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Reason and Revelation in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and the Ash‘arī Tradition

Introduction

What is the relation of reason to revelation? How do rational truths relate to truths in scripture? Does the Quran assert theological truths (“God exists”) in the same manner as it prescribes legal commands (“wine is forbidden”)? How do the *texts* of the Quran and Sunna convey such truths? This article reconsiders the status of reason and revelation in the Ash‘arī-Sunnī tradition, the prevailing school of theology in the premodern Islamic world.¹ The analysis focuses on what I term the “Ash‘arī theory of evidence” (*dalīl*) and its underlying epistemology, which, I argue, provides the operative definitions of reason and revelation for an influential line of thinkers, from Bāqillānī (d. 1013) to Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1210). Rāzī provides a systematic account of the Ash‘arī approach in two influential principles defining the relation of reason to revelation (labeled P1 and P2 below).² Put concisely, Rāzī asserts that (P1) “scriptural texts do not impart certitude whatsoever” (*al-dalīl al-naqlī lā yufīdu al-yaqīn al-batta*), because determining the intended meanings of a *text* requires the prior resolution of ten problems or assumptions (*muqaddimāt*) and that (P2) there is no *purely* scriptural argument or evidence (*al-dalīl al-naqlī*), because all scripture-based arguments involve an (implicit) premise or assumption, namely, “that this text (*naql*) is evidence (*hujja*) [i.e., is already established as binding or true].”³ Rāzī’s unified view of reason

1 Regarding the consolidation of Ash‘arism, see Thiele 2016.

2 For some sources that would adopt Rāzī’s principles in the postclassical period, see Heer 1993. Heer focuses on aspects of P1. See additional postclassical authors discussed in part 3.

3 I use *naql* and *sam‘* interchangeably to loosely mean “scriptural texts.” The precise definitions of the terms are of central importance to the analysis and I address technical definitions as we proceed. *Naql* and *sam‘* are used in our sources in various context-specific senses, which includes the notion of transmitted scriptural sources, sources based on authority, and scriptural evidence or proof-text. The most important definitions of *naql* and *‘aql* are what I label below as “the topic-based division” and “the evidence-based” definition. To anticipate, “the evidence-based” definition corresponds to the Ash‘arī definition of *dalīl ‘aqlī* as “that which indicates in itself and does not depend on convention or agreement” and *dalīl sam‘ī* as that which “requires some [external] thing to establish it as evidence.” Finally, for pre-Rāzian Ash‘arīs, the senses of “transmission” and “audition” are primary; as such, the terms do not correspond to our notion of “text.” However, Rāzī’s notion of *naql* more closely corresponds to our usage of “text”

and revelation addresses a rising and reductive nomocentric trend within the Sunnī religious sciences, which sees legal hermeneutics as the dominant, indeed exclusive, means of understanding the speech of God.⁴ This trend, in Rāzī’s analysis, not only overlooks the extent of non-legal content expressed in scripture (e.g., rational and moral content) and the importance of theological inquiry in the tradition, but elides the distinction between the speech of God, as expressed in human language and texts, and the unmediated and infallible access to the intent of God. Just as the Sunnī tradition must distinguish *fiqh* – the divergent and fallible attempts of individual jurists at interpreting God’s legal commands – from an ideal and singular grasp of Divine Law or *Sharī‘a*, our knowledge of scripture as linguistic texts must, according to Rāzī, be distinguished from the immediate and complete apprehension of God’s speech and the intended meanings (*murād al-khiṭāb*) couched therein.⁵ Rāzī’s principles aim to codify, at the level of method in the religious sciences, the epistemic implications of this distinction, which were overlooked and threatened by the approach of the jurists.

as the words of an author or speaker communicated to a real or imagined audience, a point evidence in his understanding of the epistemic role of the ten conditions in P1.

4 Regarding Rāzī’s opposition to nomocentric trends and its assumptions, it can be noted here that, in various places, Rāzī states such things as: “Know that many jurists (*fuqahā*) hold that the Quran contains none of the sciences that the *mutakallimūn* investigate; rather, there is nothing in it [they claim] except legal rules and law (*fiqh*). This is a serious error because, while there is not a single lengthy chapter devoted to legal rules, there are many chapters, especially the Meccan ones, which exclusively address the signs of God’s unity, prophecy, resurrection and judgment, all of which constitute the sciences of the *uṣūliyyīn* [i.e., theologians]. And whoever reflects knows that there is nothing in the hands of the theologian but expanding (*tafṣīl*) on what the Quran expresses in a concise manner (*ijmāl*).” Rāzī 1990, 23:223. Ash‘arī already states that *kalām* is the expansion or explanation (*tafṣīl*) of non-legal aspects of scripture. I address the connection of Rāzī’s view of theology and *tafṣīl* to Ash‘arī’s works below. See Frank 1972. Cf. Jaffer 2015, 77–83. Jaffer discusses the role of P1 and effectively locates central concerns that motivate Rāzī’s view that theology ought to concern *hermeneutics* and not simply apologetics. However, I see the central distinctions and concerns of Rāzī as grounded in earlier Ash‘arī theories of language and evidence, which stand in opposition to Mu‘tazilī views.

5 The Ash‘arīs make an important but oft-overlooked distinction between “revelation,” communicated ideally and infallibly, as is the case of the prophets and angels, and “scriptural texts” that are read by fallible interpreters, which is all that is available in Sunnī law and theology. In contrast to *fiqh*, the relevant distinction concerns the requirement of adequately grasping the language of the Quran. Ghazālī states, “If an angel or prophet hears (*sami‘ahu*) it from God, the Sublime, then it [i.e. revelation] is neither letter nor sound nor language by convention (*luḡha mawḏū‘a*), such that the [angel or prophet] grasps its meaning in virtue of having prior knowledge of linguistic convention (*muwāḏa‘a*).” Ghazālī 2015, 21–22. I set aside the question of *taṣwīb*. On Rāzī’s view, see Fadel 2019, 92–94.

Rāzī’s statement that scriptural texts do not impart certitude makes the rather radical claim that *all* scriptural texts are in principle open to alternate interpretations. Departing from his predecessors’ approach to the most definitive category of texts in legal hermeneutics, namely, *naṣṣ*, Rāzī rejects earlier definitions and states, “For there is *no expression* that is posited for a meaning but that a figurative [understanding] of it is possible so that what is *intended* is other than what it was posited for.”⁶ Rāzī’s view has been characterized as an “extreme” position, departing from established opinions in the Sunnī tradition. In his criticisms of Rāzī and later Ash‘arīs, Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328) states, “As for Rāzī and his likes, they have gone beyond the Mu‘tazilis in this, because even the Mu‘tazilis do not say that scriptural evidence does not engender certitude.”⁷ But how could the Ash‘arīs, known to be the opponents of more rational trends in the premodern Islamic world, hold consistently to such a radical view of scriptural hermeneutics? In the following, I argue against Ibn Taymiyya’s reading, which characterizes Rāzī and the Ash‘arīs as betraying the tradition and adopting a rationalism that is largely derivative of *falsafa* and Mu‘tazilism. This view has been influential in recent scholarship.⁸ The true import of Rāzī’s two principles, and their roots in earlier Ash‘arī views of evidence and inference, have been largely

⁶ Ghazālī, by contrast, views *naṣṣ* as equivalent to the most certain category of conventional signification (*dalālat al-waḍḍ*) and admissible in logic. According to Rāzī, one should distinguish between linguistic signification and the hermeneutic categories of legal interpretation that apply to (divine) speech. Cf. Zysow 2013, 52–54, 58–59.

⁷ Ibn Taymiyya 1991, 5:275. Ibn Taymiyya accurately reproduces P1 with Rāzī’s ten conditions: “Let the rational believer consider this discussion [from the *Nihāya*], and though [Rāzī] might [seem to] downgrade [his claim] and claim that [*sam*‘] does not furnish certainty simply on account of the possibility of opposing rational [evidence] (*tajwīz al-mu‘arīḍ al-‘aqli*); but he and others, however, in other places deny that *sam*‘i evidence provides certainty in virtue of it being dependent on probable premises (*muqaddimāt ḡanniyya*), like the transmission of language, grammar and morphology; lack of figurative uses, ambiguity, coined usages, ellipses, particularization; and the lack of *sam*‘i counter-evidence in addition to ‘*aqli* counter-evidence” (Ibn Taymiyya 1991, 5:328). Ibn Taymiyya understands that the status of “rational counter-evidence” is only one element in Rāzī’s P1 and that P1 makes a more far-reaching claim than Ghazālī’s universal rule. See El-Tobgui 2020, 132–176, especially 156–163. According to El-Tobgui, Ibn Taymiyya sees the Ash‘arīs as affirming a fundamental dichotomy between reason and revelation. As the following shows, Ibn Taymiyya’s view is a misreading of the Ash‘arī theory. I argue that Ibn Taymiyya advances a strawman view of Ash‘arism, which misinterprets the relevant definitions of reason and revelation as articulated by the Ash‘arīs.

⁸ El-Tobgui 2020, 23–77, 141–147; Michot 2001; Griffel 2018; Griffel 2015. El-Tobgui describes a rather percipitous trajectory (El-Tobgui 2020, 23–77, especially 39–40 [=Table 1]).

overlooked.⁹ Here, the historical and conceptual context of Rāzī's principles is especially significant. I argue that Rāzī's seemingly extreme view is in fact rooted in earlier approaches to reason and revelation in the Ash'arī tradition. More specifically, the following analysis shows that Rāzī's principles are best understood as the culmination of what Vishanoff has called the "principle of ambiguity" in Bāqillānī, which in turn builds on Shāfi'ī's (d. 820) emphasis on the ambiguity of language.¹⁰ Regarding Bāqillānī, Vishanoff notes that the former aims to demonstrate that "an Ash'arī view of the nature of God's eternal speech dovetails beautifully with Shāfi'ī's exploitation of the ambiguity of revelation."¹¹ P1 aims to codify the core intuitions behind this approach, which remained unclear in how earlier jurists addressed certainty in their analysis of hermeneutic terms. Rāzī scrutinizes the Ash'arī theory of meaning and its relation to the certainty or immediacy of meanings as conveyed by speech-texts (*naql*). More specifically, Rāzī clarifies the epistemic implications of the distinction between language as a system of signification and language as communicated speech, which remained implicit in earlier Ash'arī theorists.¹² While the former ensures immediate and transparent meanings, the latter requires attention to context and the intent of speech-text (*murād al-khiṭāb*).¹³ This approach has been viewed as coming to an end with a "traditionalist Sunnī resurgence," with "the marginalization of theology from the curriculum of the endowed colleges in favor of law," and after "the radical suspension of judgment advocated by Ash'arī (d. 935) and Bāqillānī have been utterly eclipsed."¹⁴

9 Scholarship has addressed the principles almost entirely in the context of earlier Ash'arī debates on the conflict of reason and revelation and the reinterpretation (*ta'wil*) of specific texts, which, as shown below, is peripheral to the broader aims of P1 and P2. Relevant sources include: Heer 1993; El-Tobgui 2020, 23–77; El-Tobgui 2018; Griffel 2018; Griffel 2015; Anjum 2012, 196–215; Abrahamov 1998, 32–51; Jaffer 2015, 77–83.

10 Vishanoff 2011, 152–189.

11 Vishanoff 2011, 152.

12 The distinction is of central significance to Ash'arī views and is not available to their opponents, including the extreme Ḥanbalis and Mu'tazilis. By "Ḥanbalis," I mean more specifically to non-Ash'arī Ḥanbalis, like Abū Ya'lā ibn al-Farrā' (d. 1065), who are often labelled *hashwiyya* by the Ash'aris. Ash'arī-Ḥanbalis, like [Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawzi \(d. 1350\)](#), distance themselves from Abū Ya'lā and the literalist Ḥanbalis. To be sure, [Ibn al-Qayyim](#) and others felt so strongly as to state that Abū Ya'lā and his peers "disgraced" the school with their works. Cf. Vishanoff 2011, 232–253.

13 Ghazālī 2015, 2:22; and sources discussed in part 1.3 below.

14 Vishanoff states, "Theorists affiliated with the Ash'ariyya continued to affirm an eternal divine attribute of speech expressed by created words (...) but the hermeneutical systems that fourth/tenth-century theologians had grounded in those theories of speech were discarded. Legal theory was deliberately severed from the discipline of theology, and the law-oriented hermeneutic triumphed, largely without the benefit of a coherent epistemological or theological

Against the thesis that early theory was discarded in later Sunnism, I argue that Rāzī and his successors view the two principles as a unified expression of the Ash‘arī account of knowledge and evidence.¹⁵ Critically, the principles are articulated in his major curricular works of theology (*‘ilm al-kalām*), legal theory (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) and exegesis (*tafsīr*) and become a topic of commentary for a long line of Ash‘arī thinkers. That is, unlike Ghazālī’s (d. 1111) more limited and context-specific discussions of reason and revelation, Rāzī’s principles are meant to redefine central concepts and, indeed, restructure how Ash‘arī-Sunnī scholars view evidence and methods in the religious sciences.¹⁶

A final but critical aspect of the study concerns Ash‘arī views of reason and logic. Ibn Taymiyya criticizes the Ash‘arīs for what he views as maximal or inflated definitions of reason and rational proof; he is particularly critical of the assimilation of Aristotelian syllogistics by Ghazālī and later Ash‘arīs. The view that the Ash‘arīs adopt, pretty much wholesale, Aristotelian syllogistics as the standard of reasoning has been widely accepted.¹⁷ However, I propose an alternative reading, relying on how Ash‘arīs themselves define, on rather precise terms, rational evidence and inference (*dalāla; dalīl*). In these sources, I argue that we find a general definition of rational proof as logical consequence or implication (*iṭṭirād*), which corresponds loosely to the notion of a conditional (i.e., If *F*, then *G*).

foundation.” (2011, 252; italics mine). The view that traditionalists reigned and Ash‘arī theology was eclipsed in the postclassical period requires revision in the context of recent findings. That is, the sheer magnitude of sources on Ash‘arī theology and the rational sciences, stretching from the 12th to the 19th centuries, that have been uncovered in recent studies casts serious doubts on the view. See for example, Wisnovsky 2004b, which is now outdated and simply the tip of the iceberg. Notably, many if not the majority of authors identify, in one way or other, as Ash‘arīs.

15 Rāzī’s redefinition of *naql* in P1 and his rejection of *naṣṣ* as epistemically basic and certain challenges Robert Gleave’s interpretation that “groups and tendencies commonly called ‘literalists’ (*ḥashwiyya, zāhiriyya, salafiyya* and so on) are simply applying rules concerning non-deviation from the literal meaning with a greater level of rigidity than other so-called ‘non-literalists.’ The various groups are not, in truth, operating in a different hermeneutic context.” (Gleave 2012, 2). Rāzī’s arguments are sometimes directly pointed against the *ḥashwiyya* and aim to articulate an epistemology that distinguishes the immediate apprehension of Divine Speech (as in direct revelation to prophets) from our reading of scriptural texts.

16 The major textbooks of postclassical theology and legal theory address Rāzī’s P1 and P2. See Griffel 2015.

17 El-Tobgui 2020, 66–70. Griffel states that this is basically what ‘*aql*’ means: “Their dispute [i.e., Ghazālī and Ibn Taymiyya] is further complicated by the fact that they have different understandings of the meaning of the word “reason” (*‘aql*). For Ghazālī and also Fakhr al-Dīn, this word refers to an inquiry that is guided by Aristotelian logic and by an Aristotelian understanding of demonstration (*burhān*). These two expect every credible scholar in Islamic theology and its adjacent disciplines to be firm in Aristotelian logic” (Griffel 2018, 38).

The notion of *ittirād* – which Juwaynī (d. 1085) expresses as the relation of *luzūm* – aims to capture the original sense of *dalīl* as a one-directional “indicant,” whether linguistic, conventional, or rational.¹⁸ To be sure, contrary to Ibn Taymiyya’s claims, the early Ash‘arīs contrast their definition of rational evidence directly against the more robust conditions placed on reason by the Mu‘tazilis, including co-implication (*al-in‘ikās*) and causal necessity (*al-‘illa al-mūjiba*).¹⁹ Even more, Juwaynī challenges knowledge of natures and essences in *falsafa*, anticipating Rāzī’s more thorough-going anti-essentialism.²⁰

With respect to the narrative of assimilation, I address two central claims of Ibn Taymiyya regarding the adoption of Aristotelian syllogistics. First, Ibn Taymiyya believes that, in adopting Aristotelian syllogistics, the Ash‘arīs commit to the essentialism of the *falāsifa*, and particularly the Aristotelians who believe that real definitions identify the essences of things. Those Ash‘arīs who directly address the question of essences – i.e., that there are real essences that exist beyond discrete atoms and accidents – explicitly deny that we have any knowledge of underlying natures, essences or bodies. Second, and more importantly, in affirming Aristotelian syllogistics, Ibn Taymiyya believes that the Ash‘arīs adopt categorical syllogistics as the ideal and exclusive method of reasoning. The Aristotelians, of course, held that Aristotle’s categorical syllogism is the pinnacle of deductive reasoning and that *all* valid arguments must be reducible to one of the valid syllogistic figures. That is, in contrast to the sentential logic of the Stoics,

18 *Ittirād* glosses the Ash‘arīs’ main definition of rational evidence as that “which indicates in itself” (*mā dalla fī nafsihi*). This definition is what they will use to distinguish rational evidence from scriptural evidence, as discussed below. Ibn Taymiyya will misread “indicates in itself” as implying an essentialist epistemology. Ibn Taymiyya suggests that the definition means reason provides absolute knowledge or correspondence, 1991, 1:191–194. Abrahamov notes that Ibn Taymiyya states, “being known through reason or not is not an inherent attribute of a thing but rather a relative one” (1998, 21). The Ash‘arīs explicitly clarify that they mean none of this by their definition. The *falāsifa* studied the implicational relations of *luzūm* but always as subordinate to categorical syllogistics.

19 I expand on aspects of Ayman Shihadeh’s insightful study (Shihadeh 2013). Cf. El-Tobgui 2020, 23–77.

20 For example, regarding knowledge of essences and natures, Juwaynī states, “We respond to the natural philosophers (*al-ṭabā‘iyyīn*): we do not observe singular natures which are not composite [i.e., the essential constituents of composite observable things] so we must hold to the falsity of the elements (*al-‘unṣur*). And we respond to those who affirm prime matter: we do not observe a simple body denuded of accidents” (Juwaynī 1981, 62). On Rāzī’s anti-essentialism, see Ibrahim 2013. That Rāzī (and earlier Ash‘arīs) anticipate Ibn Taymiyya’s central criticisms of Aristotelian logic has not been addressed in recent works. Shihadeh shows that pre-Rāzian Ash‘arīs held to a rather radical nominalism, addressing examples such as human and soul. See Shihadeh 2012, especially 458–461.

for example, the Aristotelians did not consider conditionals or implicational arguments (like *modus ponens*) valid on their own; such argument forms are only productive and valid when reduced, in some way or other, to syllogistic form.²¹ Rāzī offers a different analysis of the status of the categorical syllogism. Arguing against what he calls the “proponents of categorical syllogisms,” who prioritize the latter over conditional arguments, Rāzī states: “The result then is that the categorical syllogism is not productive except in virtue of it being a conditional argument in potentiality. Hence, the conditional argument must be prior in order and power to the categorical syllogism.”²² Postclassical thinkers would recognize this as Rāzī’s standard definition of deduction. Rāzī’s approach, I propose, aims to preserve the basic notion of *dalīl* as implication (*iṭṭirād* or *luzūm*) found in earlier Ash‘arī views, which makes the notion of logical consequence more basic than other more robust notions of proof.²³

In the following, I begin in part 1 with an analysis of Rāzī’s central principles regarding reason and revelation and their correspondence to earlier Ash‘arī views. I argue that P1 and P2 aim to synthesize earlier Ash‘arī distinctions regarding reason and revelation. Part 2 focuses on definitions of reason and revelation in pre-Rāzian Ash‘arī texts. Part 3 addresses Rāzī’s P1 and P2 in his works of legal theory.

1 Rāzī and Classical Ash‘arism: The Theory of Evidence and Inference

To begin with some rough distinctions, Ash‘arīs are characterized as setting up the following dichotomy between reason and revelation.²⁴ Ibn Taymiyya states the view thus: “They make *uṣūl al-dīn* (the science of theology) of two

²¹ Regarding the prevalence of Aristotelian syllogistics, van Ess astutely notes, “But in spite of all this, if we were to study their practical use of logic in detail, I am convinced we would find many cases where they still trod the old paths. Aristotle never completely vanquished the Stoics in Islam” (1970, 50). On the differences between Stoic and Aristotelian logic, see Bobzien 2020.

²² Rāzī 1996, 1:162.

²³ The point is proposed tentatively here. The basic claim of my argument here is that the Ash‘arī view of rational evidence is continuous and expressed without requiring any robust view of categorical syllogistics.

²⁴ With differing emphases: El-Tobgui 2020, 156–164; Griffel 2018 14–30; 2015, 89–120. Abrahamov addresses more systematically the foundations of rationalism and traditionalism; however, there is no clear reference to Ash‘arī definitions of reason; see Abrahamov 1998, 32–33.

kinds: rational (*‘aqliyyāt*) and scriptural (*sam‘iyyāt*) and make the first part *that which cannot be known* through the Quran and Sunna.”²⁵ That is, one begins with reason *independently* to prove the cardinal points of belief, including the existence of God, the possibility of prophecy, and (according to some interpretations) the truth of the prophecy of Muhammad. This is usually taken to mean that the believer must first use reason independently of scripture to believe in God, divine unity, and the truth of prophecy or scriptural sources. This role of reason I will refer to as “independent reason.”²⁶ From here, one sets aside independent reason and turns to scripture for theological and legal doctrines (e.g. the nature of the afterlife and what is legally permitted and forbidden), beginning with definitive texts of the Quran and Sunna. This view is attributed to the major thinkers in the Ash‘arī tradition, including Bāqillānī, Juwaynī, and Ghazālī.

In this context, Ghazālī has been viewed as the turning point in Ash‘arism. Griffel has argued that Ghazālī marks a radical departure in the tradition regarding his view of reason and revelation, which “can only, in the context of Ash‘arī theology, be regarded as a rationalist innovation.”²⁷ Griffel’s analysis centers on a work devoted to the interpretation (*ta’wīl*) of scriptural texts and the conflict of reason and revelation. More precisely, the context concerns a question posed to Ghazālī regarding a *purported* conflict between the apparent meaning (*ẓāhir*) of scriptural texts and a rational counter-evidence (*al-mu‘ārīḍ al-‘aqlī*). In response, Ghazālī invokes “the rule of interpretation” (*qānūn al-ta’wīl*), which becomes the object of Ibn Taymiyya’s attack. Remarkably, it is unclear what precisely Ghazālī’s rule is.²⁸ It should be noted that Ghazālī does not offer us any clear definition of reason and revelation. Rather, he first identifies five approaches, including a “middle position” that divides into three groups: (a) those who make reason primary or foundational (*aṣl*) and revelation posterior or secondary (*tābi‘*), (b) those who do the reverse and make revelation the foundation and reason secondary, and (c) those who make “each one a foundation” and seek to harmonize the two.²⁹ Ghazālī identifies his own approach with the latter position, (c), where reason *and* revelation are foundations, and not with the more rationalist position (a), which holds that reason is the foundation.

²⁵ Ibn Taymiyya 1991, 1:199.

²⁶ See Griffel 2018, 19–29. I set aside for the moment the question of the role of miracles in proving the truth of the prophecy of the Prophet.

²⁷ Griffel 2018, 114.

²⁸ Griffel 2018, 23.

²⁹ Griffel 2015, 108–109; the translation is mine.

As the following shows, Ghazālī’s discussion of the rule of interpretation has almost nothing to do with Rāzī’s more radical and foundational principles regarding the relation of reason to revelation (most importantly, P1 and P2 below).³⁰ The two principles will be the subject of analysis and debate by postclassical Ash‘arīs, who attribute the view exclusively to Rāzī. In contrast to Ghazālī, Rāzī unequivocally states in several places that, “Reason is the foundation of revelation,” which places him in group (a) above.³¹ However, this principle, as it stands, is of little consequence according to Rāzī as clarified below. More importantly, Rāzī advances two clearly articulated principles in nearly all of his major works, from *kalām* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* to his expansive work of exegesis, the *Mafāṭīḥ al-ghayb*. The principles, usually posited in the introductory section, articulate, as I argue, the most fundamental definitions of reason and revelation:

P1: Scriptural texts do not impart certitude whatsoever (*al-dalīl al-naqlī lā yufīdu al-yaqīn al-batta*), because *texts* depend on *ten* preconditions (*muqaddimāt*) that need resolution prior to determining the intended meaning of a text.³²

P2: A proof that is purely scriptural is impossible (*al-sam‘ī al-maḥd muḥāl*); all scriptural evidence assumes one additional premise, i.e., “this text is true.”³³ (Rāzī: “Hence, it is established that a proof that is *naqlī* in all premises is impossible and invalid.”)

30 Griffel reads Rāzī’s approach as informed primarily by Ghazālī’s discussion of the universal rule and the status of miracles. The following shows that Ghazālī’s view of the status of miracles, his view that reason is a foundation of revelation, and that reason is a character witness (*muzakkī*) of revelation are all marginal, even irrelevant, to the central questions addressed by Rāzī’s P1 and P2.

31 Rāzī 1987, 9:116; 1990, 2:52, 22:7.

32 P1 is repeated in various texts with some variation in terms of the number and kind of preconditions listed: “Textual evidence (*dalā’il naqliyya*) does not impart certain [knowledge], because it is based on the transmission of language, the transmission of grammar and rules of inflection and conjugation; it depends on the absence of synonymy, the absence of figurative usage, the absence of ellipsis (*iḍmār*), the absence of new usages [of expressions], the absence of advancement or postponement [of a command], the absence of specification (*takhṣīṣ*), the absence of abrogation, and the absence of contradicting rational evidence (‘*adam al-mu‘arīd al-aqlī*). The absence of these things is probable (*maznūn*) and not known [with certainty] and that which depends on probable knowledge is probable” (Rāzī 2007, 22). See also Rāzī 1986, 2:251–54; 1999, 151–156; n.d., 50–51; 1990, 1:28; 1987, 9:113–118; see additional references in part 3.

33 A concise expression of P2 is: “A proof (*dalīl*) is either [1] composed of premises that are all rational, which exists; or [2] [composed of premises] that are all textual (*naqliyya*), and this is absurd (*muḥāl*), because one of the premises of that proof is *that that text (naql) is evidence (ḥujja)*. And it is not possible for a text to establish a text [as evidence]. Or some of the premises are rational and some textual and that exists” (Rāzī 2007, 22). See, also, Rāzī 1986, 2:251; n.d. 50–51; and sources cited below.

I begin with P1, which Rāzī elaborates in works of *kalām* and *uṣūl al-fiqh*. P1 concerns the epistemic status of any transmitted *text*, be it scripture or otherwise. Rāzī argues, rather forcefully, that texts, in virtue of ten premises or preconditions (*muqaddimāt*), fail to independently impart certitude (*yaqīn*).³⁴ The preconditions concern various linguistic, historical and communicative aspects of texts. Remarkably, this includes the most definitive categories of scriptural text as defined by the legal theorists (e.g., *naṣṣ*, *qaṭʿī*). The principle has broad consequence for legal theory. By contrast, P2 concerns the very structure of rational and scriptural *evidence* or proof in theology and legal theory. P2 reveals Rāzī’s view of how we ought to treat the relation between reason and revelation at the fundamental epistemological level of evidence and knowledge (see diagram 1 below).

The plain texts of Rāzī’s principles already suggest that they concern a broader claim than Ghazālī’s rule of interpretation, which focuses on the more limited discussion of *taʿwīl* and the proper contexts of interpretation. Ghazālī does not approach anything like the above principles of Rāzī. In fact, to Rāzī, the question is of limited interest. He subsumes the question of a “rational counter-evidence” – at the heart of Ghazālī’s rule of interpretation – under P1 as only one of the ten preconditions that must be accounted for prior to determining the precise meaning of a text.³⁵ That is, it is more or less on par with several other requirements that have epistemic consequences, including the text’s transmission and knowledge of grammatical rules. Notably, Ibn Taymiyya himself distinguishes the view of Rāzī and his followers from Ghazālī and earlier thinkers. In his major work on the topic, *The Rejection of Conflict between Reason and Revelation (Dar’ Taʿāruḍ al-ʿAql wa-al-Naql)*, Ibn Taymiyya states:

One does not know the intent (*murād*) of the speaker by a scriptural proof (*al-dalīl al-samʿī*) as Rāzī and his followers say, who believe that scriptural proofs do not impart certain knowledge with respect to the intent of the speaker. For them, there is no *sharʿī* evidence that imparts knowledge of what the Prophet has reported, so *how can they consider that in conflict with reason (ʿaql)*.³⁶

[Rāzī] might [seem to] downgrade [his claim] and claim that [*samʿī*] does not impart certitude simply on account of the possibility of opposing rational [evidence] (*tajwīz al-muʿāriḍ al-ʿaqlī*). However, he and others in other places deny that *samʿī* evidence provides certainty *in virtue of it being dependent on probable premises (muqaddimāt ḥamīyya)*, like the transmission of language, grammar and morphology, lack of figurative uses, ambiguity, coined usages, ellipses, particularization, and the lack of *samʿī* counter-evidence in addition to *ʿaqlī* counter-evidence.³⁷

³⁴ *Muqaddimāt* is better understood as preconditions or assumptions than premises.

³⁵ See text of P2 in note above; it is usually the tenth principle.

³⁶ Ibn Taymiyya 1991, 5:342.

³⁷ Ibn Taymiyya 1991, 5:335.

Ibn Taymiyya correctly locates P1 as a central principle for Rāzī’s approach in a manner that makes the question of the conflict of reason and revelation irrelevant. To be sure, Ibn Taymiyya underscores the critical point that a proper reading of Rāzī shows that it is not even correct to say that reason conflicts with revelation, not simply because such a conflict is raised only as a hypothetical possibility but more importantly because, on Rāzī’s view, *all* scriptural texts fail to impart certitude on their own.³⁸ Ibn Taymiyya is correct but, as we will see, he overlooks the importance of P2. Notably, Ibn Taymiyya associates a whole school of thought to Rāzī with respect to the epistemology of scriptural texts.

As the following shows, the central argument of the *Dar’* is based on a persistent conflation of what Rāzī and the Ash‘arīs mean by reason and revelation. In particular, though Ibn Taymiyya reads P1 rather accurately, he overlooks the central definitions of reason and revelation at play in Rāzī’s theory of evidence (P2) and its roots in earlier Ash‘arī views. As the title of the work suggests, Ibn Taymiyya assumes that the Ash‘arīs affirm a clear dichotomy between reason and revelation. To be sure, Ibn Taymiyya’s main innovation, as El-Tobgui has argued, is to break down the alleged dichotomy of reason and revelation that is developed by the rationalizing Ash‘arīs, and to replace the latter with a newfangled view of reason and scripture.³⁹ I begin with clarifying why the above view of a dichotomy between reason and revelation is a misinterpretation of Ash‘arism, beginning with Ash‘arī himself.

It has been overlooked that Richard Frank has shown, fairly long ago, that the sharp dichotomy between reason and revelation attributed to Ash‘arī, chiefly by the Ḥanbalīs, is erroneous.⁴⁰ In an incisive analysis of the former’s approach, Frank argues that, “reason and revelation in the doctrine of Ash‘arī are, thus, inseparably bound together.”⁴¹ Importantly, Frank shows that Ash‘arī’s view is not simply a token nod to scripture, which is used as proof-text to validate the science of *kalām* and independent rational inquiry. Rather, Ash‘arī establishes a deeper “reciprocal” relation between reason and revelation. As Frank aptly

38 In his recent study, El-Tobgui states, “It is partly in pursuit of this goal that al-Rāzī (following al-Ghazālī and others) articulated the universal rule of interpretation, which explicitly prioritizes reason over revelation when adjudicating any possible conflicts between the two” (2020, 77). As Ibn Taymiyya himself points out, Rāzī believes that scriptural evidence cannot come into conflict with reason on account of P1. Cf. Griffel 2018.

39 El-Tobgui 2020, 132–141.

40 Frank’s immediate aim is Makdisi’s argument that Ash‘arī’s “traditionalism” in the *Ibāna* is incompatible with the latter’s endorsement of rational inquiry expressed in other works. Frank argues, convincingly, that the difference between the two works is in form and not in substance. See Thiele 2016, 227, note 2; Frank 1975, 136–154.

41 Frank 1975, 143.

puts it: “In taking the position specifically as [Ash‘arī] does he puts between the authority of revelation and the mind’s innate claim to autonomous judgment a bond of reciprocity by which each simultaneously grounds the functional authority of the other (...) *the probative use and intelligent understanding of either [reason or revelation] can be achieved with certainty only through the guidance of the other.*”⁴² It should be noted that, in his discourses on the validity of the science of *kalām*, Ash‘arī directly addresses the criticisms of the Ḥanbalīs. Ash‘arī goes to lengths to show how the primary aim of rational inquiry, and indeed the discipline of theology, is based on the very model of the Quran and Sunna. As Frank shows, the theologian, in Ash‘arī’s view, attempts to explain and model not only the Quran’s arguments but the Sunna of the Prophet in engaging in discourse with non-believers. This component, i.e., discourse with those who do not *already* assume the truth of scripture, is for Ash‘arī a central part of the content of revelation and is overlooked by the Ḥanbalīs. As Frank states, the function of reason and “the science of the *uṣūl ad-dīn* [theology] is to systematically recapitulate [the Quran and Sunna] and, so doing, to explain the teaching of the Prophet. To follow the way or method (*ṭarīqa*) of the Prophet is ‘to learn to use the reports as a demonstration’ and to carry out the investigation (*naẓar*).”⁴³ The words in quotes belonging to Ash‘arī are especially instructive. That is, the function of theology to systematically recapitulate and use scriptural evidence in non-legal contexts will be codified in the later Ash‘arī theory of evidence. Frank’s analysis of Ash‘arī undermines not only what he calls the “superficial” reading of Ash‘arism as positing a unqualified dichotomy between reason and revelation, but it also rebuts further claims that are attributed to the latter by the Ḥanbalīs, including the view that the texts of Quran and Sunna are not sufficient for the individual believer to believe in God’s existence and the truth of the Prophet.⁴⁴ As noted above, Ibn Taymiyya characterizes the Ash‘aris as claiming that one cannot know such truths by means of the Quran and Sunna. All this results from a conflation of the relevant senses of reason and revelation.

Frank’s study, and the relevant sources in which Ash‘arī defends his views, have been largely overlooked in more recent contributions. It is unclear why the view is left unaddressed, especially in studies on Ibn Taymiyya and Ash‘arism.⁴⁵ Afterall, Ibn Taymiyya’s major criticisms in the *Dar’* is based on the assumption of

⁴² Frank 1975, 147; italics mine.

⁴³ Frank 1975, 143; italics mine.

⁴⁴ Frank 1975, 144.

⁴⁵ El-Tobgui refers to Frank’s study in a note, stating that Ash‘arī’s argument follows the Quran in contrast to the approach of later Ash‘aris (2020, 275). I take it that Ash‘arī’s approach renders

such a dichotomy on the part of the Ash‘arīs. Perhaps the thought is that Ash‘arī’s harmonizing view of reason and revelation is overshadowed by later Ash‘arīs, who take a sharp turn down the path of dogmatic rationalism and the assimilation of *falsafa*. Importantly, later Ash‘arī authors quote, sometimes in full, the relevant works of Ash‘arī in this regard, including the *Ḥathth*. To be sure, against this misinterpretation, Bāqillānī in his work on the Quran’s inimitability affirms precisely Ash‘arī’s view of reciprocity: “This shows, according to us, the falsity of the position of those who claim that it is not possible to know the unity [and existence] of God by means of the Quran (...) It is not the case that if a thing can be known by means of reason that it is impossible to know it by means of the Quran. Rather, it is possible to know it by means of both.”⁴⁶ This is precisely what Ibn Taymiyya urges in the *Dar’*.⁴⁷ However, in his work of *kalām*, Bāqillānī seems to affirm the dichotomy imputed by Ibn Taymiyya: the existence of God is a problem “that is known by reason *without* revelation” (*bi-al-‘aql dūna al-sam’*).⁴⁸ Do the Ash‘arīs simply adopt an inconsistent approach to the relation between reason and revelation?

In the following, I argue that the Ash‘arīs provides a systematic view in their analysis of evidence and inference. The central distinctions regarding reason and revelation developed by later Ash‘arīs aim to codify the core intuitions of Ash‘arī’s view. These distinctions clarify the foundational epistemic relations between various kinds of evidence and knowledge. However, the formal and epistemic relations between *‘aql* and *naql* remain unclear in pre-Rāzian authors. Rāzī’s P1 and P2 aim to systematize earlier distinctions and set the Sunnī religious sciences on a clearer footing.

Ibn Taymiyya’s central argument otiose. As demonstrated here, later Ash‘arīs subscribe to and expand on this precise view of rational proofs.

46 Bāqillānī 1954, 23. From the topic-based discussion addressed below, it is clear that by “unity” (*tawḥīd*) Bāqillānī means the relevant rational beliefs, including the *existence* of God.

47 After noting that the Ash‘arīs hold to a strict dichotomy, he states, “This is an error on their part. The Quran indicates rational evidence, clarifies it (*bayyanahā*), and points to it” (1991, 1:199). The Ash‘arīs agree on all this except that “clarifies” means that the theologian must “elucidate” the evidence pointed to in the Quran.

48 Bāqillānī 1998, 228; Ghazālī 2012, 271. See part 2 for further details on this division of *‘aql* and *sam’*.

1.1 Scriptural Evidence: The Quran and Sunna

I begin with Ash‘arī views of revelation after Ash‘arī and prior to Rāzī. We can turn to the question posed at the beginning of the article: Does the Quran assert theological truths (“God exists”) no differently than it prescribes legal commands (“wine is forbidden”)? The Ash‘arī approach to this question is especially revealing. First, they point out that much of the Quran comprises verses that refer to “signs” or evidence that aim to demonstrate not only the existence and unity of God but various other theological truths, including arguments for the possibility of resurrection and lessons in the Quranic narratives.⁴⁹ For example, Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī (d. 1118), who was the teacher of Rāzī’s father, begins his work of *kalām* with extensive quotations from the Quran regarding those truths proven in theology and subsequently provides an exhaustive discussion of the relation of rational proofs as elucidated in *kalam* citing specific verses. To be sure, he cites Ash‘arī’s *Ḥathth* on this very topic.⁵⁰ I return to the latter work in part 2. According to later Ash‘arīs, if we properly attend to the *content* of such verses, we see that they differ in an important way from verses that concern commands or prohibitions. To understand the difference, we can turn to specific examples used by the Ash‘arīs:

A. Verses that refer the reader to ‘*aqlī*’ evidence: “In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variation of night and day, there are surely *signs* for those possessing understanding” (Quran 3:190); “Say, ‘Consider that which is in the heavens and on the earth’” (Quran 10:101); “Say, ‘He who brought them into being in the first place will resurrect [them]’” (Quran 36:79).⁵¹

B. Verses that are *sam‘ī* evidence: “[God] has but forbidden to you carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and what has been offered to other than God” (Quran 2:173); “When you agree upon a debt with another for a named term, then write it down” (Quran 48:29).⁵²

⁴⁹ See Gwynne 2004, 26–40, 152–169. The Ash‘arī approach differs in making their notion of evidence central.

⁵⁰ Anṣārī 2010, 219–220, 232–270; many precedents for this is found in Bāqillānī; see for example his 2000, 19–29. Rāzī’s arguments for the validity and superiority of *kalām* in the *Mafātīḥ* corresponds closely to this; but I have not verified whether it is direct. Jan Thiele has established a close link between the *Ghunya* and *Nihāyat al-Marām* of Rāzī’s father, which the former studied. See Thiele 2017, 135–166. The point is significant in understanding the continuity of the Ash‘arī view of reason and *kalām* in Rāzī.

⁵¹ Quoted, for example, by Anṣārī at the beginning of the discussion of *naẓar* and *dalīl* in his 2010, 1:219.

⁵² Rāzī 1990, 2:80. See discussion below of *naṣṣ*.

What, if anything, distinguishes the two sets of verses? The Ḥanbalīs deny any foundational distinction between the two. They are both commands or statements from God regarding religious duties; it is just that the first concerns belief in God and the second concerns legal acts.⁵³ The Ash‘arīs hold that conflating the two leads to denying an important aspect of the claim that the Quran aims to make in A and *how* it makes it. I provide an overview and address details in part 2. Drawing on their view of meaning and inference, the Ash‘arīs are able to distinguish the verses with respect to the meaning or *referent* (*maḍlūl*) of their expressions and how they are *intended* to constitute evidence for a particular statement. Verses in A point to “signs” or externally existing evidence for proving certain claims, including the existence of God and the resurrection of human beings after death. This evidence is true independently of the specific verses that appeal to that evidence. That is, this evidence is supposed to be available to all humans and evaluated independently, whether or not one already affirms the truth of the source itself, i.e., the Quran. In the above verse, it is the world and its features that constitute independent evidence for belief in God. To be sure, the verses consider this evidence as “proof” establishing certain truths to all, whether or not one already believes in the Prophet or truth of a scriptural text. It is of importance to note that the verses in A do not claim that the world is evidence for God’s existence *in virtue of the world being a miracle* – at least, not in the relevant sense of miracle. That is, the features of the world that are proofs of God are not apprehended immediately – like the witnessing of the splitting of the moon – but rather require some level of consideration or “reflection” (*naẓar*).⁵⁴ Nor can one view such truths as the existence of God as self-evident (*ḍarūrī*) or innate (*fiṭrī*), if the latter is taken to exclude reflection and drawing evidence (*istidlāl*).⁵⁵ It is this Quranic content that sanctions for the Ash‘arīs, *naẓar*, their term for rational inquiry.

Such verses are distinct from verses in category B, which claim no independent evidence or content that supports the truth or normativity of a claim but rather assumes the normative nature of the text. As such, our authors note that most such verses begin with “O you who believe (...)”; that is, the commands

53 Abū Yalā 1993, 131–135.

54 Importantly, the Ash‘arīs affirm that, from an ontological perspective, God is the “establisher” (*nāṣib*) of external signs. However, this assumption is not intended to be relevant to the evidence appealed to in the verses in A. Ibn Taymiyya suggests that the Ash‘arīs view such signs as independent of God and scripture. The Ash‘arīs simply make an epistemic and methodological distinction that aims to capture the very hermeneutic logic of the Quran.

55 In terms of a *cul-de-sac*, Ibn Taymiyya’s own proof conflates these distinctions. See Hallaq 1991, 49–69.

speak to one who *already* presumes the truth or bindingness of the Quran.⁵⁶ The Ash'arī view this distinction as central to the hermeneutic logic of the Quran.

These distinctions are misread and conflated by the Ḥanbalīs to mean mutually exclusive sources of evidence and knowledge, i.e., the sharp dichotomy read into the Ash'arī view where rational evidence excludes the Quran and Sunna. Verses in A are read by the Ash'arīs as the commitment and, indeed the command, of the Quran and Sunna to engage with others on some minimal or common ground of evidence and not on the basis of the authority of scripture or one's own belief.⁵⁷ They distinguish between (1) the personal duty established by the Quran to ground one's own belief in evidence rather than on received authority (*taqlīd*) and (2) the collective duty to *prove* basic theological claims to others on general standards of truth.⁵⁸ Though there are some differences of opinion, it is the latter that requires the systematic analysis and elucidation of rational arguments on their own terms, since one assesses the validity of arguments in a neutral domain of discourse. Anṣārī highlights the point that individuals are responsible to know rational proofs in a general manner (*jumlatan*), whereas the expert theologian is responsible for elucidating (*tafṣīl*), expounding proofs, engaging in debate, and so forth.⁵⁹ The distinction between knowing rational evidence in a general manner and knowing it in detail is an important distinction that is found in the tradition from Ash'arī to Rāzī.⁶⁰ It is directly aimed at the Ḥanbalī objection to the (allegedly) Ash'arī position that the ordinary believer cannot rely on scripture and must begin exclusively with reason. Moreover, the Ḥanbalīs argue that the believer is not commanded to know and set forth detailed rational arguments and that the Prophet and the Companions did not do so, which I address below.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Such a distinction is not made by the Ḥanbalīs in any systematic way. See Vishanoff 2011, 251–253.

⁵⁷ Even here, it might be noted, the categories are not static and mutually exclusive. Verses in category A are read by the Ash'arīs as also *sam'ī* evidence for the command to engage in *naẓar*, i.e., establishing or reaffirming one's belief on the basis of evidence.

⁵⁸ Anṣārī 2010, 1:235; Bāqillānī 2000, 20.

⁵⁹ Anṣārī 2010, 1:235–260. This distinction is already clear in Ash'arī; see Frank 1988, 137, 138.

⁶⁰ Anṣārī states, “Whoever holds that the Companions did not look into (*lam yanẓurū*) the signs of God after God commands them to inquiry (*naẓar*) into them and [that] they did not make clear what God made clear for them (...) equate the Companions of the Prophet and the leaders of the *salaf* (pious predecessors) with the disbelievers who turn away from the signs of God” (2010, 1:254–255). Anṣārī's point is that denying the commandment of *naẓar* in the minimal sense denies the basic meaning of the verses. *Naẓar* is minimal with respect to how the meaning or content is explicated (i.e., whether through clearly expressed premises or implicitly expressed beliefs) but clear in terms of what the content of evidence is.

⁶¹ Anṣārī 2010, 1:220.

It can be noted that, in responding to the Ḥanbali view that such beliefs are acquired by scripture, Bāqillānī states that the Ash‘arīs do not deny this, which accords with his statement in *I‘jāz al-Qur‘ān* noted above. However, he states that when one supports or reaffirms one’s belief on the basis of scriptural texts, the texts function as a “pointer” (*tanbīh*) to the evidence and is not the evidence in itself.⁶² If one reads the verses in the above manner, one need not posit any fundamental cognitive divide between verses in category A and rational evidence for truths like the existence of God.

In this regard, the Ash‘arīs develop a more foundational distinction than found in Ash‘arī himself, assessing what the relevant definitions of evidence and inference are that correspond to verses in category A and B.

1.2 Rational Evidence versus Scriptural Evidence

As the above suggests, the Ash‘arīs believe that scripture requires belief to be not simply *true* but *evidence-based* or *justified*. The Ash‘arīs offer their definitions of evidence in their analysis of *dalāla* and *dalīl*, which carry the lexical senses of “to point to,” “to guide,” “to be a sign or symbol for,” and “to indicate.”⁶³ Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. ca. 12th century) identifies the main senses of *dalāla* which the Ash‘arīs rely upon: “That by means of which one arrives at knowledge of a thing, like the signification of expressions of meanings, the indications of gestures and signs, allusions, measures for calculation, whether or not that is in virtue of the intent of one who makes it a sign (*dalāla*).”⁶⁴ As shown below, the Ash‘arī definition of rational inference as *ittirāḍ* (implication) seeks to capture this core sense of *dalāla*.

⁶² This is assuming that one does not experience the verse as a miracle.

⁶³ *Dalīl* serves as an overarching concept, the basic sense of which is an “inference” from a known to an unknown. For example, Bāqillānī defines *dalīl* as that which “leads to knowledge of what is absent from immediate knowledge (*al-ḍarūra*) and the senses, including signs (*amārāt*), indications (*‘alāmāt*), and states (*aḥwāl*)” (Bāqillānī 1987, 33–34). With respect to specific usages and my translations in the following, *dalīl* is used in varying senses depending on context, including the *signification* of a meaning by a linguistic term, a sign or token, evidence in the sense of *argument* or *proof*, and evidence, more broadly, as the *justification* for a judgement or belief. I will translate the term in its nominal form with “evidence” generally, or “proof” if *dalīl* refers to an argument. In the verbal form, *dalla*, I translate the term generally as “to indicate” but will also use “to signify” or “to prove” when the context is clear. See part 2 for further texts regarding the concept. See van Ess 1970, 26–29.

⁶⁴ Rāghib 2009, 316–317.

In their definition of evidence, the Ash‘arīs define *dalīl* as “an inference from a known to an unknown” in a general and minimal sense, including linguistic inference (i.e. an expression’s *signification* of a meaning), arguments (i.e. from known things to conclusions), and deriving or setting up evidence as proofs (*ist-idlāl*). The most important division of *dalīl* provided by the Ash‘arīs for our discussion concerns the manner in which each category constitutes evidence and knowledge:

- 1 Rational evidence (*al-dalīl al-‘aqlī*) is evidence that connects with a belief *in virtue of itself* (*fī nafsihi*; *bi-‘aynihi*); that is, “[rational evidence] does not depend on agreement or imposition *for it to be evidence*.”⁶⁵
- 2 Evidence that is evidence not in virtue of itself but in virtue of an external condition or imposition;
 - a. Scriptural evidence (*al-dalīl al-sam‘ī*) is evidence in virtue of something establishing it as evidence (*bi-naṣb nāṣib iyyāhā adilla*).⁶⁶
 - b. Language or linguistic signification (*dalālat al-lughā*) is evidence in virtue of imposition (*waḍ’*), and “were it not for a people’s imposition (*muwāḍa‘at ahlihi*) of a meaning (*dalāla*) it would not indicate [at all].”⁶⁷

I highlight the central concepts as they relate to Rāzī’s principles and discuss the Ash‘arī texts in fuller detail in part 2. Attention to the Ash‘arī definitions reveals that their analysis of kinds of *dalīl* concerns foundational questions of epistemology, focusing in particular on the grounds or justification of an inferred belief.⁶⁸ The overarching distinction between knowledge based on evidence in category 1 (rational evidence) and that in category 2 is that knowledge in the former is in some minimal sense non-arbitrary or independent (i.e., “is evidence in itself”), while in the latter case the evidence is conditional or dependent on agreement, convention, or some external factor. I will call the latter category evidence based on convention or “convention-based evidence.”⁶⁹ The two overarching categories

⁶⁵ Juwāynī states: “*Hiya tadullu li-anfusihā wa-mā hiya ‘alayhi min ṣifātihā*” (Juwāynī 1979, 1:155). For further definitions, see Bāqillānī 2000, 15; Anṣārī 2010, 1:241; Ghazālī 1998, 1:61, and discussion below.

⁶⁶ Juwāynī 1979, 1:155 and sources discussed below. I set aside the question of whether what is meant by *nāṣib*, the “establisher,” is God himself or knowledge of the truth of the Prophet. That is, once one recognizes that the speech is from God, its bindingness need not be “established” by God but is immediately known.

⁶⁷ Bāqillānī 1998, 1:205.

⁶⁸ This should be no surprise as evidence broadly construed has been central to questions of epistemology. See Kelly 2016.

⁶⁹ The Ash‘arīs view scriptural evidence as analogous to language insofar as it requires an external condition to constitute it as evidence but they differ in various ways, including their posi-

of evidence are defined with respect to their epistemic grounds.⁷⁰ I begin with the more nuanced analysis of category 1, i.e., the definition of rational evidence. I then turn to the definitions of 2a and 2b.

The Ash‘arī definition of rational evidence as that which indicates or is evidence “in itself” is read by Ibn Taymiyya in a maximalist sense to mean a foundational or infallible connection of reason to objects of knowledge (*madlūlāt*).⁷¹ Attention to what is meant by the definition of rational evidence is central to understanding the Ash‘arī view of reason and revelation. The Ash‘arīs parse this definition of rational evidence rather finely to distinguish it from various other definitions and misinterpretations, including the stronger claims and conditions placed on rational knowledge by the Mu‘tazilis.⁷² In his more elaborate discussion of rational knowledge in *al-Shāmil*, Juwaynī clarifies that “in itself” does not mean knowledge of rational causes (*‘ilal ‘aqliyya*), necessitation (*ijāb*), co-implication (*in‘ikās*), or causal explanation (*ta‘līl*).⁷³ Rather, beginning with Bāqillānī, the basic requirement in the definition of rational evidence is a one-directional implication (*iṭṭirād*), which adheres closely to the original meaning of *dalīl*. I argue that *iṭṭirād*, which I translate as “implication,” is something like a conditional statement (i.e. If F, then G) applied more loosely to terms and sentences.⁷⁴ I begin with the conditions that the Ash‘arīs reject and exclude from the definition of rational evidence.

The Ash‘arīs state that “in itself” should not be confused with the maximal notions of rational evidence given to it by the Mu‘tazilis and, unknowingly, by the jurists. Juwaynī castigates those theologians who “conflate rational causes with [rational] evidence and make them the same thing, just as some jurists

tion that the meaning of scripture construed as Divine Speech is not conventional at all but real (*ḥaqīqī*) in contrast to the arbitrary connection of utterances and meanings (Ghazālī 2015, 1:193). The parallels and differences are discussed below.

70 Bāqillānī 1998, 1:204–205: “Know that evidence is of two kinds: a kind that is rational (*‘aqli*) and a kind that is conventional (*waq‘ī*).”

71 Abrahamov 1998, 21. *Madlūl* is identified with objects of knowledge in various ways; see Bāqillānī 1998, 1:206; 1987, 33–36.

72 Ayman Shihadeh’s study on the argument of ignorance highlights important aspects of the Ash‘arī view. I am focusing on the concept of *iṭṭirād* and rational evidence. See Shihadeh 2013; and van Ess 1970.

73 Juwaynī 1981, 60–73; Shihadeh 2013, 204–205.

74 Van Ess discusses the term as it applies to cause (*‘illa*), “With *ṭard* and *‘aks* together one reaches, thus, the security of intensive (and, at the same time, reciprocal) implication: if, and only if, the *‘illa* exists, the object is a sign in the sense implied by it” (1970, 39). He does not treat *ṭard* in the more basic sense advanced by the Ash‘arīs as the definitive feature of rational evidence.

speak loosely in calling inferred analogies (*qiyās*) in juristic interpretation as ‘causes.’”⁷⁵ That is, they conflate the *ratio legis*, or ‘illa in the legal sense, with rational evidence. Remarkably, Juwaynī even states that “in itself” can be somewhat misleading because that which has “no self” or existence can nonetheless indicate (*idh qad yadullu mā lā nafsa lahu*), a position that departs from the view of the Mu‘tazilīs that even the non-existent is a thing.⁷⁶ To be sure, Shihadeh has already shown that Juwaynī views *dalīl* independently of extra-mental import: “There is, hence, no *real* and intrinsic connection between the evidence and what is evidenced.”⁷⁷ What Juwaynī means is that the content of rational knowledge need not refer to real or external entities, i.e., have existential import, for it to serve as evidence or a source of inference.⁷⁸ Juwaynī even addresses the question of whether rational evidence relies on knowledge of the natures and essences of things.⁷⁹ I return to further details of this in part 2 and focus on *iṭṭirād*.

Significantly, the examples they provide are cases such as the relation of smoke to fire and an action to an agent. The Ash‘arīs, as is well known, deny any real ontological connection between a cause and effect, including between an action and agent contrary to the Mu‘tazilīs. How, then, is the relation of smoke to fire a model for rational evidence or inference? The Ash‘arī view of implication allows them to understand rational inference independently of deeper epistemic and ontological claims, to which I now turn.

For the Ash‘arīs, the basic requirement in the definition of rational evidence is “implication” (*iṭṭirād*), which, as suggested, is like a conditional argument. This excludes as a requirement co-implication, which as van Ess notes suggests something like “if, and only if”; it also excludes causal explanations (e.g., the

75 Juwaynī 1981, 69.

76 Juwaynī 1981, 71; Bāqillānī 1987, 34–36. Shihadeh notes that Bāqillānī holds a similar view (Shihadeh 2013, 203). Examples of nonexistent terms or premises include the assumption of, say, partners with God in a proof or conditional argument. See Gwynne 2004, 170–183.

77 Shihadeh 2013, 205. My reading of Juwaynī’s approach differs. As discussed below, Juwaynī has in mind the notion of implication and logical consequence (as highlighted by Shihadeh), which anticipates Rāzī’s view of rational argument. That is, Juwaynī’s view is not a radical departure but an articulation of the central notion of *iṭṭirād*.

78 Juwaynī 1981, 65.

79 Juwaynī addresses the natural philosophers (*al-ṭabā’i’iyyūn*) and those who believe in prime matter (*al-hayūla*) by stating that we do not observe the relevant natures or substrates. In the *Burhān*, Juwaynī states, “Most of the predecessors held that apprehension of the [essential] properties of bodies and their *realities* [*ḥaqā’iq*] is the limit of intellects, for it is not possible to perceive by means of reason a specific property by which a magnet attracts iron” (Juwaynī 1979, 1:143). This is not to say that Juwaynī treats essentialism in the systematic way as found in Rāzī.

Mu‘tazilis require ‘structure’ as a precondition or cause for life).⁸⁰ It is important to note that the notion of *iṭṭirād* as the definitive feature of rational evidence is already addressed in Bāqillānī.⁸¹ Bāqillānī affirms the importance of viewing rational evidence as implication *simpliciter*, excluding cause and co-implication. He states, “It is true for the *dalīl* that is connected to its consequent [*madlūl*] and knowledge that is connected to the object of knowledge (...) to follow (*tābi‘*) the obtaining of the consequent (...) but without making anything of that the cause (*‘illa*) or reason (*sabab*) for the obtaining of the consequent as it is, because if it does not obtain as it is, it is not valid for the proof to be a proof for it [i.e., the absence of the antecedent is not proof of the absence of the consequent].”⁸² The latter point is briefly expressed and remains unclear in the text. However, if we turn to a parallel discussion in Juwaynī, the point is made more explicit, “What confirms this [i.e., the invalidity of co-implication] is that origination indicates an originator rationally but does not indicate its absence [i.e., the absence of originator is not indicated by the absence of origination] and skilled action (*itqān*) indicates knowledge but its [i.e., skilled action] absence does not indicate the absence of knowledge.”⁸³ That is, the antecedent implies the consequent but the absence of the antecedent does not imply the absence of the consequent. The point is to clarify that a rational *dalīl* does not permit the following inference: If F, then G; but not F, then not G (i.e., the latter is invalid). The notion that a rational *dalīl* is fundamentally defined as implication in the above sense is significant in understanding the basic meaning of rational knowledge in the Ash‘arī tradition. It can be noted that the definition of rational evidence as *iṭṭirād* captures the core senses of *dalāla*. If we turn to Rāghib’s examples, a sign indicates an object, a term a meaning, a number a measure and so on in the sense that the antecedent is connected to the consequent in a conditional argument. The presence of a sign or symbol indicates the signified thing but the absence of a sign does not entail the absence of the object. *Iṭṭirād* is not strictly a conditional or material implication in modern propositional logic, which is one of many valid inference rules; rather, it functions more like a general notion of logical consequence.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Van Ess 1970, 39; Shihadeh 2013, 204–206.

⁸¹ El-Tobgui views Bāqillānī as advancing something closer to the Mu‘tazili view; see El-Tobgui 2020, 188–189.

⁸² Bāqillānī 1998, 1:206. Though it does not seem to be of immediate relevance, Bāqillānī seems to have affirmed the argument from ignorance in certain instances in the *Taqrib*, as Shihadeh states (Shihadeh 2013, 200–202).

⁸³ Juwaynī 1981, 69.

⁸⁴ See discussion of consequence in Normore 2015.

How this core sense of rational evidence and proof coheres with the various proof-methods that are advanced and tested prior to Rāzī requires further investigation. It can be noted that in discussing the concept of *dalīl* and the connection between *dalīl* and *madlūl* van Ess aptly notes, “That does not mean that the sign must correspond in its nature and essence to the thing indicated.”⁸⁵ He then states, “The similarity with Stoic logic is striking, not only in the system, but also in the vocabulary.”⁸⁶ Stoic logic and Aristotelian (Peripatetic) logic were of course the main, rival schools of logic. Setting aside the details, the two systems differed in fundamental ways. The Stoics developed a propositional logic as well as a deductive system based on axioms and inferences rules.⁸⁷ The Aristotelians took the categorical syllogism to be a complete theory of deductive inference and the pinnacle of logical theory. The Aristotelians believe that all valid arguments must be reduced to one of the valid syllogistic figures. Importantly, for our discussion, the Aristotelians did not consider argument types like conditionals and modus ponens (If F, then G; F; therefore, G) as independently valid. Van Ess states that the parallel between Islamic logic (*naẓar*) and the Stoics is ultimately overturned by the rise of Aristotelian syllogistics in Islamic sources, including in *kalām*. However, van Ess concludes with the following suggestion that “Aristotle never completely vanquished the Stoics in Islam.”⁸⁸ Of course, there is no genetic connection to the Stoics but van Ess suggests that earlier approaches that parallel the propositional logic of the Stoics might be retained.

I cannot show here that there is a consistent line of thinking on logic and epistemology that can be discerned from Bāqillānī to Rāzī. However, I offer the following points, which should, at the least, be considered in contextualizing the assimilation of syllogistics.⁸⁹ That is, it is worth considering the terms and nature of the assimilation of Aristotelian syllogistics from the eyes of the Ash‘arīs. Ibn Taymiyya holds that the later Ash‘arīs, from Ghazālī onward, take the categorical syllogism as the exclusive model of inference. Ibn Taymiyya devotes a section to refuting “the doctrine that no judgment may be known except by means of syllogism.”⁹⁰ However, first, it has been shown that the epistemic and essentialist

⁸⁵ Van Ess 1970, 27. Cf. El-Togui 2020, 188–189.

⁸⁶ Van Ess 1970, 27.

⁸⁷ See Bobzien, 2020.

⁸⁸ Van Ess 1970, 50.

⁸⁹ As recent studies have shown, the assimilation of syllogistics by later Ash‘arīs departs not only from Aristotle and the Peripatetics but from Ibn Sīnā. See for example, El-Rouayheb 2010.

⁹⁰ Hallaq 1993a, 30.

claims that Ibn Taymiyya attributes to the Ash‘arīs are in fact clearly opposed by Ash‘arīs like Rāzī. Rāzī for example argues specifically against real definitions and knowledge of essences, and advances nominal definitions, all of which are Ibn Taymiyya’s primary contributions in his critique of logic.⁹¹

In this regard, Rāzī states a more revealing point regarding his own view of the alleged preeminence of categorical syllogisms. Rāzī directly addresses a central tenet of Peripatetic philosophy from late antiquity, namely, the priority of the categorical syllogism over the conditional arguments or “hypothetical syllogism.”⁹² In this context, he refers directly to Aristotle’s definition of deduction and its reception by the Peripatetics, who he suggests are the “proponents of the categorical syllogism.”⁹³ In arguing against the latter, who prioritize the categorical syllogisms over conditional arguments, Rāzī concludes: “The result then is that the categorical syllogism is not productive except in virtue of it being a conditional argument in potentiality. Hence, the conditional argument must be prior in order and power to the categorical syllogism.”⁹⁴ Rāzī articulates the point in the context of a larger discussion of the underlying semantic interpretation of categorical sentences, which must be set aside. In any case, the statement at face value turns the Peripatetic doctrine of deduction on its head by viewing the categorical syllogism as dependent, in some way or other, on a higher-order conditional argument.⁹⁵ Moreover, Rāzī seems to distance himself from the “proponents” of the categorical syllogism. To be sure, as noted in his articulation of P1 discussed below, his view of a basic inference or rational proof does not specify a syllogistic argument. Rather, he characterizes it thus: “If all its premises are certain, then the conclusion is certain, for the consequent (*lāzim*) of true premises

⁹¹ Hallaq 1993a, 15–21. Ibn Taymiyya admits that Rāzī and others oppose real definitions.

⁹² Ibn Taymiyya is correct in imputing this doctrine to Ibn Sinā and the *falāsifa* but not to Rāzī.

⁹³ Ibn Sinā states, “In sum, hypothetical syllogisms are only completed by categorical syllogisms if what is aimed for is for the deduction to be productive (...) For the analysis in the old *Analytics* is only the syllogism that is productive of predicative sentences, so the meaning of ‘categorical’ (*iqtirānī*) there and ‘predicative’ (*ḥamlī*) is one” (Ibn Sinā 1964, 415, 425).

⁹⁴ Rāzī 1996, 1:162.

⁹⁵ In the preceding, Rāzī states, “One can state [against the argument for the priority of the categorical over the hypothetical syllogism]: The definition which you have mentioned for the categorical syllogism entails that the conditional syllogism is [in fact] prior in order to the categorical syllogism. And that is because you have accepted that what implies the conclusion is the syllogism. So that it is as if the one adherent to categorical syllogisms is saying: “If this categorical syllogism (*qiyās ḥamlī*) is true, then the conclusion is true, but this predicative syllogism is true, therefore the conclusion is true” (Rāzī 1996, 1:162).

(insofar as it is a valid consequence), must be true.”⁹⁶ In this regard, it has been overlooked that, in his standard works of *kalām*, Rāzī does not stipulate *categorical syllogisms* but provides this broader definition of deduction.⁹⁷ Crucially, this is not the notion of categorical syllogistics as held by the Aristotelians, who stipulate that there be the relevant connection between the terms of the premises. It is for this reason that Aristotelian logic is called “term logic.” Rāzī’s notion of proof can be viewed as the notion of *iṭṭirād* writ large.⁹⁸ Remarkably, this notion of *luzūm* was already identified by Juwaynī, as Shihadeh has shown. Juwaynī calls a *dalīl* nothing other than “the establishing of a consequent on the basis of an antecedent (*binā maṭlūb ‘alā muqaddam*).”⁹⁹ Now, the larger implications of all this requires a more comprehensive treatment and my aim is not to show here that the Ash‘arīs develop an alternative logical system consistent with earlier views of *dalīl* and *naẓar*. Rather, the above simply shows that Ibn Taymiyya’s characterization of Ash‘arī thought as a wholesale adoption of categorical syllogistics needs to be attenuated, if not, entirely reconsidered.¹⁰⁰

Returning to the above division of categories of evidence, the Ash‘arīs draw an important contrast between the two categories, i.e., rational evidence and conventional evidence. Rational evidence indicates “in itself,” which as noted is the minimal concept of implication capturing the basic senses of *dalāla*. Rational evidence draws on the minimal level of self-evident knowledge (*ḍarūriyyāt*) available to all human beings. The precise content of this may be disputed but not the basic definition of this category of knowledge. In the case of knowledge of empirical things, a connection – say, between smoke and fire – is first established by repeated experience. In all this, the content and evidence is independent of any prior imposition of how the evidence indicates or connects with objects of knowledge. This contrasts directly with the definition of category 2, which is not evidence “in itself.” Rather, category 2 is dependent on the agreement or convention of a specific group or community. The example they will use is that of language,

⁹⁶ Rāzī 1986, 2:251. On *lāzim*, see van Ess 1970, 29. Van Ess suggests that Ibn Sinā’s notion of *luzūm* differs.

⁹⁷ Rāzī 1986, 2:251; n.d. 40–41; 2015, 1:121–124. This is especially surprising in the *Nihāya*, which he considers his most advanced work of *kalām*.

⁹⁸ Rāzī of course addresses the idea with systematic clarity not found in earlier sources. This latter is certainly an outcome of his engagement and assimilation of ancient logic and *falsafa*. That is, there seems to be a critical aspect of the assimilation and appropriation of categorical syllogistics that retains the earlier *kalām* notion of *iṭṭirād*.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Shihadeh 2013, 205. Juwaynī states: “The way of establishing a proof for contradiction, is the way of establishing a proof for everything. And that is not how one established a cause at all” (Juwaynī 1981, 69). See Karimullah 2014.

¹⁰⁰ I set aside Ghazālī’s adoption of Aristotelian syllogistic, which requires scrutiny.

where “symbols” (*kitābāt; rumūz*) indicate in virtue of a prior agreement or imposition. As Bāqillānī states, “If it were not for the agreement of a people (*ahlihi*) on what [signs] indicate, they would not indicate [anything].”¹⁰¹ That is, the word, ‘tree,’ is assigned by a language community to indicate or signify an external object; but we could have very well assigned an entirely different set of letters. Moreover, it is not our knowledge of the very letters that tells us that ‘tree’ signifies the object, tree. Rather, it is by established convention. However, once the symbols are assigned we will immediately apprehend that a specific word indicates a specific object. This immediacy is *posterior* to assigning a sign in contrast to the case of rational evidence. The difference is that rational evidence is in some sense independent of our choices or conventions, i.e., is non-arbitrary, whereas category 2 cannot indicate without some prior stipulation or assumption.

The point that language signifies in an *immediate* manner, but only after imposition, is important to understanding Rāzī’s view of the epistemic nature of texts (*naql*), as discussed below. That is, he will address the question of whether the most immediately apprehended meanings of *naql*, or speech texts is as epistemically basic as our apprehension of signified meanings.

Regarding scriptural evidence (2a), the Ash‘arīs define it as that which “requires something that establishes it as evidence.” They offer additional descriptions of scriptural evidence, which are examined in part 2. Scriptural evidence falls under category 2 because it does not indicate in itself. As noted, the authors draw an analogy between language which indicates by convention and scriptural evidence. However, scriptural evidence differs in two important senses. First, it is already coherent speech, i.e., texts comprise meanings and does not begin as arbitrary signs that is then assigned to a meaning. As such, scripture does not require an external agent to establish it as meaningful but, rather, the “establisher” ensures that the text is normative or binding, i.e., its expressed rules and truths must be accepted. I return to details of pre-Rāzian definitions of *sam‘* in Part 2.

Second, the definitions of the various categories of evidence is relatively clear. However, there are two remaining ambiguities. First, as noted, it is unclear what the relation between linguistic signification (2a) and scriptural evidence (2b) is with respect to epistemic certitude. Second, an overarching question remains regarding the very relation between category 1 and category 2. That is, if rational evidence is defined in the most minimal sense of implication, capturing the basic usages of *dalīl*, then in what sense does category 2 exclude *ittirād*? That is, what makes the two categories mutually exclusive? Are they distinct kinds of evidence

101 Bāqillānī 1998, 1:205.

because they are two distinct forms of *reasoning* or are they distinct simply in virtue of the content of the evidence?

In this regard, Bāqillānī and Juwaynī make a remarkable claim that suggests that *iṭṭirād* or implication is the general notion of inference that applies to both categories, rational and conventional. Bāqillānī views implication as a general category applying to both rational and conventional evidence. He states, “It is no doubt necessary for the *dalīl* to [possess] implication and for it to go through whatever the state of its judgment [i.e., the content of its premises] whether rationally or conventionally.”¹⁰² Bāqillānī expands on this point in his discussion of how many ways we can derive a proof (*istidlāl*), i.e., how many kinds of proofs or argument-types there are. He states that one cannot delimit the kinds rational proofs but there are relied upon methods.¹⁰³ Towards the conclusion, he discusses how language and convention can apply to rational proof:

One can also derive a proof by the stipulation (*tawqīf*) of the linguists upon us that “All fire is hot and burning” and that “All humans have this figure,” on the basis that every truthful person who reports that he saw a fire or person, and the latter is a speaker of our language (*ahl lughatinā*), intends to make us understand that he observed only what is named fire or human in our presence [i.e., experience]. We do not assert some of that for others.¹⁰⁴ *But [this applies only] by the necessity of the name and the imposition of language and the necessity of speech usage according to how it is used and by convention (waq’i) as it is established.*¹⁰⁵

Bāqillānī underscores what parallels our notion of “truth by convention.”¹⁰⁶ Setting aside the details of the above, Bāqillānī views proof as implication as a general category that *includes* inferences with purely “rational” content, e.g., immediately known truths that do not depend on convention but also include inferences the truth of whose premises are established by convention. The latter of course should fall under 2a. In other words, proof as implication, according to Bāqillānī’s closer analysis, is more general than purely rational arguments based on rational premises. Here, the question is then what excludes scriptural evidence from being a kind or subcategory of rational evidence defined as implication.

Rāzī’s P1 and P2 address these two ambiguities in the earlier tradition. P1 addresses the question of what precisely a scriptural text is as a linguistic phenomenon and what its relation is to linguistic signification. P2 addresses the more

¹⁰² Bāqillānī 1998, 1:205.

¹⁰³ Bāqillānī 1987, 31–33.

¹⁰⁴ This seems to mean that the stipulated meaning does not apply to some things, i.e., it should not be taken to apply absolutely.

¹⁰⁵ Bāqillānī 1987, 32–33.

¹⁰⁶ See Rescorla 2019.

overarching question of what the relation is between rational evidence (category 1) and scriptural evidence construed, in one way or another, as evidence in category 2.

Before turning to the relation of Rāzī’s view to the above authors, I conclude with a note on the initial dichotomy between reason and revelation attributed to the Ash‘arīs. It is becoming clear that the categories of evidence, and particularly the division between (1) rational evidence and (2a) scriptural evidence, does not aim to distinguish two mutually exclusive sources, where there is reason on the one hand and scripture on the other. Rather, the divisions concern how evidence is used and articulated. For the Ash‘arīs, the division between rational evidence and scriptural evidence does not mean that rational knowledge is independent and exclusive of the content of scripture. As noted above, verses in category (A) refer to rational evidence. However, they hold that those verses themselves are not meant to be *the evidence itself*, in contrast to other verses that stipulate and thus establish the verses themselves as the proof of a ruling or truth. Moreover, according to our authors, the *methodological* distinction between (1) rational evidence and (2) scriptural evidence is validated by the Quran and Sunna and the division between verses of category (A) and (B).

1.3 Rāzī’s Unified Theory of Ash‘arī Epistemology

Rāzī’s view is a systematization of the central distinctions highlighted above concerning Ash‘arī definitions of rational and scriptural evidence. This becomes clear if we consider more closely how the distinction between (1) rational evidence and (2a) scriptural evidence are related to knowledge, and particularly certitude. We can begin with some relevant questions that can be asked about the distinction, and then turn to how it is addressed by Rāzī.

First, are the most definitive categories of scriptural texts epistemically *immediate and certain* in the same way that the basic human knowledge (e.g. *ḍarūriyyāt*) is certain? It can be recalled that the Sunnī view is standardly interpreted as stating that the two sources of reason and revelation impart (*yufīd*) certitude independently (given that one has already proven the general truth of the latter). It is for this reason that Ibn Taymiyya is so disturbed by Rāzī’s claim in P1 that scriptural texts fail to impart certitude. The claim is not simply beyond Sunnism but beyond even Mu‘tazilism as he states. In terms of what counts as certain knowledge in each category, with respect to rational knowledge, the Ash‘arīs offer a list of (1) immediately known certitudes (*ḍarūriyyāt*), on the one hand, and (2) validly inferred truths (*naẓariyyāt*), on the other. With respect to scriptural evidence, we are given a ranking of categories of texts with respect to how clearly and definitively they convey a meaning (e.g., *naṣṣ*, *ẓāhir*, etc.). In the authors we examine below, the

most definitive text is usually called *naṣṣ*. They define *naṣṣ* as that which “independently imparts meanings in a definitive manner” (*al-istiqlāl bi-ifādat al-ma‘ānī ‘alā qat‘*) and “such that avenues of *ta’wīl* are terminated, and paths of alternative [meanings] (*iḥtimālāt*) are cut off.”¹⁰⁷ Bāqillānī defines *naṣṣ* as “that which is independent in itself in disclosing all that it encompasses [in expression], without any ambiguity in any of its meanings.”¹⁰⁸ Against his predecessors, Rāzī explicitly opposes this view: “It is claimed that [*naṣṣ*] is that which imparts a meaning in a definitive manner such that it is not open to *ta’wīl*,” and after stating that that is an incorrect definition, he states, “For there is *no expression* [of speech] that is posited for a meaning but that a figurative [understanding] of it is possible so that what is *intended* is other than what it was posited for.”¹⁰⁹ This clearly implies Rāzī’s P1, which however is a definition of *naql* at fundamental methodological and epistemic level. Rāzī distinguishes speech texts, like *naṣṣ*, which involve *intended* meanings, from direct established and signification, to which I return shortly.

I begin with a text of P2 as expressed by Rāzī in the *Ma‘ālim* and *Arba‘īn*, which are curricular works of theology and legal theory:

A proof (*dalīl*) is either [1] composed of premises that are all rational, which exists [i.e. this is a valid proof]; or [2] [composed of premises] that are all textual (*naqliyya*), and this is absurd (*muḥāl*), because one of the premises of that proof is *that that text (naql) is evidence (ḥujja)*. And it is not possible for a text to establish a text [as evidence]. Or [3] some of [the premises] are rational and some textual, and that exists (...).¹¹⁰

Prior to delving into this inquiry, it is necessary to know that a proof (*dalīl*) is either [1] rational (*‘aqliyyan*) with respect to all its premises, [2] it is textual (*naqliyyan*) with respect to all its premises, or [3] it is composed of both categories. As for [1], the first division, which is if it is rational with respect to all its premises, *if all its premises are certain, then the conclusion is certain, for the consequent (lāzīm) of true premises, insofar as it is a valid consequence (luzūman ḥaqqan), must be true*. As for if the premises are probable (...).

As for [2] the second division, which is the proof that is textual with respect to all its premises, this is impossible. Because using evidence (*istidlāl*) from the Quran and Sunna is dependent on knowledge of the truth of the Prophet and this knowledge is not derived from textual knowledge because that would be circular. Rather, it is derived from rational proofs, and there is no doubt that *this premise is one of the parts [of the proof] that is considered in the validity of a textual proof*. Hence, it is established that a proof that is *naqlī* in all premises is impossible and invalid.¹¹¹

107 Juwaynī 1979, 1:415; see also 1979, 1:160–166; Ghazālī 2015, 2:48–50; Anṣārī 2010, 1:242–243.

108 Bāqillānī 1998, 1:340.

109 Rāzī 1992, 34.

110 Rāzī 2007, 22, 153.

111 Rāzī 1986, 2:251.

I limit myself to the following comments and return to details of P2 in part 3. First, it should be noted that Rāzī begins with *dalīl* without qualifying it as rational or scriptural in both texts. Properly speaking a proof or inference is a proof regardless; “rational” and “scriptural” describe a proof with respect to its premises. However, elsewhere, Rāzī considers the notion of proofs in a broader sense as falling into the category of rational knowledge, i.e., not as something that is conventional. Crucially, Rāzī provides the above definition of rational proof: “if all its premises are certain, then the conclusion is certain, for the consequent of true premises (insofar as it is a valid consequence), must be true.” This, as noted, may include the notion of categorical syllogistics but it certainly does not require it.

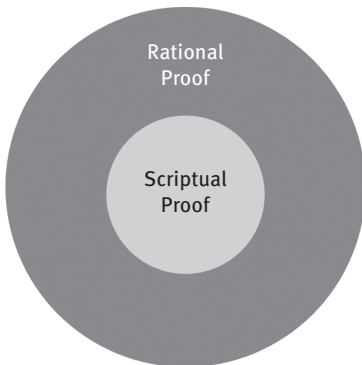
With regard to (2), namely, a proof whose premises are purely scriptural texts, Rāzī puts in clearer terms what is implicit in the earlier Ash‘arī theory, particularly their view of scriptural evidence as requiring something establishing it as evidence. He states that a proof whose premises “are all textual (*naqliyya*) is absurd (*muḥāl*), because one of the premises of that proof is *that that text (naql) is evidence (ḥujja)*.” In the *Arba‘īn*, he states, “There is no doubt that this premise [i.e., that the text is true or authoritative] is one of the parts [of the proof] that is considered in the validity of a textual proof.” That is, Rāzī considers the earlier definition of *samī‘* evidence as stipulating a conceded premise regarding the truth or evidentiary nature of a text. Critically, Rāzī explicitly combines the two kinds of proof under one general theory of inference.

In Rāzī’s view, a proper reading of the earlier Ash‘arī distinction between rational evidence and scriptural evidence demands that we treat the two as falling under a general category of inference or proof. The pre-Rāzian Ash‘arīs distinguished between rational and scriptural evidence. At the same time, it remained unclear why the two are distinct if we take the basic understanding of evidence as an inferential move from a known thing to an unknown thing. They understood this move, moreover, as a one-directional implication. For Rāzī, this is best captured by the notion of a proof with at least two premises, which is perhaps the commitment that is most influenced by Aristotelian logic. Rāzī resolves this ambiguity by considering a rational inference as a general category under which purely rational, scriptural, and conventional arguments fall. That is, all inferences are similar insofar as they are inferences; the difference concerns the nature of the premises.¹¹² Here, if we look at the definition of scriptural evidence

¹¹² Notably, Rāzī need not involve himself here in the more complex question of the relation of the form of a syllogism to its matter.

in (2a), we can see that it is in fact an argument that is in form no different than a rational argument. When we speak of scriptural evidence, or *al-dalīl al-samʿī*, we are speaking of how specific *texts* constitute evidence for a claim or belief, i.e., prooftexts. Importantly, we are not speaking, for example, of the inimitable quality of the Quran’s language, which is, in some sense, evidence in itself.¹¹³ Rather, scriptural evidence is understood as when a certain *text* in the Quran or Sunna is identified and used as a proof (*istidlāl*) for a certain claim. However, any such inferential use of a text must be distinguished from the text itself. Rāzī states that any use of a text as proof involves the implicit premise or claim that “this text is evidence.” This is precisely what the distinction between (1) rational evidence and (2) conditional evidence amounts to. That is, evidence in (2a) is true posterior to some prior belief or claim about the source of the evidence.

According to Rāzī, if we properly attend to the structure of the Ashʿarī view of evidence and knowledge, scriptural evidence should be viewed as falling under an overarching or general category of evidence and proof:



This restructuring is an important methodological point for Rāzī as it captures the central distinctions in the tradition.¹¹⁴ As discussed, the distinction is implicit in the earlier Ashʿarī analysis of evidence and inference but Rāzī is the first to put it in systematic terms. It seems that this was not conceived by earlier thinkers in part because of the division of labor between the theologians and jurists. It would

¹¹³ Juwaynī 1979, 1:35, and discussion below.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Griffel 2018, 26, who provides a Venn diagram representing partial overlapping between authority domains of reason and revelation.

make little sense to the jurists that when they use a text from the Quran as a proof-text one always implicitly assumes an additional rational premise, namely, that the source as a whole is normative evidence. To the jurist, all the relevant interlocutors accept that the Quran as evidence. But Rāzī’s claim makes clear what is implicit in the division of the religious sciences. That is, all the postulates of law assume a prior proving of its sources as evidence. This is not the case in theology. As we will see, this is an important methodological distinction that concerns not simply the standards of engagement with those who have not accepted the truth of revelation but has important consequences for the function of theology and non-legal hermeneutics.

But how does the above lead to Rāzī’s first principle, P1, the claim that texts fail to provide certitude at all? This leads us back to the question above regarding the certainty of the most definitive category of scriptural texts. Rāzī’s view, I suggested, is the culmination and systematization of what Vishanoff calls the “principle of ambiguity” of Bāqillānī, which in turn is a more systematic view of Shafi‘ī’s emphasis on hermeneutic ambiguity.¹¹⁵ Vishanoff highlights a critical point:

Al-Bāqillānī insisted that God’s speech is similar to human speech in the sense that it abides by the human Arabic lexicon, but because God’s speech cannot convey its own meaning *immediately* to humans, al-Bāqillānī argues that the words of the Quran can only function as a piece of evidence that must be deciphered without *the benefit of immediate understanding* that characterizes interpersonal address.¹¹⁶

A central aspect of Bāqillānī’s view relates to the Ash‘arī theory of meaning and speech. I limited myself to the following points. As noted, the Ash‘arīs distinguish between the “meaning” of a term or expression and its vocable (or written) form (i.e. “tree” signifies the meaning, tree). The view opposes the Mu‘tazilī and Ḥanbalī view, which equates meanings with their linguistic expressions. As Vishanoff shows, this leads the latter to a more rigid and literalist view.¹¹⁷ I argue that that the Sunnī-Ash‘arī view begins with a more basic and foundational analysis of language, which need not invoke the more contentious arguments concerning the status of Divine Speech.

¹¹⁵ Vishanoff 2011, 186: “But at the level of his interpretive rules and his overall model of interpretation, he left the meaning of revelation so radically underdetermined (...) it is hard to see how anyone could have put his hermeneutic into practice as a positive method for constructing law;” italics mine.

¹¹⁶ Vishanoff 2011, 183; italics mine.

¹¹⁷ Vishanoff 2011, 150.

As noted, the Ash‘arīs sharply distinguish between a linguistic expression (*lafz*) and its meaning (*ma‘nā*). The distinction is meant to be intuitive and evidenced by the fact that the same meaning can be signified by different expressions and in different languages (i.e., tree and *shajar* are expressions that signify the same meaning).¹¹⁸ This view of language, which prioritizes meanings over expressed forms, leads to two aspects or analyses of meaning: language as a system of signification (*dalālat al-waḍ‘*) and language as speech (*khiṭāb*). In the former sense of language, meanings are assigned by convention (*waḍ‘*) to terms in a clear and immediate manner. This aspect of language will be treated by Rāzī and later thinkers almost as a closed system of signification, where there is a one-to-one correspond between expressions and meanings. By contrast, language construed as speech involves more than mere linguistic signification. That is, language as speech presumes a speaker and audience, where linguistic expressions aim to capture the intent (*murād*) of the speaker in addition to a basic layer of given meanings. The first sense of language is in certain ways more basic to and presumed by the latter, as Ghazālī (d. 1111) states: “The path to comprehending the intended meaning (*fahm al-murād*) [of scripture] is preceded by apprehending the given [meanings] of language (*taqaddum al-ma‘rifa bi-waḍ‘ al-lughā*), by means of which communicated speech (*mukhātaba*) occurs.”¹¹⁹ For the Ash‘arīs, scriptural texts must be construed as divine *speech*, not reducible to a system of signification. Though this distinction is clear and might be conceded even by the Ḥanbalīs, the implications are not fully addressed by earlier thinkers. To be sure, the point raises a critical question in Rāzī’s eyes about the relation of *certitude* (*yaqīn*) to scriptural texts, and texts more generally construed. What ensures our certitude with respect to speaker’s intent? Put otherwise, what are the conditions for a text to exclude alternate readings of authorial intent? Do some texts *independently* ensure and convey a univocal reading? Finally, are our text-based certitudes on par with direct linguistic signification or our most basic human certitudes, e.g., immediately known truths (*ḍarūriyyāt*)? Rāzī’s two principles aim

118 Rāzī 1999, 1:187–189. Vishanoff states, “This ‘principle of ambiguity’ offered precisely what the Mu‘tazilī ‘principle of clarity’ failed to provide: great flexibility in determining the intertextual relationships that were the key to Shāfi‘ī’s hermeneutical project. Bāqillānī thus provided a highly sophisticate restatement of Shāfi‘ī’s hermeneutic of ambiguity” (2011, 178).

119 Ghazālī 2015, 2:22; Bāqillānī 2000, 15; Juwaynī 1979, 1:169–173. Jurjānī’s analysis of grammar and language is of central importance to Rāzī. I discuss aspects of this below in part 2. See Vishanoff 2011, 116–122. Bāqillānī states for *sam‘ī* evidence: “That which is evidence in virtue of speech *after* meanings are imposed [by convention], and insofar as a meaning is derived from speech (*Dāll min ṭarīq al-nuṭq ba‘da al-muwāḍa‘a, wa-min jihat ma‘nā mustakhrāj min al-nuṭq*)” (Bāqillānī 1987, 15).

to address these latter questions, which remain rather unclear in earlier views. Especially revealing in this regard will be Rāzī’s discussion of the relation of *naṣṣ*, the most definitive or certain hermeneutic category, to our more basic epistemic and linguistic certitudes.¹²⁰

The Ash‘arī analysis of language draws an important distinction between language as a system of “signification” (*dalāla*) and language as speech or “communicated” meaning (*khiṭāb*), where the latter involves a speaker communicating to a real or imagined audience. In the former, language is treated as a transparent system, where there is a one-to-one correspondence between expressions and meanings. Signification by correspondence (*dalālat al-muṭabāqa*) is viewed as the basic kind of signification, where the primary sense of a term is apprehended with certitude.¹²¹ The distinction is clear in Ghazālī and later thinkers; in part 2, I return to the question of how earlier thinkers address this. Speech, by contrast, requires the additional element of grasping the *intent* (*murād al-khiṭāb*) of the author, which involves attention to various aspects of the usage and context of expressions and speech acts. Properly understood, legal and scriptural hermeneutics – and its store of terminology, e.g., *naṣṣ*, *zāhīr*, etc. – treat scripture as (divine) speech and not simply as a system of signification. I discuss the full text of P1 in part 3 but highlight the following points.

It was noted that Rāzī holds that even the most definitive category of text, *naṣṣ*, is subject to interpretation, contrary to Ghazālī. In fact, Ghazālī states *naṣṣ* “admits no ambiguity at all (...) like ‘five,’ for example, which is *naṣṣ* in its meaning and does not admit ‘six,’ ‘four,’ or any other number.”¹²² However, does Rāzī hold that there is a basic level of language use that is not subject to ambiguity? In various places, Rāzī affirms that signification of correspondence (*dalālat al-muṭābaqa*) is the only kind of signification that is impervious to any ambiguity. Below I discuss his treatment of the problem in legal theory. However, in his work of rhetoric, which draws on the earlier work of ‘Abd al-Qāhir al-Jurjānī (d. 1078),

120 This marks a critical distinction between Rāzī’s and Ghazālī’s approaches. Ghazālī views *naṣṣ* as equivalent to the most basic category of direct signification (*dalālat al-muṭābaqa*) and admissible in logic. He states, “Hence, only *naṣṣ*, in the second posited sense [i.e., *naṣṣ* in the strict sense distinguished from *zāhīr*], can be relied upon in rational inquiry (*‘aqliyyāt*)” (Ghazālī 2015, 2:50). According to Rāzī, this amounts to a category error. *Naṣṣ* is a hermeneutic term and applies to texts (*naql*) and is not limited to purely semantic signification and inferences. Juwaynī also states that *naṣṣ* is that which is not possibly open to interpretation (*ta’wīl*); see Juwaynī 1979, 1:512. Cf. Zysow 2013, 52–54, 58–59.

121 Ghazālī 2015, 1:74–78; 2:22. See Tony Street’s chapter in this volume on the kinds of signification in Ibn Sinā (=Chapter 5).

122 Ghazālī 2015, 2:48.

after a discussion of the various kinds of conventional signification (*dalāla waḍ'īyya*), Rāzī states,

Know that the aim of speech is conveying (*ifāda*) meanings and this conveyance, as you know, is of two kinds: expression-based conveyance (*lafẓīyya*) and meaning-based conveyance (*ma'nawīyya*) (...). It becomes clear from this investigation that it is impossible that [such things as] conciseness, brevity, prolixity, omission (*ḥadhf*), and ellipsis (*iḍmār*) can encroach on conventional signification (*dalāla waḍ'īyya*). And for this nuance, nothing is used in the rational sciences but conventional signification because of its being devoid of possessing increase or decrease [in meaning] which places [one] in error and doubt.¹²³

Three points may be highlighted in this section. First, by *dalāla waḍ'īyya*, Rāzī means what he calls elsewhere correspondence (*dalālat al-muṭābaqa*).¹²⁴ To be sure, Rāzī draws a sharper distinction than that between linguistic signification and speech. He excludes other kinds of signification as well, which in logic is called implicative signification (*dalālat al-iltizām*) and containment (*dalālat al-taḍammun*).¹²⁵ Second, Rāzī connects the clarity and basicness of conventional signification with the ambiguity of intended speech, which is subject to “error and doubt.” Some of the terms, such as omission and ellipsis, are included in the ten conditions that prevent texts from imparting certitude.¹²⁶ These connections between signification theory and speech are not always clear when he posits P1 and P2 in his introductory or methodological discussions of theology and legal theory. Finally, Rāzī reads these distinctions into Jurjānī’s work. I set aside the connection of these distinctions with the Arabic linguistic tradition and its relation to Aristotelian linguistic theory.¹²⁷

If we turn back to the distinction between (2a) scriptural texts and (2b) language, we find some important implications with respect to the nature of certainty. As noted, in (2b), when a meaning is assigned to a linguistic term, the signification is, thereafter, understood immediately. However, this is not the case with speech, as it involves apprehending the intent of the speaker. Speech relies undoubtedly on a system of signification but involves more on the part of the

123 Rāzī 2004, 32.

124 Rāzī states, “Conventional signification (*dalāla waḍ'īyya*) is [precisely] correspondence (*muṭābaqa*), and the latter two [i.e., external implication (*dalālat al-iltizām*) and internal implication (*dalālat al-taḍammun*)] are dependent [on the former]” (Rāzī 2002, 19). See also Rāzī 1999, 1:219–234.

125 Ibn Sīnā notably does not exclude the latter two in logic; see Tony Street’s chapter in this volume (=Chapter 5).

126 An important difference here is that the work on rhetoric concerns language usage more generally and does not focus on Quranic hermeneutics.

127 See the insightful analysis of Najafi 2019.

audience, specifically in terms of how one claims to achieve certitude with respect to speaker’s intent. This is particularly so when the communicated meaning is not direct or live conversation and, moreover, is extended, i.e., statements are embedded in a larger message that is not only presumed to be cohesive but, in our case, constituting the speech of an Omniscient Author.

In his analysis of P1, Rāzī clarifies and systematizes these distinctions, which remained somewhat ambiguous in earlier discussions. An especially revealing question in this context concerns the epistemic nature of *naṣṣ*, as noted. That is, is *naṣṣ* epistemically certain in the same way that the most basic kind of linguistic signification is certain, namely, *dalālat al-muṭābaqa*? While earlier thinkers are rather unclear, Rāzī articulates the distinction between two aspects or analyses of language. I return to the details of Rāzī’s analysis below. However, before doing so, I conclude with some final questions that remain unresolved.

The above has addressed the question raised earlier regarding how Rāzī’s radical hermeneutic principles, which, as Ibn Taymiyya states, go beyond even the Mu‘tazilīs, is in fact a synthesis of central distinctions within the Ash‘arī tradition. Indeed, the Mu‘tazilīs could not have developed such a view given their restrictive view of meaning and their more robust requirements of rational inference. Their view of rational evidence would seem to require them to sharply distinguish rational evidence from scriptural or text-based evidence, though this requires examination. The various nuances of the Ash‘arī analysis of language and knowledge lie at the heart of this view. But this still leaves the question of how such a view can be taken to be consistent with, indeed definitive of Sunnī theology and legal theory. To that end, we turn to Rāzī’s various curricular works of theology and legal theory, where he not only advances this view but argues forcefully that this is the correct view according to the principles of Ash‘arī-Sunnism.

As I have argued, Rāzī’s hermeneutic principles advance a principle of radical underdetermination between intended meanings and speech texts. There are various concerns that motivate Rāzī’s approach to scriptural texts. I focus on two points. First, Rāzī believes that there is a nomocentric tendency in the Sunnī tradition that effaces a central aspect of the tradition, namely, theology construed in a broader sense. That is, the jurists have convinced us that theology and hermeneutics as applied to non-legal texts is marginal or supplementary. Rāzī emphasizes the point in various places and especially in his commentary on the Quran:

The verses that mention legal rulings are less than 600 hundred. As for the rest, they concern God’s unity, prophecy, and refutations of the idolaters and other kinds of polytheists. As for the verses that are mentioned regarding narratives (*qaṣas*), the aim of them is knowledge of the wisdom of God and His power as He states, “There is surely in their narratives a lesson

for those who possess understanding.” This indicates that this science [*‘ilm al-kalām*] is more noble [than law]. Here, we refer to the central points of proofs [in the Quran]. As for that which proves the existence of God, the Quran is full of that.”¹²⁸

Rāzī asserts the primacy of theology against a nomocentric trend in the tradition. This primacy concerns not simply the proving or defending of theological beliefs, which is the standard view of the function of *kalām*. Rather, *kalām* is required for a proper understanding of the (non-legal) content of the Quran. The point will be of relevance when we turn to Rāzī’s view of hermeneutic terms of legal theory. That is, the hermeneutic terms of legal theory are not exhaustive of the terms or tools of interpretation but are limited to deriving legal rules. This primacy of *kalām* is grounded in the Ash‘arī view regarding the nature of the rational content of the Quran itself, though earlier *mutakallimūn* limited its role to theological proofs. That the bulk of the Quran is non-legal and, as such, demands a broader hermeneutic approach. It seems that this expansive view of *kalām*, as a kind of theological hermeneutic, has roots in earlier Ash‘arī trends regarding the role of the rational content of scripture, particularly in their discussions of *i‘jāz* (inimitability of the Quran). What is relevant to note in this context is that Rāzī’s view is articulated as an extension of Ash‘arī’s view of *kalām* as grounded in the Quran and Sunna.¹²⁹ That is, Rāzī, much like his predecessors (perhaps with the exclusion of Ghazālī) does not require any robust assimilation of reason in *falsafa* or Mu‘tazilism. A central point that Rāzī notes above and is repeated throughout various works is: “And whoever reflects knows that there is nothing in the hands of the theologian but elucidating (*tafṣīl*) what the Quran expresses in a concise manner (*ijmāl*).”¹³⁰ The point brings us full circle as it reflects Ash‘arī’s validation of theology in *al-Ḥathth* as having a relation of reciprocity with scripture. Ash‘arī states that even if the Companions of the Prophet did not speak specifically to such problems, “their principles are specified and existent in the Quran and Sunna in a concise manner (*jumlatan*) but not in detail (*mufaṣṣalatan*)” and “every discourse expanding on (*tafṣīl*) problems of divine unity and justice is taken *only* from the Quran.”¹³¹ The later Ash‘arīs articulate the view in more

128 Rāzī 1990, 2:80. See also 1990, 23:223; 2:107.

129 Ash‘arī already states that *kalām* is the elucidation (*tafṣīl*) of scripture. See Frank 1988, 138. Here, *tafṣīl* differs from legal hermeneutics because the content of scripture at issue in theological inquiry and hermeneutics is not strictly legal rulings.

130 Rāzī 1990, 23:223.

131 Frank 1988, 137, 138. Anṣārī quotes Ash‘arīs work extensively; see Anṣārī 2010, 1:220. Rāzī states, “The Quran is the source of all knowledge, so *‘ilm al-kalām*, all of it, is in the Quran” (1990, 2:107).

systematic terms, beginning with their view of rational evidence and proof. How precisely Rāzī imagines a more comprehensive theological hermeneutic in his *Mafāṭih*, that expands on the principles of Ash‘arism, requires further study.¹³²

2 Reason and Revelation in Pre-Rāzian Ash‘arism

In this section, I examine Ash‘arī views of the relationship between reason and revelation, focusing on the works of Bāqillānī, Juwaynī, Ghazālī and others writing prior to Rāzī. The discussion examines the Ash‘arī theory of evidence in works of *kalām* and legal theory. I show that Ghazālī adopts, broadly, the same analysis as his predecessors, though there are differences. Rāzī’s synthesis of earlier views leads to some important divergences.

We can begin by asking the following questions: How, precisely, do earlier Ash‘arīs define ‘*aql* and *sam*’?¹³³ Is *sam*’, for example, the very sources or texts of scripture (specifically, the Quran and Sunna) or is it a concept or category distinguished from the texts themselves? If the latter, how is the concept defined, what is its function, and what is its relation to the concept of ‘*aql*’?

In addressing the relation of reason to revelation, the Ash‘arīs use the terms ‘*aql* and *sam*’ (and sometimes *naql* for the latter). I will use the transliterated terms or refer to the latter terms respectively as “reason” and “scriptural source” in a general sense, before specifying more technical senses of the two. In pre-Rāzian sources, we find that there are three distinct contexts in *kalām* and legal theory in which ‘*aql* and *sam*’ are defined or discussed as concepts or categories. All three aspects of ‘*aql* and *sam*’ are usually discussed in the introductory sections of works of *kalām* and *uṣūl*:

- (1) The *facultative* definition of ‘*aql*: The early Ash‘arīs discuss the ontological status of ‘*aql* as an entity or human faculty. Juwaynī broadly follows Bāqillānī in holding that ‘*aql* is nothing more than the very instances of knowledge, i.e., “knowledges” (*al-‘ulūm*). Others hold that ‘*aql* should be viewed as a power or independent faculty.¹³⁴ (Note: in this discussion of ‘*aql* as a faculty, *sam*’ is not discussed as a contrasting concept, whether as an object or kind of knowledge).

¹³² The above modifies Jaffer’s analysis which suggests Mu‘tazilism as a chief influence on Rāzī; see Jaffar 2015, 77–83.

¹³³ Though *naql* is used, *sam*’ seems to be more prevalent in the earlier sources.

¹³⁴ See, for example, Juwaynī 1979, 1:111–113; 2009, 21–22. See Juwaynī’s reference to other views, including al-Muḥāsibī’s well-known definition of ‘*aql* as disposition or instinct.

(2) The *topic-based* division ‘*aql* and *sam*’: They use the terms ‘*aql* and *sam*’ as dividing kinds of *problems* or fields of inquiry. For example, the unity of God is known by “means of” ‘*aql*, whereas the nature of the Afterlife is known by “means of” *sam*’.¹³⁵

(3) They discuss ‘*aql* and *sam*’ as kinds or categories of *evidence* (*dalīl*) and inference (*nazar*).¹³⁶

First, I have not found an instance or discussion where one’s position on (1), i.e., the facultative definition of ‘*aql*, is relevant to one’s position on the relation of reason and revelation. As such, the following analysis will set aside discussions of ‘*aql* as a faculty or ontological category.¹³⁷

In the following, I begin with the second sense of ‘*aql* and *sam*’, (2), which concerns how problems are addressed vis-à-vis reason and revelation. I have referred to this category above as the “topic-based” sense of ‘*aql* and *sam*’. I then turn to the third view of the two sources, which concerns ‘*aql* and *sam*’ as kinds of evidence. I discuss the notion of *mu’jiza* in the context of (3).

In their exposition of theology, Ash’arī authors divide beliefs in theology into three categories. They state “the principle of belief (*uṣūl al-‘aqā’id*) divide into” or “what is not known immediately divides into”: (i) that which is known independently through reason (*yudrak bi-al-‘aql lā ghayr*), (ii) that which is known independently through scripture (*bi-al-sam’ lā ghayr*), and (iii) that which is known through either reason or scripture.¹³⁸ As our authors explain, the first category, reason, independently establishes such points of belief as the generation of the world and the existence and unity of its Creator.¹³⁹ The second category, scripture, independently establishes such things as legal rulings and knowledge of past events. And the third category applies to questions that do not depend solely on reason, e.g., the nature of the vision of God and the question of free will and determinism. The topic-based division raises several questions.

In these passages, it is clear that we do not have *definitions* of reason or revelation. Rather, as indicated in their phrasings, the division concerns objects of knowledge (*ma’lūm; mudrak*) and specifically how one comes to know or prove

135 This sense is often discussed in the early works in the transition from the rational problems of *kalām* to the problems based on revelation. This section is labelled *sam’iyyāt*.

136 These are the relevant discussions and I do not mean to suggest that these are the only discussions of ‘*aql* and *sam*’.

137 Juwaynī, for example, notes that he himself has much to say on the nature of ‘*aql* but it is not relevant to the discussion of sources of knowledge and evidence; Juwaynī 1979, 1:113.

138 Juwaynī 2009, 280–282; 1979, 1:136; Bāqillānī 1998, 1:228; Ghazālī 2012, 271; 2015, 1:32–33. Bāqillānī introduces the division by stating that “all the rulings of religion are known only through three paths (*darb*).” See, also, Abrahamov 1998, 60.

139 Juwaynī 2009, 280–282; Bāqillānī 1998, 1:228–230; Ghazālī 2012, 271–272.

the various kinds of beliefs that are discussed in the religious sciences. More precisely, the division clarifies the *ordering* of proving problems in the religious sciences. Bāqillānī states, “It is necessary that knowledge of God and the prophecy of his prophets is rationally known (*ma‘lūman ‘aqlan*) prior to knowledge of the validity of revelation (*ṣiḥhat al-sam‘*).”¹⁴⁰ The authors address various other points that reveal additional reasons that motivate the division, including the point that all knowledge in the religious sciences derives from one or both of ‘*aql* and *sam‘*.¹⁴¹ Clarifying the ordering of how problems are discussed and proven in Ash‘arī discourse is the primary concern. In setting out this topic-based division, our authors will say such things as the following: the problem of proving, say, the existence of God is a problem “that is known by reason *without* revelation” (*bi-al-‘aql dūna al-sam‘*)¹⁴² or “that which is known by the evidence (*dalīl*) of ‘*aql* without *shar‘* (i.e., revelation) are all things, if unproven [by ‘*aql*], the *shar‘* remains unproven (*lam yuthbat*).”¹⁴³ These and other such phrasings strongly suggest that category (i) *excludes* the Quran and, even more, they make the validity of the Quran or scripture *itself* dependent on reason.¹⁴⁴ As discussed in section 1 above, this language leads critics, like Ibn Taymiyya, to mischaracterize the Ash‘arīs as affirming a superficial dichotomy between reason and revelation. For clarification, we turn to nuances that our authors add to the topic-based distinction.

In his discussion of (2), Bāqillānī, for example, addresses a traditionalist’s objection, who holds that “I know God, the Exalted, and the prophecy of his prophets by *sam‘* (the report) of someone other than the word (*qawl*) of God or His Prophet.”¹⁴⁵ That is, the traditionalist objects to the Ash‘arī view by stating that knowledge of God’s existence and the veracity of the Prophet need not be known by reason but rather is known in virtue of a report from “someone,” i.e., such knowledge is obtained through a transmitted report and not from the direct word of God or the Prophet. Bāqillānī first notes that one does not have immediate knowledge (*ḍarūratan*) of the veracity of any reporters (*mukhbirūn*) and that such knowledge is only obtained directly from God and the Prophet, a point the

140 Bāqillānī 1998, 1:228; Juwaynī 2009, 280–282.

141 Bāqillānī begins his section by stating, “Know, may God have mercy on you, that every judgment [i.e. belief or legal ruling] in religion that is known does not exceed three kinds (...).” Bāqillānī 1998, 1:228.

142 Bāqillānī 1998, 1:228; Ghazālī 2012, 271.

143 Juwaynī 1979, 1:153–54; 2009, 280–282; Bāqillānī 1998, 1:228–30; Ghazālī 2012, 271. Cf. Ghazālī 2015, 1:36–38; 1998, 1:62.

144 Ghazālī 2012, 210.

145 Bāqillānī 1998, 228.

corresponds to Ghazālī's distinction between revelation and scriptural texts.¹⁴⁶ Bāqillānī then states that it is also *not* possible for the traditionalist to claim that the truth of the reporters is known in virtue of the rational evidence that the report comprises regarding the existence of God and the prophecy of his Prophet. Bāqillānī explains: "Because that entails that that [rational] proof is the proof by means of which divine unity and prophecy is known and not the report of the one who reports the two [points of belief]. Rather, his report of the two is like a *notice (tanbīh)* for the two [points of belief], and *they are the proof (dalāla) not his statement (dūna qawlihi)*."¹⁴⁷ Bāqillānī states that it is in virtue of *the content* of what is reported that one comes to believe in those points of belief and it is not in virtue of the reporter or report itself. This content is in reality the proof or *dalāla* "not his statement." The reporter's statement is merely a "notice" or pointer. The point is nuanced but of critical significance. It corresponds to the Ash'arī distinctions regarding the *content* of scriptural texts, where some verses point the reader to content that is true independently of one's belief in the truth of scripture and other verses presume the truth of the source. Bāqillānī's point directly addresses and dissolves the dichotomy that is read into the topic-based distinction; that is, it is possible to obtain beliefs in category (i) through scriptural texts but it is not in virtue of those texts qua transmitted reports (*sam'*) that one comes to believe in the existence of God or the possibility of prophecy. It can be noted that Abū al-Qāsim al-Anṣārī makes a similar point. Anṣārī begins his *kalām* work by stating, "The way to knowing God, the Exalted, is by inquiry into His signs and proofs that point to Him, and they are His acts. That is because if a thing is not known by sense perception or by immediate knowledge, the way to knowing it is by signs and pointers that are evidence for it (*dālla 'alayhi*). And God has introduced those with intellects to his signs and proofs in various sources of the Quran (...)."¹⁴⁸ Anṣārī then cites over a dozen places in the Quran that establish various proofs, from God's existence to His unity. He then states, "These [verses] and their like are *indicators (ta'rifāt)* from God, the Exalted, for those of intellect, making known to them by means of these signs who He is."¹⁴⁹ Anṣārī's view of such verses as "indicators" parallels Bāqillānī's term.

A final point can be noted regarding the topic-based division. As pointed to in the section 1, in his work on *i'jāz*, Bāqillānī states, "It is not the case that if a thing can be known by means of reason that it is impossible to know it by means of the

146 Ghazālī 2015, 2:21.

147 Bāqillānī 1998, 1:230.

148 Anṣārī 2010, 1:219.

149 Anṣārī 2010, 1:220.

Quran. *Rather, it is possible to know it by means of both.*¹⁵⁰ As noted, the point he opposes seems to be precisely what he states in his own topic-based division of category (i): “As for what is properly known only through reason and not through revelation.”¹⁵¹ Just as he addresses the mistaken view of the traditionalist in his topic-based discussion, Bāqillānī, I propose, in the latter text is addressing mis-readings of the Ash‘arī topic-based division, which imputes a false dichotomy of reason and revelation.

The topic-based division of reason and revelation, on its own, remains rather ambiguous.¹⁵² Moreover, it does not provide definitions of reason and revelation but establishes a relationship between ‘*aql* and ‘*sam*’ as sources of evidence, on the one hand, and points of belief that are discussed and demonstrated in the religious sciences, on the other. I argue that the topic-based discussion is informed by, and is posterior to, the definitions of reason and revelation developed in the Ash‘arī analysis of evidence and inference, to which I now turn.

In addition to the topic-based usage, then, the terms ‘*aql* and ‘*sam*’ are discussed in the context of kinds of evidence and inference. In this context, the terms ‘*aql* and ‘*sam*’ qualify or define *dalīl*.¹⁵³ As discussed above, *dalīl* is used in a variety of senses, including the notion of the signification of a meaning, a sign, and an argument or proof; the focal sense of *dalīl* is an inference from a known to an unknown. The discussion of evidence aims, first, to demarcate minimal notions of inference in various kinds of human knowledge, whether linguistic, rational, or conventional. Second, the Ash‘arīs are interested in how this analysis informs their definition of reason and revelation. It is important to note that, in contrast to the topic-based discussion of reason and revelation, the definitions in this context are meant to *distinguish* ‘*aql* from ‘*sam*’, that is, these are definitions that aim to identify distinct concepts.

In his discussion of evidence, Juwaynī states: “As for the *sam*‘*īyyāt*, they [are evidence that] indicate (*tadullu*) in virtue of something establishing them as

150 Bāqillānī 1954, 23. From the topic-based discussion, it is clear that by “unity” (*tawḥīd*) Bāqillānī means the relevant rational beliefs, including the existence of God.

151 Bāqillānī 1998, 1:228.

152 Many questions can and have been raised here regarding the topic-based division. For example, what is the precise nature of category (3)? If an overlap is possible in (3), why are all the categories not overlapping? Why is (1) not an overlapping category with (2), which is Ibn Taymiyya’s objection. Much of this will be resolved by the fact that this is not a definition of reason and revelation but a division regarding the *order of proving* problems and principles in theology. Aladdin M. Yaquub raises several questions as well in his comments; see Ghazālī 2013, 209–210.

153 Bāqillānī divides evidence into (1) that which engenders true and certain knowledge and not just probable belief (*ghalabat al-ẓann*) and (2) that which engenders belief that a thing is probable or very likely. See Bāqillānī 1998, 1:221–222.

evidence (*bi-naṣb nāṣib iyyāhā adilla*), and they are analogous (*mumaththala*) to languages (*luḡhāt*) and expressions that point to meanings, either by God endowing [knowledge of that] or by convention made through [human] choice.”¹⁵⁴ Bāqillānī states, “*sam’ī shar’ī* [evidence (*dalīl*)] indicates in virtue of speech after the imposition [of meanings] and from the perspective of a meaning derived from speech. Linguistic [evidence (*dalīl*)] indicates in virtue of agreement and imposition of the meanings of speech.”¹⁵⁵ Bāqillānī’s point is especially significant as it corresponds to the distinction noted in section 1 regarding language as a system of signification and language as speech. I return to further aspects of this shortly. Elsewhere, Juwaynī states, “*sam’ī* [evidence] is that which relies on a truthful report or a thing that must be followed (*amr yajibu ittibā’uhu*).”¹⁵⁶ I turn now to their view of language to better understand the analogy our authors draw between *sam’* and language. A key distinction in the above concerns their view that *sam’* is evidence “in virtue of something [else] establishing it as evidence,” which will contrast with their definition of rational evidence.

The Ash’arīs take language to be established in virtue of the “imposition” (*wad’*) of linguistic terms or utterances (*lafẓ*) for meanings, which, at base, means that linguistic terms do not signify meanings *intrinsically* but do so in virtue of some external cause. To illustrate what they mean, we can take the markings on this page, “t-r-e-e,” which do not *intrinsically* designate the object, tree, or anything else for that matter. Rather, the markings are arbitrary and we could just as well have assigned the markings, ر-ح-ش, to point to the same meaning (and, in Arabic, the markings *do* signify the object, tree). For English speakers, “t-r-e-e” refers to a kind of plant not in virtue of the *markings* but in virtue of our agreement on designating that specific marking type as a symbol or signifier (*dalīl*) for the intended meaning (*madlūl*). Hence, as Juwaynī states above, the relationship between the signifier and signified object obtains in virtue of a “prior imposition,” be it divine will or human choice. Significantly, according to the early Ash’arīs, this kind of evidence includes language but is a broader category comprising other kinds of evidence, which our authors call evidence by convention

¹⁵⁴ Juwaynī 1979, 1:155. See also Juwaynī 2009, 15; Anṣārī 2010, 1:241. Here, the Asha’rites are not concerned with whether language is divinely imposed or established by human convention. As Juwaynī’s statement suggests, their view is that language is conventional, be it divinely or humanly instituted, and that there is no natural or necessary relation between terms and things, as held by the Mu’tazilīs. See Shah 2011; Weiss 1974.

¹⁵⁵ Bāqillānī 2000, 15. Bāqillānī states for *sam’ī shar’ī*: “*Dāll min ʔariq al-nuṭq ba’da al-muwāda’a, wa-min jihat ma’nā mustakhrāj min al-nuṭq.*”

¹⁵⁶ Juwaynī 2009, 15; Juwaynī 1979, 1:155; Ghazālī 1998, 61.

or imposition (*dalīl waḍ‘ī; muwāḍa‘a; muwāḍa‘a, ittifāq*).¹⁵⁷ I will refer to this category as “conventional evidence,” as the Ash‘arīs will treat it as evidence that is established *after* agreement. Distinguishing between ‘*aqlī* and *waḍ‘ī* evidence, Bāqillānī states that conventional evidence can be expanded to include writings (*kitābāt*), signs (*rumūz*), physical expressions (*ishārāt*), markers of quantities or measurements, and so forth.¹⁵⁸ What distinguishes such evidence from rational evidence is that the former requires prior knowledge of certain facts or rules established by convention or agreement of people. Bāqillānī states, “If it were not for the imposition [of a people (*ahlihi*)] for what [signs] indicate, they would not indicate [anything].”¹⁵⁹ Bāqillānī underscores a critical point, namely, that linguistic expressions would not indicate, or be evidence, at all were it not for the prior act of imposition. In other words, linguistic signifiers are arbitrary. There is no direct or natural relation between linguistic signs and their objects. The Ash‘arī theory aims to distinguish between arbitrary and non-arbitrary knowledge, as discussed. One neither immediately grasps nor deduces the object, tree, from mere markings or sounds, which contrasts with what we will see is their definition of rational evidence as truth-bearing *in itself*. Juwaynī defines conventional evidence, under which he includes language as “that which does not indicate in virtue of an attribute that it has *in itself*, rather, it indicates only in virtue of an imposition.”¹⁶⁰ There is no immediate cognitive error or violation if a non-English speaker fails to grasp what “tree” refers to; moreover, in the case of linguistic and conventional evidence, the signifier and signified thing can be changed (a point that, again, will distinguish this category from ‘*aqlī* evidence).¹⁶¹ This, then, provides us with what makes language “analogous” to *sam‘* in some minimal sense. That is, language is similar to *sam‘* insofar as both indicate things not intrinsically but in virtue of something else. At this point, the analogy of language with *sam‘* will fall apart, since *sam‘* is not an arbitrary assignment of symbols. Rather, it is one whose *truth* or *authority* is established in a prior manner (i.e., Juwaynī’s second definition above).

The authors define the evidentiary category of ‘*aql* in direct opposition to *sam‘ī* and *waḍ‘ī* evidence. ‘*Aqlī* evidence is that which signifies “in virtue of

157 Bāqillānī 2000, 15; Juwaynī 1979, 1:155; Ghazālī 1998, 61.

158 Bāqillānī 1998, 1:205. He makes the same point in 1998, 15, following the point above. Juwaynī also distinguishes between ‘*aqlī* and *waḍ‘ī* evidence in this way; see 1996, 120. Here, Juwaynī also treats language as only one kind of *waḍ‘ī* evidence.

159 Bāqillānī 1998, 1:205.

160 Juwaynī 1996, 1:120.

161 Bāqillānī 1998, 1:205; Juwaynī 1996, 1:120.

itself” and “does not depend on agreement or imposition for it to be evidence.”¹⁶² Rather, ‘*aqlī* evidence constitutes evidence irrespective of the aim or choice of an agent in designating it as evidence.¹⁶³ The example they provide is that of our knowledge of an action which points to an agent, or the relation of smoke to fire. Bāqillānī states, “[‘*aqlī* evidence] has a connection to its signified thing (*madlūl*) in the manner that an action signifies its agent (*fā‘ilihi*).”¹⁶⁴ As discussed, the phrase, “in itself,” is significant and needs careful parsing. With this qualification, the Ash‘arīs aim to register a critical distinction, namely, that it is the very *content* of rational evidence that indicates its result or conclusion. Rational evidence is not arbitrary or contingent on the conventions of an individual or group. We come to associate an action with an agent, or fire with heat, in virtue of our very experience of those items. This contrasts with our experience of sounds or symbols, which yield no such doxastic state. In the *Mankhūl*, Ghazālī states, “The evidence of ‘*aql* connects to their objects in themselves (*adillat al-‘aql tata‘allaqu bi-madlūlātihā li-a‘yānihā*) (...) and *sam‘iyyāt* do not indicate in themselves, for they are expressions that are understood by convention (*bi-al-iṣṭilāḥ*).”¹⁶⁵ In contrast to ‘*aqlī* evidence, conventional evidence or signifiers are not truth-bearing and do not signify in virtue of their cognitive content. We need not repeat the above discussion of how the Ash‘arīs distinguish their view of rational evidence from the Mu‘tazilīs and *falāsifa*. It can simply be noted that “the requirement of [rational] proofs is implication (*al-iṭṭirād*) and what is not a condition is co-implication (*al-in‘ikās*).”¹⁶⁶

The Ash‘arī definitions of rational and scriptural evidence establishes the foundational senses of reason and revelation in their analysis of theological and legal problems. What is notable is that in these discussions reason and revelation are treated as epistemological categories. In particular, what the categories assess is a central element of knowledge in the context of Ash‘arī theology, that is, what proves or justifies a belief. However, an important question in the context of Rāzī’s P1 and P2 that remains concerns how *certitude* corresponds to reason and revelation, to which I now turn.

¹⁶² Bāqillānī 1998, 1:205; Ghazālī 1998, 61.

¹⁶³ Juwaynī 1979, 1:155; Ghazālī 1998, 61; Anṣārī 2010, 1:241; Bāqillānī 1998, 1, 205. Juwaynī states, “*tadullu li-anfusihā wa-mā hiya ‘alayhi min ṣifātihā* (...) *idhā waqa‘at hādhihi al-adilla dallat li-a‘yānihā, min ghayr ḥājatin ilā qaṣd qāṣid ilā naṣbihā adillatan.*” (Juwaynī 1979, 1:155).

¹⁶⁴ Bāqillānī 2000, 15.

¹⁶⁵ Ghazālī 1998, 61. He adds: “They do not go beyond their conventional [usage] of them to their contradictory.”

¹⁶⁶ Juwaynī 1981, 69.

2.1 The Certainty of Naql versus the Certainty of ‘Aql

The Ash‘arīs categorize certain or definitive knowledge (*yaqīn*; *qaṭ‘ī*) with respect to each category of ‘*aql* and *naql*. As noted, Rāzī thinks that we cannot divide knowledge in this way; that is, ‘*aqlī* certainty, on the one hand, and *naqlī* certainty, on the other. Rāzī does not think *naqlī* sources impart certitude at all (P1). Moreover, according to him, there is no such thing as purely textual evidence or proof (P2). In the following, I focus on how Ash‘arīs prior to Rāzī address the question of certitude and what the relation is between the certitudes of ‘*aql* and the certitudes of *naql*.

In the case of ‘*aql*, we have seen that certain knowledge includes immediately known principles (*ḍarūriyyāt*) and knowledge gained through valid inferences. With regard to scriptural evidence, the Quran, Sunna, and consensus (*ijmā‘*) are viewed as imparting certainty.¹⁶⁷ Scriptural sources are not, however, treated as a single epistemic category. That is, the certainty they furnish and their evidentiary status varies with respect to the nature of specific texts.¹⁶⁸ How scriptural texts constitute definitive knowledge or evidence turns on discerning the expressed and intended meanings of specific texts, which is the primary function of legal hermeneutics. The most definitive category of text that our early theorists specify is *naṣṣ*, or the self-evident text, which they define as that which “independently imparts meanings in a definitive manner” (*al-istiqlāl bi-ifādat al-ma‘ānī ‘alā qaṭ‘*).¹⁶⁹ Juwaynī adds “such that avenues of *ta’wīl* are terminated, and paths of alternative [meanings] (*iḥtimālāt*) are cut off.”¹⁷⁰ Bāqillānī defines *naṣṣ* as “that which is independent in itself in disclosing all that it encompasses [in expression], without any ambiguity in any of its meanings.”¹⁷¹

In addition to the epistemic status of texts, the classical Ash‘arīs assess the nature of meanings, i.e., how expressions are determined and how they signify meanings. Their analysis addresses (1) determining the received vocabulary and grammar of a language as well as (2) determining the *intended* meanings and uses of speech (*murād al-khiṭāb*).¹⁷² Bāqillānī states, “Our saying, *khiṭāb* (speech),

¹⁶⁷ The nature of the evidentiary certainty of *sam‘* is expressed in various ways. See, for example, Juwaynī 1979, 1:146–147.

¹⁶⁸ Regarding the degrees of certainty of scriptural texts, see Juwaynī’s summary of views in 1979, 1:160–165.

¹⁶⁹ Juwaynī 1979, 1:415; see also 1:160–166; Anṣārī 2010, 1:242–243. See notes above for Ghazālī’s definitions of *naṣṣ*.

¹⁷⁰ Juwaynī 1979, 1:415

¹⁷¹ Bāqillānī 1998, 1:340.

¹⁷² Bāqillānī 1998, 1:204–205, 335–336; Juwaynī 1979, 1:196–198; also 1:169–180. The distinction between the two fields of analysis is not as sharp as found in the later tradition.

requires that [there is] a listener (*mukhāṭab*) addressed by it (...) and that [speech] is only possible with two [interlocutors], both of whom exist.”¹⁷³ The former (1) is established prior to (2) the latter, which they treat as something like speech acts. As such, they begin their analysis with the basic elements of the Arabic language, focusing on the signification of terms and grammatical structure (e.g., noun, verb, and particle).¹⁷⁴ As noted, according to the Ash‘arīs, the meanings of terms are given in language in virtue of convention (*waḍ‘ al-luġha*), rather than being predetermined by a natural or essential connection between a term and its meaning.¹⁷⁵ As such, the most basic layer of scriptural meaning is not acquired by reason independently but established through the transmitted uses of language.¹⁷⁶ Since the Quran and Sunna are expressed in the “speech of the Arabs,” scriptural interpretation relies on a received tradition of Arabic grammar and lexicography in determining the given meanings and forms of scriptural texts. This point will be significant for Rāzī, who interrogates the parallel between the requirement of historically verifying *ḥadīth* literature and determining the status of meanings of terms and grammatical rules as transmitted in the Arabic linguistic corpus. Returning to the above discussion, this basic layer of language, i.e., grammar and signification, is the starting-point of the richer analysis of meaning that, according the early Ash‘arīs, is required for legal and exegetical interpretation, including the nature of figurative speech and commands. That is, the texts of the Quran and Sunna cannot be understood with reference to lexical meanings and grammar alone, but require an understanding of the contextual uses of language. That is, a hermeneutics of the Quran involves communicative aspects of language: the ways in which a speaker can communicate meaning to an audience. The bulk of the hermeneutic apparatus of the legal theorist – including the analysis of commands (*amr*), literal and figurative usages (*ḥaqīqa/majāz*), etc. – addresses how the intended meanings of scriptural texts are to be determined and interpreted.

But we have a certain ambiguity. The early Ash‘arī distinguish speech from a basic layer of linguistic signification. Meanings in the latter sense are established by convention (*waḍ‘*) and, when all definitions and terms are clarified, the primary senses are known with certainty. *Naṣṣ*, however, does not concern

173 Bāqillānī 1998, 1:335. Ghazālī 2015, 2:22. See Juwaynī 1979, 1:196. The latter states that the linguists divide speech into such things as nouns, verbs, and particles, while the *uṣūlīs* add such things as commands, reports, and so forth “according to their aims.”

174 Juwaynī 1979, 1:196.

175 Juwaynī 1979, 1:171; Bāqillānī 1998, 1:319–329. On the linguists, and Mu‘tazilī views, including their embracing the doctrine of *tawqīf*, see Shah 2011, 27–46.

176 Juwaynī 1979, 1:169.

meanings that are established by *waq'*. Rather, *naṣṣ* certainly requires the latter but then involves the additional conveyance of an intended meaning between speaker and listener. Is there a way to know the certitudes conveyed in speech in the same way that we know the certitudes of *waq'*, e.g., signification of correspondence (*dalātat al-muṭābaqa*)? I turn to the answer provided by Ghazālī, who makes the epistemic connection between *sam'* and *'aql* clearer than earlier Ash'arīs.

With respect to *al-Mustaṣfā* and other works of *kalām* and legal theory, Ghazālī departs little from the earlier theorists. Though we find a more systematized and comprehensive treatment of rational methods, particularly with the inclusion of syllogistic logic, his discussion of the relation between *'aqlī* and *sam'ī* evidence follows the basic stance of earlier thinkers, by which I mean the following points.¹⁷⁷ First, as noted above, Ghazālī distinguishes between *'aqlī* evidence and *sam'ī* evidence, invoking the tripartite topic-based division of inquiry noted above. He states, “What is not immediately known is divided into: that which is known through a proof of reason without (*dūna*) revelation, that which is known through revelation without reason, and that which is known through both.”¹⁷⁸ He uses the term *sam'* in the varying senses noted above, including to refer to a category of evidence and the problems based on such evidence. Regarding *'aql*, the sources of certain knowledge include the principles of demonstration expounded within Ghazālī's adaptation of syllogistics.¹⁷⁹ These include first principles (*awwaliyyāt*), internal states, sense perception, experience-based knowledge (*tajribiyyāt*), and mass-transmitted knowledge. Of more importance to the following is his approach to *sam'*.

Ghazālī's approach to *sam'* follows the line of thinking of earlier authors discussed above. With respect to the hermeneutic context of determining definitive scriptural texts, Ghazālī follows the linguistic analysis above, assigning *naṣṣ* to the highest category of linguistic clarity. He defines *naṣṣ* with similar terms, e.g., “independently imparts meaning in every respect” and “that which does not admit alternate meanings (*iḥtimāl*) in any respect.”¹⁸⁰ He also states, “*Naṣṣ* is that which is not subject to *ta'wīl*” in contrast to the *ẓāhir*, which is subject

¹⁷⁷ Ghazālī 2015, 1:35–43. Ghazālī provides a more expansive approach to the classification of religious versus rational sciences but the analysis of the relation between *'aql* and *sam'* remains the same.

¹⁷⁸ Ghazālī 2012, 210–211; see, also 2015, 1:37–38.

¹⁷⁹ See his discussion of “certainty in itself” (*yaqīn fī nafsihi*) in 2015, 1:93. A closer reading of Ghazālī's analysis of syllogistics is required to make any judgment on the nature his assimilation.

¹⁸⁰ Ghazālī 2015, 2:48–49; 2:19–21.

to interpretation.¹⁸¹ Importantly, Ghazālī is careful to distinguish this precise usage – which he labels the second “coined” sense – from other senses. For example, *naṣṣ* is used to refer more loosely to a term whose meaning is apparent and understood “without being definitive” (*min ghayr qaṭʿ*).¹⁸² In this case, he states that its meaning corresponds to that of the “apparent text” (*ẓāhir*). Ghazālī urges the reader to adhere to the former definition to avoid confusion.¹⁸³ Ghazālī takes the point to be significant, as we will see. To be sure, this is not simply a terminological quibble: the distinction is central to Ghazālī’s view of the relation of reason to revelation and his application of the “universal rule.”

First, it should be noted that Ghazālī draws a revealing connection between *naṣṣ* and *ʿaql*, which earlier theorists leave open. That is, *naṣṣ*, in his view is the only category of terms or statements that is used in rational proofs (*adilla ʿaqliyya*), as it admits no degrees of clarity in the apprehension of meaning. He states, “A remote possible meaning is the same as a proximate possible meaning in rational inquiry, because a rational proof cannot be contravened in any way. It is possible for a remote possible meaning to be intended (*murād*) by the term in some way. Hence, only *naṣṣ*, in the second posited sense [*bi-al-waḍʿ al-thānī*, i.e., *naṣṣ* in the strict sense distinguished from *ẓāhir*], can be relied upon in rational inquiry (*ʿaqliyyāt*).”¹⁸⁴ This is a critical move for several reasons. First, one implication of there are speech-texts that impart certitude and do so in the manner that Rāzī would reserve for linguistic signification of correspondence. To be sure, Ghazālī admits the hermeneutic term, *naṣṣ*, into the apparatus of logic. To Rāzī, this amounts to a category error. Rāzī will explicitly oppose this view of placing the epistemic status of *naṣṣ* in parallel with *ʿaqli* knowledge. He states,

Naṣṣ [is] every word or speech that independently imparts the understanding of the intent of the speaker from it [i.e., the word or speech] by itself. This is its definition. It is claimed that [*naṣṣ*] is that which imparts a meaning in a definitive manner such that it is not open to *taʿwīl*. And the first [definition] is more suitable. Rather, it is the correct position. *For there is no expression that is posited for a meaning but that a figurative [understanding] of it is possible, so that what is intended is other than what it was posited for.*¹⁸⁵

One might think this is simply a terminological quibble in legal theory. However, Rāzī is making a critical distinction between the *hermeneutic* analysis of language, specifically when used in the context of a communicative act (which, inter

181 Ghazālī 2015, 2:48.

182 Ghazālī 2015, 2:48.

183 Ghazālī 2015, 2:50.

184 Ghazālī 2015, 2:50.

185 Rāzī 1992, 34.

alia, addresses the speaker's intention), versus the basic analysis of linguistic meaning and signification. The latter kind of linguistic analysis is as he states relevant to rational evidence and argument but the former is not. More significantly, Rāzī, in contrast to Ghazālī, makes explicit the distinction in the very definition of *naṣṣ* in *al-Maḥṣūl*:

Naṣṣ: it is every speech (*kalām*) whose imparting of its meaning is apparent and which does not admit more than that [i.e., the apparent meaning]. By our stating [in the definition of *naṣṣ*], "speech," we [aim to] exclude two things. The first of which is that the evidence of reason [*adillat al-'uqūl*] and actions are not named *nuṣūṣ*.¹⁸⁶

Rāzī distinguishes between the hermeneutic term, *naṣṣ*, which assesses "speech," from evidence and knowledge based on reason and actions.¹⁸⁷ I turn now to Rāzī's analysis of P1 and P2.

3 Rāzī: Redefining 'Aql and Naql

Rāzī reiterates P1 in various places in his most influential works, including *al-Ma'ālim*, *al-Maḥṣūl*, *Muḥaṣṣal*, *al-Arba'īn*, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, and *al-Maṭālib al-'āliya*. In these texts, he affirms the principle that "textual evidence does not engender certain [knowledge] in virtue of it depending on ten premises."¹⁸⁸ In his *Mafātīḥ*, he states unequivocally, "There is no doubt that belief in these assumptions involves pure probability, and that which is dependent on probable knowledge is a fortiori probable."¹⁸⁹ The phrasing of P1 varies only slightly from text to text. Following his definition of 'aqlī versus naqlī evidence where he articulates P2 in the *Ma'ālim*, Rāzī discusses the relation of *naqlī* evidence to certainty:

P1: Textual evidence (*dalā'il naqliyya*)¹⁹⁰ does not impart certain [knowledge], because it is based on the transmission of language, the transmission of grammar and rules of inflection

¹⁸⁶ Rāzī 1999, 1:381–382.

¹⁸⁷ Notably, Rāzī adds "actions," which is relevant to legal theory. That is, actions of the Prophet are distinguished from his speech in various respects. See 1999, 1:413–431.

¹⁸⁸ Rāzī 1986, 2:251; 1999, 1:151–152; n.d., 50–51; 1990, 1, 28; 1987, 9:113–118.

¹⁸⁹ Rāzī 1990, 1:28.

¹⁹⁰ It should be noted that, in the above passages, Rāzī uses various terms to refer to this category of proof, including *adilla* or *dalā'il lafziyya*, *naqliyya*, *dalālat al-alfāz*, and *dalā'il sam'iyya*. It is clear that he means the same category of proof, and I return shortly to how the various fields overlap, given that they were distinct in the approach of earlier thinkers. Though there are some details I will have to gloss over, including Qarāfī's interpretation that Rāzī views even *waḍ'ī* signification as open to interpretation and uncertainty. See Qarāfī 1997, 2:527.

and conjugation; it depends on the absence of synonymy, the absence of figurative usage, the absence of ellipsis (*iḍmār*), the absence of new usages [of expressions], the absence of advancement or postponement [of a command], the absence of specification (*takhṣiṣ*), the absence of abrogation, and the absence of contradicting rational evidence (*‘adam al-mu‘arīḍ al-‘aqli*). The absence of these things is probable and not based on certain knowledge and that which depends on probable knowledge is probable. If that is established, it becomes apparent that textual evidence is probable and that rational evidence is certain and that which is the probable does not contradict the certain.¹⁹¹

This text has been commented upon by dozens of thinkers, including Najm al-Dīn al-Kātibī (d. 1267) and Ibn Kammūna (d. 13th century). Indeed, a legion of jurists and theologians will comment on this passage in a variety of works, including commentaries on the above sources of Rāzī as well as in new works of *kalām* and *uṣūl*. Some critical points regarding the text can be registered here. First, the above is not the *universal rule* of Ghazālī. Indeed, the question that the universal rule centers on, i.e., the status of a “rational counter-evidence” and the role of *ta’wīl*, is only *one* of the ten assumptions that Rāzī lists.

In his influential work of legal theory, entitled *al-Maḥṣūl fī ‘Ilm al-Uṣūl*, Rāzī devotes the first of thirteen books to the central features of language (*luḡha*). As he states in his introduction, the work begins with language, “because relying on [authoritative] texts (*maṣṣūṣāt*) is only possible by means of language, so it is necessary that the chapter on language precede all [other chapters].”¹⁹² The implication is that the analysis of scriptural texts, and its interpretation, is dependent on a prior analysis of language. He begins with a general analysis of language, signification and meaning. This, as discussed above, is the division broadly between language as a system of signification and speech. In the first of nine chapters of the book on language, Rāzī discusses “general rules” (*aḥkām kullīyya*) concerning language, which includes the essence of language (*māhiyyatal-kalām*), signification, and whether terms signify things by convention or by nature. In the fifth inquiry of the first chapter, Rāzī discusses how we come to have knowledge of the meanings of terms and the grammatical rules specifically of the Arabic language. That is, he states that since both the Quran and reports (i.e., *ḥadīth*), on which knowledge of the *sharī‘a* is dependent, are couched in the language of the Arabs, including their grammar and morphology, knowledge of both sources is dependent on knowledge of the Arabic language. But from where do we acquire knowledge of the language of the Arabs? Here, he considers three possible sources: reason (*‘aql*), “transmitted” sources or texts (*naql*), or

191 Rāzī 2007, 22.

192 Rāzī 1999, 1:167.

evidence composed of the two.¹⁹³ Rāzī immediately dismisses reason as a source of knowledge, because language is a matter of convention and reason cannot independently apprehend matters determined by convention, a central Ash‘arī tenet as discussed above. This leaves the latter two sources: transmitted text and some combination of text and reason. The rest of the chapter provides a sustained discussion of problems (*ishkālāt*) raised regarding the status of our knowledge of the transmitted Arabic lexicon and the rules of grammar. Here, Rāzī underscores the parallel between verifying transmitted *ḥadīth* reports and our knowledge of the meanings and uses of the Arabic language. He states,

What wonder it is that the legal theorists (*uṣūliyyūn*) have shown that an individually-transmitted report (*khabar al-wāḥid*) constitutes evidence (*ḥujja*) in the law (*shar‘*) and have not established that with respect to language (*lughā*) and the latter is more [significant], because establishing language is [like] a principle for adhering to individually-transmitted reports. And if it is granted that they have established a proof for that [i.e., evidential status of language], it would be required of them to investigate the conditions of the narrators of the linguistic corpus and grammar, and to verify the evidence for their reliability and unreliability (*jarḥ* and *ta‘dīl*), as they did with respect to the narrators of [*ḥadīth*] reports. But they have neglected that entirely despite the acute need for it. For language and grammar play the role of a principle in the derivation of scriptural evidence (*li-al-istidlāl bi-al-nuṣūṣ*).¹⁹⁴

Rāzī raises an important distinction that was only implicitly acknowledged by earlier theorists: the verification of the *transmitted texts* of the Quran and Sunna does not ensure the certainty of the *meaning* of those texts, which depend on an established and stable corpus of vocabulary and grammar. Shihāb al-Dīn al-Qarāfī (d. 1285), in his commentary on the *Maḥṣūl*, accepts Rāzī’s point but states in response that there is nothing to wonder about in that (*laysa fī dhālika ‘ajab*) and provides a reason as to why the jurists might have been unconcerned with the transmission of language: he states that while there was a systematic attempt of lying against the Prophet no such worry existed with regard to language.¹⁹⁵ Qarāfī’s response does not quite get at Rāzī’s point, which centers on the fundamental epistemic status of the certitude of texts. Qarāfī simply suggests that it is unlikely that the transmission of meanings subject to weaknesses or inaccuracies. In the passage, and throughout the inquiry, Rāzī presses the point regarding the foundational status of language, which, as he states, is a principle – or serves “like” a principle – for interpreting scriptural sources. The point suggests that each of the ten points in P1 serve as principles that are epistemically prior

¹⁹³ His example of a composite of *naql* and ‘*aql* is knowledge of the grammatical rule that the plural form indicates generality, which is derived from two transmitted sources of knowledge.

¹⁹⁴ Rāzī 1999, 1:212.

¹⁹⁵ Qarāfī 1997, 2:527.

to the analysis of the texts of the Quran and Sunna as it is generally assumed or understood. This is evidently very different from how our earlier theologians view the epistemic status of *samʿ* and *ʿāql* and the hermeneutic status of *naṣṣ*.¹⁹⁶ Significantly, Rāzī will invoke the results of this chapter in his general account of P1, incorporating them under the label, “the transmission of languages” (*naql al-lughāt*) as one of ten principles that need addressing in scripture-based arguments. I turn to the latter discussion now.

Rāzī invokes P1 in the ninth section of the book on language, entitled, “On how to draw evidence from the speech (*khiṭāb*) of God and the speech of the Prophet in [determining] rulings.”¹⁹⁷ The only difference of note from the list in the *Mahṣūl* from that above is that he views “counter-evidence” as general and inclusive of rational or textual evidence. Regarding the transmission of language, he states,

As for clarifying that the transmission of language [leads to] probably knowledge, it is because the basis of it relies on the masters of language, and those of intellect (*ʿuqalāʾ*) are in unanimous agreement that they are not such that their infallibility [in transmitting language] is known definitively, so their transmission of language only imparts probable knowledge. And the complete discussion of this matter has preceded.¹⁹⁸

That is, Rāzī makes clear that this point regarding *naql*, which falls under P1, includes his broader criticisms of the transmission of the Arabic linguistic corpus. Rāzī registers further doubts regarding that status of deriving grammar from ancient poetry, which I will set aside. Rāzī then moves on to discuss each of the nine other principles individually. At the conclusion of the section, Rāzī sums up his own view:

Hence, adhering to *naqli* evidence produces only probable knowledge (*ẓānn*) (...). But know that the fair position (*inṣāf*) is that there is no way to acquire certainty from linguistic evidence unless one attaches to it accompanying evidence (*qarāʾin*) that imparts certainty, whether that accompanying evidence is due to direct experience (*mushāhada*) or transmitted by mass-transmission (*tawātur*).¹⁹⁹

196 See, for example, Juwaynī 1979, 1:169–172. Rāzī’s own response to the problem suggests that the point in and of itself is not so significant in terms of how the received linguistic corpus will be used. In brief, his response is that the bulk of the vocabulary and grammar of the Arabic language is the same as it was in the time of the Prophet in virtue of self-evident knowledge and those aspects of Arabic that are uncertain do not affect much. However, he includes this principle as one of the ten principles of P1, which leads him to assert that texts fail to impart certainty on their own.

197 Rāzī 1999, 1:385.

198 Rāzī 1999, 1:391.

199 Rāzī 1999, 1:408.

In the *Arba‘īn*, which is perhaps the next most extensive discussion of P1, Rāzī states the point thus:

This point left without qualification is not correct [i.e., that *naqlī* evidence does not impart certainty at all], because it may be that *naqlī* evidence combines with things that are known to obtain by *mutawātir* reports. And those things negate these possibilities. And on this supposition, *sam‘ī* evidence combined with accompanying evidence established by *mutawātir* reports imparts certainty.²⁰⁰

In the *Arba‘īn*, Rāzī lists P1 and P2 as the 38th of 40 problems of *kalām*. That Rāzī affirms the principles in such works as the *Arba‘īn*, an intermediate work on creedal theology, and in the *Maḥṣūl* strongly suggests that Rāzī is arguing for the view to be incorporated into the Ash‘arī exposition of reason and revelation. It should be noted that Rāzī’s radical claims, which Ibn Taymiyya regards as “founding the principles of disbelief (*ilhād*),” turns out to be rather limited with respect to challenging the received status of scriptural sources and meanings.²⁰¹ Moreover, it does not have the rationalizing agenda of certain Mu‘tazilī approaches. Rather, what is radical about P1 and P2 is the clarification and articulation of how Sunnī thought ought to be understood at an epistemological and methodological level. His point is that it is not *texts* as God’s words that ensure knowledge and are the fundamental sources of certitude.²⁰² Moreover, Rāzī opposes the nomocentric trend in the tradition and argues to reestablish the centrality of theology, expanding the latter’s scope from the perspective of Sunnī thought. Rāzī’s claim that it is by “accompanying evidence” that texts become certain is significant and has important epistemic implications, particularly regarding the textualism of the Ḥanbalis and jurists. I turn now to P2.

Prior to his discussion of P1, Rāzī often discusses the kinds of evidence or proofs that are possible. Here, Rāzī establishes two foundational points: (1) that evidence in this context is an inference or argument; (2) there is no such thing as a purely scriptural argument. In the section above of *Arba‘īn*, which as noted is devoted to P1 (entitled, “On whether adhering to linguistic evidence imparts certainty or not”), he states,

Prior to delving into this inquiry, it is necessary to know that a proof is either [1] rational (*‘aqliyyan*) with respect to all its premises, [2] it is textual (*naqliyyan*) with respect to all its premises, or [3] it is composed of both categories (...) As for [2] the second division, which is the proof that is textual with respect to all its premises, this is impossible. Because drawing evidence (*istidlāl*) from the Quran and Sunna is dependent on knowledge of the truthful-

²⁰⁰ Rāzī 1986, 2:254.

²⁰¹ Ibn Taymiyya 1991, 5:336.

²⁰² See Hallaq 1990.

ness of the Prophet and this knowledge is not derived from textual knowledge because that would be circular. Rather, it is derived from rational proofs, and there is no doubt that *this premise is one of the parts [of the proof] that is considered in the validity of a textual proof.* Hence, it is established that a proof that is *naqli* in all premises is impossible and invalid.²⁰³

As discussed above, the early Ash‘arīs methodologically distinguish between the use of *sam‘* as evidence prior to the necessary rational and miracle-arguments required to establish the use of *sam‘* as evidence. What they mean is that a *valid sam‘ī* argument relies on prior established principles or arguments. That is, to simply read or quote the verse, “Muhammad is the Messenger of God,” is not an argument. And if one intends to use it as evidence one assumes, according to the Ash‘arīs, that the text in which the statement is embedded has been established as truthful speech. However, the early theologians are not entirely clear on what the connection is between a valid argument and the *sam‘ī* argument in form and content. Rāzī, here, clarifies the precise connection: a *naqli* argument always assumes at least one additional premise. As such, it is in the form of a two-premise argument. Rāzī in fact puts the point more effectively in the more advanced *Ma‘ālim*,

[It is impossible for all the premises to be *naqliyya*] because one of the premises of the proof is that *naql* is a proof (*hujja*) and it is not possible to prove *naql* with reference to *naql* (...) The rule then is that every premise that must first be proven for a *naql* to be proven cannot be proven by *naql* and everything that is a report of something that is possible to obtain or not obtain can only be known by sense perception or by a report.²⁰⁴

Rāzī’s approach is part of his larger analysis of the nature of ‘*aqli*’ proofs and arguments in his works of philosophy. Here, for the theologian, Rāzī considers what an argument or proof is in its most basic sense. He argues, in his more extensive discussions, that an argument must be composed of at least two premises.²⁰⁵ By drawing on this distinction, Rāzī is able to more precisely distinguish the Ash‘arī view of the relation between ‘*aql*’ and *naql*, as an evidentiary and epistemic category. Though Rāzī’s reinterpretation seems – at first blush – radically different from the classical Ash‘arī view, it is largely consistent with the deeper analysis of ‘*aql*’ and *naql* that the early theologians of the school asserted. His reinterpretation will have far-reaching consequences for the philosophical and hermeneutic connections that are drawn between exegesis and the rational sciences in the postclassical period.

²⁰³ Rāzī 1986, 2:254.

²⁰⁴ Rāzī 2007, 72.

²⁰⁵ Rāzī 2002, 331–332.