

The Power and Limits of Reason: Al-Rāzī on the Possibility of General and Particular Metaphysical Knowledge

Eşref Altaş*

*Translated by Ayaz Asadov***

Abstract: This article examines al-Rāzī's views on the possibility of metaphysical knowledge. Firstly, after outlining his classification of the metaphysical knowable into essence and existence as well as undetailed (*ijmālī*) and detailed (*tafṣilī*), the article analyzes al-Rāzī's acceptance of the possibility of general knowledge of metaphysics under a few headings by delving into some major themes. These include the claims that the category of existence is broader than the world of the sensible, that theoretical reasoning leads to metaphysical knowledge, and lastly that the theoretical evidence provides necessary knowledge about the existence of a creator. Al-Rāzī has also been demonstrated in *al-Maṭālib* to have inherited the arguments rejecting metaphysical knowledge, which he had attributed in his earlier works to a group with the name *muhandisiyyūn*, by restricting them to the issue of God's essence being knowable. For al-Rāzī, theoretical reasoning could provide knowledge about the existence of a particular metaphysical being but not about its quiddity. The article further underlines the metaphysical and epistemic theses for the position on the unknowability of God's essence and discusses its semantic interpretation. The debate on the potential of theoretical reason to provide uncertain knowledge of detailed metaphysics in the form of the best possible explanations (the metaphysics of the best explanation, or *al-awlāwīyya*), however, is left to another article.

Keywords: Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī, metaphysics, negative theology, God's essence, God's existence, general metaphysics

* Assoc. Prof., İstanbul Medeniyet University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Department of Philosophy.

** Ph.D. Candidate, Ibn Haldun University, Alliance of Civilizations Institute.

Introduction

The power and limits of reason in attaining metaphysical knowledge is among the major controversies in Islamic intellectual history. The sources at times mention the parties of these debates by specifying individual names and sometimes by referring to groups like the sophists and *muhandisiyyūn* whose followers are unclear. According to the accounts from *Kalām* texts and the philosophy authored during the classical period, sophists expectedly rejected metaphysical knowledge as much as they rejected knowledge in general. The *sumaniyya*'s exclusive acceptance of the knowledge acquired by senses led to their rejection of rational knowledge, including metaphysical knowledge. The *muhandisiyyūn*, on the other hand, claimed that human beings could obtain knowledge only in the realm of mathematics and argued for the impossibility of metaphysical knowledge by comparing it to sensory knowledge: if sensory knowledge, being perceived directly, is incomplete and uncertain, how is metaphysical knowledge, which is speculative, possible? Lastly, the *Sufis* interpreted the unreliability, subjectivity, and faults of reasoning as the difficulty and impossibility of rational metaphysical knowledge, viewing it to be possible only through spiritual witnessing (*mushāhada*) similar to the experience of revelation.

This article does not consider the sophist criticism concerning the possibility of knowledge but will briefly discuss other groups' skepticism toward metaphysical knowledge with a focus on al-Rāzī's responses. The criticisms of and responses to these groups will be discussed as a means to present al-Rāzī's own position on the knowability of general metaphysical knowledge and the existence of a specific metaphysical being. Therefore, the aims of the article are to demonstrate the scope of the claim regarding the method of theoretical reasoning (*naẓar*) about metaphysical knowledge in the example of al-Rāzī and to reveal the state of the Sufi assertion "The point al-Rāzī reached is a proof for the limitation of rational metaphysics"¹ in regard to al-Rāzī himself. Thus, the focus of the article is on the

1 Rūmī's following lines characterize this approach: "If the intellect could discern the (true) way in this question, Fakhr-i Rāzī would be an adept in religious mysteries; But since he was (an example of the saying that) whoso has not tasted does not know, his intelligence and imaginations (only) increased his perplexity. How should this "I" be revealed by thinking? That "I" is revealed (only) after passing away from self (*fanā*)."
Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, and Reynold Alleyne Nicholson. *The Mathnawī of Jalālu'ddīn Rūmī*. London: Printed by Messrs. E.J. Brill, Leiden, for the Trustees of the "E. J.W. Gibb memorial" and published by Messrs. Luzac and Company, 1925, Vol 5: 246; See also, Hayri Kaplan, "Bahā Veled, Şems ve Mevlānā'nın Rāzī'ye Eleştirileri ve Rāzī'nin Süfilere/Tasavvufa Bakışı", *Tasavvuf İlmî ve Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 6/14 (2005): 285–330.

power, adequacy, and competence of reason in attaining the knowledge of general and particular metaphysics according to al-Rāzī's views.

Firstly, al-Rāzī classified the metaphysical known into the following categories based on the dichotomies of existence-quiddity, essential-accidental, and essence-attribute-action:

1. Knowing the general realm of metaphysics,
2. Knowing the existence of a particular metaphysical being (i.e., God's existence),
3. Knowing God's specific essence (*al-dhāt al-makḥṣūṣa*) and reality and whether He possesses quiddity in the Avicennan sense,
4. Knowing God's negative attributes,
5. Knowing God's positive attributes,
6. Knowing God's names, and
7. Knowing God's action.²

Accordingly, when used without any qualification, we refer to metaphysical knowledge as general or detailed knowledge of either all these categories of metaphysical knowable or of a specific one. In order to fulfil the above-mentioned objectives, I will focus on the details of the first three items. First, I will discuss al-Rāzī's positive attitude toward the realm of general metaphysics being knowable in an undetailed form (*'ala sabīl al-ijmāl*). Then I will move on to his positive attitude toward the general knowability (*'alā sabīl al-ijmāl*) of the existence of a particular metaphysical being. Finally, I will address his denial of the possibility of detailed knowability (*'alā sabīl al-taḥṣīl*) of a particular being (i.e., the knowability of God's essence). Thus, I will demonstrate that al-Rāzī's arguments about the knowability of the metaphysics span a wide spectrum of themes from affirmative to negative language, from a general approach that expresses the knowledge of existence to the detailed knowledge that signifies the knowledge of quiddity, and from *yaqīn* [the certain] to *awlawiyya* [the probable].

2 Faḥr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-'āliya min al-'ilm al-ilāhī*, ed. Aḥmad Hījāzī Aḥmad Saqqā (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabi, 1407/1987), II, 88–9.

I. The Possibility of Undetailed (*ijmālī*) Knowledge of the General Metaphysical Realm

I will discuss al-Rāzī's views on the undetailed (*ijmālī*) knowability of the general metaphysical realm (i.e., knowledge of its existence) under two main headings: (a) the authority of the estimative (*wahm*) and imaginative (*khayāl*) faculties in the general metaphysical realm. (b) the claim about the inability of theoretical reasoning (*naẓar*) to provide metaphysical knowledge and the criticism of this.

(a) The Authority of the Estimative (*wahm*) and Imaginative (*khayāl*) Faculties in the General Metaphysical Realm

Various groups have been found in the history of the Islamic intellectual tradition, including the *Mujassima* [corporealists], *Mushabbihā* [anthropomorphists], and the *Karamite*, who accepted the existence of God but rejected an abstract metaphysical realm of being that transcends space and direction, even for God.³

Meanwhile, the *Sumaniyya* regarded reason as an instrument of the senses, claiming sensory perception to be the only type of knowledge one can possess. This made them further argue theoretical reasoning to neither lead to the meaning of a universal being nor to provide knowledge of the metaphysical domain.

Contrary to this, the vast majority of the Islamic intellectual tradition have claimed a metaphysical realm of existence to be found beyond space, direction, body, and the corporeal and that the knowledge of this realm is obtainable using reason. For example, the sources narrate an incident in which a group from the *Sumaniyya* asked, "How do you know there is a god when you do not perceive it with the five senses?" Jahm ibn Ṣafwān answered by stating sensory perception to not encompass the whole realm of existence, using the example of the soul.⁴

In his interpretation of Ibn Sinā, al-Rāzī connected the existence of the metaphysical realm to the proof of the notion that existence as a category is broader than the sensible. According to Ibn Sinā, people under the influence of the estimative faculty generally make the judgement "existence consists of the sensible."⁵ In other words, they equate the category of existence with the category of the sensible.

3 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, II, 9.; Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī, *Allah'ın Aşkınlığı: Esāsu't-takdīs fī ilmi'l-kelem*, trans. İbrahim Coşkun (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2006), 38–9.

4 Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya wa-l-Zanadiqa*, Ed. Sabri ibn Salāma Shāhin (Riyadh: Dār al-Thabāt, 1424), 93–5.

5 Ibn Sinā, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, Ed. 'Alī-Riḍā Najafzāda (Tehran: Anjuman-i Āthār wa Mafakhir-i Farhangī, 1384), II, 93–5.

Epistemologically speaking, this judgment means the estimation, which itself is sensory, has overstepped its boundary. The judgment over the inability of human reason to transcend the sensible world is also misleading. To use al-Rāzī's own ontological expression: "Whereas when you reflect on the sensible itself, you realize that there are nonsensible things within the sensible itself."⁶ After expressing a similar opinion in *al-Ishārāt*, Ibn Sīnā also stated, "This is most astonishing."⁷

The knowledge of the senses and imagination, epistemologically, is beyond the faculties of sense and imagination themselves.⁸ Even from the perspective of those who think they have completely devoted their prospect to the physical world, the elements that emerge from the sensory experience of the physical world cannot construct that sensory experience itself because the sensory knowledge obtained by this experience cannot be constructed in the senses. Therefore, this knowledge needs the judgment of an estimative faculty.

For example, the sum of the human parts (e.g., the head, feet, torso) does not result in the human. The meaning of universal human is a non-sensible thing that is abstract from matter and all material interests. Al-Rāzī was of the opinion that only a mental acceptance of the universal would not be enough to respond to those who accept mental meanings but reject extramental metaphysical beings. However, acceptance of the universal as existing outside the mind would open the door for metaphysics.

Al-Rāzī made the following argument: pointing "This human" indicates a compound being in the external world. The simple components of this compound being, which are "this" and the subject that "this" points to [i.e., the absolute (*muṭlaq*) human], exist in the external world. This means the quiddity of the human that exists unrestrictedly has an external existence. And the quiddity of the absolute man remains unsensible as long as it remains unindicated by "this" or has not accepted material attributes. In such a case, at least one non-sensible being exists.⁹

When putting this into the form of a question, how is it that although one always encounters the parts of an object, one can grasp the object as existing

6 al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, II, 337.

7 Avicenna, and Shams Constantine Inati. *Ibn Sina's Remarks and Admonitions: Physics and Metaphysics: An Analysis and Annotated Translation*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 119.

8 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, II, 17.

9 *Ibid*, II, 11–3.

as well as being a thing, and moreover as being something differentiated and instantiated in itself and united with its substance? Similarly, although one always encounters particular objects, how is anyone able to arrive at a universal with a substantive unity that does not prevent all the members of particular objects from being included in its scope and that takes the place of the object? The grasping of a particular that can be differentiated by pointing it out and of a universal that covers the particulars ultimately means going beyond, extending from what emerges from the sensory experience, and thus pointing to another layer of existence beyond the physical world through the help of a universal.¹⁰

Ibn Sinā expounded upon another important point in this context: “Every reality is a unity which cannot be indicated in terms of its inherent essential reality through which it becomes real. So what is the thing through which every real thing arrives at its own existence?” Al-Rāzī interpreted these statements in the following manner. If a person abstracts the individualizing attributes of an extramental thing to which they are attached, the person would know the thing is not sensible because limiting any object in the external world by demarcating or defining it and then pointing at it is possible through its reality that makes differentiating it from objects outside itself possible. The external existence of an object and its differentiation are not due to its sensible attributes such as size, color, rigidity, or direction; essentially, its reality is what makes it exist. An object that has external existence and thatness always exists as a thing with quiddity, not as absolute existence or absolute body. As a result, the Real, which makes this externally non-indicatable and non-sensory reality exist, more appropriately has an existence that transcends the senses.¹¹ This is because the expression of reality (*ḥaqīqa*) when used to refer to God connotes the meaning of the actor that gives reality to the possible beings. However, for the possible beings it has the meaning of object (*maf‘ūl*), as they possess reality only when the Real gives them reality.¹²

In proving the existence of the metaphysical realm, al-Rāzī mentioned the Platonist non-physical subsistent beings such as time, location, space, and ideas

10 al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, II, 337–9; *al-Maṭālib*, II, 17. In the context of rejecting crude materialism, Ibn Sinā argued that the feelings of love, fear and sadness cannot be reduced to their processes in the body and therefore they are not sensible and can possibly point to the metaphysical realm. Ibn Sinā, *al-Ishārāt*, II, 339.

11 al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*, II, 339–40.

12 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, III, 246. It should be kept in mind this argumentation is based on an ontological footing that accepts the reality of the external.

to also be able to serve as evidence, should one accept. Similarly, if one accepts the philosophers' consideration of the soul and intellects as abstract beings, al-Rāzī takes this to also point to the realm of metaphysical existence.¹³

In summary, al-Rāzī considers the judgment “Existence is limited to the sensible” to be obtained not by reason rather as an inaccurate judgement coming from the faculty of estimation because the sensible object ontologically is more than what is perceived through the senses. Sensory knowledge itself is also knowledge that epistemologically transcends the senses, and as this judgement of the estimative faculty itself resides beyond the domain of the estimative faculty, it constitutes a contradiction. If the beings like universals, ideas, and other such things that cannot be grasped by the senses do exist, they are external. In that case, a metaphysical realm exists other than the sensible world as perceived by the senses. Consequently, the category of existence is broader than the category of the sensible.

(b) The Claim about the Inability of Reason to Provide Metaphysical Knowledge and Its Critique

In many of his books, al-Rāzī examined the negative epistemological theses of different groups in great detail. These include the stances of the Sophists toward the possibility of knowledge, of the *Sumaniyya* toward the possibility of rational knowledge, and of the *Muhandisiyyun* and the *Bāṭiniyya* (*ahl al-ta'lim*) toward the possibility of rational metaphysical knowledge. While some of these contentions against the possibility of metaphysical knowledge are skeptical of all sorts of perceptions, the second group takes the sensory perception as fundamental and states *'aql* [reason] to be constructed on the sensory perceptions and an instrument for managing sensory perceptions. A third group focused on the argument that metaphysical concepts cannot be contained within senses, disposition, or mind. In other words, human beings cannot have any knowledge-process about the metaphysical realm. In this section, I will only indicate the arguments about the impossibility of theoretical reason to deliver metaphysical knowledge due to its relevance to the subject, then I will present al-Rāzī's criticism and solutions.

According to al-Rāzī, the first argument for the position on the impossibility of metaphysical knowledge, which is the same argument the *Bāṭinites* used to make

13 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, II, 10,17,18; VII, 29–31.

the case for the infallible Imam, is the contradictions metaphysical beliefs have with each other. In this respect, people support different metaphysical views and even the same person can possess changing metaphysical views throughout life. These views being acquired by reason means that knowledge about metaphysics arrived at by reason is assumption and speculation.¹⁴

The second argument is that, although people obtaining concepts through the senses, consciousness, reason, and collaboration is possible, none of these concepts can be a source for a metaphysical concept. The third argument is about the human incapability of grasping realities like the bodies, time, and space that exist in the same ontological plane. How can a human being know metaphysical realities while being unable to know their self? In other words, when reason cannot provide certain knowledge about the physical realm, how can it provide knowledge about the speculative realm of metaphysics?¹⁵ As I will discuss the details of these last two arguments in the section on God's specific essence and reality (*al-dhāt al-makhṣūṣa*), here the analysis of the responses given to them will suffice.

Al-Rāzī's responses to these arguments are twofold. For him, "these arguments show the difficulty of acquiring metaphysical knowledge, not the impossibility".¹⁶ Developing a standard metaphysical science everyone can agree upon may be impossible as: (i) people are different in terms of their characteristics and thus possess varying capacities of *malaka* [disposition] and cognition, (ii) the levels and types of metaphysical knowledge are different, leading to multiplexity of veils, (iii) the difficulty of verifying metaphysical knowledge increases the sophistry, errors, and confusion.¹⁷

Moreover, as stated at the beginning of *al-Maṭālib*, these arguments are not about the existence of a general metaphysical realm but apply only to the unknowability of the particular reality of the creator. In that case al-Rāzī can viably be said to have inherited the view and arguments of the *Muhandisiyyūn* on the impossibility of metaphysical knowledge, to which he had referred since his early works and narrated in an internalizing manner at the beginning of *al-Maṭālib* by restricting their validity to the knowability of the reality of *al-dhāt al-makhṣūṣa*

14 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-'uqūl fī dirāyat al-usūl*, ed. Sa'īd 'Abd al-Laṭīf Fūda (Beirut: Dār al-Zahāir, 2015/1436), I, 182; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib al-'āliya: al-Manṭiq*, Süleymaniye Library, Fatih 3145, 55a.

15 Fakhr al-dīn al-Rāzī, *el-Muhassal: Kelâm ve Felsefenin Ana Meseleleri*, tr. Eşref Altaş (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2019), 37–8.

16 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 55–9.

17 Rāzī, *el-Muḥaṣṣal*, 38 [أن ما ذكرتموه يدل على صعوبة تحصيل هذا العلم، لا على تعذره].

[*specific essence*]. The conclusion that needs to be drawn here is the impossibility of knowledge about essence and reality, not knowledge of the overall general metaphysical realm.

Then, with which method can we attain the knowledge of a specific being in such a domain of existence, what is the nature of knowledge acquired by this method, and what can be said about the certainty of this knowledge?

II. The Possibility of Undetailed (*ijmālī*) Knowledge of a Particular Metaphysical Being

Al-Rāzī's views on the knowability of the existence of a particular metaphysical being can be addressed under three headings: (a) a method for proving the particular metaphysical being, (b) the knowledge acquired by reasoning about the particular metaphysical existent being knowledge about its existence, not about its quiddity, and (c) the certainty of knowledge of the existence about the particular metaphysical being as acquired by reason.

(a) A Method for Proving the Particular Metaphysical Being

According to al-Rāzī, the following methods either tell nothing about the existence of a creator at all or provide uncertain knowledge. (i) Knowledge of the existence of the creator does not occur by way of necessity, as argued by al-Jāhiz and al-Ka'bi; in other words, the existence of a creator cannot be known by necessity as this contradicts the experience and religious command (*taklif*). (ii) Although a person's ability to arrive at the knowledge of existence of a creator may be told through tradition, indoctrination, or imitation, a consensus exists among the major theological schools about the inadequacy of imitation (*taqlid*) in knowing the existence of the creator. (iii) The knowledge of the existence of the creator through scriptural evidence as argued by the *Ta'limiyya* and the *Hashawiyya* is also impossible as that method involves circular reasoning. (iv) Successive narrations (*mutawātir*) are also unable to provide knowledge of the existence of the creator, as *mutawātir* reports must rely on the senses for their origin, and knowledge of God's existence is not sensory. Also, single-chain (*āḥād*) reports are unable to be considered as they only provide probable knowledge and are unreliable in regard to credal subjects that require certain proofs.¹⁸ (v) The acquisition of knowledge of

18 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, IX, 201–13.

the existence of the creator through inspiration (*ilhām*) is a view with a marginal position in *Kalām* and has been attributed to the Indian tradition. (vi) Spiritual purification (*taṣfiya*) is also inadequate and unreliable for arriving at knowledge of the existence of the creator as one cannot be sure of errors due to the ultimate need for reasoning. (vii) The view the *Bāṭinites* defended regarding the possibility of an infallible Imam in instructing on a particular metaphysical existence is primarily a sophist attitude, as it had been built upon the critique of reason in attaining knowledge. Additionally, no guarantee exists regarding the infallibility of the teacher who would provide knowledge in this subject. (viii) Knowledge of the creator's existence is unattainable through the senses due to the nature of metaphysics transcending the senses. (ix) Knowledge of the creator's existence is neither a psychological idea present in the natural disposition or conscience of a person, (x) nor is it a concept similar to secondary intelligibles like existence, non-existence, or oneness that occur in the mind.¹⁹

Thus al-Rāzī begins the proof of the existence of the creator as follows:

*Know that if we want to prove a being the existence of which is not affirmed by our senses or the innate structure (fiṭra) of our soul and mind, only one method exists that leads to the proof of such a being. This method is the assertion of our mind that the sensible beings, the existence of which we affirm with our senses and reason, are in need of a being that is not reachable by the senses or any estimation in terms of its existence and attributes. Only by this method, can reason afford to prove that metaphysical (al-ghāib) being.*²⁰

So, if the knowledge of the existence of a specific metaphysical being neither depends on necessity, indoctrination, imitation, scriptural evidence, massively transmitted or single-chain reports, inspiration, instruction by an infallible Imam, inadequate spiritual purification, or the senses nor appears in the soul upon birth or as self-evident in the mind, then it must rely on reasoning and inference. If this is true, do reasoning and inference provide knowledge of a particular metaphysical being?

19 For further details, see al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 207; Rāzī, *el-Muḥaṣṣal*, 36–40; al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-'uqūl*, I, 195–219; al-Rāzī, *al-Riyāḍ al-mūniqa fī arā' ahl al-'ilm*, Ed. As'ad Jum'a (Tunis: Markaz al-Nashr al-Jāmi'i, 2004), 55–69; Najm al-Din al-Kātibi, *al-Mufaṣṣal*, Ed. Abd al-Jabbar abu Sanina (Amman: al-Aslayn li-dirasat wa-l-nashr, 2018/1439), I, 149–59.

20 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 71.

(b) The Generality of the Knowledge Gained by Reason Regarding the Existence of a Specific Metaphysical Being

According to al-Rāzī, reasoning (*nazar*) is a method that can be employed either as an inference from a cause to an effect or between the equals, or from an effect to a cause. In metaphysics, only the inference from an effect to a cause is effective. An investigation that goes from the effect to the cause cannot give knowledge of the creator Himself, His reality, or His quiddity because the path from the effect to cause only provides undetailed knowledge of existence (‘*alā sabīl al-ijmāl*’) in metaphysics. Why the method from effect to cause cannot provide detailed knowledge (‘*alā sabīl al-taḥṣīl*’) of essence and only provide general knowledge of existence can be demonstrated through two principles; one is derived from ontology and the other from epistemology.

Firstly, the effect may have more than one type of cause.²¹ This primarily means that the effect does not share the same species with its cause and secondarily means that the knowledge of the effect does not say anything about the species of the cause. If that is the case, a method that moves from effect to cause does not provide knowledge of species or quiddity but only provides knowledge about its existence.

This conclusion can be analyzed more closely by looking at examples: A nature or power has one action, but one type of action may have different causes in terms of species. This is because, regardless of the unity of time and space, the emergence of a reality can be related to different causes. For example, ownership can emerge through trade, gifting, bequeathing, or inheritance. In other words, the existence of different faculties in a human being can be asserted based on human actions. The existence of actions like growth, nutrition, reproduction, perception, and movement points to the existence of the principle that they originate from but does not show the quiddity of that principle.

Similarly, the cause of heat or existence of that cause can be derived from the presence of heat; but the quiddity of this principle (i.e., whether it originates from sunlight or movement-related friction) can only be known by studying the quiddity of that principle. Furthermore, according to al-Rāzī, whether the cause behind the effect is one or many will also be unknown. As he does not accept the philosopher’s

21 al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ ‘Uyūn al-ḥikma*, ed. Aḥmad Hījāzī al-Saqqā (Tehran: Mu’assasat al-Sadiq li-t-tibaa wa-l-nashr, 1415), II, 273.

principle of “from the one, only one proceeds,”²² different actions like particular and universal perceptions do not have to arise from multiple powers of the soul; one single soul can produce them.

A similar example can be given based on one’s self-awareness. Namely, with reference to the idea of the flying man and the soul’s actions like perception and thought, Ibn Sinā claimed human quiddity to be abstract.²³ Contrarily, al-Rāzī argued actions and effects to not provide knowledge about the quiddity: “Knowledge of the soul’s existence in terms of it being a thing is one thing; detailed and specific knowledge of what it is (i.e., knowledge of its quiddity) is another.”²⁴

Even if the quiddity of the soul is said to be abstract in the meaning of not being space-occupying and not situated onto something that is space-occupying, the abstractness will consist of a negative restriction, and a negative restriction cannot provide knowledge about a particular essence (quiddity).

Also, the objection that this negative attribute is an essential difference (*faṣl*) or necessary concomitant (*lāzim*) of a quiddity is false because saying that a negative qualifier is a necessary concomitant of a quiddity does not seem possible. Thus, the thing that is known by presence through the soul’s awareness of itself or through the actions of the soul is not its quiddity but its existence.²⁵

As evident from all these examples, when viewed as an action, the universe provides knowledge about the existence of a cause or creator but not knowledge about the quiddity or reality of that cause/creator. Moreover, it does not even provide knowledge about whether the creator of this universe is the ultimate creator or not. I will discuss this below.

Secondly, regardless of whether a judgement provides knowledge about cause or existence, it does not provide conceptual knowledge because the judgment does not essentially depend on the conception of its subject and predicate. Without knowing its quiddity, the quality of “is moving” can be predicated to a distant silhouette. Therefore, the proposition whose subject is a creator does not necessarily

22 According to al-Rāzī, Ibn Sinā accepted the principle of “from the one, only one proceeds” valid not only in the superlunar realm, but also in physics and psychology.

23 Ibn Sinā, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, in Aristo ‘inda l-‘Arab, Ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, (Kuwait: Wakalat al-matbāāt, 1978), 126; Ibn Sinā, *al-Ta’līqāt*, Ed. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, (Qom: Matktabah al-i’lāmī’l-Ilslāmī, 1984), 160–1.

24 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, VII, 39.

25 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, VII, 41, 42.

provide knowledge about the reality of its subject. In summary, propositions such as “The creator exists, is one, and is all knowing” do not provide knowledge about the reality of the creator. Multiplying these sorts of judgments in order to get a better picture about Him will become descriptions (*rasm*) in the technical sense but will not be a definition or conception that provides the truth of its quiddity.²⁶

The example of the cosmological argument (*ḥudūth*) “Every originated being has a creator/ the Universe is originated / Then the universe also has a creator” can be given in regard to metaphysics for the capacity of reasoning to provide knowledge about existence and not quiddity. In this syllogism, the middle term is the cause of the existence of the major term in the minor term. The reason why every object in the external world is originated is because that thing has a creator. However, this syllogism has made the originated, being the effect of the creator, into a means by which to prove the existence of the originator of the universe. In this syllogism, the middle term is the cause of the predication of the major term to the minor not in existence yet is the cause of its assent in mind and judgement. This is why it provides knowledge about existence.

(c) Certainty of the Knowledge of Existence Acquired by Reason in the Metaphysical Realm

After stating how reason provides knowledge about existence in the metaphysical realm, the following background needs to be considered in order to discuss the certainty of this knowledge. Al-Rāzī has often pointed out that human reason can acquire knowledge in the field of physics and metaphysics only in the form of the best explanation (*al-awlā wa-l-akhlaq*). Is every piece of knowledge obtained by any of the proof methods of reason in the form of the best possible explanation? From an epistemological point of view, best possible explanation (*al-awlā*), in al-Rāzī’s words, stands for overwhelming probability (*ẓann ghālib*), which does not involve affirmation. This sort of belief does not even involve affirmation in an epistemological sense so as to allow it to become a religious belief by addition of submission, assertion, obedience, gentleness, or contentment. Therefore, at this point the following question can be asked, “Is the knowledge derived by reason in the metaphysical domain certain or probable?”

26 On the dependence of the affirmation on the truth and conception of the sides of a proposition see Eşref Altaş, “Varlık Kavramının Bedâhetine Delil Getirilebilir mi? Müteahhirîn Dönemi Merkezli Bir Tartışma”, *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 30 (2013): 59–79.

According to al-Rāzī, knowledge can be certain by fulfilling three conditions: (1) a belief that A is B, (2) a second belief that the first belief about A being B corresponds with what is believed and for these not to correspond is impossible, and (3) these beliefs cannot be unjustified. This justification is pure conception of parts of the proposition if the proposition is self-evident (*badihī*). If not, then the middle term is justification. For al-Rāzī, these conditions of logic have been referred to in the *mutakallimun* discourse as follows: Certain knowledge is the knowledge that the possessor does not entertain any doubt when doubts are expressed about it. What is meant by this is that the belief is about something being so and the belief that its contrary is impossible.²⁷

Now can all the knowledge acquired by reason be said to have these qualities? In al-Rāzī's view, no debate exists that rational arguments can lead to probable knowledge based on their premises. Sensible people would not argue about the capability of reason to deliver apodictic judgement (*al-jazm*) free of doubt and probability, and having complete certitude in the mathematical domain. The disagreement is on the possibility of certain knowledge in the field of physics and metaphysics, as mentioned earlier. Al-Rāzī has no doubt that reason provides definitive and certain knowledge in metaphysics. Although this view has been defended by different theses,²⁸ al-Rāzī proposed that the following argument should be relied upon:

When a metaphysical issue arises and we arrange an argument with self-evident parts and premises, we would reach a judgement that reason provides at least a piece of knowledge about metaphysics, as the result from such a syllogism will require. Let us consider the syllogism of "Every originated has a cause. / The movement of celestial bodies are originated. / Then the movement of the celestial bodies has a cause" as an example. The major and minor premises of this syllogism are necessary propositions, and therefore the conclusion is also necessary. We should then examine the major and minor premises:

The minor premise of this syllogism that goes from the effect to cause is proved as follows: Motion is a transfer from one state to another. Motion is created (ḥādith), as another state precedes the state in the motion. In this case, every state is preceded by its own absence. Because the created is a thing whose non-existence precedes its existence, a movement that is the sum of them has also been originated.

27 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib, al-Mantiq*, pp. 27–28

28 For the arguments and their criticisms that we cannot address here, see al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib, al-Mantiq*, p. 52b–54b.

The proof of the major premise “Every originated has a cause” is much more controversial. First of all, the principle on which both the cosmological argument and Avicenna’s argument rely on is basic causality, or activity between the cause and action.²⁹ (It is debatable whether this can be counted as a Principle of Sufficient Reason). From the most voluntarist to the most rationalist theories, all the streams of Islamic intellectual tradition are in agreement that denial of the activity between the cause and action will lead to the closure of doors of proof of the existence of the cause and creator. According to the absolute voluntarist schools, the active will performs an action or leaves it without any cause, making one prefer the action (al-dawā’i) or halt (al-ṣawārif): nonetheless, no action can occur without an agent. According to al-Rāzī, to defend the idea of possibility for an action to take place without an agent would mean to defend the idea of spontaneity and randomness as the Greek atomists and the Dahriyya did.³⁰

The debate takes place on how the principle of action in the form of “No action can occur without an agent” functions in the major premise of the propositions about the proof of the necessary being. In Ibn Sinā’s argument based on contingency, this is expressed as “For one of the two sides of the contingent to outweigh the other is impossible without a selectively determining factor” or “A contingent needs a cause for its existence and nonexistence.”

In the cosmological argument, this is formulated as “Every originated thing needs an originator.”³¹ Since Ibn Sinā’s argument from contingency is not the concern here, it can be left alone for now. The proof of the dependence of the originated on a cause or the major premise of every originated thing having a cause in the cosmological argument varies from one argument to another.

Based on al-Rāzī’s work, for the proof of the major premise here three different non-exhaustive cosmological arguments can be identified.

The pure cosmological argument whose major premise is self-evident is the argument adopted by al-Ka’bī and a small group. According to this position, the moment any intelligent person perceives an originated, they move to its originator, which shows the knowledge about every originated thing having an originator to be self-evident.

29 Rāzī, *Tefsīr-i Kebīr*, Tran. Cafer Sadık Dođru et all. (İstanbul: Huzur Yayınevi, 2013), II, 13 (the commentary of the verse al-Baqarah 2/7).

30 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, IV, 364, 371.

31 For a discussion on whether this principle is self-evident or inferential see al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 74–90; 200–214; al-Rāzī, *al-Khalq wa’l-ba’th*, Süleymaniye Library, Ayasofya 2257, pp. 59a–62b.

According to al-Rāzī, however, the reason only affirms the simultaneous originator of each originated; it does not directly affirm an eternally existing originator. Furthermore, the reason also asserts that an originated thing must have time and matter, whereas neither al-Ka‘bī nor the other *mutakallimūn* considered the necessity of time or matter for the first creation; they criticized those philosophers who did that. This would then mean that, in the premise of “every originated thing having an originator”, the claim of self-evidence in the form al-Ka‘bī suggested is false.³²

Abū ‘Ali, Abū Hāshim, Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, and their followers accepted the cosmological argument whose major premise is *a posteriori*. According to this version, the argument was formulated as an analogy of the unseen to the seen. In this analogy, the main item is human beings as the originator of their own action with the universe being secondary. The judgement is about the need for an originator, and the originated is the cause.³³ However, the analogy of the unseen to the seen is problematic in several aspects. First of all, it depends on a Mutazilite principle (i.e., human beings create their own action), meaning just as human beings’ actions indicate their existence, the universe as an action also indicates its creator. However, the principle where human beings are the originator of their actions cannot be accepted or proven by everyone. This would mean that the judgement predicated on the unseen does not have any basis in the seen world. Secondly, the judgment of the originated needing an originator has been transferred here to the unseen (i.e., metaphysics). However, for such an analogy to be valid, the analogy needs to be unifying (*jāmi‘*), meaning that it needs to bring unity to the causality, reality, condition, and inference between the unseen and the seen. However, as an absolute ontological difference exists between God and the originated human being (i.e., between God and those other than Him), achieving such kinds of homogeneity is impossible, or no one would be sure if the claimed unity is real.

In other words, because the theory of emanation in the form of existence overflowing from God on the condition that existence is not identical to Himself nor completely different is not accepted by the defenders of the argument, establishing a relationship of similarity (*sympatheia*, *sinhiyyah*), level, degree or gradation (*tashkīk*) between God and the universe. In this case, this cosmological argument

32 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 207–9.

33 *Ibid*, 210.

cannot lead to any conclusion as it is not based on any fundamental knowledge about the validity in the unseen (metaphysical) world of the things that are valid in the seen (physical) world due to the ontological difference. If origination is creation from nothing, which it is, the idea itself argues that God has a completely different reality, as God is eternal and the universe is an originated thing; therefore, the analogy fails.³⁴

Then what is the possibility and basis of saying, “The Creator exists” according to al-Rāzī? In other words, how will the major premise in the argument of proof be proven?

This question will take one to the third version of the cosmological argument al-Rāzī himself adopted. This cosmological argument proves its major premise on the basis of the idea of contingency/possibility (*imkān/jawāz*) or accepts possibility (*imkān*) as the source of need. Al-Rāzī described this as an argument that unites the cosmological argument with the contingency argument. This argument in its most general form can be expressed as follows:

Everything that is possible by its essence has a necessary agent.

Every originated thing is possible due to its essence.

Therefore, every originated thing necessarily has an agent.

For this argument to be complete, the annulment of the creation of an indefinite possible, of individual possibilities, of the parts of the possible, or the sum of possibilities by an indefinite possible, by individual possibilities, by a part of the possible, or by the sum of possibilities through infinite regression or circular reasoning has to be added as a middle premise. After this intermediary premise, despite al-Rāzī sometimes expressing the major premise of the argument to be self-evident, he mostly mentioned the possibility to be the source of the agent needed by the originated. In this method, the observable subjection of bodies (i.e., the originated) to change is provided as proof that the bodies are possible beings, and then the possibility of possible beings is provided as evidence of their need for an agent.³⁵

34 al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-‘uqūl*, I, 133-6; I-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 210-4; Ömer Türker, “Bir Tümdengelim Olarak Şāhitle Gāibe İstidlāl Yöntemi ve Cüveynî’nin Bu Yönteme Yöneltiği Eleştiriler, *İslām Araştırmaları Dergisi* 18 (2007): 12, 16, 23–4.

35 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 200-206; With the term “possible,” al-Rāzī does not mean the Avicennan “possible,” he instead refers to a meaning of “admissibility for a thing to continue its previous state and not to continue its previous state.” This conception of possible gains a fundamental function for understanding the quality of the creator, whether the existence emanates from Him by necessity or He creates it by specification. This is because this admissibility meaning of possible pushes the grounds

When the major and minor premises of a syllogism are proven necessary or as self-evident propositions and they are arranged in accordance with one of the productive forms and modes of logic (i.e., if it fulfils all the conditions related to its form and content), the conclusion of such syllogism according to al-Rāzī's epistemology is rationally necessary.³⁶ Saying "al-Rāzī's epistemological understanding" refers to his argument that syllogism provides knowledge not by the theory of preparation (*i'dād*), custom, or engenderment but by necessity. Accordingly, for a syllogism to produce knowledge by necessity, it needs to fulfill the following four conditions: (i) the premises of the syllogism have to be certain themselves or indirectly certain through the necessity of other certainties, (ii) these premises have to be organized in a form whose truth is known to be self-evident, (iii) such an arrangement of these premises should produce a result in a way that its congruity is known to be self-evident, and (iv) the self-evidence of the knowledge necessitated by a self-evident has to be known self-evidentially.³⁷ As a result, whenever a major premise is attached to a proven minor premise and this major premise is either self-evident or its certainty has been proven, because infinite regression and circular reasoning are also false, the conclusion of every originated thing having an agent becomes necessary by the technical conditions of syllogism being fulfilled.

So far, I have discussed the existence of the general metaphysical realm, the existence of a creative particular being, and the certainty of the knowledge of the existence of this being in terms of al-Rāzī. Now I can ask the following: Can reason in general and the cosmological argument in particular provide that the creator I have proven to exist is the ultimate one, is eternal, and is God? Moreover, can they provide the reality and quiddity of this particular metaphysical being?

Although this subject deserves to be dealt with on its own, the classical cosmological argument in the form of "The universe is originated/ Every originated thing has an originator/ Then the universe has an originator" according to al-

on which the manifestation of a certain group of atoms with specific features rather than one way or another depends, out of nature; therefore, it basically becomes a proof for the attributes and qualities of the creator. Since an argument that proves a particular is part of the general particular, thus proves the general, it can be seen as one of the doors opening to metaphysics (*bāb ithbāt wājib al-wujūd*).

36 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib, al-Mantiq*, 54b; On the details of al-Rāzī argument about the necessity see the following thesis Ayşe Kaya, "Fahreddin er-Rāzī'nin Bilgide Zorunluluk Teorisi" (MA Thesis, Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2019).

37 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib, al-Mantiq*, 57b.

Rāzī does not provide knowledge about the creator I have proven not being an intermediary but the ultimate being. In fact, al-Rāzī mentioned the cosmological argument to only be able to be completed by the annulment of the infinite regress and vicious circle and by proof of the eternal existence of God.³⁸ However, al-Rāzī still expressed the *mutakkallim*'s proof of the eternal being to be open to criticism because of the principle that not every eternal being is God.³⁹ However, this topic is beyond the scope of this article as it is a complicated issue that deserves independent treatment.

III. The Possibility of Detailed (Tafṣīlī) Knowledge of a Specific Metaphysical Being

Because al-Rāzī stated that a general metaphysical domain and a creator exist, that this creator is the ultimate being, and that the creator is God who is eternal and necessary by its essence, a subsequent question can be asked. Can reason know the essence of God in terms of what its being is, and how can one interpret the answer to this question?

(a) Knowability of God's Specific Essence (*al-dhāt al-makḥṣūṣa*)

Concerning knowledge of the specific essence, quiddity, and reality of God (*al-dhāt al-makḥṣūṣa*), al-Rāzī mentioned three groups: (i) Those who claim that the essence of God is knowable in this world and the hereafter, with the literalists among the Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites being from this group (*al-ẓāhiriyyūn*);⁴⁰ (ii) the Sufis,

38 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 200.

39 See al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 318 regarding this.

40 al-Rāzī provides arguments for the claim that "specific essence can be known" and their criticism in detail. According to this, those who believe that the specific essence is knowable can possibly offer five arguments:

The first argument is based on the contradiction of the negative theology within itself. For example, the proposition of "the specific essence of God cannot be known", in a self-contradictory manner, contains at least knowledge about its unknowability. al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, II, 95; For criticism of self-contradiction of the negative theology, see Michael Durrant, "The Meaning of 'God'-I", *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 31 (1992): 74.

The second argument is based on the idea that the attributions of existence, oneness, and existence in positive theology provides positive knowledge about God. According to this, to predicate an attribute to an essence is only possible after some knowledge of both. In this case, one's negative theology about the unknowability of God is self contradictory. Moreover, the claim about the unknowability of God is also in contradiction with the religions which require the knowledge of and belief in the attributes of God (e.g., oneness).

al-Juwayni, and al-Ghazzālī who argue that the essence of God is not knowable in this world or the hereafter, and (iii) those who argue about that knowing God's essence in the hereafter is possible, which includes al-Bāqillānī (who mentioned the essence of God to be unknowable in this world while the case of the hereafter is unclear) and Ḍirār ibn 'Amr, who claimed that one would be able to know the essence of God with the help of a sixth sense granted in the hereafter.⁴¹

While al-Rāzī accepted the knowability of God's essence in *al-Ishāra*, one of his earliest books,⁴² he admired Abū al-Barakāt's explanation of the possibility of God illuminating the human heart with the knowledge of His essence in *al-Lawāmi'*.⁴³

The third argument suggests that knowing God means knowing either the essence or attributes in terms of them relying on the essence. Knowledge of an essence is not knowledge of an absolute attribute. The other two possibilities support the idea that knowledge of God means some knowledge of His essence.

The fourth argument is based on the analysis of our knowledge of God having "self-subsistent essence" and its meaning. Accordingly, self-subsistent essence is either the whole of God's quiddity nor its part or outside of it. Only the first option is valid, as the last version will require attributing it to a thing other than God. The second option is also invalid as it is against the simplicity of God. Then, knowledge about self-subsistent essence is knowledge of God.

The fifth argument suggests that knowledge of God's existence will also provide knowledge about quiddity. According to al-Rāzī, this argument originates from the failure of the early *Mutakallimūn* for distinguishing between existence and quiddity.

Al-Rāzī's criticism of the first two arguments is based on the analysis of the premise that "It is impossible to make an affirmation about something without its conception." This is because accepting the first two arguments as being correct will require a change in the reality of the subject of this premise (*al-inqilāb fi al-haqīqa*). Namely, the term "unconceived" will change to "conceived," and this will violate the principle of noncontradiction. Or else the premise will fall into one of the paradoxes of self-reference.

In the criticism of the third and fourth arguments, al-Rāzī also uses a single principle. Accordingly, one's knowledge of God is knowing "He is an independent essence that does not need any other," and this is a negative statement. A negative statement, as it is not part of the quiddity, cannot give knowledge about the reality of God. For these arguments, see al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālīb*, II, 96–98; al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-'uqūl*, III, 211; al-Rāzī, *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 164–5; al-Rāzī, *al-Arba'īn fi uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥijāzī l-Saqqā (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyya, 1415/1986), I, 310.

As a result, al-Rāzī responds to the argument that the positive statements about God provide knowledge about His essence based on the distinction firstly between the essence and attributes and then between "talking about the essence" and "knowing the essence."

See Joseph A. Buijs, "The Negative Theology of Maimonides and Aquinas", *The Review of Metaphysics* 41/4 (1988): 726. for the distinction between talking about God and knowing God in the context of moderate and radical versions of negative theology.

41 al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-'uqūl*, III, 210–1; al-Rāzī, *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 164; For al-Rāzī's position on the views of earlier kalam scholars, see Binyamin Abrahamov, "Fahr al-dīn al-Rāzī on the Knowability of God's Essence and Attributes", *Arabica* 49/2(2002): 204–11.

42 al-Zarkān, Muḥammad Ṣālīḥ. *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa-ārā'uhu al-kalāmiyya wa-l-falsafīyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1963) 205.

43 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Lawāmi' al-bayyināt*, Ed. Ṭāhā 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Sa'd (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1984), 72–3. In the same book, al-Rāzī also mentions the impossibility of the truth of the reality of God (p. 246).

However, in *al-Mabāhith*, *al-Mulakhkhas*,, *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, *al-Arba ‘in*, *al-Ma ‘ālim*, and *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, *al-Maṭālib* as well as in many other works, al-Rāzī defended the unknowability of God’s reality with some minor variations. Now I can closely examine the way he justified his position:

Al-Rāzī’s view is that the groups who support the proposition “Knowing the specific essence of God is impossible” had reached this conclusion with arguments specific to their methods. He discussed (i) the epistemological difficulties that play a role in the unknowability of God’s essence in terms of the philosophers, (ii) the ontological and methodological limitations of human beings in terms of Sufis and the *Muhandisiyyūn*, and (iii) the difficulties emerging from God’s ontological difference over the *mutakallimūn*.⁴⁴

(i) Epistemological difficulties: Al-Rāzī narrated the philosophers to have corroborated their claim about the unknowability of God’s essence over three bases: Firstly, if one knew the reality of God, they would possess the knowledge of all of existence based on the philosophers’ principle of “Whoever has knowledge of the cause also has knowledge of the effect.”⁴⁵

Secondly, because knowledge is defined as the occurrence of the image of the known in the knower, the knowledge of God’s essence would require the occurrence of an image of this essence in the mind of a person. Thirdly, according to philosophers, only the universals that do not prevent the participation of many are the subject of knowledge. Specific (*al-mu‘ayyan*) essences like the essence of God that prevent participation are unknowable.⁴⁶

Al-Rāzī accepted the claim about the unknowability of God’s essence, yet he found the arguments of philosophers insufficient as they had relied on philosophical

44 The debate on the possibility of differentiating between the existence and quiddity of God is not relevant to the topic here. The debate is not, as is often assumed, about whether general being (*al-wujūd al-mutlaq*) and the essence of God are the same. It is about whether His particular existence and quiddity are the same. According to Ibn Sīnā, “The absolute and general existence (*al-wujūd al-mutlaq*) which is predicated to God with gradation/ambiguity (*tashkīk*) is knowable, whereas His particular existence (*al-wujūd al-khaṣṣ*), which is his identity, is not. (Mahmūd b. Abdurrahman el-İsfahānī, *Tesdīdū’l-kavāid fī šerhi Tecridi’l-akāid*, Ed. Eşref Altaş, Muhammed Ali Koca, Salih Günaydın, Muhammed Yetim, İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Araştırmaları Merkezi (İSAM), 2020. 55th psg.). As a result, al-Rāzī has rightfully discussed the issue of the knowability of the specific essence in Kalam literature and the debate of the knowability of the particular being in the Avicennan literature under the same heading without making any distinction.

45 al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-‘uqūl*, III, 213; al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, II, 92; al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Din. *al-Risāla al-kamāliyya fī-l-ḥaqā’iq al-ilāhiyya*. Edited by ‘Ali Muḥyi al-Din. (Beirut, Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2002), 47.

46 al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-‘uqūl*, III, 214–6; al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Din. *al-Mulakhkhas*; Süleymaniye Library, Şehid Ali Paşa 1730, 182a-b; al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, II, 92–4.

principles such as knowledge being an image, knowledge of the cause necessarily leading to knowledge of the effect, and God being self-necessitating (*mūjib bi-l-dhāt*). For al-Rāzī, the position of the unknowability of God who is beyond all limitations cannot be consistently maintained with a philosophical perspective because the philosophical tradition believes knowledge to precisely refer to a being that is abstracted from matter.⁴⁷ After all, God is a being separated from matter.

Al-Rāzī intriguingly dealt with the issue from the perspective of philosophers mostly in relation to the difficulties arising from the epistemological conceptions, because Ibn Sinā had related the unknowability of God's essence to God's ontological simplicity.⁴⁸ Yet, I have to mention that al-Rāzī had uncritically adopted in some of his works the reasoning based on the principle of simplicity where, because God is not a composite being and does not possess the genus/species difference, He cannot be defined, and thus His quiddity cannot be known.⁴⁹

(ii) Ontological and Methodological Limitations of the Human Being:

Al-Rāzī addressed human limitations in relation to the unknowability of God's essence through the example of Sufis and the *Muhandisiyyūn*, because in the Islamic intellectual tradition, the most fundamental criticisms of the possibility of rational metaphysics were voiced by these two groups. Two main arguments are found here: Firstly, human beings are limited, while God is not, and the limited cannot comprehend the unlimited.⁵⁰ The arguments about the inability of reason to go beyond the intelligible may be considered, just as none of the senses can transcend their limits. According to this, the realm of reason is intelligible, while its elucidation of metaphysical realities and illuminations is absurd.⁵¹

47 al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-'uqūl*, I, 213–6.

48 Rahim Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation: Avicenna's and Thomas Aquinas' Positions* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005), 26–8.

49 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, III, 245–6; In his various books, al-Rāzī narrates how the Prophet Moses answers the question of Pharaoh “And what is the Lord of the worlds?” al-Shu‘arā’ 26/23) which is in the form of a question of quiddity, insistently with the attributes, names, and actions of God. al-Rāzī brings a lot of evidence from the Qur’an on the subject. See al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, III, 245, al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, XVII, 312–316 (interpretation of the verse al-Shu‘arā’ 26/23).

50 al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-'uqūl*, III, 220; al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, II, 94; al-Rāzī attributes this argument to the *Mutaqaaddimūn* probably intending al-Juwaynī; *al-Juwaynī, Imām al-Ḥaramayn, al-Burhān fī uṣūl al-fiqh*, Ed. Abdul Azim al-Dib, 2nd. ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Ansar), I, 142–4.

51 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, VII, 284–4.

The second argument is the emergence of the dominance of the knower over the known. However, for a human being to gain such dominance by knowing the specific essence of God goes against the nature of the necessary and contingent.⁵²

Al-Rāzī's other argument about the possibility, limit, and accessibility of metaphysical knowledge is the need to understand human beings as a different species when dealing with metaphysical knowledge and ethical practices. For him, just as mountains differ from each other with the ores they contain, human beings also have different species.⁵³ With this perspective, al-Rāzī underlined the impossibility of commensurable metaphysical knowledge or the construction of a metaphysics that would encompass the whole of humanity. He also stressed the impossibility of building a science out of metaphysical knowledge due to the individual nature of such knowledge.

Al-Rāzī corroborated human limitation with three additional different arguments through the *Muhandisiyyūn*, who also considered metaphysical knowledge impossible. According to the first argument, although human beings know themselves most evidently, they differ in their views on the soul. This in turn means that human beings do not have definitive knowledge about the quiddity of their own soul nor also about time, space, body, food, medicine, and even some of the geometric shapes they can prove with certainty. In other words, human beings possess probable and speculative knowledge in their own ontological domain that only contains the best possible explanations (*al-awlā wa-l-akhlaq*). Analogically, human beings quite naturally lack certain (*yaqīnī*) knowledge about the essence of God, as God is the furthest being to their nature and is completely different from them and all other beings.⁵⁴

In this context, the second argument al-Rāzī's mentioned focuses on the limitations of the method of theoretical reasoning for providing metaphysical knowledge as this would leave three possibilities for obtaining knowledge about God's essence: (a) reasoning from cause to effect, (b) analogy between two similar beings, and (c) reasoning from effect to cause. As the first two of these possibilities are nonfunctional in attaining knowledge about God's essence, I will have to follow

52 al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-'uqūl*, III, 220; al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, II, 94–5; In his commentary on the verse “He is dominant over His servants” (al-An‘ām 6/61), al-Rāzī argues that the human being's knowledge of God's essence will mean dominance. al-Rāzī, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, XVII, 315–316 (interpretation of the verse al-Shu‘arā’ 26/23).

53 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 55–57.

54 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 41–6.

the third. However, this third possibility is also unacceptable as a method leading to the reality of God because of God's ontological difference; misleading judgments of imagination, estimation, and mind; and the multiplicity of the ontological layers in existence. If considered as a journey of perfection, this route is long and deceivers abound as the human soul stands at the lowest layer of metaphysical abstract beings.

For this reason, human beings fail at one of these levels and cannot pass them all to reach the highest level (i.e., God's essence). Another difficulty exists in relation to this path. An effect only points to an indefinite cause. The actions, occasions, and effects in this universe only signify the existence of a cause, not its quiddity.⁵⁵

(iii) Difficulties Caused by God's Ontological Separation

First of all, the same realities require shared concomitants. For the necessary God to share the same reality with the contingents, the equalness of the contingents and the necessary is required in contingency and necessity, which is impossible.⁵⁶ Although al-Rāzī made longer arguments about God's ontological separation, in this context I am only interested in how this separation underpins the problem of knowing. On this issue, al-Rāzī mentioned two arguments from the *Mutakallimūn*.

According to the first one, one knows God's existence and the nature of this existence through positive and negative relative attributes. Knowledge of these is not knowledge of quiddity, as knowledge about existence does not provide knowledge about the quiddity of the cause. Their knowledge does not necessitate knowledge of the essence because, by knowing these qualities, one knows that a being with these qualities exists out there, while its quiddity remains unknown. Therefore, one cannot know the essence of God.⁵⁷

55 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, I, 51–52; al-Rāzī supports the argument that the epistemic faculties of the human being are not suitable for knowledge of God's essence with a quotation from Aristotle in various places in *al-Maṭālib*: "Aristotle said: P 'A person who wants to start metaphysical knowledge should create a new disposition (*fitrah*) for himself.' Human beings are in the state of habituation with the judgements of the estimative and imaginative faculties. And those judgments do not match with metaphysical themes. Because of this very reason the student needs to generate a different disposition." al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 57; II, 20; al-Rāzī, *Asās al-taqdīs*, 36.

56 al-Rāzī, *al-Mulakkhaṣ*, 179b; al-Rāzī, *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, p. 133; al-Rāzī, *al-Arba'in*, I, 137–42; al-Rāzī, *al-Risāla al-Kamāliyya*, 51.

57 al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-'uqūl*, I, 216–219; al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, II, 88–90; al-Rāzī, *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 164–5; al-Rāzī, *al-Arba'in*, I, 308; al-Rāzī, Fakhr al-Dīn, *al-Ma'ālim fi uṣūl al-dīn*, Ed. Ṭahā 'Abd al-Ra'ūf Sa'd. (Cairo: Maktabat Kulliyat al-Azhar, nd.), 78–9.

The second argument from the *Mutakallimūn* helps at better understanding al-Rāzī's own view and primarily focuses on the origins of the concepts in human beings. For al-Rāzī, human beings possess four types of knowledge originating from the senses, from the conscience, from reason, and from a composition of the first three sources: (a) the knowledge of sensory qualities as a white, high-pitched sound, tough, sweet, and nice smell as well as sensory substances like the body which are perceived by the senses, (b) knowledge of the qualities of conscience like pain, weakness, hunger, desire, and love that are experienced directly; (c) the second intelligibles like existence, non-existence, oneness, multiplicity, necessity, contingency, and impossibility that are discovered by reasoning, and (d) the knowledge that is deduced from the composite concepts, propositions, and syllogisms that are constructed by the concept from the first three sources, such as a sea made of mercury, the phoenix, an eagle with 1,001 heads as constructed by the imaginative faculty, as well as the enemy wolf constructed by the estimation and as a proposition and syllogism constructed by the mind.⁵⁸

Now, is the knowledge of God's reality specifically a kind of knowledge that is acquired through one of these four ways? According to al-Rāzī, because the reality of the Divine cannot be obtained by any of these four sources, it is unknowable, and the underlying reason is nothing other than the ontological separation of God. The essence of God is not perceivable through the senses, conscience, or reason because of God's dissimilarity to created things (*mukhālafā li-l-ḥawādith*). Neither is God a composition of concepts attained by these methods of perception, as He is not a compound being.

As a result, the shared aspect of the arguments developed by the philosophical, mystical, and rational perspectives based on their methods is that God's essence is unknowable.⁵⁹

(b) Semantic Interpretation of the Unknowability of God's Specific Essence

The previous section described how al-Rāzī had defended the thesis of the unknowability of the essence of God based on the principle of ontological

58 al-Rāzī, *Nihāyat al-ʿuqūl*, III, 219–20; al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 49–50; II, 90–91; al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣal*, 65, al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn*, I, 309.

59 For this specific aspect of the issue and the relevant arguments, see Mustafa Bozkurt, "Fahredden er-Rāzī'de Allah'ın Hakikatini Bilmenin İmkânı", *Turkish Studies: Türkoloji Araştırmaları: International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic* XIII/25 (2018): 129–143.

separation and human epistemological and methodological limitations. According to this description and compatible with the general conception of a transcendental God with the ontological separation and with the metaphysical thesis of negative theology (MNT), al-Rāzī argued the following: The essence of God is different from everything that was, is, or shall be existent and “Naught is as His likeness” (Qur’an, 42:11). Compatible with the religious attitude expressed in the hadith “Ponder on the creation of God, but ponder not on God’s essence” (*tafakkarū fi khalqih wa-lā tafakkarū fi al-Khāliq lā tuqaddirūna qadrah*)⁶⁰ in general and with the epistemological thesis originating from the ontological separation principle of negative theology (ENT)⁶¹ in particular, al-Rāzī further stated that one can know the existence of God but not His quiddity.

However, al-Rāzī’s claim that God’s essence is unknowable was not built on the premises of the different versions of negative theology that had led to this conclusion. Therefore, al-Rāzī’s negative theology of the reality of the essence was not a radical negative theology.⁶²

In this case, how should the semantic thesis of negative theology (SNT) about the essence be understood?⁶³ In other words, what does al-Rāzī’s claim of God’s essence being unknowable mean exactly? This can be understood in multiple ways, such as rejection of a specific metaphysical being, metaphysical skepticism, the meaninglessness of talking about God, the Neoplatonist ineffability of divine simplicity, the impossibility of God as a subject of a positive proposition, and the perplexity of reason before the Divine. Then to re-ask the question, what does al-Rāzī mean by saying God’s essence is unknowable?

I can put forward a number of semantic theses that suggest how the epistemological thesis of God’s essence being unknowable should be understood. According to these theses:

60 Abu Bakr Ahmed ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Bayhaqī, *al-Asmā wa-l-Ṣifāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1984), 360; The translation of the *hadith* is the one used in El-Tobgui, Carl Sharif. “Chapter 6 Reason Reconstituted: The Divine Attributes and the Question of Contradiction between Reason and Revelation”. In *Ibn Taymiyya on Reason and Revelation*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2019).

61 Buijs, “The Negative Theology”, 727.

62 As an example, the four theses of the negative theology attributed to Pseudo-Dionysos have been formulated by Rojek as follows: *God has all positive properties. God has negations of all positive properties. God has negations of all negations of positive properties. God is unknowable.* See Pawel Rojek, “Towards a Logic of Negative Theology”, *Logic in Religious Discourse*, Ed. A. Schumann (Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2010), 194–7.

63 Buijs, “The Negative Theology”, 727.

[SNT1]: God's essence being unknowable means God can only be a subject in negative propositions.⁶⁴ Al-Rāzī cannot be said to have accepted this interpretation because it restrictively suggests God is unable to be a subject for positive propositions. However, al-Rāzī claimed that both God and God's positive, negative, and active attributes can be the subject of positive and negative predicates (e.g., God is all-knowing).

[SNT2]: God's essence being unknowable means God can be talked about by saying what He is not.⁶⁵ This interpretation basically claims that one can speak about God's essence by saying what He is not, with the condition of this not being a defining statement. However, al-Rāzī on this same condition asserted predicates in the form of is not a body, is knowing, is not unknowing, and is eternal with regard to God. The first of these predications is negative both in form and meaning, the second is positive in terms of meaning and form, the third is negative in form but positive in meaning, and the last is positive in form but negative in its meaning.

Here I can refer to al-Rāzī's two examples against [SNT1] and [SNT2]: According to the first example, although one may not know the essence of God, one can still speak affirmatively about Him. When one thinks about the meaning of perfection (*kamāl*), of defect in terms of form and quantity within humans, one understands the meanings of absolute perfection and deficiency by necessity because the absolute is part of the restricted quiddity. In other words, thinking of perfection and deficiency specifically is possible only by thinking about perfection and deficiency in an absolute sense. Thus, one accepts this meaning of absolute perfection to be able to be positively attributed to God by removing all deficiencies from this meaning. Consequently, one becomes able to say, "God is perfect."⁶⁶

Similarly, although knowledge about the essence of God is beyond human ken, one can speak about Him in negative sentences on the condition of negation. For example, when considering the proposition "The existence of a partner to God is impossible," the proposition is composed of the concepts of partner (coming from senses) and of impossible (coming from reason), and the generally known concept of God as brought about by reason. Reason has first formed the concept of God's partner by combining the first two concepts. Then, to reveal the impossibility of the concept of God having a partner, reason is used to compare this to the state of human beings and concludes the meaning present in human beings to be invalid for God.⁶⁷

64 Buijs, "The Negative Theology", 727.

65 *Ibid.*

66 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 50-1.

67 *Ibid.*, I, 49-50; II, 91.

[SNT3]: God's essence being unknowable means God absolutely should not be talked about. If one considers al-Rāzī's attitude toward the first two semantic interpretations, his thesis would clearly not be understood as the theology of silence in the form of God absolutely should not be talked about. According to this interpretation, God is transcendent, and human language is limited. Therefore, one should restrain from making any positive or negative statements about God. Where God is concerned, human beings should remain silent and not talk. As I have discussed, al-Razi had adopted a contrary view. As he stated in various places, he would argue the statement "God cannot be talked about" to be either a contradiction in terms or to contain one of the paradoxes of self-reference.⁶⁸

[SNT4]: God's essence being unknowable means unbelief. Al-Rāzī could not possibly accept this atheistic or sophist interpretation either. As I have mentioned earlier, the claim of God's essence being unknowable, which is based on the metaphysical thesis about God's dissimilarity to all created things, does not mean God is nonexistent. This has a clear reason: As addressed before, constructing arguments that provide knowledge about existence but not about quiddity is possible. A better argument would be as follows: Saying that a being that is dissimilar to all possible beings exists is possible because complete dissimilarity of a being to all other possible beings with its peculiar qualities does not logically necessitate its nonexistence.

In other words, the nonexistence of God's likeness does not necessitate God's nonexistence. In fact, suggesting that the existence of anything depends on the existence of its like would be inaccurate because no correlation is found between the existence of a thing and the existence of its likeness. Moreover, individuation (*al-tashakkkhuṣ* / *al-tafarrud*) and entification (*al-ta'ayyun*) take place through the distinction (*tamayyuz*) of a thing from its similitude. This means that dissimilarity and distinction rather than similarity are what determine individuation and singularity more in the external world.⁶⁹ As a result, unknowability of essence does not indicate its nonexistence.

[SNT5]: The unknowability of God's essence may also signify agnosticism⁷⁰

68 *Ibid*, II, 97–8; For the details of the paradox, see Harun Kuşlu, "Knowing the Unknown: The Paradox of "The Absolute Unknown" From Fakhr al-Din al-Razi to Tashkoprizada", *Nazariyat* 6/1 (April 2020), 89–123.

69 Rāzī, *Allah'ın Aşkınlığı*, pp. 37–38; al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, II, 23–4;

70 For such an interpretation of al-Juwayni, see Ömer Türker, "Eş'ari Kelâmının Kırılma Noktası: Cüveynî'nin Yöntem Eleştirileri", *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 19 (2008): 16–7.

either about God's essence or in the meaning of uncertainty about His existence. This interpretation would shift the logical emphasis of [SNT1] (i.e., cannot be the subject of an affirmative proposition) and linguistic emphasis in [SNT3] (i.e., unspeakable) to an epistemological emphasis in the form of unknowable.⁷¹ Furthermore, while [SNT3] was an interpretation that facilitates religious submission, the agnostic approach in the meaning of the unknowability of the existence of the essence is an interpretation that negates religious belief. According to al-Rāzī, understanding the unknowability of God's essence as agnosticism about the existence of God is incorrect. As I have considered in detail, the transformation of an agnosticism about the essence to an agnosticism about the existence stems from the failure to understand the difference between the knowability of essence and the knowability of existence.

[SNT6]: The unknowability of the essence can also be interpreted as an expression of religious submission before a transcendental being. With such an interpretation, the unknowability and ineffability of God would not require agnosticism but rather religious submission, humility, annihilation, and perplexity. Verily, this is the basic wit and deep meaning of sacredness. For this reason, many religious traditions have prohibited the utterance of God's name, and prohibition (*muḥarram*) is one of the subtler dimensions of sacredness. Because of this, the sections of al-Rāzī's writings dealing with the unknowability of specific essence strongly emphasize the tension of transcendence, majesty, greatness, and grandeur has with the feelings of annihilation and submission such as human impotence, perplexity, and horror before this greatness:

[One of the daunting knots of the human being] is the knowledge of essence. If one affirms the essence of God to be equal to anything one perceives with the senses, finds within the self (wijdān), or thinks using reason, the essence will have to be contingent. However, this is impossible. If one affirms the difference of that special being from all the beings one can think of and know, the mind will then be in a state of perplexity and bewilderment by having failed to achieve anything. The conclusion to be drawn from this is: for reason to have proven that specific reality in a way that perception can reach it means it is unknown to him. This is because whatever can be perceived by reason is a contingent being, not a necessary being. But if the reason has proven this specific being different from all other realities, then it has failed to know that being in terms of what

71 Rojek, "Towards a Logic", 201–5; Piotr Urbańczyk, "The Logical Challenge of Negative Theology", *Studies in Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric* 54/1 (2018): 158–63.

*it is. If it has not been capable of knowing and imagining, how will it be able to describe him with the attributes of majesty, greatness, and sacredness? This is a majestic pause in knowing the essence.*⁷²

Consequently, al-Rāzī's view of the unknowability of God cannot be interpreted as something that cannot be talked about or that requires wordlessness. It would not necessitate the denial of God's existence. It cannot also be interpreted in a way that will require uncertainty about God's existence. Neither would it cancel practical religious life.

Al-Rāzī's position on this constitutes an epistemological emphasis according to which the essence and reality of God are unknowable, unreachable, and incomprehensible. However, one can make affirmative and negative statements about Him and speak about His attributes, actions, and qualities. This then means that, although one cannot comprehend God, one can acquire knowledge and speak about God from different aspects such as existence (I shall call this [SNT 7]).

I should finally ask the following: Do the metaphysical, epistemological, and semantic theses of negative theology have an entailment relationship with one another? Put differently, would not speaking about God's positive and negative attributes, names, and actions, as well as claiming to possess knowledge about them mean that God is knowable? Conversely, is not talking so much about God and then saying God's essence to be unknowable also a contradiction?⁷³

For al-Rāzī, no relationship of entailment exists between knowing the existence, attributes, names, and actions of God and knowing His essence. Namely, just as the absence of knowledge about the essence does not entail its nonexistence, knowledge of the existence of the essence doesn't necessitate knowledge about its nature. This is because knowing that He is not created, contingent, or space-occupying and does not reside in a receptacle while also having knowledge about His positive attributes such as all-knowing and omnipotent only provides concomitants of reality. Additionally, their expression would be like a description of reality with its concomitants. According to the rules of logic, knowing the concomitants of something does not entail its knowledge in terms of what it is.⁷⁴

72 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, I, 60.

73 This entailment has been mentioned by Hayner in a different context. Accordingly, negative statements that express the reality of God seem to assume the knowability of God's reality when their truth is tested. Paul C. Hayner, "Analogical Predication", *The Journal of Philosophy* 55/20 (1958): 859.

74 al-Rāzī, *Mulakhkhas*, 182a-b; al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib: al-Mantiq*, 31b.

I can analyze this rule in a little more detail according to my own purpose: (i) Knowing the existence is not knowing the essence because the general being is different from God's specific being. (ii) Knowing the necessity of God is also not knowledge of His essence because the necessity is a quality of God's existence. Because the knowledge of his necessity shows His being to be from Himself, the continuity of His existence, needlessness, impossibility of His nonexistence, and finally His simplicity in all aspects⁷⁵ are all nothing more than knowing the qualities of His existence. In other words, when understood as the modality of the predicate "exists," necessary as a word only indicates one mode of God's existence, not His essence. (iii) Just because knowledge of God's negative attributes means knowing what God is not does not provide direct knowledge of God's essence. (iv) Just because knowledge of God's relational attributes indicates the relation between the essence and another being does not mean this is knowledge of God's essence itself. (v) Because the essence and attributes do not correspond in all their aspects for al-Rāzī, knowledge of real attributes is not knowledge of the specific essence. In short, one can find something that can be characterized with these five things within one's self, internal world, and conscience without knowing its essence according to al-Rāzī. This is more evidence for the nonequivalence the knowledge of these five qualities has with knowledge of essence.⁷⁶

Still more evidence for the absence of entailment is the following: Inference from the existence of a result to the existence of the cause does not bring about knowledge of the essence of the cause. The essence of a thing can be conceptually known and also can be known by a direct experience of that thing. Now, humans know the universe is contingent and every contingent has a cause and also consider the falsehood of the infinite regress and vicious circle. From these premises, I deduce the contingent beings need to be related to the necessary being. This is the very proof of a being that does not depend on the other, while the other depends on Him. In this argument, knowledge of the absolute being contains relational knowledge where the other depends on Him, and negative knowledge that He does not depend on the other. Just as none of these is the specific essence, knowledge of any of these is not knowledge of the specific essence.⁷⁷

A further argument showing no entailment to exist is that the affirmation does not give knowledge of the quiddity of the sides. In short, a proposition where God

75 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, III, 247–48.

76 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, II, 88–90; al-Rāzī, *al-Risāla al-Kamāliyya*, 47.

77 al-Rāzī, *al-Maṭālib*, II, 81–82.

is the subject does not necessarily give knowledge about the reality of God because the judgment does not depend on a conception of the nature of the two sides. Therefore, the proposition “God is knowing” does not entail knowledge about God’s reality.⁷⁸

While negative and transcendental discourse has been developed against anthropomorphic approaches such as the acceptance of God as body (*tajsīm*) or likening Him to human beings (*tashbīh*), it has enabled the questioning of the arrogance of human reason, the human capacity to know everything including the metaphysical realm through logical concepts, and the idea of the knowability of God’s essence. This negative theology from al-Rāzī drawing the limits of reason opens the door to narratives based on mysticism, analogy (*tamthīl*), and poetry and knowledge only produced by religious experience but logically unprovable. It has allowed these ideas to pass through the border of legitimacy in Islamic intellectual history. Al-Rāzī’s second chapter in *al-Maṭālib* dealing with the unknowability of God’s essence being followed by a third chapter dealing with the topic of the virtue of the method of spiritual disciplining and struggle is no coincidence.⁷⁹

Nonetheless, al-Rāzī’s negative attitude toward the knowability of essence is not a radical one that can be applied to the entirety of the metaphysical realm. This is because he argued that, even though one does not know the specific essence, one can still acquire knowledge about the positive and negative attributes of the essence.

In this case, my question transforms into “What can be known about the attributes, names, and actions of God?” In other words, is detailed knowledge (*‘alā sabīl al-tafṣīl*) of a particular metaphysical being possible using the reasoning method? On this very point did al-Rāzī put forth his metaphysics of best possibility, which is expressed as the best possible explanation. The questions and answers relating to this are the subject of another study.

78 Altaş, “Varlık Kavramının Bedâhetine Delil Getirilebilir mi?”, 59–79.

79 These tendencies of al-Rāzī seem to be compatible with the constructive and destructive roles of negative theology. For these roles, see N. Bulhof & L. Kate, “Echoes of an Embarrassment Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology: An Introduction”, *Flight of the Gods: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology*, Eds. Ilse N. Bulhof & K. Laurens (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 5–6; İhsan Fazlıoğlu discusses examples of the constructive and destructive implications of al-Rāzī’s tendencies in “Rāzī Krizini Açmak: Mevlânâ’nın ‘Arayış’ı için Yeni Bir Yorum”. *Düşünen Şehir* 8 (2019): 104–17.

Conclusion

The possibility of using reason to acquire metaphysical knowledge has been one of the major debates in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Al-Rāzī attempted to answer this question by categorizing the metaphysical knowable as knowledge of essence, existence, attribute, name, and action while dividing the knowledge of metaphysics into undetailed and detailed. Therefore, al-Rāzī's position varies based on the category of metaphysical knowledge in question.

Al-Rāzī generally based proof of the metaphysical realm on the fact that the identification and limitation of what is acquired by the senses transcends the senses. The proof of this is the impossibility of constructing sensible objects in the senses. In addition, the universal, being beyond sensory experience, also proves the metaphysical realm. The abstractness of the reality that ensures the realization of an object as a thing provides the abstractness of the source of this reality as well.

Al-Rāzī further stated that, in addition to the general metaphysical domain, reason also proves the particular metaphysical being. For him, the existence of God cannot be known through means such as necessity, imitation, purification of heart, senses, inspiration, or the teaching of an infallible imam. Because reasoning in the form of transition from cause to effect or between equals does not provide knowledge of God's existence, the remaining form of reasoning is the one that occurs from effect to cause. This method that moves from the effect to cause gives knowledge about the existence of the metaphysical domain. When the conditions of reasoning (i.e., the matter- and form-related conditions of the syllogism) are met, the arguments that provide knowledge about metaphysical existence provide the necessary rational knowledge. Consequently, knowledge of the metaphysical realm and knowledge of the existence of God may be obtained. However, this method can be said to be difficult for accidental conditions.

According to al-Rāzī, human beings cannot know the essence of God due to the ontological difference God has and the epistemological limitations human beings have. Because of this, al-Rāzī accepted the validity of the criticism the *Muhanidisiyyūn* made regarding the possibility of metaphysical knowledge only on the issue of the knowability of God's essence.

The ontological thesis of al-Rāzī's negative theology about the unknowable essence of God can be expressed as: The essence of God is unique. The epistemological thesis on the other hand can be stated as: God's existence can be known, but His reality is unknowable. However, the unknowability of God's essence does not mean

that He can be talked about only with negative statements or that no positive predication can be made nor be subjected to atheistic or agnostic interpretation. The inability to know His essence can develop the feeling of perplexity and nurture annihilation and submission in human beings.

The question of whether one can obtain knowledge about God's names, attributes, and actions, which al-Rāzī qualified as difficult and at times as the best possibility (*awlāwiya*), whatever form this will have is left to another study.

Bibliography

- Abrahamov, Binyamin, "Fahr al-din al-Rāzī on the Knowability of God's Essence and Attributes", *Arabica* 49/2 (2002), 204–30.
- Acar, Rahim, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation: Avicenna's and Thomas Aquinas' Positions*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005.
- Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya wa-l-Zanādiqa*, Ed. Sabri ibn Salāma Shāhin, Riyadh: Dār al-Thabāt, 1424.
- Altaş, Eşref, "Varlık Kavramının Bedâhetine Delil Getirilebilir mi? Müteahhirin Dönemi Merkezli Bir Tartışma", *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 30 (2013), 59–79.
- al-Bayhaqī, Abū Bakr Ahmed ibn al-Ḥusayn, *al-Asmā' wa-l-Şifāt*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1984.
- Bozkurt, Mustafa, "Fahredden er-Rāzī'de Allah'ın Hakikatini Bilmenin İmkânı", *Turkish Studies: Türkoloji Araştırmaları: International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic XIII/25* (2018), 129–143.
- Buijs, Joseph A., "The Negative Theology of Maimonides and Aquinas", *The Review of Metaphysics* 41/4 (1988), 723–38.
- Bulhof N. ve L. Kate, "Echoes of an Embarrassment Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology: An Introduction", *Flight of the Gods: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology*, ed. Ilse N. Bulhof ve Laurens ten Kate, New York: Fordham University Press, 2000.
- al-Juwayni, İmām al-Ḥaramayn, *al-Burhān fī uşūl al-fīqh*, Ed. Abdul 'Aẓim al-Dib, 2nd. ed., Cairo: Dār al-Ansār.
- Durrant, Michael, "The Meaning of 'God'-I", *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 31 (1992), 71–84.
- Fazlhoğlu, İhsan, "Rāzī Krizini Aşmak: Mevlânâ'nın 'Arayış'ı İçin Yeni Bir Yorum", *Düşünen Şehir* 8 (2019), 104–17.
- Hayner, Paul C., "Analogical Predication", *The Journal of Philosophy* 55/20 (1958), 855–62.
- Ibn Sinā, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, Ed. 'Ali-Riḍā Najafzāda, Tehran: Anjuman-i Āthār wa Mafakhir-i Farhangī, 1384.
- _____, *al-Mubāḥathāt*, in Aristo 'ında al-'Arab, Ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, Kuwait: Wakalat al-matbūāt, 1978.
- Ibn Sinā, *al-Ta'liqāt*, Ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān Badawī, Qom: Matkatabat al-'ilāmi'l-İslāmī, 1984.
- el-İsfahānī, Mahmūd b. Abdurrahman, *Tesdīdül-kavâid fī şerhi Tecridi'l-akâid*, thk. Eşref Altaş, Muhammed Ali Koca, Salih Günaydın, Muhammed Yetim, İstanbul: Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Araştırmaları Merkezi, 2020.

- Kaplan, Hayri, "Bahâ Veled, Şems ve Mevlânâ'nın Râzî'ye Eleştirileri ve Râzî'nin Sûfilere/Tasavvufa Bakışı", *Tasavvuf İlmî ve Akademik Araştırma Dergisi* 6/14 (2005), 285–330.
- al-Kâtîbî, Najm al-Dîn Ali ibn 'Umar, *al-Mufaşşal*, Ed. Abd al-Jabbar Abu Sanina, Amman: al-Aslayn li-dirâsat wa-l-Nashr, 2018/1439.
- Kaya, Ayşe, "Fahreddin er-Râzî'nin Bilgide Zorunluluk Teorisi", Yüksek lisans tezi, Marmara Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2019.
- Kuşlu, Harun, "Bilinemeyeni Bilmek: Fahreddin Râzî'den Taşköprülüzâde'ye 'Mutlak Meçhul' Paradoksu", *Nazariyat* 6/1 (April 2020), 85–107.
- Mevlânâ, Celâlüddin Muhammed b. Muhammed el-Belhî, *Mesnevî*, çev. Veled İzbudak, İstanbul: MEB Yayınları, 1988, V.
- er-Râzî, Fahreddin, *Allah'ın Aşkını: Esâsu't-takdîs fi ilmi'l-keîlâm*, çev. İbrahim Coşkun, İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 2006.
- al-Râzî, *al-Arba'in fi usûl al-dîn*, ed. Aḥmad al-Ḥijâzî al-Saqqâ, Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyât al-Azhariyya, 1415/1986.
- _____, *al-Khalq wa'l-ba'th*, Süleymaniye Library, Ayasofya 2257.
- _____, *al-Ma'âlim fi usûl al-dîn*, Ed. Ṭâhâ 'Abd al-Ra'ûf Sa'd, Cairo: Maktabat Kulliyat al-Azhar, nd.
- _____, *al-Maṭâlib al-'âliya min al-'ilm al-ilâhî*, ed. Aḥmad Ḥijâzî Aḥmad Saqqâ (Beirut: Dâr al-Kitâb al-'Arabî, 1407/1987).
- _____, *al-Maṭâlib al-'âliya: al-Mantiq*, Süleymaniye Library, Fatih. 3145.
- _____, *al-Mulakhkhas*, Süleymaniye Library, Şehid Ali Paşa 1730.
- _____, *al-Risâla al-kamâliyya fi al-ḥaqâ'iq al-ilâhiyya*. Ed. Ali Muḥyîl-Dîn, Beirut: Dâr al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2002.
- _____, *al-Riyâḍ al-mûniqa fi ârâ' ahl al-'ilm*, Ed. As'ad Jum'a, Tunis: Markaz al-Nashr al-Jâmi'î, 2004.
- _____, *el-Muhassal: Kelam ve Felsefenin Ana Meseleleri*, trans. Eşref Altaş, İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2019.
- _____, *Lawâmi' al-bayyinât*, Ed. Ṭâhâ 'Abd al-Ra'ûf Sa'd, Beirut: Dâr al-Kitâb al-'Arabî, 1984.
- _____, *Nihâyat al-'uqûl fi dirâyât al-usûl*, Ed. Sa'id 'Abd al-Laṭîf Fûda, Beirut: Dâr al-Zahâir, 2015/1436.
- _____, *Sharḥ 'Uyûn al-ḥikma*, I-III, Ed. Aḥmad Ḥijâzî al-Saqqâ, Tehran: Mu'assasat al-Sadiq li-t-tibaa wa-l-nashr, 1415.
- _____, *Sharḥ al-Ishârât wa-l-tanbihât*, Ed. 'Ali-Riḍâ Najafzâda, Tehran: Anjuman-i Âthâr wa Mafâkhir-i Farhangî, 1384.
- _____, *Tefşir-i Kebîr*, trans. Cafer Sadık Doğru vd., İstanbul: Huzur Yayınevi, 2013.
- Rojek, Pawel, "Towards a Logic of Negative Theology", *Logic in Religious Discourse*, ed. A. Schumann, 192-215, Frankfurt: Ontos Verlag, 2010.
- Türker, Ömer, "Bir Tümdengelim Olarak Şâhitle Gâibe İstidlâl Yöntemi ve Cüveynî'nin Bu Yönteme Yöneltiği Eleştiriler, *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 18 (2007), 1–25.
- _____, "Eş'ari Kelâmının Kırılma Noktası: Cüveynî'nin Yöntem Eleştirileri", *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi* 19 (2008), 1–24.
- Urbańczyk, Piotr, "The Logical Challenge of Negative Theology", *Studies in Logic, Grammar and Rhetoric*, 54/1 (2018), 149–74.
- al-Zarqân, Muḥammad Şâlih, *Fakhr al-Dîn al-Râzî wa-âra'uhu al-kalâmiyya wa-l-falsafiyya*, Cairo: Dâr al-Fikr, 1963.