

AN INTRODUCTION TO ISLAMIC THEOLOGY

Imam Nūr al-Dīn al-Ṣābūnī's
Al-Bidāyah fī uṣūl al-dīn

INTRODUCTION, TRANSLATION, ANNOTATION,
AND APPENDICES

BY FARAZ A. KHAN



ZAYTUNA COLLEGE



Table of Contents

Foreword xi

Introduction i

An Introduction to Islamic Theology 29

THE EXISTENCE AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD 35

On Epistemology 36

On the Temporality of the Cosmos and Necessary Existence of the Creator 42

On Divine Oneness 48

On Divine Transcendence above Temporal Qualities 54

On the Attributes of God, the Exalted 62

On the Name and the Named 70

On Divine Uniqueness and Dissimilarity from Creation 72

On the Eternality of Divine Speech 76

On the Act of Creating and the Created 86

On the Possibility of Seeing God, the Exalted 96

On Vision During Sleep 106

On Divine Will 108

Annotations 113

PROPHETS, MIRACLES, AND EARLY ISLAM 161

On Affirming Messengers 162

On Evidence of the Prophethood of Muḥammad ﷺ 168

On Traits Specific to Prophets 178

On Saintly Miracles 180

On Political Leadership and Related Matters 182

On the Imamate of the Rightly Guided Caliphs ﷺ 186

Annotations 195

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DIVINE OMNIPOTENCE, HUMAN AGENCY, AND
ONTOLOGY OF THE WORLD 223

- On Ascription of Justice or Injustice 224
- On Potency and Human Agency 226
- On Ontology of Human Action 234
- On Occasionalism and the Negation of Secondary
Causation 242
- Annotations 247

PREDESTINATION AND THE EXISTENCE OF
EVIL 267

- On Placing a Burden Beyond One's Capacity 268
- On the Generality of Things Willed 272
- On the Nonexistent 280
- On Denial of Incumbency upon God to Do What Is Best [for
People] 282
- On Provisions 286
- On Lifespans 288
- On Predestination and the Divine Decree 290
- On Guiding and Misguiding 294
- Annotations 299

HUMAN SIN AND DIVINE FORGIVENESS 311

- On Those Who Commit Enormities 312
- On Intercession 318
- On Whether or Not God's Pardoning Disbelief Is Logically
Possible 320
- On Whether or Not Divine Omnipotence Includes Oppression,
Foolishness, or Lying 322
- On Enormities and Minor Sins 324
- Annotations 327

FAITH, BELIEF, AND THE INTELLECT 335

- On Faith and Submission 336
- On the Reality of Faith 340

TABLE OF CONTENTS

On the Faith of One Who Merely Emulates 344
On Whether or Not Faith Increases 346
On Necessary Tenets of Faith Deduced from Revelation 350
Annotations 357

Appendix A: The Kalam Cosmological Argument 367
Appendix B: Descriptions of the Prophet ﷺ 423
Transliteration Key 435
Bibliography 437
Acknowledgments 447
Index 453



Introduction

THE CENTRAL PURPOSE of authentic religion is to enlighten people regarding reality, in a profoundly full ontological sense, as well as to guide them on how to live in the world in accordance with that reality—namely, to know, love, and worship the abidingly real (God, the exalted) and to serve His creation with nobility and purpose. In the language of philosophy, religion’s point of departure is metaphysics—the science of being and of first principles and the foundation of religion’s law and virtue ethics, from which emanate its politics. Unfortunately, the first principles that ground our knowledge of metaphysics have not fared well in recent intellectual history. In many ways, Western post-Enlightenment modernity represents a departure from first principles, while the postmodernity that followed is characterized by their very deconstruction. Rather than first principles, power structures are fundamentally what must be known and understood to discover reality; accordingly, deconstruction of their linguistic and political foundations reveals the subjective biases of what various societies deem real. Thus, ours is an era that generally deems the notion of universal and absolute truth to be an antiquated idea, a mere relic of the medieval past, and replaces it with a multiplicity of plastic words and tractable truths, each relative to a people’s experience, culture, history, or worldview. To the chagrin of biology, even gender is not spared from the deconstructionist onslaught. The understanding of truth as correspondence between ideas or propositions and objective reality is replaced with coherence or pragmatic

theories of truth: truth is our integration of beliefs into a coherent system, or simply whatever works for us as members of a society. For thoroughgoing postmodernists, truth is whatever consensus is arrived at by politically influential members of society, whose social deliberations construct reality. And despite the incoherence of such forms of relativism, in that they are truth claims regarding the way the world actually is and therefore need some level of correspondence to make their arguments, many of their proponents consider religion a nuisance at best. But for people genuinely in search of meaning and of guidance, of the ultimate telos of existence and its ground of being, divinely revealed religion remains a beacon of hope, a lighthouse in the vast ocean of philosophical unruliness.

Because modern man often recoils at the notion of absolute truth, due to a perception of resultant intolerance, it must be underscored that the doctrinal exclusion entailed by objective truth does not preclude sociopolitical harmony; both principles are essential for the human family. The diversity of the human spectrum is an opportunity for mutual recognition and benefit, for it is predicated on a shared humanity that demands peaceful coexistence and respect for the other.¹ Truth, however, is but one. Epistemological realism asserts that contrary propositions cannot be simultaneously true, for the human mind does not construct reality but discovers it. Thus, far more than just a code of legal strictures or a set of rituals, authentic religion is an expression of metaphysics; a recognition of reality as it truly is; and at bottom, a remembrance of the divine. Through that remembrance, human consciousness is imbued with a sense of the sacred—an illumination that increasingly permeates one's very being and enables the individual to discern truth from falsehood and thereby lead a sincere life of virtue, altruism, empathy, and love. The soul's illumination also provides self-awareness of one's faults and shortcomings, which one must continuously struggle to overcome yet which also serve the purpose of

Sample Pages from Text and Translation

“What is your name?” and you answer, “Muḥammad.” [The questioner] intends thereby to ask regarding the act of naming, as indicated by his usage of the word “What,” which [in Arabic] is used for inanimate things. But if [a name] is used with the word “Who,” as in “Who is Muḥammad?” and you say, “I am,” you ascribe it [the name] to the entity [the one named]. You do not say, “Indeed, Muḥammad is my name.” So that proves our position is correct. And God alone is the One who enables.

ON DIVINE UNIQUENESS AND DISSIMILARITY
FROM CREATION

We have established the attributes of perfection for God, the exalted, as a rebuttal to those who deny them (*mu‘aṭṭilah*), so now likeness and resemblance must also be negated as a rebuttal to the anthropomorphists, whereby the upright way and straight path are elucidated. Both extremes are contemptible, while “the best of matters are those that are moderate and balanced.”⁴⁰ The evidence of this position is the Exalted’s statement “There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him, yet He is all-hearing, all-seeing” (42:11). He negates resemblance with His words “There is nothing whatsoever like unto Him,” yet affirms attributes with His words “yet He is all-hearing, all-seeing.”

There is a difference of opinion regarding what constitutes resemblance. The philosophers, esoterists, and Jahm b. Ṣafwān⁴¹ [d. 128/745] state that resemblance [between two things] is entailed in the predication [upon each] of merely the same description or name, to the extent that they refuse to ascribe to God, the exalted, the names Existent (*mawjūd*), Thing (*shay’*),⁴² Living (*ḥayy*), Knowing (*‘ālim*), and Able (*qādir*), so as to negate any likeness between God, the exalted, and His creation. This, of course, is absurd. If resemblance is entailed by [sharing] the [most] general quality, linguistic categories would be rendered null,

البداية في أصول الدين

مَا اسْمُكَ؟ فَتَقُولُ مُحَمَّدٌ، يُرِيدُ بِهِ السُّؤَالَ عَنِ التَّسْمِيَةِ، بِدَلِيلِ أَنَّهُ ذَكَرَهُ
بِكَلِمَةِ « مَا » وَإِنَّهَا لِعَبْرِ الْعُقَلَاءِ. ثُمَّ إِذَا اسْتَعْمِلَ بِكَلِمَةِ « مَنْ »، فَيُقَالُ
مَنْ مُحَمَّدٌ؟ فَتَقُولُ أَنَا، تُضَيِّفُهُ إِلَى الدَّاتِ، وَلَا تَقُولُ إِنَّ مُحَمَّدًا اسْمِي.
فَدَلَّ ذَلِكَ عَلَى صِحَّةِ مَا قُلْنَا. وَاللَّهُ الْمُوقِّعُ.

القول في نفي التشبيه والمماثلة

قَدْ أَثْبَتْنَا صِفَاتِ الْكَمَالِ لِلَّهِ تَعَالَى رَدًّا عَلَى الْمُعْظَلَةِ، فَلَا بُدَّ مِنْ نَفْيِ
التَّشْبِيهِ وَالْمُمَاثَلَةِ رَدًّا عَلَى الْمُشَبَّهِةِ، لِيَتَّضِحَ الْمَنْهَجُ الْقَوِيمُ وَالصَّرَاطُ
الْمُسْتَقِيمُ، فَكَلَا طَرَفِي الْأَمْرِ ذَمِيمٌ، وَخَيْرُ الْأُمُورِ أَوْسَطُهَا. وَدَلَالَةُ ذَلِكَ
قَوْلُهُ تَعَالَى ﴿ لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ ﴾؛ نَفْيِ الْمُمَاثَلَةِ بِقَوْلِهِ
﴿ لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ ﴾، وَدَلَّ عَلَى ثُبُوتِ الصِّفَاتِ بِقَوْلِهِ ﴿ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ
الْبَصِيرُ ﴾.

وَاخْتَلَفَ الْقَائِلُونَ فِيمَا تَثْبُتُ بِهِ الْمُمَاثَلَةُ. قَالَتِ الْفَلَسِيفَةُ وَالْبَاطِنِيَّةُ
وَجَهْمُ بْنُ صَفْوَانَ الْمُمَاثَلَةَ تَثْبُتُ بِالِاشْتِرَاكِ فِي مُجَرَّدِ الْوُصْفِ وَالتَّسْمِيَةِ،
حَتَّى امْتَنَعُوا عَنِ تَسْمِيَةِ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى مَوْجُودًا وَشَيْئًا وَحَيًّا وَعَالِمًا وَقَادِرًا نَفِيًّا
لِلْمُمَاثَلَةِ بَيْنَ اللَّهِ تَعَالَى وَبَيْنَ خَلْقِهِ. وَهَذَا بَاطِلٌ، فَإِنَّ الْمُمَاثَلَةَ لَوُثِّبَتْ
بِالْوُصْفِ الْعَامِّ لَبَطَلَ تَفْسِيمُ أَرْبَابِ اللِّسَانِ بَيْنَ الْأَشْيَاءِ،

such as classifying something as opposite, as contradictory, as a genus, or as similar. In fact, all things would share resemblance [given that all are described as “existent”], even incapacity with power, stillness with movement, and honey [that is, antidote] with poison. Those who possess intellect consider this meaningless.⁴³

The Mu‘tazilites state that resemblance [between two things] is entailed by [their] sharing the most specific of qualities: [for example,] our knowledge has three qualities—it is existent, it is an accident, and it is [specifically] knowledge. “Existence” is the most general of its qualities, “being an accident” its middle one, and “being knowledge” its most specific. Therefore [according to them], knowledge resembles knowledge in its *being knowledge*, not in its existence or in its being an accident. Hence, they reject ascribing knowledge to God, the exalted, so as to negate likeness between Him and His creation. But this position also is illogical, for indeed one person’s ability by which he can carry ten loads is similar in its most specific quality to another’s ability by which he can carry a hundred loads, yet despite that, the two bear no resemblance.

According to us, resemblance is entailed only by sharing all qualities [under consideration], such that if two attributes differ in even one [relevant] quality, they do not have “resemblance.”⁴⁴ For example, human knowledge is existent, is an accident, is knowledge, is originated, is logically possible, and is replicated [by God] every moment. But when we affirm knowledge as an attribute of God, the exalted, [what we affirm as real] is existent, an attribute, knowledge, eternal, logically necessary, and perpetual from anterior eternity to posterior eternity [that is, atemporal and timeless]; hence, it does not resemble knowledge possessed by creation in any real way whatsoever [due to the categorical difference between what is necessary/eternal and what is possible/temporal].

البداية في أصول الدين

مِنْ تَسْمِيَّتِهِمْ لِبَعْضِ الْأَشْيَاءِ ضِدًّا وَلِبَعْضِهَا خِلَافًا وَلِبَعْضِهَا جِنْسًا
وَلِبَعْضِهَا مِثْلًا ، بَلْ كَانَتْ الْأَشْيَاءُ كُلُّهَا مُمَاثِلَةً ، حَتَّى كَانَ الْعَجْزُ مِثْلًا
لِلْقُدْرَةِ ، وَالسُّكُونُ مِثْلًا لِلْحَرَكَةِ ، وَالشَّهْدُ مِثْلًا لِلسُّمِّ ، وَهَذَا مِمَّا يُحْيِلُهُ
الْعُقْلَاءُ .

وَقَالَتِ الْمُعْتَزِلَةُ الْمُمَاثِلَةُ تَثْبُتُ بِالِاشْتِرَاكِ فِي أَحْصَ الْأَوْصَافِ ، فَإِنَّ
الْعِلْمَ مِمَّا لَهُ ثَلَاثَةٌ أَوْصَافٍ : مَوْجُودٌ وَعَرَضٌ وَعِلْمٌ . فَالْوُجُودُ أَعْمٌ وَأَوْصَافِهِ
وَالْعَرَضِيَّةُ أَوْسَطُهَا وَكَوْنُهُ عِلْمًا أَحْصَاهَا . فَالْعِلْمُ يُمَاتِلُ الْعِلْمَ مِنْ حَيْثُ
كَوْنُهُ عِلْمًا لَا مِنْ حَيْثُ كَوْنُهُ مَوْجُودًا وَعَرَضًا . وَلِهَذَا امْتَنَعُوا عَنِ وَصْفِ
اللَّهِ تَعَالَى بِالْعِلْمِ نَفِيًّا لِلْمُمَاثِلَةِ بَيْنَ اللَّهِ وَبَيْنَ خَلْقِهِ . وَهَذَا أَيْضًا فَاسِدٌ ،
فَإِنَّ الْقُدْرَةَ الَّتِي يَحْمِلُ الْإِنْسَانُ بِهَا عَشْرَةَ أَمْثَالٍ تَشَارِكُ الْقُدْرَةَ الَّتِي يَحْمِلُ
بِهَا غَيْرُهُ مِائَةَ مَنْ فِي أَحْصَ أَوْصَافِهَا ، وَمَعَ ذَلِكَ لَا تُمَاتِلُهَا .

وَعِنْدَنَا الْمُمَاثِلَةُ إِنَّمَا تَثْبُتُ بِالِاشْتِرَاكِ فِي جَمِيعِ الْأَوْصَافِ ، حَتَّى لَوْ اخْتَلَفَا
فِي وَصْفٍ وَاحِدٍ لَانْتَفَتِ الْمُمَاثِلَةُ . مِثَالُ ذَلِكَ أَنَّ الْعِلْمَ مِمَّا مَوْجُودٌ وَعَرَضٌ
وَعِلْمٌ وَمُحَدَّثٌ وَجَائِزُ الْوُجُودِ وَيَتَجَدَّدُ فِي كُلِّ زَمَانٍ . وَلَوْ أَثْبَتْنَا الْعِلْمَ صِفَةً
لِلَّهِ تَعَالَى لَكَانَ مَوْجُودًا وَصِفَةً وَعِلْمًا وَقَدِيمًا وَوَاجِبَ الْوُجُودِ وَدَائِمًا مَن
الْأَزَلِ إِلَى الْأَبَدِ ، فَلَا يُمَاتِلُ عِلْمَ الْخَلْقِ بِوَجْهِهِ مِنَ الْوُجُوهِ .

Sample Pages from Annotations
to the Translation

says, “God,” he has made remembrance of other than God, for he mentioned the name of God, and His name is other than Him.” (al-Şābūnī, *Al-Kifāyah*, 18r. [BT])

38 And glorification is suitable only for His entity, not for other than Him. See al-Şābūnī, *Al-Kifāyah*, 18r. [BT]

39 The author states in *Al-Kifāyah*,

If one states: It is narrated about the Prophet ﷺ that he said, “Verily, God has ninety-nine names. Whoever enumerates [and comprehends] all of them shall enter paradise.” So were the name and the named one and the same, the one named would also be ninety-nine. We would respond: The term *name* can be used to mean “naming,” which is ascribed to the one who names, which by consensus is other than the named. So enumeration, multiplicity, and temporality all return to the naming, not literally to the name. (al-Şābūnī, *Al-Kifāyah*, 18v. [BT])

40 This statement is related by Ibn Sa‘ānī (d. 562/1167) in the addendum to *Tārīkh Baghdād*, with a chain of narrators that includes someone unknown (*majhūl*), up to the Prophet ﷺ through ‘Alī b. Abī Ṭālib ؑ; as well as by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923) in his exegesis (*tafsīr*) as a statement of Muṭarrif b. ‘Abd Allāh (d. 95/714) and Yazīd b. Murrah al-Ja‘fī. Imam al-Bayhaqī (d. 458/1066) also relates it from Muṭarrif; while al-Daylamī (d. 558/1162) relates it without a chain of narration, yet through Ibn ‘Abbās ؓ to the Prophet ﷺ, as saying, “The best of actions are those that are moderate and balanced,” in a hadith that starts with, “Be consistent in performing your obligations.” It is also related that Imam al-Awzā‘ī (d. 157/774) said, “There is nothing God has commanded save that the devil opposes it with two tendencies, not caring whichever one he succeeds in inciting: excess (*ghuluww*) and shortcoming (*taqṣīr*.” Imam al-Sakhāwī (d. 902/1497) notes that the principle of moderation is confirmed by the Qur’an, as in 17:29, 17:110, 25:67, and even by allusion in 2:68. See Muḥammad b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sakhāwī, *Al-Maqāṣid al-ḥasanah fī bayān*

kathīr min al-aḥādīth al-mushtahīrah ʿalā al-alsīnah, ed. ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad al-Ṣiddīq (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1991), 205–6.

- 41 He is Abū Miḥraz Jahm b. Ṣafwān from Samarqand, a client (*mawlā*) of Banī Rāsib and head of the sect that would be called the Jahmiyyah. Imam al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1348) calls him “a misguided heretic who died in the time of the young followers (students of the Prophet’s companions—*tābiʿūn*). He had planted seeds of immense evil.” He worked for the army of al-Ḥārith b. Surayj (d. 128/746), who led a revolt against the Umayyad governor Naṣr b. Sayyār (d. 131/748). Upon the order of the latter, he was executed in the year 128/745. See al-Ziriklī, *Al-Aʿlām*, 2:141.
- 42 In classical Islamic theology, the word *shayʿ* refers only to *mawjūd*, or “that which exists.”
- 43 Imam al-Lāmishī explains their position as follows:

The Qarāmiṭah, many of the philosophers, Jahm b. Ṣafwān, and others state, “These terms [Existent (*mawjūd*, *shayʿ*), Living (*ḥayy*), Knowing (*ʿālim*), Able (*qādir*), etc.] may not be ascribed to God, the exalted; likewise, any name that may be ascribed to other than God, the exalted, may not be ascribed to Him, the exalted, so as to avoid affirming resemblance [between God and His creation].”

We [Sunni orthodoxy] respond: This is absurd, for the term *shayʿ* refers only to “existence,” and there is no equivalence whatsoever between God, the exalted, and other than Him with respect to existence, for the existence of God, the exalted, is *necessary* while the existence of all others is merely *possible*.

Likewise, there is no equivalence at all between the life of God, the exalted, and the life of other than Him, for His life is eternal, not an accident, and its continuity is not impossible; while the life of all others is temporal and an accident, and its continuity is impossible. So equivalence between the two is false, and there is no resemblance without equivalence.

This is the case for all the divine attributes [affirmed by Sunni orthodoxy], so resemblance between God and His creation is

not entailed in the affirmation of these names and attributes for God; thus, our position by no means entails affirmation of resemblance. (*Kitāb al-tamhīd*, 67–68)

- 44 The position of the author (and of Imam al-Ash‘arī himself) appears to affirm resemblance between two things (such as two entities or two attributes) only when all of their qualities are similar. Yet later theologians (such as Imam Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī) note that this is logically incoherent, for it entails that no two things could ever resemble one another, since some quality of each, however minor or irrelevant, would be unique to it and absent in the other. For example, two scholars of equivalent knowledge of jurisprudence would not resemble one another in light of each scholar’s unique physical traits and personality. Thus, according to Imam al-Taftāzānī, Imam al-Farhārī, and others, the position of Imam al-Ash‘arī and Imam al-Ṣābūnī is interpreted to mean that resemblance between two things is affirmed only when all of their *relevant qualities that are under consideration* are identical, even if other qualities (that are irrelevant to what is being considered) are not shared by both things. See al-Farhārī, *Al-Nibrās*, 120–22.

This interpretation is reflected in Imam al-Ṣābūnī’s explanation in the text. At bottom, the Sunni affirmation of the divine names and attributes does not entail resemblance of God, the exalted, to creation due to the absolute and categorical difference (*tabāyun*) between what is necessary/eternal (God, the exalted, and His attributes) and what is possible/temporal (creation and its attributes). And, in light of that categorical difference, some theologians hold the view that any terms that are used for both God, the exalted, and His creation (such as existence, life, knowledge, power) are used as homonyms (*ishtirāk lafẓī*). Shaykh Muḥammad al-Hāshimī comments,

Realize that the position of Shaykh al-Ash‘arī is that the term *existence* [or *being* (*wujūd*)], when used for what is eternal and for what is temporal, is a homonym.... So there is no universal/general existence of which eternal existence and temporal existence

are particulars/types.... Rather, according to [al-Ash^ʿarī], eternal existence is categorically different (*mubāyin*) from temporal existence, as is evident from the categorical difference between their innumerable respective properties, some of which are as follows: God's existence is without beginning or end, while the existence of all else is preceded by and followed by nonexistence [or nonbeing (ʿ*adam*)]; God's existence is metaphysically necessary and its negation entails impossibility, based on both reason and scripture, while the existence of all else is metaphysically possible, the negation of which entails no impossibility whatsoever; God's existence is not bound or conditioned by time and space, for He is the creator of time and space, while the existence of all else is necessarily bound by both; God's existence alone is not dependent whatsoever on anything, while the existence of all else is ever dependent on His power and will, at its inception as well as for its continuity (according to the correct view). So were it not for His largesse and favor upon all things in the cosmos, of granting them existence (*ījād*), they would never have existed. And were it not for His largesse and favor upon them of continually maintaining their existence in every moment (*imdād*), their being would at once vanish into nonbeing, for in each moment they are innately accepting nonbeing. [*ījād* is the divine act of bringing into existence, while *imdād* refers to the continued divine sustainment that follows *ījād*.] Ibn ʿAṭāʾ Allāh [d. 709/1309] states in his aphorisms, "There are two blessings that no [temporally] existent thing is without and that everything in the cosmos necessarily needs: the blessing of God's [initial] act of granting existence and the blessing of God's unceasing acts of maintaining in existence"; "He [the exalted] blessed you initially with [His act of] granting you existence and subsequently with [His acts of] unceasingly maintaining you in existence."

This [reality] is what it means for the existence of all things other than God to be preceded by and followed by nonexistence, and for nonexistence to be possible for them in each of their moments, which is why they always [without interruption] need the ontic

support of their Creator's power. And this is the proper exegesis of the Qur'anic verse "Every single thing is perished (*hālik*), except His [God's] countenance" (28:88)—that is, perished constantly in all of its moments: *actually* perished before its current moment of existence [its past] and after its current moment of existence [its future], and *effectively* perished in its present moment of existence [since were it not for the divine *imdād*, the thing on its own would be nonexistent]. And the term *thing* here is general to encompass everything in the cosmos....

This is also the proper interpretation of the [rigorously authenticated (*ṣaḥīḥ*)] hadith [related in *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*] "The truest statement a poet ever uttered is the statement of Labīd: Verily, everything other than God is unreal (*bāṭil*)"—that is, unreal without interruption ([actually unreal] in its past, [effectively unreal] in its present, and [actually unreal] in its future), as we just explained regarding the verse. (*Miftāḥ al-jannah*, 97–98)

- 45 Historically, the issue of divine speech was among the most debated in Islamic theology; according to some scholars, this is why the discipline was given the name *kalam*. The Sunnis regarded their view as another median position, in this case, between various misunderstandings over the nature of the Qur'an. The main tension was over reconciling the revealed *temporal* word with the *eternality* of its revealer: God, the exalted, is timeless, so His attributes must also be timeless, yet the Qur'an—which is His speech—is in certain aspects clearly in time, such as its words and letters, to which we have direct access. The anthropomorphist tendency (extreme *Ḥanbalism*, or pseudo-*Ḥanbalism*) led to ascribing eternality to the very words and sounds, clearly a logical absurdity, while the tendency of misplaced rationalism (*Mu'tazilism*) led to affirming temporality and createdness to God's speech, in all its aspects, thereby resulting in denial of a divine attribute (eternal divine speech).

In the eyes of its scholars, Sunnism avoided both extremes by asserting that the reality of speech is not words or sounds but



APPENDIX A

The Kalam Cosmological Argument

THE ARGUMENT FOR the existence of God presented in most texts of classical Islamic theology, including *Al-Bidāyah*, is called the *kalam cosmological argument* (KCA). It is an apodeictic proof (or demonstration, Ar. *burhān*), meaning both that its premises are certain, not merely probable or likely, and that its syllogistic form is valid. Hence, the conclusion follows necessarily from the premises and is also certain.

Its minor premise is *the universe had a beginning*. Its major premise is *everything that has a beginning necessarily has an efficient cause*. Its conclusion is therefore *the universe necessarily has an efficient cause*. Moreover, the efficient cause of the universe cannot itself be temporal, as based on the above major premise, it too then would need an efficient cause, leading to either circular reasoning or an infinite regress of causes, both of which are logically absurd. Based on this *reductio ad absurdum*, the final conclusion is *the universe necessarily has an efficient cause that is eternal, or that transcends space and time*. There also exist implications of this argument that result in the affirmation of certain necessary attributes of this eternal efficient cause—such as life, knowledge, will, and power—in light of which it is proven that the eternal entity is in fact the personal creator of the heavens and earth affirmed by Islamic scripture.

Other cosmological arguments have been used in various traditions but are not dealt with here. While the KCA demonstrates a creator of the universe *ex nihilo* [and its sustaining ground of being], the Thomist cosmological argument (TCA) demonstrates only its sustaining ground of being: it affirms the current existence of finite, contingent beings and proceeds to a metaphysically necessary being as the basis for the current existence of those contingent beings. The argument is based specifically on the rejection of an infinite regress of concurrent, essentially ordered causes. The Leibnizian cosmological argument (LCA) demonstrates a sufficient reason something exists rather than nothing. It begins with the question “Why is there something rather than nothing?” and proceeds to the truth of a logically necessary proposition, “God exists,” based on the principle of sufficient reason (PSR). Of the three cosmological arguments, it is uniquely the *kalam* version that seeks to prove the temporal finitude of the universe, as the other two allow for an eternal universe in proving the existence of God.

In addition, the simplicity of the KCA’s premises and conclusion should not lead one to assume this argument is insufficient in accounting for the complexity of issues raised in theistic/atheistic arguments or in cosmology in general. A true and valid argument may have simple, straightforward premises even if its proponent must deal with involved issues in defending those premises. And once those premises are demonstrated as certain, it follows that subsequent rejection or doubt concerning them does not alone render them probabilistic. Rather, their certainty would have to be disproven.

This essay begins with the minor premise, followed by the major premise and conclusion. Each discussion is interspersed with common objections and rejoinders to those objections, some classical but many contemporary, at least in form. Several key considerations for the minor premise, as well as a few for the major premise and conclusion, are taken from

