speak about its whatness is to affirm what its qualities resemble in the contingent world. Anything that we find within the world has a contingent isness (*hastiyya*), meaning that its whatness (*mā'iyya*) can be known due to its similarity to other things on the same ontological level. It is only God who has a unique, eternal isness, such that His whatness cannot be known due to its dissimilarity to all other things.³⁰⁹

Nasafī's analysis of the semantic connotations of the words *'ilm* and *idrāk* represents a different expression of the same idea. Regarding the knowledge of God we possess, one may know (*ya'lamu*) God—particularly, His existence and divine attributes—, but fully comprehending (*idrāk*) God's essence is unattainable. This is because, he says, *idrāk*, in terms of the degree or level of cognition, is defined as completely grasping something (*iḥāṭa*) to the point of understanding all its limits (*ḥudūd*) and ends (*nihāyā*).³¹⁰ This level of knowledge about God

³⁰⁸ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 93.

³⁰⁹ Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 76.

³¹⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:15.

surpasses what can be achieved through analogical reasoning and the finite human intellect; therefore, *idrāk* of God remains unattainable due to His infinite and transcendent nature.³¹¹

Having clarified his epistemological preferences, Nasafī declares that apart from knowledge derived from reason (*‘aql*) or evidence (*dalīl*), there can be no other way to ascertain whether one adheres to the true religion.³¹² (i) A feeling forming in the heart about the goodness (*ḥasan*) of a religion, (ii) intuition (*ilhām*) regarding the veracity of that religion, and (iii) mere imitation of ancestors or tradition (*taqlīd*) cannot provide dependable means for discerning the truth (*ṣiḥḥa*) or falseness (*fasād*) of religious beliefs. Considering the plethora of religions, each presenting conflicting truth claims, even within a single faith, Nasafī’s argument implies the challenge of relativism, where various traditions may claim equal legitimacy. Therefore, he argues for the necessity of employing rational evidence to ensure that one is following the truth, as this is, he says, the only means of distinguishing the right from the false.³¹³

In conclusion, Nasafī categorises knowledge into three parts: knowledge derived from the senses, knowledge obtained from reliable reports (including mass-transmitted reports and reports delivered by prophets who are supported by divine miracles), and knowledge acquired through

³¹¹ We see the same tendency in ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Samarqandī (d. 701/1301), a later representative of the Māturīdī school, with the following words: “The entire created realm is an indication, a sign (*āya*) leading to Him, a manifestation of His names and attributes, a mirror reflecting His perfection. Yet God is *bāṭin* (hidden), for only He can truly know Himself.” See Demiri, ‘God and Creation’, 90. Demiri characterises this perspective as ‘the theology of humility’ because it acknowledges the limitations of human understanding in comprehending God. Only God Himself can truly know His own essence. While the signs of God’s existence and attributes are evident in the created realm, God Himself remains hidden and unknowable to humans. Therefore, true knowledge of God only comes from God Himself. See Demiri, ‘Introducing’, 26.

³¹² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:34.

³¹³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:34.

intellect (encompassing self-evident knowledge, along with knowledge gained through analogical reasoning or inference). His categorisation presents a hierarchical structure.

According to foundationalists, there are some ‘basic’ or ‘foundational’ beliefs whose epistemic justification is taken for granted. In other words, their epistemic status counts as ‘justified’ or as ‘knowledge’ without depending on any other beliefs for this status. These basic beliefs are self-evident, indubitable (impossible to doubt; they cannot be wrong), and justified ‘immediately.’ Examples include self-evident truths (e.g., ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’), sensory perceptions (e.g., ‘I am in pain’), and introspective beliefs (e.g., ‘I am thinking’). The rest of our beliefs, on the other hand, are ‘non-basic’ or ‘non-foundational.’ This means that they must be founded on basic beliefs for certainty or ultimately traced back to basic beliefs for their epistemic justification.³¹⁴ Foundationalists developed this theory for the sake of certainty, insisting that the chain of epistemic justification must end at some point; otherwise, there would be an infinite regress of beliefs requiring further justification, making knowledge impossible. Thus, foundational or basic beliefs serve as the stopping point in this chain, and non-basic beliefs derive their certainty from the former.

Nasafi’s theory of knowledge follows the same hierarchical structure; that is, our non-basic beliefs gained through inference, for the sake of maintaining certainty, must be traced back

³¹⁴ This idea of epistemic justification can be traced back to Aristotle. He argued that “not all knowledge is demonstrative,” meaning not all knowledge is based on arguments from other things already known; therefore, some knowledge must be “independent of demonstration,” that is, self-evident or immediately justified, and does not need to be proven by other arguments (*Posterior Analytics*, I.3). See Ali Hasan and Richard Fumerton, ‘Foundationalist Theories of Epistemic Justification,’ in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, Fall 2022), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2022/entries/justep-foundational/>.

to basic beliefs. Self-evident truths (*al-‘ilm al-badīhī*), which we find immediately or already present in our minds, are indubitable; that is, they are certain (*darurī*) and cannot be wrong. Furthermore, when treated in alignment with their conditions, sense perception and mass-transmitted reports also provide us with certain (*darurī*) beliefs and thus count as ‘justified’ or ‘knowledge.’ According to Nasafī, denying that these three sources provide certain knowledge is self-contradictory, as discussed earlier. Collectively, all these remarks suggest that Nasafī’s epistemological framework corresponds to a strict foundationalist position in epistemic justification. This is because, according to Nasafī, non-basic beliefs that are properly gained by relying on the aforementioned basic beliefs through inference (*istidlāl*) are also certain (*darurī*). However, this does not mean that inferential knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-istidlālī*) or the process of inference is completely immune to error. It is possible for one to fail to meet the necessary conditions of reasoning and thus reach incorrect conclusions. Nasafī’s views also imply an ‘internalist’ understanding of epistemic justification; namely, he links the epistemic justification of beliefs to the fulfilment of one’s epistemic duties or responsibilities on a personal level. Therefore, he is cautious about accepting beliefs simply because they are passed down or imitated (*taqlīd*) without questioning or rational examination. This positions him, at least for now, as a strict evidentialist within the context of the ‘Ethics of Belief’ debate, though this conclusion will require some modifications later, particularly in light of his understanding of the nature of evidence (*dalīl* or *hujja*) and the function of prophetic knowledge in moral issues.

Before moving on to the next section, it is pertinent to briefly discuss a claim made by Harvey regarding al-Māturīdī, the founder of the school. Harvey argues that although al-Māturīdī himself adopted a non-foundationalist epistemic justification, theologians from the classical era of the Māturīdī school, notably Nasafī, who is of particular interest to this study, either

misunderstood or overlooked his non-foundationalist approach, instead embracing a strict classical foundationalist position.³¹⁵ Harvey suggests that al-Māturīdī consciously eschewed strict foundational principles in justifying Islamic beliefs. He proposes that al-Māturīdī was a precursor to modern philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Hans-Georg Gadamer, and Alasdair MacIntyre, who emphasised the significance of situating rational activities within a specific intellectual tradition.³¹⁶ In this view, knowledge and rationality are not independent of the historical and cultural milieu or tradition in which they develop. In other words, they are not founded on strict, unchanging foundational principles; rather, they arise from and are moulded by continuous inquiry and evolution within the respective tradition. Harvey argues that al-Māturīdī adopted what might be termed “open theology” as a theological method, valuing a diversity of sources and prioritising meaning over systematic, foundationalist proofs.³¹⁷ In contrast, he maintains that classical-era Māturīdī theologians, in order to secure the coherence of their theological system, followed a “closed theology,” excluding concepts that could not be justified through foundationalist means, which ultimately resulted in sacrificing the “total theological meaning”. Harvey, succinctly put, criticises these theologians, particularly Nasafī, for

³¹⁵ Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 5, 11–12.

³¹⁶ Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 5.

³¹⁷ Harvey advocates for a re-evaluation of al-Māturīdī’s ideas within a modern context, especially his epistemology from a non-foundationalist perspective, which he believes could significantly contribute to a contemporary *kalām* project. He then positions this non-foundationalist perspective at the core of his own project of *kalām jadīd*. His primary claim is that al-Māturīdī’s approach to justifying religious truths was not based on foundationalist principles—he did not regard the senses (*‘iyān* or *ḥawāss*), reports (*akhbār*), and inquiry (*naẓar*) as indubitable foundations—but rather on a variety of inferential methods that are themselves embedded in tradition. Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 5; Cf. al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 65–68, 69 and fn. 8.

neglecting the principles laid down by al-Māturīdī and elucidates why he believes this state of affairs had negative effects on the subsequent development of the school.³¹⁸

While Harvey's efforts to construct a *kalām jadīd*, considering the debates of contemporary philosophy and philosophical theology, are admirable and praiseworthy, his interpretation of al-Māturīdī as a defender of non-foundationalist epistemic justification—along with his claim that the followers of al-Māturīdī, particularly Nasafī, changed this non-foundationalist position to a strict foundationalist one by altering the core epistemic principles of his theology—seems open to question. First, among contemporary scholars who have studied al-Māturīdī, both in the Western academic tradition and in Turkey, there is almost a consensus that al-Māturīdī espoused a foundationalist approach to justifying Islamic beliefs. For instance, as Cerić notes, al-Māturīdī's foundationalist epistemic principles led to a complete rejection of *taqlīd*,³¹⁹ which is precisely what Nasafī does in this regard, as we shall explore later.³²⁰ Second, within al-Māturīdī's *Tawhīd*, several phrases (e.g., *'ilm al-ḍarūra*, *tjāb al-'ilm*, and *ḍarūrat al-*

³¹⁸ For more details on this, see Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 11–12, 222–223.

³¹⁹ Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology*, 67–68; Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 203, 231–233; Pessagno, 'Intellect and Assent', 19–20; Özcan, *Mātūrīdī'de Bilgi Problemi*, 110–114, 129ff.; Kholeif, 'Muqaddima', 3; Muammer Esen, 'Matūrīdī'nin Bilgikuramı ve Bu Bağlamda Onun Alem, Allah ve Kader Konusundaki Görüşlerinin Kısa Bir Tahlili', *AÜİFD* 49, no. 2 (2008): 45–49; Cf. al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 65–68.

³²⁰ This does not mean that a *muqallid*'s faith would necessarily be rejected by God. However, even if faith acquired through *taqlīd* aligns with the truth, the individual is still considered culpable and deemed disobedient (*'aṣī*) in the sight of God for failing to properly utilise their God-given rational faculties. Such a person is regarded as a sinner or wrongdoer—but not a disbeliever—in the afterlife for neglecting reason in matters of faith, even if they happen to arrive at the truth through *taqlīd*. Nevertheless, according to Nasafī, depending on their circumstances and God's judgment, they may either receive forgiveness for their sins or be punished in proportion to the gravity of their wrongdoing. See Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:41–42.

‘*aql*, referring to the senses, reports, and reasoning, respectively) suggest that the sources of knowledge he adopts yield knowledge that is necessary, certain, and indubitable, implying a foundationalist position.³²¹ Third, one of the important points that seems to have led Harvey to claim that al-Māturīdī was a non-foundationalist is the following, in his words:

The very fact that he provides so many arguments from as many different sources as he is able – sensory, traditionary and rational – is a clue that he does not see these arguments as individually providing absolute certainty but working together to secure epistemic warrant. If al-Māturīdī is not using these sources of knowledge as routes to indubitable justificatory foundations, as assumed by the later authors with whom I started this section, then what is he doing?³²²

The very same approach—providing many arguments from different sources (sensory, traditional, and rational)—is also applied by Nasafī, as will become evident later in the study. Then, why should al-Māturīdī be classified as a non-foundationalist while Nasafī—who also uses similar arguments to those of al-Māturīdī for both the legitimacy of the sources of knowledge and the defence of Islamic beliefs—is deemed a foundationalist?³²³ Nasafī, though he adopts a foundationalist position in epistemology, does not claim that all Islamic beliefs should be justified by the standards of a strict foundationalist position, as we will examine later. For example, according to Nasafī, the epistemic justification of certain religious beliefs—such as our belief in the existence of angels and matters of the afterlife—is not founded upon a strict foundationalist position; however, this does not mean that we cannot provide epistemic reasons for their justification. According to him, even if we cannot directly justify these beliefs through

³²¹ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 70–72.

³²² Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 20.

³²³ Cf. Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 65ff.; Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:22ff.

rational demonstration, we can still justify them indirectly; that is, we can show the trustworthiness of the source (the Prophet) from which we take these beliefs. Thus, their justification is still possible, albeit indirectly.

As will be shown throughout the thesis, particularly in the fifth chapter, Nasafi greatly respected al-Māturīdī, closely followed his teachings, and further developed his theological positions. It is true that Nasafi made a few changes to his master's theology, but these changes were minimal. For example, he dismissed his master's theory of natures (*tabā'i*) in favour of the atomistic theory and accepted the legitimacy of the Ash'arite formulation alongside the Māturīdī one regarding the createdness of the Quran. In short, it seems that, although Harvey's interpretation of al-Māturīdī's position might still be possible, he does not provide enough evidence for the claim that Nasafi shifted from al-Māturīdī's non-foundationalist epistemological position to a foundationalist one, or for why Nasafi cannot be interpreted in a similar manner to his predecessor. Perhaps reading the Māturīdī tradition as a whole as non-foundationalist—particularly by highlighting the exception that Nasafi makes for certain religious beliefs—might provide a better foundation and a greater source of inspiration for Harvey's *kalām jadīd* project. For such an important project, I believe Nasafi's voluminous work, *Tabṣira*, would offer many useful insights. Although there is much more that could be discussed on this point, I must limit my discussion to this extent, as the aforementioned claim is only indirectly related to our discussion in the current study.

Let us now examine Nasafi's arguments, which his epistemological principles led him to propose, for the first and most fundamental proposition of faith (*īmān*): the existence of God.

3. Rational Arguments for God

Arguments for the existence of God are commonly classified as ontological, which are based on the concept of God itself, cosmological, and teleological, with the latter two being grounded in experience. Nasafi's primary argument for the existence of God falls under the cosmological category, yet his writings also suggest teleological motifs, implying a sense of purpose or design in the universe.

The cosmological argument is not a single, specific argument but rather encompasses a range of arguments. Philosophers and theologians typically infer from specific observations or facts about the universe the existence of a unique entity, namely God. They use deductive, inductive, or abductive reasoning to argue that there must be a first cause, sustaining cause, unmoved mover, necessary being, or a personal being (God) responsible for the existence and maintenance of the universe. One of the most intriguing questions in this regard is why anything exists at all, or why there is something rather than nothing or something else. Such thought-provoking questions lead thinkers to seek an ultimate explanation for the contingent existence of the universe, its origins, and the sustenance of the cosmos.

Scholars employ various criteria to categorise cosmological arguments. For example, Craig classifies cosmological arguments into three types as follows, based on their treatment of the concept of an infinite chain of causes:

- i. The first, known as the *kalām* argument, is based on the premise that contingent things had a temporal beginning because an "infinite temporal regress" is considered impossible.

- ii. The second, associated with Aquinas, centres on the implausibility of “an essentially ordered infinite regress”. Essentially ordered means that each event or cause depends on the previous one in a chain.
- iii. The third, adopted by Leibniz and Spinoza, is grounded in the Principle of Sufficient Reason. According to this version of the argument, contingent things cannot be self-generated. Notably, it does not reference the concept of an infinite regress at all.³²⁴

Al-Nasafī, as we shall see, does not employ an argument of the second kind, which relies on an Aristotelian metaphysical framework.³²⁵ Nasafī’s primary argument falls into the first category, known as *ḥudūth* (temporality) or more famously, the KCA (Kalām Cosmological Argument). It is built upon two premises: first, the idea that contingent things (things that could exist but might not have) need a cause, and second, the idea that the universe began to exist. In addition to the KCA, Nasafī also employs an argument of the third type, which is based on the premise that contingent things necessitate a sufficient cause for their existence. This cause must be one that necessarily exists, namely God (*wājib al-wujūd*).³²⁶

In the history of *kalām*, the earliest theologian reported to have used an argument from the duality of substances and accidents was the founder of the Mu‘tazilī school of Basra, Abū al-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf (d. 235/849-50 [?]).³²⁷ That being said, a more developed form of the KCA

³²⁴ William L. Craig, *The Cosmological Argument from Plato to Leibniz* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 282–283.

³²⁵ Contemporary scholars typically avoid from employing this type of cosmological argument, see Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 108.

³²⁶ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:105.

³²⁷ Herbert A. Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity, Creation, and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 134–135; Josef van Ess, *Theology and Society in*

can be observed in the works of Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), a prominent figure in the Ash‘arī school. According to him, the world, encompassing both celestial and terrestrial realms, consists of two fundamental categories: substances (sing. *jawhar*, namely atoms) and accidents (sing. *‘araḍ*, i.e., secondary properties). First, accidents possess a certain reality or existence, and through observation, we know that they are temporal (*hādith*), having a beginning and an end in time. This temporal nature is evident because we observe, for instance, that when something in motion eventually comes to rest. Second, bodies (sing. *jism*), which are composed of atoms, are also temporal because, they do not precede the accidents within them in time; they emerge simultaneously alongside their associated accidents. If bodies are not antecedent to their accidents in existence, they share the same status of temporality. Therefore, “whatever does not precede that which is created is created like it.”³²⁸

Following al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), another prominent Ash‘arī scholar, repeats the initial part of his predecessor’s argument. The world is composed of atoms and accidents, and the union of two atoms results in a body. To demonstrate that both are temporal or created, four principles must be established: (i) accidents exist, (ii) accidents are created, and (iii) it is impossible for atoms to be stripped of accidents, thus atoms are also created. Nevertheless, when addressing the last principle (iv), he introduces a new element to al-Bāqillānī’s version of the KCA: what is temporal cannot be without a first, which is the impossibility of an actual

the Second and Third Centuries of the Hijra, trans. Gwendolin Goldbloom, 5 vols (Leiden: Brill, 2016–2020), 3:249–250.

³²⁸ Harry A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam* (Cambridge (Mass.)-London: Harvard University Press, 1976), 393. See Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhīd al-‘Awā’il wa-Talkhīṣ al-Dalā’il*, ed. ‘Imād al-Dīn Aḥmad Ḥaydar (Beirut: Mū’assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, 1987), 32–42; Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 136.

infinite regress of events.³²⁹ If such an infinite regress were possible, it would be absurd because any event that requires an infinite number of preceding events could never come into existence.

According to Aristotle, an ‘actual infinite’, where all its parts exist simultaneously, is impossible and does not exist. However, a ‘potential infinite’, which is infinite by succession, where all its parts do not exist simultaneously, such as time, humans, or movement, is possible and does exist. Aristotle’s acceptance of a potential infinite is motivated by the idea that denying all forms of infinity would lead to logical inconsistencies or untenable consequences. One notable consequence is that refusing all forms of infinity leads to the idea that time has a beginning and an end.³³⁰ Having said that, al-Juwaynī’s argument at hand, regarding the impossibility of an infinite chain of causes (that is, a potential infinite or an infinite by succession), was originally formulated as an objection to Aristotle’s position and can be traced back to Nazzām (d. 231/845) and Iskāfī (d. 240/854), a distinguished theologians from the Mu‘tazilī School of Basra and Bagdad, respectively.³³¹ Returning to al-Juwaynī’s argument, he asserts that once the initial three principles, borrowed from al-Bāqillānī, and the last principle, which seems to be influenced by Mu‘tazilī scholars, have been established, it logically follows that, based on the self-evident truth that the whole does not precede its parts of which it consists, it is also created like its parts. Therefore, the universe as a whole is created.³³²

³²⁹ Imām al-Ḥaramayn al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād ilā Qawāṭi‘ al-Adilla fī Uṣūl al-I‘tiqād*, ed. Aḥmad ‘Abd al-Raḥīm al-Sāyih and Tawfīq ‘Alī Wahba (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfa al-Dīniyya, 2009), 23–24.

³³⁰ Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 411–412.

³³¹ Davidson, *Proofs for God*, 117; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 410, 416–417.

³³² Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 24; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 396–397; Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 143–146.

By the time of the well-known Ash‘arī theologian al-Ghazālī, who is known for his debates with *falāsifa*, the argument in question appears to have evolved into its mature form, taking the shape of a syllogism. Craig articulates al-Ghazālī’s version of the argument as follows:

[i] Every being which begins [*ḥādith*] has a cause for its beginning; [ii] now the world [‘*ālam*] is a being which begins; [iii] therefore, it possesses a cause [*sabab*] for its beginning.³³³

Al-Ghazālī not only gives the KCA the form of a syllogism but also brings support for the second premise on the grounds that, due to the impossibility of an infinite by succession, there must be a determinant or preponderator (*murajjih*).³³⁴ The first premise is regarded by him as indubitable, ‘an axiom of reason’. He states that by *ḥādith*, he means things that did not exist before and then came into existence.³³⁵ The temporal world, as a whole, was ‘possible’ (*mumkin*) before it came into existence. That is, it had the potential to either exist or not exist equally; it could have gone either way.³³⁶ “To tilt the balance in favor of existence, a ‘determinant’ (*murajjih*) was necessary —since otherwise this possible universe would have always remained in a state of non-being.”³³⁷

³³³ William L. Craig, *The Kalām Cosmological Argument* (London: MacMillan, 1979), 44. See Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fī al-I‘tiqād*, ed. Anas Muḥammad ‘Adnān al-Sharafāwī (Jeddah: Dār al-Minhāj, 2008), 93.

³³⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād*, 92–93.

³³⁵ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād*, 92.

³³⁶ Craig, *Kalām Cosmological Argument*, 44; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 446–447; Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 173–174.

³³⁷ Majid Fakhry, ‘The Classical Islamic Arguments for the Existence of God’, *The Muslim World* 47, no. 2 (1957): 141. See al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād*, 92–93, 103.

Al-Ghazālī then strengthens the second premise by showing the logical absurdities in the idea of an eternally existing world, that is, in an infinite regress of temporal events. He argues that if the world had always existed, then celestial objects like the Sun and Saturn would have completed an infinite number of revolutions or orbits. This leads to the absurdity of infinities of different sizes. However, we know that celestial bodies revolve at different rates. For example, Saturn’s revolution takes thirty times longer than that of the Sun. If their revolutions are both infinite, how can one be larger than the other? Logic clearly indicates that one infinity cannot be greater than another. Additionally, if the number of revolutions is infinite, the total would have to be either odd or even, but infinity cannot be classified as either. As a result, the idea of the eternity of the world leads to absurd conclusions; therefore, the world cannot be eternal.³³⁸

The KCA was also employed by Nasafī’s master al-Māturīdī, prior to the theologians previously mentioned.³³⁹ A distinguished aspect of his argument is his incorporation of natures alongside bodies and accidents to support the second premise of the argument. An interesting and somewhat unusual point in his argument is that he used the existence of evil as an argument in favour of God, which is typically used to argue the opposite. Al-Māturīdī argues that if the world were self-sufficient or existed by itself, it would not generate or cause the evil we observe

³³⁸ Craig, *Kalām Cosmological Argument*, 46–48; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 422; Davidson, *Proofs for God*, 129–130.

³³⁹ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 83–84.

in it.³⁴⁰ According to him, the presence of evil necessitates a divine explanation.³⁴¹ Rudolph summarises the main points of al-Māturīdī's arguments as follows:

... experience shows that all the things we know go back to a creator (e.g., buildings go back to builders or writing goes back to writers). Also, the world must be the work of a creator, because it could not have subsisted eternally, since its distinguishing feature is a plurality of opposites (e.g., the unified and separated; good and bad; living and dead; accidents and bodies; mutually opposing natures).³⁴²

Nasafī, before presenting his version of the KCA, takes a preliminary step, and it appears that this particular step is what distinguishes him from the other scholars discussed earlier. Nasafī is an elaborate writer who carefully explains key terms before presenting his argument and sometimes makes semantic analyses in detail if he considers it necessary. To prevent any potential confusion, he clarifies which terms are used interchangeably or as synonyms among the *mutakallimūn* when discussing the argument. It would be appropriate to briefly mention these concepts and Nasafī's understanding of them.

Nasafī begins with the concept of 'ālam,' which, apart from God, refers to the external world, the entire universe and everything within it. The root of the word 'l-m' has several

³⁴⁰ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 84. Kholeif notes that al-Māturīdī is the first philosopher or theologian to use evil in such a way to argue for the existence of God. See Kholeif, 'Muqaddima', 34. Pessagno remarks that no one, subsequent to al-Māturīdī, has further developed this method of reasoning from evil. See Pessagno, 'The Uses of Evil', 73.

³⁴¹ Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 233–237; Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology*, 108–138, 142; Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 108–111, 120–121.

³⁴² Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 263; al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 77–83.

meanings, including ‘sign,’ ‘distinguishing mark,’ and ‘characteristic.’³⁴³ Nasafī explains that we call the cosmos ‘*‘alam*’ because it stands as a sign. Everything within the realm of existence (*mawjūdāt*) points to the existence of its Maker (*Ṣāni‘*).³⁴⁴ Moreover, the signs out there not only indicate His existence but also reflect His various attributes, such as ‘The Living’ (*Ḥayy*), ‘All-Hearing’ (*Samī‘*), ‘All-Seer’ (*Baṣīr*), ‘Omniscient’ (*‘Alīm*), and ‘Omnipotent’ (*Qadīr*). These signs also lead to the understanding of God’s oneness and uniqueness, as stated in the Quran. “There is nothing like Him” (*laysa kamithlihī shay‘*).³⁴⁵

Additional concepts come into play when examining the components of the universe. Nasafī states that majority of Muslim theologians classify the components of the universe into three categories: substance or atom (*jawhar* pl. *jawāhir*), body (*jism* pl. *ajsām*), and accident (*‘araḍ* pl. *a‘rāḍ*). These are the components that make up the entire universe. However, Nasafī, following his predecessor al-Māturīdī, finds the three-part classification problematic and disagrees with it. He explains, what they (likely referring to Ash‘arīs and Mu‘tazilīs) call ‘body’ (*jism*) is actually composed of atoms (*jawhar*) because bodies are formed by their combination. Thus, he suggests that a more accurate classification would consist of two categories: ‘*ayn*’ (pl. *a‘yān*) and *a‘rāḍ*. This new term means ‘essence’ or ‘entity’ and includes both atoms and bodies. The key distinction between *a‘yān* and *a‘rāḍ* is that the first can exist on their own independently and do not require a place (*maḥall*), whereas *a‘rāḍ* cannot exist on their own and require a *maḥall*. The former is divided into two categories: ‘compound’ (*murakkab*) and ‘non-compound’

³⁴³ Hans Wehr, ‘*-l-m*’, in *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan, 3rd ed. (Ithaca, New York: SLS, 1976), 636.

³⁴⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:62.

³⁴⁵ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:62; Quran, 42:11.

(*ghayr murakkab*).³⁴⁶ The non-compound category includes atoms, which are considered the smallest indivisible parts (*al-juz 'alladhī lā yatajazza'*). The compound category includes bodies; when two atoms combine, they form a body with three dimensions: length, width, and height. As for *a 'rād*, as mentioned, they are characteristics that cannot exist independently, such as colours, tastes, and smells. These entities do not possess the quality of sustained presence or continuity (*dawām*) nor the quality of durability (*thabāt*) over time. Their existence depends on something external to them, namely, *a 'yān*. In other words, they are contingent upon something else for their existence rather than being self-sufficient.³⁴⁷

In summary, Nasafī, influenced by al-Māturīdī, challenges the three-part classification (substance or atom, body, and accident), favouring a two-part classification by combining substances and bodies under the category of 'foundations' (*a 'yān*), while the rest remains same as *a 'rād*.

Nasafī also considers the terms '*ḥādith*' and '*qadīm*' important for understanding his KCA. He explains that when we call something *ḥādith*, it means that it has a beginning to its existence in time (*huwa mā liwujūdihi awwal* or *ibtidā'*). On the other hand, when we refer to something as *qadīm*, it means that it has no beginning to its existence (*huwa mā lā awwal liwujūdihi*).³⁴⁸

Nasafī, following his introduction of key terms, lists several arguments and narratives that challenge the traditional belief in divine creation concerning the origin of the universe. He

³⁴⁶ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:64; *Tamhīd*, 4. While the common terms in *kalām* manuals are '*murakkab*' and '*ghayr murakkab*,' which he employs in *Tamhīd* as well, he refers to them as '*mutarakkib*' and '*ghayr mutarakkib*' in his *Tabṣira*, which sounds unusual.

³⁴⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:62–69; *Tamhīd*, 4.

³⁴⁸ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:77; *Tamhīd*, 4–5.

does not just present these alternative explanations; he also subjects them to thorough criticism.³⁴⁹ After completing his refutation, Nasafī moves onto his own argument, clarifying once again the key terms he will use: “When we say *‘ālam* (the cosmos), we mean every being except God; and when we say *ḥādīth*, we mean every being that begins to exist, namely, all ‘bodies’ (*a’yān*) and their ‘accidents’ (*a’rāḍ*).”³⁵⁰ Although his argument in *Tabṣira* is not structured in a formal syllogistic format, it still follows a logical order that reflects the pattern of a syllogism. For instance, he starts by addressing the initial premise: Anything that did not exist before but has come into existence (*ḥādīth*) must have a cause (*muḥdīth*). Nasafī is firmly convinced of the certainty of this principle, emphasising its *ḍarūrī* nature to underscore its absolute certainty. This emphasis is similar to his earlier use of the term to highlight the undeniable nature of sources of knowledge. Nasafī asserts that there is an undeniable causal relationship in the external world and employs the same examples as al-Māturīdī, such as buildings tracing back to builders and writing to writers.³⁵¹

Although Nasafī believes this premise to be indubitable, he employs, unlike al-Māturīdī,³⁵² the idea of the impossibility of an actual infinite to support it, which can be summarised as follows: The Maker of the world (*‘ālam*) is eternal (*qadīm*), because if He were not eternal, He would have been contingent (*ḥādīth*). There is no intermediary between the eternal and the contingent. The eternal is that which has no beginning to its existence, and the contingent is that which has a beginning to its existence. If the Maker were contingent, it would

³⁴⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:78–82.

³⁵⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:105–106.

³⁵¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:105–106; *Tamhīd*, 4–5.

³⁵² Although al-Māturīdī did not explicitly use the argument based on the impossibility of the infinite, Harvey argues that this idea is implicit in his discussion. See Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 109.

have required another contingent cause/event (*muḥdith*). And so would the second and the third ad infinitum (*mā lā yatanāhā*). The assumption of an infinite series of events or an infinite continuous time is absurd because it cannot be traversed, and consequently, the present moment could never have been reached. In other words, if an infinite regress were possible, then the world would have always remained in a state of non-existence. However, the world exists and is observed, and its contingency (*ḥādith*) is established by evidence. Therefore, it is known that its coming into being is necessarily caused by a single, unique, and eternal Maker (*Ṣāni*).³⁵³

Afterward, in accordance with the syllogistic order of the argument, he moves on to the second premise: *a 'yān* (essences or entities, which from now on will be called substances) and *a 'rād* (accidents) possess distinct realities or different natures in the external world. It is certain by both the senses and through deductive reasoning that the latter is temporal (*ḥādith*). Our consistent observation shows that sometimes a particular substance can transition from a state of stillness (*sukūn*) to a state of motion (*ḥaraka*), and the opposite could also be true. Both stillness and motion are accidents, which cannot exist on their own; both need a particular substance or place (*maḥall*) to exist.³⁵⁴ The existence of motion and stillness, or rest, is not intrinsic to the essence of the substance in question. If they had a distinct reality outside of the substance, it would be possible for these two to coexist simultaneously within the same substance. Nevertheless, it is logically undeniable that a substance can only manifest either a state of rest or a state of motion within the same space and time, but not both simultaneously.³⁵⁵

³⁵³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:82–83; *Tamhīd*, 6.

³⁵⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:88; *Tamhīd*, 4–5.

³⁵⁵ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 4.

Nasafī, based on his previous reasoning and observations, concludes that accidents (*aʿrāḍ*) do not possess a genuine or separate existence of their own, and thus, they are temporally originated entities (*ḥādith*).³⁵⁶ Yet, it is impossible for substances to exist without accidents. Accidents are properties that substances must always possess, such as colour, rest, motion, or temperature. And anything that cannot exist prior to something that is created, is itself created.³⁵⁷ In other words, since substances are inseparable from accidents —serving as their substratum— and do not precede them in time, they share the same created, temporal nature as accidents. To sum up, the KCA, as presented in Nasafī’s works, can be formulated as follows:

1. Anything that begins to exist (*ḥādith*) must have a cause (*muḥdith*).

- This is a self-evident fact derived from causality.
- An infinite time or series of events cannot be traversed.
- Buildings require builders, and writings require writers.

2. The universe (*ʿālam*) began to exist.

- Accidents are known to have begun to exist, evident through senses and inference.
- Whatever inseparable from a created thing (accident) is itself created.

3. Therefore, the universe has a cause (*muḥdith*).

The KCA has captured renewed interest in recent times, with William L. Craig largely responsible for rehabilitating its reputation by presenting his contemporary formulation.³⁵⁸ In addition, one significant factor in this revival has undoubtedly been the recent scientific support

³⁵⁶ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:82.

³⁵⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:77, 92; *Tamhīd*, 5.

³⁵⁸ See Craig, *Kalām Cosmological Argument*.

for the argument's second premise. A recent voluminous collection, consisting of two separate volumes —each dedicated to one of the premises of the KCA argument— demonstrates the high level of scholarly interest in the argument. Therefore, it would be appropriate to briefly discuss the key elements of contemporary discussions on the argument.

Taking al-Ghazālī's formulation on the centre, Craig presents his modern version of the KCA as follows:

1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence.³⁵⁹
2. The universe began to exist.
3. Therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence.³⁶⁰

To emphasise that the cause in question is a personal agent, the following premise and conclusion are added as a supplementary argument: (4) Scientific explanations, which are bound by physical laws, cannot offer a causal explanation for the origin of the universe, as these laws and conditions are components of the universe itself. (5) Therefore, a satisfactory explanation for the origin of the universe must transcend these limitations: the cause of the universe must be a non-natural/transcendent, personal, conscious agent.³⁶¹

³⁵⁹ Initially, Craig used a formulation of the argument heavily influenced by al-Ghazālī. However, he later realised that the argument's strength does not require a premise as broad as al-Ghazālī's. Instead, a simpler and more modest premise suffices: "If the universe began to exist, the universe has a cause of its beginning." This premise not only suffices for the argument but is also evidently more true. While Craig has presented various arguments to support the KCA's first premise, his primary focus has been on the second premise, that is, "the universe began to exist." See Paul Copan, 'Introduction', in *The Kalām Cosmological Argument: Philosophical Arguments for the Finitude of the Past*, ed. Paul Copan and William L. Craig (New York, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 4.

³⁶⁰ Craig, *Kalām Cosmological Argument*, 63.

³⁶¹ Craig, *Kalām Cosmological Argument*, 14–15, 151; Bruce Reichenbach, 'Cosmological Argument', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, Winter Edition 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2023/entries/cosmological-argument/>.

As indicated earlier, Craig's treatment of the KCA garnered intense attention. Adolf Grünbaum, for example, raised concerns regarding how the KCA deals with the concept of time. He argued that Craig's argument in favor of the KCA is based on the assumption that time has a certain quality, specifically a 'tense theory of time,' where the experience of time passing is considered to be a real and objective phenomenon. Grünbaum argued for a different theory of time, known as the 'tenseless theory of time,' in which the experience of time passing is not considered as an objective phenomenon. In short, according to Grünbaum, under his theory of time, Craig's description of the universe as having 'began to exist' lacks meaning.³⁶²

In response, Craig has reinforced his position by further clarifying his understanding of causality, the nature of time, and the implications of cosmological theories. Craig firmly believes that the idea of the universe having a beginning is not only supported by philosophy but also by scientific evidence. This beginning implies the existence of a cause that is beyond or transcendent to the universe.³⁶³

In light of the debate between Craig and Grünbaum, Harvey structured the KCA as follows:

P1. Everything that begins to exist has a cause of its existence.³⁶⁴

P2. The universe began to exist.

C1. Therefore, the universe has a cause of its existence.

³⁶² For more details on his argument, see Paul Copan and William L. Craig, eds., *The Kalām Cosmological Argument: Philosophical Arguments for the Finitude of the Past* (New York, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 15–52.

³⁶³ Copan and Craig, *Philosophical Arguments for the Finitude of the Past*, 53–70.

³⁶⁴ Harvey also points out the restricted version of this premise as later modified by Craig, as we noted above: "If the universe began to exist, the universe has a cause of its beginning." He adds that the modest version of the premise "does the same work, while being easier to defend." Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 111, fn. 41.

P3. Only a personal agent (not a mechanistic cause) is able to select between possible tensed time effects in causing the universe.

P4. Time is tensed.

C2. Therefore, the cause of the universe is a personal agent.³⁶⁵

A review of the aforementioned edited volumes reveals numerous essays from both advocates and critics regarding Craig's assertion that the KCA is supported by robust premises grounded in philosophy and science. The first volume³⁶⁶ explores the philosophical foundations of the KCA's initial premise, which posits the finitude of the past. Various essays, penned by authors with divergent views on the infinitude of the past, endeavour to ascertain whether the concept of an actual infinite is feasible outside of mathematical theory. Those disputing the possibility of an infinite often reference certain paradoxes, such as Tristram Shandy, the Grim Reaper, and Hilbert's Hotel. For example, the Hilbert's Hotel paradox, constructed by mathematician David Hilbert, demonstrates the counterintuitive characteristics of an actual infinity. This hypothetical hotel, possessing an infinite number of fully occupied rooms, can nonetheless accommodate additional guests by relocating each occupant to the subsequent room. Proponents of the KCA argue that this implausible scenario underscores the paradoxical nature of infinite sets and challenges the likelihood of an actual infinite existing beyond the realm of mathematics. Furthermore, the debate extends to the application of this concept of infinity to the

³⁶⁵ Harvey comments that P3 and C2 are implicit in Craig's discussion of the argument. See Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 111, fn. 40.

³⁶⁶ Copan and Craig, *Philosophical Arguments for the Finitude of the Past*.

future. In other words, if an infinite past is considered impossible, how can an infinite future, especially in the context of theistic beliefs about the afterlife, be possible?³⁶⁷

The second volume³⁶⁸ focuses on two critical scientific discoveries. The first is the Big Bang theory, which implies a finite age for the universe, thereby suggesting a beginning. This theory is supported by various observations, including the cosmic microwave background radiation and the redshift observed in galaxies, which both suggest that the universe is expanding. If we turn the expansion back in time, we reach a point or singularity at which the entire universe was condensed into an extremely hot and dense state, marking the origin of the universe.³⁶⁹ The second scientific development pertains to the second law of thermodynamics, which describes the behaviour of energy within a closed system. In such a system, which does not exchange matter with its environment, entropy—a metric of disorder or randomness—tends to increase over time. According to the second law of thermodynamics, at the time of the Big Bang, the universe was in a state of extremely low entropy (highly ordered or in a less random state) and has been moving towards higher entropy (more disorder or randomness) ever since. The expansion and cooling of the universe contribute to the overall increase in entropy. Regarding its implications for the KCA, if the second law of thermodynamics is applied to the universe, it might be argued that the universe had a starting point characterised by a state of low entropy. At some earlier stage, the universe had less disorder and more energy, and over time, it

³⁶⁷ For discussions on both the arguments supporting and challenging the impossibility of an actual infinite, see Copan and Craig, *Philosophical Arguments for the Finitude of the Past*, 91–284.

³⁶⁸ Paul Copan and William L. Craig, eds., *The Kalām Cosmological Argument: Scientific Evidence for the Beginning of the Universe* (New York, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

³⁶⁹ For further details on the implications of the Big Bang theory for a finite universe, see Copan and Craig, *Scientific Evidence for the Beginning*, 12–158.

has moved towards higher entropy and less energy, or more precisely, less usable energy.³⁷⁰

Therefore, the second law of thermodynamics implies that the universe cannot be eternal in its past because an eternal universe would have reached a state of maximum entropy long ago.

According to proponents of the KCA, all of this suggests that the universe has a beginning in time.³⁷¹

As it has become evident, within the landscape of contemporary academia, the Kalām Cosmological Argument remains a central and significant topic of discussion. Nonetheless, to avoid getting side-tracked from the primary purpose of the study, I must be content with this much here. Let us now turn our attention to additional arguments put forward by Nasafī in support of the KCA. The primary goal of these additional arguments is to establish that the initial cause (or first cause) identified in the KCA is indeed a divine entity with personal attributes — namely, God.

The first argument that Nasafī employs to support his KCA is known as the argument from particularization (*takhṣīs*), previously used by his master al-Māturīdī and many Ash‘arī

³⁷⁰ The total energy of a closed system, like the universe, remains constant over time, also known as the law of energy conservation. This law states that energy cannot be created or destroyed, only transformed from one form to another. While the total energy remains constant, the quality or usefulness of that energy changes. As entropy increases, the energy within the system becomes more dispersed and randomised. In practical terms, this means that the energy becomes less useful. See Copan and Craig, *Scientific Evidence for the Beginning*, 15–23.

³⁷¹ For more on the second law of thermodynamics and its implications for the origins of the universe, as well as counterarguments challenging its theological implications, see Copan and Craig, *Scientific Evidence for the Beginning*, 159–296.

scholars, such as al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī, and his contemporary al-Ghazālī.³⁷² Nasafi's first presentation of his argument from particularization centres around the idea of atoms (*jawhar*).

Nasafi suggests that all bodies (*jism*) are made up of atoms, which can be configured in numerous ways. In other words, the present arrangement of atoms within a body is just one possibility among many. He further introduces an analogy where a building might be constructed in various ways. It is entirely conceivable to construct a building taller or shorter, larger or smaller, more aesthetically pleasing or less so. Based on these premises, he argues that since bodies have the potential for various atomic arrangements but exhibit only one specific configuration, there must be a particularizer (*mukhaṣṣiṣ*) who caused this particular configuration to exist over any other potential configuration.³⁷³

Again, using the idea of particularization, Nasafi presents the following version of the same argument:

³⁷² Wolfson does not mention al-Māturīdī at all, but, as Davidson correctly notes, the argument in question is available in his seminal work, *al-Tawhīd*, see al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 83; Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 159–160. Cerić gives al-Māturīdī's argument as follows: "If the world had come into existence by itself, there would have been no time more appropriate for its existence than a certain other time, nor would there have been a state more proper than a certain other state, nor would there have been a characteristic (or quality) more suitable than a certain other characteristic (or quality). But since the world's existence has different times, states, and characteristics, it stands established that its coming into existence was not by itself. For, if it had been permissible for the world to create every thing for itself by itself, the world would have created the best states and characteristics which would have, in turn, eliminated all the evil and ugly things. Therefore, the existence of these things in proof for its coming into existence by a being other than itself." See Cerić, *Roots of Synthetic Theology*, 148. Also see Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 110. For the arguments from *takhṣiṣ* adopted by the aforementioned scholars, see Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 174–194; Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 434–444.

³⁷³ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:53, 105; *Tamhīd*, 5; *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 89.

Once it is established that the universe is created (*muhdath*), and what is created is that which is not necessary (*wājib al-wujūd*) but permissible in existence (*jā'iz al-wujūd*), and what is permissible in existence is also permissible in non-existence (*jā'iz al-'adam*), and for that which the existence and nonexistence are equally possible (*mumkin*), its existence cannot be dictated by the necessities (*muqtaḍayāt*) of its essence (*dhāt*). Its being in existence rather than in non-existence, especially when it previously did not exist, is not possible —except by a particularizer (*mukhaṣṣiṣ*) who particularizes (*takhṣiṣ*) his existence over non-existence. Therefore, just as a building cannot stand without a builder, there must be a creator (*Muhdith*) who brought it into existence when it previously did not exist and particularized its existence (*wujūd*) over non-existence (*'adam*).³⁷⁴

The passage, while making reference to a particularizer who prefers one option from many possibilities, also implies that the universe's existence is not in and of itself but rather contingent (*jā'iz al-wujūd*). This further suggests that anything with a contingent existence must have been brought into being by a creator (*Muhdith*) whose existence is necessary (*wājib al-wujūd*).³⁷⁵ Therefore, Nasafi's second version of the *takhṣiṣ* argument seems to imply the idea of 'Sufficient Reason', a notion introduced at the beginning of this section. This principle was proposed by philosophers like Leibniz and Spinoza as a specific version of cosmological arguments. Moreover, this version of Nasafi's argument suggests that the particularizer in question must possess free will and choose for the universe to transition from potential existence to actual existence. In other words, there must be an agent who possesses free will to make it possible to single out the universe's existence from non-existence. The realisation of one

³⁷⁴ Nasafi, *Tamhīd*, 5.

³⁷⁵ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:105.

particular option (existence) rather than the other (non-existence) not only demonstrates God's existence but also His free will.

The point that the creator (*Muḥdith*) in question must possess free will can be made clearer by formulating the argument as follows:

1. Everything that is only possible in terms of existence, and that does exist, must have been accorded preponderance of existence over non-existence by a free agent.
2. The world is only possible in terms of existence, and it does exist.
3. Therefore, the world must have been accorded preponderance of existence over non-existence by a Free Agent, namely, God.

All the arguments discussed thus far fall under the category of 'cosmological arguments,' which seek to prove the existence of God by examining the mere existence of the universe. In addition to the cosmological arguments examined previously, in Nasafi's writings, there are also some remarks that can be interpreted as a kind of teleological argument, which focus on the design and purpose in the universe. For instance, he argues that it is inconceivable that the universe, which exhibits qualities such as remarkable structure, beautiful appearance, and a strong and flawless foundation, could have been created by a being devoid of life, knowledge, and power. According to him, no one possessing common sense can deny this. He extends his point with an analogy. Anyone who thinks that intricate creations like embroidered silk fabric, grand palaces, or exquisite paintings can emerge purely by chance from lifeless, unwise entities

such as stones, or from beings without wisdom, is considered either foolish (*safih*) or stubborn by those who possess common sense.³⁷⁶

It seems that Nasafi's argument is centred on finding evidence of design in the world, whether on a small scale or a larger cosmic scale. The functionality, orderliness, and aesthetic qualities of the things observable in the world can be regarded as signs pointing to a deliberate divine Designer. He asserts that because of the evident design in the world, there must be an intelligent cause or a single intelligent planner responsible not only for the existence of the universe but also for its current particularized (*mukhaṣṣas*) existence we witness at every instant in time. Nasafi's argument from design assumes the existence of God as a starting point. This assumption is likely primarily derived from his earlier argument of contingency (*hudūth*) and his additional arguments, through which he has established the existence of the Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*), Particularizer (*Mukhaṣṣis*), or Maker (*Ṣāni*). Nasafi's teleological argument then asserts that by observing the design in the world, one can deduce that God not only exists but also possesses certain attributes such as wisdom (*ḥikma*), power (*qudra*), and will (*ikhtiyār*).

Herbert A. Davidson asserts that the arguments made by the *mutakallimūn* in favour of design typically lack detailed assessment of what qualifies as evidence of design. Additionally, he claims that these arguments often do not provide a comprehensive justification for how one can logically move from observing design in the world to the conclusion that there must be a designer. Furthermore, he goes on to argue that Islamic theologians have not discussed the

³⁷⁶ Nasafi, *Tamhīd*, 21; *Tabṣira*, 1:246–255.

possibility that a single plan or design in the universe could be the result of collaboration among multiple entities, similar to a group of architects working together as a committee.³⁷⁷

This study does not aim to establish a definitive conclusion on this point that applies to the entirety of the *kalām* tradition. However, concerning Nasafī, who is the primary focus of this study within that extensive body of *kalām* literature, it can be observed that his discussions of the issue are not as detailed as those found in modern discussions of the design argument.

Nevertheless, from Nasafī’s perspective, in response to Davidson’s first claim regarding the assessment of what qualifies as evidence or justification, it appears that for Nasafī, evidence of design is so clear and unmistakable that anyone with intelligence and a sound mind (*al-‘uqūl al-salīma*) should easily recognise it. Recognising this design logically leads to the acknowledgement of the existence of an intelligent designer, or the Wise (*Hakīm*), the All-Knowing (*‘Alīm*), the Maker (*Ṣāni‘*). In response to Davidson’s second claim, Nasafī³⁷⁸ and many other Muslim theologians like him have actually employed a specific type of argument known as a ‘argument of mutual hindrance’ (*dalīl al-tamānu‘*), which is inspired by specific verses from the Quran.³⁷⁹ This argument is used to demonstrate the oneness (unity) of the Designer or God. The argument of mutual hindrance is an attempt to justify and establish that God must be singular; otherwise, without this singularity, the order observed in the cosmos would not be maintained.

³⁷⁷ Davidson, *Proofs for Eternity*, 236.

³⁷⁸ See Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 95–96; *Tamhīd*, 21.

³⁷⁹ “If there were gods in the heavens and earth, besides God, there would be chaos and disorder.” See the Quran, 21:22. And: “God has not chosen a son, nor is there a god with Him. For then each god would go away with his own creation, and some would overcome others.” See the Quran, 23:91.

Let us now examine Nasafī's *tamānu* ' argument, which will be the final argument addressed in this section.

Based on the assumption derived from the *ḥudūth* argument, Nasafī declares that the universe has a Creator. He argues that it is logical to conclude there is only one God because the order or organisation we observe in the universe could not have been achieved unless the Maker is only one.³⁸⁰ The existence of multiple deities is explicitly and evidently illogical and absurd. His central argument revolves around the idea that if there were two gods, it becomes conceivable that they could disagree on a particular matter or issue. Should these two gods disagree, then it would logically result in chaos or disorder. To illustrate his point, Nasafī provides an example where one deity desires to create life for a person while the other opposes this idea. If such disagreements between the deities existed, it would inevitably lead to chaos within the universe. Nasafī extends his argument by suggesting that in every situation where there are contradictory intentions favouring one possibility over another, such as motion versus stillness or unity versus division, the problem of mutual hindrance or interference (*tamānu*) would arise.³⁸¹

He goes on to elaborate his argument as follows: in such scenarios where different agents have conflicting wills concerning the same matter, there are three possible outcomes: (i) both wills come true, (ii) neither of the wills come true, or (iii) one will prevails over the other. Nasafī argues that the first scenario is logically impossible (*mustahīl*) because it would imply the existence of two contradictory opposites in the same space and time. For example, having both

³⁸⁰ Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 95–96.

³⁸¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:112; *Tamhīd*, 6.

darkness and light simultaneously is impossible. In the second case, their wills cancel each other out, and neither of the wills of the conflicting deities comes true. If that were true, the universe would not have come into existence. Furthermore, if the conflicting wills cancel each other out, it implies that the entities named as creators are actually powerless. This powerlessness, according to Nasafī, shows that they are not genuine creators. In the last scenario, the will of one deity prevails over the other's. The alleged deity whose will does not come true is essentially powerless. This powerlessness is a characteristic of created (*muḥdath*) beings, not of a true creator. To sum up, if there were multiple gods with conflicting intentions, they would obstruct each other's actions, leading to complete disruption in the universe. Therefore, there must be only one Creator.³⁸²

Nasafī also argues that, to safeguard God's unity, it is essential not to perceive God's attributes as entirely separate from His essence (*dhāt*). God's attributes are neither identical to His essence nor are they distinct from it (*kullu ṣifatin lā huwa wa-lā ghayruhū*).³⁸³ The belief that God's attributes are separate from His essence could lead to the idea that one attribute might exist independently of another, or its possessor—a view deemed problematic by Nasafī, as it implies the existence of more than one eternal (*qadīm*) entity.³⁸⁴ God's attributes, just like His essence, are of an eternal nature and inseparable from Him; therefore, it is inconceivable for them to cease to exist or pause, even for a split second.³⁸⁵

³⁸² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:112–113; *Tamhīd*, 23.

³⁸³ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 23.

³⁸⁴ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 22–23.

³⁸⁵ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 22–23; *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 90–92.

Nasafī uses an analogy to clarify the interconnectedness between God’s essence (*dhāt*) and His divine attributes, using numbers as symbols: ‘10’ represents God’s essence, and ‘1’ represents one of God’s attributes. He argues that the relationship between the digit ‘1’ and the number ‘10’ is inseparable. In other words, the number ‘10’ cannot exist without the presence of the digit ‘1’. The digit ‘1’ is neither something separate from the number ‘10’, nor is it the entirety of ‘10’ itself. Similarly, just as the number ‘10’ cannot exist without the digit ‘1’, God’s essence cannot be separated from His attributes, as they are intrinsic to His nature.³⁸⁶

Harvey discusses the same problem, focusing on al-Māturīdī, and refers to Nasafī’s aforementioned analogy to explain the matter.³⁸⁷ Harvey’s analysis suggests that both al-Māturīdī and Nasafī share a similar viewpoint on this issue. He describes their stance as a rejection of the Law of Excluded Middle (LEM), a principle in classical logic asserting that a statement must be either true or false, leaving no room for ambiguity or a middle position. Intuitionistic logic, on the other hand, permits situations where the principle of LEM may not apply. Within intuitionistic logic, one can propose a stipulation without encountering a logical contradiction. For example, it can be stipulated that a singleton set $\{1\}$ is neither identical to its sole member (the number 1) nor entirely distinct from it, without any logical contradiction. Harvey suggests that this idea of being neither identical to nor entirely separate from its members can be extended into a broader principle. It can be applied also to “the empty set, of which there must be only one.”³⁸⁸ The empty set, as a “mental encapsulation of nothing,”³⁸⁹ within the

³⁸⁶ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 23.

³⁸⁷ Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 84, n.176.

³⁸⁸ Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 84.

³⁸⁹ Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 84.

framework of intuitionistic logic, is neither the same as ‘nothing’ nor entirely distinct from the concept of nothingness. The same rationale can be applied to the positions of Nasafī and his teacher al-Māturīdī. Their perspectives should not necessarily be analysed or interpreted within the constraints of classical logic. The rejection of the two options by these scholars (namely, neither being God’s essence nor other than His essence) should not be construed as implying the nothingness of divine attributes. Instead, it can be perceived as a middle position, a position that is sometimes essential, particularly when engaging in complex theological matters.

In conclusion, Nasafī’s argument from temporality (*ḥudūth*)—the Kalām Cosmological Argument (KCA)—remains relevant today. The core principles of Nasafī’s argument from *ḥudūth* align with the modern formulation of the KCA, which continues to be widely debated and studied by contemporary philosophers, both supporters and critics alike. According to Nasafī, his arguments—particularly the KCA, along with additional arguments such as the argument from particularization (*takhṣīṣ*), the argument of mutual hindrance (*dalīl al-tamānu*), and arguably the argument from design—establish the existence of a First Cause. This First Cause—identified through the KCA—is not merely an abstract cause but a personal and divine entity with attributes—established through his three additional arguments—that we associate with God. Taken together, these arguments provide sufficient reasons for the believer to hold that God exists. Nasafī contends that such formal philosophical arguments should be employed by scholars (*‘ulamā*) and developed to the best of their ability. However, as the next section will show, philosophical argumentation is not the only method for justifying religious beliefs, as people vary in their rational capacities and available time.

4. The Learned (‘*ālim*) and the Laymen (*muqallid*)

Nasafī, based on their intellectual capacities and pursuits, categorises people into three groups: the learned or the epistemic elite (‘*ulamā*’), the laymen or the common folk, and the pleasure-seekers. He defines the first group, the learned, as those possessing sharp minds and an abundance of intellect, dedicated to contemplation, theoretical studies, and divine signs (*al-ma‘ālim al-ilāhiyya*). This intellectually privileged group prioritises intellectual and spiritual pursuits over bodily pleasures (*al-ladhdhāt al-bahīmiyya* or *al-maṭālib al-jusdāniyya*).³⁹⁰ The second group, although possessing intellectual abilities similar to those of the first group, is primarily occupied with practical affairs (*al-maṣāliḥ al-dunyawiyya*) that are essential for the well-being of society and the continuation of humanity. Their obligation to acquire and distribute essential resources, indispensable for the perpetuation of humanity, often leaves them with limited time and energy for the pursuit of divine knowledge.³⁹¹ The third group squanders the precious gift of life bestowed by God in the pursuit of carnal pleasures and, as a result, misses out on the benefits of divine sciences. Nasafī believes that their relentless pursuit of bodily desires negatively impacts their intellectual faculties. He describes them as unsophisticated and simple-minded, lacking an interest in the study of divine sciences and unwilling to give up their hedonistic, pleasure-oriented lifestyles. Lastly, he maintains that individuals belonging to the first group of elites, who place intellectual and spiritual pursuits above all else, are extremely uncommon or rare in society.³⁹²

³⁹⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 21.

³⁹¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 21.

³⁹² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 22; *Tamhīd*, 33–34. It seems that Nasafī has been influenced by the *falāsifa*’s elitist view of humanity, although he does not reject the possibility of salvation for the masses. Al-Fārābī asserts that

This classification can, in fact, be simplified into two groups, as it primarily focuses on individuals' orientations towards divine sciences and rational thinking: the learned and the laymen. Nasafi observes that the second group commonly justifies their religious beliefs through imitation (*taqlīd*), namely, they adopt their beliefs from their parents or based on tradition, rather than through independent intellectual endeavour. Nasafi criticises this method of forming beliefs and deems it problematic, as it leads to contradictory truth claims. True justified belief, according to him, requires sufficient epistemic reasons, as this is the only way to distinguish what is true from what is false. Therefore, it appears that morally justified belief is synonymous with epistemically justified belief. Like al-Māturīdī, Nasafi rejects blind imitation in religious matters.³⁹³

He also gives examples of imitators attempting to provide justifications for their religious convictions through invalid claims. For instance, he states that this kind of individuals generally claim they know the soundness of Islam because the Prophet believed in it. He poses the question: if a believer's justification for accepting Islam as a legitimate faith is based on the Prophet's own belief in Islam, then how can that person be certain that the Prophet was correct in

prophets possess a combination of imaginative and intellectual faculties, enabling them to receive an overflow of intelligibles from the 'agent intellect' or the 'tenth intellect.' This distinctive combination of faculties sets prophets apart from philosophers. However, he suggests that philosophers can also acquire prophetic knowledge, though through inference, demonstration, or intellection. According to al-Fārābī, only these two elitist groups are capable of achieving ultimate happiness, thus excluding the masses or ordinary people. For further details on his theory of prophecy, see Richard R. Walzer, 'Al-Fārābī's Theory of Prophecy and Divination', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77 (1957): 142–148.

³⁹³ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:36–38; al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 65–66.

choosing Islam as his faith in the first place?³⁹⁴ As it stands, his teachings clearly suggest that one should acquire a level of epistemic certainty before forming their religious belief.

Nasafī, nevertheless, recognises that individuals outside the scholarly elite may lack the necessary time, intellectual background, or inclination for rational inquiry into understanding complex philosophical concepts and formal arguments. Despite this recognition, Nasafī asserts that laypeople can still have their religious beliefs justified through rational means. He suggests that they can acquire the epistemic foundations of their faith with the assistance of scholars (*‘ulamā’*). Ultimately, both the learned and the lay follower share the same religious convictions, holding these beliefs for identical epistemic reasons.³⁹⁵

Nasafī’s second method of acquiring epistemic justification for faith, for the group in question, involves reports widely and consistently transmitted by multiple reliable sources, known as *‘al-khabar al-mutawātir.’*³⁹⁶ According to his theory of knowledge, these reports are self-justified sources for acquiring true propositions in many fields. As previously discussed, knowledge derived from mass-transmitted reports can establish certainty not only for scholars or experts but also for ordinary individuals. As we quoted from al-Jāhīz earlier, this method of acquiring knowledge places both the educated (*al-‘ālim*) and the uneducated (*al-jāhil*) on equal footing.³⁹⁷

Apart from these methods —namely, taking the *evidence* from testimony or mass-transmitted reports— the following quote is also noteworthy for implying another method and

³⁹⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:37.

³⁹⁵ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:36.

³⁹⁶ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:37.

³⁹⁷ Al-Jāhīz, *‘Risālat al-Ma‘ād’*, 144.

shedding light on what Nasafī actually considers as evidence. The fact that this passage appears at the end of his formal arguments for the existence of God, and its evocation of the teleological argument, particularly makes it relevant to the matter at hand.

From the heavens (*samāwāt*), adorned with their rotating celestial bodies and glittering wandering stars, to the lands (*arḍūn*), with majestic mountains, verdant vegetation (*nabāt*), inanimate objects (*jamād*), and enigmatic oceans, including all their inhabitants —the universe, as a whole, stands as a profound testament (*dalāla*) to the Creator.³⁹⁸

This passage implies a more straightforward way of acquiring evidence for faith. If we consider the passage alongside his formal philosophical arguments and the methods advised for ordinary people, we can say that, according to Nasafī, there are multiple and sufficient ways of holding epistemic reasons or evidence (*dalīl*) for belief in God.³⁹⁹ One method involves formal philosophical reasoning, characterised by structured, logical arguments, namely, the traditional philosophical arguments for God. However, such arguments demand a high level of specialisation in various fields of knowledge. Therefore, it is unreasonable to expect that every member of society can meet the same epistemic standards. Nevertheless, the other is more straightforward: epistemic reasons for belief in God are, in fact, accessible to all through observing and interpreting signs or phenomena in the world around us. Nasafī views the universe (*‘ālam*) itself as immediate evidence of the Divine Architect or Supreme Maker (*Ṣāni‘*).⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 5.

³⁹⁹ Nasafī does not limit the term ‘evidence’ (*dalīl*) exclusively to formal philosophical arguments, which further supports my assertion above. This point will become more evident as we analyse his understanding of evidence in detail in Chapter 4.

⁴⁰⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣīra*, 1:14–15.

The presence of order in the universe is unlikely to be the result of random processes or the conflicting wills of multiple deities. Otherwise, according to Nasafī, if there were no Divine Cause and purpose behind the universe, the only alternative explanation would be that the universe and all men came into existence for the sake of ‘nothingness’ (*fanā*) —a notion that Nasafī finds absurd and meaningless.⁴⁰¹ For him, *fanā* is so absurd that it does not require arguments to be demonstrated, as every sound mind immediately realises its absurdity. He argues that reason immediately recognises that everything in the realm of existence, a realm to which reason itself belongs, possesses a meaning (*ḥikma*).⁴⁰² Human beings, too, must have been meant for a meaning. Reason immediately knows that purposelessness and nothingness are simply bad. People inherently love and treasure continuity (*baqā*) and endlessness (*dawām*) and seek ways to secure even their limited existence in this world.⁴⁰³ This irresistible desire must have been implanted in the human soul by a Wise Being. Therefore, evidence of God’s existence cannot be limited to complex philosophical debates. That would be an unwise action that cannot be attributed to that Wise Being, since He created all men for sustained existence and taught them, through prophets, various occupations to ensure the continuation of human life. In short, for Nasafī, humanity is created for a meaningful destiny, a meaningful ‘future’ (*baqā*) rather than insignificance, purposelessness, or nothingness (*fanā*). This, for Nasafī, is *prima facie* justified fact that every sound reason immediately or intuitively knows.

Nasafī thus criticises unbelievers for their failure to recognise such evident signs, despite these being readily accessible to everyone on a daily basis. He says, unbelievers negate the

⁴⁰¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:13–14.

⁴⁰² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:13.

⁴⁰³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:13–14.

meaningfulness of their own existence and fail to appreciate the remarkable capabilities of their souls, choosing instead to dwell in ignorance. By denying the purposeful nature of the universe, they contradict their rational nature, which he considers a divine gift. According to Nasafi, to dismiss the universe's purposefulness is not just an intellectual error but a moral transgression against God.⁴⁰⁴

Given the discussions we have pursued thus far, I posit Nasafi as a staunch adherent of Evidentialism with regard to the ethics of belief. Nasafi's Evidentialist stance maintains that one ought to believe a proposition solely when there is sufficient evidence, or broadly speaking, epistemic reasons, in its favour. Nevertheless, I argue that this doxastic norm or obligation to believe that *p* based on evidence, to avoid inconsistency in Nasafi's philosophy, ought to be interpreted as a general or overall obligation, not limited to merely moral or epistemic considerations. Evaluating beliefs through the lens of a single type of obligation, such as a pragmatic or epistemic obligation, appears insufficient. This is because, in certain instances, various types of obligations may conflict, leading to a more complex predicament. In such scenarios where different types of obligations (epistemic, prudential, moral) compete or are at odds—for example, when a prudential reason propels an individual in one direction while an epistemic reason urges them in another—a comprehensive assessment of all conflicting reasons is essential to establish sound ethical doxastic norms. There may arise circumstances where pragmatic and moral reasons ought also to be taken into account. Nonetheless, for Nasafi, this analysis of conflicting reasons must invariably be grounded in reason (*'aql*); that is, the ultimate belief, deduced after weighing all factors, should, or possibly can, be supported by epistemic

⁴⁰⁴ Nasafi, *Tabşira*, 1:105.

considerations as well. As we explore in subsequent chapters, even pragmatic and moral reasons for forming a belief should, or perhaps can, be epistemically justified, from Nasafi's perspective.

This strict Evidentialist principle applies particularly to the epistemic elite concerning the most basic premise or article of faith, namely the existence of God. The situation changes somewhat when it comes to other articles of faith, which will be discussed in the next section. For those not part of the epistemic elite, Nasafi suggests a more flexible or moderate approach, or what Wykstra calls 'sensible evidentialism'.⁴⁰⁵ According to sensible evidentialism, one can intellectually justify their beliefs even in areas where they do not possess any expertise, and this justification does not necessarily require inferential grounding. As noted earlier, if a person can demonstrate that they have access to an expert in a specific field, it can suffice to provide the justification for their belief on that particular topic. In other words, the expertise of the person in question can serve as evidence for the non-expert's own position. As Audi points out, almost anything that can be known first-hand can also be known through testimony.⁴⁰⁶ However, within the framework of the ethics of belief, this method of justifying beliefs should be termed 'external justification', where one simply borrows the epistemic grounds of a proposition without possessing first-hand understanding of the underlying epistemic reasons.

Nasafi's initial advice to non-experts, as previously noted, involves learning the proofs from experts, which can only externally justify a belief. While Nasafi promotes testimonial knowledge for the justification of laypersons' beliefs, he does not advocate solely for a purely passive reception of knowledge, especially when religious beliefs are concerned. Instead, he

⁴⁰⁵ See pp. 24–27.

⁴⁰⁶ Audi, 'Testimony and Ethics of Belief', 197.

encourages non-experts to actively engage with and understand the evidence provided by experts, within the limits of their intellectual abilities, available time, and mental energy.⁴⁰⁷ In simpler terms, individuals without expertise, too, should aim for ‘internal justification’ as their ultimate goal. Nasafi states, as will be discussed later, that faith becomes more praiseworthy in the sight of God when it emerges from personal intellectual investment, and divine rewards are granted in direct correlation with the challenges or hardships (*mashaqqa*) endured in the pursuit of one’s faith.⁴⁰⁸ In other words, faith is not only about the conclusions one reaches but also about the journey one undertakes or how one reaches those conclusions.

Nasafi’s evidentialism bears some resemblance to that of Locke, a modern strict Evidentialist discussed earlier. According to both Nasafi and Locke, it is possible for a person to accidentally stumble upon the truth, even if they do not employ their rational faculties. For Nasafi, this accidental discovery of truth could result from an improper method, such as imitation (*taqlīd*) or intuition (*ilhām*). Moreover, both Nasafi and Locke agree that those who fail to employ their intellectual powers and consequently fall into error are unquestionably accountable for their errors. However, Locke is sceptical about whether stumbling upon the truth by chance can excuse an individual’s irrational or unmethodical way of forming belief. Nasafi, on the other hand, is resolute in his stance that even if faith acquired through imitation aligns with the truth, the individual is still considered culpable and thus deemed disobedient (‘*āṣī*’) for not properly utilising their God-given rational faculties. For this reason, the individual in question is considered a sinner or wrongdoer in the afterlife for abandoning reason in matters of faith, even

⁴⁰⁷ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:36.

⁴⁰⁸ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:39–40.

if they happen to stumble upon the truth accidentally. And depending on their circumstances and God's judgment, they may either receive forgiveness from God for their sins or be punished in proportion to the extent of their sins.⁴⁰⁹

In conclusion, Nasafi underscores that mere adherence to tradition is insufficient. He strongly emphasises the necessity of evidence and rational arguments to justify religious beliefs, even for non-experts. However, he advocates for a balanced, middle-ground approach to religious epistemology. He suggests that ordinary individuals should also seek internal justification, but in a realistic manner that aligns with their intellectual background or available means. Moreover, a specific segment of society, the epistemic elite (*'ulamā'*), must possess such internal justification for religious beliefs, thereby illuminating the path for others in need of expertise. The task assigned to the epistemic elite should not be seen merely as an intellectual pursuit or as apologetics. Their role is essential not only in defending religious beliefs against possible criticism but also in maintaining authentic faith. According to Nasafi, the failure of the epistemic elite to fulfil their duty leads laypeople to rely on flawed methodologies, such as *taqlīd* and *ilhām*, which, in turn, could result in conflicting interpretations of truth or issues of relativism even within the same religious tradition. In such a scenario, each group claims equal validity, which, according to Nasafi, poses a risk to the integrity of authentic faith.

⁴⁰⁹ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:41–42.

CHAPTER 3: PROPHECY AND FAITH⁴¹⁰

First of all, the mere belief in the existence of God, arrived at through reason, is not sufficient on its own for attaining the eternal happiness promised by Islam. Nasafī argues that natural reason, which leads one to conclude that God exists, also suggests that God is wise, and His divine wisdom necessitates sending messengers to humanity for their eternal happiness. This is because only through messengers can humans learn other truths or virtues necessary for salvation. Therefore, according to Nasafī, belief in God alone, without embracing the religion or *sharī‘a* (Islamic law), is not considered genuine faith but rather a preliminary step towards it. Belief in God constitutes the initial phase, which is articulated in the first part of the Islamic declaration of faith (*shahāda*). True faith (*īmān*) is achieved only when one not only believes in God but also accepts and follows the teachings of the religion or the Prophet, as articulated in the second part of the *shahāda*.

As is well known to students of Islam, within the context of the Euthyphro dilemma — a philosophical problem that explores the nature of morality in relation to the divine will— the Mu‘tazilīs believe that God loves and wills the good because it is inherently good. In other words, they believe that goodness exists independently of God’s will and that God, being perfectly good, naturally aligns with what is good.⁴¹¹ In contrast to the Mu‘tazilīs, the Ash‘arīs argue that goodness is determined by God’s will. They believe that what is good is so because

⁴¹⁰ This chapter is an expanded and revised version of the author’s previously published article. See Muhammet Saygi, ‘Abū Al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī’s Defence of Prophecy (*Nubuwwa*): An Examination of Prophecy and Its Justification in Islamic Theology’, *Kader* 21, no. 1 (2023): 1–28.

⁴¹¹ ‘Alī bin Sa‘d al-Ḍuwayhī, *Ārā’ al-Mu‘tazila al-Uṣūliyya: Dirāsa wa-Taqwīm* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1995), 164.

God deems it as such, implying that morality is contingent upon divine decree.⁴¹² Mu‘tazilī theology, as it implies an independent source of moral normativity beyond God’s will, can be described as a form of ‘moral realism’, where moral truths exist independently of God’s will. Conversely, Ash‘arī theology, as it rejects the idea of an independent moral reality, can be called ‘moral voluntarism’, where moral truths are contingent upon God’s commands.⁴¹³

As for Nasafī and the Māturīdī school of theology, reason has the ability to distinguish between good and evil in general terms but lacks the precision to evaluate the moral value of individual actions. Reason, based on general principles or its overall understanding of good and evil, can discern what is morally obligatory (*wājib*) and what is prohibited (*mumtani*). However, there are also intermediate (*wāsīt*) actions that fall between the categories of obligatory and prohibited. According to the Māturīdīs, divine revelation or prophecy is necessary to accurately comprehend the moral value or status of these actions.⁴¹⁴

Nasafī’s position emphasises the limitations of natural reason in evaluating the moral value of individual actions. Nevertheless, this limitation serves to strengthen his argument for the necessity of prophethood, as divine revelation becomes essential for understanding the moral nuances beyond what reason can grasp alone. In contrast to Nasafī, the Mu‘tazilites believe that prophetic teachings offer nothing that cannot be learned, at least approximately, through reason alone, but this poses challenges in justifying the necessity of prophethood. On the other hand, the Ash‘arites maintain that the determination of good and evil is solely within God’s domain.

⁴¹² Al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 258.

⁴¹³ For more details on their ethical perspectives, see George F. Hourani, *Reason and Tradition in Islamic Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 17–22, 124–34.

⁴¹⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:21; see al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 311–312.

However, the Ash‘arite assertion that reason is entirely irrelevant in determining good and evil raises challenges in justifying certain aspects of Islamic law to those who do not share the same religious beliefs. For example, the imposition of the *jizya* tax on non-Muslim subjects is difficult to justify solely based on divine decree without considering rational arguments. Therefore, prioritising divine revelation over reason in determining moral principles also brings its own set of problems.⁴¹⁵ In short, Nasafi and his school hold an intermediate position between the Mu‘tazilites and the Ash‘arites.

In addition to the aforementioned point, another rationale of Nasafi for prophethood is that only prophets can possess absolute epistemic certainty (*yaqīn*) regarding specific religious beliefs or articles of faith. The source or cause of prophets’ knowledge and its certainty is fundamentally distinct from the sources accessible to ordinary humans. Unlike the doxastic norms known to human beings —ordinary reasoning based on epistemic, prudential, and moral considerations, as discussed in the first chapter of the study— the doxastic norms for prophets are rooted in divine revelation. Prophets understand how the human intellect works in this domain and receive direct knowledge of these specific articles of faith, especially those related to Islamic eschatology, such as the Day of Judgment (*yawm al-qiyaama*) and resurrection after death (*ba‘th ba‘da al-mawt*), among others. This level of certainty is not merely the result of their ordinary human efforts or reasoning; it is preordained and bestowed upon them by God. The

⁴¹⁵ This does not mean that the Ash‘arīs asserts that reason has no role in understanding moral issues. According to them, morality is not inherent in things or actions themselves. Moral values are established solely by God’s will, and these moral truths are revealed to humans through divine revelation. Once God’s commands are revealed through scripture, human reason can be used to understand and apply these divine commands. In short, even though the Ash‘arites believe that moral principles come from God, they still value reason as a tool for understanding and applying God’s moral commands.

reasons for this particular state of affairs are known only to Him. Yet, we can say that this is not injustice because, according to Nasafī, no unjust or futile actions emanate from God, given His divine wisdom.

The rest of us, whether learned or laypeople, are precluded from attaining the same level of certainty (*yaqīn*) in certain religious beliefs as prophets do. According to Muslim philosophers, prophets can grasp these fundamental truths due to their superior faculty of imagination compared to the rest of humanity.⁴¹⁶ For Nasafī, the reason prophets can attain this level of epistemic certainty is due to their divinely granted attributes of acumen (*fatāna*) and infallibility (*‘iṣma*).⁴¹⁷ This means they are safeguarded against committing major sins and errors in delivering God’s message, and they have the capacity to understand divine revelations and apply them wisely in different circumstances. In other words, the special attributes granted to prophets shield them from both epistemic and moral failings. These qualities are divine gifts that set prophets apart from ordinary individuals.

Nasafī argues that for prophets to attain knowledge in this manner, a certain level of intellectual or mental effort is required on their part, as stated in the previous chapter. Therefore, he categorises this special knowledge acquired by prophets as inferential knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-istidlālī*) in contrast to self-evident knowledge (*‘ilm al-ḍarūrī* or *badīhī*), which does not necessitate effort on the part of the acquirer. However, it must be noted that the rest of us humans cannot acquire such knowledge, even if we exert our best intellectual efforts. This suggests that Nasafī believes prophets possess a unique faculty of mind or superior attributes —like the

⁴¹⁶ See Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 87, 146–148.

⁴¹⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:82–83.

mentioned *fatāna* and *‘iṣma*— compared to the rest of humanity. For this reason, there is no difference between the *‘ulamā*’ and ordinary people when it comes to these truths of faith. In other words, all must accept these truths based on the prophetic testimony.

However, when it comes to determining the reliability of an alleged prophet or his testimony, the distinction between experts and non-experts becomes clear. If the path of knowledge to these truths is closed to us, then the learned or scholar must establish the accuracy or reliability of the source from which we receive these truths, and the rest should learn about this established reliability of the source from them. Nasafī, whom I have identified from the very beginning as adopting an Evidentialist stance, believes that, in alignment with his Evidentialist perspective, epistemic reasons can never be entirely dismissed in discussions of faith. If rational arguments or epistemic reasons cannot be provided for the content of certain religious beliefs, the effort should then be directed towards verifying their sources. Therefore, even if reason cannot achieve knowledge or establish epistemic certainty for these beliefs, it should at least demonstrate or confirm the following two points: (i) they do not conflict with reason, and (ii) they are acquired from reliable sources.

The following examination of Nasafī’s arguments for prophecy shows that his discussion of the problem revolves around this central theme. Since reason can only verify the source of such religious beliefs, not the beliefs themselves, then it must first be demonstrated that prophecy is not contrary to reason or that it is rationally possible. Secondly, rational arguments should show that what is not contrary to reason has indeed been realised in history, namely, that certain individuals were sent by God as prophets. Lastly, it must be established that the Prophet of Islam is part of this prophetic tradition.

1. Prophecy as Possibility (*mumkin*) and Necessity (*wājib*)

In his discussion of prophecy, Nasafī starts by analysing the lexical and technical definitions of key concepts pertinent to the subject. This approach, which we will explore in more detail when examining his intellectual legacy, is a routine method in his theological works and serves to familiarise the reader with key terms that are of foremost importance for the topic addressed. Accordingly, he states that ‘*risāla*,’ as understood by Arabic lexicographers, signifies the act of conveying a message with relevant proof (*dalāla*) to the intended audience (*al-maqṣūd*).⁴¹⁸ As for its technical meaning within the terminology of *kalām*, ‘*risāla*’ or ‘*nubuwwa*’ signifies the servant’s ‘*sifāra*,’ which refers to the state of being a messenger or intermediary between God and His rational creatures. The purpose of this intermediary role is to bridge the gaps in matters that intellect alone cannot fully comprehend. The message conveyed by the prophets pertains to their benefits (*maṣāliḥ*), both in this world and in the Hereafter.⁴¹⁹

After introducing the relevant terms, Nasafī first clarifies that the arguments he will present in support of prophecy are primarily aimed at those who already acknowledge the existence and oneness of God. While these arguments might offer some insights to non-believers about the legitimacy of prophethood, Nasafī emphasises that non-believers must first be convinced of God’s existence and unity through conclusive evidence.⁴²⁰

Following these introductory remarks, Nasafī explains that the nature of prophecy should be analysed from two distinct perspectives: natural reason and divine wisdom. Through the lens of natural reason, prophecy is considered within the realm of possibility (*mumkin*), meaning that

⁴¹⁸ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:5.

⁴¹⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:5.

⁴²⁰ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 11.

its existence is not rationally impossible or contradictory to reason.⁴²¹ On the other hand, from the perspective of divine wisdom, prophecy is deemed a necessity (*wājib*), as it is inconceivable for God to leave humanity without guidance.⁴²²

Nasafī explains the idea of prophecy as being possible in terms of reason by referencing God’s absolute authority. He portrays God as singular or unique (*wāḥid*) in His divine essence. God has absolute ownership and dominion over the entirety of the universe and all that exists within it. Therefore, God is the true and sole Owner (*mālik*) of all; as a result, every other entity is regarded as a possession or property (*mamlūk*) of God. Furthermore, God is the true and sole Governor (*Rabb*) of every being: consequently, every other being is a subject (*marbūb*) or under His governance and authority.⁴²³ Therefore, God has the right to do whatever He wishes, including sending prophets to guide humanity toward righteousness and fulfil His divine plan for creation. Nasafī elucidates this idea through the analogy of the seen (*al-shāhid*) to the unseen (*al-ghā’ib*). In the realm of the seen, it is observed that every owner possesses the right of *taṣarruf*, which refers to the actions an individual can undertake within the framework of their ownership. Therefore, they can utilise their property in a manner they see fit, consistent with their level of ownership. Since God is the creator of everything out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) and the ultimate owner of all, it is entirely logical for Him to be the sole legislator of His property.⁴²⁴ As the eternal sovereign, God may direct humans to perform or abstain from specific actions for their own welfare. This notion is not contradictory to reason, as there is nothing within this idea that

⁴²¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:7–8.

⁴²² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:12–13.

⁴²³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:7.

⁴²⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:7.

reason would find implausible. Just as any owner is entitled to exercise *taṣarruf* over their property in a manner consistent with their ownership, this principle equally applies to God, the supreme owner of the universe.

Nasafī, again utilising the analogy of the seen to the unseen, concludes that God is absolutely Wise (*ḥakīm*), as every being in the seen world points to His wisdom. As the possessor of perfect wisdom, God never undertakes futile (*safah*) or pointless actions.⁴²⁵ Sending human beings into an unknown realm of existence without guidance would be incongruous with God's wisdom. Thus, His wisdom inherently necessitates the dispatch of prophets to guide humanity. It is important to note that while Nasafī views prophecy as a necessity within the context of God's wisdom, he emphasises that this does not impose compulsion on God or negate divine will. In other words, while God could have chosen not to send prophets, His infinite wisdom, compassion, and grace toward His creation ultimately led to the emergence of prophets in human history. Nasafī strongly counters the idea of *aṣlah*, a well-known doctrine of the Mu'tazila, which advocates that God necessarily does what is most just and best for humanity.

2. Arguments for Prophecy as an Established Fact in Human History

Nasafī states that in terms of their moral value, human actions for which God holds individuals accountable can be classified into four categories: obligatory (*ijāb*), prohibited (*manʿ*), permissible (*īflāq*), and reprehensible (*ḥaẓr*). The legal or moral responsibility associated with these actions is referred to as *taklīf* (responsibility or liability).⁴²⁶ God may reveal the laws pertaining to these actions to His servants in any manner He chooses. He might instil knowledge

⁴²⁵ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:1.

⁴²⁶ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:7.

of the law directly into their hearts, or He may convey it through a messenger who provides a comprehensive explanation or instruction (*tablīgh*) of the law for their benefit (*maṣāliḥ*).

According to Nasafī, sending prophets to humanity is essential for the effective implementation of the law because only through them can the application of the law be concretely explained to people. Anyone with intellect and a sense of justice in their soul (*nafs*) would acknowledge that prophecy does not contradict human reason.⁴²⁷

In another section of his *Tabṣira*, Nasafī provides a threefold categorisation of human actions as follows: obligatory (*wājib*), prohibited (*mumtani*), and middle or neutral (*wāsiṭ* or *mumkin*), which are neither obligatory nor prohibited. While the human mind can distinguish between obligatory and prohibited actions, it struggles to determine the merit of neutral actions. Depending on the time and place, such actions may be considered meritorious or non-meritorious. To ascertain when a neutral action is meritorious, an individual with insight into these actions must explain it to others. Thus, Nasafī argues, the limitations of the human mind regarding *wāsiṭ* actions provide another rationale for the necessity of prophethood.⁴²⁸

Nasafī presents similar opinions when discussing whether human intellect alone is sufficient to discern what is good and what is evil. As mentioned previously, he argues that while human intellect can recognise what is good (*maḥsana*) and what is evil (*qabīḥa*) in general terms, it falls short in applying these concepts to specific situations or actions to determine their moral values.⁴²⁹ In other words, while we can comprehend the concepts of good and evil in theory,

⁴²⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:7–8.

⁴²⁸ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:21.

⁴²⁹ In *kalām* literature, the problem at hand is often denoted by the terms ‘*ḥusn*’ and ‘*qubḥ*’, which are also employed by Nasafī occasionally. For instance, see Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:17.

deciding whether a particular action is good or evil is more complex and surpasses mere intellectual reasoning. Given the limitations of human reason in making precise moral judgments, there is a clear need for detailed and case-by-case guidance on what constitutes good and evil. Furthermore, without the guidance provided by prophets, divine commands to do good and avoid evil would become meaningless, as humans would lack the necessary instruction for their implementation. Nasafī also asserts that God created humans with an inherent predisposition to pursue good and avoid evil. The intended objective or aim (*'illa*) of this predisposition is to naturally incline humans to embrace prophetic teachings. The alignment of prophetic guidance on good and evil with human predisposition suggests that these teachings indeed reflect God's commandment (*amr*) and prohibition (*nahy*). This congruence between human nature and prophetic teachings supports the reality of prophethood.⁴³⁰

Human beings, as an integral part of their existence, are similarly inclined to seek and value wisdom (*ḥikma*) and knowledge (*'ulūm*). They also harbour an inherent desire to achieve perfection (*kamāl*), which, according to Nasafī, can only be realised with the assistance of a guide or mentor (*murshid*) who leads them towards moral righteousness. God created humans with such inclinations so they would be predisposed to accept and adhere to the teachings of prophets and the divine guidance they provide. For those endowed with deep insight or discernment (*baṣīra*), this natural tendency and predisposition towards seeking wisdom and perfection serve as sufficient evidence of the reality of prophecy.⁴³¹

⁴³⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:17–18.

⁴³¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:8; Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 21.

In another argument, Nasafī states that God designed humans to require specific types of nourishment for survival. This dependency on nourishment is part of the natural order or divine plan (*'ādat Allāh*) established by God. Human beings experience pleasure (*ladhdha*) from eating, which indicates that these foods are in harmony with human nature and contribute to their overall well-being. The fundamental purpose of this design is to encourage humans to consume food, thereby ensuring their survival. In other words, the pleasure derived from eating is a divine strategy to motivate humans to seek out the necessary nourishment, thus securing their survival and the continuation (*baqā'*) of the species. However, alongside the nutrients needed for humankind's survival, God has provided humanity with a wide range of substances (*jawāhir*), such as plants and chemicals, historically used for their medicinal properties in treating various diseases. Yet, among these beneficial substances, God has also created ones containing lethal and harmful toxins. Some plants and chemicals, potentially deadly, can be mistaken for safe substances if judged solely by human logic and sensory experiences (*tajriba*).⁴³²

Human reason is inherently averse to testing substances that could threaten life because it recognises the peril of determining their effects through trial and error. It also understands that assigning or delegating this hazardous task to a particular group is not a solution. Nasafī illustrates this with a hypothetical scenario where a master commands a servant to consume specific food to test its safety. However, this approach is flawed because some toxins have delayed effects, a reality well-known by experts on substances. In such cases, if the food contains a slow-acting poison, it could endanger the servant, the master, and the entire community, potentially leading to loss of life or severe health issues before the toxin is detected. Waiting to

⁴³² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:13.

discover the effects of these substances, which are not immediately apparent, is not a viable solution either. This is because waiting too long to identify the effects of these substances could result in death from starvation or dehydration in the first place. Relying on a segment of the community to test substances is thus impractical and risky. The survival of humans and their lineages up to the present time indicates that they possess vital knowledge of dangerous substances. Nasafi attributes this knowledge to divine guidance through prophets, suggesting that without such wisdom, humanity would have faced extinction long ago.⁴³³

Furthermore, if humans were unaware of how to utilise the substances and resources around them, the existence of these substances and resources would be meaningless. This scenario, in which blessings serve no purpose, contradicts the notion of God's wisdom. Conversely, it aligns with God's wisdom to equip humans with the knowledge and means to identify and utilise these resources. If humans were incapable of discerning what is beneficial or harmful, it would imply that God created them without a survival strategy, equating to a state of nothingness (*'adam*).⁴³⁴ Such a concept is inconsistent with Nasafi's perception of a wise and purposeful God. Therefore, it is logical to conclude that if God's creation was not for the sake of non-existence or nothingness, He indeed provides guidance through prophets on how to live and prosper, as this is the only way humanity can achieve sustained existence and well-being.

At this juncture, one might argue that attributing our knowledge about substances solely to divine guidance is overly simplistic, reflecting a particular theological stance. This viewpoint seems to disregard the invaluable contributions of countless scientists and researchers who have

⁴³³ Nasafi, *Tabşira*, 2:13–14.

⁴³⁴ Nasafi, *Tabşira*, 2:14.

enhanced our understanding through experimentation and observation. It can be argued that our knowledge stems from the collective human experience across history, rather than solely, or even not at all, from a divine origin. Moreover, if divine wisdom is essential for revealing harmful substances to humans through prophecy, should not prophets consistently update humanity about these dangers over time? Considering the vastness of the largely unexplored universe, is it reasonable to assume that humanity has gained all necessary knowledge, negating the need for future divine interventions or prophets to broaden our understanding?

Possibly, Nasafī would slightly modify his argument in response to these objections. He might then propose that the contributions of prophets to humanity’s advancement are not continuous and case-by-case revelations in each field, but rather a one-time provision of fundamental principles across various domains which are crucial for humanity’s survival and well-being. This idea of prophets providing first principles aligns with his epistemology, where self-evident knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-ḍarūrī*) is used to derive new propositions (*al-‘ilm al-istidlālī*) through inferential reasoning. Similarly, prophets taught foundational principles to humanity in key areas, which in turn enabled them to further develop these fields and establish new scientific branches based on those principles. In other words, prophetic teachings could be viewed as having unlocked or activated the inherent human capacity to generate and expand knowledge. In this vein, Nasafī’s master, al-Māturīdī, referencing the dawn of human history, suggests that the unaided human intellect could not have discovered essential survival knowledge through experience alone.⁴³⁵ However, as Nasafī initially noted, even this revised version of the argument might appeal only to those with a theistic worldview. Given the lack of concrete evidence from

⁴³⁵ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 250–251.

humanity's prehistoric periods, it seems that Nasafi's claims about the role of divine revelation in early human history require historical and archaeological corroboration to be discussed in a scholarly context. Consistent with this reasoning, Anthony Kenny argues that faith is reasonable only if two conditions are met: first, the existence of God must be established independently of religion or religious texts; and second, any historical events claimed as divine revelations must be independently verified with a certainty comparable to other historical knowledge.⁴³⁶ If Nasafi were aware of the advancements in the sciences of archaeology and history in our time, he would most likely encourage theologians to study these fields to validate the reality of prophecy in human history.

Turning back to Nasafi's arguments for prophecy, it is noted that humans inherently value continuity (*baqā'*) and strive to sustain their lives. This, in turn, drives them to gather the necessary resources for survival. However, the absence of a universally recognised law (*sharī'a*) to safeguard each individual's life complicates social order and threatens individuals' opportunities to secure sufficient resources for survival. In such a scenario, the weak may struggle to access resources, while the strong might commit egregious acts against the weak and monopolise survival resources beyond their own needs. This instability could lead to conflicts, potentially endangering human continuity. Additionally, human beings desire various material possessions, such as spacious homes, gardens, and swift mounts for transport. The acquisition and ownership of these assets need to be regulated by laws to prevent malicious individuals from unjustly seizing them. Without such legal frameworks, conflicts and wars between communities

⁴³⁶ Anthony Kenny, *What is Faith? Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 57.

become more likely, undermining the divine purpose of creation, which necessitates *baqā'* over *'adam*. To prevent such dire consequences, humanity needs God to send prophets to explain the laws, demonstrate their application, and promote their peaceful implementation in society.

Without prophets, humanity would not know how to prevent conflicts, ensure the fair distribution of resources, or establish peace in society, and therefore the continuity of life would not be ensured.⁴³⁷

The argument in question evokes the renowned Islamic philosopher Ibn Sīnā's ideas on the rational foundations of prophecy. Ibn Sīnā argues that human survival depends on mutual interdependence among individuals, which, in turn, necessitates a division of labour within society. For example, while one person may take up farming, another specialises in breadmaking, and a third commits to tailoring. The division of labour and urbanisation are crucial for human sustenance and well-being. According to Ibn Sīnā, the ultimate goal of human beings is to achieve a state of perfection (*kamāl*), which represents the pinnacle of human fulfilment and ultimate happiness. Without a division of labour and urbanisation, an environment conducive to contemplation and the pursuit of perfection cannot be established. Such an environment is essential for true happiness, as the perfection of the rational soul can only be realised in these circumstances. That being said, in a society where a division of labour is established, social relationships naturally form, necessitating their regulation through specific laws. Ibn Sīnā asserts that the task of establishing these laws should not be left solely to humans. If individuals were left to their own devices, each would claim their self-serving actions as just and denounce opposing actions as unfair. Therefore, the individual tasked with formulating laws

⁴³⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:14–16; *Tamhīd*, 23–24.

must have their authority derived from the Divine, indicating that this lawgiver must be a prophet.⁴³⁸

The apparent resemblance between these two arguments suggests that Nasafī was possibly influenced by Avicennian philosophy. However, making a hasty judgment solely based on this similarity would be unfounded, and it is not one of the central themes and objectives of the current study to make an ambitious assessment of the extent to which Ibn Sīnā influenced Nasafī's theology. Yet, that being said, in his *Tabṣira*, Nasafī often discusses the views of philosophers (*al-falāsifa*, or occasionally he calls them *al-mutafalsifa*) and reports their views if they are relevant to his subject matter. However, he never explicitly cites the names of these philosophers or the specific sources from which he derived their views.⁴³⁹ Additionally, as mentioned earlier, Wisnovsky argues that the influence of philosophy on Islamic theology and the shift towards philosophical theology—contrary to the widely held view, which typically credits al-Ghazālī with the significant role of introducing philosophical ideas into Islamic theology and leading the shift towards a philosophical theology—actually began to emerge earlier than commonly assumed. The influence of Avicennian metaphysics, particularly Ibn Sīnā's distinctions between essence (*māhiya*) and existence (*wujūd*), as well as between necessary existence in itself (*wājib al-wujūd bi dhātihi*) and possible existence in itself (*mumkin*

⁴³⁸ Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, ed. Muḥī al-Dīn Ṣabrī al-Kurdī (Egypt: Maṭba'at al-Sa'āda, 1938), 334–336; also see Deborah L. Black, 'Certitude, Justification, and the Principles of Knowledge in Avicenna's Epistemology', in *Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays*, ed. Peter Adamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 131–132; Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy*, 146–148; İlhan Kutluer, *Akıl ve İtikad Kelâm-Felsefe İlişkileri Üzerine Araştırmalar* (Istanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 1996), 95; Ömer M. Alper, *İslam Felsefesinde Akıl-Vahiy Felsefe Din İlişkisi -Kindî, Fârâbî, İbn Sînâ Örneği-* (Istanbul: Ayışığı Kitapları, 2000), 190.

⁴³⁹ For example, see Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:207, 336, 510, 2:366.

al-wujūd bi dhātihī), can be traced back to early Ash‘arī theologians such as al-Bāqillānī and al-Juwaynī, as well as to al-Ghazālī’s contemporaries, Māturīdī theologians like al-Pazdawī and our scholar Nasafī.⁴⁴⁰ If Wisnovsky’s assessment is taken for granted, then the influence of Ibn Sīnā on Nasafī is highly possible, given that al-Pazdawī, whom Wisnovsky describes as the most influential figure of this transformation, was an earlier contemporary of Nasafī. In the remainder of this chapter, additional examples will be presented, implying that Nasafī was influenced by *falsafa*, not just by Ibn Sīnā but also by al-Fārābī. This further supports Wisnovsky’s conclusion that the philosophical turn within the *kalām* tradition can be traced back to Ibn Sīnā and the theologians who were his contemporaries, rather than merely being a result of al-Ghazālī’s critique of *falsafa* and his endorsement of certain aspects of its disciplines, particularly logic (*manṭiq*). Apart from that, al-Māturīdī, whom Nasafī holds in high esteem, also proposed a similar argument in support of prophecy in this matter.⁴⁴¹ As Chapter Five will demonstrate, Nasafī diligently studied al-Māturīdī’s works, interpreted them, and further developed his master’s ideas. Therefore, rather than directly reading Ibn Sīnā’s works, Nasafī might be influenced by this strand of thought through his master al-Māturīdī or his earlier contemporary al-Pazdawī. The former is supported by Nasafī’s explicit and frequent citations from al-Māturīdī’s works, particularly from his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.⁴⁴²

Returning to Nasafī’s arguments for prophecy, he asserts that the natural inclination toward gratitude (*shukr*) instilled in humans by God serves as further evidence supporting

⁴⁴⁰ Wisnovsky, ‘Avicennian Turn in Sunnī Theology’, 96–97. Also see Wisnovsky, ‘Towards a Genealogy of Avicennism’, 323–363; Endress, ‘Reading Avicenna in the Madrasa’, 371–424; Shihadeh, ‘From al-Ghazālī to al-Rāzī’, 141–179; Gutas, ‘Avicenna and After’, 19–72.

⁴⁴¹ See al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 250–251.

⁴⁴² See for example, Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:130, 210, 397, 398, 2:143.

prophecy. Reason intuitively recognises showing gratitude in response to blessings as good and ingratitude (*kufrān*) as bad.⁴⁴³ God has immensely blessed humanity, creating them in the most beautiful form (in His image) and designating everything on Earth for their use and service. Even the recognition of God's blessings itself is another blessing, as we acknowledge those blessings through reason, which is another gift from Him. Again, reason intuitively suggests that the expression of gratitude should correspond to the magnitude of the blessing received and be executed appropriately; failing to do so indicates a lack of proper appreciation for the Benefactor. Adherence to these stipulations is the minimum for the act of *shukr*. Yet, considering God's supreme stature, human expressions of gratitude cannot equal even the smallest of His blessings. Nonetheless, while no one can fully express gratitude for God's infinite blessings, He graciously accepts our imperfect gratitude, a testament to His mercy. Given these aspects, humans need guidance on the specifics of *shukr*, including its form, extent, and timing (such as in relation to prayer and fasting), to perform their acts of gratitude to the best of their capacity.⁴⁴⁴

According to Nasafī, the human mind is inherently weak and limited, even among those who have undergone significant intellectual development. Thus, individuals need the guidance and support of their fellow humans to attain the necessary benefits (*maṣāliḥ*) for the continuity of their life on Earth. For example, the crucial role of institutions like schools in transmitting knowledge across generations and the significance of exchanging views and engaging in discussions to advance scientific knowledge both demonstrate our need for others' guidance and education. If acquiring basic knowledge essential for life on Earth requires help from others, it

⁴⁴³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:18.

⁴⁴⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:18–20.

logically follows that obtaining knowledge for the eternal afterlife, which is of greater importance, undoubtedly necessitates guidance from prophets. Relying solely on reason is insufficient for acquiring the benefits of the afterlife. To reject this notion would be to equate one's limited knowledge with God's, an arrogant and misguided stance. In short, our need for knowledge, both for the benefits of this world and the hereafter, underscores the necessity of prophecy.⁴⁴⁵

As recalled from the previous chapter, Nasafī categorises people based on their use of reason and their dedication to contemplation and intellectual introspection to acquire true knowledge of things (*ashyāʾ*). The first group consists of individuals who abstain from bodily desires by living on the brink of asceticism. This group resists bodily desires to avoid being consumed by carnal passions, which can harm their souls. Instead, they prefer to contemplate God and divine matters rather than indulge in worldly pleasures. The second group comprises individuals whose capacity for reasoning is as strong as that of the first group. However, they are in a position where they must use their abilities to sustain their lives and those of others around them. As a result, they cannot focus on fundamental matters related to divinity, as they are preoccupied with obtaining necessary benefits for the continuation of human life and distributing them to their peers. The third group consists of individuals whose rational strength is impaired or distorted. Members of this group squander the precious gift of life bestowed upon them by God on pursuing carnal desires. Even if we assume that the first group may not necessarily require the guidance of prophets, it is undeniable that the latter two groups are in dire need of prophetic guidance. The second group needs prophetic guidance because they dedicate their efforts to

⁴⁴⁵ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:20–21.

ensuring the essential needs for the perpetuity of human existence and, consequently, cannot create a suitable atmosphere or allocate time for contemplative practices. The last group is unsuitable for reflection on divine matters, being unsophisticated and simple-minded, and unable to relinquish earthly pleasures. Compared to the other groups, the first group is a tiny minority and thus negligible. Given that the majority of people need prophetic instruction, the necessity of prophecy cannot be questioned simply because a few individuals do not require it.⁴⁴⁶

This suggests once more that Nasafī may have been influenced by the *falāsifa*, particularly by the elitist view of humanity espoused by al-Fārābī, a prominent Islamic philosopher. In his political philosophy, al-Fārābī advocated for a hierarchical structure of society and governance, proposing that an elite group of individuals, who have attained the highest levels of intellectual and moral virtues, should lead the community. This elite group is symbolised by the philosopher-king, a concept he borrowed and adapted from Plato's *Republic*. The philosopher-king represents the ideal ruler, possessing wisdom and virtue, capable of guiding society towards its ultimate goal: achieving happiness and realising the virtuous city (*al-madīna al-fāḍila*). The elite, or philosopher-kings, are those who have reached the pinnacle of perfection in both intellectual and moral domains. This enables them to comprehend the true nature of things, including metaphysical realities, and to legislate and govern accordingly.⁴⁴⁷ In addition to this, prophets possess an enhanced imaginative faculty and intellectual capacity. This allows them to receive an influx of intelligibles from the agent intellect (the tenth intellect), which distinguishes them from philosophers. However, the knowledge acquired by prophets

⁴⁴⁶ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:21–23; *Tamhīd*, 33–34.

⁴⁴⁷ Al-Fārābī, *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, ed., Albert Nasri Nader (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1991), 3–4, 7; Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy*, 87, 128–29.

through their imaginative faculty can also be obtained through philosophical inquiry and demonstration. Consequently, this elite group of philosophers does not necessarily require prophetic guidance, as their acute intellect enables them to grasp reality as it is and attain the knowledge necessary for ultimate happiness.⁴⁴⁸

It appears that Nasafi is ambivalent about the idea that some individuals may not require prophetic guidance. While he largely opposes this idea throughout most of his discussion, his statements subtly or implicitly suggest that there could be a few people who do not need prophecy.⁴⁴⁹ However, in the passage above, Nasafi, without explicitly stating his own opinion, argues that even if we accept the assumption that there are a few individuals who do not need the light of prophecy, it does not alter the overarching truth: that is, for the majority of people, prophecy is a necessity for ultimate happiness.⁴⁵⁰

Returning to the groups that possess and effectively use the capacity for reasoning, Nasafi, as previously mentioned, points out that human reason is inherently flawed due to its finite and limited nature. Moreover, various obstacles, including emotions such as anger and sadness, as well as adversities like physical or mental illnesses encountered in life, can hinder the proper functioning of reason. Consequently, more people are hindered by these challenges in their quest for truth than those who overcome these obstacles and continue their pursuit of truth. Given these challenges, Nasafi argues that divine truths and wisdom must be transmitted through prophets to enlighten individuals, as most are incapable of attaining such truths through reason alone. Even for those best equipped for rational inquiry, acquiring knowledge through reasoning

⁴⁴⁸ Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy*, 87, 146–148.

⁴⁴⁹ See Nasafi, *Tabşira*, 2:21, 22.

⁴⁵⁰ Nasafi, *Tabşira*, 2:23.

is a strenuous and burdensome process. Therefore, for the people of reflection (*ahl al-naẓar*), it is a mercy and a blessing that divine revelation (*al-wahy al-samāwī*) is provided to all humankind. This mercy reduces the intellectual burden for truth-seekers and protects them from the doubts and hesitations that invariably accompany the path of reasoning.⁴⁵¹

Despite most people in the last two groups lacking the time and ability for contemplation, those among them who follow the prophets demonstrate persistence and adherence to the truth (*ḥaqq*). On the other hand, philosophers, despite their sharp intellects and persistent pursuit of truth, often fall into blasphemy and heresy as they gradually deviate from the truth. This deviation primarily stems from their lack of exposure to divine revelation or their conscious decision to ignore it. When considering the philosophers, it is rare to find anyone among them who embraced the belief in the unity of God (*tawḥīd*) and acknowledged the resurrection after death (*al-ḥaṣhr wa-al-ma‘ād*). Nevertheless, a few of them accepted prophets and gained knowledge from them about God and other divine matters. This clearly indicates that even individuals dedicated to reflection require divine guidance. God’s act of sending detailed explanations through prophets to all human groups is a blessing and a means to alleviate their trials (*imtiḥān*) in this world.⁴⁵²

At this juncture, it is important to note that Nasafī’s critique of philosophers implicitly targets not only non-Muslim thinkers but also prominent Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. First of all, they neither rejected the oneness of God nor denied the idea of resurrection (*ma‘ād*) after death. However, it should be acknowledged that their philosophical

⁴⁵¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:23.

⁴⁵² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:23–24.

interpretations of the resurrection diverged from traditional religious teachings and the literal interpretations of certain Quranic passages. For instance, al-Fārābī argues that the human soul is an immaterial substance, connected yet not dependent on the body, and that the soul’s ultimate fulfilment or highest happiness lies in attaining intellectual virtues and, thereby, uniting with the active intellect, achieving a form of immortality. At death, the rational soul detaches from the body, and based on its intellectual and moral virtues, it either attains immortality through union with the active intellect or faces eternal annihilation (*fanā*).⁴⁵³ In other words, souls that fail to attain perfection (*kamāl*)—particularly those of ignorant city-dwellers—will not achieve immortality. Instead of portraying them as residents of an afterlife, whether in hell or paradise, in accordance with the religion’s teachings, al-Fārābī views nonexistence or nothingness (*‘adam*) as the ultimate punishment for these souls. This interpretation, equating punishment with eternal annihilation, is unorthodox at best.⁴⁵⁴ Fakhry also makes a similar point: “In this regard, and in his partial admission of the transmigration of the Soul or its endless progression through the cycle of rebirth, it is clear that al-Fārābī’s view of individual immortality and of the ultimate destiny of the Soul is more akin to Plato’s, though radically at variance with the Islamic doctrine of bodily resurrection and the indiscriminate survival of all Souls, ignorant and wise alike.”⁴⁵⁵

As for Ibn Sīnā, he also believed in the continuation of the human soul after death. However, he also tended to overinterpret the passages in the Quran that refer to bodily or physical (*jismānī*) resurrection within the framework of his theory of religious language. According to Ibn Sīnā, the Quran employs a ‘religious language’ comprised of symbols and

⁴⁵³ Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy*, 132.

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. The Quran, 3:185, 69:27.

⁴⁵⁵ Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy*, 132.

analogies. As a result, he believed that the meaning of these religious expressions or utterances, which evoke bodily resurrection, extends beyond their literal meanings. According to his system of philosophy, a physical resurrection after death is impossible, which, in return, leads him to the idea of a spiritual (*rūḥānī*) resurrection. Additionally, he argued that describing resurrection solely as spiritual or non-physical would be detrimental to those lacking understanding, the less sophisticated or average believers, which is why the Quran and the Prophet employed symbolic language to convey the idea of resurrection. In short, according to Ibn Sīnā, divine truths in *Sharī'a* are communicated in a language that average people can understand, meaning what they cannot comprehend is conveyed in a more accessible manner through metaphors and symbolic utterances. If these truths in religions had not been elucidated and transmitted in this way, religions would certainly not serve any purpose for the majority of people.⁴⁵⁶

The negative stance of Islamic Peripatetic philosophers toward physical resurrection stems from their belief that it is impossible to restore the *ma'dūm* (that which has ceased to exist or is no longer present, in this context, the human body) to its initial state. They argue that once a soul's physical body has decayed and disintegrated, recreating or restoring it to its original condition is unfeasible. While it is true that God can create a new body and unite it with the soul, the notion of the same soul being united with different bodies suggests reincarnation, which they consider a superstitious belief. Thus, from their perspective, resurrection pertains solely to souls, not to physical bodies. Now, as we conclude this discussion due to the limitations of this study, it is important to note that despite their interpretations conflicting with the Quran's literal text,

⁴⁵⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-Aḍḥawiyya fī Amr al-Ma'ād*, ed. Ḥasan Āsī (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Jāmi'iyya, 1987), 91–126.

these philosophers did not totally deny the concept of resurrection, a core tenet of Islamic faith. Therefore, labelling them as heretics or apostates is contentious, even though al-Ghazālī did so, and it depends on one's interpretation of Islamic excommunication (*takfīr*) and its principles.⁴⁵⁷

Coming back to Nasafī, he proposes a hypothetical scenario in which individuals possess the capacity to discern or recognise the truth without relying on prophetic knowledge. He takes this scenario a step further and assumes that prophetic guidance does not even facilitate achieving salvation. Even if we assume that these assertions are correct, this would not make prophethood superfluous. According to Nasafī, even in such cases, prophethood should still be considered a gift or blessing, similar to the many instances of God's generosity that we observe in our surroundings. In other words, offering more than the bare minimum is not meaningless; this surplus is a manifestation of divine grace and benevolence. To illustrate his point, Nasafī uses the following analogy: if basic food were devoid of taste or pleasure, it would still serve its fundamental purpose of sustenance. However, the presence of diverse flavours, colours, and aromas in food elevates the act of eating into an enjoyable experience. Similarly, while clothing that provides adequate protection from extreme weather conditions is sufficient, adding ornaments or accessories for extra comfort and aesthetics is neither pointless nor frivolous. Thus, in the same vein, prophecy should be appreciated as an embodiment of divine grace (*faḍl*), blessing (*in 'ām*), and abundance (*ziyāda*).⁴⁵⁸

⁴⁵⁷ For more on al-Ghazālī's accusations of irreligion (*kufr*) and heresy (*bid'a*) against the *falāsifa*, as well as an assessment of these claims, see Fakhry, *Islamic Philosophy*, 223–239; Kemal Batak, 'Tehâfütü'l-Felâsife ile Alâkalı Genel Problemler: Gazâlî'nin Filozofları Tekfîrine Giriş (1)', *İslâmî Araştırmalar* 13, no. 3-4 [Gazâlî Özel Sayısı] (2000): 364–399.

⁴⁵⁸ Nasafī, *Tabşıra*, 2:24–25.

For Nasafī, the most convincing evidence that a person claiming to be a prophet can present is the occurrence of a tangible, verifiable miracle (*mu'jiza*) at his hand.⁴⁵⁹ When addressing the topic of *mu'jiza*, Nasafī, in accordance with his standard method, first analyses its linguistic and technical meanings. He states that the root ‘*ajz*,’ from which *mu'jiza* is derived, signifies ‘helplessness,’ ‘incapacity,’ or ‘the inability to perform an action.’ Based on his analysis of its root, he concludes that these events are called *mu'jiza* because they incapacitate or render powerless those who oppose the prophetic claimant. He also discusses the significance of the letter ‘*tā' marbūṭa*’ (ة) at the end of the word *mu'jiza*. He states that this grammatical feature serves to emphasise the strength of the meaning, similar to how it functions in other words like ‘*allāma* (knowledgeable), *nassāba* (skilled in genealogy), or *rāwiya* (skilled in storytelling). The inclusion of *tā' marbūṭa* in the word *mu'jiza* thus serves to underscore the profound sense of helplessness felt by those who witness these kinds of extraordinary acts or feats. In other words, the overwhelming nature of the evidence presented by the prophet is so intense that no one can counteract the miracle or its possessor.⁴⁶⁰

As for its technical definition, Nasafī reports that, according to the *falāsifa* (Islamic philosophers), a miracle is an action or phenomenon that originates from the divine realm and exceeds the capabilities of human beings. To elaborate more, it is a superb and particular (*juz'ī*) divine act that transcends not only human physical abilities (*al-quwwa al-ṭabī'iyya*) but also surpasses their mental capacities (*al-quwwa al-nafsāniyya*).⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:29.

⁴⁶⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:30. Nasafī's master, al-Māturīdī, defines *mu'jiza* as “an event that occurs in the hands of prophets and cannot be realised or brought about through means of learning or education.” See al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 289–290.

⁴⁶¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:30.

This view, attributed by Nasafī to Muslim philosophers without specifying names, seems problematic. At least two renowned Islamic philosophers, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, who extensively addressed and discussed the issue of prophecy within their philosophical frameworks, do not necessarily regard miracles as occurrences that disrupt the natural order. In line with their deterministic perspective, they perceive miracles not as events that breach or oppose the laws of nature but as occurrences that exist within or are inherent to the natural order. In other words, miracles are integral to these laws. Such phenomena are deemed extraordinary by ordinary individuals due to their limited perceptual abilities. On the other hand, individuals with heightened cognitive capacities understand that these events are already embedded within the natural order and, thus, do not contravene its established laws.⁴⁶² Furthermore, according to Ibn Sīnā, the ability to perform miracles is an intrinsic aspect of a prophet's nature. It is a rare

⁴⁶² See Metin Pay, 'İslam Düşüncesinde Bazı Mucize Telakkileri', *Dini Araştırmalar* 18, no. 47 (2015): 146–171; İsmail Erdoğan, 'İslam Filozoflarına Göre Nübüvvet ve Mucize', *Fırat Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 1, no. 1 (1996): 436–437, 439. As is well known, the deterministic understanding of nature embraced by philosophers was strongly criticised by al-Ghazālī, a famous contemporary of Nasafī. Al-Ghazālī famously states that our consistent observation of events occurring in a specific order—namely, the connection between cause and effect—leads us to assume that these events are inherently interconnected. However, al-Ghazālī challenges this by asking what grounds we have to confidently assert a causal connection. We observe only that one event follows another, but philosophers lack evidence to support a necessary causal relationship beyond this observation. For instance, they note that burning occurs when fire touches an object, linking the occurrence of burning with the touch of fire based solely on prior observations. Yet, these observations do not provide a solid basis to assert a necessary causal relationship. At best, they indicate simultaneity, not causality. In fact, the act of burning upon touching fire is not a necessity; rather, it is God who continuously creates the sensation of burning upon the fire's touch, as a manifestation of His divine custom ('*āda*). See Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā, 9th ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 2007), 65–69. For a detailed analysis of al-Ghazālī's rejection of natural causality, see Michael E. Marmura, 'Ghazali and Demonstrative Science', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (1965): 183–204.

occurrence for matter (*hayūlā*) to take on its perfect form (*ṣūra*) in the natural realm. Yet, certain extraordinary events —matter assuming its perfect form—transpire when prophets enter this world, and it is thanks to these events that we set them apart from the rest of humanity. Ordinary people assume that prophets can manipulate natural phenomena, but in reality, these extraordinary acts are nothing more than matter achieving its perfect form. However, as noted, such occurrences are infrequent or very rare, which accounts for the scarcity of prophets throughout history.⁴⁶³ Now that we have clarified the contradictions between Nasafī’s definition of *mu’jiza*, which he attributes to *falāsifa*, and their actual perspectives, we can proceed to examine the definition of *mu’jiza* that he attributes to *mutakallimūn*.

Nasafī reports that, according to *mutakallimūn*,⁴⁶⁴ a *mu’jiza* is an event that occurs within the realm of legal responsibility (*dār al-taklīf*) and is characterised by its departure from the regular laws or patterns (*‘āda*) observed in nature. These extraordinary acts are beyond the ability of humans to perform; they are directly performed by God. Nevertheless, these acts are demonstrated through a prophet as evidence to validate their claim to prophethood. In short, these extraordinary acts serve as divine attestations to the legitimacy of a prophet’s message. Nasafī emphasises the precision and significance of each term used in the definition. Accordingly, to reach a comprehensive and precise definition, each word is carefully selected to convey a specific aspect of the concept at hand and to exclude any possible and unintended

⁴⁶³ Hülya Alper, ‘İbn Sînâ ve Bâkılânî Örneğinde İslâm Filozofları ile Kelâmcıların Nübüvvet Anlayışının Kur’ânî Perspektifle Değerlendirilmesi,’ *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 28 (2005): 60–61.

⁴⁶⁴ Although he does not specify who he means by ‘*mutakallimūn*,’ it is most likely that he is referring to the theologians of his own tradition in Transoxiana. In his *Tabşira*, Nasafī provides a complete list of scholars from his tradition (see *Tabşira*, 1:468–475), spanning from his era up to Abū Ḥanīfa, including al-Māturīdī, whose relevance to the list will be discussed in the final chapter.

interpretations. For example, the phrase ‘*dār al-taklīf*’ refers specifically to the realm of legal responsibility, that is, the world we live in. By including this term in the definition, Nasafī or the theologians to whom he attributes this definition, distinguishes between miraculous events that occur within this world and those that pertain to the afterlife. This distinction ensures that the extraordinary acts in the hereafter are not categorised as *mu‘jiza*.⁴⁶⁵

Nasafī states that throughout history, God has sent many prophets to provide guidance to humanity. One way these prophets validated their divine mission was by performing miracles that defied natural laws, occurring solely by the will of God. He provides various examples of such miracles, including those associated with the prophets Ibrāhīm (Abraham), Mūsā (Moses), and ‘Īsā (Jesus). For example, he recounts the story of Abraham being thrown into a fire by his adversaries, but miraculously, God intervened to make the fire cool and peaceful, ensuring Abraham’s safety and allowing him to emerge unscathed. He also recounts the story in which Moses’ staff transformed into a snake in the presence of Pharaoh and his splitting of the Red Sea to facilitate his followers’ escape from Pharaoh’s pursuit. Furthermore, he notes Jesus’ reputation for performing healing acts, such as restoring sight to the blind, curing lepers, and bringing the dead back to life. Additionally, he mentions an account in which Jesus formed birds from mud and brought them to life by the will of God.⁴⁶⁶

In response to the objection that we do not have the opportunity to witness these miracles today and therefore should not accept them as evidence, he replies, although these miracles were witnessed first-hand or through direct experience (*mushāhada*) by those who were present,

⁴⁶⁵ For a detailed analysis of the reasons behind the preference for each word or expression in the given definition, see Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:30–31.

⁴⁶⁶ For further examples of miraculous events shown by various prophets, see Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:38.

subsequent generations come to know the reality of these events through numerous reliable sources (*al-khabar al-mutawātir*), which Nasafī considers to convey necessary knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-ḍarūrī*). Reports of the *mutawātir* type form the foundation of our knowledge about various matters, such as distant lands we have never visited or nations that have disappeared from the stage of history, as discussed in detail in the previous chapter. According to Nasafī, the certainty of knowledge obtained from mass-transmitted reports is equivalent to that acquired through direct observation. In other words, the level of certainty in both cases is the same as if it had been witnessed first-hand. This is because it is illogical for a large number of people to converge on a falsehood, given that individuals have different natures, desires, and objectives, which would lead to different motivations for various fabrications.⁴⁶⁷ The miraculous events in question were confirmed by multiple individuals through sensory knowledge (*ḥiss* or *tajriba*), which Nasafī regards as one of the most reliable sources of knowledge. Consequently, the details of these remarkable events were transmitted to future generations through mass-transmitted reports.⁴⁶⁸ Therefore, according to Nasafī, individuals possessing this type of knowledge about miracles are on par with those who witnessed these miracles with their own eyes.

Nasafī argues that human reason alone cannot disprove miracles because any argument against miracles based on reason can also be countered by reason itself. Therefore, reason is not an absolute tool for disproving miracles, as it can be used to argue both for and against the reality of miracles. He supports his idea by pointing out the limitedness of human reason. Accordingly, in the context of the issue at hand, reason can only provide inferential (*istidlālī*) knowledge,

⁴⁶⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:38; *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 46.

⁴⁶⁸ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:39; *Tamhīd*, 45.

which is not infallible and is always vulnerable to error (*khaṭa*). He then contrasts the fallible nature of inferential knowledge with sensory knowledge, arguing that if one's senses are sound or healthy, sensory experience provides necessary knowledge (*al-ilm al-ḍarurī*)—as discussed previously, it is certain, free from error, and indisputable within his epistemology. This knowledge of miracles, gained through direct sensory experience, is then passed down through widely transmitted reports, which are also deemed by him to provide necessary knowledge. In the case of a conflict between inferential knowledge and the knowledge gained through sensory experiences, one of the two must be rejected. If a choice must be made, it is more reasonable to reject the one that is vulnerable to error.⁴⁶⁹ As a result, concerning miracles, we can say that Nasafī prioritises the knowledge gained through direct sensory experience—and also the widely transmitted versions of these sensory experiences—over inferential propositions.

Miracles are fundamentally different from the illusions or magic tricks performed by magicians. These individuals sharpen their craft through years of practice, which, in turn, enables them to present seemingly impossible acts or incidents that deceive their spectators through sleight of hand and trickery. However, the awe and wonder inspired by magic tricks diminish

⁴⁶⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:39–40. Nasafī appears to regard sensory experience as infallible if aligned with its conditions, such as having healthy senses and being free from external causes that might distort perception. However, his contemporary al-Ghazālī asserts in his renowned work *Munqidh* that knowledge acquired through the senses is prone to error. See Abū Hāmid al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl = Deliverance from Error and Mystical Union with the Almighty*, ed. Muḥammad Abū Layla and Nūrshīf ‘Abd al-Raḥīm Rif‘at, trans. Muḥammad Abū Layla (Washington D.C.: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2001), 164–167 (pages refer to the Arabic text). For more on al-Ghazālī’s discussion of sense perception and its fallibility, see Nabil Y. Mohamed, *Ghazālī’s Epistemology: A Critical Study of Doubt and Certainty* (London, New York: Routledge, 2024), 22–23; D. C. Muolder, ‘The First Crisis in the Life of AlḠhazālī’, *Islamic Studies* 11, no. 2 (1972): 115, 120–121.

over time as people uncover and understand the methods behind the illusions. Once the secrets behind the tricks are revealed, the sense of mystery and wonder fades away. In contrast, miracles gain more certainty and continue to inspire awe and wonder as people delve deeper into their investigation of how these miraculous acts occur. Therefore, upon closer examination, miracles are understood to be divine interventions from a higher power, whereas it comes to light that magic tricks are merely forms of entertainment with no inherent spiritual or metaphysical significance.⁴⁷⁰

Lastly, on the topic of miracles, Nasafī questions why humans, having accepted the existence of God through rational argumentation, still find miraculous occurrences difficult to believe or accept.⁴⁷¹ Everything in existence, whether accident or substance, is created by God, who is omnipotent. If God can create the entire universe out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), performing miracles within that universe is certainly within His power. This is because God is not only the creator of the physical world but also the author of the natural laws that govern it. As the ultimate authority, God has the power to suspend or override these laws when necessary.⁴⁷²

Nasafī argues that one of the most compelling proofs for the legitimacy of prophecy is humanity's detailed knowledge of various substances (*jawāhir*) in the natural world. He categorises these substances into three main groups: food, which sustains life; poison, which can harm or kill; and medicine, which can heal or treat illnesses. He argues that despite humans' inability to discern certain qualities of substances solely through rational means or empirical

⁴⁷⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:41.

⁴⁷¹ As he stated at the beginning of the discussion, Nasafī directs these arguments at those who share his belief in the existence and oneness of God.

⁴⁷² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:40.

observation, humans possess remarkably detailed knowledge about them. For example, we know the precise dosages of drugs and the circumstances under which they produce therapeutic or harmful effects. Nasafī asserts that individuals who possess this detailed knowledge of substances did not attain it through logical reasoning or empirical means but rather through instruction from a knowledgeable teacher or mentor. He suggests that if someone were to question the origin of our medical knowledge, it would be attributed to the ancient Greek physician Hippocrates (Buqrāt), who is widely regarded as the father of modern medicine. If asked where Hippocrates acquired his knowledge, people would respond that he received it from the supreme Asclepius (Isqilīnūs) —a figure from Greek mythology associated with healing and medicine— who ascended to the heavens with his soul and acquired it.⁴⁷³ In conclusion, the depth and precision of human knowledge about substances, essential for human health and survival, surpass what can be achieved through purely human endeavours. Therefore, Nasafī posits that this knowledge serves as evidence of divine intervention in human affairs, reinforcing the legitimacy of prophethood.

The study of astronomy, or the study of celestial bodies (*al-‘ilm bi al-nujūm*), serves as additional evidence supporting the truthfulness and reality of prophecy.⁴⁷⁴ Nasafī suggests that the detailed knowledge humans have about celestial bodies contributes to the legitimacy of prophecy. Accordingly, without advanced tools, especially given the tremendous distances between us and celestial bodies, obtaining accurate and detailed knowledge about them is impossible for humans. Therefore, he asserts that even individuals with exceptional sensory

⁴⁷³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:35–36.

⁴⁷⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:36.

perception and abundant intellects (*al-‘uqūl al-wāfira*) could not acquire knowledge about celestial bodies without divine assistance. Nasafī reports a common belief among astronomers that their knowledge originates from Hermes Trismegistus (Harmas al-Ḥakīm), a legendary figure associated with ancient wisdom and mysticism. According to his report, Hermes gained insight into the stars through direct observation (*mushāhada*) during his spiritual ascent in the kingdom of the heavens (*malakūt al-samawāt*). Nasafī notes that many historians of his era identified Hermes Trismegistus as the prophet Idrīs, a figure well-known to the people of the Maghreb.⁴⁷⁵ Nasafī further expands on the scope of knowledge transmitted through prophethood. Accordingly, information on how people will perpetuate their lineages and details regarding the transformation of the natures of substances through various processing methods have also been taught by prophets.⁴⁷⁶ Following these observations, Nasafī concludes that the widespread presence of our body of knowledge regarding various fields across cultures and civilisations suggests a common origin rooted in divine teachings delivered by prophets.

Prophets played a significant role not only in spiritual guidance but also in transmitting practical knowledge and skills related to basic human professions.⁴⁷⁷ For example, they imparted knowledge on constructing shelters to protect against harsh weather and potential threats from

⁴⁷⁵ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:36.

⁴⁷⁶ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:37. He could be referring to *sīmyā*, a specific branch of alchemy during medieval times, focused on manipulating and altering the inherent properties of materials to produce substances often perceived as having superior qualities. Examples include the transmutation of base metals into gold or the creation of an elixir of life, believed to grant immortality or cure all diseases. This branch of alchemy was not only a precursor to modern chemistry but also deeply intertwined with philosophical, mystical, and spiritual ideas. Some translate it as ‘white magic’ or ‘natural magic.’ For more on this, see Jaime C. Cordero, ‘La Sīmiyā’ En al-Andalus’, *El Futuro Del Pasado* 1 (2010): 451–463.

⁴⁷⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:36.

animals. Nasafī also presents bread-making as an example of practical knowledge that required divine assistance for its discovery. Given that it is a complex process from growing grain to baking bread, humans could not have developed such skills solely through trial and error. He cites dressmaking as another essential skill taught by prophets. Additionally, knowledge such as how to tame predatory animals and benefit from them was also conveyed through prophecy. According to Nasafī, while prophets provided the foundational knowledge and skills, humans further developed and refined their expertise in various professions using their innate reasoning abilities. In summary, the presence of practical knowledge and skills among humans is evidence of the crucial role prophethood played in shaping human civilisation and advancing various fields. The breadth and depth of human knowledge and skills in basic professions stand as evidence supporting the reality of prophethood in human history.⁴⁷⁸

Nasafī also claims that the first language spoken by humanity was taught by prophets. From this original language, he believes that other languages evolved and diversified over time.⁴⁷⁹ Nasafī does not provide detailed information about the original language from which all later languages emerged, indicating that his focus was more on the role of prophets in the transmission of language rather than on the specifics of linguistic origins.

The question of the origin of languages (*aşl al-luġha*) has been a subject of inquiry and discussion within Islamic scholarship. For instance, the theory of *iştilāh* proposes an alternative explanation for the origin of language, suggesting that it emerged through the collective agreement and consensus of human beings (*muwāda‘a*). The theory of *iştilāh* is often associated

⁴⁷⁸ Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 2:36.

⁴⁷⁹ Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 2:37.

with the Mu‘tazila school of Islamic theology but has also found acceptance among Sunni theologians. Nasafī appears to align himself with the theory of *tawqīf*, which posits that language was directly taught to humanity by God through the agency of prophets. Later Muslim scholars accepted that both theories were plausible, with some even suggesting a synthesis, asserting that language’s origin is partly divine teaching and partly a product of human effort. Yet, during the 9th and 10th centuries, there was a clear division in opinions on the origins of language: orthodox scholars supported *tawqīf*, suggesting language was divinely given, while arch-rationalists favoured *iştilāh*, arguing that language evolved through human consensus.⁴⁸⁰

Nasafī concludes his arguments by asserting that one must accept the teachings brought by prophets, regardless of whether they are validated by miracles. He stresses the importance of embracing these truths for their intrinsic merit rather than depending solely on the occurrence of extraordinary acts. He argues that the truths communicated by prophets are inherently apparent or intuitive and naturally resonate with individuals who maintain their original disposition (*fiṭra*). In other words, the teachings of the prophets, such as urging individuals to seek closeness (*taqarrub*) to God through spiritual purification, express gratitude (*shukr*) for divine blessings, and uphold ethical and political virtues (*al-siyāsā al-faḍīla*), are all essential for leading a dignified and honourable life. Therefore, prophetic teachings are intuitively recognised by those who have managed to preserve their innate nature. Sound reasoning (*al-‘aql al-ṣarīh*) cannot find fault with these teachings, as they are truths embedded within human nature by God.⁴⁸¹ To sum

⁴⁸⁰ For more on this debate regarding the origin of language among Muslim scholars, see Mustafa Shah, ‘Classical Islamic Discourse on the Origins of Language: Cultural Memory and the Defense of Orthodoxy’, *Numen* 58, no. 2–3 (2011): 315–316.

⁴⁸¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:44.

up, Nasafī argues that accepting the truths delivered by prophets is a natural and logical outcome, as these teachings align with core human values and are upheld by reason. Individuals who retain their inherent disposition are likely to readily recognise the authenticity of these teachings, even in the absence of extraordinary acts.

3. Legitimacy of the Prophet of Islam

First of all, according to Nasafī, in terms of reason, the idea of Muhammad being a prophet is neither unusual nor impossible. In fact, his prophethood aligns with God’s practice (*sunnat Allāh*), as prophethood is a recurring phenomenon in human history by the will of God.⁴⁸² His role as a prophet is part of this continuous and familiar tradition, tracing back to the first prophet, Adam. Thus, given that prophethood is a recurring tradition and considering Muhammad’s alignment with it, a reasonable person should initially be open to the possibility that Muhammad is truthful in his claim to prophethood. Therefore, the first step for a rational person is to examine Muhammad and what he brought from God before forming any judgments or assumptions about his prophethood.⁴⁸³ Nasafī points out that God emphasises this approach in the Quran when instructing Muhammad on how to interact with those who deny his prophetic claim or are hesitant to consider the possibility that his message might be true. He references the following verses as examples:

Say: “I am no bringer of new-fangled doctrine among the messengers, nor do I know what will be done with me or with you ...” (Quran, 46:9).

Is it a matter of wonderment to men that We have sent Our inspiration to a man from among themselves? ... (Quran, 10:2).

⁴⁸² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:45.

⁴⁸³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:45–46.

... there never was a people, without a warner having lived among them [in the past.] (Quran, 35:24.)

Then sent We our messengers in succession ... (Quran, 23:44).

Nasafī emphasises that, out of His divine wisdom, it is unthinkable that God would abandon people to their own devices. Because of His compassion for humanity, God bestows divine guidance upon them through prophets for their benefit. Prophets do not volunteer for or choose their role as messengers; rather, they are chosen by God, often contrary to their own preferences, to deliver His message to humanity. Regardless of whether people are willing to listen and follow this message, prophets are tasked with conveying it faithfully. The ordeals and sufferings endured by the Prophet and other prophets throughout history underscore the truth of their missions and serve as proof of their sincerity.⁴⁸⁴

The moral purity and righteousness of the Prophet are among the most compelling proofs of his prophethood. No records exist, even from his enemies, of him telling a lie even once during his lifetime. Nor is it known that he committed any sinful acts or engaged in conduct for which he was censured. Despite facing various hardships, persecution, and torment, both he and his followers remained steadfast. He never abandoned his companions (*aṣḥāb*) or fled the battlefield. His resilience in the face of such severe adversity, without faltering, suggests he received divine assistance. Without such help, it would be unimaginable for an ordinary man to persevere in his cause amid such challenges. He was not known to be quarrelsome, to engage in unseemly actions, or to be overly jestful, further demonstrating his dignity, restraint, and good moral character. He did not seek to please or ingratiate himself with others for personal gain.

⁴⁸⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:46; *Tamhīd*, 58.

Following his appointment as a prophet, he dedicated his life to spreading God’s message and guiding people towards truth and righteousness. He was exceptionally kind, compassionate, and merciful, to the extent that his concern for others’ well-being began to affect him adversely, prompting divine warnings like, “... So let not thy soul go out in (vainly) sighing after them: for Allāh knows well all that they do!”⁴⁸⁵ His life of generosity and selflessness is well-documented. We know that he did not accumulate worldly possessions for the future and that he spent all he had on the poor and for the success of his divine mission. His extreme generosity even led to the following divine warning in the Quran: “Make not thy hand tied (like a niggard’s) to thy neck, nor stretch it forth to its utmost reach, so that thou become blameworthy and destitute.”⁴⁸⁶ The Meccan polytheists offered him numerous worldly possessions and privileges, such as mansions, horses, wealth, desirable spouses, and leadership over Mecca, all of which he declined, remaining committed to his mission to spreading God’s message. He openly and courageously opposed his powerful relatives, the Meccan leaders, and the rulers of empires of his time in the name of God, undeterred by their strength. His moral excellence was so profound that even his adversaries acknowledged it. Some of the Prophet’s enemies even trusted him with their belongings due to their recognition of Muhammad’s honesty and righteousness. Because of this, he was known even before his prophetic mission as ‘Muhammad the Trustworthy’ (*Muḥammad al-Amīn*). The Prophet’s virtuous life, acknowledged even by his opponents, demonstrates that he was nurtured, supported, and morally disciplined by the Divine.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁵ Quran, 35:8.

⁴⁸⁶ Quran, 17:29.

⁴⁸⁷ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 2:54–55.

He grew up in a tribe of Bedouin people, who had almost no knowledge of books or formal education. The majority of them were illiterate, nomadic animal herders in the Arabian deserts. The Prophet never left his tribe except for a brief trade journey to Damascus. He did not meet or receive teachings from anyone in Mecca among the clergy of the People of the Book or those knowledgeable in the Law (*sharī'a*) of previous nations. Despite this, he conveyed information about previous prophets and nations that was unknown to his tribe members. Historians have not recorded that the Prophet underwent any formal training or dedicated himself to any educational pursuits.⁴⁸⁸ Regarding this, the Quran states:

Or do they not recognise their Messenger, that they deny him? (Quran, 23:69).

And thou wast not (able) to recite a Book before this (Book came), nor art thou (able) to transcribe it with thy right hand: In that case, indeed, would the talkers of vanities have doubted (Quran, 29:48).

... [A] whole lifetime before this have I tarried amongst you: will ye not then understand? (Quran, 10:16).

Nasafī argues that those who earnestly reflect on the facts presented in the verses will not hesitate to acknowledge his prophethood.⁴⁸⁹

In another argument, Nasafī claims that earlier divine scriptures sent by God foretold the coming of Prophet Muhammad.⁴⁹⁰ He references the following verse from the Torah: “I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him” (Deuteronomy 18:18). Nasafī interprets the term ‘brethren’ as referring to the descendants of Ishmael, the son of Abraham.

⁴⁸⁸ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:59.

⁴⁸⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:59; *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 61.

⁴⁹⁰ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 54; *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 68.

Since Abraham is the common patriarch of both the sons of Israel (*banī Isrāʿīl*), through his grandson Jacob (also known as Israel), and the sons of Ishmael (*banī Ismāʿīl*), through his son Ishmael, Nasafī argues that the descendants of Ishmael—the twelve tribes from his lineage—are the brethren of the twelve tribes descended from Jacob (Israel). In short, the word ‘brethren’ indicates the brothers of the Israelites, namely, the sons of Ishmael; thus, the predicted prophet would emerge from among the sons of Ishmael. Nasafī notes that among the descendants of Ishmael, Prophet Muhammad has been the only figure to claim prophethood by referencing the tradition of the Old Testament prophets or by situating himself within that prophetic lineage. The prophet’s lineage and the absence of other Ishmaelite prophets in the Old Testament tradition suggest that the prophecy about the forthcoming prophet, mentioned in Jewish scriptures, is fulfilled in Prophet Muhammad. Moreover, he asserts that since no other prophet introduced a new religious law like Moses did (I will raise up for them a Prophet like you) after Moses himself, except for Prophet Muhammad, the prophecy cannot pertain to any Israelite prophets. Consequently, he maintains that the Jewish interpretation of this prophecy, which suggests it refers to an Israelite prophet, is incorrect. This is because the Israelite prophets following Moses do not conform to his prophetic model, particularly in not introducing a new law, and they are not from the Ishmaelite lineage. According to Nasafī, these points collectively confirm that Prophet Muhammad is the fulfilment of the prophecy in the Old Testament.⁴⁹¹

Nasafī also cites numerous passages from the New Testament, claiming that the term “Παράκλητος / Paraklētos” (which he refers to as “Fāraqḷīṭ” or “Bāraqḷīṭ”) signifies Prophet

⁴⁹¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:63–64. For the other two cases from the book of Zabūr, the holy book of David (Dāwūd), cited by Nasafī as evidence of the Prophet’s prophethood; see Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:64.

Muhammad. For instance, John 14:26 states: “The Paraklētōs, the soul of the truth, whom my Father will send in my name, will teach you everything” (*Fāraqliṭ rūḥ al-ḥaqq alladhī yursiluhū abī bi al-ismī wa-huwa ya ‘lamukum kullu shay’*).⁴⁹² Nasafī notes that earlier Muslim scholars have thoroughly examined these references in their works and identified numerous passages that point to the Prophet. Furthermore, he mentions that these scholars found numerous signs in earlier scriptures which not only point to Prophet Muhammad but also to his Companions, Mecca, the Kaaba, the sacred sanctuary (Ḥaram), and so forth.⁴⁹³ However, he does not specify any scholars or their works. He criticises the Jewish and Christian scholars of his time for distorting (*tahrīf*) such verses, misinterpreting them, and straying from their original meanings.⁴⁹⁴

The original Greek term in the verse Nasafī references is “Paraklētōs” (*Παράκλητος*), often translated as “Helper,” “Advocate,” “Counselor,” or “Comforter” by Christian scholars. According to them, Paraklētōs refers to the Holy Spirit, who is sent to assist and live in believers, guiding them, interceding for them, and comforting them. The interpretation of Paraklētōs as referring to the Prophet Muhammad is part of an Islamic perspective on biblical prophecies. Nasafī and many other Muslim scholars suggest that Jesus, in the New Testament, predicted the coming of another prophet after him, whom they identify as Muhammad. This interpretation is primarily derived from certain passages in the Gospel of John (14:16, 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7),

⁴⁹² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:64. The passage is translated in the New King James Version as: “But the Helper [Paraklētōs], the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). ‘New Testament/John’, Bible Gateway, accessed 16 March 2024, <https://www.biblegateway.com>.

⁴⁹³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:64.

⁴⁹⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:64–65.

where Jesus speaks of the Paraklētōs who will come after him. While Christians understand these passages to refer to the Holy Spirit, some Muslim scholars argue that the characteristics and role described for the Paraklētōs fit the Prophet Muhammad more than they do the Holy Spirit. They highlight attributes such as guiding people to all truth, glorifying Jesus, and speaking what he hears from God, which, from their perspective, align with Muhammad’s role as a prophet. Additionally, some Islamic scholars point to linguistic arguments, suggesting that the original word used might have been “Periklytos” (Περικλύτος), meaning “the Praised One”, which is similar to the meaning of “Muhammad” (from the root *h-m-d*, which means “to praise”) in Arabic. The term Periklytos is sometimes brought up in Islamic interpretations as a word that could have been used in the original texts to refer to Prophet Muhammad. However, Christian apologetics argue that the word used in the existing Greek manuscripts of the New Testament is “Paraklētōs” (Παράκλητος), not “Periklytos” (Περικλύτος). On the other hand, some Muslim scholars argue that a translator or later copyist could have confused the two words or corrupted it intentionally.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹⁵ For more on these Muslim apologetic arguments and the Christian understanding of ‘Paraklētōs,’ see Seyyed S. R. Montazery and Saeed Karimpur, ‘The History of the Idea of a Literal Connection between the Words “Ahmad” and “Paraclete” in the Quran and the Gospel of John’, *Religious Inquiries*, no. 13 (2018): 113–129; Sean W. Anthony, ‘Muḥammad, Menahem, and the Paraclete: New Light on Ibn Ishāq’s (d. 150/767) Arabic Version of John 15: 23–16: 1’, *Bulletin of SOAS* 79, no. 2 (2016): 255–278; Edward Malatesta, ‘The Spirit/Paraclete in the Fourth Gospel’, *Biblica* 54, no. 4 (1973): 539–550; D. A. Carson, ‘The Function of the Paraclete in John 16:7-11’, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98, no. 4 (1979): 547–566. Christian teachings have often been used by early Muslim scholars to support Islamic beliefs, particularly the legitimacy of prophethood in general and that of the Prophet Muhammad in particular. For al-Māturīdī’s criticism of the Christian belief in Jesus as the Divine Son of God, as well as his claim regarding Jesus as a respected member of the same prophetic tradition to which the Prophet Muhammad belongs, see David Thomas, *Christian Doctrines in Islamic Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 82–117.

Nasafī also cites the following verses from the Quran, which inform us that Muhammad’s prophethood was foretold in the Jewish and Christian scriptures:

Those who follow the messenger, the unlettered Prophet, whom they find mentioned in their own (scriptures), —in the law and the Gospel;— for he commands them what is just and forbids them what is evil; he allows them as lawful what is good (and pure) and prohibits them from what is bad (and impure) ... (Quran, 7:157).

And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said: “O Children of Israel! I am the messenger of Allāh (sent) to you, confirming the Law (which came) before me, and giving Glad Tidings of a Messenger to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad ...” (Quran, 61:6).

Ye People of the Book! Why reject ye the Signs of Allāh, of which ye are (Yourselves) witnesses? Ye People of the Book! Why do ye clothe Truth with falsehood, and conceal the Truth, while ye have knowledge? (Quran, 3:70–71).

Those to whom We have given the Book know this as they know their own sons. Those who have lost their own souls refuse therefore to believe. (Quran, 6:20).⁴⁹⁶

Nasafī highlights the verses in question and claims: “How could the Prophet consider it appropriate to instruct them to consult their own scriptures about his prophethood, especially knowing that they would find nothing there to affirm it?” Such an action, he was aware, would only intensify their animosity and divert them from his message. He says, “Despite this, the Prophet asserted, ‘The proof of my prophethood is in the scriptures you hold, which foretold my arrival.’” According to Nasafī, this sincerity of the Prophet demonstrates his truthfulness and authenticity.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁶ Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 2:65.

⁴⁹⁷ Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 2:65.

The Prophet's confident assertion that his prophethood was foretold in previous scriptures strongly demonstrate the authenticity of his claim. This is because such behaviour is not expected from someone who is unparalleled in shrewdness (*dahā`*), intelligence (*dhakā`*), and eloquence (*balāgha*). Furthermore, it is impossible for this conduct to originate from someone who is insane (*majnūn*), especially one of history's most impactful figures, whose teachings have proliferated globally despite significant opposition.⁴⁹⁸ Additionally, if the Prophet had been deceitful, why would knowledgeable Jewish and Christian scholars and clerics like 'Abdullāh bin Salām, Tamīm al-Dārī, and Ka'b convert to Islam, fully aware of his alleged falsehood? By presenting numerous examples similar to those mentioned here, Nasafī concludes that the Prophet's mission was indeed predicted in earlier scriptures.⁴⁹⁹

According to Nasafī, prophecies in the Quran about future events also substantiate the authenticity of Prophet Muhammad's claim. One of the most notable prophecies is the following:

The Byzantines have been defeated in the nearest land. But they, after their defeat, will overcome within three to nine years. To Allāh belongs the command before and after. And that day the believers will rejoice in the victory of Allāh. He gives victory to whom He wills, and He is the Exalted in Might, the Merciful. [It is] the promise of Allāh. Allāh does not fail in His promise, but most of the people do not know. (Quran, 30:2–6).

Nasafī says, the Roman Empire's triumph, predicted in this Quranic verse, came to fruition, despite the prevailing expectation of their defeat, even by their own emperor.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁸ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:65.

⁴⁹⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:65–66.

⁵⁰⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:67.

The Quran itself, as a miracle, represents the most perfect and clear proof of his prophethood.⁵⁰¹ These proofs and miracles are tangible (*hissī*) and logical (*‘aqlī*), meaning they can be tested through senses and reason. Moreover, they are universal, not confined to a specific time and place, unlike other miracles associated with previous prophets. Most people cannot directly verify those earlier miracles, instead relying on the mass-transmitted reports (*al-akhbār al-mutawātira*). In contrast, the miracles of the Quran are accessible to everyone for direct experience. A prime example of these miracles is the Quran’s unique arrangement and versification (*naẓm*), which evokes a profound sense of awe and mystery, setting it apart from all other texts. At first glance, one might categorise the Quran’s content as prose (*manthūr*) or as poetic or rhythmic (*manzūm*), yet it transcends these conventional categories.⁵⁰² Nasafī emphasises that the Quran is distinct from all recognised Arabic literary forms, such as poetry (*shi‘r*), *rajaz* (a form of classical Arabic poetry), sermons (*khutba*), and treatises (*risāla*) —a fact acknowledged even by Quraysh critics. Introducing a novel literary form that deviates from those known to entire cultures, with its complex and varied rhythms, is beyond human capability. Nasafī argues that this exceptional literary achievement underscores the Quran’s divine origin, especially considering its revelation to an individual who was illiterate.⁵⁰³

Nasafī states that numerous verses in the Quran encourage people to contemplate and reason about the universe as evidence of God’s existence. This aspect of the Quran suggests that it is the word of the Creator, who best understands the intricacies of His creation. He cites the following verses as examples:

⁵⁰¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:77.

⁵⁰² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:78.

⁵⁰³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:77–78.

On the earth are signs for those of assured Faith. As also in your own selves:
Will ye not then see? (Quran, 51:20–21).

Were they created of nothing, or were they themselves the creators? Or did they create the heavens and the earth? Nay, they have no firm belief. (Quran, 52:35–36).

Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which Allāh sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they Trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth;- (Here) indeed are Signs for a people that are wise. (Quran, 2:164).

The Quran, which promotes reflection on the universe, along with the explicit examples provided, is designed to be intelligible even to the simplest minds. This facet of the Quran demonstrates that there is a creator of the universe, and the author of the Quran is undoubtedly the Creator Himself, validating the Prophet's claim.⁵⁰⁴

Nasafī argues that the eloquence and certainty of the arguments in the Quran, which refute naturalism, demonstrate that this scripture is indeed a divine revelation. According to this perspective, nature, or natural substances and causes, is seen as the sole and original source of all existence, with its proponents attempting to explain everything around us through natural laws and forces.⁵⁰⁵ Nasafī suggests that, from a rational standpoint, proving the resurrection of dry bones and decomposed bodies is exceptionally challenging, as there is no way to test or observe what happens after death. However, the Quran points to humanity's initial creation, indicating

⁵⁰⁴ Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 2:88.

⁵⁰⁵ Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 2:88.

that for God, resurrecting humans after death is simpler compared to creating them from nothing initially. Nasafī argues that this reasoning appeals to both the intellectually sophisticated and the simple-minded. He maintains that despite the challenging nature of the problem, the Quran’s eloquent argumentation convincingly demonstrates the possibility of resurrection, further confirming the authenticity of the Prophet’s claims. The pertinent verses are:

And he puts forth for Us a parable and forgets his own creation. He says, “Who will give life to bones while they are decayed?” Say, “He will give them life who produced them the first time; for He is knowledgeable about all creation.”
(Quran, 36:78–79).

The depth of this inference (*istidlāl*) and its ability to eliminate any doubts about resurrection with such a concise explanation are indeed remarkable, strongly indicating that it is the word of God.⁵⁰⁶

The Prophet lived in a society that was oblivious to the proofs of God’s existence, unity, and attributes. It was not unusual for them to engage in idolatry and associate other beings with God. An illiterate man who had never pursued formal education or read any scholarly books emerged from such a primitive tribe. He spent the first forty years of his life in a rudimentary environment, devoid of opportunities to learn from knowledgeable teachers what he would later accomplish. Reflecting on his achievements after the age of forty, it seems inconceivable that a single individual could achieve so much in such a short period of time without divine assistance.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁶ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:88–89.

⁵⁰⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:91.

Nasafī dedicates the final section of his chapter on prophethood to the intricacies of Islamic Law (*Sharī'a*). He argues that the numerous subtleties and pieces of wisdom within the Law underscore the legitimacy of the Prophet's claim.⁵⁰⁸ Nasafī offers many other arguments to support the legitimacy of the Prophet. In fact, a substantial portion of *Tabṣira*, spanning over fifty pages, is devoted to these arguments in favour of Prophet Muhammad's prophethood. Nonetheless, the examples provided thus far are sufficient to grasp his perspective on the topic.

Nasafī's discussion on prophecy thus far shows that prophecy and divine scriptures are indispensable for imparting correct religious beliefs to humanity and guiding them towards a life aligned with those beliefs. However, from an Evidentialist perspective, making arbitrary exceptions in forming beliefs is unacceptable. For a belief to be justified, it must be supported by sufficient evidence, particularly empirical evidence, and the belief should correspond to reality or truth. Therefore, if one adopts Evidentialism and refuses to make arbitrary exceptions for religious beliefs, they must provide a reasonable explanation for why one ought to accept certain beliefs based on prophetic messages, about which they cannot possess epistemic certainty.

I term Nasafī's stance on the issue 'moderate Evidentialism' because it is Evidentialist in the sense that correct religious beliefs should be based on sufficient evidence and align with reality. In other words, one should believe that p only if there are sufficient epistemic reasons supporting p and if p aligns with truth. Then, prophets, as individuals responsible for teaching humanity correct religious beliefs and morals, ought never to believe in propositions for which they have no irrefutable evidence. Therefore, prophets possess no false beliefs, and prophetic knowledge contains no falsehoods.

⁵⁰⁸ For his arguments focusing on the subtleties of Islamic Law, see Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:92–103.

Nevertheless, Nasafi's stance differs from standard Evidentialism and comes closer to a non-Evidentialist approach because he acknowledges that ordinary individuals, aside from prophets, must believe in certain propositions even in the absence of sufficient evidence. Nasafi's solution to the problem and his rationale for the unique role of prophecy can be summarised as follows: Only prophets, due to their access to the Divine, can possess epistemic certainty for specific religious beliefs. Prophecy teaches us things we cannot learn otherwise. For instance, it instructs us on how to live our lives in a way that enables us to control our desires and achieve righteousness, neither of which can be achieved solely through ordinary means or human reasoning. Certain religious beliefs are necessary for everyone, including both the learned and laypeople, because only through these beliefs can one adhere to the instructions given by prophets. However, the necessity of these beliefs does not stem from epistemic reasons but from the unique place of prophecy in our overall body of knowledge. Proper epistemic grounds for these beliefs, in the sense of guaranteeing certain and true knowledge, are unavailable to ordinary humans. Therefore, we must learn to contend with imperfect knowledge —knowledge in the sense of lacking traditional epistemic means. This, however, does not mean that we should totally abandon Evidentialist principles in this domain. According to Nasafi, while humans cannot attain absolute epistemic certainty for certain religious beliefs and the moral values of specific actions (referred to by Nasafi as *wāsiṭ* or *mumkin* actions), we can justify these beliefs and their moral implications by verifying their prophetic origins, namely, by demonstrating the possibility and actuality of the prophetic tradition in human history.

In conclusion, this is the way through which Nasafi solves the issue of providing epistemic reasons for religious beliefs in the process of forming our doxastic attitudes. That is, (i) prophecy fulfils a unique function in our overall body of knowledge, which is not accessible

through conventional means, and therefore, (ii) epistemic reasons should be provided for the source, not the beliefs themselves. This is because only through prophetic wisdom can controlling human desires, leading a righteous life, and attaining eternal happiness be possible. This demonstrates that Nasafi does not make arbitrary exceptions, even for religious beliefs, within the overall domain of beliefs.

CHAPTER 4: ASSENT, HUMAN FREEDOM, AND FAITH⁵⁰⁹

1. What is Faith?

In his renowned work *Tabşirat al-Adilla*, Nasafî begins his investigation of faith (*īmān*) by noting the enduring debates among Islamic scholars about the true nature of faith.⁵¹⁰ According to Nasafî's account, the debates among Muslim scholars regarding the nature of faith have resulted in the emergence of various perspectives. He reports that some scholars assert that faith consists of three fundamental components: knowledge by the heart (*al-ma'rifa bi al-qalb*), open confession or declaration by the tongue (*al-iqrār bi al-lisān*), and practical implementation of faith in accordance with the pillars of Islam (*al-'amal bi al-arkān*) in one's life.⁵¹¹ On the other hand, some scholars suggest that faith is primarily a matter of the heart and tongue (*al-ma'rifa bi al-qalb and al-iqrār bi al-lisān*), with deeds or actions (*a'māl*) playing no significant role.⁵¹² Nasafî also notes the existence of various interpretations of these three components —*al-ma'rifa bi al-qalb, al-iqrār bi al-lisān, and al-'amal bi al-arkān*— and categorises each school of thought or individual based on their unique combination of these elements to define faith. In summary, Nasafî's exposition demonstrates that the definition of faith among Muslim theologians varies in terms of the number of essential elements. Some scholars recognise one

⁵⁰⁹ This chapter is an expanded and revised version of the author's previously published article. See Muhammet Saygi, 'Two Aspects of Faith and its Relation to Human Free Will in Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafî: A Philosophical Analysis', *Ankara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 64, no. 2 (2023): 277–314.

⁵¹⁰ Nasafî, *Tabşira*, 2:404.

⁵¹¹ Nasafî, *Tabşira*, 2:404.

⁵¹² Nasafî, *Tabşira*, 2:404.

aspect as constituting faith, others combine two, and still others consider all three to be necessary components of faith.

There is one group that merits particular attention due to their claim's close relation to the core discussion of this chapter. Nasafī reports that some argued faith is solely knowledge by the heart or knowledge that occurs in the heart (*al-ma'rifa bi al-qalb*).⁵¹³ In this context, 'ma'rifa' refers to the outcome or manifestation of the human cognitive faculty, that is, the knowledge through which the truthfulness of the Islamic creed is proven, validated, and justified. This group suggests that one should rigorously question and reflect upon the articles of the Islamic faith to establish their truthfulness. For this group, following such an inquiry, it is necessary for an individual to reach a substantiated conclusion or determination, supported by evidence (*dalīl*), concerning the authenticity of Islam. Therefore, according to this understanding, faith refers to the specific knowledge formed within the heart that affirms Islam as the true religion. The Jahmiyya school of thought, followers of Jahm bin Ṣafwān (d. 128/745-46) and considered the rationalists of early Islam, can be cited as adherents of this view. They are noted for being the first group to earnestly address the question of faith and its internal structure.⁵¹⁴ It appears they excluded all other aspects of faith, whether internal, such as submission (*khudū*), love (*maḥabba*), or glorification/exaltation (*ta'zīm*), or external, such as

⁵¹³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:405–6.

⁵¹⁴ Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept of Belief in Islamic Theology: A Semantic Analysis of Īmān and Islām* (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1965), 82.

confession by the tongue (*iqrār bi al-lisān*). According to al-Ash‘arī as well, this group equated faith solely with knowledge.⁵¹⁵

After presenting an overview of various perspectives on the meaning of the concept of *īmān*, Nasafī proceeds to discuss the widely accepted view held by Ahl al-Sunna, which defines faith as “the assent of the heart” (*al-taṣdīq bi al-qalb*). He credits Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 150/767)⁵¹⁶ and Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944) as pioneers of this view.⁵¹⁷

Interestingly, in his voluminous work *Tabṣira*, Nasafī does not explicitly state his own opinion on the nature of faith. However, he dedicates an entire chapter to defending the viewpoint of the Ahl al-Sunna.⁵¹⁸ Furthermore, in *Tabṣira* and in his shorter theological treatise, *al-Tamhīd fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, Nasafī examines and analyses the meanings of the word *īmān* as found in dictionaries and lexical sources. Ultimately, he concludes from his linguistic analysis that faith can be understood as nothing other than assent by the heart.⁵¹⁹ Considering these points and

⁵¹⁵ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa-al-Ikhtilāf al-Muṣallīn*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd, 2 vols (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1950), 1:197–98. Nasafī also notes that they adhered to this view. See Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:406.

⁵¹⁶ This assertion made by Nasafī regarding Abū Ḥanīfa’s position on faith will be discussed in the following chapter.

⁵¹⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:406. Abū Manṣūr defines faith as “*inna al-īmāna taṣdīqun*” (faith is indeed assent). This suggests that, in his understanding, faith involves affirming or agreeing to certain truths. Furthermore, the act of faith as assent is realised by the heart (*al-taṣdīqu yaqunu bi al-qalbi*), indicating that faith, according to him, is a matter of inner conviction or acceptance within one’s innermost being. See al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 471, 478–479.

⁵¹⁸ See Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:404–431.

⁵¹⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:406ff.; *Tamhīd*, 99. Ḥanafī-Māturīdīs had a Mu‘tazilī tendency toward optimism regarding the workings of language. They believed in the validity of the literal meaning and accepted deviation from it only if supported by strong evidence. See Zysow, *Economy of Certainty*, 109.

Nasafī’s steadfast commitment to Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Māturīdī, it is reasonable to infer that he shared the same interpretation of faith.

Nasafī’s primary argument in defence of the Ahl al-Sunna’s perspective revolves around how experts in language and linguistics, whom he refers to as *ahl al-lisān* (philologists or lexicographers), utilise the concept of *taṣdīq* and several other related notions. Nasafī states that, according to lexicologists, the word ‘faith’ (*īmān*) is regarded as the opposite or antonym of ‘unbelief’ (*kufr*).⁵²⁰ Thus, he also accepts that these two words have contrasting meanings in linguistic terms. Nasafī continues, the meaning of the word *kufr*, as understood by lexicologists, has two main aspects. The first is that it involves claiming something to be false or untrue (*takdhīb*), or in other words, declaring something as falsehood. The second aspect is that *kufr* also means to deny or disacknowledge (*juḥūd*) the truth content of something. Nasafī states that if we examine the antonyms of *takdhīb* and *juḥūd*, they lead us to the concept of ‘assent’ (*taṣdīq*). He argues that, based on this linguistic analysis, attributing any meaning to *īmān* other than *taṣdīq* is incorrect, as such an attribution would deviate from the term’s intended or original meaning.⁵²¹ In simpler terms, the gist of Nasafī’s argument is that faith is the means by which one transitions from the state of non-belief to belief, and conversely, unbelief is the means by which one transitions from the state of belief to non-belief. Lexicographers’ use of *īmān* and *kufr* as antonyms confirms that *īmān* is equivalent to or synonymous with *taṣdīq*.

⁵²⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:406. As Nasafī noted, the words ‘faith’ and ‘unbelief’ are often used as antonyms in the Quran. For instance, “There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion. The right course has become clear from the wrong. So whoever disbelieves in Taghut and believes in Allah has grasped the most trustworthy handhold with no break in it. And Allah is Hearing and Knowing.” Quran, 2:256.

⁵²¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:406–408.

Nasafī opposes and refutes the arguments and assertions of various other schools and individuals that claim faith is something other than, or more than, mere assent by the heart. He firmly asserts that all views, except those of Ahl al-Sunna, must be rejected, as he believes faith can be nothing more than *taṣḍīq*. In this context, he criticises those who consider deeds an integral part of faith and, interestingly, supports his position by even referencing the views of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī. Nasafī claims that al-Ash‘arī also recognised *īmān* as assent by the heart and criticised those who view deeds or Islamic practices (*a‘māl* or *af‘āl*) as components of *īmān*.⁵²²

One of the interesting aspects of Nasafī is that he occasionally incorporates the views of Abū Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, the founder of the Ash‘arī school of theology, into his own arguments. This typically occurs when there is complete agreement between the Māturīdīs and the Ash‘arīs. One such example of this is their agreement on the concept that faith is assent, as quoted by Nasafī above. When al-Ash‘arī’s works are examined, it becomes clear that his ideas on faith were not static, but rather evolved over time, as he proposes two different definitions of faith. The first of these definitions is very close to the definition held by the traditionalists (Ahl al-Ḥadīth),⁵²³ while the second is the same as the definition that Nasafī attributed to al-Ash‘arī above. As is well known, after he left the Mu‘tazila, al-Ash‘arī adopted the beliefs of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth and defended their positions in his theological works. In *al-Ibāna*, written after he deserted the Mu‘tazila, al-Ash‘arī defines faith as consisting of both verbal declaration (*qawl*)

⁵²² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:406.

⁵²³ “Confession by the tongue, assent by the heart, and practice with the limbs” (*qawl bi al-lisān wa-taṣḍīq bi al-janān wa-‘amal bi al-arkān*). See William M. Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 135.

and practice (‘*amal*’).⁵²⁴ Clearly, this definition does not include inner assent. However, in his later work, *al-Luma‘*, written during his clashes with the Mu‘tazilites, he abandons the earlier definition and defines faith solely as assent. He also claims that there is a consensus among scholars on this definition (*huwa al-taṣḍīq bi Allāhi wa-‘alā dhālika ijmā‘*).⁵²⁵ It seems that he later found the earlier definition of faith unsound in his debates with Mu‘tazilite scholars. The omission of any mention of al-Ash‘arī’s earlier definition of faith by later Ash‘arī scholars, such as al-Bāqillānī, al-Juwaynī, and al-Ghazālī, supports the idea that al-Ash‘arī later adopted faith as assent, since his aforementioned followers also use al-Ash‘arī’s later definition.⁵²⁶ In addition, other Māturīdī scholars besides Nasafī, such as al-Pazdawī and al-Ṣābūnī, also recount that al-Ash‘arī understood faith solely as assent.⁵²⁷ This further strengthens the conclusion that there was a shift in al-Ash‘arī’s understanding of faith over time. According to Franz Rosenthal, the idea of equating faith with assent (*taṣḍīq*) emerged around the late 2/8th and early 3/9th centuries, and it was the Ash‘arīs who first introduced this idea.⁵²⁸ This claim is open to doubts, especially considering that al-Māturīdī, who was an older contemporary of al-Ash‘arī, also

⁵²⁴ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, *al-Ibāna ‘an Uṣūl al-Diyāna*, ed. Bashīr Muḥammad ‘Uyūn, 3rd ed. (Beirut: Maktabat Dār al-Bayān, 1990), 49.

⁵²⁵ Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash‘arī, ‘Kitāb al-Luma‘ fī al-Radd ‘alā Ahl al-Zaygh wa-al-Bid‘a’, in Richard J. McCarthy, *The Theology of al-Ash‘arī: The Arabic Texts of al-Ash‘arī’s Kitāb al-Luma‘ and Risālat Istiḥsān al-Khawḍ fī ‘Ilm al-Kalām* (Beyrouth: Imprimerie Catholique, 1953), 75. After departing from the Mu‘tazilites, al-Ash‘arī’s thought underwent changes and developments over time. For a study of al-Ash‘arī’s intellectual transformation, focusing on his definition of faith, see Galip Türcan, ‘Eṣ‘arī ve Eṣ‘arī’nin İman Tanımı’, *Tabula Rasa: Felsefe-Teoloji* 3, no. 8 (2003): 297; Cf. Watt, *Formative Period*, 131ff.

⁵²⁶ See al-Bāqillānī, *Tamhūd*, 389; al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 306; al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād*, 162–163.

⁵²⁷ Al-Pazdawī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 146; al-Ṣābūnī, *al-Kifāya*, 354.

⁵²⁸ Rosenthal, *Knowledge Triumphant*, 101–102.

defines faith as mere assent.⁵²⁹ Furthermore, as will be discussed in the next chapter, the concept of faith as assent can be traced back to Abū Ḥanīfa, the renowned early Islamic scholar who was held in high esteem by both Nasafī and his master al-Māturīdī.

Coming back to Nasafī, he argues that attributing the name *īmān* to aspects of Islamic law (*sharāʿi al-Islām*), such as fasting and daily prayers, inappropriately broadens (*tawassu*) its meaning. He insistently asserts that it is not the outward actions that determine whether one is a true believer, but the sincere inner assent to the Islamic creed (*iʿtiqād* or *ʿaqīda*). Therefore, one's status as a true believer is judged by their genuine inner conviction or assent, rather than by their external actions.⁵³⁰ This is because one can outwardly adhere to Islamic practices without genuinely committing to the creed and values of Islam. The Quran labels such individuals as hypocrites (*munāfiqūn*) because they appear to embrace Islamic beliefs and values, but in reality, they do not.⁵³¹ Several Quranic verses discuss the motivations and mental states of those who engage in religious rituals seemingly for show, social approval, worldly gains, or other hidden agendas, rather than out of genuine love for God.⁵³²

On the nature of faith, Nasafī further asserts that it is a firm disposition or state present in the heart, one that neither increases (*lā yazīdu*) nor decreases (*wa-lā yanquṣu*) in terms of its quantity.⁵³³ In simpler terms, the core beliefs or articles of faith remain constant and unchanging over time because they are accepted as the ultimate truth, revealed by Almighty God. Moreover, there is no middle ground between faith and unbelief. An individual cannot remain in a state that

⁵²⁹ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 478.

⁵³⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:406.

⁵³¹ Quran, 4:140.

⁵³² Quran, 2:8–9; 3:167; 4:137, 143; 8:49; 33:12; 63:3.

⁵³³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:416.

hovers between the two; they must choose either to fully accept (*taṣḍīq*) faith or to completely deny (*juḥūd*) it.⁵³⁴ To elaborate further, one cannot be considered a true believer (*mu'min*) if they embrace certain beliefs of the Islamic faith while simultaneously rejecting others. Consequently, in Nasafi's thought, faith is a strong and unshakeable commitment to the entire set of beliefs and principles that make up Islam.

Nevertheless, an increase (*ziyāda*) and decrease (*nuqṣān*) in faith can be accepted in terms of its light (*nūr*) and brightness (*diyā'*), that is, in terms of its quality.⁵³⁵ In other words, although the articles of faith themselves do not increase or decrease, the intensity of faith can vary, becoming stronger or weaker depending on how fervently a person is committed to their faith and its necessities. When a person engages in righteous deeds (*al-a'māl al-ṣāliḥa*), such as acts of kindness, charity, or good moral conduct, their faith strengthens. Conversely, when a person commits sins and disobeys the teachings or moral codes of the religion (*ma'āṣi*), their faith weakens.⁵³⁶

Nasafi's stance on the issue of 'exception in faith' (*istithnā'*) also provides valuable insights into understanding the true essence of faith. He asserts that when a person firmly assents to and commits to their faith, they should express their belief with confidence and certainty. Instead of using conditional language, such as "I am a believer if God wills," which might imply doubt or uncertainty, it is more appropriate for them to make definitive statements like "I am truly a believer" or "I am a believer in reality."⁵³⁷ If there is doubt, it cannot be said that assent is

⁵³⁴ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 2:416.

⁵³⁵ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 2:416.

⁵³⁶ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 2:416.

⁵³⁷ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 2:423.

truly acquired or firmly established in the heart. However, if a person uses conditional language like “I am a believer if God wills” not out of doubt but out of humility before God or because they are uncertain about the final outcome of their life, then such a statement can be tolerated.⁵³⁸ In this context, the statement is not a sign of doubt but rather a reflection of humility and an acknowledgment of one’s limitations in understanding the divine will, especially concerning whether they will remain a believer. Yet, despite these considerations, Nasafī still maintains that it is better to avoid using conditional language when describing one’s state of faith, as employing *istithnā’* may convey an impression of doubt or uncertainty about one’s belief.⁵³⁹

In conclusion, based on the discussion so far, it can be stated that according to Nasafī, faith is a firm assent (*taṣdīq*) by the heart, not subject to doubt or uncertainty, but rather a steadfast conviction deeply rooted within the believer’s heart.

2. Assent, Knowledge, and ‘Will to Believe’

Simply accepting religious dogmas based on tradition, hearsay, or personal feelings is insufficient, as none of these can justify one’s faith morally or intellectually. According to Nasafī, true knowledge of a religion can only be acquired through evidence (*dalīl*).⁵⁴⁰ He uses the term ‘evidence’ (*dalīl*) interchangeably with ‘knowledge’ (*ilm* or *ma’rifā*) and views the sources of knowledge (*asbāb al-ma’rifā*) as tools for evaluating the correctness of religions (*ṣiḥḥat al-adyān*).⁵⁴¹ He also emphasises the importance of contemplation (*ta’ammul*) and reflection (*tafakkur*) in various parts of his *Tabṣira* to distinguish between true and false

⁵³⁸ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:423.

⁵³⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:423.

⁵⁴⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:35.

⁵⁴¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:34–38.

religions.⁵⁴² All these concepts point to the rational aspect of the soul, suggesting that reason (*'aql*) and its outcomes or manifestations (*dalīl*, *'ilm/ma'rifa*, *ta'ammul*, and *tafakkur*) are the essential means for determining the truth or discerning the true religion. There are no alternative methods to judge the validity (*ṣiḥḥa*) or falsity (*fasād*) of religions.⁵⁴³ This is because the most compelling and convincing answer one can provide when asked why they have chosen one faith over another is grounded in evidence. Thus, for Nasafī, reason and its outcomes are the sole means by which one's faith can be deemed meritorious or praiseworthy, both morally and intellectually.

After asserting that the previously explained methods are the only valid means to attain the truth, he reports that in his time, some individuals resorted to false or superstitious methods in their quest for truth. For instance, there was a group of people who believed that one should embrace a particular religion if a feeling or thought that convinced them of that religion's goodness formed or arose in their heart (*mā yaqa' fī al-qalb ḥasanuhū*).⁵⁴⁴ For Nasafī, accepting such feelings or assumptions that arise in the heart as valid evidence is considered unreasonable. This is because individuals from various religious traditions can all make similar claims about experiencing a feeling or inner conviction in their hearts, which they believe validates the truth of their respective religions. However, religions are numerous and highly diverse, with apparent contradictions between them regarding what they present as truth. Furthermore, even within a single religion, multiple and conflicting truth claims can be proposed by different sects of the

⁵⁴² See Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:40.

⁵⁴³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:35–36.

⁵⁴⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:34.

same faith. Therefore, the only way for individuals to discern the truth among these conflicting claims is through evidence, as it stands as the sole method for refuting false assertions.⁵⁴⁵

Nasafī also mentions another group who believed that intuition or inspiration (*ilhām*) could serve as a valid and reliable basis for discerning the truth or falsehood of a religion.⁵⁴⁶ However, similar to the previous scenario, *ilhām* cannot be considered a valid method for acquiring knowledge and determining the correct religion. This is because individuals from various religious traditions can claim divine inspiration about the truthfulness and legitimacy of their own faith, leading once again to contradictory truth claims. Nasafī argues that reason tells us the simultaneous acceptance of these contradictory claims is impossible (*muḥāl*).⁵⁴⁷

Lastly, Nasafī argues that imitating (*taqlīd*) the beliefs of others or adhering blindly to a particular religion, whether within Islam or any other faith, is not a valid way to attain true belief. Following religious doctrines without evidence cannot be considered a reliable method for ascertaining the truth of any religion. Again, when questioned about the validity or truth of their religious beliefs, individuals can only provide the most convincing and credible response if it is supported by evidence.⁵⁴⁸ Nasafī's theological writings consistently bring to the forefront a significant contradiction in the mindset of those who adopt *taqlīd* as a method for determining the truth of religions. These writings serve as a prominent example of how Nasafī employs various intellectual concepts such as knowledge (*ilm* or *ma'rifa*), evidence (*dalīl*), reason (*'aql*), contemplation (*tafakkur*), and signs (*'alāma*) in the quest to ascertain the validity and truth of

⁵⁴⁵ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:27, 34.

⁵⁴⁶ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:34–35.

⁵⁴⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:34–35.

⁵⁴⁸ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:35.

religious beliefs. They underscore the importance of critical thinking, reasoning, and evidence in evaluating religious beliefs, as opposed to unquestioning adherence without understanding. In various parts of his *Tabṣira*, Nasafī offers numerous pieces of advice for those who wish to walk securely on the path of faith.⁵⁴⁹ He consistently criticises imitators who unquestioningly accept the teachings, beliefs, or doctrines of others, such as teachers (sing. *‘ālim*) and spiritual mentors or fathers (sing. *shaykh*), without verifying their truth or accuracy through evidence.⁵⁵⁰

Nonetheless, in some sections of *Tabṣira*, his statements regarding how God views the faith of those who imitate others in their religious beliefs are not entirely clear. In one such statement, Nasafī suggests that, in certain cases, God might consider the faith of imitators as valid. This validity arises from the imitators’ sincere intention to draw closer to God and their conscious choice to embrace faith as a means of attaining God’s love. In other words, Nasafī recognises the imitators’ genuine desire to establish a meaningful connection with God through their faith. As we will explain later, this desire is one of the requirements that Nasafī considers essential for an act of faith to be regarded as praiseworthy. However, he also points out that, despite the sincerity of their intentions, imitators are still considered sinners in the eyes of God.⁵⁵¹ The reason for this is that they fail to actively use their intellect, a gift from God, to study and understand their religion’s fundamental principles and truths. Nasafī views this intellectual

⁵⁴⁹ For instance, the imitator is advised to adopt their faith under the guidance of a scholar (*‘ālim*) and to learn the evidence of their faith from the scholar. If the evidence is found to be rationally consistent, then the imitator’s faith becomes legitimate, since ultimately both the authority and the imitator hold faith in the same religion. For this and other pieces of advice, see Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:36–37.

⁵⁵⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:35–36.

⁵⁵¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:41.

passivity as a significant shortcoming in the eyes of God, given that intellect is meant to be used to pursue the truth.

As shown, Nasafi firmly argues that knowing the truth of religion depends on sufficient evidence, and he maintains that faith can only be considered morally virtuous when it is firmly grounded in such evidence. This persistent emphasis on evidence prompts us to delve deeper into Nasafi's understanding of evidence (*dalil*). However, before exploring Nasafi's concept of evidence, it is prudent to address the supplementary criteria he enumerates, apart from evidence, that must be met for an act of faith to be recognised as morally praiseworthy or justified.

For example, for faith to be considered morally justified, individuals must exert their utmost efforts in confronting hardship (*mashaqqa*) and dispel doubts along the path of faith. This includes patiently enduring hardship, showing courage in the face of adversity, and persisting despite obstacles and setbacks in the pursuit of evidence for genuine faith. It is only at that point that one's faith can be regarded as worthy of praise or morally justified.⁵⁵² Nasafi explains that a wise person engages in contemplation (*ta'ammul*) and meditation (*tafakkur*), wholeheartedly dedicating their mental and emotional faculties to research, seeking the correct way of thinking (*baḥth*) and reasoning (*nazar*), while also taking refuge in God or turning to Him for guidance during difficult times on their path to faith. On the other hand, the foolish prioritise worldly pleasures over dedicating time and effort to the search for truth. Some among them adopt faith through imitation without significant effort or hardship; they do so because this way they do not face the challenges or burdens typically associated with the quest for the truth. In short, the worth of an act of faith is determined by the extent of effort an individual invests in gaining knowledge

⁵⁵² Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:39–40.

and understanding during its acquisition. According to Nasafī, those who do not endure challenges and hardships while pursuing faith will not receive any rewards and will not be able to fully taste the benefits that come with faith in this world and the hereafter. The level of *mashaqqa* and intellectual effort exerted in acquiring faith is directly linked to the merit and benefits associated with that faith.

Another requirement for an act of faith to be regarded as praiseworthy or meritorious from both Islamic and moral perspectives is that it must possess two specific characteristics. Firstly, when performing an act of faith, one should have the sincere intention of ‘*taqarrub*,’ which essentially means that the act should be done with the purpose of getting closer to God, seeking His pleasure, and strengthening one’s spiritual connection with Him. Secondly, it should not involve any elements of ‘*iḍtirār*,’ which pertains to acts of compulsion or coercion.⁵⁵³ In this context, it means that faith should not result from necessity where an individual is compelled or forced to accept or agree with something against their will. In essence, faith should be a voluntary and sincere choice made by an individual, not something imposed upon them through coercion or necessity.

In accordance with Islamic teachings, Nasafī asserts that an act of faith that occurs when a person is on their deathbed or in their final moments of life cannot be considered praiseworthy

⁵⁵³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:39.

and, therefore, will not be accepted by God.⁵⁵⁴ This idea finds its basis in the Scripture,⁵⁵⁵ and Nasafi's interpretation of it can be summarised as follows: When a person is in their final moments, certain truths and realities become clear to them. In this state, they experience the truth as it is, directly and unambiguously. The individual comes to a realisation that what has been promised by the religion regarding the afterlife is undeniably true. It is as if a metaphorical 'curtain of truth' is lifted. In other words, there was a veil before, obscuring the truth due to the necessity of the divine test, and in those moments just before death, this veil is removed, revealing the profound reality. However, at that moment, the divine trial or test that God has set for human beings loses its significance because the person is faced with imminent death and the truth. The awareness of the truth does not arise from their own efforts and will, but because of a necessity —namely, God's direct manifestation of the truth to the dying.⁵⁵⁶ In summary, in accordance with Islamic teachings, Nasafi emphasises that faith should not be postponed until the final moments of life because, at that point, the soul is introduced to the profound truth in its perfect state; thus, their faith will not be accepted by God, for their faith arises from necessity.

If we return to the concept of evidence, what exactly does Nasafi mean by it, a concept he consistently emphasises throughout his writings? Firstly, it should be mentioned that he uses

⁵⁵⁴ Nasafi, *Tabşira*, 1:40. As the story of the Pharaoh in the Quran shows, even the most powerful and feared rulers can come to realise their own mortality and embrace faith based on the truths they witness at the moment of death. Nonetheless, since the secrets of God's test for humanity become apparent at the time of death or in the throes of dying, such last-minute acceptance of faith is deemed invalid. See Quran, 10:90–91.

⁵⁵⁵ "What! Do they wait either for the angels to appear before them or for your Lord to come unto them or for some clear signs of your Lord to appear before them? When some clear signs of your Lord will appear, believing will be of no avail to anyone who did not believe before, or who earned no good deeds through his faith. Say: 'Wait on; we too are waiting.'" See Quran, 6:158.

⁵⁵⁶ Nasafi, *Tabşira*, 1:40–42.

this term in a broad sense.⁵⁵⁷ Secondly, although he occasionally mentions terms like ‘*hujja*,’ ‘*istidlāl*,’ and ‘*burhān*’ to refer to the concept of evidence or proof, the word he predominantly uses for this purpose is ‘*dalīl*,’ which has multiple literal meanings, including ‘*sign*,’ ‘*indication*,’ ‘*proof*,’ ‘*evidence*,’ and ‘*guide*.’⁵⁵⁸

The most critical characteristic of *dalīl* is that it should be logically sound and align with rational thinking while being compelling enough to convince the listener of the truth of religion. Furthermore, evidence need not rely solely on overly intricate and sophisticated arguments. According to Nasafī, sophisticated formal philosophical arguments should be reserved for experts in the field of *kalām*. In other words, Nasafī values straightforward and cogent reasoning as a means of acquiring faith and emphasises that evidence should be accessible and understandable to a broad audience, rather than being overly convoluted. Yet, individuals with sufficient time and a high level of knowledge and skill in advanced reasoning can employ formal arguments. What is important here is that before adopting any faith, individuals, depending on their intellectual capacity, should seek knowledge about religion through evidence, whether simple or sophisticated, as long as it is reliable. The evidence may include intricate and advanced reasoning regarding various aspects of the universe, such as its physical components (*jism*, *jawhar*, and *a’rād*), the nature and status of things (*ashyā’*) concerning their origins in space and time, and the oneness of the Creator or Originator (*al-Muḥdith*), who is identified as the true cause (*sabab*) of everything in existence, along with His divine attributes. However, the act of contemplating or engaging in deep reflection (*ta’ammul*

⁵⁵⁷ For more on the concept of evidence in Islamic theology, see Ess, ‘The Logical Structure of Islamic Theology’.

⁵⁵⁸ Wehr, ‘*d-l-l*’, 289–290.

and *tafakkur*) about the lives, remarkable stories, and miracles of esteemed prophets emerged throughout history can also serve the same purpose, albeit being a less sophisticated approach compared to the first method mentioned. In summary, whether individuals employ the first method or the second, they are exercising their intellectual capabilities and fulfilling their responsibility as rational beings. Attaining faith through either method is equally praiseworthy or justified, with those achieving faith by either means deserving of reward from God in the afterlife.⁵⁵⁹

Nasafī cites the story of Prophet Ibrahīm from the Quran as an excellent example of using reasoning in a simple, yet precise and accurate manner. According to the account of the Quran, Prophet Ibrahīm carefully observed the movements of celestial bodies such as stars, the moon, and the sun. Through inference (*istidlāl*), he came to the conclusion that there must be a higher power, namely God, who controls and organises these heavenly bodies according to His divine plan.⁵⁶⁰ In short, Nasafī's argument is that every intelligent individual who has reached the age of responsibility (*taklīf*) should, according to their ability, use their intellect to recognise that the universe has a Creator, just as Prophet Ibrahīm did. This realisation can be achieved through either sophisticated or simple yet accurate arguments.⁵⁶¹

⁵⁵⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:39–40.

⁵⁶⁰ Quran, 6:75–79.

⁵⁶¹ Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 64–5. Nasafī references the story of Ahl al-Kahf (the Seven Sleepers or the Companions of the Cave) in the Quran as a further illustration of how one can attain knowledge of God in this manner, which implies that he takes evidence in its broad sense. See Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 82–3. Meanwhile, Nasafī mentions an intriguing idea from the Mu'tazilī school of theology. According to Mu'tazilī scholars, one does not have to deduce with reason in order to know Allāh; but, reason necessarily or inherently recognises and knows Allāh the Almighty (*lā yajibu 'alayhi an yastadille bi al-'aqli, wa-lākinna al-'aqla yūjabu 'alayhi an ya'rifa Allāhi ta'āla*). Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 83. It might be worth exploring, as the focus of an

This is Nasafi's understanding of the concept of evidence. According to him, individuals seeking authentic knowledge about religion should distinctly establish two points through evidence: First, the arguments should be compelling enough to convince the listener that the self-proclaimed prophet exhibits qualities of sincerity and truthfulness (*ṣidq*) in both speech and actions. Secondly, the arguments should be compelling enough to demonstrate the objective truth of the religious message itself. In short, both the truthfulness of the person delivering the message and the objective truth of the message itself should be established by strong evidence. Only when these two points are firmly established can the validity (*ṣihḥa*) or falsehood (*fasād*) of a religion be determined. The evidence or knowledge in question can be acquired through both reasoning and trustworthy news from mass-transmitted reports.⁵⁶²

Nasafi systematically applies the principles explained in the previous paragraphs to analyse the claim of prophethood made by the Islamic Prophet. He provides a comprehensive account of the reasons why one should accept the truthfulness (*ṣidq*) of the Prophet and the authenticity (*ṣihḥa*) of his message, making a diligent effort to demonstrate that Muhammad's prophethood is an established fact in human history.⁵⁶³ His insistence on having everyone use this method is driven by his desire to attain a faith that is devoid of any doubt, as this is what faith truly is, and this approach aligns with his earlier explanations about the nature and characteristics of faith. He has previously emphasised that hesitation or pausing (*taraddud*) regarding faith implies that the individual is in a state where they neither fully deny nor

independent study, whether the Mu'tazilites proposed something similar to Plantinga's idea that "belief in God is properly basic." See Plantinga, 'Is Belief in God Properly Basic?', 42; Alvin Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', 47–63.

⁵⁶² Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 1:34.

⁵⁶³ See Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 2:45–106.

wholeheartedly affirm the tenets of faith. However, when someone genuinely assents, any doubts or hesitations related to matters of faith should vanish.⁵⁶⁴ According to Nasafī, achieving absolute certainty in one's faith can only occur through strict adherence to the principles outlined above. Only then is a man of faith so surrounded by evidence that they would have no legitimate reason to be concerned or fearful about any attempts by opponents to challenge or refute their position.

Up to this point, Nasafī has placed a strong emphasis on knowledge, which leads to the question of how he distinguishes between knowledge and faith. This is particularly relevant given his initial opposition to the Jahmiyya idea that faith is solely a matter of knowledge that emerges within the heart. To understand the subtle distinction between these two concepts, it is essential to analyse Nasafī's linguistic argument, which posits that faith is not merely equivalent to knowledge but is, instead, an assent by the heart on top of initial knowledge. Additionally, it is important to examine how he relates intellect to religious assent in the process of acquiring faith.

His argument to prove that faith is assent by the heart might seem complicated. Therefore, before delving into this argument, it would be helpful to offer a straightforward and lucid explanation of Nasafī's method. By keeping the core of the argument in mind, confusion can be avoided.

Firstly, it is worth noting that Nasafī combines both logical reasoning and the study of meaning to build his argument, which, according to some researchers, evokes the methods of modern science of semantics, as we will discuss in the last chapter. According to Nasafī, to ascertain the true meaning of *īmān*, one should start by examining the potential meanings of its

⁵⁶⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:38.

antonyms, namely the word *kufṛ*, and then identify the opposites of those meanings. This is because, according to Nasafī, these antonyms would logically lead us to the true meaning of faith. In other words, by first analysing what faith is not —namely, *kufṛ* and its synonyms— and then identifying the antonyms of *kufṛ*'s synonyms, one can conclude what the true meaning of faith is.

Nasafī cares about the nuanced meanings of key terms related to the topic and focuses on these nuances. He begins his argument with a comprehensive examination of the different meanings associated with '*īmān*', '*kufṛ*', and other related concepts such as '*taṣḍīq*', '*ma'rifā*', '*takdhīb*', '*jahāla*', '*juḥūd*', and '*nukra*'. As noted earlier, Nasafī states that, based on the opinions of lexicographers, the word '*kufṛ*' is the antonym of '*īmān*'. The term '*kufṛ*' carries meanings such as '*takdhīb*', which means claiming something is false or untrue, and '*juḥūd*', which signifies disacknowledging or denying the truth content of something. As for '*ma'rifā*', it has two possible antonyms: '*nukra*', which means not knowing or being unfamiliar with something, and '*jahāla*', which means being ignorant of something.⁵⁶⁵ If *īmān* were to be equated with *ma'rifā*, it would logically follow that *kufṛ* and its synonyms—all of which are opposites of *īmān*—should also be opposites of *ma'rifā* and its synonyms. However, as clarified by language experts (*ahl al-lughā*), the antonym of *kufṛ* and its synonyms is not *ma'rifā* but *taṣḍīq*. Following this reasoning, he concludes that *ma'rifā* cannot be equated with *īmān* because neither the antonyms of *kufṛ* nor the antonyms of *kufṛ*'s synonyms correspond to *ma'rifā*. In conclusion, Nasafī's analysis underscores that *īmān* and *ma'rifā* differ not only in their meanings but also in their linguistic relationships with other terms. Consequently, Nasafī bases his

⁵⁶⁵ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:415.

argument on the study of these specific words' meanings and demonstrates that *īmān* and *ma'rifā* are not synonymous or interchangeable. Thus, *ma'rifā* cannot be considered equivalent to *īmān*.

As evident from his argument above, Nasafī confidently asserts that knowledge cannot be equated with faith. However, he also acknowledges that knowledge is the only means by which one can come to know the truth of a religion, as previously explained. Then, how do faith and knowledge relate to each other, or more directly, what is the relationship between them? Nasafī argues that the relationship between knowledge and faith—as well as between ignorance and disbelief—is not strictly causal. This means that these phenomena can exist independently of one another. In other words, ignorance or a lack of knowledge about something does not necessarily lead to its denial (*kufṛ*), and possessing knowledge about something does not automatically result in assent (*īmān*) to its truth. According to Nasafī, individuals can possess knowledge about something yet choose not to have faith in it.

Nasafī uses a Quranic example to illustrate the latter: “Those to whom We gave the Scripture know him as they know their own sons. But indeed, a party of them conceal the truth while they know [it].”⁵⁶⁶ In light of this verse, Nasafī claims that these individuals know the truth as intimately and assuredly as they know their own sons. However, despite their clear knowledge of the truth, there is a group among them who intentionally hide or conceal it. Thus, according to Nasafī, faith cannot be spoken of here because individuals in question do not assent to the truth even though they possess knowledge of it.⁵⁶⁷ According to Nasafī, therefore, it is possible for a person to mislead or delude themselves, even when they possess knowledge of the truth. In other

⁵⁶⁶ Quran, 2:146.

⁵⁶⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:415; *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 166.

words, possessing knowledge of the truth does not guarantee that one will always act in accordance with the truth content of that knowledge; one can still choose to ignore the truth or act contrary to it. It seems that Nasafī implies human behaviour and free choices can be influenced by many factors beyond mere knowledge.⁵⁶⁸

While Nasafī does not believe that knowledge must always lead to faith in a strict cause-and-effect manner, he still acknowledges a strong relationship between these two concepts. As mentioned before, just as knowledge can lead to faith, ignorance can also lead to disbelief. This means that Nasafī views knowledge only as a ‘motive’ or ‘cause’ (*sabab*) that can potentially lead to faith.⁵⁶⁹ This is the specific role or function that Nasafī assigns to knowledge in acquisition of faith.

It is evident that knowledge plays a significant role in the act of faith in Nasafī’s theology. Nevertheless, knowledge alone is not sufficient to lead to faith, as faith requires the ‘assent of the heart.’ This implies that what truly matters in the act of faith is the movement of the heart or one’s inner response to the content of that knowledge. Therefore, faith cannot solely be a matter of intellectual understanding. It goes beyond mere knowledge; it involves a genuine and sincere commitment to God, where one, after recognising the truth, promises to live a life that aligns with its principles. This is because faith occurs through the heart (*al-īmān yakūn bi al-qalb*), as faith is assent (*al-īmān huwa al-taṣdīq*) to the truth content of that knowledge, and this assent is realised by the heart (*bi al-qalb yakūn al-taṣdīq*).⁵⁷⁰ Considering all this, it can be said that according to Nasafī, faith is an inner act and, most importantly, a moral response to truth.

⁵⁶⁸ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:415–6.

⁵⁶⁹ Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 67.

⁵⁷⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:415.

Upon closer examination of Nasafi's use of the term *taṣḍīq* in his writings, one can find a clear basis for this interpretation. Therefore, let us now examine his understanding of assent more closely.

His strong emphasis on defining faith as the assent of the heart, and his strict rejection of a causal relationship between knowledge and faith, imply that he understands assent (*taṣḍīq*) in a dual sense. The first sense of assent relates to one's mental or cognitive recognition of something. Therefore, when *taṣḍīq* is used in this sense in the act of faith, it means that one cognitively recognises a specific religion as the truth. In this case, giving assent to something is not a matter of free will because knowledge necessarily leads to assent. In other words, it is an inevitable outcome of acquiring knowledge. In this scenario, free will can only play a role before cognition; namely, one can initially choose whether to seek knowledge of the truth. However, once cognition of that *p* is achieved, the individual necessarily acknowledges that *p* is the truth. This is then the first meaning of *taṣḍīq*, which occurs through cognition and is basically related to knowledge.

However, when a person attains knowledge of the true religion, they still retain the freedom to decide whether or not to integrate the moral values of that religion into their life. This is the result of the non-causal relationship that Nasafi proposed between knowledge and faith. To put it differently, having knowledge about something does not necessarily lead someone to adopt its truth content as their moral principles; it still remains a matter of free choice. Then, in the case of the second meaning of assent, one not only recognises the truth as passive knowledge but also

voluntarily commits oneself to act accordingly. Nasafī considers this second *taṣḍīq* to be the most genuine expression of faith and, thus, the most deserving of being called *īmān*.⁵⁷¹

Al-Taftāzānī's testimony in his *Sharḥ al-‘Aqā’id*, a commentary on the Creed (*‘Aqā’id*) of Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 537/1142), a Māturīdite scholar and student of Nasafī, confirms that the dual understanding of *taṣḍīq* was widely held among Māturīdite theologians.⁵⁷² In short, faith entails more than mere knowledge; it also entails a voluntary commitment to its truth content. The following quotation from al-Taftāzānī clearly illustrates how Māturīdite theologians regard faith as a voluntary act, thus supporting our analysis above:

... [T]here is a distinct difference between the cognition of the judgments and deciding that they are true on the one hand, and the assent to them and conviction about them on the other. So[,] it is sound to call the second kind Belief [*īmān*] in distinction from the first. ... Some of the Early Theologians mention the suggestion that assent is an expression for binding the heart to that which is known of the narratives given by the Narrator; and it is something acquired (*kasbī*), established by the choice of the one who assents. Therefore[,] it is to be rewarded and considered the chief of religious duties (*al-‘ibādāt*) rather than cognition which sometimes occurs without any acquisition, as when one's glance falls on some body and there results to him knowledge that it is a wall or a stone. ... [A]ssent means that by your choice you ascribe veracity to the Narrator. Thus, if it were to occur in the heart without choice, it would not be assent, even though it were cognition.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷¹ As has been noted on many occasions, Nasafī was a devoted follower of al-Māturīdī, and his understanding of *taṣḍīq* aligns with that of his master. Both scholars view *taṣḍīq* as having a dual meaning. For the analysis presented here, I am indebted to Pessagno's study of the concept of *taṣḍīq* in al-Māturīdī's thought. For more on the meaning of *taṣḍīq* in al-Māturīdī, see Pessagno, 'Intellect and Religious Assent', 18–27.

⁵⁷² Al-Taftāzānī, *Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, 122–123.

⁵⁷³ Al-Taftāzānī, *Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, 123.

Although al-Taftāzānī does not specifically mention Nasafī's name here, when he uses the expression "Some of the Early Theologians," it is likely that Najm al-Dīn's teacher Nasafī is also included in the group he had in mind, as he frequently references Nasafī's *Tabṣira* in the mentioned work.⁵⁷⁴

In light of the discussion so far, it appears that, according to Nasafī, both types of *taṣdīq* are carried out by the heart, which might seem awkward. In the first *taṣdīq*, one comes to know through the heart that the Messenger is trustworthy and that the message he delivers is true. During this process, the mind or intellect plays a crucial role, as it is only through the rational aspect of the soul that one can distinguish between truth and falsehood. Therefore, when assent is related to knowledge, it is more accurate to understand the term '*qalb*' as referring to the mind or rational soul of men, which serves as the source of all cognition and intuition.

As for the second *taṣdīq*, it signifies a subsequent step or level of affirmation beyond initial acknowledgment. After initially acknowledging or understanding something (the first *taṣdīq*), an individual takes a further step to fully integrate this understanding into their life. This integration implies that the acknowledgment in the first *taṣdīq* is not superficial or merely theoretical. It is a profound acceptance that significantly influences and guides the person's decisions, actions, and overall approach to life. Thus, the second *taṣdīq* is about transitioning from mere intellectual acceptance or understanding to a deeper, more integrated, and life-guiding embrace of the truth that was initially acknowledged. In this second *taṣdīq*, the cognitive aspect of the soul, namely the mind, does not play a role. Nasafī states that it is solely a matter of the

⁵⁷⁴ See, for example, al-Taftāzānī, *Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, 47, 55, 88.

heart.⁵⁷⁵ Here, the heart no longer refers to the mind or our cognitive faculties. Instead, it should now be understood as our faculty of choice or free will, serving as a controlling, commanding, and guiding power.⁵⁷⁶ Through the power of this faculty, one moves from passive acknowledgment of the truth to an active and wholehearted embrace of it. Nasafi's metaphor, characterising this aspect of *taṣdīq* as a "light in the heart" (*nūr fi al-qalb*),⁵⁷⁷ and his emphasis on its voluntaristic nature, suggest that at this second level of *taṣdīq*, a person not only willingly and enthusiastically embraces this inner light but also allows it to illuminate their path. In other words, this assent shapes the decisions and actions they will take throughout their lives.

Then, in the first assent, the word '*qalb*' refers to the mind, and in the second assent, it refers to our faculty of choice. It is important to note that during Nasafi's time, there was no clear distinction between the 'heart' and the 'mind'.⁵⁷⁸ At that time, the heart was not merely a physical organ but also served as a metaphorical or symbolic representation of the entire faculties of the human soul: our capacity for reasoning, volition, experiencing emotions, and understanding moral and ethical principles, among other faculties. The heart also symbolised one's consciousness and was associated with spiritual knowledge that transcends mere intellectual reasoning, representing a deeper, more intuitive understanding of the truth. This

⁵⁷⁵ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 2:415.

⁵⁷⁶ Nasafi, when he particularly needs to differentiate between the mind and the heart, uses the term '*bāl*' to refer to the former. For example, he uses the phrase '*khaṭara bibāliḥ*' which means thoughts that arise in the mind. See Nasafi, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 164–165.

⁵⁷⁷ Nasafi, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 67.

⁵⁷⁸ This aligns with the Quranic understanding of the heart. The Quran frequently refers to the heart (*qalb*) as the seat of understanding, reasoning, and moral insight. For example, it states, "Have they not travelled throughout the land so their hearts may reason, and their ears may listen? Indeed, it is not the eyes that are blind, but it is the hearts in the chests that grow blind." See Quran, 22:46.

suggests that the focus on the heart as the core of human exceptional abilities and strengths indicates that a human being is viewed in a holistic manner. In other words, this perspective implies that understanding a human being is possible only when all aspects of their existence — physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual— are taken into account. Conversely, understanding a human being is impossible if done only atomistically or fragmentarily, namely, by considering just one aspect of their existence.⁵⁷⁹

The remark of al-Nasafī's contemporary, Abū al-Yusr al-Pazdawī, in this context, also shows that there was not a sharp distinction between the heart and the intellect. According to al-Pazdawī, the heart is the essence of the human being, and the effects of all faculties we possess, including the intellect, are manifested within the heart. For example, the effect produced by the intellect is ultimately realised within the heart. The intellect or reason (*'aql*) is a subtle or ethereal body (*jism laṭīf*), a tool or instrument (*āla*) through which we acquire knowledge of things (*ashyā'*).⁵⁸⁰ Abū al-Yusr describes the head (*al-ra's*) as the 'place' or 'location' (*maḥall*) of the intellect but asserts that the impact or effect of the intellect extends to the heart (*qalb*). In other words, its influence is felt throughout the entire being of a person, that is, in one's heart.⁵⁸¹

This subtle nuance in the dual meanings of *taṣdīq* clarifies what Nasafī means when he states that faith is "assent by the heart." Faith is a two-fold process: the first involves the

⁵⁷⁹ For more on the concept of '*qalb*' and its implications, see Fabio Vicini, 'Thinking Through the Heart: Islam, Reflection and the Search for Transcendence', *Culture and Religion* 18, no. 2 (2017): 110–128; Mehmet Y. Seker, 'A Map of the Divine Subtle Faculty: The Concept of Qalb (Heart) in Classical and Contemporary Islamic Scholarship' (PhD Thesis, Australian Catholic University, 2012); Arthur S. Tritton, 'Man, Nafs, Rūh, 'aql', *Bulletin of SOAS* 34, no. 3 (1971): 491–495; Loumia Ferhat, 'Al-Ghazālī's Heart as a Medium of Light: Illumination and the Soteriological Process', *Journal of Islamic Ethics* 4, no. 1–2 (2020).

⁵⁸⁰ Al-Pazdawī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 205.

⁵⁸¹ Al-Pazdawī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 205.

intellectual recognition of the truth, while the second entails the commitment to that truth in one's life. The initial assent does not necessarily require commitment, so it cannot be called faith. However, Nasafī also makes it clear that faith cannot be entirely isolated from the first assent, which is knowledge, because faith cannot be built on unfounded assumptions. To put it another way, the first assent is necessary but not sufficient on its own. Only when this necessary assent is accompanied by the second assent can there be faith.

Given this analysis, it becomes clear why Nasafī does not endorse the idea that *īmān* can be equated with *ma'rifa*. Instead, "*īmān* is *taṣdīq* with *ma'rifa*" seems to be a more appropriate expression of Nasafī's interpretation of religious faith. He describes faith as the "light of knowledge in the heart" (*nūr al-ma'rifa*),⁵⁸² implying that it is incorrect to skip to the second assent without the first. Nasafī places great importance on reason, evidence, and signs in matters of faith, opposing blind adherence or mere imitation of beliefs that lack a rational basis. He is strictly opposed to any means of knowing truth other than reason, as they lead back to the old idea of the relativism of truth introduced by the ancient Greek sophists (*Sūfastā'iyya*).⁵⁸³ He believes that intellect and religious assent cannot be in conflict, as he considers both to be blessings from God. His works include extensive discussions on the role of intellect, its defence, and the necessity of employing it in matters of faith, underscoring the significance of a rational foundation for religious beliefs.⁵⁸⁴

Until now, Nasafī has repeatedly implied that faith is a conscious and voluntary act, acquired autonomously through the inner faculties of the soul (*qalb*), without any external

⁵⁸² Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 67.

⁵⁸³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:24, 28–29.

⁵⁸⁴ See Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:27–33; *Tamhīd*, 4; *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 61.

influence. However, given that in Islam, Allāh is acknowledged as the ultimate creator of everything, including human actions, this presents a dilemma concerning human agency and the divine will or omnipotence of God. In other words, who is responsible for causing *īmān* or *kufr* if God is the ultimate creator of everything? If it is God, then is it just for God to reward the believer and punish the unbeliever? The upcoming section will discuss how Nasafī addresses the apparent conflict between the belief in individual agency and the belief in God as the ultimate creator of everything.

3. The Interplay of Human and Divine Will

First and foremost, in the Quran, one can find verses that affirm both the concept of divine predestination (*qadar*)⁵⁸⁵ and the idea of human free will (*ikhtiyār*).⁵⁸⁶ This dual presentation in the Quran has profoundly influenced how Muslim theologians approach and address this complex issue. Upon accepting this premise, it becomes evident that both faith (*īmān*) and unbelief (*kufr*) are creations of God, yet human beings must somehow be responsible for their deeds, as the Quran also clearly implies. Moreover, if both faith and unbelief are creations of God, it becomes challenging to justify why God would reward believers and punish non-believers. These considerations prompted Nasafī and other Sunni theologians to develop a

⁵⁸⁵ For example, “That is Allah, your Lord! there is no god but He, the Creator of all things: then worship ye Him: and He hath power to dispose of all affairs” (Quran, 6:102). “He doth regulate all affairs” (Quran, 13:2. Also see Quran, 22:6, 25:2, 28:68, 37:93–96, 39:62, 57:22.

⁵⁸⁶ For example, “Let there be no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error: whoever rejects evil and believes in Allah hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold, that never breaks. And Allah heareth and knoweth all things” (Quran, 2:256). See also 18:29–30, 73:19, 74:37, 76:3, 76:29.

theory that reconciles two points: (i) God is the ultimate source of all existence and creative acts in the world, and (ii) human beings possess free will and are thus responsible for their actions.

The debate on free will and predestination is often traced back to Mu‘āwiya bin Abī Sufyān (d. 60/680) and the Jabriyya school he supported.⁵⁸⁷ However, some reports suggest that the issue was debated even during the time of Prophet Muhammad. For instance, the renowned theologian from the Basra school of Mu‘tazilite thought, Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, reports that Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) narrated the following account:

When Prophet Muhammad was designated by God as a prophet among the Arabs, there was a prevailing belief among the people that their actions were predetermined by an inevitable fate. Consequently, people attributed the responsibility for their sins to Allāh, claiming that He had willed their actions. They would say, “Allāh has willed the situation we are in. It is He who has led us to do these things.” In response to their assertion, Allāh the Almighty declared, “And when they commit an immorality, they say, ‘We found our fathers doing it, and Allāh has ordered us to do it.’ Say, ‘Indeed, Allāh does not order immorality. Do you say about Allāh that which you do not know?’ (Quran, 7:28).”⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁷ In fact, Jabriyya is not a specific school of thought with a unified set of beliefs or doctrines. It is a broad term used to categorise various groups or sects that share the belief that human beings do not possess control or power over their actions. For example, the Jahmiyya group, associated with Jahm bin Ṣafwān, shares this belief and is thus included under the title of Jabarites.

⁵⁸⁸ Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī, *al-Mughnī fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd wa-al‘Adl*, ed. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, vol. 8, 16[20] vols (Cairo: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa, 1960–69), 8:329–30; Cf. Julian Obermann, ‘Political Theology in Early Islam: Ḥasan Al-Baṣrī’s Treatise on Qadar’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 55, no. 2 (1935): 154ff.; Michael Schwarz, ‘The Letter of Al-Hasan al-Baṣrī’, *Oriens* 20 (1967): 15–30. For further reports on the point that this issue was a topic of discussion during the time of Prophet Muhammad, and that he was asked various questions on the matter, see Qāḍī, *Mughnī*, 8:263–64, 332–34, 339. Muḥammad ‘Imāra notes that the issue continued to be a subject of discussion and remained on the agenda of the Muslim community

Although discussions on free will and predestination might have existed earlier, their evolution into a major theological debate was significantly influenced by the policies of Mu‘āwiya and the subsequent rulers of the Umayyad dynasty (661–750 CE). To legitimise the shift from the initial consultative caliphate system (*shūrā*) to a more monarchical structure under Mu‘āwiya in the eyes of the people, it was necessary to justify this administrative change within the context of Islamic teachings and beliefs. The Umayyad dynasty used the concept of divine predestination to legitimise their political power and rationalise their criticised actions, thereby seemingly providing a solid foundation for the new governance model. Mu‘āwiya, in particular, actively promoted this idea to garner public support, claiming his leadership as *imām* and ruler of the Muslim community was divinely predetermined by Allāh.⁵⁸⁹

The Jabriyya school, which supported the Umayyad rulers, sought to give this claim a formal appearance or a scholarly expression. They asserted that humans have only a symbolic or superficial connection with their actions. According to this view, individuals cannot directly influence their actions; instead, they are merely vessels or loci (*mahall*) where divine intentions

during the rule of the four caliphs as well. See Muḥammad ‘Imāra, *al-Mu‘tazila wa-Mushkila al-Ḥurriyya al-Insāniyya*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1988), 21–25.

⁵⁸⁹ Qāḍī, *Mughnī*, 8:4; Ignaz Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law*, trans. Andras and Ruth Hamori (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981), 83–85; Watt, *Formative Period*, 82; Hasan Q. Murad, ‘Jabr and Qadar in Early Islam: A Reappraisal of Their Political and Religious Implications’, in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams*, ed. Wael B. Hallaq and Donald P. Little (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 117–118.

or actions are manifested.⁵⁹⁰ Thus, human actions are not the result of individual free will but are manifestations of divine will. Consequently, individuals are compelled to believe or disbelieve.

People soon came to realise that the Umayyad rulers had manipulated the concept of divine predestination for their own purposes. As a result, alternative viewpoints and counterarguments began to emerge. Disapproving of the Jahmiyya stance, the Qadarites in Damascus and Basra, including figures like Ma'bad al-Juhanī (d. 83/702 [?]) and Ghaylān al-Dimashqī (d. around 105/723), supported the principle of human free will and asserted that individuals have the ability to act independently. Over time, the debate between these two groups influenced other theological schools. The belief in human agency held by the Qadarites later became a defining aspect of the Mu'tazilī creed. On the other hand, the traditionalists and the Ash'arīs adopted a stance similar to the Jabarite stance, aligning themselves with the belief in strict predestination.⁵⁹¹

The Mu'tazilites⁵⁹² expanded upon and further developed the idea of *ikhtiyār* originally proposed by the Qadarites, which essentially claims that humans possess the capacity to make

⁵⁹⁰ Al-Ash'arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1:315; Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī, *al-Faṣl fī al-Milal wa-al-Ahwā' wa-al-Niḥal*, ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Naṣr and 'Abd al-Raḥman Umayra, 5 vols (Beirut: Dār al-Jayl, 1996), 3:33, 34; Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī, *Tārīkh al-Jahmiyya wa-al-Mu'tazila*, (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1979), 28–29.

⁵⁹¹ De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination*, 6.

⁵⁹² Although they are commonly referred to as Mu'tazilites in Sunni theological literature, they deliberately identified themselves as the People of Justice and Monotheism (*Ahl al-'Adl wa-al-Tawḥīd*). They articulated their theological views within the framework of five core principles, known as the Five Principles (*Uṣūl al-Khamsa*): Monotheism (*Tawḥīd*), Justice (*'Adāla*), Promise and Threat (*al-Wa'd wa-al-Wa'īd*), the Intermediate Position (*al-Manzila bayn al-Manzilatayn*), and Commanding Good and Forbidding Evil (*Amr bi al-Ma'rūf wa-al-Nahy 'an al-Munkar*). They placed particular emphasis on the first two principles, Monotheism and Justice, considering them foundational, as they believed that the latter three principles were

choices and act independently. The Mu‘tazilī views on human agency notably stand out as perhaps the most unique aspect of their theology and distinguish them from other theological schools and groups. They disagreed not only with the idea of determinism (*jabr*) but also with the Ash‘arite attempt to balance free will (*ikhtiyār*) and determinism through the concept of acquisition (*kasb*), wherein humans are perceived as acquiring their actions in a manner that acknowledges both divine influence and human choice. They found the Ash‘arite attempt to integrate determinism and free will even less coherent and logical than the idea of complete determinism. For this reason, they defended the necessity of adopting a clear and firm position on the issue in support of human *ikhtiyār*, distinctly opposing both the idea of determinism and any attempts to reconcile free will with determinism.

The principle of Justice, as understood by the Mu‘tazilites, necessarily leads to the idea that human beings must possess the freedom to act. This is because a fair or righteous deity would not blame or hold humans accountable for actions over which they have no control. In other words, accountability can only arise if one has the capacity to act freely. Therefore, they argued that humans are autonomous in their actions, and they encapsulated this idea of autonomy through the concept of ‘divine delegation’ (*tawfiq*).⁵⁹³ Divine delegation means that God entrusts humans with the authority to exercise their free will, or humans are granted autonomy to act within the bounds of divine permission. Only in this case, in accordance with the divine attribute of Justice, can humans be held responsible for their actions.

already implicit within the concept of Justice. See Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadhānī, *Sharḥ al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, ed. ‘Abd al-Karīm K. ‘Uthmān (Cairo: n.p., 1965), 23–25.

⁵⁹³ Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 124; Richard M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash‘arite School* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 44; De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination*, 4.

They saw human beings as the ultimate and true owners of their actions (*sāhib al-fi'l*), thereby justifying bearing full responsibility for them (*mas'ūl 'an al-fi'l*). For the Mu'tazilites, it is impossible for an action to originate from the influence or effect (*ta'thīr*) of two distinct agents or to be driven by two separate causes.⁵⁹⁴ The actions performed by humans are influenced by their desires, intentions, and their inherent capacity or power to act (*qudra*).⁵⁹⁵ In other words, what people do is determined by what they want, intend, and are capable of doing. Based on these considerations, they openly described humans as creators (*khāliq*) of their own actions, and this process of bringing about the actions as creation (*khalq*) caused by human agency.⁵⁹⁶ They particularly underscored that when designating a person as the 'agent' (*fā'il*) in relation to their actions, this designation is not metaphorical or symbolic—it is a direct and literal attribution.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁴ Qāḍī, *al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, 333, 337–338; Qāḍī, *Mughnī*, 8:3, 8, 25, 43, 9:15–19; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl*, 3:34, 53.

⁵⁹⁵ De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination*, 10–11; Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 124.

⁵⁹⁶ Unlike the Ash'arites, they do not strictly define creation as bringing something into existence from nothing or in a completely unique way. According to Mu'tazilite doctrine, creation, as it pertains to humans, means making or producing something according to one's intentions and plans. In other words, humans have the capacity to create their own actions, but this ability is subject to or possible within the framework of divine permission. They illustrate this idea through the colloquial Arabic expression, "I created [animal] skin [hide]" (See Qāḍī, *al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, 380). They also support their belief in human creativity by referencing Quranic verses. For instance: "Indeed, you worship idols besides God and you create falsehood ..." (Quran, 29:17) and "... Praise be to God, the best of creators" (Quran, 23:14). In short, while God is acknowledged as the ultimate creator who initiates creation from nothing, Mu'tazilites argue that humans also possess the capacity to create. However, human capacity is limited; they cannot create perfectly or in a limitless way to the same extent as God. See Qāḍī, *Mughnī*, 8:298.

⁵⁹⁷ The Mu'tazilites firmly argued that humans possess power (*qudra*) to carry out their actions. This power is present within humans before action. They believed, only in such a case, holding the power prior to the action, can one say that a human being is the genuine cause of their actions, rather than just being a symbolic or

When asked whether they believe that someone other than Allāh can be considered a true agent, these intellectuals would steadfastly reply with a definite “Yes.”⁵⁹⁸ They used various descriptive terms for the human agent to emphasise this point and thus their exclusive responsibility, such as ‘creator’ (*khāliq*), ‘initiator’ or ‘originator’ (*mūjjid*), ‘inventor’ (*mukhtari* ‘ or *mubdi* ‘), and ‘doer’ or ‘agent’ (*fā’il*).⁵⁹⁹ Consequently, they believed that faith (*īmān*) and disbelief (*kufṛ*) are the direct result of human autonomy; thus, one deserves punishment for disbelief and reward for faith.

As for the Ash‘arites, their interpretation of the problem is strongly influenced by their belief in God’s absolute omnipotence.⁶⁰⁰ According to the Ash‘arites, God is the ultimate cause

metaphorical cause. See al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1:111, 139; Cf. Qāḍī, *al-Uṣūl al-Khamsa*, 396; Qāḍī, *Mughnī*, 4:331.

⁵⁹⁸ Qāḍī, *Mughnī*, 20:2.

⁵⁹⁹ Al-Ash‘arī, *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*, 1:110; De Cillis, *Free Will and Predestination*, 11.

⁶⁰⁰ The Ash‘arite theologians were concerned with preserving the absolute sovereignty of God and ensuring that nothing in the universe could act independently of His will. With this purpose, they developed an original theory known as occasionalism. According to occasionalism, all events and actions in the universe, including seemingly causal relationships between objects or events, are directly caused by God. Thus, there are no inherent causal powers in created things themselves; rather, God is the direct cause of every occurrence in the world. They rejected the idea of secondary causes or natural laws as independent agents of causation. See al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, 239–251; Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī’s Philosophical Theology*, 125–27, 145–46, 148ff; Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Averroës and Aquinas* (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), 56–78. Occasionalism has been influential not only in Islamic theology but also in Western philosophy, particularly in the works of early modern philosophers such as René Descartes and Nicolas Malebranche, who adapted and developed occasionalist ideas within the context of Christian thought. See Steven M. Nadler, ‘Descartes and Occasional Causation’, in *Occasionalism: Causation Among the Cartesians* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 29–47; Andrew R. Platt, ‘Malebranche’s Case for Occasionalism’, in *One True Cause: Causal Powers, Divine Concurrence, and the Seventeenth-Century Revival of Occasionalism*, online edn. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 302–C8.N135, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190941796.003.0009>, accessed 22 Mar. 2024.

of everything that happens in the universe, including human actions.⁶⁰¹ Nothing can occur without God's will and power being involved. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that they adopted a position of complete fatalism either. Instead, they endeavoured to develop a middle path between the Mu'tazilites and the Jabarites. They introduced the concept of 'acquisition' (*kasb*) through which they sought to provide a framework for understanding and justifying human moral responsibility within the context of God's absolute power, without attributing the power of creation directly to humans themselves.⁶⁰²

They categorise human actions into two types: those that are involuntary and beyond an individual's control, such as sneezing, and those that are voluntary and under one's control, such as walking. Regardless of whether an action is voluntary or involuntary, all human deeds are attributed to a temporarily created power (*qudra muḥdatha*) granted by God.⁶⁰³ This power or capacity, which causes an action to occur, is accompanied by a simultaneous act of will or intention (*qaṣd*). Moreover, this power to perform actions is given by God at the moment of intention and continues to exist alongside the actual performance of the action.⁶⁰⁴ Despite being

⁶⁰¹ Al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna*, 132; al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 158; 'Abd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1981), 101–102.

⁶⁰² Al-Ash'arī, *Kitāb al-Luma* ', 37–38; al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 159; Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Faṣl*, 20–22.

⁶⁰³ Al-Ash'arī, *al-Ibāna*, 132–33; *Kitāb al-Luma* ', 55; al-Juwaynī, *Kitāb al-Irshād*, 159–62. According to another interpretation, al-Ash'arī argued that the temporarily created power (*al-qudra al-ḥāditha*) granted by God does not directly impact or influence (*ta'thīr*) the action it corresponds to (*maqdūr*). Moreover, this temporarily created power neither initiates nor triggers the production or occurrence (*wuqū'*) of the action or its attributes (*ṣifāt*). This interpretation of al-Ash'arī's position considerably makes it difficult to justify human responsibility for their actions. See Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology*, 130.

⁶⁰⁴ Al-Ash'arī, *Kitāb al-Luma* ', 55–56.

empowered by God to perform actions, individuals are credited with the actions because they simultaneously exercise their will to carry them out.

As a result, it is assumed that responsibility is effectively attributed to human beings because their will and intention play a triggering role in the occurrence of the action. In other words, it is a person's will and intention that make them the agent (*fā'il*) or acquirer (*kāсіб*) of an action.⁶⁰⁵ Yet, although humans are seen as the agents and 'proximate' causes of their actions, God still remains the 'primary' or 'ultimate' cause of human acquisition.⁶⁰⁶

In short, within Ash'arite thought, human free will and God's divine will coexist harmoniously in the realm of human action. When individuals form intentions, God immediately grants them a created power (*qudra muḥdatha*) to bring their intentions into reality. Humans act as the immediate causes of their actions, while God remains the ultimate source of human power to act. It is assumed that since God, as the proximate cause, does not hinder individuals from acting or believing as they desire, it does not impede their freedom. Therefore, for the Ash'arite, it is considered acceptable and logical to hold individuals accountable for their actions.

The discussion so far has revealed three standpoints or approaches for reconciling human free will with the divine attributes of God. Firstly, the fatalistic or deterministic approach, as advocated by the Jabarites, denies human free will and asserts that everything is predetermined. While this perspective upholds divine attributes, it raises questions about human moral responsibility, as individuals are regarded as mere instruments of God's will. Secondly, the indeterministic or libertarian attitude, often associated with the Mu'tazilite school, holds that

⁶⁰⁵ Frank, Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School, 118–120.

⁶⁰⁶ Frank, Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School, 118–20; Griffel, al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology, 125–130.

humans have the capacity to make choices and perform actions independently, without external determinants. This perspective firmly supports human autonomy and free will, thus justifying human accountability, but it undermines traditional beliefs regarding God's omnipotence and control over human affairs. Thirdly, the approach proposed by the Ash'arites seeks to find a compromise or balance between these two positions. Specifically, they aim to maintain both human freedom and responsibility while also preserving the divine attributes of God. In other words, they aim to reconcile the concept of human autonomy and accountability with the belief in God's omnipotence and omniscience.

Before analysing Nasafi's understanding of human freedom, it is prudent to briefly outline the views of his master, al-Māturīdī, on this issue, as Nasafi clearly follows in his footsteps. For al-Māturīdī, it is evident from the Scripture that humans are subject to certain divine commands and prohibitions, leading him to conclude that we are responsible and free beings. He also argues that everyone knows from their own consciousness of self (*min nafsihī*) that they freely choose (*mukhtār*) what they do and that they are real agents (*fā'il*) who acquire what they do (*kāsib*).⁶⁰⁷ In short, there is no doubt in al-Māturīdī's mind that human beings are responsible and free agents, as both Scriptural evidence and our consciousness support this assertion; however, the challenge lies in clearly explaining this fact alongside the reality that everything, including human actions, is created by God.

Al-Māturīdī argues that the problem can be resolved by recognising the existence of two distinct powers in the emergence of human action. Accordingly, for every human action, there are two aspects: (i) From the first aspect, in respect to creation (*khalq*), actions belong to God, as

⁶⁰⁷ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 316–317.

His action is the act of originating (*al-ibdāʾ*), which involves bringing forth or extracting (*al-ikhrāj*) from non-existence (*al-ʿadam*) to visible existence (*wujūd*). (ii) From the second aspect, in respect to acquisition (*kasb*), actions belong to humans, as they are the ones who acquire these actions through their eagerness or desire (*hirs*) and their decision to perform them. Thus, human actions represent free choice in respect to acquisition, but in regard to creation, they do not, as all actions, one by one, are ‘things,’ and all things are created by God. Yet, according to al-Māturīdī, the simple fact of asserting the createdness of anything does not indicate whether it acts freely or in a determined manner. He argues that attributing an action to both God and the human agent in different respects (creation vs. acquisition) is a balanced solution to the problem. By holding this view, al-Māturīdī rejects the Jahmiyya interpretation of human actions, which they regard as merely metaphorical rather than real. Additionally, he counters the Muʿtazilite argument that accuses his philosophical position of being a form of hidden or crypto-determinism. Al-Māturīdī also states that humans cannot always predict whether their actions will result in good or evil. If humans truly created their own actions, they would always achieve their desired outcomes. Therefore, since humans are often unaware of the consequences, al-Māturīdī argues that it is clear they are not the creators of their actions, but that God is. Thus, we can uniquely call God ‘The Creating Agent’ (*fāʿil khāliq*), but in the case of humans, when acting as agents, they cannot be called *khāliq*; instead, they should be called ‘The Acquiring Agent’ (*fāʿil kātib*), because human agents acquire their power to act, unlike The Creating Agent Who possesses the power to act intrinsically or essentially.⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰⁸ For more details about al-Māturīdī’s understanding of *kasb*, see al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 316–320; Pessagno, ‘Irāda, Ikhtiyār, Qudra, Kasb’, 180–191.

As for Nasafī, much like his master al-Māturīdī and their counterparts, the Ash‘arites, his main concern regarding human actions is to find a solution that preserves the fundamental Islamic belief in God’s omnipotence while ensuring human responsibility. Specifically, Nasafī aims to establish a framework where human actions are meaningful and individuals are held accountable for their choices, without undermining the belief that God is the ultimate creator and sustainer of all actions. Nasafī’s two main themes are: (i) God is the creator of everything, including human actions, and (ii) humans have freedom in their actions and, therefore, bear responsibility for the consequences. Otherwise, if humans were not free in their actions, divine justice would be undermined.⁶⁰⁹

Nasafī disagrees with the Mu‘tazilite belief that humans create their own actions. He argues that this idea contradicts the monotheistic belief in a single, all-powerful God who is the origin of all existence. Nasafī strongly condemns the Mu‘tazilites for their belief because, in his view, acknowledging any creators other than God contradicts the principle of *tawḥīd*, which emphasises the oneness of God and His exclusive role as the creator.⁶¹⁰

According to Nasafī, humans have the ability to make choices and act freely (*ikhtiyār*) because they possess the power or capability (*istiṭā‘a* or *qudra*) to do so.⁶¹¹ The concept of *istiṭā‘a* or *qudra* is divided into two parts: the first relates to having sound causes and tools (*salāmat al-asbāb wa-al-ālāt*) for action, while the second pertains to the physical health and

⁶⁰⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:113–114, 172.

⁶¹⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:173–175.

⁶¹¹ Nasafī states that terms such as ‘*istiṭā‘a*,’ ‘*ṭāqa*,’ ‘*qudra*,’ and ‘*quwwa*’ are synonymous in the terminology of Muslim theologians (*mutakallimūn*). In their theory of human actions, these terms are used interchangeably to refer to the capacity that an individual must possess in order to perform an action. See Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:113; *Tamhīd*, 53; *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 69.

functioning of the body's organs and limbs (*ṣiḥḥat al-jawāriḥ wa-al-a'dā'*). In simpler terms, the first aspect of *istiṭā'a* pertains to the situation or conditions before taking action. Having the right circumstances and resources available beforehand is a precondition for the successful completion of the action. Nasafī uses a Quranic verse as an example of this kind of *istiṭā'a*: “Pilgrimage thereto is a duty men owe to Allah, —those who can afford the journey (*man istiṭā'a sabīlan*)”.⁶¹² This refers to having the means such as food, transportation, and a healthy body required for performing a pilgrimage. The second aspect of *istiṭā'a* is an accident (*'araḍ*) created by God in man at the time of action, which is the actual power or faculty (*al-qudra al-ḥaqīqiyya*) through which voluntary actions are performed or acquired (*kasb*) by the servants. Nasafī uses another Quranic verse to exemplify this type of *istiṭā'a*: “Did I not say that with me you would never be able to (*lan tastaṭī'a*) have patience?”⁶¹³ Nasafī asserts that this power granted by God is what truly allows humans to make free choices, and it is not a pre-existing potential but rather something newly created by God each time it is utilised by humans.⁶¹⁴

According to Nasafī, the power (*qudra*) possessed by humans influences their actions, but this effect is not in the sense of creation (*ta'alluq al-qudra lā li jihat al-ikhtirā'*); that is, it does not mean that the human agent, through this power, brings something into existence out of nothing.⁶¹⁵ He states that the power can have an effect (*ta'thūr*) on action (*maqdūr*) in two distinct ways: one is related to invention or creation (*ikhtirā'*), and the other is related to acquisition (*kasb*).⁶¹⁶ The former implies that the power enables one to initiate or create

⁶¹² Quran, 3:97.

⁶¹³ Quran, 18:72.

⁶¹⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:114–115, 223; *Tamhīd*, 56.

⁶¹⁵ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:223–224.

⁶¹⁶ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:225.

something new, while the latter implies that the power facilitates the acquisition or attainment of something that already exists. The power of creation belongs solely to God. Conversely, the power of acquisition is attributed to humans. According to Nasafī's theological stance, God retains the power of creation for Himself, while granting humans the power of acquisition, thereby making them responsible.

Nasafī here, in fact, follows the footsteps of his master al-Māturīdī, who explains the distinction between the act (*fi 'l*) carried out by God and the one performed by human beings in his *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* through the following words: "The meaning of Allāh's act (*fi 'l*) is the creation of something (*ibdā'*) and bringing it forth from nothingness (*'adam*) into existence (*wujūd*)."⁶¹⁷ The act of creation (*ibdā'* or *ikhtirā'*) means giving something its essence, intrinsic nature, or quiddity (*shay' iyya*). The act (*fi 'l*), in this sense, is peculiar only to Allāh.⁶¹⁸

That being said, human beings are not passive recipients of these created natures; they actively participate in acquiring the things that God has brought into existence for them. To elaborate further, there can be two distinct agents or powers that influence actions, one human and the other divine: "The entry of a single action (*maqdūr*) under two distinct powers, one being the power of creation (*ikhtirā'*) and the other being the power of acquisition (*iktisāb*), is permissible."⁶¹⁹ Nevertheless, although human actions can be subject to the influence of two different powers or agents, these actions cannot be created by both of those agents, or both of these distinct powers cannot be in the sense of creation.⁶²⁰ The distinction between these two

⁶¹⁷ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 317.

⁶¹⁸ See al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 143, 171, 174; Nasafī, *Tabṣira* 2:202–203.

⁶¹⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:226; *Tamhīd*, 70.

⁶²⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:224–25.

powers is explained by Nasafi in detail, but his following words summarise his idea: “What occurs through a means is acquisition (*kasb*), and what occurs without a means is creation (*khalq*).”⁶²¹

Nasafi elsewhere presents human intention as the underlying reason that renders individuals responsible for their actions. Accordingly, while God is the ultimate source of human actions in the sense of providing the quiddity of those actions, it is human intention (*qaṣd*) that activates or triggers God’s creative act (*takwīn*), bringing these actions from nonexistence into existence. This is a consistent practice established by God, wherein every action is created when a person possesses a firm intention to perform that action. Nasafi articulates this idea as follows: “Truly, Allāh, the Most High, has established [or decreed] a consistent custom [or practice] (*āda*) in which He creates every action [when there is] a firm intention (*qaṣd*) on the part of the servant to acquire that action.”⁶²² Nevertheless, God creates human actions not out of obligation, but rather as a result of His established practice and divine wisdom (*ḥikma*). In other words, God does not create something because He has to, but rather because His divine wisdom makes that creation inevitable. This inevitability arises from the fact that every action He wills to create is necessary for His overarching plan for creation as a whole. According to Nasafi, while there may be several explanations within God’s boundless wisdom for this particular divine practice, the main purpose is to hold individuals accountable for their actions and to determine their treatment in the afterlife based on these actions.⁶²³ However, God has the power to deviate from this practice. For example, there are exceptions to this general rule or habit of God when He creates

⁶²¹ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 2:226.

⁶²² Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 2:228–229.

⁶²³ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 2:177, 228.

extraordinary acts (*mu'jizāt*) to demonstrate the legitimacy of His prophets, which is also another necessity of His divine wisdom.

Then, according to Nasafī, God is the ultimate cause that brings actions into existence and is also the creator of the human capacity for free will in the sense of pure potential. Yet, the actualisation of that potential for each action belongs to the human agent. In other words, all actions are ultimately initiated by God. Humans simply manifest the intention or will in favour of the realisation of a particular action by God on behalf of themselves. The potentiality or inherent capacity for humans to make choices is again a result of God's creation. However, despite God being the ultimate cause and creator of human actions and their capacity for free will, Nasafī seems to suggest that the actualisation of this potential for each specific case lies within the domain of human agency. Notably, according to Nasafī, the manifestation or act of expressing one's will in favour of the realisation of a specific action is uncreated.⁶²⁴ What is created is the human potential or capacity for making free decisions. It is within the discretion of each individual to exercise this will as they see fit. In other words, when an individual decides to act in a certain way—which is the state of actuality of their capacity for volition and thus not created—their decision arises from their capacity for free will—which is the state of

⁶²⁴ Nasafī uses the following analogy to explain this point: a master tells his slave that if he enters the house, he will be free. In this story, Nasafī explains that the state of being free is only realised if the slave chooses to enter the house of his own free will. The master's words may serve as motivation, but they do not compel the slave to act. In other words, the act of being free is only realised through the slave's own free will, not the master's words, which may serve only as a source of motivation because the slave still has the choice not to enter the house. Nasafī extends this analogy to God's influence on human actions. He argues that God's influence does not mean that people are forced to carry out those actions. Instead, the true cause of a person's actions lies within their own free will, and God's influence only makes it possible for humans to use their potential as they see fit. See Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 69–70, also see 78–79.

potentiality and thus created— where they have the ability to choose between different options, including both favouring and opposing the realisation of a particular action. According to Nasafī, this is what makes individuals responsible for the outcomes of their actions. The creation of an action by Allāh and its acquisition by an individual in accordance with their particular act of will are interconnected and inseparable. Essentially, they are one and the same, two facets of a single process, occurring simultaneously, with the action being both divinely created and individually acquired.

Nasafī's interpretation of human freedom differs significantly from that of both the Mu'tazilites and the Jabarites. According to the Mu'tazilites, only one power (*qudra*), that of human beings, can influence action, while in the Jabarites, it is solely the power of God that has influence on action. As for Nasafī, two distinct powers can influence the same action: one is the power of creation (*ikhtirā'*), which belongs to God, and the other is the power of acquisition (*kasb*), which belongs to humans. Nasafī's interpretation differs from that of the Ash'arites as well because, for Nasafī, human power has influence (*ta'thīr*) on action, whereas the Ash'arites reject this idea.⁶²⁵ In addition to this, both Nasafī and the Ash'arites agree that human free will, as an inherent capacity or potentiality, is created by God. However, according to Nasafī, a specific actualisation or utilisation of this potential for every human action or decision is not

⁶²⁵ Salmān bin Nāṣir al-Nīsābūrī (d. 512/1118), a student of al-Juwaynī, reports on al-Ash'arī's teachings on the issue as follows: According to al-Ash'arī, both the temporarily created power (*al-qudra al-hāditha*) that humans possess and the actions they perform are accidents. These accidents —human actions and their temporary power, like all other accidents— are created by God alone. The temporarily created power granted to humans has no effect (*ta'thīr*) on the actual action (*maqdūr*) they perform (*al-qudra al-hāditha lā tu'aththiru fī maqdūrihā..., lā yajūzu an yakūna al-fī'l muta'alliqan bi al-fā'il min jamī' al-jihāt*). See Salmān bin Nāṣir al-Nīsābūrī, *al-Ghunya fī al-Kalām*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ḥasanayn 'Abd al-Hādī (Cairo: Dār al-Salām, 2010), 803, 809.

created, whereas for the Ash‘arites, this specific actualisation of human free will for each case is also divinely created. In the final analysis, although they seem to have significant differences in their perspectives on this latter point, it appears they only have a verbal disagreement in the former case. This is because both accept the same notion that individuals can only acquire their actions, not create them. This idea of *kasb* is understood by Nasafī as human power having an effect on the action. However, although the Ash‘arites also defend the very same idea, they do not interpret it as humans having an influence on their actions. If we were to present a linear sequence, in order to clarify Nasafī’s and his school’s position on the issue, ranging from strict determinism to a greater recognition of human free will, even if it entails limiting God’s omnipotence to some extent, it would be as follows: Jabarites, Ash‘arites, Māturīdites, and Mu‘tazilites.

Nasafī acknowledges the challenge of understanding the theory of *kasb*.⁶²⁶ Nevertheless, it is his attempt to explain and justify why human beings are morally responsible for their actions. His discussion of the problem and his arguments in favour of the moral responsibility of human action occupy a significant part of his voluminous work *Tabṣira*.⁶²⁷ However, we must be content with this general overview of his theory of human agency, as our purpose in this subsection is not to delve into the intricacies of his theory of *kasb* or to offer a solution to the dilemma between divine and human will. The aim of our discussion is to determine Nasafī’s position on whether the act of faith is the result of human free will, as this greatly affects whether

⁶²⁶ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 71.

⁶²⁷ See Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:113–269, 281–312.

his interpretation of religious faith is morally and intellectually justified in terms of the Ethics of Belief framework. Therefore, let us now move on to his views on this particular issue.

4. Faith: Divine Gift or Human Acquisition?

Nasafī begins his discussion of whether faith is an outcome of human free will by articulating the logical consequences of the theories of human agency held by the aforementioned schools of thought. According to the Jabarite perspective, human beings do not possess the power and free will to acquire faith; therefore, faith is something created (*makhlūq*) and given to them by God as a blessing (*min Allāhi ta'āla ilā al-'abdi*).⁶²⁸ Since faith is given by God, man is essentially forced or compelled by God's will to either believe or disbelieve (*al-'abdu majbūrun 'alā al-īmāni wa-al-kufri*).⁶²⁹ According to them, since one's ultimate destiny is already determined by God, human efforts have no bearing on one's salvation or damnation.

According to the Mu'tazilite perspective, faith is something that individuals create through their own will and power. Therefore, the decision to have faith is not created (*ghayr makhlūq*) or predetermined by God outside of human control. Human beings possess the power (*quwwa*) to independently choose faith without requiring God's intervention or assistance (*'awn*). If the idea of a creator should be brought into the discussion at all, it is not God but the individuals themselves, because they possess the power to act before the action (*al-'abdu mustafī'un likasb nafsihī linafsihī qabla al-fi'l*).⁶³⁰ Man is the creator of his or her actions, whether good or evil, because God does not decree evil (*lā yuqaddiru al-sharr*), does not

⁶²⁸ Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 66.

⁶²⁹ Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 66.

⁶³⁰ Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 66.

perform evil (*lā yaqḍī bi al-sharr*), and does not will evil (*lā yashā`u al-sharr*). If it were accepted that God controls people's actions and punishes them for their evil deeds, it would imply that God is unjust, which contradicts the Quran's portrayal of a just God. God cannot be associated with injustice (*ẓulm*), tyranny, or oppression (*jawr*) in any way.⁶³¹ However, Nasafī finds this radical rejection of the idea of *jabr* unacceptable because it implies placing a limitation on God's omnipotence or all-powerfulness.

Regarding the Ash'arites, Nasafī states that as a result of their theory of human actions, they asserted that faith is created, but they attempted to justify human responsibility through their theory of *kasb*. Nasafī respects the Ash'arīs for their carefulness in safeguarding the concept of God's omnipotence in their theory of human actions. Yet, he also critiques them for not acknowledging the effect (*ta'thīr*) of human power on actions.⁶³² As a result, although their theory of *kasb* has some merit in terms of protecting God's attributes, it is flawed in terms of properly establishing human responsibility and is ultimately indistinguishable from Jabarite determinism.

As for Nasafī's understanding of the relationship between free will and faith, he expresses his commitment to the principles of revealed religion, as he does on every occasion when dealing with other issues. According to him, the act of believing cannot be attributed to human effort alone, as God is the ultimate creator of everything; therefore, there must be a divine aspect involved as well. In line with his theory of human agency, Nasafī believes that both human and divine power (*qudra*) should play a role in a person's act of having faith. He says,

⁶³¹ Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 69.

⁶³² Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 65.

“Faith is the action (*fi ‘l*) of the servant, but the guidance (*hidāya*) comes from the Lord.”⁶³³

Elsewhere, he states that “from the human side, faith is confession (*iqrār*) by the tongue and assent (*taṣdīq*) by the heart. From the divine side, it is guidance and success (*tawfīq*) granted by God.”⁶³⁴

These quotes from Nasafī imply that both human and divine power have influence on the act of having faith. In other words, according to Nasafī, because it is conceivable for two distinct powers or agents to have an impact on an action, faith, in this case, is viewed as an action that is carried out collaboratively, in a sense, between the servant and God. However, because only God possesses the power to create something from nothing, human power cannot be understood as the creative force responsible for bringing human actions into existence out of nothingness. The effect of human power can be understood solely as the servant’s focus or direction of their will or intention towards faith, choosing it over disbelief, uncertainty, or vacillation between the two. Nasafī interprets this role of the servants as their influence (*ta`thīr*) on the action and calls this mechanism acquisition (*kasb*), through which the action is attributed to the servants. On the other hand, God demonstrates to humans the ugliness of disbelief and the goodness of faith through His guidance (*hidāya*), and based on the will of the servants, God

⁶³³ Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 65.

⁶³⁴ Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 77. As previously discussed, according to Nasafī, the true essence of faith is solely assent by the heart. However, Nasafī acknowledges the practical necessity for individuals to openly declare their faith in Islam. This public profession is crucial for being acknowledged as a Muslim by society. Therefore, Nasafī sometimes includes the phrase “confession by the tongue” (*iqrār bi al-lisān*) in his discussions of faith. However, he emphasises that this verbal confession mainly concerns the external manifestation of faith and is not the essence of faith itself. As far as the essence of faith is concerned, Nasafī consistently describes it as “assent by the heart” (*taṣdīq bi al-qalb*). See Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 65; *Tamhīd*, 99; *Tabṣira*, 2:404–415.

creates either faith or disbelief, which individuals then acquire. Nasafī understands this part as the influence of God on the act of believing and calls it creation (*ikhtirā`*). This implies that, according to Nasafī, belief is not solely a result of human effort or acquisition but also involves God's active involvement in creating or instilling faith within individuals. In this way, both man's power of acquisition permeates or influences the act of having faith, thus making the servant responsible for it, and God's power of creation permeates or influences the very same act, thus ensuring that His attribute of being the creator of everything is safeguarded.

In Nasafī's theological writings, there are numerous statements that point to the notion that faith involves both human and divine agency or influence (*ta`thīr*), portraying it as a joint endeavour between the servant and the divine. The act of manifesting or revealing (*ta`rīf*) His existence through various signs belongs to Allāh, but the act of recognising these signs and attaining knowledge or awareness (*ma`rifā* or *ta`arruf*) of Allāh belongs to the servant.⁶³⁵ The act of providing guidance (*hidāya*) belongs to Allāh, while the act of seeking guidance (*ihtidā`*) and accepting it (*istihdā`*) belongs to the servant.⁶³⁶ Similarly, the act of providing assistance (*tawfiq*) belongs to Allāh, while manifesting firm determination (*`azm*), intention (*qaṣd*), and working diligently (*jadd*) towards faith belongs to the servant.⁶³⁷ Lastly, the acts of giving generously (*ikrām*) and granting (*i`ṭā`*) belong to Allāh, while the act of approving or receiving (*qabūl*) belongs to the servant.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁵ Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 66.

⁶³⁶ Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 66.

⁶³⁷ Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 66.

⁶³⁸ Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 66–67.

The discussion so far has revealed three key propositions concerning Nasafī's interpretation of religious faith: According to Nasafī, faith and deeds are two distinct entities, albeit closely interconnected. Furthermore, mere verbal confession (*iqrār*) alone cannot be considered faith, as it is possible to assert the opposite of what one truly holds in the heart. While verbal confession is important for voluntary participation in the Muslim community and adherence to its laws (*sharī'a*), it must be accompanied by genuine belief (*taṣdīq*) to be meaningful in the presence of God. Lastly, while there is indeed a close relationship between faith and knowledge, with faith being rooted in knowledge, the two are not synonymous. Indeed, according to Nasafī, faith must rely on knowledge, but it also encompasses elements beyond what can be empirically known. Therefore, humanity is in need of divine knowledge revealed through prophecy.

Let us start with the last point. Given that, according to Islamic scripture, ideally knowledge should precede faith (*īmān*),⁶³⁹ it is not surprising that Nasafī suggests faith can be rooted in nothing but knowledge. However, as Nasafī observed, individuals may arrive at faith through incorrect methods, such as claiming to receive inspiration (*ilhām*) or believing that blind imitation (*taqlīd*) is the most reliable way to form correct religious beliefs. According to Nasafī, these methods essentially reveal one's ignorance or lack of intellectual self-confidence regarding matters of faith, leading them to embrace fallacious pathways and thus contradictory truth claims (relativism) in their pursuit of ultimate salvation. Nevertheless, while ignorance (*jahāla*) or lack of knowledge (*nukra*) is often the main reason for disbelief (*inkār*), there is not a direct causal relationship between knowledge and faith. In other words, someone can have knowledge but still

⁶³⁹ See Quran, 2:146; 6:20; 9:74; 18:29; 27:14.

choose to disbelieve. Although falling into disbelief due to lack of knowledge is morally condemned, persisting in disbelief even when presented with knowledge is a greater sin. This is because it represents a deliberate rejection of truth and an open rebellion against God. Then, it seems, according to Nasafi, even when knowledge is present, the will or our volition still has a role in coming to have faith. But how? And if human will is indeed a genuine factor in the process of having faith, then it becomes necessary to demonstrate that this act of faith is an outcome of human agency; otherwise, an unbalanced interpretation of the relationship between God's omnipotence and human will could render human responsibility futile.

Frederick R. Tennant,⁶⁴⁰ along with many Evidentialists, argues that belief cannot be formed solely through the power of will. He asserts that "We can, by no effort of will, come to believe what we know to be false", because faith cannot be formed independently of, or despite,

⁶⁴⁰ It seems Tennant rejects the strict Evidentialist position, which asserts that "It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence." Yet, his position can be characterised as a form of moderate Evidentialism, as he basically argues for the rationality of religious beliefs. Tennant, both in his personal disposition and philosophical stance, does not favour mysticism. He believes that to validate assertions made through religious experiences —such as encounters with the divine— a foundation of theism must be established beforehand. This implies that Tennant neither accepts religious experiences as sufficient evidence on their own nor completely rejects them to prove the existence of God; rather, he believes they need to be supported by a prior intellectual acceptance of theism. Therefore, theism should be established through a methodical and intellectually rigorous process. This involves a gradual 'ascent' or progression, which he describes as 'laborious,' from knowledge derived from various disciplines such as epistemology, psychology, and the natural sciences. He establishes a similarity between the beliefs formed by scientists and believers, claiming that, in the final analysis, both positions are not fundamentally different from each other. According to him, beliefs can be justified by a combination of rational inference, empirical evidence, moral reasoning, and personal experience, even if they cannot be proven with absolute certainty. Our epistemic reasons serve as good motives for coming to have faith, but they are inconclusive in terms of objectivity or objectively binding all individuals and their mental states, as empirical evidence in matters of faith is limited. See Frederick R. Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 1:257–365.

epistemic reasons; therefore, the idea of ‘will to believe’ is not possible.⁶⁴¹ According to many Evidentialists, forming beliefs by disregarding evidence is, in the first place, psychologically impossible, as noted earlier. However, when knowledge, which represents the highest level of certainty, is concerned, assent occurs without our conscious control. In such cases, we necessarily assent to the truth content of knowledge, which implies that when knowledge is present, faith is imposed upon us involuntarily.⁶⁴²

That being said, there must be a role for human agency in its formation if religious faith is considered morally praiseworthy. Then, either possessing knowledge should not automatically result in the belief that *p*, or alternatively, it should be demonstrated that this mere belief, that *p*, and the religious faith associated with it are not the same.

There can be three potential solutions to this: The first, as suggested by Penelhum, is accepting that although knowledge inevitably leads one to faith, individuals can voluntarily choose to be glad or pleased with knowing and accepting the truth. This attitude is morally praiseworthy because one can also choose to be displeased with knowing the truth and decide to remain indifferent to its content or implications.⁶⁴³ This idea was also expressed by Tennant before with the following words: “Assent is not necessarily accompanied by, or inclusive of, any emotional element such as ‘welcoming’: we may believe and rejoice—or tremble—and we may

⁶⁴¹ Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, 1:293.

⁶⁴² Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, 1:292–93.

⁶⁴³ “Perhaps acceptance can be given voluntarily even though the grounds are conclusive. If this seems absurd, let us reflect first that there are two ways in which one can accept what is proved to one: one can be reluctant to accept it, ..., or one can be glad to accept it. Perhaps the man of faith has merit because he is glad to accept the truths of faith when the devil is not.” Terence Penelhum, ‘The Analysis of Faith in St Thomas Aquinas’, *Religious Studies* 13, no. 2 (1977): 152–53.

believe and be left cold.”⁶⁴⁴ In short, this solution suggests that individuals have the autonomy to choose their emotional response to knowing the truth. The second solution proposes to place the role of will before the acquisition of knowledge. Deciding to pursue truth precedes its acquisition, and it is a conscious decision. Rational inquiry into truth also requires effort on the part of the individual. Therefore, despite faith being acquired necessarily after knowledge, the act of actively seeking truth prior to it makes the individual and the act of faith worthy of praise. The third approach is to make a distinction between two types of assents. Accordingly, we can hold two different states or attitudes towards a proposition: intellectual and volitional. The former results from having knowledge of it, and the latter relates to our commitment or devotion to the truth content of it. In other words, merely acknowledging something as true because of knowledge is a far different attitude from genuinely embracing its principles with dedication and commitment. Although the former state of mind—namely, merely acknowledging something as true—lacks any element of choice or personal commitment, the latter state of mind—namely, genuinely embracing the principles arising from that truth—requires a conscious choice and commitment. The second attitude is driven by personal volition. Therefore, intellectual assent and volitional assent are completely different attitudes. The latter represents genuine faith, suggesting that faith involves more than just intellectual cognition; it also entails emotional and moral commitment, which makes faith morally meritorious.

As discussed in detail throughout this chapter, Nasafi adopts the last option. For him, knowledge (*maʿrifa*) is a good motive for coming to have faith, just as ignorance (*jahāla*) is for coming to disbelief. Evidence does not negate our free will (*ikhtiyār*) because humans are

⁶⁴⁴ Tennant, *Philosophical Theology*, 1:291.

capable of deceiving themselves even in the presence of knowledge. In other words, individuals still have the autonomy to choose how they interpret and respond to that evidence. The act of faith, like all human actions, is influenced by the power (*qudra*) of both man and God. The latter power influences the act of faith in terms of creation (*ikhtirā*'), whereas the former power affects it in terms of acquisition (*kasb*). Through the theory of acquisition, Nasafī aims to reconcile these influences. It helps him avoid undermining God's divine attributes and also preserves human responsibility.

Must one's actions align with one's belief that *p* if one claims to believe that *p*? In other words, should there be consistency between what one believes and how one behaves? This question is closely related to whether there is a real distinction between *īmān* and *islām*. As noted before, Nasafī believes that there is no such difference. However, his interpretation of faith as commitment shows that genuine faith requires not only 'cognitive assent' but also its manifestation through one's actions, i.e., one's 'volitional assent'. This is consistent with the 'dispositional' theory of belief in Western philosophy, which suggests that beliefs and corresponding actions are inherently linked and cannot be separated. In other words, according to dispositionalism, beliefs naturally incline individuals towards certain actions or behaviours that are consistent with those beliefs. Thus, for Nasafī, to be a true believer is to act in accordance with the obligations outlined in the Quran and Sunna. This is because only our actions can be subject to both blame and praise. Adherence to the moral principles of faith is a clear demonstration that one's faith is voluntary and therefore meritorious. As a result, the mere public profession of faith (*iqrār bi al-lisān*) has no merit in the presence of God and therefore cannot be the essence of faith, for whether one's faith is worthy of praise or divine reward is measured by how closely one follows the teachings of that faith.

However, according to Nasafī, this does not mean that someone who has sinned cannot still be properly regarded as a true believer. In other words, one could not legally be tried for apostasy if one explicitly claimed one's commitment or disposition to Islam, even if one's actions seemed to suggest otherwise. This is because human beings, by their nature, are prone to error. As long as one's sincerity and inner assent to the principles of faith remain intact, one's status as a Muslim is preserved. Therefore, although deeds and faith are closely connected, deficiency or failure to fulfil its practices do not automatically make one an unbeliever. As a result, it is not deeds one by one (*'amal bi al-arkān*) that are the true essence of faith, but rather the maintenance of a general disposition to act in accordance with its principles and a continuous and sincere commitment to live by its values.

And lastly, although Nasafī believes that a morally justified belief must be based on sound epistemic reasons, this does not mean that he would ignore the role of practical/prudential and moral considerations in shaping one's beliefs. Rather, Nasafī would most likely argue that if there are prudential or moral reasons for holding a belief, these reasons cannot exist separately from epistemic ones, or they can be reduced to epistemic considerations. In other words, he would argue that practical and moral doxastic attitudes can be grounded in epistemic reasons.

For example, if we revisit the example of the cancer patient presented in the first chapter, in this scenario Nasafī, adhering to his Evidentialist position, would speak of a state of conflict between two pieces of evidence rather than accepting a belief despite evidence against it. In other words, in forming a belief, he would stress the importance of weighing and considering all available evidence. If we recall the scenario in the example above, where the field of medicine suggests that a cancer patient is unlikely to survive, while the field of psychology suggests that a strong belief in overcoming cancer can increase the chances of survival, Nasafī

would argue that choosing to trust the input of psychology over medicine is not necessarily contrary to the evidence. Both medicine and psychology have their own valid methods for reaching conclusions, and in certain situations, the field of psychology can play a significant role in determining the overall outcome alongside medicine. Therefore, in this scenario, it is not necessarily against the evidence to favour the discipline of psychology over the discipline of medicine.

Nasafī, like his contemporaries in the Transoxiana region, held expertise not only in theology but also in Islamic jurisprudence. Given his background, it is unlikely that he would ignore the five fundamental objectives (*Maqāsid*) of Shari‘a, which include the principle of the sanctity of human life and the imperative to protect it. In this hypothetical scenario, Nasafī would probably seek to justify the prudential motive with an epistemic motive (preferring psychological evidence over medical evidence), or to prioritise one piece of evidence over another. In short, Nasafī would likely attempt to reconcile conflicting evidence rather than outright rejecting any particular piece of evidence that contradicts his Evidentialist stance.

CHAPTER 5: NASAFĪ'S LEGACY

The last chapter of the study is concerned with Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī's intellectual legacy and his contributions to the school. To uncover his legacy, I will first examine how Nasafī treated his predecessors' writings. This analysis is intended to demonstrate that Nasafī's theological views were not developed in isolation but were instead built upon the intellectual heritage established by earlier scholars. Subsequently, I will discuss what he contributed to the existing theological discourse of his era in Transoxiana, with a focus on both the methodology he introduced and the substance he added to the existing body of theological knowledge. Finally, through a brief survey of works penned after Nasafī, I aim to assess his influence on later scholars and establish his position within the Māturīdī school of theology.

1. His Treatment of the Past

First of all, Nasafī, as mentioned, did not develop his intellectual legacy entirely from scratch; rather, his theology was built upon the pre-existing intellectual tradition of his predecessors. He particularly valued the creedal statements found in the treatises attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa, considering them the most eloquent expressions of the true Islamic faith, firmly rooted in the Quran and Sunna. Nasafī elaborated on these creedal statements from a theological perspective, enriching them with his insights, strengthening them with rational proofs, and passing them on to subsequent generations. Nasafī was also deeply influenced by al-Māturīdī, the eponym of the school, whose ideas Nasafī further developed in formulating his own theology. His frequent citations of al-Māturīdī suggest he had access to al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and other works that have not survived to the present day. As demonstrated by Rudolph's study, al-Māturīdī fundamentally transformed the 'aqīda-based theology of his era,

which had been concisely articulated by Abū Ḥanīfa and his followers in Transoxiana, albeit without much detail compared to Nasafī. Following in al-Māturīdī's footsteps, Nasafī could not have been indifferent to the precedent set by the master. Thus, his theological writings were undoubtedly influenced by the founder of the school.

Let us first examine how Nasafī approached and interpreted the creedal texts attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa. As shown in the previous chapter, according to Nasafī, faith (*īmān*) is assent (*taṣdīq*) by the heart, and he claims that this view was also held by Abū Ḥanīfa in his work, *al-‘Ālim wa-al-Muta‘allim*.⁶⁴⁵ In the text referenced by Nasafī, the exact phrase “faith is assent by the heart (*al-īmān huwa al-taṣdīq bi al-qalb*)” is not found verbatim. Nonetheless, Nasafī's intention is not to claim that Abū Ḥanīfa used this specific phrase to define faith, but rather to suggest that Abū Ḥanīfa preached the idea that the essence of faith is assent (*taṣdīq*) rather than deeds (*a‘māl*) or confession (*iqrār*). Upon examining the referenced text, *al-‘Ālim wa-al-Muta‘allim*, we find that faith is defined through the concepts of assent (*taṣdīq*), knowledge (*ma‘rifā*), certainty (*yaqīn*), confession or utterance with the tongue (*iqrār*), and submission to the will of God (*islām*).⁶⁴⁶ The text then elaborates on each concept. All additional elaborations and explanations from the text in question and other texts attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa support Nasafī's assertion. For example, in the text at hand, after defining faith through the concepts stated above, the author asserts that, at their core, they all mean one and the same thing: that is, an individual's sincere affirmation (*taṣdīq*) of the Prophet and his teachings from Allāh.⁶⁴⁷

⁶⁴⁵ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:38.

⁶⁴⁶ Abū Ḥanīfa, ‘al-‘Ālim wa-al-Muta‘allim Riwāyat Abī Muqātil ‘an Abī Ḥanīfa’, in *Īmām-ı A‘zam’ın Beş Eseri*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, trans. Mustafa Öz, 13th ed. (Istanbul: İFAV, 2017), 18.

⁶⁴⁷ Abū Ḥanīfa, ‘al-‘Ālim wa-al-Muta‘allim’, 18.

Expanding on this, someone who believes in their heart and declares their belief with their tongue is considered a believer both in the presence of Allāh and by people alike. A person who believes in their heart but does not express it with their tongue is viewed as a believer by Allāh but as an infidel by people. Conversely, an individual who does not believe in their heart but claims to believe with their tongue is seen as a disbeliever by Allāh and a believer by people because only Allāh knows what lies within people's hearts.⁶⁴⁸

Again, in his *risāla* to 'Uthmān al-Battī, Abū Ḥanīfa speaks of believers as the people of assent (*ahl al-taṣḍīq*), those who recognise and affirm the truthfulness of the Prophet and what he brought from Allāh.⁶⁴⁹ Additionally, in the same text, it is argued that faith (*īmān*) and deeds or actions (*a'māl*) are not the same. A deficiency in one's deeds does not affect their status as a believer unless they relinquish their assent (*taṣḍīq*).⁶⁵⁰

As demonstrated, despite the absence of an explicit statement defining faith as *al-taṣḍīq bi al-qalb*, the concept of *taṣḍīq* emerges as a significant theme in the works attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa. According to these texts, the true essence of faith is found in one's inner conviction or acceptance (*taṣḍīq*), rather than in outward confession (*iqrār*) or actions (*a'māl*). Thus, even though Nasafī's specific definition of faith cannot be found word-for-word in the works attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa, the interpretations and supplementary explanations within them support the idea that faith fundamentally involves one's inner assent, which accords with Nasafī's perspective on the issue.

⁶⁴⁸ Abū Ḥanīfa, 'al-Ālim wa-al-Muta'allim', 18–19.

⁶⁴⁹ Abū Ḥanīfa, 'Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā 'Uthmān al-Battī', 80.

⁶⁵⁰ Abū Ḥanīfa, 'Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā 'Uthmān al-Battī', 81–82; 'al-Ālim wa-al-Muta'allim', 17.

As discussed previously, the assertion put forth by the Jahmiyya school that faith consists solely of knowledge (*ma'rifa*) has likely sparked significant debates among later generations, as Nasafī extensively addresses this issue in his *Tabṣira*. According to Nasafī although assent born from knowledge is an inseparable part of faith, it alone is not sufficient to constitute faith. He implies that there is a distinction between having mere knowledge of something and having true faith in it. Possessing knowledge does not automatically lead to faith. A person might understand something intellectually but still lack genuine faith in it. The assent known as faith is an additional assent built upon the initial assent derived from knowledge. Therefore, having faith means embracing a positive attitude towards truth, being content, glad, and joyful to encounter it, firmly placing it at the centre of life, and living accordingly with unwavering determination.⁶⁵¹

The concept of certainty (*yaqīn*) found in *al-ʿĀlim wa-al-Mutaʿallim* is also an inseparable part of Nasafī's understanding of faith—this commitment and belief in truth must be absolute—but according to him, again *yaqīn* is not its essence but an adjective that shows the strength of this commitment. Confession (*iqrār*) is once more an action expected under normal circumstances from a person who holds such absolute faith. Nasafī interprets Abū Ḥanīfa's mention of '*iqrār*' in the definition of faith to mean that one should treat someone who confesses that they believe in the Prophet and what he brought from Allāh as a believer. This is because outward confession may indicate faith, yet the true essence of faith is assent by the heart, which only Allāh can truly know. Therefore, even if someone does not confess their faith under duress or danger, their faith remains intact, as confession is not the essence of faith. The concept of '*islām*', which denotes submission to God's will, serves to express another dimension of the

⁶⁵¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:406–415.

same assent. In other words, the inner assent, which lies at the core of faith, inherently includes submission to God's will. Therefore, according to Nasafī, *īmān* and *islām* are synonymous. Through these kinds of elaborations, Nasafī not only transmits the views of Abū Ḥanīfa to later generations but also expands upon and refines them, providing a more developed theological and philosophical structure.

Nasafī occasionally cites passages from the texts credited to Abū Ḥanīfa with minimal alteration, reproducing the original wording almost word-for-word. For instance, when discussing that in the hereafter one's faith will not be of any benefit for the believer, Nasafī makes reference to *Fiqh al-Absaṭ*, another text attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa, and quotes the following passage:

قيل له ما بال أقوام يقولون يدخل المؤمن النار. فقال رحمه الله لا يدخل النار الا كل مؤمن فقيل له فالكفار فقال هم مؤمنون يومئذ.⁶⁵²

These words closely mirror the following passage found in *Fiqh al-Absaṭ*:

قلت فما بال أقوام يقولون لا يدخل المؤمن النار قال لا يدخل النار الا كل مؤمن، قلت، والكفار؟ قال هم يؤمنون يومئذ،⁶⁵³

According to Nasafī, faith is only legitimate or justified when grounded in evidence or epistemic reasons, as we have discussed in previous chapters. Since, in the afterlife, presenting evidence from the manifest world (*shāhid*) to the hidden one (*ghā'ib*) will no longer be possible, and the overwhelming truth will suppress or override all men's free will, everyone will be

⁶⁵² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:38–39.

⁶⁵³ 'Al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ', in *Īmām-ı A'zam'ın Beş Eseri*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, trans. Mustafa Öz, 13th ed. (Istanbul: İFAV, 2017), 52.

believers by necessity, in any case. Nasafī encapsulates this notion through the words of Abū Ḥanīfa, which show both the origin of Nasafī’s idea and how he further elaborates on Abū Ḥanīfa’s statements on creedal matters. Comparing the original statements found in *Tabṣira* and *al-Fiqh al-Absaṭ*, there emerge no significant differences between the two quotes, save for variations in punctuation and the use of verbs, whether active or passive. The first excerpt from *Tabṣira*, translated below, sufficiently conveys the essence, rendering the need for understanding the second excerpt redundant, given its close resemblance to the former:

It was said to him, “What is the matter with some people who say that the believer enters the fire (Hell)?” To this, he (Abū Ḥanīfa), may Allāh have mercy on him, said “No one enters the fire except every believer.” It was said to him, “[Then what about] the disbelievers?” He said, “They are believers on that day.”

Another issue that Nasafī elaborates upon, based on Abū Ḥanīfa’s views, is that of grave sin. This issue concerns the fate of a believer in the afterlife who has committed a major sin, as well as how such individuals should be regarded and treated in this world. According to Abū Ḥanīfa, as reported by Nasafī, a person is not automatically considered an apostate even for committing a major sin as long as they profess their faith.⁶⁵⁴ Nasafī then elaborates on this over a couple of pages and concludes that Abū Ḥanīfa holds a moderate stance regarding the status of a believer who has committed a major sin. The person in question retains the opportunity for repentance until their death; therefore, faith is not negated by sinning, and ultimate judgment should be deferred to Allāh on the Day of Judgment.⁶⁵⁵ This concept of ‘*irjā*’, familiar to every

⁶⁵⁴ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:368; see Abū Ḥanīfa, ‘Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā ‘Uthmān al-Battī’, 81–82; ‘al-‘Ālim wa-al-Muta‘allim’, 22.

⁶⁵⁵ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:368–370.

student of Islam, is central to the Murji'ā doctrine, which advocates for deferring the judgment of a believer's actions to Allāh. Abū Ḥanīfa himself adopted this doctrine, as we know through his letters to 'Uthmān al-Battī.⁶⁵⁶

To sum up, Nasafī adhered to the creedal maxims of the great Imām from Kūfa, valued the texts attributed to him, and utilised the creedal statements found therein as the cornerstones of his own *kalām* project. Having demonstrated Abū Ḥanīfa's significant influence on Nasafī, let us now turn our attention to Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, the master of rational theology in Transoxiana. He was the paramount example for Nasafī to emulate in endowing Abū Ḥanīfa's creedal principles with a *kalām* identity, through employing rational argumentation and a systematic framework.

Among his predecessors, al-Māturīdī was the one whose writings Nasafī most frequently referred to in his own theological works. Nasafī engages with al-Māturīdī's works in two distinct manners: sometimes, he rephrases al-Māturīdī's ideas to articulate his own points; at other times, he directly copies al-Māturīdī's original texts without modification. An example of the former can be observed in a passage where Nasafī likely references al-Māturīdī's *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* on the topic of divine attributes, endeavouring to show that these attributes are intrinsic to God's essence:

والشيخ الإمام أبو منصور الماتريدي رحمه الله يقول: إن الله تعالى عالم بذاته، حي بذاته، قادر بذاته، ولا يريد به نفى الصفات...⁶⁵⁷

And the Shaykh, the Imām Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, may Allāh have mercy upon him, says: Indeed, Allāh, the Exalted, is knowing by His essence, alive by

⁶⁵⁶ Abū Ḥanīfa, 'Risālat Abī Ḥanīfa ilā 'Uthmān al-Battī', 78–85.

⁶⁵⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:338.

His essence, powerful by His essence, and he does not intend by this [phrase] to negate the attributes.

Nasafī was possibly referring to the following statements by al-Māturīdī in his *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*:

والله سبحانه بنفسه يفعل، وذلك كما علم سبحانه بذاته وقدر بذاته...⁶⁵⁸

And Allāh, Glorified be He, acts by Himself or His essence, and that is as He (Glorified be He) knows by His essence and decrees by His essence.

As can be seen, al-Māturīdī articulates his point by employing the verbal forms of the divine attributes in question, while Nasafī rephrases his predecessor’s words using the active participle form of the same attributes. Yet, Nasafī goes beyond merely restating what the master said; he also adds his own interpretation, arguing that al-Māturīdī’s use of these expressions was not intended to deny or negate the existence of God’s attributes. He then continues to further elaborate on this issue throughout the pages of *Tabṣira*, explaining that al-Māturīdī does not reject God’s attributes but endeavours to demonstrate that they are eternal and subsist with God’s Being or Essence (*Dhāt*); that is, they do not possess a separate existence independent of Him.⁶⁵⁹ For example, as discussed earlier, he employs the analogy of the relationship between the digit 1 and the number 10 to elucidate al-Māturīdī’s view that divine attributes should not be seen as either exactly the same as God’s Being or entirely different from it.⁶⁶⁰

The passage below from *Tabṣira* is another example where Nasafī cites al-Māturīdī, yet this time he does not specify the name of the master’s work:

⁶⁵⁸ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 112.

⁶⁵⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:338ff.

⁶⁶⁰ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 34–35.

قال الشيخ أبو منصور رحمه الله، الأصل في هذا أن الله تعالى إذا أطلق الوصف له ووصف بما يوصف به من الفعل والعلم ونحوه يلزم الوصف به في الأزل. وإذا ذكر معه الذي هو تحت وصفه به من المعلوم والمقدور عليه والمراد والمكُون، يُذكر فيه أوقات تلك الأشياء لئلا يتوهم قدم تلك الأشياء.⁶⁶¹

It seems Nasafī evidently draws nearly verbatim from the following passage found in al-Māturīdī’s *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*:

والأصل أن الله تعالى إذا أطلق الوصف له، [و] وُصِفَ بما يُوصَفُ من الفعل والعلم ونحوه يلزم الوصف به في الأزل. وإذا دُكِرَ معه الذي هو تحت وصفه به من المعلوم والمقدور عليه والمراد والمكُون، يُدْكَرُ فيه أوقات تلك الأشياء لئلا يتوهم قَدَمَ تلك الأشياء.⁶⁶²

The fundamental principle [in this matter] is that whenever an attribute is attributed to Allāh the Exalted, such as action, knowledge, and the like, this attribution applies to Him eternally. However, when these attributes are discussed in conjunction with things that fall under His attributes, like what is known, the decreed upon, the intended, and the created (*mukawwan*), the times of those things are specified so as not to assume those things are eternal.

It is clear that translating the second passage leaves the translation of the first passage redundant, as the two passages are almost identical. As we will explore in detail later in this chapter, Nasafī adheres to al-Māturīdī’s teachings on the divine attributes of God, arguing that all of them eternal. That being said, according to Nasafī, there exists a distinction between an attribute of God and the outcomes produced by that attribute. In other words, God’s attributes, such as the attribute of creation (*takwīn*), are distinct from the entities that God creates (*mukawwan*). However, the fact that God’s attribute of *takwīn* is eternal does not imply that the *mukawwan* — that which is created, as in the case of the universe — is also eternal.

⁶⁶¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:482.

⁶⁶² Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 111.

Thus far, we saw that Nasafi, when citing or quoting al-Māturīdī's texts, typically pays tribute to the author by mentioning his name with respectful phrases and generally notes the work from which the content is taken.⁶⁶³ However, there are instances in *Tabṣira* where Nasafi directly quotes from *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* without even mentioning al-Māturīdī's name. A good example of this is found on the topic of human freedom:

Tabṣirat al-Adilla:

ثم الأصل أن المسمى باسم القدرة / والاستطاعة عندنا قسمان: / أحدهما سلامة الأسباب وصحة الآلات،
وهي تتقدم الأفعال، وحقيقتها ليست بمجعولة عللا للأفعال وإن كانت الأفعال لا تقوم إلا بها، لكنها نعم من
الله تعالى يكرم بها من يشاء...⁶⁶⁴

Kitāb al-Tawḥīd:

الأصل عندنا في المسمى باسم القدرة أنها على قسمين. أحدهما سلامة الأسباب وصحة الآلات، وهي
تتقدم الأفعال. وحقيقتها ليست بمجعولة للأفعال، وإن كانت الأفعال لا تقوم إلا بها، لكنها نعم من الله أكرم
بها من شاء...⁶⁶⁵

Further examples can be provided on this point, as a study on the sources of Nasafi's *Tabṣirat al-Adilla* revealed that approximately fifteen textual fragments, covering various topics and reflecting al-Māturīdī's opinions, are included in *Tabṣira* with phrasing that is identical or similar to that found in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.⁶⁶⁶

⁶⁶³ Nasafi's *Tabṣira* also contains numerous references to al-Māturīdī's lost works. For citations and possible quotations from his lost works, such as *Kitāb al-Maqālāt and Radd 'alā Kitāb al-Imāma*, see *Tabṣira*, 1:72, 210–211, 472.

⁶⁶⁴ Nasafi, *Tabṣira*, 2:113.

⁶⁶⁵ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 342.

⁶⁶⁶ Özervarlı, 'Tebsiratü'l-Edille'nin Kaynakları', 37–44. See also Özervarlı, 'Authenticity of Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd', 19–29.

Nasafī's confident quotations from *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, often mentioning the title of the work, suggest he was working from a version of the text that closely mirrored the original or an early copy. Given that there is only one known surviving manuscript of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* today, Nasafī's quotations that align with the content of this manuscript lend significant support to its reliability.⁶⁶⁷

In summary, Nasafī held the theological works of his predecessors in high esteem, deeming the extant corpus of theological knowledge at his disposal of paramount importance. He significantly contributed to the preservation and dissemination of this body of knowledge, ensuring its transmission to future generations. Moreover, his inclusion as a transmitter in the *asānīd* (the chains of transmission) of al-Māturīdī's *Tawḥīd* and the texts attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa further underscores this point.⁶⁶⁸ Let us now examine more closely Nasafī's contributions to the legacy he inherited.

2. His Contributions to the School

Nasafī, as previously mentioned, regarded the basic creedal ideas introduced by Abū Ḥanīfa not as final conclusions but as starting points for further development. He also held in high esteem the foundational works and methodological approaches of scholastic theology, pioneered by al-Māturīdī in Transoxiana. Nasafī expanded upon al-Māturīdī's initial framework,

⁶⁶⁷ Özervarlı, 'Tebseratü'l-Edille'nin Kaynakları', 59–60; Özervarlı, 'Authenticity of Kitāb Al-Tawḥīd', 28–29.

⁶⁶⁸ See Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, 'Muqaddima', in *İmâm-ı Azamın Beş Eseri*, ed. Muḥammad Zāhid al-Kawtharī, trans. Mustafa Öz (Istanbul: İFAV, 2017), 4–10; at-Tancî, 'Māturīdî', 2–3; Bruckmayr, 'Persistence of Māturīdî Kalām', 61–62. For the authenticity of the text *al-Ālim wa-al-Muta'allim* and its attribution to Abū Ḥanīfa, see Joseph Schacht, 'An Early Murcī'ite Treatise: The Kitāb al-Ālim wal-Muta'allim', *Oriens* 17 (1964): 96–117; Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 43ff.

thereby playing a crucial role in the consolidation and augmentation of theological discourse in the region.⁶⁶⁹ Although al-Māturīdī provided a structured theological framework for the doctrinal themes introduced by Abū Ḥanīfa, his way of articulating these themes —particularly his use of vague language in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* and his approach to organising the themes within it— presented some challenges.

The vagueness in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* arises from al-Māturīdī's use of a writing form that deviates from conventional Arabic. His sentence construction and vocabulary choice do not adhere to the classical Arabic grammar and lexicon.⁶⁷⁰ This deliberate and consistent departure from standard Arabic has been noted by almost every modern scholar who has analysed his *Tawḥīd*.⁶⁷¹

⁶⁶⁹ Abū al-Mu'īn, in addressing various topics, consistently and wholeheartedly adopted the teachings of al-Māturīdī. Abū al-Mu'īn not only followed these teachings but also explained and elaborated on them in a manner that is often clearer and more refined than how al-Māturīdī himself presented them in *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. See Rudolph, 'Ḥanafī Tradition and Māturīdism', 292.

⁶⁷⁰ Al-Māturīdī's unusual writing style, along with his choice of vocabulary and preferred grammatical constructions, has led some to speculate about his ethnic background. In particular, these idiosyncratic features in his work have prompted claims that he might have been of Iranian or Turkic origin. See Robert Wisnovsky, 'Notes on Avicenna's Concept of Thingness (Šay'iyya)', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (2000): 196; Bekir Topaloğlu, 'Önsöz', in Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd = Kitābū't-Tevhid Tercümesi*, trans. Bekir Topaloğlu (Istanbul: İSAM, 2002), xviii–xix; 'Alī 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Maghribī, *Imām Ahl al-Sunna wa-al-Jamā'a: Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī wa-Ārā'uhū al-Kalāmiyya* (Cairo: Maktaba Wahba, 1985), 12–13; Josef van Ess, 'Review of Kitāb al-Tawḥīd by Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad al-Māturīdī, Edited by F. Kholeif', *Oriens* 27/28 (1981), 561; Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 192; Kutlu, 'Imām Māturīdī', 6–7.

⁶⁷¹ Richard M. Frank, 'Review of Kitāb al-Tawḥīd by Abū Maṣṣūr Muḥammad al-Māturīdī, Edited by F. Kholeif', *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung* 71, no. 1–6 (1976): 54; Ess, 'Review of Kitāb al-Tawḥīd', 556; Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 191; Dorroll, 'The Universe in Flux', 119; Kutlu, 'Imām Māturīdī', 6; Şükrü Özen, 'Māturīdī', in *TDV İslām Ansiklopedisi*, 46 vols (Istanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, 2003),

Understanding al-Māturīdī's work has always been challenging, a fact acknowledged not only by contemporary scholars but also by those from earlier times within the same tradition. For example, 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, a well-known student of Nasafī, pointed out the lack of eloquence in al-Māturīdī's writings. This lack of eloquence, according to al-Samarqandī, leads to difficulties for readers of *Tawhīd*, as they encounter complex expressions (*ighlāq fī l-lafẓ*) and ambiguity in meaning (*ibhām fī l-ma'nā*), diminishing the text's clarity.⁶⁷² Al-Samarqandī further notes in his commentary on al-Māturīdī's *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān* that, unlike *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, *Ta'wīlāt* was not directly authored by al-Māturīdī.⁶⁷³ Instead, it was compiled from his lectures by his leading students, making it more accessible and easier to understand than his own writings. This observation helps explain why the issues of complexity and ambiguity are less prevalent in *Ta'wīlāt*. Abū al-Yusr al-Pazdawī, an early contemporary of Nasafī, also comments on this, noting that *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* suffers from obscurity and prolixity, and its organisation is somewhat difficult to follow (*qalīla inghilāqin wa-taṭwīlin wa-fī tartībīhi naw'a ta'sīrin*).⁶⁷⁴ These observations suggest that even scholars deeply embedded in al-Māturīdī's intellectual tradition and fluent in the academic language of their era found his texts to be complex and challenging.

It appears that al-Pazdawī delegated the task of exegesis and interpretation of the master's works to his younger contemporary, Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī. Interestingly, despite

28:146; Recep Önal, 'Mâtürîdî'nin Hayatı, Eserleri ve Kelam İlmi'ndeki Yeri', *Akademik İncelemeler Dergisi* 8, no. 3 (2013): 334.

⁶⁷² 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, *Mizān al-Uṣūl fī Natā'ij al-'Uqūl*, ed. Muḥammad Zakī 'Abd al-Barr (Doha: Wizārat al-Awqāf wa-al-Shu'ūn al-Islāmiyya, 1997), 3–4.

⁶⁷³ Al-Samarqandī, *Sharḥ Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, fol., 1b.

⁶⁷⁴ Al-Pazdawī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 3.

frequently referencing al-Māturīdī's works in his *Tabṣira*, Nasafī never mentions encountering any difficulties in understanding them. This is noteworthy, considering al-Māturīdī's style is known for its complexity and ambiguity, as acknowledged by the previously mentioned authors. This implies that Nasafī either put forth more effort than his colleagues or had a unique talent for interpretation that set him apart. As a result, Nasafī made the master's texts more accessible to future generations, through both his writings and his lectures to students. Rudolph's comparison of the contents of *Tawḥīd* and *Tabṣira* concludes that "often parallel formulations and arguments can be followed for pages at a time, in which al-Nasafī's words are, in general, more intelligible." He further notes that Nasafī's clearer explanations are beneficial in two ways: first, they assist in interpreting al-Māturīdī's theological views; and second, they are valuable for the philosophical analysis and reconstruction of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.⁶⁷⁵

To elaborate on the point in question, al-Māturīdī identifies three primary sources through which humans acquire knowledge: perception or the senses (*al-ʿiyān*), reports (*al-akḥbār*), and rational speculation (*al-naẓar*).⁶⁷⁶ Nasafī, on the other hand, employs terms that are more aligned with standard Arabic: the sound senses (*al-ḥawāss al-salīma*), the report or testimony of a truthful person (*ḵabar al-ṣādiq*), and the mind or intellect (*al-ʿaql*).⁶⁷⁷ Nasafī replaces al-Māturīdī's term '*al-ʿiyān*'—which may not be commonly used for sensory perceptions or could specifically imply visual perception rather than all sensory experiences—with '*al-ḥawāss*', and occasionally '*al-ḥiss*'.⁶⁷⁸ These latter terms, more commonly understood to

⁶⁷⁵ Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 195.

⁶⁷⁶ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 69.

⁶⁷⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:24.

⁶⁷⁸ See Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:32.

encompass all senses, signify a shift towards terminology that is both more intelligible and inclusive.

Furthermore, in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, the concept of ‘existence’ or ‘being’ is seldom expressed using the standard Arabic term ‘*wujūd*’. Instead, al-Māturīdī predominantly employs ‘*hastiyya*’,⁶⁷⁹ a term of Persian origin, which may seem unusual to Arabic readers. Nasafī explains that al-Māturīdī found ‘*wujūd*’ to be ambiguous; this is why he prefers ‘*hastiyya*’ over ‘*wujūd*’.⁶⁸⁰ Consequently, Nasafī favoured the use of the more standard term ‘*wujūd*’ in both his comprehensive work, *Tabṣira*, and his shorter treatise, *Kitāb al-Tamhīd*.⁶⁸¹

The arrangement of topics in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* can sometimes lead to confusion or make the text difficult to follow. The structure of the work is not always intuitive or logical from the reader’s perspective. For instance, discussions on ‘non-existence’ (*ma ‘dūm*)—whether non-existence can be considered something (*shay’*) or constitutes a being—would typically be expected in the section dedicated to epistemology, according to standard scholarly practice. However, al-Māturīdī introduces this subject unexpectedly in an unrelated section, immediately following the discussion on the ‘vision of God’ (*ru’yat Allāh*).⁶⁸² In contrast, in *Tabṣira*, Nasafī logically places the inquiry into *al-ma ‘dūm* within the epistemology section.⁶⁸³ Harvey also notes the discrepancy in structural choices between al-Māturīdī and Nasafī.⁶⁸⁴ Similarly, Ayedh S. Aldosari highlights the more organised nature of *Tabṣira*, stating that Nasafī’s influential works

⁶⁷⁹ See al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhīd*, 70, 90, 91, 106, 143, 171, 247.

⁶⁸⁰ Nasafī also notes that the term ‘*hastiyya*’ used by al-Māturīdī is of Persian origin. Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:211.

⁶⁸¹ See, for example, Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:62, 63, 77, 83; *Tamhīd*, 5, 7.

⁶⁸² Al-Māturīdī, *Tawhīd*, 151–152.

⁶⁸³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:11–12.

⁶⁸⁴ Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 76, fn.125.

established a definitive model for organising *kalām* manuals within the classical period. These works outlined the doctrines to be defended and specified the rational tools to be employed.⁶⁸⁵

Nasafī adopts a more organised and systematic approach in his writings compared to al-Māturīdī. Unlike the master, Nasafī begins his discussions by clearly defining fundamental concepts and elucidating the subtle distinctions among them. This methodological approach is evident in his argument from *ḥudūth* (contingency or having a beginning in time) for the existence of God. Before presenting his *ḥudūth* argument, Nasafī thoroughly addresses several philosophical concepts—including *‘ayn*, *‘araḍ*, *qadīm*, and *ḥādith*—one by one and with a depth not encountered in al-Māturīdī’s *Tawḥīd*. Nasafī’s examination and elaboration of the *ḥudūth* of the universe span forty-six pages in his *Tabṣira*, in contrast to al-Māturīdī, who discusses the same topic over eight pages.⁶⁸⁶

Furthermore, one notable practice of his is that, should there be any ambiguity or vagueness regarding the fundamental concepts of the matter he is dealing with, he clarifies it right at the beginning of the discussion, thereby precluding any potential confusion for the reader. For example, in discussing human actions, he explains that terms such as *al-istiṭā‘a*, *al-quwwa*, *al-quḍra*, and *al-ṭāqa*, though linguistically related, are used by theologians to convey the same meaning—the power or capacity to act.⁶⁸⁷ Similarly, in addressing God’s attribute of creation, he lists terms like *takwīn*, *taqhlīq*, *ījād*, *iḥdāth*, and *ikhtirā‘*, clarifying that they are synonymous and all pertain to the divine act of creation by God. He specifically states, “All are

⁶⁸⁵ Ayedh S. Aldosari, *Ḥanafī Māturīdism: Trajectories of a Theological Legacy, with a Study and Critical Edition of al-Khabbāzī’s Kitāb al-Hādī* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2020), 184–185.

⁶⁸⁶ See Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:62–108; Cf. al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 77–85.

⁶⁸⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:113.

intended to express a single meaning, that is, the act of bringing the non-existent (*al-ma‘dūm*) from nothing (*‘adam*) into existence (*wujūd*).⁶⁸⁸ His ability to navigate and clarify various concepts not only demonstrates his strong command of the theological literature of his era but also his adherence to the tradition of his predecessors. This is evidenced by his intentional remark, “We specifically use the term ‘*takwīn*’ following in the footsteps of our predecessors, may God have mercy on them, in this regard.”⁶⁸⁹ This demonstrates his respect for, and continuity with, the earlier tradition.

After explaining the basic concepts relevant to the discussion, Nasafī introduces the views of rival Islamic schools, and where applicable, those of non-Islamic traditions, along with the arguments they use to support their positions.⁶⁹⁰ He then critiques these views and arguments, demonstrating their flaws or inaccuracies. This critical examination aims to refute the positions of the opposing schools and traditions. Finally, Nasafī articulates the stance of his own school of thought, striving to establish its superiority and correctness through a dual approach: employing logical or rational reasoning (*‘aqlī* argumentation) and drawing upon traditional Islamic sources (*naqlī* argumentation), specifically the Quran and Hadith. Moreover, he enhances his arguments by utilising linguistic analysis of the fundamental concepts related to the topic, thereby further

⁶⁸⁸ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:400.

⁶⁸⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:400.

⁶⁹⁰ The Mu‘tazila, Ash‘ariyya, Aṣḥāb al-Hayūlā (Followers of Prime Matter), Jahmiyya (Followers of Jahm ibn Ṣafwān), Bāṭiniyya (a group that interprets Islamic scripture metaphorically or allegorically, often linked with esoteric sects like the Ismailis), Thanawiyya (Dualists), Dahrīs (Materialists), Sūfastā‘iyya (Sophists), Ṭabī‘iyyūn (Naturalists), Falāsifa (Philosophers), Karrāmiyya (a group noted for its anthropomorphic views of God), Mujassima (those who ascribe a physical body to God), Mushabbihā (similar to al-Mujassima), Christians, Jews, and others represent the various schools of thought, heretical sects, and non-Islamic traditions Nasafī critiques in his *Tabṣira*. See Nasafī *Tabṣira*, 1:103–199, 207, 209.

demonstrating the validity of his school's viewpoint. In general terms, Nasafi adopts this structured approach to theological argumentation and largely remains true to it throughout his *Tabṣira*.

There is another noteworthy aspect of Nasafi's methodology that merits attention. He frequently conducts detailed examinations of word meanings (semantics) —taking into account their literal and figurative usage, synonyms and antonyms, and their semantic fields, among other aspects— and analyses the grammatical structures of sentences⁶⁹¹ when discussing theological problems. Nasafi pays close attention to language to understand and address the challenges he encounters, valuing the opinions of linguists and incorporating their terminology in his writings. Due to Nasafi's engagement in this type of linguistic analysis, some researchers regard him as a forerunner in modern semantics or believe that his techniques closely resemble those employed in the discipline.⁶⁹²

The most remarkable among these studies is Erdem's doctoral thesis, which posits that Nasafi utilised methods akin to those found in contemporary 'Linguistic Semantics' and 'Philosophical Semantics' to address theological issues.⁶⁹³ Two fundamental fields in linguistic semantics are 'lexical semantics,' which concerns the meanings of words, and 'compositional

⁶⁹¹ Rudolph too notes that Nasafi used grammar to formulate arguments in support of the school's views. See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 322.

⁶⁹² Erdem, 'Tabṣire'ye Semantik Yaklaşım', 1–2, 74–75; Yüce, 'Nesefi'nin Semantik Tahlili', 111–126; Yazıcıoğlu, 'İki Büyük Sima', 288.

⁶⁹³ Erdem, 'Tabṣire'ye Semantik Yaklaşım', 1–2.

semantics,' which deals with how smaller parts, such as words, combine to form the meanings of larger expressions, such as sentences.⁶⁹⁴

One basic method for determining a word's precise meaning involves analysing its synonyms and antonyms.⁶⁹⁵ Another method involves examining its semantic or lexical field. A semantic field is a set of words grouped semantically (by meaning) rather than syntactically (by grammatical function). These words share a common semantic property and are often related to a single concept or related concepts within the same area of knowledge. In this approach, words are analysed not in isolation but as part of a network within a specific knowledge domain. Examining a word within its semantic field allows linguists to uncover nuances, variations, and its relationships with other words. For instance, in the semantic field of 'movement', words like 'walk', 'run', 'jog', and 'sprint' are included. While each word pertains to the concept of moving, they each capture different nuances of speed, intention, or manner. Analysing these words within their semantic field helps uncover their differences in meaning and usage, as well as the relationships between them.

Erdem also highlights the historical significance of linguistic meaning in philosophy, particularly in the realm of analytic philosophy. In 'Philosophical Semantics,' philosophers aim to discern the conditions that render a sentence true or false, emphasising the role of propositions in determining the truth values of sentences. To analyse linguistic meaning of a word, they utilise

⁶⁹⁴ Erdem, 'Tabsire'ye Semantik Yaklaşım', 4–5; Cf. John Lyons, *Semantics*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1:1–31, 2:373ff.; John Lyons, *Linguistic Semantics: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 46ff., 131ff.

⁶⁹⁵ Erdem, 'Tabsire'ye Semantik Yaklaşım', 5; Lyons, *Semantics*, 1:270–80; Lyons, *Linguistic Semantics*, 60–65; Patrick Griffiths, *An Introduction to English Semantics and Pragmatics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 26–28, 30–31.

formal and logical tools. For example, one key concept, the principle of compositionality, suggests that the meaning of a complex expression is dictated by the meanings of its constituent parts and the grammatical rules that combine them.⁶⁹⁶

Erdem asserts that Nasafî employed methods reminiscent of those found in modern linguistic and philosophical semantics in his *Tabşira*, well before the advent of contemporary scholarship. For example, Erdem observes that Nasafî accounts for changes in a word's meaning across different sentences. He pays particular attention to the context in which a word is used, analysing it within that specific setting. Furthermore, Nasafî explores the linguistic relationships between words by studying their derivatives. In discussing Nasafî's use of semantic methods, Erdem presents numerous examples from *Tabşira*, particularly passages where Nasafî endeavours to prove that '*takwîn*' and '*mukawwan*' are not identical. For instance, Nasafî addresses the question of whether the eternity of *takwîn* necessitates the eternity of its outcomes, namely, the universe, through the linguistic analysis of specific terms: '*Dhāt*' (Divine Essence), '*takwîn*' (divine creative act or attribute of creation), and '*mukawwan*' (that which is created). Nasafî points out that linguists have established '*fā'il*' (subject), '*fi'l*' (verb), and '*maf'ūl*' (object) as distinct entities: the subject performs the action, the verb refers to the action performed, and the object receives the action or is the entity upon which the action is executed. The aforementioned terms can be analysed within this framework: '*dhāt*' as the '*fā'il*'; '*takwîn*' as the '*fi'l*'; and '*mukawwan*' as the '*maf'ūl*' of God's creative act. The grammar of Arabic and its interpretation by linguists demonstrate that all three terms are linguistically and ontologically distinct. Therefore, the divine attribute of *takwîn* is eternal and coexists with the *Dhāt*, yet it is

⁶⁹⁶ Erdem, 'Tabsire'ye Semantik Yaklaşım', 8–11; Cf. Lyons, *Semantics*, 1:138–173, 2:787–849.

distinct from the *Dhāt*. Since these two differ, the *mukawwan* is also distinct from both.

Consequently, the eternity of God's creative act does not imply the eternity of the universe, as the latter is a product of the attribute of *takwīn* and is separate from it. If one says that God knew the world in eternity alongside the time of its existence, this is accurate. However, stating that God knew the world's existence in eternity is erroneous, as it might lead to the misconception that the known world, or the universe, is eternal.⁶⁹⁷

Nasafī continues by stating that conflating the action (*fi 'l*) with the recipient of that action (*maf'ūl*) is a linguistic error. For example, claiming that the act and the object of the act are the same is akin to saying that the act of hitting (*ḍarb*) and the one hit (*maḍrūb*), the act of eating (*akl*) and the thing eaten (*ma'kūl*), and the act of killing (*qatl*) and the one killed (*maqtūl*) are identical, which is clearly not the case. Linguists have clearly proven that all acts and their objects are distinct. As grammar dictates, an agent or subject becomes such only after performing an act, and similarly, an object becomes an object through the effect of the action upon it. This principle, applicable in the manifest world (*al-shāhid*), also equally holds true in the hidden world (*al-ghā'ib*), affirming that *Dhāt*, *takwīn*, and *mukawwan* are separate entities. The eternal Creator who possesses eternal *takwīn* can create the universe within time. To assume *takwīn* and *mukawwan* are identical leads to the erroneous belief that the universe is also eternal, a notion that is fundamentally flawed. In short, the linguistic differences accepted by language scholars between these terms also demonstrate their fundamental ontological distinctions.⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁷ Erdem, 'Tabsire'ye Semantik Yaklaşım', 28–30; Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 1:406–423.

⁶⁹⁸ Erdem, 'Tabsire'ye Semantik Yaklaşım', 43–45; Nasafī, *Tabşira*, 1:423–425.

To summarise, Erdem seeks to strengthen his claim by referencing these and many other examples from Nasafī's *Tabṣira*. He concludes that the linguistic analysis of certain terms by Nasafī, and the inferences drawn from those analyses, demonstrate that he employed semantic methods similar to contemporary practices in both linguistic and philosophical semantics.⁶⁹⁹

The present study does not intend to draw any definitive conclusions about the extent to which Nasafī utilised the methods of linguistic and philosophical semantics in his works. However, it is significant to note that, as recalled from the previous chapter, Nasafī extensively used linguistic analysis as a method to argue that faith (*īmān*) is distinct from knowledge (*ma'rifa*). Nasafī designated the synonyms of '*īmān*' and examined concepts closely related to, or directly contrasting with, it, such as '*ma'rifa*' (knowledge), '*taṣdīq*' (assent), and '*kufṛ*' (disbelief). Furthermore, he analysed these words' synonyms and antonyms, such as '*takdhīb*' (denial), '*jahāla*' (ignorance), '*juḥūd*' (disavowal), and '*nukra*' (not to know). By mapping the relationships between these terms, Nasafī seems to be constructing a complex network of meanings or establishing what is known as a semantic or lexical field—which is, as noted earlier, a conceptual framework in which words are interconnected semantically within a specific domain of knowledge to accurately determine the meaning of the targeted word. Nasafī's linguistic analysis of the seeming or alleged semantic field of *īmān* leads him to conclude that *īmān* fundamentally differs from *ma'rifa* and is more similar to *taṣdīq*, a conclusion for which the method employed seems to support Erdem's claim.

Nasafī not only transmitted and introduced methodological innovations to the existing theological corpus in Transoxiana but also augmented and enriched its content. It is widely

⁶⁹⁹ Erdem, 'Tabsire'ye Semantik Yaklaşım', 48–73.

known that there was intense disagreement between the Māturīdīs and the Ash‘arīs on the topic of God’s creative act (*takwīn*). Nasafī adheres to the traditional teachings on the problem. Nonetheless, in his *Tabṣira*, he dedicates more space to the discussion of this problem than to any other theological issue,⁷⁰⁰ which suggests he regarded possessing an accurate interpretation and view on God’s creative act as central to his theological identity. Like many other topics, Nasafī builds upon the existing theological tradition by maintaining its core doctrines, thereby enriching the theological discourse. He addresses and refutes critiques from various opposing groups, including the Mu‘tazilīs, Najjārīs, Kullābīs, Qalānisīs,⁷⁰¹ and notably, the Ash‘arīs.⁷⁰² Brodersen’s research identifies seventeen arguments made by theologians after al-Māturīdī concerning God’s eternal creative power and the distinction between *takwīn* and *mukawwan*. Brodersen highlights Nasafī’s pioneering role in developing a total of eight arguments, which had not been used before by anyone else—four out of six in the former case,⁷⁰³ and four out of eleven in the latter⁷⁰⁴—within these debates. This demonstrates Nasafī’s significant contributions to the theological arguments developed over time to support the school’s perspective on the topic. Among this set of eight arguments, those previously discussed, which evoke the methods of contemporary semantics, are particularly deserving of attention.

⁷⁰⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:400–489; See Madelung, ‘Al-Nasafī and Ash‘arī Theology’, 324.

⁷⁰¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:400.

⁷⁰² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:400, 412–453.

⁷⁰³ Angelika Brodersen, *Der unbekannte kalām: Theologische Positionen der frühen Māturīdīya am Beispiel der Attributenlehre* (Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2014), 552–553; Angelika Brodersen, *Bilinmeyen Kelâm: Erken Dönem Mātüridiliğinde Kelâmi Yaklaşımlar Sıfat Teorisi Örneği*, trans. Özcan Taşçı (Istanbul: Albaraka Yayınları, 2022), 530–531.

⁷⁰⁴ Brodersen, *Der unbekannte kalām*, 554–556; Brodersen, *Bilinmeyen Kelâm*, 532–534; see Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 402–489.

Nasafī’s transformative impact on the prevailing tradition of his era is particularly evident in discussions on another divine attribute: the divine speech of God (*kalām*), which was central to the debate on whether the Quran is created or uncreated. Before Nasafī, the master al-Māturīdī argued that there is a distinction between the physical means through which the Quran is delivered (i.e., the words, letters, and sounds making up the Quran) and the content or message of the Quran itself. According to him, the physical means are created, but the content, being the speech of God, is not created.⁷⁰⁵

Nasafī first presents the formulation his predecessors employed on the issue: “The Quran is the speech (*kalām*) of God and His attribute (*ṣifa*). The speech of God is uncreated (*ghayr makhluq*), as is His attribute.” He continues, “they (*mashāyikhunā*) refrained from saying that ‘the Quran is uncreated’ [the Ash‘arite formulation] to avoid leading listeners to assume that the linguistic expressions (*‘ibārāt*), composed of letters and sounds, are uncreated, as the Ḥanbalīs assert.”⁷⁰⁶ The word ‘Allāh,’ although it refers to God, cannot actually be equated with God or His essence. Similarly, the letters and sounds of the Quran as ‘indicators’ (*dalālāt*) of God’s actual speech cannot be equated with the actual speech of God. In other words, the physical aspects of the Quran merely point to the divine speech without being identical to it. Nasafī uses the term ‘linguistic expressions’ (*‘ibārāt*)⁷⁰⁷ to encapsulate the Māturīdī idea that the Quran’s humanly accessible form (its words and sounds) serves as a medium through which the content of divine speech is understood, without providing direct access to the divine attribute of speech itself.

⁷⁰⁵ Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 116–23. See also al-Pazdawī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 53–54, 65–66.

⁷⁰⁶ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:373.

⁷⁰⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:373.

Nasafī then enumerates numerous arguments, some of which include linguistic analyses, referencing the “people of language” (*ahl al-lughā*), to support the school’s point.⁷⁰⁸ However, despite the nuanced distinctions made previously to uphold the traditional formulation, Nasafī finds justification for adopting the succinct Ash‘arī formulation, “the Qur’ān is uncreated”. He states that this latter phrase is entirely appropriate for referring to the divine attribute of speech that subsists in the essence of God and for distinguishing this divine attribute from its physical manifestation.⁷⁰⁹ Nasafī appears to be attempting to reconcile the Māturīdī distinction between the physical expression of God’s speech and the divine attribute itself with the Ash‘arī formulation. By using the Ash‘arī phrase, he argues that it is possible to maintain the essential distinction between the created form of the Quran (as experienced by humans) and the uncreated nature of divine speech. It seems Nasafī suggests a theological alignment or synthesis that respects the depth of al-Māturīdī’s and his other predecessors’ theological insights, while also embracing the more commonly concise expression of the Ash‘arī school.⁷¹⁰

In summary, one of the many ways in which Nasafī influenced the later development of Māturīdī *kalām* was his pivotal role in shifting the Māturīdī stance towards the more well-known Ash‘arī formulation regarding the uncreated Quran. Due to this transformative impact, Doroll observes: “tracing this history of this issue [the divine speech of God] in Māturīdī theology reaffirms two important dynamics of the early Māturīdī school [the period after al-Māturīdī and before Nasafī’s rise]: the conscious desire to distinguish themselves from both excessive

⁷⁰⁸ For instance, see Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:392.

⁷⁰⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:393.

⁷¹⁰ See Philip Dorroll, ‘The Doctrine of the Nature of the Qur’ān in the Māturīdī Tradition’, in *Māturīdī Düşünce ve Māturīdīlik Literatürü*, ed. Raşit Akpınar, Recep Tuzcu, and Aslı Menekşe (Istanbul: Endülüs Yayınları, 2018), 138; Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 227–228.

literalism and excessive rationalism, and the clear historical demarcation between the pre and post-Nasafī tradition of Māturīdī theology.”⁷¹¹

In *Tabṣira*, many more examples can be found regarding how Nasafī further elaborates on the preceding theological accumulation. For example, al-Māturīdī argued in the debate about the origin of faith that faith is a human action (*fi ‘l*) and, as such, like all other human actions, it must be created; therefore, faith is undoubtedly created.⁷¹² The text, *Kitāb al-Sawād al-A ‘zam*, which served as the official creed of the Sāmānids, suggests a compromise by stating that belief is both created and uncreated. This duality is explained by the idea that belief consists of various elements: some are influenced by human actions and decisions (hence, created), while others are the result of divine intervention or attributes (hence, uncreated).⁷¹³ Al-Pazdawī reports that scholars in Samarqand considered faith to be created. In contrast, Ḥanafite scholars in Bukhārā argued against the blanket statement that all aspects of belief are created, suggesting that some aspects might not be created. Theologians in Ferghana adopted an even more stringent stance, forbidding any discussion that associates belief with being created.⁷¹⁴ As detailed in the previous chapter, Nasafī accepts the view that faith is partly created and partly uncreated. He then elaborates on which acts within the act of faith belong to man and which to God. Acts such as *ta ‘arruf, istihdā’, ‘azm, qaṣd, jadd, and qabūl* are attributed to humans and are therefore created;

⁷¹¹ Dorroll, ‘The Doctrine of the Nature of the Qur’ān’, 124.

⁷¹² Al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawhid*, 385–386.

⁷¹³ Abū al-Qāsim al-Ḥakīm al-Samarqandī, *Kitāb al-Sawād al-A ‘zam* (Istanbul: Maṭba‘at al-Jamāl, 1304), 17; al-Pazdawī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 154–155; Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 113.

⁷¹⁴ Al-Pazdawī, *Uṣūl al-Dīn*, 154–155.

acts such as *i 'īā'*, *hidāya*, *tawfīq*, *ta 'rīf*, *ihtidā'*, and *ikrām* are attributed to God and are therefore not created.⁷¹⁵

Nasafī has also made significant contributions to our understanding of the history of the scholarly tradition in Transoxiana. In his *Tabṣira*, he records a continuous line of scholars associated with the region in question, stretching from Abū Ḥanīfa to al-Māturīdī. Thus, the bibliographical passages of *Tabṣira*, which shed light on the scholars of the era who lived during the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries, are valuable for understanding the intellectual heritage and continuity within the tradition. Rudolph interprets Nasafī's documentation of the tradition not merely as record-keeping. According to him, by documenting the unbroken lineage of scholars from Abū Ḥanīfa to al-Māturīdī, Nasafī has reconstructed the School of Samarkand in a historical context.⁷¹⁶

Among the names he lists, Nasafī mentions several renowned Ḥanafite scholars, such as Abū Sulaymān al-Jūzjānī (d. 200/816 [?]), Abū Bakr al-Jūzjānī (d. in the second half of the 3rd/9th century), and Abū Naṣr al-'Iyāḏī (d. in the last quarter of the 3rd/9th century), all of whom were teachers of al-Māturīdī.⁷¹⁷ Nasafī characterises the theological identities of these scholars by their belief in the eternal nature of God's creative act, just as he had previously defined his own theological stance based on the same belief. He states that they all believed in

⁷¹⁵ In addition, Correa points out another example of Nasafī's contribution to the tradition. According to the author, Nasafī further developed and expanded upon Abū Zayd al-Dabūsī (d. 430/1039)'s ideas on the subject of reports (*akhbār*) and deeply influenced the subsequent treatment of the subject in the school. See Correa, 'Testifying Beyond Experience', 117, 132.

⁷¹⁶ Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 72; See Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:468–175; at-Tancî, 'Māturīdī', 3–12; Ess, *Theology and Society*, 2:633.

⁷¹⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:468–169.

the eternal nature of God’s creative act and in the non-identity of *takwīn* and *mukawwan*.⁷¹⁸

It can be claimed that it is this belief that sets them and him apart from the Mu‘tazilīs and Ash‘arīs.

Yet, among these scholars, al-Māturīdī is distinguished by his exceptional status. In his masterpiece, *Tabṣira*, Nasafī reserves his highest praise for al-Māturīdī and his significant contributions to the tradition they are both part of. Nasafī expresses his profound admiration for the master with the following words:

If there were no one among them except the Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (may Allāh have mercy on him) —who dove into the oceans of knowledge to extract its pearls, brought forth the proofs (*hujaj*) of religion, and adorned them with his eloquence (*faṣāḥa*) and the wealth of his knowledge... (this list of accolades continues for six lines)— this alone would have been sufficient. And [this alone] would have sufficed as a deterrent against slandering or denigrating (*thalb*) the opinions held by the school, for those endowed with intellect and faith (*dīn*).⁷¹⁹

To elaborate more, according to Nasafī, an examination of al-Māturīdī’s work unmistakably leads one to conclude that he was endowed with miracles (*karāmāt*), gifts of grace (*mawāhib*), divine assistance (*tawfiq*), and guidance (*irshād*).⁷²⁰ The combined knowledge of many scholars does not equal the comprehensive knowledge found in him alone. His *Ta‘wīlāt* stands alone at the pinnacle of its category, with no other book matching its level of expertise,

⁷¹⁸ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:468.

⁷¹⁹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:471–472.

⁷²⁰ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:472–473.

and no work by previous authors in the same domain even approaches its calibre (*lā yudānīhi shay'un min taṣānīfi man sabaqahu fī dhālika al-fann*).⁷²¹

Nasafī not only shares his own considerations but also recounts how al-Māturīdī was celebrated and lauded by others. He highlights that al-Māturīdī's contributions were so profound that al-Ḥakīm al-Samarqandī (d. 342/953), the author of *Kitāb al-Sawād al-A'zam*, commissioned the following epitaph for his grave: “This is the grave of one who generously devoted his life to the pursuit of knowledge, tirelessly working towards its dissemination and enlightenment. Thus, his contributions to religion were extolled, and the fruits of his life were harvested. May Allāh have mercy on him.”⁷²² The accolades did not end there. Nasafī further mentions, “For this reason, his teacher, Abū Naṣr al-'Iyādī, would not speak in his gatherings unless Shaykh Abū Maṣūūr was present. And whenever he saw him from afar, he would look at him with a look of wonder and say, ‘And your Lord creates what He wills and chooses.’”⁷²³

As Rudolph observes, Nasafī's aim in listing the scholars of the tradition and singling out al-Māturīdī was to demonstrate that they represent a distinct school of thought.⁷²⁴ This is why Nasafī makes a deliberate effort to include al-Māturīdī's name among a complete list of notable scholars from Samarqand, distinguishing him with every word he utters and considering him the most eminent theologian among those listed. Nasafī authored several works deeply influenced by

⁷²¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1: 473; Rudolph notes, “the exceptional nature of this book [*Ta'wīlāt*] was proclaimed by the highest authority [Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī], and it is no wonder that it henceforth remained acknowledged as such; al-Nasafī's words are to be found later in several works by figures such as Ibn Abī l-Wafā', Ḥājī Khalīfa [Kātib Jalabī / (in modern Turkish): Kātib Çelebi], and Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī.” See Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 184.

⁷²² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:471–472.

⁷²³ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:473.

⁷²⁴ Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 322.

al-Māturīdī's foundational text, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, continuing and expanding upon al-Māturīdī's teachings. Through his achievements, Nasafī laid the groundwork for further theological development. Shortly after the death of Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, his pupil Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī composed the well-known creed, '*Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya*', summarising Abū al-Mu'īn's writings, which were undoubtedly rooted in the teachings of Abū Ḥanīfa and al-Māturīdī.⁷²⁵ The text later became a staple taught in *madrasas*, marking the continued influence of Nasafī's works. As a result, a new tradition emerged. This new strand of thought, rooted in Abū Ḥanīfa's creedal statements and given a theological (or *kalām*) identity through al-Māturīdī's *Tawḥīd*, was further developed by Nasafī in both content and methodology. It then formed a distinct school of *kalām* that stands as one of the pillars of Sunni rational theology in Islam, alongside Ash'arism. Although this new tradition remained associated with the followers of Abū Ḥanīfa, its foundation lay in the teachings of al-Māturīdī and Nasafī's interpretation of them. For this reason, the tradition came to be more accurately known as Māturīdiyya,⁷²⁶ with Nasafī's contributions to its recognition under this name surpassing those of anyone else within the school. İsmail Hakkı İzmirli (1869-1946), a late Ottoman theologian known for his *kalām jadīd* project, highlights the role of scholars bearing the *nisba* of 'Nasafī' and notably places Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī at the forefront in transforming the school's name from Ḥanafīyya to Māturīdiyya.⁷²⁷

⁷²⁵ Rudolph highlights the close textual relationship and dependence of *al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafiyya* on Abū al-Mu'īn's work *Tawḥīd*. The former is essentially just a collection of phrases that have been directly taken, almost word for word, from the latter. See Rudolph, 'Ḥanafī Tradition and Māturīdism', 292; *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 252, fn. 85.

⁷²⁶ Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 322–323.

⁷²⁷ İsmail Hakkı İzmirli, *Yeni İlm-i Kelâm*, ed. Sabri Hizmetli (Ankara: Umran Yayınları, 1981), 67.

A cursory glance at the works of Nasafī's students leads one to speculate that he not only singled out al-Māturīdī's name from among a group of scholars but also portrayed him as the head of the school in his lectures, at least concerning the *kalām* identity of the tradition, while its creedal roots still remained firmly anchored in Abū Ḥanīfa. For example, Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, the author of *'Aqā'id al-Nasafīyya*, notably and consistently uses the phrase *'ra's*' (head or leader) when referring to al-Māturīdī: "Most of our scholars (*mashāyikh*) from the people of Iraq and what lies beyond the river (*mā wa rā' al-nahr*, Transoxiana), whose head (*ra's*) is the Imām Abū Manṣūr..."⁷²⁸ Another quote goes, "The scholars of Samarqand and their head (*ra'suhum*) the Imām Abū Manṣūr said..."⁷²⁹ And again, "Our scholars and their head (*ra'suhum*) the Imām Abū Manṣūr said..."⁷³⁰ Abū al-Mu'īn's another well-known student, 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, from whom we learn that he and others studied al-Māturīdī's *Ta'wīlāt* under Abū al-Mu'īn, says, "the head (*ra's*) of the ahl al-Sunna, Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī al-Samarqandī"⁷³¹ Examples can be multiplied, but this suffices to make the point.

Before concluding this subsection, it is pertinent to address a claim made by Rudolph. According to him, the emphasis Abū Yusr al-Pazdawī and Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī placed on the authority of the great Kufan, Abū Ḥanīfa, was not aimed at further elevating his revered status — it was already established— but rather at preventing "the conceivable possibility of selecting him [al-Māturīdī] as the new leader and eponym of the school."⁷³²

⁷²⁸ Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, 'Kitāb Taḥṣīl Uṣūl al-Fiqh wa-Tafṣīl al-Maqālāt fihā 'alā al-Wajh', in *Maṭla' al-Nujūm wa-Majma' al-'Ulūm* (MS 1462, Tashkent: Biruni Institute, copied 764/1363), 34b.

⁷²⁹ Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, 'Taḥṣīl Uṣūl al-Fiqh', 35a.

⁷³⁰ Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, 'Taḥṣīl Uṣūl al-Fiqh', 36a.

⁷³¹ Al-Samarqandī, *Mizān al-Uṣūl*, 3.

⁷³² Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 6.

This claim does not seem accurate, at least with respect to Nasafī and his students. In Nasafī's *Tabṣira*, the principal figure is undeniably al-Māturīdī. However, Nasafī does not portray him as an independent figure who established his own distinct school; instead, he depicts al-Māturīdī as a devoted follower of Abū Ḥanīfa, similar to others in Transoxiana. That being said, al-Māturīdī is distinguished from others and characterised as the most devoted (*kāna min ashadd al-nās itbā'an li Abī Ḥanīfa*) and knowledgeable among Abū Ḥanīfa's followers (*a'raf al-nās bi madhāhib Abī Ḥanīfa*), both in the principles of faith (*uṣūl*) and in the practical application of Islamic law (*furū*).⁷³³

It is well-known that the early scholars in Transoxiana established a natural relationship with Abū Ḥanīfa, evidenced by their occasional journeys to Kufa to consult him on various matters. This relationship is depicted in *al-Ālim wa-al-Muta'allim*, where the 'ālim' is a reference to Abū Ḥanīfa, and the 'muta'allim' most likely refers to Abū Muṭī' al-Balkhī (d. 199/814), an early scholar from Transoxiana. These scholars admired Abū Ḥanīfa's stance on legal issues, considering his legal opinions to be the most correct. Later, this admiration likely extended to his views on matters of faith too, as evidenced by the texts of treatises and letters attributed to Abū Ḥanīfa. Consequently, it seems that the early scholars of Transoxiana sincerely recognised and believed in Abū Ḥanīfa as the most distinguished 'ālim, who speaks the truth in both legal and theological matters.

Considering Abū Ḥanīfa's esteemed status among scholars in Transoxiana, and the numerous praises Nasafī bestows upon al-Māturīdī in his *Tabṣira*—praises not extended to any other figure within the tradition, not even to Abū Ḥanīfa—it seems that Nasafī, rather than

⁷³³ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 16–17; *Tabṣira*, 1:210.

attempting to prevent al-Māturīdī from being the eponym of the school, perhaps aimed to both express his gratitude towards Abū Ḥanīfa and lend legitimacy to the school across the Islamic world through the renown of this great *‘ālim*. Given the established relationship with Abū Ḥanīfa, it would have been imprudent for Nasafī to overlook this connection or fail to utilise it for the school’s benefit. Therefore, Nasafī acknowledged and promoted Abū Ḥanīfa as the principal source of inspiration and leadership for the school, especially in regard to the creedal doctrines of the Muslim community in Transoxiana. Overlooking Abū Ḥanīfa, a figure whose fame extended to every distant corner of the Islamic world, would have been unwise for Nasafī and his colleagues.

However, it was through al-Māturīdī’s efforts that Abū Ḥanīfa’s views were systematically presented in *kalām* format, a task previously unattempted in the Transoxanian region. Thus, perhaps Nasafī regarded al-Māturīdī as the actual head of the school in this context—as far as the *kalām* format of Abū Ḥanīfa’s views is concerned—since his every statement about the master, al-Māturīdī, underscores his unique role for the school. If Abū Ḥanīfa’s uniqueness lay in establishing or indoctrinating the basic principles of faith, then al-Māturīdī’s lay in elaborating these principles through rational theology. Nonetheless, Nasafī and his colleagues never abandoned Abū Ḥanīfa’s name for the legitimacy of the school. This state of affairs is supported by Nasafī’s students, who explicitly name al-Māturīdī as the school’s leading figure (*ra’s*) in their works, while simultaneously affirming their adherence to Abū Ḥanīfa’s teachings. This reverence for Abū Ḥanīfa persisted into later periods, as evidenced by the work of the late Ottoman scholar Kamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Bayāḍī (d. 1098/1687). He titled his work *Ishārāt al-Marām min ‘Ibārāt al-Imām* (Indications of the Intent from the Statements of the Imam), which suggests ongoing devotion to the great Kufan Imam on creedal matters. However,

al-Bayāḍī also acknowledged al-Māturīdī's leadership in the development of what, after al-Māturīdī, came to be known as *kalām*, again with its roots in Abū Ḥanīfa.⁷³⁴ He refers to the school as Ḥanafīyya-Māturīdiyya due to al-Māturīdī's significant influence on the school.⁷³⁵ Al-Bayāḍī still endeavours to uncover the implications of the great Kufan's statements on creedal matters in his mentioned work. This is precisely what al-Māturīdī and subsequent scholars within the tradition endeavoured to achieve throughout history, an endeavour that was first initiated by al-Māturīdī. This recognition, initially implicit and later explicit, of al-Māturīdī as the pioneer in the *kalām* interpretation of Abū Ḥanīfa's views established him as the head of the intellectual tradition in Transoxiana. For this reason, Nasafī and his students emphasised Abū Ḥanīfa not to prevent al-Māturīdī from being perceived as the head of the school, but rather to legitimise the school and demonstrate that the principles of faith they advocated were not their own inventions; these were, instead, beliefs long accepted across the Islamic world. The procedure used by Nasafī to legitimise the school's position on *takwīn* underscores this very point.⁷³⁶ That is, the fact that he emphasises that their beliefs on *takwīn* are not new but were shared by all previous scholars up to Abū Ḥanīfa, and that he lists the names of these scholars who held the same position, serves the same purpose of legitimising the school. However, when it came to explaining these beliefs through rational theology and substantiating them with evidence, al-Māturīdī was the real leader, being the one most loyal to Abū Ḥanīfa (*ashadd al-nās itbā'an li*

⁷³⁴ Kamāl al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Bayāḍī, *Ishārāt al-Marām min 'Ibārāt al-Imām*, ed. Yūsuf 'Abd al-Razzāq (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 1949), 8, 39.

⁷³⁵ Al-Bayāḍī, *Ishārāt al-Marām*, 56.

⁷³⁶ See Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:468ff.

Abī Ḥanīfa) and most knowledgeable (*a 'raf al-nās bi madhāhib Abī Ḥanīfa*) about the implications of his teachings.

3. His Influence on Later Scholars

Nasafī's magnum opus, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*, has become a fundamental source for subsequent Māturīdī scholars in their own *kalām* projects. Dorroll highlights its paramount influence, stating, "As is well known, ...*Tabṣirat al-Adilla* became the most influential systematic text in the Māturīdī tradition... What was adopted as orthodox Māturīdī *kalām* after the end of the 12th century is based on Nasafī's monumental work."⁷³⁷

This was partly because it was more accessible than the works of al-Māturīdī himself, who used complex language and a less organised approach to systematisation in his theological manual, as we discuss later. Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī, a later notable figure within the school, employs a methodology and arguments similar to those of Nasafī in his works, *al-Kifāya* and its summary, *al-Bidāya*,⁷³⁸ which suggests that al-Ṣābūnī learnt much from *Tabṣira*. Moreover, the following remarks of al-Ṣābūnī, as reported by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210),⁷³⁹ demonstrate al-Ṣābūnī's respect and admiration for the author of *Tabṣira*, and its influence on

⁷³⁷ Dorroll, 'The Doctrine of the Nature of the Qur'ān', 137.

⁷³⁸ For example, his discussion on knowledge and its sources, the structured order of topics, and his interpretation of the concept of *ḍarūrī*—as encompassing both self-evident and certain knowledge—mirror Nasafī's approach. See al-Ṣābūnī, *al-Kifāya*, 48–51; Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī, *Kitāb al-Bidāya min al-Kifāya fī al-Hidāya fī Uṣūl al-Dīn* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1969), 29–33.

⁷³⁹ Al-Rāzī, a famous Ash'arite theologian known for his scholarly debates (*munāzarāt*), reports that al-Ṣābūnī expressed these words at the end of their third and final debate in Bukhārā. See al-Rāzī, *Munāzarāt*, 23.

him. Al-Şābūnī says, “I have read the *Kitāb Tabṣirat al-Adilla* by Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, and I believe that nothing surpasses that book in verification (*taḥqīq*) and meticulousness (*tadqīq*).”⁷⁴⁰

Nasafī’s influence is discernible across nearly all subsequent representatives of the school. For instance, Nasafī states on the topic of thankfulness, “Complete thanks or gratitude (*shukr*) for a blessing (*ni‘ma*) cannot be truly realised by an individual towards the Creator without the success (*tawfīq*) granted by Allāh to that individual, and the ease (*taysīr*) He bestows upon their act of gratitude.”⁷⁴¹ This divine assistance becomes a new blessing in itself, which in turn necessitates further gratitude. An individual cannot attain this further state of thankfulness without another instance of divine intervention (*ta‘thīr*). Consequently, this initiates an endless cycle of acts (*wa-hākadhā ilā mā lā yatanāhā*) of gratitude.⁷⁴² Echoing this sentiment, another representative of the school, Rukn al-Dīn ‘Ubayd Allāh al-Samarqandī (d. 701/1301), similarly states that complete gratitude for both the outward (*zāhir*) and inward (*bāṭin*) blessings bestowed by God is unattainable. He explains that expressing thankfulness for one blessing invariably leads to the recognition of additional blessings, such as power, protection, time, space, and so forth, thus perpetuating an infinite sequence of gratitude.⁷⁴³ As observed, both authors agree on the idea that thankfulness is an infinite process. Every act of gratitude is realised through additional blessings from God, which, in turn, necessitates a perpetual cycle of thankfulness.

⁷⁴⁰ Al-Rāzī, *Munāzarāt*, 23–24.

⁷⁴¹ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:19.

⁷⁴² Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 2:19.

⁷⁴³ Rukn al-Dīn ‘Ubayd Allāh ibn Muḥammad al-Samarqandī, *al-‘Aqīda al-Rukniyya fī Sharḥ lā ilāha ill Allāh Muḥammad Rasūl Allāh*, ed. Mustafa Sinanoğlu (Istanbul: İSAM, 2008), 93. For a translation of this passage and other relevant passages from al-Samarqandī’s work in question, see Demiri, ‘God and Creation’, 101.

Another example is Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Umar al-Khabbāzī (d. 691/1292), a later representative of the school. Al-Khabbāzī employs arguments similar to those of Nasafī on the topic of prophecy. For instance, humans are created with needs for food and medicine to survive and maintain their health; however, alongside substances that serve as beneficial food and medicine, we also encounter harmful substances in nature. Human reason alone cannot intuitively discern what is beneficial or harmful, and while experience can eventually lead to such knowledge, it is fraught with risks and requires a long time. In contrast, the knowledge provided by prophets on these matters is devoid of danger and has ensured the survival of human beings until our time. Furthermore, the necessity for various useful crafts for human survival and comfort serves as another testament to the reality of prophecy. In short, without prophets, humans would be unable to learn these crafts. Humans have an innate tendency to seek out and receive wisdom, a trait that flourishes further under the guidance of a wise teacher. This demonstrates the necessity of sending prophets to fulfil this innate tendency. The intellect recognises the goodness (*ḥasan*) of gratitude (*shukr*) towards a benefactor and the badness or wickedness (*qabīḥ*) of ingratitude. However, it cannot fully grasp the extent and manner of expressing gratitude properly towards God. Hence, there is a need for clear, verbal guidance on how to fulfil the obligation of gratitude towards God. Without such guidance, humans would be burdened with an obligation they cannot fulfil, which contradicts God’s wisdom.⁷⁴⁴ As discussed in Chapter Four, all these arguments, among many others, were previously used by Nasafī.

⁷⁴⁴ For more on his arguments in support of prophecy, see Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Umar al-Khabbāzī, *al-Hādī fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Adil Bebek (Istanbul: Marmara İlahiyat Yayınları Vakfı, 2006), 205–209.

Many additional examples of Nasafi's influence can be discovered through a simple survey of later scholars' works. For instance, as is well known, 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Samarqandī authored a commentary on al-Māturīdī's *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*. Yet, this commentary was not solely his own creation but rather a compilation of explanations from his teacher, Nasafi, delivered during his lectures. Al-Samarqandī states that, to ensure the preservation of Nasafi's interpretations, he compiled the notes he took during his teacher's lectures into a book and titled it *Sharḥ Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*.⁷⁴⁵ This demonstrates how Nasafi enhanced and expanded upon the teachings of the master, al-Māturīdī, and then passed these on to his students. As Madelung showed, al-Samarqandī was among the first scholars from Transoxiana to migrate westward and disseminate the school's views in Anatolia,⁷⁴⁶ which illustrates Nasafi's indirect influence through his students on the dissemination and prominence of al-Māturīdī's theological views in Central Asia and beyond.

Another distinguished scholar, Ḥusām al-Dīn al-Ḥusayn b. 'Alī al-Sighnāqī (d. 714/1314), who originated from Turkestan and studied Ḥanafī law and Māturīdī theology in Transoxiana, was also influential in the dissemination of Māturīdī school. Madelung suggests that Abū al-Mu'īn's work, *Tamhīd*, was instrumental in shaping al-Sighnāqī's intellectual journey, as evidenced by his commentary on this significant text. Al-Sighnāqī's travels took him westward to Baghdad, Damascus, and finally Aleppo, where he passed away in either 711/1311 or 714/1314. As he journeyed and taught in these regions, al-Sighnāqī shared the knowledge he had gained in Transoxiana, significantly contributing to the spread and influence of al-Māturīdī's

⁷⁴⁵ Al-Samarqandī, *Sharḥ Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, 1b.

⁷⁴⁶ Madelung, 'Māturīdism and Turks', 167–168.

teachings and his theological school.⁷⁴⁷ This again reflects the indirect yet profound influence of Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī on the wider transmission and acceptance of Māturīdism among various scholarly circles that were influenced by al-Sighnāqī’s teachings.

Another example of this is Ibn al-Humām (d. 861/1457), through whom the intellectual legacy of Transoxanian scholarship has been passed down to the Ottoman and Mamluk regions, as shown by Bruckmayr.⁷⁴⁸ It is known that Ibn al-Humām greatly benefited from Nasafī’s *Tabṣira*. His role as a transmitter of *Tabṣira* demonstrates his appreciation and interest in Nasafī’s work.⁷⁴⁹ We observe that al-Bayāḍī, an Ottoman scholar from the late Ottoman era, still continues to reference *Tabṣira*,⁷⁵⁰ which again shows Nasafī’s lasting influence and relevance in scholarly circles into the late period. Moreover, in various regions of the Islamic world, Nasafī’s works, particularly his *Tamhīd* and *Tabṣira*, were integral to the education provided in *madrasas*. The inclusion of these texts in *madrasa* curricula from the 15th to the 20th century serves as evidence of their enduring influence.⁷⁵¹

Correa’s study has demonstrated that Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, and Maḥmūd b. Zayd al-Lāmishī placed greater emphasis on the theological principles underlying legal theory than their predecessors.⁷⁵² Consequently, this led to what Correa

⁷⁴⁷ See Madelung, ‘Māturīdism and Turks’, 155, fn. 125.

⁷⁴⁸ Bruckmayr, ‘Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām’, 66–67.

⁷⁴⁹ For the chain of transmission, see Claude’s ‘preface’ in Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*, ed. Claude Salamé, 2 vols (Damas: Institut Français de Damas, 1990), 1:11.

⁷⁵⁰ See al-Bayāḍī, *Ishārāt al-Marām*, 214, 217–218, 235–236.

⁷⁵¹ See Bruckmayr, ‘Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām’, 64–65, 67.

⁷⁵² For example, al-Samarqandī adopts Nasafī’s framework to classify reports into two primary categories: *taklīf* and *ta’rīf*. Following Nasafī, al-Samarqandī distinguishes between the two: the former includes commands and prohibitions and thus relates to legal obligations, whereas the latter is more concerned with

describes as the emergence of a “theological turn” in legal theory.⁷⁵³ Considering that all these figures were students of Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, it is evident that he had a profound influence on subsequent generations.

Nasafī’s teachings and legacy have been best preserved within the famous creedal text known as *al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafīyya*, authored by his student Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī. Aldosari observes that the enduring presence and significance of *al-‘Aqā’id*, since its authorship, attest to the success of Abū al-Mu‘īn’s methodology and his arguments.⁷⁵⁴ Kātib Jalabī (d. 1067/1657) notes that *al-‘Aqā’id al-Nasafīyya* is a condensed version of Abū al-Mu‘īn’s *Tabṣira*.⁷⁵⁵ In fact, both the systematic structure and content in Najm al-Dīn’s creed can be unmistakably traced back to Abū al-Mu‘īn’s works. It appears that Najm al-Dīn formulated his creedal text using phrasing very similar to that found in Abū al-Mu‘īn’s works, especially in passages where Abū al-Mu‘īn articulates the school’s definitive stance on relevant topics. For example, the first article of the creed is an exact copy from Nasafī’s *Tamhīd*: “*ḥaqā’iq al-ashyā’ thābitatun wa-al-*

describing or presenting information without necessarily imposing legal obligations on humanity. See Correa, ‘Testifying Beyond Experience’, 175.

⁷⁵³ Correa, ‘Testifying Beyond Experience’, 158, 160–169. Central Asian Ḥanafite scholars, beyond individuals primarily known for their impact on Islamic jurisprudence, such as al-Sarakhsī (d. 483/1090) or al-Maghinānī, also included many scholars who played crucial roles in both legal and theological arenas. Figures like Abū al-Yusr al-Pazdawī, Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, and Abū al-Barakāt al-Nasafī (d. 710/1310) were among those who contributed significantly to both jurisprudence and theology. See Bruckmayr, ‘Persistence of Māturīdī Kalām’, 63, fn. 7.

⁷⁵⁴ Aldosari, *Ḥanafī Māturīdism*, 184–185.

⁷⁵⁵ Ḥājī Khalīfa Muṣṭafā b. ‘Abd Allāh Kātib Jalabī / (in modern Turkish:) Kātib Çelebi, *Kaṣḥ al-Zunūn ‘an Asāmī al-Kutub wa-al-Funūn*, ed. Mehmet Ş. Yaltkaya and Kilisli R. Bilge as ‘Keşf el-Zunun’, 2 vols (Ankara: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1941-43), 1:337. Modern researchers also note this point, see Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 252; Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 11.

'ilm bihā mutahaqqiqun.'⁷⁵⁶ Another instance is when Abū al-Mu'īn refers to the sources of knowledge as 'the sound senses' (*al-ḥawāss al-salīma*), 'the report of the truthful person' (*khabar al-ṣādiq*), and 'the mind' (*al-'aql*).⁷⁵⁷ Najm al-Dīn repeats the same categorisation with only one minor adjustment as follows: *al-ḥawāss al-salīma*, *al-khabar al-ṣādiq*, and *al-'aql*.⁷⁵⁸ Najm al-Dīn's creed later became the most commonly used textbook among the Māturīdīs and was subjected to *sharḥ* by many scholars, including Ash'arīs. The most renowned among these commentaries is the one authored by al-Taftāzānī. He, too, must have recognised the text's striking resemblance to Nasafī's *Tabṣira*, as he frequently references it in his commentary.⁷⁵⁹ In summary, it can be stated that the essence of Abū al-Mu'īn's teachings has been effectively captured and perpetuated in Najm al-Dīn's creed, thereby preserving Abū al-Mu'īn's theological contributions to the school for future generations.

In conclusion, Nasafī greatly valued the texts of his predecessors and saw them as valuable foundations upon which he further expanded and built. He did not merely transmit the existing body of theological knowledge but aimed to reinforce and consolidate the school's views with his systematic innovations. Moreover, he introduced novel arguments that were later utilised by his successors. He provided bibliographical remarks about previous figures of the tradition, contributing to its recognition as a distinct school of thought. His voluminous work, *Tabṣira*, which stands as the largest within the Māturīdī tradition, is a testament to these observations.

⁷⁵⁶ Nasafī, *Tamhīd*, 2; Cf. Najm al-Dīn, *al-'Aqā'id*, 13.

⁷⁵⁷ Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:24.

⁷⁵⁸ Najm al-Dīn, *al-'Aqā'id*, 13.

⁷⁵⁹ See, for example, al-Taftāzānī, *Commentary on the Creed of Islam*, 47, 55, 88.

Nasafi's ability to synthesise and build upon the works of Abū Ḥanīfa, al-Māturīdī, and even occasionally the Ash'arites underscores his critical role as both a preserver and a transformer of the school's views. His magnum opus, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*, served as a cornerstone for subsequent scholars in authoring their theological manuals. Thus, Nasafi emerges as a towering figure whose scholarly endeavours have significantly shaped the trajectory of Māturīdī theology. His privileged position within the school has certainly captured the attention of modern researchers, who acknowledge Nasafi's efforts in organising, strengthening, and brilliantly contributing to the school's development. Their description of Nasafi, using privileged terms such as 'systematiser,' 'the real founder,' 'the highest authority,' 'major consolidator,' and 'most brilliant figure' of the Māturīdī school, attests to this point.⁷⁶⁰ Some even refer to the theology before him as pre-Nasafi,⁷⁶¹ suggesting that after Nasafi, the theology of Transoxiana was never the same.

⁷⁶⁰ Rudolph, *Al-Māturīdī and Sunnī Theology*, 31, 184, 291; Harvey, *Transcendent God*, 11; Yazıcıoğlu, 'İki Büyük Sima', 281.

⁷⁶¹ Dorroll, 'The Doctrine of the Nature of the Qur'ān', 124.

CONCLUSION

There is a wealth of material on the Māturīdī school of *kalām* that has not yet been thoroughly studied in the Anglophone world, with one example being Nasafī's majestic work, *Tabṣīrat al-Adilla*. The present study partially fills this gap by focusing on Nasafī's concept of *īmān* and placing his voluminous *kalām* manual at its centre. However, much can and must be said about Nasafī and his masterpiece, which is of paramount importance for a true assessment of Māturīdī theology, as it became the most influential systematic text within the school after the 12th century. Nevertheless, the present study has reached its limits and needs to be concluded by summarising its overall findings. This can be organised into two parts, each addressing different aspects of the scope and objectives of the study. First, I will present my findings on Nasafī's interpretation of religious faith and its relation to the ongoing discussion known as the 'Ethics of Belief' debate. Second, I will summarise Nasafī's contributions to the Māturīdī school of theology.

The debate introduced in the first chapter of this study is an old one, yet it was revived by Clifford in Western philosophical circles and eventually came to be known as the *Ethics of Belief*, which was originally the title of Clifford's influential paper on the subject. The crux of the discussion lies in understanding the factors that shape our doxastic attitudes —our process of belief formation— and it raises the question of whether there are specific ethical principles with which our beliefs should align. Philosophers in the ethics of belief traditionally recognise three types of values or reasons that shape our doxastic attitudes: epistemic, prudential, and moral. According to Nasafī, religious beliefs should be formed only if they are supported by sufficient epistemic reasons —knowledge (*ma'rifa*) or evidence (*dalīl*). He strongly rejects invalid methods

of forming religious beliefs, including: (i) relying on subjective feelings regarding the goodness (*hasan*) of a religion, (ii) relying on inspiration (*ilhām*) allegedly demonstrating the truth of a religion, and (iii) relying on blind imitation (*taqlīd*) of religious doctrines without rational grounding. According to Nasafī, all of these must be rejected because they lead to the problem of relativism, where different individuals or groups can equally advocate contradictory claims to truth. This, in turn, results in uncertainty and inconsistency in determining what is actually true or what constitutes genuine faith. To ascertain the truth (*ṣiḥḥa*) or falsity (*fasād*) of religious beliefs, one should rely solely on proof, as it is the only way to refute false claims. Therefore, Nasafī's position corresponds to the broader Evidentialist tendency on the matter, which can be articulated as follows: *S*'s belief that *p* is justified only if *S* has sufficient evidence in support of the belief that *p*.

For rationally and morally justified faith, the first step should be the establishment of theism by the epistemic elite (*'ulamā'*) through solid evidence. However, Nasafī's stance is not as strict as Clifford's Evidentialism. He recognises two sufficient ways of establishing belief in God and His divine attributes. One method is related to formal philosophical arguments—the traditional arguments for the existence of God—which require expertise. Therefore, this method applies only to the epistemic elite or knowledgeable scholars (*'ulamā'*) who possess the necessary intellectual skills and training. This particular segment of society must necessarily possess the highest forms of philosophical arguments and internal justification in favour of theism, and their duty should not be seen merely as an intellectual pursuit or as apologetics. Their role is essential not only in defending religious beliefs against criticism but also in maintaining the authenticity of faith. The failure of the epistemic elite to fulfil its duty leads the

common people to rely on flawed methodologies, which, in turn, could result in heretical beliefs and conflicting interpretations of truth even within the same religious tradition.

The other method is more straightforward and accessible to all. It involves observing and interpreting the signs in the world around us. For Nasafi, meeting the Divine or feeling His presence is something that all human beings can experience in their daily lives, as the Prophet Abraham did. The universe is filled with numerous signs that point towards its Creator and His benevolence towards all living creatures. Those who are in tune with their natural inclination or have not strayed from their innate sense of right and wrong (*fiṭra*) can recognise these signs and understand that they are evidence of a merciful Creator who cares for His creation and continuously provides abundant blessings for their continuity (*dawām*). God, who has bestowed countless blessings to sustain even humans' limited existence in this world, would not have instilled in mankind a desire for eternal life without a purpose. The inherent human longing for eternal life is a manifestation of a deeper truth —that existence cannot be meaningless and that life must have a purpose beyond this mere temporal existence in this world. According to Nasafi, it would be absurd for life to be created only to perish permanently, and this conclusion is something that our intellect (*‘aql*) intuitively grasps as a necessary truth.

The second step is the establishment of the necessity and reality of prophecy (*nubuwwa*) through compelling evidence. According to Nasafi, individuals without exposure to divine revelation (*wahy*) would not have formed the correct beliefs and moral principles necessary for eternal happiness. This is because only prophets can possess the highest epistemic certainty (*yaqīn*) regarding certain religious beliefs. This level of certainty cannot be achieved through human effort or reasoning; it is bestowed only upon selected individuals by God. The rest of us, whether the epistemic elite or common people, must accept these truths based on the testimony

of prophets. However, from his Evidentialist perspective, making arbitrary exceptions when forming beliefs is unacceptable. In other words, for a belief to be justified, it must be supported by epistemic reasons in every circumstance. Therefore, if the path to acquiring knowledge of these truths is closed to us, then the epistemic elite must verify the reality and trustworthiness of the source—the reality of the prophetic tradition in general and the authenticity of the Prophet in particular—from which we receive these truths. Others should learn the proofs regarding the truth of prophecy from scholars who are experts in epistemology and religious sciences. In short, (i) prophecy fills or compensates for a fundamental gap in our overall body of knowledge, where epistemic certainty is not accessible by conventional means, and therefore, (ii) evidence must be provided for the source of the beliefs, not for the beliefs themselves. These beliefs and moral principles are equally necessary for both the epistemic elite and ordinary people, for only through prophetic wisdom can one achieve the ability to control human desires, lead a morally upright life, and attain eternal happiness.

In Nasafī's theology, knowledge (*ma'rifa*) and faith (*īmān*), despite their strong connection, are not the same. If knowledge is equated with faith, then the problem of faith not being a matter of free will arises. Knowledge represents the highest state of certainty for the human mind, and encountering this perfect form of certainty inevitably leads one to assent. However, faith must be a free choice, as it is only through one's freedom of action that human agency and responsibility can be justified. To overcome this problem, Nasafī distinguishes between two forms of assent (*taṣdīq*): (i) assent arising from knowledge, and (ii) assent arising from commitment. The first is about one's intellectual recognition of the truth of something. In this case, assenting to something is not a matter of free will, since knowledge inevitably leads to assent. To put it another way, once the individual cognitively grasps that *p*, they inevitably

acknowledge that *p* is true. In the second form of assent, one not only recognises the truth as passive knowledge but also voluntarily commits oneself to act upon it. Nasafī considers this second form of assent to be a genuine expression of one’s free will and, therefore, the most deserving of the name *īmān*. Furthermore, both assents are achieved by the heart (*qalb*), which represents the core of a person’s being or consciousness. In the first assent, the heart refers to the mind, but in the second assent, it actually refers to our faculty of free will.

This is the meaning of Nasafī’s definition of faith as “assent by the heart” (*taṣdīq bi al-qalb*). Yet, for Nasafī, faith cannot be isolated from knowledge, because faith cannot be built on unfounded assumptions. Therefore, *īmān* with *ma’rifā* more accurately articulates his interpretation of religious faith. The first assent is necessary but not sufficient on its own. Faith emerges only when intellectual assent is accompanied by volitional assent or commitment. This does not mean that someone who has sinned cannot still be properly regarded as a true believer. Nasafī acknowledges that human beings, by their nature, are prone to error. However, as long as one’s sincerity and inner commitment remain unbroken, one’s status as a Muslim is preserved. It is not the deeds (*arkān*), one by one, that constitute the true essence of faith, but rather the maintenance of one’s general disposition to act sincerely in accordance with the principles of religion.

Nasafī accepts that studying and acquiring proofs of faith, and living by its principles and values can be challenging and may require utmost dedication and perseverance. However, the praiseworthiness of one’s faith is determined by the degree of struggle or adversity (*mashaqqa*) endured in the pursuit of correct beliefs, and in incorporating them into one’s decisions, actions, and overall daily interactions with others. If one has done all they can to arrive at correct beliefs and lead a moral life but still unintentionally has shortcomings either in theory (*īmān*) or practice

(*'amal bi al-arkān*), they may be guilty of lesser faults, and it is hoped that God will forgive them based on their sincerity. However, it is not for humans to judge them as unbelievers or apostates, as such matters are too indeterminate for us to assess, and they may be properly resolved only on the Day of Judgment.

For Nasafī, the mere assertion that faith is an act of free will is inadequate on its own. To justify human responsibility, one must also establish genuine human autonomy in actions. Nasafī's primary objective on this matter is to find a middle ground by avoiding extreme positions. Therefore, he does not align himself with either the 'people of delegation' (*ahl al-tafwīd*) or the 'people of coercion' (*ahl al-ijbār*). He argues that the former group blurs God's omnipotence by excessively emphasising human agency, while the latter group blurs human responsibility by excessively emphasising divine agency and thus falls into overt determinism. Nasafī elucidates his middle way through the theory of acquisition (*kasb*). According to this theory, human beings have power (*qudra*) and influence (*ta'thīr*) over their acts (*maqdūr*). It is permissible (*jā'iz*) for two distinct powers —human and divine— to influence the same act. While man influences the realisation of the act through acquisition (*kasb*), God influences the same act through creation (*ikhtirā'*). The act's creation by God and its acquisition by a person (through a simultaneous act of will) are interconnected and inseparable. In other words, they are one and the same —two facets of a single process occurring simultaneously, with the action being both divinely created and humanly acquired.

Nasafī's position on the discussion aligns with moderate evidentialism, akin to what Wykstra refers to as 'sensible evidentialism,' contrasting with the strict stance represented by Clifford. Nasafī suggests that non-experts, who may not have the time or background for complex philosophical arguments, should use simpler yet clear and valid arguments to justify

their religious beliefs. Nasafī points to the Quranic narrative of Prophet Abraham as compelling and accessible evidence for non-experts. Furthermore, Nasafī advises non-experts to seek more detailed proofs and understanding of their beliefs from experts in the field. This is because, within a community, individuals can rely on the knowledge and testimony of specialists or experts to justify their religious beliefs. This aligns with a valid epistemic principle, as Audi suggests, “nearly anything that can be known firsthand can also be known on the basis of testimony.”

As for Nasafī’s influence and contributions to the Māturīdī school of theology, he played a significant role in preserving and transmitting the texts of his predecessors, particularly Abū Ḥanīfa and Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, to later generations. This is evidenced by the fact that in his theological writings, Nasafī often directly quotes these scholars word-for-word, summarises or paraphrases their ideas, and appears as a transmitter in the chains of narration of their works. Nasafī’s frequent references to *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* suggest that he had access to a version of the text that was very close to the original or was one of the earliest copies. Since there is only one known surviving copy of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, Nasafī’s quotations, which align with the content of this copy, have great significance and offer substantial evidence supporting the authenticity and reliability of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.

Nasafī significantly developed both the methodology and content of rational theology established by Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī in the Transoxiana region. Al-Māturīdī did not view Abū Ḥanīfa’s credal statements as final conclusions; instead, he regarded them as initial foundations upon which further theological development and refinement could occur. Nasafī, like al-Māturīdī, stayed loyal to the foundational beliefs introduced by Abū Ḥanīfa and sought to imbue them with a distinct *kalām* identity. However, the theological legacy of al-Māturīdī, as

acknowledged by both modern scholars and classical writers such as Abū al-Yusr al-Pazdawī and ‘Alā’ al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, presents several challenges, such as the use of unclear or ambiguous language and the complex organisation and treatment of theological subjects. Nasafī, through his voluminous work *Tabṣira* and lectures to his students, facilitated a better understanding of al-Māturīdī’s *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*. Therefore, certain ambiguous expressions in al-Māturīdī’s work can be clarified and rendered more comprehensible only through Nasafī’s *Tabṣira*. Through Nasafī’s *Tabṣira*, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd* can become more accessible to readers, students of theology, and researchers in the English-speaking world. Nasafī’s abundant words in *Tabṣira* undoubtedly contribute to the philosophical analysis and reconstruction of *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.

Nasafī’s *kalām* manual demonstrates a more organised and systematic approach compared to al-Māturīdī’s work. His methodology can be summarised as follows. At the beginning of the discussion, he clarifies the key concepts related to the debate, noting any slight variations or distinctions between them if necessary. After introducing the problem, he presents the views of rival Islamic schools and, where relevant, non-Islamic traditions on the topic, along with the arguments they use to justify their positions. He then critiques the views he deems incorrect and seeks to expose their flaws or inaccuracies. Finally, he presents the view advocated by his school of thought and supports it with both rational (*‘aqlī*) and scriptural (*naqlī*) arguments. A notable characteristic of his argumentation is his frequent use of linguistic analysis. He considers words’ literal and figurative usage, synonyms and antonyms, and their semantic fields, among other aspects. He also analyses the grammatical structures of sentences when discussing problems. This approach has been interpreted by some scholars as reminiscent or a forerunner of the methods used in modern semantics. In general terms, this is Nasafī’s systematic

approach to *kalām*. He consistently employs this method throughout his theological writings and rarely deviates from it.

In addition to transmitting the earlier tradition and introducing methodological innovations to the existing theological corpus in Transoxiana, Nasafī also augmented and enriched its content. He developed new arguments that had not been used by anyone else before.⁷⁶² Additionally, Nasafī had a significant impact on the subsequent evolution of Māturīdī theology by aligning the Māturīdī position more closely with the views of the Ash‘arī school concerning the belief that the Quran is uncreated. After Nasafī, the earlier formulation was abandoned in favour of the Ash‘arī formulation. As a result of Nasafī’s transformative influence, his *Tabṣira* later became a definitive model for *kalām* manuals in the classical period. In his *Tabṣira*, he outlined the doctrines to be defended and specified the rational tools to be used, presenting a more coherent and intelligible exposition than al-Māturīdī’s *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*.

Nasafī’s *Tabṣira* also significantly enhances our understanding of the scholarly tradition in Transoxiana. The bibliographical passages in *Tabṣira* are invaluable resources for exploring the intellectual legacy and continuity of this tradition. Nasafī’s meticulous attention to detail allows us to grasp the lives of scholars who thrived during the 2nd/8th and 3rd/9th centuries. Through his careful efforts, Nasafī skilfully reconstructs the historical narrative of the School of Samarqand, tracing an unbroken lineage of scholars from Abū Ḥanīfa to al-Māturīdī. Notably, al-

⁷⁶² For example, concerning God’s eternal creative power (*takwīn*) and the distinction between *takwīn* and *mukawwan*, Nasafī developed a total of eight arguments that had not been used before by anyone else in these debates. See Brodersen, *Der unbekannte kalām*, 552–553; Brodersen, *Bilinmeyen Kelâm*, 530–531. Most of these arguments relate to conceptual analyses of certain terms relevant to the problem, as we have seen in many examples from Nasafī throughout the current study. One example of these eight arguments can be found in the current study on pp. 275–277. Also see Nasafī, *Tabṣira*, 1:423–425.

Māturīdī's prominence is underscored by Nasafī's deliberate inclusion of his name among the esteemed scholars of Samarqand, solidifying his position as the leading theologian of his time. Nasafī's intentional focus on al-Māturīdī's name resulted in his students explicitly recognising and acknowledging al-Māturīdī as the leader of the school.

Nasafī significantly influenced his students Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī, 'Alā' al-Dīn al-Samarqandī, and Maḥmūd b. Zayd al-Lāmişī, as well as later notable figures of the school such as Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī, Rukn al-Dīn 'Ubayd Allāh al-Samarqandī, and Jalāl al-Dīn 'Umar al-Khabbāzī. Through his achievements, Nasafī laid the groundwork for further theological development. Shortly after the death of Abū al-Mu'īn al-Nasafī, his follower Najm al-Dīn al-Nasafī composed the well-known creed, *al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafīyya*, summarising Abū al-Mu'īn's writings, which were undoubtedly rooted in the teachings of Abū Ḥanīfa and the theological framework of al-Māturīdī. The enduring presence and significance of *al-'Aqā'id al-Nasafīyya*, since its authorship, attests to the success of Abū al-Mu'īn's methodology. Najm al-Dīn's creed later became the most commonly used textbook among the Māturīdīs in *madrāsas* and was subjected to commentaries by many scholars, including the Ash'arīs. The most renowned among these commentaries is the one authored by al-Taftāzānī. As a result of his achievements, a new tradition emerged. This new strand of thought, rooted in Abū Ḥanīfa's creedal statements and given a theological identity through al-Māturīdī's *Tawḥīd*, was further developed by Nasafī in both content and methodology. It then formed a distinct school of *kalām* that stands as one of the pillars of Sunni rational theology in Islam, alongside Ash'arism. Although this new tradition remained associated with the followers of Abū Ḥanīfa, its foundation lay in the teachings of al-Māturīdī and Nasafī's interpretation of them. Consequently, this tradition came to be more

accurately known as Māturīdiyya, with Nasafī's contributions to its recognition under this name surpassing those of anyone else within the school.

Nasafī's theological contributions represent a remarkable feat of systematisation, blending various earlier pioneering models. Foremost among these influences was the groundwork laid by the esteemed scholar and his master, al-Māturīdī. However, Nasafī did not hesitate to incorporate pre-Māturīdī or Ḥanafī theological opinions and even elements of the Ash'arite thought where he perceived al-Māturīdī's views as too Mu'tazilī or excessively philosophical. By synthesising the perspectives of Abū Ḥanīfa, al-Māturīdī, and even the Ash'arites, Nasafī has left an indelible mark on the landscape of Māturīdī theology, cementing his position as a prominent figure within the Māturīdī school. He became a foundational source for subsequent representatives of the school. Nasafī's esteemed status within the school has attracted the attention of modern scholars as well, who recognise his role in organising, strengthening, and profoundly enriching the school's theological framework. These scholars describe Nasafī in reverential terms like 'systematiser,' 'the highest authority,' 'major consolidator,' and 'most brilliant figure' of the Māturīdī school, emphasising his monumental impact. Some even refer to the period before Nasafī as 'pre-Nasafī,' indicating that his influence fundamentally transformed the theological discourse of Transoxiana.

As a final note on the first theme of the study, in Nasafī's thought, it is neither rational nor moral to adopt a belief independent of epistemic reasons or without sufficient evidence. However, this does not mean that he entirely disregards practical or moral considerations in forming beliefs. According to Nasafī, if there are practical or moral considerations in favour of a belief, then there must also be underlying epistemic considerations. In other words, ethical or practical motivations for belief can ultimately be grounded in rational and epistemological

foundations. Prudential and moral considerations can be understood or reduced to epistemic reasons. Therefore, Nasafī rejects the idea of ‘will to believe’ because, as rational beings, humans, through the power of their will, cannot arbitrarily choose to believe something that contradicts reason. Nasafī’s interpretation of religious faith is highly relevant to the ‘Ethics of Belief’ debate and therefore merits serious attention as a significant source of inspiration, particularly for Evidentialist positions. Nasafī and his seminal work, *Tabṣirat al-Adilla*, also merit serious attention in future *kalām jadīd* projects. Without shedding light on Nasafī’s theology and contributions to the school, a true and comprehensive assessment of Māturīdī theology and its reconstruction seems considerably challenging, if not impossible.

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