

## **Debating Prophethood: Ibn al-Malāḥimī's Critique to Muslim Philosophers**

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### **Abstract**

Medieval Muslim thinkers sought to defend the necessity of prophecy, especially against external critiques, as prophecy constitutes a central tenet of Islam. Within the Muslim intellectual tradition, however, significant debate surrounds key theological teachings including the doctrine of prophecy itself. This paper aims to reveal the debate, focusing specifically on the critique of Ibn al-Malāḥimī, a prominent figure within the Mu'tazila school, who challenges the prophetic theory of Muslim philosophers. While previous studies have addressed aspects of Ibn al-Malāḥimī's thought, none have thoroughly examined his specific objections to the philosophical interpretations of prophecy. This study employs qualitative research methods, by using Ibn al-Malāḥimī's *Tuḥfah al-Mutakallimīn* as its main source. Data collection was conducted through extensive literature study. The findings of this paper reveal that Ibn al-Malāḥimī's critique of the Muslim philosophers' theories of prophecy centers on four key points: (1) the nature of prophecy itself, and (2) the role of prophets as agents of human's worldly goodness. These critiques are further connected to his opposition to (3) the philosophers' views on the nature of soul and (4) their fatalistic worldview which he argues negates necessarily human free will.

**Keywords:** prophecy, Islamic philosophy, Ibn al-Malāḥimī, Mu'tazila.

### **Abstrak**

Para pemikir Muslim abad pertengahan telah berupaya membela keniscayaan kenabian, khususnya dari serangan eksternal, sebab kenabian merupakan salah satu ajaran pokok dalam Islam. Meskipun begitu, di internal umat Muslim sendiri terjadi perdebatan mengenai pokok ajaran ini. Paper ini bertujuan mengungkap perdebatan tersebut, namun dikhususkan pada kritik Ibn al-Malāḥimī yang mewakili mazhab Mu'tazilah terhadap teori kenabian para filosof Muslim. Meski sudah terdapat beberapa penelitian tentang pemikiran Ibn al-Malāḥimī, namun tidak ada satupun yang mengkaji kritiknya terhadap teori kenabian para filosof. Metode yang digunakan dalam paper ini adalah penelitian kualitatif dengan menjadikan kitab *Tuḥfah al-Mutakallimīn* sebagai sumber utamanya. Pengumpulan datanya dilakukan melalui telaah pustaka. Temuan dalam paper ini: kritik Ibn al-Malāḥimī terhadap teori kenabian para filosof Muslim mengarah pada empat pandangan mereka, yaitu (1) hakikat kenabian dan (2) peran para nabi sebagai

pembawa kemaslahatan di dunia. Dua kritik ini berkaitan dengan kritiknya dalam topik berbeda, yaitu (3) pandangan para filosof mengenai jiwa dan (4) pandangan dunia mereka yang fatalistik dan menafikan kebebasan kehendak bebas manusia.

**Kata Kunci:** kenabian, filsafat Islam, Ibn al-Malāhimī, Mu‘tazilah.

## **A. Introduction**

During the early period of Islam, prophecy was generally accepted without significant reliance on rational proof. However, as Islam spread to distant regions, Muslims encountered societies with diverse cultural and religious traditions. These intercultural and interreligious engagements gave rise to debates and polemics on various theological issues, including the concept of prophethood. Historically, the topic of prophethood became a point of contention between Muslims and adherents of Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, and Brahmanic religion (Hinduism-Buddhism). Among the Christian figures who engaged in polemics with Muslims was John of Damascus who asserted in his writings that Muhammad was a “false prophet.” Another notable figure was ‘Abd al-Masīh al-Kindī who, upon being invited to embrace Islam by ‘Abdallāh al-Hāshimī, responded with a letter refuting the prophethood of Muhammad.<sup>1</sup>

Another intellectual challenge that prompted early Muslim scholars to explore the concept of prophethood in Islam more deeply came from individuals who reject the prophethood altogether (*munkirū al-nubuwwa*). In the Kalam discourse, these individuals were often referred to as the *Barāhima*, adherents of the Brahmanical tradition. They acknowledged the existence of God but argued that religious life can be conducted solely on the basis of reason, without the need for a prophet to provide guidance.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, within the Arab intellectual landscape, some thinkers held similar views to those *Barāhima*. In the history of Islamic thought, Ibn al-Rāwandī and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī are two prominent examples. According to historical reports, Al-Rāzī rejected prophethood on the grounds that the teachings of various prophets contradicted one another and led to social conflict. In his view, reason was a more reliable means of ensuring peace than the doctrines espoused by prophets.<sup>3</sup> Al-Rāzī is also recorded to have authored works such as *Makhāriq al-Anbiyā’* (The Fraudulent Tricks of the Prophets), *Ḥiyal al-Anbiyā’* (The Deceptions of the Prophets), and *Fī Naqd al-Adyān* (On the Critique of Religions).<sup>4</sup>

Roughly contemporaneous with Abū Bakr Al-Rāzī, another Arabic philosopher adopted a contrasting stance by acknowledging the necessity of prophets for mankind. This figure was Abū Nasr al-Fārābī. Although committed to reason and rationality, as

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<sup>1</sup> Sarah Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī, Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, and Their Impact on Islamic Thought* (Brill, 1999), 193 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Abū al-Faṭḥ Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm Al-Shahrastānī, *Al-Milal Wa al-Niḥal*, ed. Amīr ‘Alī Mahnā and ‘Alī Ḥasan Fā’ūr (Dār al-Ma’rifah, 1993), 601 ff.

<sup>3</sup> Abū Bakr Al-Rāzī, *Rasā’il Falsafiyah*, ed. Paulus Kraus (Al-Maktabah al-Murtaḍawiyah, n.d.), 295–230.

<sup>4</sup> Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam*, 93.

was typical of philosophers, Al-Fārābī sought to explain the doctrine of prophethood in the Abrahamic religions through rational and philosophical framework, demonstrating that no fundamental contradiction existed between religious teachings and rational thought. For Al-Fārābī, prophethood was a rational necessary, grounded in his theory of the soul (philosophical anthropology).<sup>5</sup> Evidence suggests that Al-Fārābī had studied the works of Ibn al-Rāwandī and Al-Rāzī, as he wrote a refutation of their arguments.<sup>6</sup> Continuing Al-Fārābī's line of thought, Ibn Sīnā offered a quite different idea of prophethood, while still operating within the framework of philosophical anthropology.<sup>7</sup>

Outside the contributions of philosophers, the Kalām scholars (mutakallimūn) also engaged with the phenomenon of prophethood-deniers by presenting arguments for the necessity of prophets in religious life. Their works always included a special discussion of prophethood. In addition, they also composed treatises specifically discussing the Islamic doctrine of prophethood. These writings became part of distinct literary genre known as *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* (proofs of prophethood). The oldest extant work within this genre is Al-Jāḥiẓ's *Ḥujaj al-Nubuwwa*, a short treatise attempts to explain the miraculous nature of the Prophet Muhammad's deeds as recorded in the hadiths. The approach used in this genre, according to Marieke Koertner, is called 'ḥadīth-based *dalā'il al-nubuwwa*'. This approach differs from the other two methods of *dalā'il al-nubuwwa* genre: one that seeks to prove Muhammad's prophethood through claims that earlier scriptures foretold his coming as the final prophet, and another that engages in theological discourse on the necessity and essential nature of prophethood.<sup>8</sup>

The composition of works within this genre was undertaken by Kalām scholars from various schools. Among the Mu'tazila, notable contributions include *Ḥujaj al-Nubuwwa* by Al-Jāḥiẓ and *Tathbīt Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa* by Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār. Within the Ash'arī school, Al-Māwardī authored *A'lām al-Nubuwwa*, while the Māturīdī school contributed a special section on prophethood in Al-Māturīdī's *Ta'wīl Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*. Among scholars of the Ahl al-Ḥadīth or Athariyya school, Abū Nu'aym al-Iṣfahānī and Al-Bayhaqī contributed works within the same genre. The Ismā'īlī school also produced works on the subject, such as *Kitāb Ithbāt al-Nubuwwa* by Abū Ya'qūb al-Sijistānī. Moreover, Sarah Stroumsa had identified an even broader intellectual scope for this genre. According to her, the 'proofs of prophethood' genre showed similar characteristics across the three Abrahamic religions—Islam, Christianity and Judaism—especially in response to opposing religious traditions that rejected the necessity of prophets.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Richard Walzer, "Al-Fārābī's Theory of Prophecy and Divination," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 77, no. 1 (1957): 142–48, <https://doi.org/10.2307/628647>.

<sup>6</sup> Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam*, 188.

<sup>7</sup> Walzer, "Al-Fārābī's Theory of Prophecy and Divination," 148.

<sup>8</sup> Marieke Koertner, *Proving Prophecy: Dalā'il al-Nubuwwa Literature as Part of the Scholarly Discourse on Prophecy in Islam* (Brill, 2024), 3.

<sup>9</sup> Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam*, 214 ff.

Alongside the shared efforts among Muslim scholars to prove the necessity of prophets in religious life and to find common ground between the use of reason and the necessity of divine revelation (al-sam'), internal debates and polemics also emerged within the Muslim scholars concerning theories of prophethood. Muslim philosophers criticized the mutakallimūn for providing arguments that, in their view, lacked demonstrative rigor and failed to meet the standards of rational sciences.<sup>10</sup> Conversely, Kalām scholars criticized the rational theories of Muslim philosophers as inadequate in establishing the proofs of prophethood according to the true teachings of Islam. Al-Ghazālī, for example, considered the philosophical conceptions of prophethood, particularly those of Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, as inconsistent with the Qur'anic portrayal of prophethood.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Ibn Taymiyya criticized the philosophers' approach as well, arguing that their theories sought to define prophethood based on their own principles which he considered erroneous.<sup>12</sup>

In the history of Kalām, the Mu'tazilites are also known as a theological school which critically engaged with the theories of Muslim philosophers, including those of prophethood. However, this does not seem to have received significant attention. When explaining the theologians' critique of the philosophers' theories of prophethood, Fazlur Rahman did not mention any figures from the Mu'tazilites,<sup>13</sup> when in fact Ibn al-Malāḥimī, one such figure, authored *Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn fī al-Radd 'alā al-Falāsifa*, a treatise dedicated specifically to criticizing the thoughts of Muslim philosophers. This indicates that Mu'tazili rationalism was not merely a product of their interaction with philosophical literature but was instead rooted in their contemplation and interpretation of the Qur'an.<sup>14</sup> Mustafa Akyol argued that while the Mu'tazila were influenced by Greek philosophy, this influence was in terms of method and technique rather than substance or content. As a result, they identified themselves as mutakallimūn (theologians) rather than falāsifah (philosopher).<sup>15</sup>

Frank Griffel stated in his study that Ibn al-Malāḥimī wrote *Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn* within the framework of the Mu'tazilī school of thought, making the Muslim philosophers' thoughts were framed in opposition to Mu'tazilī doctrines. This approach differs from the strategy used by Al-Ghazālī in writing his *Taḥāfut al-Falāsifa* which focused exclusively on assessing the philosophers' arguments without explicitly

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<sup>10</sup> Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's Psychological Proof of Prophecy," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22, no. 1 (1963): 49–50, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/543930>.

<sup>11</sup> Michael E. Marmura, "Avicenna's Theory of Prophecy in the Light of Ash'arite Theology," in *The Seed of Wisdom: Essays in Honour of T. J. Meek*, ed. W. S. McCullough (University of Toronto Press, 1964), 178.

<sup>12</sup> Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam*, 192; Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (Routledge, 1959), 103.

<sup>13</sup> Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 92 ff.

<sup>14</sup> Ayub, "Mu'tazila in Western Scholarship: Their Origin, Originality, and Legacy," *Taqaddumi: Journal of Quran and Hadith Studies* 1, no. 2 (2021): 84–86, <https://doi.org/10.12928/taqaddumi.v1i2.4676>.

<sup>15</sup> Mustafa Akyol, *Reopening Muslim Minds: A Return to Reason, Freedom and Tolerance* (St Martin's Essentials, 2021), 35.

presenting the Ash'arite perspectives.<sup>16</sup> Thus, Ibn al-Malāḥimī's critique of the philosophers offers a different nuance compared to other schools of Kalām, particularly the Ash'arism.

A review of previous research suggests that Ibn al-Malāḥimī's critique can be placed within a broader intellectual context. Several researchers have explored the Mu'tazilite defense of the necessity of prophethood, as briefly discussed in the works of Sayyid 'Abd al-Sattār Mayhūb,<sup>17</sup> Maha El Kaisy-Firemuth,<sup>18</sup> and Jhasim & Aswad.<sup>19</sup> However, none of these studies specifically examine Ibn al-Malāḥimī's thoughts, especially as presented in his *Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn*. Additionally, existing researches on Ibn al-Malāḥimī, whether focusing on *Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn* or his other works, have not addressed the topic of prophethood in depth. This is evident in studies such as those by Farsani & Rezanía on Zoroastrianism in Ibn al-Malāḥimī's thoughts,<sup>20</sup> Heidrun Eichner on skepticism in Ibn al-Malāḥimī's works,<sup>21</sup> Ansari & Schmidtke on Ibn al-Malāḥimī's influence upon Ibn Sīnā's philosophical debate within Yemeni Zaydī theology.<sup>22</sup> Regarding *Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn* itself, some researchers have studied important aspects of the work,<sup>23</sup> including its differences with *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*,<sup>24</sup> its critique of philosophers' theory of the soul,<sup>25</sup> its analysis of God's omniscience,<sup>26</sup> and its discussion of *taklīf* (moral obligations).<sup>27</sup> However, no study has yet provided a specific discussion about prophethood in this work.

This paper will focus on Ibn al-Malāḥimī's critique of Muslim philosophers'

<sup>16</sup> Frank Griffel, "Theology Engages with Avicennan Philosophy: Al-Ghazālī's *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* and Ibn al-Malāḥimī's *Tuḥfat al-Mutakallimīn* Fī l-Radd 'alā l-Falāsifa," in *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Theology*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke (Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Sayyid 'Abd al-Sattār Mayhūb, *Al-Qur'ān Wa al-Nubuwwah 'Ind al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār* (Dār al-Hidāyah, 1996), 180–85.

<sup>18</sup> Maha Elkaisy-Firemuth, "The Human and the Prophet in Abd Al-Jabbār's Theology," in *Rationalität in Der Islamischen Theologie: Band I: Die Klassische Periode*, ed. Maha Elkaisy-Firemuth (De Gruyter, 2019), 226–41.

<sup>19</sup> Mohamed Saffah Jhasim and Nihad Humud Aswad, "Mawqif al-Mu'tazilah min al-Nubuwwah," *Arab Scientific Heritage Journal* 4, no. 4 (2015): 241–66, <https://www.iasj.net/iasj/article/110770>.

<sup>20</sup> Yoones Dehghani Farsani and Kianoosh Rezanía, "Ibn Al-Malāḥimī on Zoroastrianism," *Iranian Studies* 53, nos. 5–6 (2020): 703–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2020.1713058>.

<sup>21</sup> Heidrun Eichner, "Scepticisms in the Formation of Islamic Rational Theology: Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī and Ibn al-Malāḥimī Providing a Window on the Transmission of Arguments from Late Antiquity," *Theoria* 88, no. 1 (2021): 49–71, <https://doi.org/10.1111/theo.12322>.

<sup>22</sup> Hassan Ansari and Sabine Schmidtke, "Sixth/Twelfth-Century Zaydī Theologians of Yemen Debating Avicennan Philosophy," *Shii Studies Review* 5, nos. 1–2 (2021): 217–69, <https://doi.org/10.1163/24682470-12340068>.

<sup>23</sup> Wilferd Madelung, "Ibn Al-Malāḥimī's Refutation of the Philosophers," in *A Common Rationality: Mu'tazilism in Islam and Judaism*, ed. Camilia Adang et al. (Ergon, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Griffel, "Theology Engages with Avicennan Philosophy."

<sup>25</sup> Wilferd Madelung, "Ibn Al-Malāḥimī on the Human Soul," *The Muslim World* 102, nos. 3–4 (2012): 426–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.2012.01410.x>.

<sup>26</sup> Orhan Şener Koloğlu, "Ibn Al-Malāḥimī's Criticism of Philosophers' Views on God's Knowledge of Particulars," *Uludağ Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 27, no. 2 (2018): 47–65, <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/uluifd/issue/41319/499530>.

<sup>27</sup> Aulia Rakhmat, "Kritik Mu'tazilah Terhadap Sistem Filsafat Ibn Sina: Analisis Pemikiran Taklif Ibn al-Malahimi," *Living Islam: Journal of Islamic Discourses* 5, no. 1 (2022): 61–78, <https://doi.org/10.14421/lijid.v5i1.3495>.

theories of prophethood. In *Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn*, the topic of prophethood becomes a distinct chapter of discussion, even though the topic is deeply interconnected with other theological issues in *Mu'tazilī kalām* discourse, as noted by Wilferd Madelung and Aulia Rakhmat.<sup>28</sup> The method used in this study is content analysis, utilizing a library research approach. The primary source used is Ibn al-Malāḥimī's *Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn* itself, supplemented by his other works and other secondary sources.

## **B. Theoretical Framework**

### **Prophethood in Islamic Discourse**

According to Marieke Koertner, the works composed by the *mutakallimūn* on the proofs of prophethood can be classified into three approaches. The first consists of works that attempt to establish the truth of prophethood—particularly that of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)—through compilations of ḥadīth and other transmitted reports narrating the miracles performed by the prophets. Koertner refers to this approach as the ḥadīth-based *dalā'il al-nubuwwah*. The second approach relies on prophecies found in the scriptures preceding the Qur'an, especially the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, concerning the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, as claimed by the Qur'an itself. The third approach consists of theological discussions on the necessity of prophets in religious life and their essential nature.<sup>29</sup>

Ibn al-Malāḥimī's critique of the philosophers' theory of prophethood pertains primarily to this third approach. In his critique, he shows little interest in proving prophethood or refuting the philosophers on the basis of the first and second approaches. This is due to two reasons. First, the philosophers discussed prophethood within the framework of reconciling religious teachings with the rationalist tradition of Greek philosophy—in other words, between revelation and reason. Consequently, they did not relate prophethood to the Qur'anic claim that Muhammad's prophethood had already been foretold in earlier scriptures. Second, the main objection raised by the *mutakallimūn* against the philosophers' theory of prophethood revolved around the nature of prophethood itself and the character of the miracles performed by prophets. Muslim philosophers, especially Ibn Sīnā, argued that while miracles do serve as evidence of prophethood, the miraculous character of the prophets does not lie in extraordinary supernatural events they may perform, but rather in the exceptional qualities of their souls.

Moreover, Ibn al-Malāḥimī's critique in his *Tuḥfat al-Mutakallimīn* does not attempt to comprehensively engage with the philosophers' and the *Mu'tazilite* school's theories of prophethood, but instead focuses only on particular topics he deems necessary to critique. His objections center on the essence of prophethood and the proofs for it in the form of miracles. Since the theory of prophethood is closely connected with other topics—namely, the theory of the soul and the doctrine of *taklīf*

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<sup>28</sup> Madelung, "Ibn Al-Malāḥimī on the Human Soul," 432; Rakhmat, "Kritik Mu'tazilah Terhadap Sistem Filsafat Ibn Sina," 66.

<sup>29</sup> Koertner, *Proving Prophecy: Dalā'il al-Nubūwa Literature as Part of the Scholarly Discourse on Prophecy in Islam*, 3.

(moral responsibility)—this study will include these themes as integral to Ibn al-Malāḥimī's critique of the philosophers' theory of prophethood.

### **Mu'tazilism and Ibn al-Malāḥimī's Position**

A common misunderstanding in discussions of the Mu'tazilite school is the assumption that it represents a homogeneous theological tradition devoid of internal diversity. In reality, Mu'tazilism encompassed a wide range of intellectual variations, though all were nevertheless classified under the rubric of Mu'tazilite thought. This misconception largely stems from the perspective of their opponents, who tended to view sectarian identity as monolithic and therefore sought to minimize any acknowledgment of internal diversity.

Such a perspective, however, does not hold true for the Mu'tazilite tradition. Mu'tazilism was a fluid school characterized by a remarkable plurality of intellectual orientations. Even so, Mu'tazilites upheld certain doctrinal principles that, from their own perspective, were non-negotiable. These principles are known as the "Five Principles" (al-uṣūl al-khamsah): divine unity (al-tawḥīd), divine justice (al-'adl), the intermediate position (al-manzilah bayn al-manzilatayn), promise and threat (al-wa'd wa al-wa'id), and enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong (al-amr bi al-ma'rūf wa al-nahy 'an al-munkar). These five principles could, in fact, be reduced to two: divine unity and justice, with the remaining three subsumed under the principle of justice.

Opponents of the Mu'tazila, writing from the perspective of outsiders, often explained the school by dividing it into various sub-branches. Such representations are readily found in heresiographical works authored by figures such as Al-Baghdādī in *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*,<sup>30</sup> Al-Isfarāyīnī in *Al-Tabṣīr*,<sup>31</sup> Al-Shahrastānī in *Al-Milal wa al-Niḥal*,<sup>32</sup> and Al-Rāzī in *I'tiqādāt*.<sup>33</sup> This outsider perspective, however, requires comparison with insider accounts in order to achieve a more balanced degree of objectivity. Accordingly, what follows reflects the Mu'tazilites' own understanding of their internal divergences.

The Mu'tazilites themselves recognized a division of their school into two main branches: the Basran school (baṣriyyūn) and the Baghdadi school (baghdādiyyūn). While this classification is based nominally on geographical centers, it in fact reflects distinctive intellectual tendencies. Historically, many Basran Mu'tazilites pursued careers outside Basra—some even in Baghdad—indicating that the geographic designation was primarily nominal. The Basran school was characterized more by intellectual concerns than by political activism, and tended to be more orthodox than philosophical. By contrast, the Baghdadi school displayed a stronger political

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<sup>30</sup> 'Abd al-Qāhir Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq*, ed. 'Alī 'Abd al-Bāsiṭ Mazīd (Maktabah al-Īmān, 2015), 97–171.

<sup>31</sup> Abū al-Muzaffar Al-Isfarāyīnī, *Al-Tabṣīr Fī al-Dīn Wa Tamyīz Firaq al-Nājiyyah 'an al-Firaq al-Hālikah*, ed. Kamāl Yūsuf Al-Ḥūt ('Ālam al-Kutub, 1983), 67–87.

<sup>32</sup> Al-Shahrastānī, *Al-Milal Wa al-Niḥal*, 59–69.

<sup>33</sup> Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, *I'tiqādāt Firaq al-Muslimīn Wa al-Mushrikīn*, ed. 'Alī Sāmī Al-Nashshār (Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1982), 40–45.

orientation and exhibited a more philosophical cast in its thought.

Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd later divided each of these two schools into early (*qudamā'* or *al-mutaqaddimūn*) and later (*muta'akhhirūn*) phases, yielding four distinct groupings within Mu'tazilism. The early phase in both schools was marked by highly divergent and often contradictory views, with individual figures frequently holding positions that stood in sharp opposition to one another. This period stretched from the founding figures—Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' in Basra and Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir in Baghdad—through their immediate successors, such as Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf in Basra and Abū Ja'far al-Iskāfi in Baghdad. In contrast, the later phase of Mu'tazilism was characterized by increasing coherence and systematization, allowing it to be regarded as a more integrated “system of thought.” This phase began with Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī in Basra and Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāṭ in Baghdad.<sup>34</sup>

From the Mu'tazilite perspective, the history of their school could also be explained in terms of successive generations, known in classical literature as *ṭabaqāt*. Collections of these *ṭabaqāt*—some of which have survived—were compiled by Mu'tazilites themselves, beginning with Abū al-Qāsim al-Balkhī in his *Al-Maqālāt wa 'Uyūn al-Masā'il*. This initiative was continued by later figures, including Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār in *Faḍl al-'Iṭizāl*, al-Jushamī in his commentary on *'Uyūn al-Masā'il*, and Ibn al-Murtaḍā in *Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazilah*. In these works, Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' is credited with being the first to compose a systematic treatise in *kalām*,<sup>35</sup> and thus he is considered the founder of the Mu'tazilite school and even the pioneer of speculative theology itself.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, according to Mu'tazilite compilers of *ṭabaqāt*, the doctrines of divine justice and unity (*al-'adl wa al-tawḥīd*) had already existed long before his time, even dating back to the era of the Companions of the Prophet. On this basis, the earliest generation of Mu'tazilites was said to include the Companions, the second generation the Successors (*tābi'ūn*), and Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' was placed in the third generation.<sup>37</sup>

Ibn al-Malāḥimī was a Mu'tazilite thinker who lived during the first half of the sixth/twelfth century and resided in Khwārazm, south of the Aral Sea, in a region corresponding today to parts of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Geographically, this was far removed from the earlier Mu'tazilite centers of Basra, Baghdad, and Ray. Yet by the time of Ibn al-Malāḥimī, Khwārazm had become a major center for Mu'tazilite thought. The form of Mu'tazilism that flourished there was that of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī (d. 426/1044), known for its strong philosophical orientation. Abū al-Ḥusayn, a

<sup>34</sup> Daniel Gimaret, “Mu'tazila,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam New Edition* (Brill, 1993), 7:784–85.

<sup>35</sup> Abū al-Qāsim 'Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad Al-Balkhī, *Kitāb Al-Maqālāt Wa Ma'ahū 'Uyūn al-Masā'il Wa al-Jawābāt*, ed. Ḥusayn Khānshū et al. (Kuramer, 2018), 159; Abū al-Qāsim 'Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad Al-Balkhī, “Dhikr Al-Mu'tazilah Min Kitāb al-Maqālāt,” in *Faḍl Al-'Iṭizāl Wa Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazilah*, by Abū al-Qāsim 'Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad Al-Balkhī et al., ed. Fu'ād Sayyid (Dār al-Fārābī, 2017), 5.

<sup>36</sup> Abū Hilāl Al-'Askarī, *Al-Awā'il*, ed. Muḥammad al-Sayyid Al-Wakīl (Dār al-Bashīr, 1987), 374.

<sup>37</sup> Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, “Faḍl Al-'Iṭizāl Wa Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazilah Wa Mubāyanatuhum Li Sā'ir al-Mukhālifīn,” in *Faḍl Al-'Iṭizāl Wa Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazilah*, by Abū al-Qāsim 'Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad Al-Balkhī et al. (Dār al-Fārābī, 2017), 202; Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *Kitāb Ṭabaqāt Al-Mu'tazilah*, ed. Susanna Diwald-Wilzer (Maktabah al-Ḥayāh, 1961), 28.

student of al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, pursued his career in Baghdad until his death. He was widely recognized as a Mu'tazilite who had undergone intensive training in philosophy, thereby achieving a degree of independence in his thought and developing positions distinct from those of his teacher. According to Al-Ḥākim al-Jushamī, Abū al-Ḥusayn was avoided by his Mu'tazilite contemporaries for two reasons: first, his deep engagement with Greek philosophy, and second, his rejection of the established views of earlier Mu'tazilite authorities (al-mashāyikh).<sup>38</sup>

The precise manner in which Abū al-Ḥusayn's doctrines spread from Baghdad to Khwārazm remains unclear. Some scholars suggest that they were transmitted by his student Abū Muḍar Maḥmūd ibn Jarīr al-Ḍabbī al-Iṣfahānī (d. 508/1115). Ibn al-Malāḥimī may have studied directly under al-Ḍabbī, or perhaps under one of his students. The discovery of Ibn al-Malāḥimī's works lends further confirmation to the statement of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, who observed in his *I'tiqādāt Firaq al-Muslimīn wa al-Mushrikīn* that the forms of Mu'tazilism still extant in his time were those of Abū Hāshim al-Jubbā'ī and Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī.<sup>39</sup>

### C. Method

This study employs a qualitative library research design, relying exclusively on document analysis rather than fieldwork such as interviews or observation. As Merriam and Tisdell note, qualitative inquiry is best understood through its defining characteristics: an emphasis on meaning from the participants' perspective, the researcher's role as the primary instrument, inductive reasoning, and the production of rich descriptions.<sup>40</sup> The data sources consist of primary texts—particularly Ibn al-Malāḥimī's *Tuḥfat al-Mutakallimīn*, *Kitāb al-Fā'iq*, and *Al-Mu'tamad fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*—and secondary materials, including Mu'tazilite works, philosophical writings (notably those of Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā), and modern scholarly studies. Data collection is conducted through systematic document review, while analysis follows Miles and Huberman's interactive model of qualitative analysis, involving data reduction, presentation, and verification in a cyclical process.<sup>41</sup> To ensure validity, the research adopts triangulation of documentary sources,<sup>42</sup> reflexivity concerning the researcher's theological standpoint as an Ash'arī scholar studying Mu'tazilism,<sup>43</sup> and peer review by academic colleagues.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Al-Ḥākim Al-Jishumī, "Al-Ṭabaqātān al-Ḥādīyah 'Ashrah Wa al-Thānīyah 'Ashrah Min Kitāb Sharḥ 'Uyūn al-Masā'il," in *Faḍl Al-I'tizāl Wa Ṭabaqāt al-Mu'tazilah*, by Abū al-Qāsim 'Abdullāh ibn Aḥmad Al-Balkhī et al. (Dār al-Fārābī, 2017), 402.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Rāzī, *I'tiqādāt Firaq al-Muslimīn*, 45.

<sup>40</sup> Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (A Willey Brand, 2016), 15–18.

<sup>41</sup> Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, 2nd ed. (Sage Publications, 1994), 10–12.

<sup>42</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 244; Uwe Flick, *Managing Quality in Qualitative Research* (Sage Publications, 2007), 40.

<sup>43</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 249.

<sup>44</sup> Merriam and Tisdell, *Qualitative Research*, 249–50.

## **D. Results and Discussion**

### **The life of Ibn al-Malāḥimī dan His Works**

His full name is Maḥmūd ibn Muḥammad al-Malāḥimī al-Khwārizmī. He was given the honorary title Rukn al-Dīn (pillar of the religion). His name indicates his association with Khwārizm, his place of origin. Little is known about his personal history, except that he passed away in 536 AH/1141 CE. One report states that Al-Zamakhsharī, the renowned author of the well-known tafsir Al-Kashshāf, studied under him in Khwārizm.

In the field of Mu'tazilī theology, Ibn al-Malāḥimī adhered to the views of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, a disciple of Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār. This is evident in his recently discovered works. According to Wilferd Madelung, the teachings of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī reached Khwārizm through Abū Muḍar Maḥmūd ibn Jarīr al-Ḍabbī al-Iṣfahānī (d. 508 AH/1115 CE), who introduced them during his visit to the region. While Ibn al-Malāḥimī was already an established teacher of Mu'tazilī theology, he also studied under this scholar. According to Madelung's study, despite being overlooked in broader historical narrative, Mu'tazilism continued to survive in Khwārizm for three centuries after Ibn al-Malāḥimī's life.

Regarding his works, some of them have been successfully discovered and published in a modern way, while others remain lost. These works are:

1. Al-Mu'tamad fī uṣūl al-dīn (The reliable source on the principles of religion). As its title suggests, this work is a theological treatise based on the doctrines of Mu'tazila, especially the teachings of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī. A manuscript of this book was discovered in Sana'a, Yemen, and later copied with a microfilm version preserved at Dār al-Kutub in Egypt. Based on this manuscript, Martin McDermott and Wilferd Madelung edited and published the text through Al-Hudā publisher, London, in 1991.
2. Al-Fā'iḳ fī Uṣūl al-Dīn (The superior work on the principles of religion). This book was edited by Faiṣal Badīr 'Awn based on two manuscripts preserved in Maktaba al-Jamī' al-Kabīr Sana'a, Yemen. It was subsequently published in 2010 at Dār al-Kutub wa al-Wathā'iq al-Qawmiyya, Cairo.
3. Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn fī al-Radd 'alā al-Falāsifa (A gift to theologians in refuting the philosophers). As indicated in its title, this work is dedicated to refute Muslim philosophers' views considered incompatible with Islamic theology. Interestingly, its criticisms represent Mu'tazilī point of view, distinguishing it from other theological refutations based on Ash'arī doctrines, such as Tahāfut al-Falāsifa by Abū ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and Muṣādama al-Falāsifa by al-Shahrastānī. Using a manuscript preserved at Riḍawiyya Shrine Library in Meshhed, Hassan Ansari and Wilferd Madelung succeeded in producing a modern critical edition, which was published in 2008 by the Iranian Institute of Philosophy and the Institute of Islamic Studies at Freie Universität Berlin. Several academic studies have examined this

- work, including analyses by Wilferd Madelung,<sup>45</sup> Frank Griffel,<sup>46</sup> and Aulia Rakhmat.<sup>47</sup>
4. Kitāb al-Ḥudūd (The book of limits). This work is considered lost and no known manuscript has been found.
  5. Jawāb al-Masā'il al-Aṣfihāniyya (Responses to the questions from Isfahān). This work is also considered lost and no manuscript has been found.
  6. Kitāb al-Tajrīd (The book of abstraction). This work deals with the principles of fiqh and serves as an abridged version of Al-Mu'tamad by Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī. It is likewise considered lost with no known manuscript available.

### **The Background of Ibn al-Malāḥimī's Critique of Muslim Philosophers' Thoughts**

Ibn al-Malāḥimī openly criticized Muslim philosophers on various topics, including the theory of prophethood and broader issues in Islamic theology ('ilm al-kalām). In particular, he authored a work dedicated to these critiques, titled Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn fī al-Radd 'alā al-Falāsifa. Here he included a specific section, titled bāb al-kalām fī al-nubuwwa (a chapter on discussion about prophethood), addressing his objections to philosophical conceptions of prophethood. Additionally, in another of his works, Al-Fā'iḳ fī Uṣūl al-Dīn, he briefly touched upon these criticisms in the context of Mu'tazilī perspectives on prophethood.

In his introduction to Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn, Ibn al-Malāḥimī stated that no systematic critique had previously been undertaken by any scholar of Islamic theology (aḥad min mutakallimī al-Islām) against the ideas of later Muslim philosophers (al-falāsifa al-muta'akhhirīn).<sup>48</sup> This claim might be valid if he was specifically referring to early Mu'tazilites.<sup>49</sup> Historical reports indicate that early Mu'tazilī scholars had engaged with and debated philosophers. For instance, it is reported that Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf and his disciple, Abū Sayyār al-Nazzām, studied philosophical texts and formulated criticism of them.<sup>50</sup> Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir, known as the founder of Baghdad school of Mu'tazila, is also reported to have written a treatise titled Al-Radd 'alā al-Falāsifa (a refutation to philosophers).<sup>51</sup> Thus, Mu'tazilī critiques of philosophy were not unprecedented. However, the aforementioned claim by Ibn al-Malāḥimī could be interpreted to mean that previous critiques were not systematically developed and only covered limited themes. His Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn may therefore represent the first comprehensive and systematic critique of Muslim philosophers' thoughts from a Mu'tazilī perspective.

Furthermore, Islamic theological critiques of philosophers in broader context were also not unprecedented. Within the Ash'arī school, systematic criticisms of Muslim philosophers' thoughts had already emerged before Ibn al-Malāḥimī's time. Approximately 50 years before him, Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī had written Tahāfut al-

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<sup>45</sup> Madelung, "Ibn Al-Malāḥimī's Refutation."

<sup>46</sup> Griffel, "Theology Engages with Avicennan Philosophy."

<sup>47</sup> Rakhmat, "Kritik Mu'tazilah Terhadap Sistem Filsafat Ibn Sina."

<sup>48</sup> Rukn al-Dīn Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn Fī al-Radd 'alā al-Falāsifah*, ed. Sabine Schmidtke and Wilferd Madelung (Iranian Institute of Philosophy & Institute of Islamic Studies Freie University of Berlin, 2008), 4.

<sup>49</sup> Cf Koloğlu, "Ibn Al-Malāḥimī's Criticism of Philosophers' Views," 49.

<sup>50</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār, "Faḍl Al-'Iṭizāl," 242–43.

<sup>51</sup> 'Abd al-Sattār 'Izz al-Dīn Al-Rāwī, *Thawrah Al-'Aql: Dirāsah Falsafiyah Fī Fikr Mu'tazilah Baghdad* (Dār al-Shu'ūn al-Thaqafiyah al-'Āmmah, 1987), 111.

Falāsifa, in which he similarly complained the absence of a solid and systematic refutation of Muslim philosophers' ideas.<sup>52</sup> There is no adequate evidence to determine whether Ibn al-Malāḥimī had read Al-Ghazālī's critiques, either directly or through secondary sources. Two editors of *Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn*, Hassan Ansari and Wilferd Madelung, repeatedly compared several passages from the text with those found in Al-Ghazālī's *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifa*, but this cannot yet be definitive proof that Ibn al-Malāḥimī had studied Al-Ghazālī's works.

After stating that no previous Kalām scholar had produced a comprehensive critique of Muslim philosophers, Ibn al-Malāḥimī added another rationale for composing his *Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn*. He argued that Muslim philosophers had "interpreted Islam according to the method of the classical philosophers" (*takhrīj al-Islām 'alā ṭarā'iq al-falāsifa al-mutaqaddimīn*),<sup>53</sup> a practice he considered unacceptable as they had "not reached the truth in any measure, whether small or great" (*lam yuṣībū al-ḥaqq fī qalīl wa lā kathīr*). Additionally, he criticized jurists (*mutafaqqih*) who adopted philosophers' views and incorporated them into various Islamic sciences, including *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) and *uṣūl fiqh* (Islamic legal theory). According to Ibn al-Malāḥimī, this approach is unjustifiable; Islamic jurisprudence should be based solely on Islamic legal theory, while Islamic legal theory should be grounded in *uṣūl al-Islām* (the principles of Islam), which he identified with Kalām.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, Ibn al-Malāḥimī viewed this practice as dangerous, as it led to the common people to mistakenly believe that these philosophical interpretations represented authentic Islamic teachings, despite it was not taught by the prophets at all.<sup>55</sup>

By *uṣūl al-Islām*, Ibn al-Malāḥimī referred specifically to Kalām according to the Mu'tazilī school. In a matter of fact, he often presented Muslim philosophers' ideas in his *Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn* as opposition to those *al-muslimūn* (Muslims), but this latter term appears to refer specifically to the Mu'tazila. Therefore, readers need to exercise caution when encountering statements such as "the Muslims say..." (*al-muslimūn qālū*), as in certain context, Ibn al-Malāḥimī may actually be explaining Mu'tazilī theological positions.

### E. Ibn al-Malāḥimī's Critique of the Philosophers' Theory of Prophethood

Ibn al-Malāḥimī's critique of the philosophers' theory of prophethood revolves around two main topics: the necessity of prophethood and the criteria for verifying the truth of an individual who claims to be a prophet (proof of prophethood). However, his critique of prophethood also has implication for two additional topics, namely the theory of the soul and the theory of moral obligation (*taklīf*). Consequently, Ibn al-Malāḥimī's criticism of the Muslim philosophers' theory of prophethood ultimately encompass three interconnected topics.

According to Ibn al-Malāḥimī, these three topics must be critically examined because they are all rooted in the philosophers' attempts to interpret Islam through the principles of Greek philosophy, leading them to "fail in reaching the truth, whether in small or great amount" (*lam yuṣībū al-ḥaqq fī qalīl wa la kathīr*). In his view, a similar approach was undertaken by Christians, which resulted in their adoption of the

<sup>52</sup> Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Munqiz Min al-Dalāl Wa al-Mufsiḥ Bi al-Aḥwāl* (Dār al-Minhāj, 2015), 61–62.

<sup>53</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 3–4.

<sup>54</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 3.

<sup>55</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 8.

doctrine of the Trinity (al-aqānīm al-thalātha), the incarnation (al-itthihād) and the deification of Jesus (ṣayrūrah 'Īsā ilahan ba'da an kāna insānan).<sup>56</sup>

The foundation of the Muslim philosophers' perspective on prophethood lies in their conception of God. For them, God is the Necessary Cause ('illa mūjiba) and the Cause of all causes ('illa al-'ilal).<sup>57</sup> This means that God's Essence necessitates His actions, rendering their effects coexistent with His Essence.<sup>58</sup> This view, in turn, leads the philosophers' controversial claim that the universe is eternal. This stands in contrast to that of Muslim theologians who assert that God is the Omnipotent (al-qādir) and the Sovereign Will (al-mukhtār).<sup>59</sup> According to Ibn al-Malāḥimī, the philosophers' conception of God inevitably leads them to endorse a deterministic worldview, including a deterministic understanding of human action. As a consequence, they would not be able to develop a proper understanding of taklīf-'aqlī (rational obligation) and prophethood. In his view, the philosophers deny human free will in a its genuine meaning, restrict their discussions to taklīf-shar'ī (moral obligation within religious law) while ignoring taklīf-'aqlī, and ultimately reduce the function of prophethood to merely worldly welfare.<sup>60</sup>

### The Necessity of Prophethood

Prophets were sent to guide humanity toward their well-being. This guidance is manifested in the form of divine law (ḥukm shar'ī),<sup>61</sup> which is essential for human being due to their inherently social nature. Due to their social nature, humans cannot fulfill their needs independently but rely on cooperation with others. Social life, in turn, requires a mutually agreed-upon and just system of regulations that all members of society adhere to. Consequently, there must be an individual responsible for organizing communal life through a legal framework. This individual must be just and wise. Through such a system of law, both virtuous and wrongful actions are met with appropriate recompense, whether in this world or the hereafter. The one who conveys these divine regulations is a prophet who receives a mandate from God through revelation.<sup>62</sup>

Thus, the primary focus here is not merely on defining a prophet but rather on the necessity of sending prophets and the special abilities they possess as the bearer of God's mandate. According to Muslim philosophers, prophets were sent to establish and implement divine laws in order to create a just society and avoid oppression.<sup>63</sup> In the conception of Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, prophets played the role of a 'philosopher-king,' as it is only through such role that the proper governance of society or nation can be realized.<sup>64</sup>

Ibn al-Malāḥimī criticized this view. He repeatedly stated that such a view

<sup>56</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 9.

<sup>58</sup> Rukn al-Dīn Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Kitāb Al-Fā'iḳ Fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Fayṣal Badīr 'Awn (Dār al-Kutub wa al-Wathā'iḳ al-Qawmiyyah, 2010), 593.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 9.

<sup>60</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 137.

<sup>61</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 147.

<sup>62</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 137; bandingkan Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 52–53; Shams al-Dīn Al-Samarqandī, *Bishārāt Al-Ishārāt Fī Sharḥ al-Ishārāt Wa al-Tanbīhāt Li al-Shaykh al-Ra'īs Abī 'Alī Ḥusayn Ibn 'Abd Allāh Ibn Sīnā* (Mīrāth Maktūb, 2020), 2:394.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 5.

<sup>64</sup> Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 55–58.

implies that the prophets were sent solely for the benefit of humanity in the world. This, he argues, is contrary to the view of Muslims that prophets were sent not only for the benefit of humanity in this world but also for their ultimate salvation in the hereafter.

هذا ما حكاه عنه عبارته، وهذا تصريح كما ترى في أن الشرع والنبي إنما أريدا لإصلاح دنيا هذا النوع الإنساني، لا أن النبي والشرع مراد لما يقوله المسلمون من أنه يراد النبي ليعرف مصالح الدين، والشرعيات ألطاف في التكليف العقلي، فيبين بذلك أنهم موافقون للمسلمين في القول بأصول الإسلام، ثم يخرجونها على آرائهم.

This is what has been conveyed about him (Ibn Sīnā) in his own words, and as you can see, it is an explicit statement that divine law (sharī'a) and the prophet were intended solely for the benefit of the worldly affairs of humankind. It does not align with what Muslims assert—that the prophet is sent to impart knowledge of religious benefits and that divine laws serve as means of facilitating rational obligation (taklīf 'aqlī). This demonstrates that they agree with Muslims on the fundamental principles of Islam, but they ultimately interpret these principles according to their own philosophical views.<sup>65</sup>

Regarding the nature of prophethood, Ibn al-Malāḥimī began his critique of the philosophers by presenting their views. According to Muslim philosophers, a prophet is an individual entrusted by God with the mandate to preach and teach divine law (sharī'a) to others. This individual possesses certain psychological characteristics, namely having a soul that is superior to those of other human being, enabling him to receive divine revelation (al-ilhām al-ilāhī) from God.<sup>66</sup> The notion that prophets possess an exceptional soul is a hallmark of Muslim philosophers' attempt to explain the nature of prophethood philosophically. They argue that prophets have extraordinary intellectual capacities, allowing them to acquire knowledge without the need for conventional learning processes. This is because a prophet's intellect can access the Active Intellect (al-'aql al-fa'āl) directly, without any intermediary. This, according to Al-Fārābī—and with some modifications, according to Ibn Sīnā—is the process through which revelation occurs.<sup>67</sup>

It was at this point that Ibn al-Malāḥimī launched his critique of the philosophers' understanding of the nature of prophethood. To begin his argument, Ibn al-Malāḥimī questioned the rationale behind their position. Muslim philosophers claimed that human souls are inherently unprepared to receive divine revelation directly from God. Consequently, they argue, sending of prophets is the only means through which humans can attain guidance for their goodness in this world. Ibn al-Malāḥimī rejected this view on two grounds. First, he contended that the philosophers' position implies that prophethood and the divine law are merely coincidental occurrences (umūr ittifaqiyya). This implication came from their view that it is impossible for God to create all humans with an internal capacity to receive revelation, given that human nature is as it currently exists.<sup>68</sup> Second, the philosophers' view on the necessity of prophethood contradicts their own claim that God does not possess

<sup>65</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuhfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 138.

<sup>66</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuhfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 5.

<sup>67</sup> Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam*, 30–31.

<sup>68</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuhfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 147–48.

knowledge of particulars (al-juz'īyyāt), because His Knowledge of humanity's need for prophetic guidance itself is a particular matter, making their position inconsistent.<sup>69</sup>

### Proof of Prophethood and Miracles

Regarding the proof of prophethood, Ibn al-Malāḥimī presented Muslim philosophers' views which he considered as incompatible to the position held by the broader Muslim community. While Muslims generally assert that the proof of prophethood lies in miracles that God makes manifest through the prophets, Muslim philosophers contend that the true proof of prophethood is the conformity of a prophet's teachings with the well-being (maṣlaḥa) of humanity.<sup>70</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī said:

واعلم أنهم خالفوا المسلمين في هذا الأصل، وهو أنهم لا يقولون: لا طريق إلى معرفة صدق المدعي للنبوّة إلا ظهور المعجز عليه، وهم ذكروا [...] أن الطريق إلى معرفة صدقه هو أن يُعلم أن ما أتى به هو مطابق لما يصلحون به، ولأغراضهم التي بسببها يحتاجون إلى النبي، ولم يشترطوا في هذه الجملة ظهور معجز عليه [...] ومن قال بهذا قال: إن العلم بمطابقة المعجز من طريقة العوام والمتكلمين، أما العلم بمطابقة شرع للمصالح فهو طريقة المحققين.

Know that they (the philosophers) deviate from the Muslims' position on this fundamental matter. Muslims hold that there is no way to verify the truthfulness of someone who claims prophethood except through the manifestation of miracles. However, the philosophers argue that the means of verifying a prophet's truthfulness is his ability to demonstrate that what he brings aligns with what benefits humanity and serves the purposes for which they require a prophet. They do not consider the occurrence of miracles to be a necessary condition in this regard. [...] Those who uphold this view claim that knowledge of the correspondence between miracles and truth is the method of common people and theologians (al-mutakallimūn), whereas knowledge of the correspondence between divine law and human well-being is the method of true scholars (al-muḥaqqiqūn).<sup>71</sup>

According to Ibn al-Malāḥimī, Muslim philosophers are divided into two perspectives regarding miracles. First, some philosophers did not consider miracles as proof of prophethood at all, as indicated in the previously cited passage. Second, other philosophers acknowledged miracles as evidence of prophethood but posited them a lower status than the alignment of prophetic teachings with worldly human well-being. They argued that miracles can still be doubted as acts of magic or the use of talismans (ṭalism). According to this latter view, miracles in the form of extraordinary events, such as turning a staff into a serpent or splitting of the moon, could be used by the prophets as supporting evidence for their prophetic claims. However, these miracles are considered effective only for the common people who may struggle to grasp the rational alignment of prophetic teachings with human well-being. In contrast, philosophers, who are well-trained in various sciences, may perceive such extraordinary events as mere illusions or tricks of magic.<sup>72</sup>

Ibn al-Malāḥimī rejected this view by criticizing the philosophers' claim that they could grasp the alignment of prophetic teachings with human well-being through

<sup>69</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 148.

<sup>70</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Kitāb Al-Fā'iqa*, 361.

<sup>71</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 150.

<sup>72</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 150.

reason alone. He argued that this is impossible, as the benefits of religious obligations such as prayer (ṣalāh), fasting (ṣawm), or pilgrimage (ḥajj) cannot be fully understood by reason alone. Knowledge of such teachings is accessible only through the help of revelation, which necessarily implies for proof of prophethood beyond the mere alignment of those teachings with human well-being. Therefore, the proof of prophethood lies only in miracles.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, Muslim philosophers tried to explain miracles rationally by asserting that the souls of prophets possess the ability to influence the external world beyond their physical bodies. However, Ibn al-Malāḥimī used this view as a weapon against philosophers regarding their skepticism that miracles are definitive proof of prophethood.

وأيضاً، فإنكم تقولون: إن حقيقة المعجزة هو أن تؤثر نفس النبي في هوى العالم، فيغير صورة بعض أجزائه إلى صورة أخرى، بخلاف تأثيرات سائر النفوس. فإذا كان هذا هو المعجز عندكم لزم أن يكون العلم به يقيناً، وأن يعلم أن صاحب ذلك النفس هو نبي. فيبطل قولكم أن العلم بالمعجزة غير يقيني.

Moreover, you claim that the essence of a miracle (mu'jiza) lies in the ability of the prophet's soul to exert influence over the hyle (prime matter) of the world, transforming the form of certain elements into another, in a manner distinct from the effects produced by other souls. If this is indeed what constitutes a miracle according to you, then knowledge of it must necessarily be certain, and it must be known with certainty that the one possessing such a soul is a prophet. This invalidates your assertion that knowledge of miracles is not definitive.<sup>74</sup>

Quoting the philosophers, Ibn al-Malāḥimī noted that what is referred to as a miracle is, in essence, a unique quality inherent in prophets, distinguishing them from ordinary humans in general. Extraordinary nature of this personal quality is measured by three criteria. First, prophets possess a special faculty (quwwa) within their souls that enables them to influence the material world by altering its forms—removing one form one form and replacing it with another. For example, their ability to affect the air, making it impossible for a storm to occur or, conversely, bringing forth rain as needed for istisqā' (prayer for rain). Second, they have an exceptionally pure and refined rational faculty (al-quwwa al-naẓariyya), which allows them to acquire knowledge that is otherwise impossible for others to obtain without similar conditions and readiness. Third, their imaginative faculty (al-quwwa al-mutakhayyila) is extraordinarily strong, enabling them to access the unseen realm (al-ghawā'ib) in forms of incomparable beauty. This faculty also enable them to perceive, in a conscious and wakeful state, what others can only witness in dreams, such as encountering and conversing with angels.<sup>75</sup> Al-Ghazālī, in his *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, acknowledged these three criteria as prophetic miracles recognized by his theological school, although he did not limit miracles to these three things alone.<sup>76</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī further argued that the philosophers' view is rooted in their broader understanding of human soul—an

<sup>73</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 150–51; Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Kitāb Al-Fā'iḳ*, 363–64.

<sup>74</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 153.

<sup>75</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 153–54.

<sup>76</sup> Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut Al-Falāsifah*, 3rd ed., ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1957), 236–38; Abū Ḥāmid Al-Ghazālī, *Maqāṣid Al-Falāsifah*, ed. Mahmoud Piegeot (Maṭba'ah al-Ṣabāḥ, 2000), 221–22.

understanding that is unique to Muslim philosophers (al-muta'akhhirīn).<sup>77</sup> This is the reason why he criticized their theory of the soul.

### The Theory of the Soul and Free Will

According to Ibn al-Malāḥimī, as expressed in his discussion on taklīf, the philosophers have fallen into a fatalistic world view, thereby denying the true existence of human free will. This view is rooted in their view of the human soul and their theory of causality that encompasses all things.<sup>78</sup>

With regard to the theory of causality, Ibn al-Malāḥimī criticized the philosophers' perspective in two ways. First, he rejected their naturalistic understanding of causation. For Ibn al-Malāḥimī, causality may take the form of either a necessary, non-personal entity (amr mūjib) or a personal entity endowed with power (qudra) and choice (ikhtiyār).<sup>79</sup> With this distinction, Ibn al-Malāḥimī tried to incorporate human free will within the framework of causation and thus refute the fatalistic stance of the philosophers. Second, Ibn al-Malāḥimī challenged the philosophers' view that the human soul exists as a separate entity from the body and that the body is merely an instrument controlled by the soul. If the body is merely a tool for the soul, Ibn al-Malāḥimī argued, then it could not be considered as a true agent (al-fā'il), and as a result, its actions would not be subject to moral evaluation as good or evil. However, in Islamic teachings, moral judgments regarding human actions frequently pertain to physical actions. Thus, the correct view, according to Ibn al-Malāḥimī, is that the soul and body are inseparable. Both mental and physical actions can be evaluated as good or bad.<sup>80</sup>

To support this position, Ibn al-Malāḥimī cited the statement of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, who asserted that the human agent is the totality of its being (hādhihi al-jumla), rather than something residing within or external to her/him.<sup>81</sup> This means that the entity referred to as the agent is living, rational, and capable being (al-ḥayy al-'āqil al-qādir). Such a being is the one who can be described as obedient or disobedient (al-muṭī' wa al-'āṣī).<sup>82</sup> In addition to adopting the view of Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Baṣrī, Ibn al-Malāḥimī seems to extend the ideas of Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, who argued that the essence of human being consists of "the physical totality (al-jumla) that we perceive, rather than something external to or residing within the body."<sup>83</sup>

In reality, the Mu'tazilites themselves held differing views on the nature of human. The view adopted by Ibn al-Malāḥimī and 'Abd al-Jabbār, as mentioned above, was first introduced by Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Allāf. However, other Mu'tazilite figures, such as Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām and 'Alī al-Uswārī, put forth a different view, arguing that the essence of human being is the soul that resides in a body. Meanwhile, other figures such as Bishr ibn al-Mu'tamir, Abū al-Ḥusayn al-Khayyāt, and Al-Najjār held that human

<sup>77</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 154.

<sup>78</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 144–45.

<sup>79</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 145.

<sup>80</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 157–58.

<sup>81</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 158.

<sup>82</sup> Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *Tuḥfah Al-Mutakallimīn*, 158.

<sup>83</sup> Abū Muḥammad Ibn Mattawayh, *Al-Majmū' Fī al-Muḥīṭ Bi al-Taklīf*, ed. Josef J. Houben s.j. and Daniel Gimaret, II (Dar el-Machreq, 1980), 241.

nature consists of both the soul and the body in combination.<sup>84</sup>

Abū al-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf’s view seems to have become the dominant position among later Mu‘tazilites. Abu Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī, for instance, reportedly argued against the notion that the soul resides within the body on the grounds that its location cannot be detected or perceived by any means. He illustrated this point by analogy: just as a person inside a house or a body within a shirt can have their location being certainly identified, so too should the soul be locatable within the body if it truly resided there. Since no means exist to determine the precise location of the soul within the body, this theory is logically unacceptable.<sup>85</sup> This view was maintained and its arguments were further developed by Abu Hāshim al-Jubbā’ī’s followers, continuing into the time of Ibn al-Malāḥimī.

The critique advanced by Ibn al-Malāḥimī and certain other Mu‘tazilites<sup>86</sup> regarding the relationship between the soul and the body is quite similar to Gilbert Ryle’s critique of Cartesian dualism. According to Renè Descartes, the soul and the body are two distinct entities that exist in a control-based relationship. However, Gilbert Ryle contended that such dualism arises from a fundamental error in reasoning which that he called as ‘category mistake’. In his book, *The Concept of Mind*, Gilbert Ryle ridiculed the Cartesian dualistic idea as ‘the ghost in the machine’.<sup>87</sup>

The Mu‘tazilites rejected dualism—the strict distinction between the soul and the body—because they believed that this view ultimately implies fatalism and the negation of human free will. If humans lack free will, then prophethood and religious law would become meaningless. This, in turn, would contradict the Mu‘tazilite doctrine of divine justice, for they maintained that God’s justice necessitates wisdom and purpose in all His actions.

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<sup>84</sup> Al-Balkhī, *Kitāb Al-Maqālāt*, 461–63; Al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī Fī Abwāb al-Tawḥīd Wa al-‘Adl: Al-Taklīf*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Alī Al-Najjār and ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm Al-Najjār, XI (Al-Dār al-Miṣriyyah li al-Ta’līf wa al-Tarjamah, 1961), 310–11.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār, *Al-Mughnī: Al-Taklīf*, XI, 315; ff Maha Elkaisy-Friemuth, *God and Humans in Islamic Thought: ‘Abd al-Jabbār, Ibn Sīnā and Al-Ghazālī* (Routledge, 2006), 53.

<sup>86</sup> Mengenai keserupaan pandangan ‘Abd al-Jabbār dengan Ibn al-Malāḥimī serta variasi pandangan kaum Mu‘tazilah tentang hal ini, lihat ‘Abd al-Karīm ‘Uthmān, *Naẓariyyah Al-Taklīf: Ārā’ al-Qāḍī ‘Abd al-Jabbār al-Kalāmiyyah* (Mu’assasah al-Risālah, 1971), 309–16.

<sup>87</sup> Muhammad Hilal, “Filsafat Bahasa Biasa Gilbert Ryle dan Relevansinya dengan Konsep Pendidikan Karakter di Indonesia,” *Jurnal Filsafat* 29, no. 2 (2019): 209, <https://doi.org/10.22146/jf.44313>.

## Conclusion

This study has examined Ibn al-Malāḥimī's critique of Muslim philosophers' theories on prophethood, highlighting his unique Mu'tazilite perspective. His objections focus on three key areas: (1) the nature and necessity of prophethood, (2) the role of prophets beyond mere worldly benefits, (3) the philosophers' conception of the soul and their deterministic worldview, which he argues undermines human free will. Through his work *Tuḥfa al-Mutakallimīn fī al-Radd 'alā al-Falāsifa*, Ibn al-Malāḥimī offers a systematic refutation of philosophical interpretations of prophecy, distinguishing his arguments from both Ash'arite and earlier Mu'tazilite critiques. By analyzing his critique, this paper contributes to a broader understanding of the intellectual tensions between Kalām theology and Islamic philosophy. Unlike philosophers such as Al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, who framed prophecy within a rationalist framework tied to the Active Intellect, Ibn al-Malāḥimī insists that prophethood is essential for both rational and religious guidance, with miracles serving as its primary proof. His opposition to the philosophers' deterministic outlook also reinforces the central Mu'tazilite doctrine of divine justice and human responsibility.

Future research could further explore how his critiques influenced later theological developments, particularly within the Zaydī and post-classical Mu'tazilite traditions. Additionally, a comparative study of his arguments alongside Ash'arite critiques, such as those of Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyya, could deepen our understanding of the broader intra-Islamic debate on the nature of prophecy. Ultimately, Ibn al-Malāḥimī's work serves as a critical bridge between Kalām theology and the ongoing discourse on reason, revelation, and human agency in Islam.

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