# IBN TAYMIYYAH'S CRITIQUE OF ARISTOTELIAN METAPHYSICS

## Hamid Fahmy Zarkasyi

### Khulasah

Satu dari persoalan utama perdebatan di antara para ahli falsafah Islam, khususnya di antara Ibn Taymiyyah dan Ibn Sīnā, adalah metafizik, terutama berkenaan persoalan utamanya. Bagi Ibn Taymiyyah, persoalan utama metafizik adalah wujud kulli yang mutlak (*al-wujūd al-kullī al-muṭlaq*), iaitu Allah SWT dan ia dapat dicapai dengan mengkaji Sifat-sifat DhatNya (*lawāḥiq al-dhātiyyah*). Manakala bagi Ibn Sīnā pula, ia adalah kewujudan (*al-mawjūdāt*), segala kewujudan berilat (*kullu mawjūd ma'lūl*) atau usul bagi segala kewujudan berilat, dan bukannya Allah SWT. Pemahaman yang berbeza ini telah mempengaruhi pandangan yang berbeza tentang kewujudan Allah SWT dan tentang penciptaan alam.

**Katakunci:** Metafizik; kulli; wujud; kewujudan; Allah SWT; wujud wajib; wujud mumkin; penciptaan alam.

### Abstract

Metaphysics has always been one of the pivotal topics of debate between Muslim philosophers; this may especially be said about Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Sīnā. For Ibn Taymiyyah, the subject matter of metaphysics is absolute and universal Existence (*al-wujūd al-kullī al-muṭlaq*), namely God, which is known by investigating the intrinsic attributes of His essence (*lawāḥiq al-dhātiyyah*). For Ibn Sīnā, it is *al-mawjūdāt* (existing beings), the whole of caused being (*kullu mawjūd ma'lūl*), or the principle abstracted from the whole of caused being, and not God. Such clear and discrete views resulted in different notions of God's existence as well as of the origination of the universe.

**Keywords:** Metaphysics; universal; al-wujūd; al-mawjūd; God; necessary existence; contingent existence; origination of the universe.

## Introduction

Ibn Taymiyyah was an eminent Muslim scholar reputed with his criticism of Aristotelian logic, especially in his works *al-Radd 'alā al-Manṭīqiyyīn* and *Naqd al-Manṭiq.* Inherent in his criticism of logic was his refutation of metaphysics, the actual target of his criticism of logic.[1] Ibn Taymiyyah thought that Muslim philosophers (had) approached some metaphysical problems pertaining to Islam from an almost exclusively Aristotelian perspective,[2] even despite their attempts to harmonise Greek metaphysics with the Islamic teachings.[3] Their approaches were, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, rather incompatible with

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[1] Ibn Taymiyyah (1993), *al-Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, ed. Rafīq 'Ajam, vol. I, Beirut: Dār al-Fikrī al-Lubnānī, p. 29.

[2] The most eminent work of Aristotle on metaphysics known by the Muslim was his collection of the 14 articles, called as *Kitāb al-Ḥurūf* (The Book of Letters). Madhkūr and Rahman suggest that Aristotle used nowhere the term metaphysic'. The term used by him was "The First Philosophy" or *Theologikè* (theology). According to Madhkūr, quoting Ross, A*ristotle's Metaphysics,* t. I, p. XXXII, the first who used the term 'metaphysics' was Nicolas al-Dimashqī who took from Andronicus. See Ibn Sīnā (1960), *al-Shifā' (al-Ilāhiyyāt)*, 2 vols. ed. Ibrāhīm Madhkūr, Cairo: Hay'ah al-Āmmah li-shu'ūn al-Maṭābi' al-Amīriyyah, see *editor's introduction*, p. 11; See also M.A.Raḥmān Marḥaban (1975), *Min al-Falsafah al-Yūnāniyyah ilā al-Falsafah al-Islāmiyyah,* Beirut: Manshūrāt 'Uwaydah, p. 178.

[3] Al-Kindī wrote a treatise called 'On The First Philosophy', al-Fārābī wrote a treatise on the objectives of Aristotle's articles of metaphysics called *'Fī Aghrāḍ al-Ḥakīm fī kulli maqālāt min Kitābihi al-Mawsūm bi-l-Ḥurūf* (On The Objectives of the Wise in all Articles of his Book, called Letters). Ibn Sīnā wrote ten articles on metaphysics known as *al-Shifā',* in which he adapted Aristotle's works. Ibn Rushd even translated Aristotle's work 'Alpha Minor called *Tafsīr al-Maqālah al-Ūlā min mā ba'da al-Ṭabī'ah* (The commentary of the First Article of Metaphysics) and many other works. See M.A.Raḥmān Marḥaban, *Min al-Falsafah al-Yūnāniyyah,* p. 34; See also Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā' (al-Ilāhiyyāt),* see *editor's introduction*, p. 6.

the metaphysical doctrines taught by the Qur'ān and the Prophetic tradition as understood by the earlier generation of Muslims (*al-salaf al-ṣāliḥ*). It is interesting to elaborate on the incompatibility of Aristotle's metaphysics with its Islamic counterpart upheld by Ibn Taymiyyah. There are at least three aspects of metaphysics that Ibn Taymiyyah believed to be contradictory, which he consequently rebutted earnestly. The three aspects are the subject matter of metaphysics were (1) the concept of universal, (2) the issue of the contingent being and God's existence, and (3) the origination of the universe.[4] This article will elaborate on these three aspects.

### On the Subject-matter of Metaphysics

There are two reasons why Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism of the subject matter of metaphysics is significant: (1) because it is the starting point of the Muslim philosophers in their metaphysical discourse and (2) because this discloses Ibn Taymiyyah's fundamental principles, on which his whole criticism is based. The main issue here is not only its designation, but also the theory of 'existence' (*al-wujūd*) and the existing being (*al-mawjūd*), where the basic concept of the universal is disputed.

The term *metaphysics* is made up of two Greek lexemes, namely *meta* and *physis*. *Meta* is translated into Arabic as *ba'da* (after), *warā'a* (behind), or *qabla* (before), and *physis* as *al-ṭabī'ah*. 'Metaphysics' was therefore known among the Muslim philosophers as *'ilm mā ba'da* (*warā'a*, or *qabla*) *al-ṭabī'ah*, meaning the science about the things after, behind or before the physical nature.[5] It was also called *al-Falsafah al-'Ūlā*

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[4]  This is based on his major work on philosophical refutation, *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al-'Aql wa al-Naql*, published in 11 volumes.

[5]  M.A.Rahman Marḥaban, *Min al-Falsafah al-Yūnāniyyah*, p. 187; Ibn Sīnā preferred to call this science as *al-'ilm mā qabla al-ṭabī'ah* (before

(The First Philosophy), implying that it was the science that deals with the first thing(s) in existence and the first thing(s) in general. Beside those two appellation, it was also called *al-ʿilm al-ilāhī* (theology), seen as the science of God and of things abstracted from matter, both in the mind as well as in the external world.[6]

It appears from the above definitions that metaphysics, first philosophy, and theology (*al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*) were different names for the same science, called 'metaphysics' in the Greek tradition.[7] Although al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā distinguished metaphysics from theology,[8] they seemed to still have regarded both of them as the universal science and the highest form of knowledge.[9]

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the nature) because the subject matter dealt with in this science is, essentially (*bi al-dhāt*) and generally (*bi al-ʿumūm*), before the nature. As regards the mathematical or arithmetical sciences, he called it *al-ʿilm mā baʿd al-ṭabīʿah* (after the nature) because its subject is not separated from nature. But, he did not mention the designation of the term *warāʾ al-ṭabīʿah* (behind the nature). See Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ* (*al-Ilāhiyyāt*), vol. I, p. 22.

[6]   This second meaning falls under the philosophers' classification of science, which are three in number: *physics* (a science that cannot be abstracted from matter, neither in the mind nor in the external world), *mathematics* (a science that is abstracted from matter in the mind, but not in the external world) and *metaphysics* (a science that is abstracted from matter in both the mind and the external world). See Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifāʾ* (*al-ilāhiyyāt*), vol. I, p. 15; *al-Radd,* ed. R. ʿAjam, vol. I, pp.133-134; See also M.A.Raḥmān Marḥaban, *Min al-Falsafah al-Yūnāniyyah,* p. 187.

[7]   Nasr & O.Leaman (1996), *History of Islamic Philosophy,* London: Routledge, Part II, p. 784.

[8]   *Ibid,* p. 785.

[9]   Nasr (1993), *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrine,* State University of New York Press, p. 197.

Due to this diversity of definitions, Ibn Taymiyyah found it hard to determine on which of the two he should focus his criticism. Therefore, in his *Radd* he criticised specifically the subject matter of theology (*al-'ilm al-ilāhī*), while in his *Dar' Ta'āruḍ*, he rebutted the designation of the subject matter of the first philosophy (*al-Falsafah al-'Ūlā*). It must be added, though, that the term theology does not refer here to *Kalām*, but to the term employed by the philosophers to specify their discourse on God.

Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism of the designation of the subject matter of theology was levelled against Ibn Sīnā and his followers. According to Ibn Sīna in his *al-Ilāhiyāt*, the subject matter of theology is that which exists as it exists or is as being (*al-mawjūd bimā huwa mawjūd*).[10] 'Being,' or the existing thing (*al-mawjūd*), in this sense would refer to the whole of existing things (*kullu mawjūd*), which can further be understood in two ways: as the whole of being that has no principle (*mabda'*) and/or as the whole of caused being (*kullu mawjūd ma'lūl*), which is part of all beings or entities (*ba'd al-mawjūdāt*).[11]

According to Ibn Sīnā, the study of the properties of being (*al-mawjūd*) is at the same time a study of its 'principles' and will lead to the knowledge of the principle of the principles,

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[10] Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā'* (*al-ilāhiyyāt*), vol. I, p. 13. In the metaphysics of Aristotle, 'being' in general indicates the material, the movement, the quantity, the possibility to know and the cause of existence; all of them became objects of the science of physics, mathematics, logic and metaphysics, respectively. See M.A. Raḥmān Marḥaban, *Min al-Falsafah al-Yūnāniyyah*, p. 186.

[11] The meaning of being as alluded to by Ibn Taymiyyah can be related to Ibn Sīnā's division of being into 'Necessary Being' and 'contingent being' (or substance and accident). See *al-Radd,* ed.R. 'Ajam, vol. I, p. 134.

the ultimate causes (*al-asbāb al-quṣwā*), or the cause of the causes, namely God.[12] The principle here is not the principle of the whole of being (*mabda' kullu mawjūd*), since the whole of being in this sense is the principle (*mabda'*) itself.[13] The 'principle' here means the principle of the caused being (*ma'lūl*) or the causes of the caused being as it is *caused* (*asbāb al-mawjūd al-ma'lūl bi mā huwa mawjūd ma'lūl*). Thus, the subject matter (*mawḍū'*) of theology would in such a case not be God, but the whole of caused being. God would be the goal (*maṭlūb*) of this science.

Taking Ibn Sīnā's definition into account, the knowledge about God (the Cause) should be obtained by constructing the principle abstracted from the caused being. The mental journey would thus start off at the caused being and seek to reach the cause or, said otherwise, at the creature seeking to gain knowledge about the Creator.

Against the above delineation, Ibn Taymiyyah questioned Ibn Sīnā's designation of *al-mawjūd* as the subject matter of theology, because it differs from the usual philosophical denotation of *al-mawjūd*, which means an absolute universal being (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq al-kullī*), namely God. Ibn Taymiyyah asserts that if Ibn Sīnā understands 'existence' (*al-wujūd*) either as all existing being (*kullu mawjūd*) or as limited to the whole of caused being (*kullu mawjūd ma'lūl*), and then he divides it into necessary and possible, then such a concept is erroneous.[14] The mistake would lie in the thought that the necessary and the possible being become parts of the whole of caused being (*kullu mawjūd ma'lūl*), while 'existence'

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[12]   Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā' (al-ilāhiyyāt)*, vol. I, pp. 4-6; 15.

[13]   *Ibid*, p.14.

[14]   *Al-Radd*, ed. R. 'Ajam, vol. I, p. 140.

(*al-wujūd*) would refer to the universal existence (*al-wujūd al-kullī*). The universal can only be divided into particulars (*juz'iyyāt*), while 'the whole' (*kullu*) is divided into parts (*ajzā*), and this concerns a general principle.[15]

Thus, 'the universal existence' (*al-wujūd al-kullī*) is different from the 'whole of existing things' (*kullu mawjūd*). The former is in the mind, while the latter is in the external world. Therefore, since theology elaborates on the universal, absolute matter, it cannot be something in the external world, for it has no knowable object in the external world (*laysa ma'lūm fī al-khārij*) as it does not exist as universal (given that the universal exists only in the mind).[16]

The foregoing argument demonstrates that the two opponents basically had the same idea that theology or metaphysics is a science about universal being, but they differed on their understanding of the concept of the universal. While Ibn Sīnā posited that the subject matter of metaphysics is the whole of existing things (*kullu mawjūd*), Ibn Taymiyyah believed that the whole of existing things is an external reality that can be neither universal nor the subject matter of metaphysics. It is only God who is the universal being. Thus, the subject matter of theology or metaphysics for Ibn Taymiyyah is not the whole of existing things, but God Himself.

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[15]   The example of universal division is like the division of 'animal' into 'speaking' and 'speechless', which refers to the division of genus into species and of species into individuals. The division of 'the whole' (*kullu*) is like the division of inheritance, lands, parts of the human body, etc. See *ibid.*

[16]   Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Radd,* ed. R.'Ajam, vol. I, pp.146-147; *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā li Ibn Taymiyyah,* ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Qāsim, vol. IX, Cairo: Maktabah Ibn Taymiyyah, n.d. p. 130.

Ibn Taymiyyah probably misunderstood Ibn Sīnā's concept of the whole of existing things, as the term itself is ambiguous, because sometimes it means *kullu mawjūd* and, other times, *kullu mawjūd ma'lūl.* Ibn Taymiyyah understood it as something in the external world, though Ibn Sīnā meant it as something abstracted from matter, allowing it to be universal. To gain a better perspective on Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of the universal, we shall go further into his criticism.

In his *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* Ibn Taymiyyah refuted the grounds on which the universal absolute being (*al-wujūd al-kullī al-muṭlaq*) is designated as the subject matter of the First Philosophy. The Philosophers' view was based on their depiction of the ontological status of an essence as essence, or a quiddity as quiddity. To them, essence exists neither in the mind nor in the external world, neither universally nor particularly. In order for it to become universal, universality must be added to the essence, since universality is an accident that exists only in the mind. To add the universality to the essence, the mind must abstract the essence from a particular that is external to the mind or from that which is common to many external realities.[17] Hence, universality does not exist in the external world if it is separated from the essence; it only exists when the essence is added to it. Yet, this is not applicable to God, as in God essence and existence are inseparable.

Against this concept, Ibn Taymiyyah asserted that there is nothing that can exist neither in the external worlds nor in the mind as posited by the philosophers.[18] He also denies the

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[17]  Ibn Taymiyyah (1989), *Dar' Ta'āruḍ al- 'Aql wa al-Naql,* vol. I, ed. M.Rishād Sālim, Cairo: Dār al-Kunūz al-Adabiyyah, 11 vols, p. 293; See also Nasr, *Islamic Cosmological Doctrine,* p. 189.

[18]  Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Radd,* p. 67; Ibn Taymiyyah, "Tawḥīd al-Ulūhiyyah", in *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā* vol. I, p. 158.

philosophers' distinction of essence or quiddity and existence, especially in extra mental existence. To him, essence can only be described in one of two modes of existence: in the external world or in the mind. The former indicates that essence is the very thing which exists, that is the particular or the individual, while in the latter essence is the representation of that particular or individual.[19] Thus, essence is no more than a generalisation or abstraction of individuals which exist externally.[20] If the existence of the creature in the extra mental world is the very essence and existence, the existence of God is *a fortiori* (*awlā*) to be His very essence.[21] This principle will appear more clearly in his criticism of the issue of God's existence and His attributes.

Similarly, according to Ibn Taymiyyah's concept of essence, the universal can never exist externally; it exists only in the mind. It is nothing more than a common, general meaning retained by the mind in order to signify the individual in the real and natural world.[22] In other words, the mental description corresponds to the reality in the external world, like the name corresponds to the named object (*al-musammā*).[23] Therefore, Ibn Taymiyyah rejects the philosophers' notion that the natural universal exists externally and remains universal at the time of its existence. He maintains that it is universal only as long as it is in the mind and it becomes particular and real when it exists in reality. The universality of a thing, he asserts, is conditional upon its being in the

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[19]   *Al-Radd,* 'A. Ṣamad, p. 67.

[20]   *Ibid,* p. 118; *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā,* IX, p. 118.

[21]   *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. I, p. 293.

[22]   *Ibid,* p. 290; "Tawḥid al-Ulūhiyyah", in *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā* vol. I pp. 88, 94.

[23]   *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. I, pp. 290-291.

mind.[24] From this it follows that the whole of existing things (*kullu mawjūd*) that exist in the external world are particular and different from other particulars, and cannot therefore be regarded as universal.

Accordingly, for Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-wujūd* (existence) is universal and unreal, while *al-mawjūdāt* (existent beings) are real and particular. The philosophers' notion that Necessary Existence (*wājib al-wujūd*) is the highest of all existent beings (*al-mawjūdāt*) is unacceptable. This is because Necessary Existence is universal and the universal cannot be compared to the particular and has nothing in common with the particular, while the particular can be compared to other particular. The former has no plurality, while the latter consists of plurality. Since the philosophers subsume Necessary Existence under the category that the existent beings (*al-mawjūdāt*) have in common with it, it will no longer be the object of metaphysical investigation.[25] For the subject matter of theology to Ibn Taymiyyah is not *al-mawjūd* (the existent being), which includes the creature and all things that exist, but *al-wujūd* (existence), which is the universal (*al-kullī*).

The above criticism shows that Ibn Taymiyyah wanted to maintain that the subject matter of theology is the absolute universal existence (*al-wujūd al-kulli al-muṭlaq*), namely God. Since God is universal existence, He does not have qualities in common with the existent beings (*al-mawjūdāt*). Consequently to know God as universal existence (*al-wujūd kullī*) is to investigate the intrinsic attributes of His essence (*lawāḥiq al-dhātiyyah*),[26] which is in contrast with Ibn Sīnā's idea that the

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[24]   *Al-Radd,* ed. R.'Ajam,vol. I, p. 144.
[25]   *Ibid,* p. 135.
[26]   *Ibid,* p. 140 .

subject matter of this science is the whole of caused being (*kullu mawjūd ma'lūl*) or the principle abstracted from the whole of caused being, and not God.

Ibn Taymiyyah's objection against metaphysics' being concerned with the whole of caused being (*kullu mawjūd ma'lūl*) was that it may allow comparison between the caused beings and God, thus running the risk of sowing confusion between the two. Ibn Sīnā, however, wanted to make the Necessary Being the goal of metaphysics, and not its subject matter, in order to show that this science leads towards knowledge of the existence of God (even though it does not provide knowledge of His being).[27] Ibn Taymiyyah preferred to stress the absolute incomparability of God, while Ibn Sīnā was inclined to follow the doctrine of the philosophers.

The pivotal point that we should underline here is the obvious distinction between Ibn Taymiyyah and the philosophers, particularly Ibn Sīnā, on the starting point of the knowledge about God. On the one hand, the philosophers start from something other than God, upon which they make logical deductions and draw general principles abstracted from matter. God, to them, cannot be posited as the starting point, as doing so will make Him a means for this intellectual search, while God is the goal and cannot be a means. On the other hand, for Ibn Taymiyyah the starting point of knowledge about God is God Himself, and it is known from God and not taken from any other source. Using something other than God to gain knowledge of the deity would implicitly suggest that there are principles applicable both to God and to things that are not God. Consequently, God would be subsumed under the principle that is shared in common between His

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[27]   Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā' (al-ilāhiyyāt)*, vol. I, pp. 5-7.

own creatures and could therefore not be held to be universal anymore. In order to maintain His universality, the knowledge about God should be derived from God Himself, which was not difficult for Ibn Taymiyah since he believed that God has given ample information about Himself revealed through the Prophet and understandable by reason.

## On Contingent Being and God's Existence

Providing knowledge about God is not only the major task carried out by the Muslim philosophers and the *mutakallimīn,* but also a fundamental part of the Islamic faith. Some of their theories were sound, while others were untenable; it is to the latter ones that Ibn Taymiyah directs his criticism. However, reading thoroughly his *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* we will find that he criticises the ideas of the *mutakallimīn* more than those of the philosophers,[28] for he believes that the ideas of the former are less valid than the latter's.[29] The basic assumption of Ibn Taymiyah is that their theories are too abstract, obscure and general and that they consist of dubious demonstrations, sometimes creating ambiguity between qualities particular to the Creator and those peculiar to creatures.[30]

As mentioned in Ibn Taymiyah's criticism of metaphysics, the philosophers — in particular Ibn Sīnā — started off by enquiring into the knowledge of God from the general principle of the mode of being. In addition, they also built a theory to prove the existence of the Necessary Being or God by applying the theory of movement. These two theories became

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[28]  *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. III, pp. 88-93; 128-134; 179-181; 210-223.
[29]  *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. VIII, p. 356.
[30]  "Tawḥīd al-Ulūhiyyah", in *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā,* vol.I, pp. 49-50.

the target of Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism that will be elaborated on in the following section of this contribution.

The theory of being introduced by Ibn Sīnā starts from a simple postulate: being itself can be necessary (*wājib*), possible (*mumkin*) or impossible (*mumtaniʿ*). However, this theory, and especially the question of possible being, seems obscure and Ibn Taymiyyah finds it unacceptable and contradictory. In his *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt,* (Remarks and Admonitions),[31] as Ibn Taymiyyah quotes it, Ibn Sīnā says:

> If every being is considered with respect to its essence, it is either necessary being or not necessary being. If it is necessary, it is eternal and the necessary existent by its essence. But, if not necessary, it cannot be impossible, since it has been determined as being. If the essence of being is conjoined by a condition (*shart*) [32]it becomes impossible (*mumtaniʿ*) or necessary (*wājib*), but if it is not conjoined by a condition the third alternative is left, which is the possible (*al-mumkin*). This possible being, with respect to its essence, is a thing which is neither necessary nor impossible. Therefore, every being is either necessary or possible being by its essence.[33]

Ibn Taymiyyah did not question Ibn Sīnā's concept of necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*), but he disagreed with the concept of determining possible being. He adduced eleven

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[31]   Ibn Sīnā(1958), *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt,* ed. Sulaymān Dunyā, Cairo: al-Maʿārif.

[32]   What Ibn Sīnā means by 'condition' (*shart*) here is the presence or the absence of the cause of this being. See *Darʾ Taʿārud,* vol. III, p. 336.

[33]   *Darʾ Taʿārud,* vol. III, pp. 166-167, 336; cf. Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt,* vol. III, pp. 447-448.

arguments[34] that can be summarised in three points: (1) on the determination of possible existence (*mumkin al-wujūd*), (2) on the conjoinment of condition, and (3) on the essence of the possible.

1) With regard to the first point, namely the determination of possible existence (*mumkin al-wujūd*), Ibn Taymiyyah understood Ibn Sīnā's statement to refer to the whole of being (*kullu mawjūd*), including extra mental existence (*al-mawjūd fī al-khārij*).[35] He argues therefore that if 'the possible' is determined as the alternative of the necessary and impossible, it implies that it is neither necessary nor impossible. This is against extra mental existence or reality, because there is nothing in reality which is neither necessary nor impossible. Even if it is understood as an unreal thing and merely a mental perception, the notion that there is an essence that can be either existing or non-existing, is also unacceptable. It is because if an essence does not exist, it still can be present in the mind, which is called mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*).[36] This mental existence will become an external existence when it is found in external reality.

We can now understand the differences between Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Sīnā on the theory of essence and existence. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, essence exists only in the mind, while existence exists in the extra-mental world. The essence of a thing is the very existence of that thing.[37] Therefore, in

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[34]   *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol.III, pp. 337-349.

[35]   The expression *mawjūd fī al-khārij* (existents in the extra mental world) is used by Ibn Taymiyyah as the 'that which exists beyond the mind' (i.e. in the world that we can see and observe). See *Ibid.*

[36]   *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. III, p. 344.

[37]   *al-Radd,* ed. R. 'Ajam, vol. I, pp. 118; 368; *Majmū'at al-Fatāwā,* IX, p. 118. In this principle, Ibn Taymiyyah coincidentally shared the same

the external existence of a thing, essence and existence are inseparable,[38] and, in the case of God, His essence is His very existence.[39] According to Ibn Sīnā in 'beings' other than God, existence is only accidentally added to their essence or quiddity, meaning that essence is separated from existence, while in the Necessary Being or God, essence is inseparable from existence.[40] The two have a totally different view, especially in relation to 'beings' other than God, but they have almost the same idea concerning God. The difference in the case of God is that, to Ibn Taymiyyah, essence is concomitant with existence; while, to Ibn Sīnā, essence and existence are one.

Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism is justifiable if we accept his principle of the inseparability of essence and existence, even though it might hardly be acceptable for one who shares Ibn Sīnā's standpoint. It was difficult for a theologian such as Ibn Taymiyyah to allow that there can be essences separate from existence in things other than God. A modern writer like Shehadi [41] suggests that Ibn Sīnā's theory of existence as an accident added to essence only leads to confusion and also 'shatters' Aristotle's teaching. However, on Necessary Existence, Ibn Taymiyyah and Ibn Sīnā seem to have been in agreement. Just as Ibn Sīnā saw that God is a Necessary Existence and whatever is different from God is a possible existent, Ibn

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idea of Ibn Rushd, who also attacked Ibn Sīnā's theory that existence is an accident of the essence. See *Averroes' Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, vol. II translated by Simon Van Den Bergh (1954), University Press Oxford, p. 137.

[38] *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. III, pp. 338, 350.

[39] *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. I, p. 293.

[40] Ibn Sīnā (1938), *Kitāb al-Najāt,* Cairo: Maṭba'ah Muḥyī al-Dīn Ṣabrī al-Kurdī, pp. 224-225; Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā': al-ilāhiyyāt,* pp. 7-11.

[41] Shehadi, Fadlou (1982), *Metaphysics in Islamic Philosophy,* Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, p. 76.

Taymiyyah saw that to put the division of being into Necessary, which is necessary in itself, and possible, which exists by another, is a sound proposition. This suggests that Ibn Taymiyyah agreed on elements that maintained a clear distinction between God and creation.

2) The other point criticised by Ibn Taymiyyah was Ibn Sīnā's conjoinment of the condition. To him, if the essence of a possible existent is determined by excluding the condition by which the essence will be neither caused (associated with a cause) nor uncaused (without a cause), the result is not the possible, but the impossible. This is because the essence of the existing thing is always conjoined with a condition. When the essence is conjoined with a cause, it becomes necessary and considered as existing (*mawjūdah*); it therefore no longer has the quality of being possible. As a result, the division of necessary and possible is invalid and cannot be applied.[42]

Alternatively, Ibn Taymiyyah asserted the division of necessary and possible as conceivable when the possible is sometimes determined as qualified as existing and other times as not existing: thus, it sometimes exists and sometimes does not. It is qualified as possible when it does not exist, because it has the possibility to exist, and when it exists it has the possibility of not existing. Moreover, he also put the possible as a 'being' that exists through another since it is created. But, he refused to designate the possible as having an essence that is in isolation from existence (*al-wujūd*) and non-existence (*al-'adam*).[43]

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[42]  *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. III, pp. 346-347.
[43]  *Ibid,* p. 347.

The core of Ibn Taymiyyah's argumentation on this point concerns the essence and the existence of the possible. To Ibn Taymiyyah, the possible can only refer to whatever actually exists in the real world: since God created essence and existence, together, the category of necessary and possible must therefore be based on the inseparability of both of them. What exists cannot be seen as something that cannot exist at all; it can therefore never be impossible. Likewise, the non-existing thing that cannot exist cannot be qualified as not possible. The possible is not a thing that can either exist or not exist.[44] For Ibn Sīnā, however, possibility refers to the essence, which has no existence. It can become necessary only when existence is added to it or if it receives the quality of the necessary from the First cause.[45]

The important aspect of Ibn Taymiyyah's argument here is that he wanted to make a clear distinction between possible and necessary existence, and thus preclude the idea of the possible being necessary in any way. In a wider context, he might also have intended to maintain the idea that the possible being is created from nothing by the Necessary Being, thus vindicating the doctrine of creation *ex-nihilo.*

3) The last point concerns Ibn Sīnā's division of essences into Necessary, possible and impossible. He identified the possible as the case in which the essence is neither necessary nor impossible and it hence cannot exist apart from the

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[44] *Ibid,* p. 345.
[45] Nasr, *Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, p. 199. Ibn Rushd also disagreed with Ibn Sīnā that the 'possible' can become 'necessary'. See Ibn Rushd (1968), "Faṣl al-Maqāl fī mā Bayna al-Ḥikmah wa al-Sharī'ah min al-Ittiṣāl," in *Kitāb Falsafat Ibn Rushd,* ed. Muṣṭafā 'Abd al-Jawād 'Imrān, Cairo: Maktabah al-Muḥammadiyyah al-Tijāriyyah, pp. 41-42.

Necessary Being. As for the essence, he asserted that a thing cannot exist unless another has made it exist or, in other words, that it cannot have existence without the Necessary. Thus, Ibn Taymiyyah concluded that the application of Ibn Sīnā's theory to a being which exists by another results in a being that has no essence or no existence and that cannot therefore be regarded as possible existence.[46] It is clear that these two thinkers had different standpoints. Ibn Taymiyyah maintained his conviction that existence is actually made by the Necessary, whereas Ibn Sīnā held that existence is an accident added to the essence and that it has nothing to do with the process of making. However, when Ibn Sīnā's principle is applied to the designation of possible existence, it becomes untenable.

Furthermore, in the context of the affirmation of the Necessary Existence, Ibn Taymiyyah identified a contradictory idea of Ibn Sīnā's. The latter posited that the possible (*al-mumkin*), which allows the state of being and non-being, can be eternal sempiternal (*qadīm azalī*).[47] The idea can be traced to Ibn Sīnā's *al-Najāt,* where he divided the contingent being (*mumkin al-wujūd* or *mumkināt*) into two. One is the contingent by itself and receives the quality of being necessary from the First Cause; i.e. it is the eternal effect of the Creator, such as the intelligences and angelic substances. The other is only contingent: it comes into being and passes away, such as the composed bodies of the sublunary sphere.[48] Ibn Taymiyyah's objection to this postulate concerns the conjoinment of the eternal sempiternal quality in the contingent with the created

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[46]   *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. III, pp. 347-348.

[47]   *Ibid,* pp. 139-141; 337; cf. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhāj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyyah fī Naqd Kalām al-Shī'ah al-Qadariyyah,* ed. Rashād Sālim, Maktabah al-Khayyāṭ, 2 vols. n.d., ed. R.Sālim, vol. I. p. 127.

[48]   Ibn Sīnā, *al-Najāt,* pp. 224-225.

being or the caused object from the beginning and forever, though temporal things sometimes exist and sometime do not.[49] Not only did Ibn Taymiyyah find that this idea was contradictory in itself, he also thought that it contradicted Ibn Sīnā's own ideas expressed in his *al-Shifā,* where he said that the possible being is new (*ḥādith*) and preceded by non-being and only the Necessary Being is eternal (since all other things are brought into being, i.e. *muḥdath*).[50] Ibn Taymiyyah agreed particularly with the latter idea, but he questioned Ibn Sīnā's whole concept of the Necessary and the possible being.

Observing Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism, it appears that he did not directly focus on Ibn Sīnā's theory of the Necessary Existence as he admitted it to be true. He only rebutted the theory that there could be a possible being with its own characteristics that could be confused with the Necessary Existence. His criticism seemed to be intended to keep the proof of God's existence as a simple process. Therefore, his argument is so simple that ambiguity is precluded without the metaphysical ramifications of Ibn Sīnā's proof.

## The Origination of the Universe
Having closely examined and criticised the philosophers' theory about the mode of being as a general principle that may provide knowledge about God, Ibn Taymiyyah turned to analyse their concept of God in relation to the origination of the universe. The crucial point, he found, is that, *inter alia,* the philosophers rejected God as Creator by teaching the

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[49]  *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. III, pp. 139-140.

[50]  Ibn Taymiyyah mentioned that Ibn Rushd had also noticed this contradiction, although al-Rāzī supported Ibn Sīnā's idea. See *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. III, pp. 140-141. Nasr also notices this contradiction. See Nasr, *Islamic Cosmological Doctrine,* p. 199, note: 8.

eternity of the world and by positing its emanation from God in place of the creation of *ex nihilo*.

In fact, the philosophers' principle of emanation related closely to their concept of God including their proof of His existence. To prove the existence of God they used the theory of movement, in which God is posited as the agent (*fā'il*). The proof begins with recognizing that there are two types of agents (*fā'il*). The first is an agent from which emanates an object. The act of this agent is related to the object during the process of its emanation, but after completing the process the object becomes independent of its agent. The second, is an agent from which only emanates an act related to an object. The existence of this object is dependent upon the act, without which no object can exist. Thus, the agent is the Mover (*muḥarrik*) and the act is the movement (*ḥarakah*). The agent of the movement is the agent of the universe.[51]

Moreover, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, in Aristotle's thought movement is the act of the agent (*fā'il*). Seen that the world cannot exist completely without movement, movement itself must be the agent of the world. Since all movement requires a mover (*muḥarrik*) and since there cannot be an infinite series of movers, the series must ultimately stop at the Unmoved First Mover,[52] namely God. Similarly, in his *Ilāhiyyāt* Ibn Sīnā admitted the existence of an infinite incorporeal power (*quwwah ghayr mutanāhiyah ghayr mujassimah*) that is the origin of the first movement (*mabda' al-ḥarakah al-awwaliyyah*).[53] In this way, Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Rushd and Aristotle

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[51]  *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. VIII, pp. 137-138.
[52]  *Ibid,* p.138; see also Netton, Ian Richard (1989), *Allah Transcendent,* London: Routledge, p. 172.
[53]  Ibn Sīnā, *al-Shifā' (al-ilāhiyyāt),* vol.II, p. 373.

advocated the proof of God's existence from the theory of movement.

Ibn Taymiyyah criticises this argument from two different perspectives. The first is the idea that prevailed among Aristotelian traditions, and the second is the basis upon which the Muslim philosophers justified their ideas.

1) With regard to the first, Ibn Taymiyyah found that the philosophers erred since they had not regarded God as the agent (*fā'il*) of the movement of the celestial spheres. Although He was seen as the Beloved (*maḥbūb/ ma'shūq*) and the movement of the celestial spheres imitates Him, He was not perceived as the Innovator and the Creator of their movement. Although He was viewed as the final cause (*'illah ghā'iyyah*), He was not understood as the efficient cause (*'illah fā'ilah*). Therefore, they did not determine the Self-necessary Existence as the agent of temporal phenomena (*al-ḥawādith*) or the cause of temporally emerging and originated phenomena (*al-muwalladāt* or *al-ḥawādith*). He was deemed to only be the cause of the movement of the spheres. Aristotle and his followers even admitted that the origin (*al-awwal*) does nothing, knows nothing and wills nothing.[54] Thus, God is not the sufficient and eternal cause of the universe or, in other words, God is not the active God.

Ibn Taymiyyah went on to say that they had posited God as the agent of the existence of the universe, but not as the Creator of its substances (*jawāhir*) and accidents. He was seen only as the agent of one among all accidents, namely of movement. This assumption, to Ibn Taymiyyah, fell short of describing the true nature of the Creator of the universe.[55] In

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[54] *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. VIII, p. 139.

[55] *Ibid,* p. 140; pp. 218-9.

addition, their supposition that the universe cannot exist without movement was, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, a statement without proof. If it could not exist without movement, then it would or could be deficient; but deficiency does not necessarily mean non-being.[56] It was clear to Ibn Taymyah that Aristotle's concept of God derived from the theory of movement was indefensible. That is why he rejected the philosophers' concept of God as a passive First Principle, which was very different from the active Qur'ānic vision of the sovereign creative God.

2) As seen by Ibn Taymiyyah, the proof for the existence of God based on movement, as used in Muslim philosophical thought, originated from the method employed by the *mutakallimūn*[57], which was based upon the story of Abraham in the Qur'ān. However, the philosophers do not give us a valid argument for this as the *mutakallimūn.* The problem centres on the identification of the word *Āfilīn* (those that set) in the Qur'ān[58] as 'movement'. Movement (*al-afwal*) is postulated as an aspect of the contingent because all things other than God move. It is an inherent quality (*waṣf lāzim*) of the sun, the stars and the moon. They move because they are contingent *(mumkinah)*, and they are contingent because they move. Based on this premise and in conjunction with the story of Abraham, the philosophers inferred that since movement

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[56]   *Ibid,* p. 219.

[57]   The first who used the proof from the story of Abraham, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, were Jahmite and Mu'tazilite. They interpreted the words "This is my Lord" in the Qur'ān as the creator of the universe. The word *al-afwal* meant, to them, 'movement and change'. See *Minhāj al-Sunnah,* ed. R.Sālim, vol. II, p. 142.

[58]   The verse reads: *When the night covered him over, he saw a star. He said: "This my Lord", but when it set, he said :"I love not those that set"* (*Āfilīn*). The Qur'ān, 6: 76.

occurs after it previously did not, it is a temporal phenomenon (*ḥādith*).[59] Thus, movement is not only a proof of the negation of the divinity, but also an argument for the temporality (*ḥudūth*) of the body and the universe.

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, the philosophers misunderstood this Qur'ānic text and its historical context. To him, the word *al-afwal* (passing thing) meant 'the absent' (*al-mughīb*) and 'hiddenness' (*al-iḥtijāb*). For this interpretation, he found support among language experts and the majority of *mufassirīn*. It had nothing to do with the theory of movement or accident, which is inseparable from the body. In the Qur'ānic story, the concept suggests that Abraham did not think movement contradictory to his goal of finding God, but that the thing that was passing down (*al-afwal*) was incompatible with his goal.[60]

Since the philosophers' understanding of movement in the Qur'ān was incorrect, their theories were also untenable. Ibn Taymiyyah's repudiation of the philosophers' theory of movement as a means to prove the existence of God is convincing, as he was able to claim a better understanding of the Qur'ānic text than the philosophers. Their theory in general and their final analysis in particular were much more indefensible seen that they portrayed the existence of a god with limited power.

## Conclusion
Ibn Taymiyyah's critique of Aristotelian metaphysics seems to be driven by a desire to follow the way of the earlier generations of pious Muslims (*salaf al-ṣāliḥ*), who had posited that the only source of Muslim thought was revelation. He therefore

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[59]  *Dar' Ta'āruḍ,* vol. VIII, p. 310-56.
[60]  *Ibid,* p. 355-56.

held that the subject matter of metaphysics could not be the reality of created being (*al-mawjūd*), but God Himself (*al-wujūd*). He argued that placing the created being as the subject matter of metaphysics could lead to the application of a principle that God has in common with all of His own creatures, thus reducing His universality. However, he did not clarify that in some places the revelation also commands that Muslims should understand God by way of His creature. The dispute would then evolve around the concept of 'universal'. Moreover, Ibn Taymiyyah's concern to avoid positing any resemblance between God and creation was also manifest in his repudiation of Ibn Sīnā's theory of 'possible being' in relation to the 'Necessary Being,' especially in relation to the theory of emanation. Yet, the philosopher's theory of emanation was against the principle of creation. Envisaged from this angle, the philosophers' metaphysics was incompatible with Qur'ānic thought as understood and vindicated by Ibn Taymiyyah and by other Muslim thinkers, too.