CHAPTER TWO
GOD’S WISE PURPOSE, PERPETUAL ACTIVITY AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The Problematic of God’s Goodness and God’s Self-Sufficiency

In order to safeguard God’s sufficiency apart from the world, Ash’arī Kalām theologians deny that God wills to create the world on account of causes or wise purposes. There is no reason why God created the world in time out of nothing when He did, and God does not need the world to be God. Mu’tazili Kalām theologians agree that God has no need for the world and that He created the world \textit{ex nihilo}. Nonetheless, the Mu’tazilis try to affirm a stronger sense of God’s goodness by introducing some kind of rationality into creation. God created the world to benefit humankind, but God’s wise purpose in creation has no impact on Him.

Ibn Taymiyya follows neither the Ash’aris nor the Mu’tazilis on the issue of God’s sufficiency apart from the created world. Instead, he affirms that God creates for the sake wise purposes that God loves, and, to make sense of this, he employs conceptual strategies found also in Ibn Sīnā. A review of some of Ibn Sīnā’s basic ideas here will prepare the ground for further consideration of Ibn Taymiyya’s approach in the rest of the chapter.

Within Ibn Sīnā’s writings is found a view of God’s unchanging perfection not unlike that of the Kalām theologians. God is completely perfect as He is. He is pure perfection, pure good and pure actuality. God has no need, and there is no unrealized potentiality or possibility in God. God does not change because change would entail imperfection in God. However, Ibn Sīnā rejects the Kalām doctrine of creation \textit{ex nihilo} and portrays the creation of the world as an emanation proceeding necessarily from its First Cause God. God is essentially productive, emanating the world as a necessary concomitant of His essence. The world is eternal because its Cause is


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eternal. Ibn Sinā also rejects the Mu’tazilī claim that God creates the world for the good of creatures. God does not emanate the world out of concern for the world itself, nor does God act for causes or purposes external to Himself because that would entail change in God. Instead the emanation of the world follows necessarily from the very essence of God. Ibn Sinā puts it this way: “The emanation of things from [the Creator] is because of His essence, not because of something external, and His essence is the cause of order and good.” Ibn Sinā speaks about the origin of the world in a variety of idioms. For example, he speaks of the First’s (i.e. God’s) love (‘ishq) of Itself: “When the First loves Its essence because It is good and Its beloved essence is the principle of existing things, then they emanate from It ordered in the best order.” Another idiom is the First’s knowledge of Itself. The First does not acquire knowledge from existing things but from Its essence, and Its knowledge is then the cause of existing things: “The First knows everything from Its essence, not that existing things are a cause of Its knowledge, but Its knowledge is a cause of them.”

Al-Ghazālī takes Ibn Sinā and his ilk to task for denying the agency and will of God despite their claims that God is the Artisan and Agent of the world. While Ibn Sinā does speak of God willing and choosing to create the world, he does so only in a certain sense. The philosopher equates God’s will (irāda) with God’s knowledge or God’s providence and insists that God’s will is not subject to purpose in the Mu’tazilī sense. Rather, God’s choice is conformity with His essence:

In the choice (ikhtiyār) of the First, no motive motivates It to [exercise] that [choice] other than Its essence and Its goodness. It does not have choice potentially and then become one who chooses actually. Rather, It has been eternally choosing in actuality. Its meaning is that It does not choose other than what It does.

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Here as with God's knowledge and God's love, any thought that God needs the world as an arena in which to manifest His attributes or carry out His will is eliminated by making God's essence the first point of reference. God's self-referentiality is essential while the world that emanates eternally from the essence is only accidental. As Ibn Sinā puts it, “[The First] loves Its essence… and the order of the good is beloved to It accidentally (bi-l-ʿarad).”

God loves, wills, knows and chooses only Himself in the first instance. God has no need of the world, and He does not love or will it directly. The world only emanates from God as an accidental, but necessary, concomitant of God's self-love and self-willing. As will become apparent below, Ibn Taymiyya resolves the problem of relating God's self-sufficiency to God's goodness in creating the world with the notions of God's self-love and God's necessary, but accidental, creative work in a fashion similar to that of Ibn Sinā. However, the shaykh departs substantially from Ibn Sinā by rejecting emanation and giving a much stronger and more dynamic role to God's will.

Joseph Bell gives extended attention to Ibn Taymiyya's theology of God's wise purpose and God's sufficiency in his *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam*. In line with the book's title, Bell's primary interest is Ibn Taymiyya's doctrine of love, especially in dialogue with Ashʿarī theology. The Ashʿarīs maintain that God cannot love humans and humans cannot love God. Otherwise, God would suffer need, and God would share some measure of affinity with human beings. They also argue that the eternal God cannot be an object of human love because only a nonexistent or something susceptible to nonexistence can be loved. Henri Laoust attributes this view to Ibn Taymiyya as well, arguing that the shaykh taught love for God's law

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10 For further exposition, see Rahim Acar, *Talking about God and Talking about Creation: Avicenna’s and Thomas Aquinas’ Positions* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 132–149; which is nearly identical to Rahim Acar, “Avicenna’s Position Concerning the Basis of the Divine Creative Action,” *The Muslim World* 94 (2004): 65–79. Ibn Sinā’s view of God’s creation of the world has often been portrayed as naturalistic—like fire burning—rather than volitional. Acar shows that this is inaccurate and interprets Ibn Sinā’s view of creation along lines compatible with what I present here.
and command but not love for God Himself in His essence or attributes. Bell corrects this and shows how Ibn Taymiyya sets the Ash'ari arguments aside to make room for his own doctrine that God loves human beings and that human beings can and should worship and love God for Himself in His essence, not merely for the blessing and reward that they might gain from obeying Him.

Additionally, Bell examines how Ibn Taymiyya relates God's love to God's will, and this draws him into an analysis of the shaykh's theodicy. Ibn Taymiyya rejects the Ash'ari theologian al-Juwaynī's reduction of God's love (mahabbah) and good pleasure to nothing more than God's will in creating all things, even unbelief and iniquity. The shaykh agrees with the Ash'aris that God wills all that exists with His creative will (irāda khalqiyya), but, whereas al-Juwaynī affirms that God loves even the unbelief and iniquity that He creates, Ibn Taymiyya asserts that God hates these evils. What God loves is the belief and obedience that correspond to His prescriptive or legislative will (irāda shar'iyya). God does create things that He hates, but He does this only for the sake of a wise purpose (ḥikma) that He loves. With this, Bell observes, Ibn Taymiyya subordinates God's will to God's love, and, in the shaykh's understanding, God may forgo creating something that He loves in order to attain something else which is better. Thus, while God loves what He wills humans to do in obedience to His law, he also loves the wise purpose in everything that He wills to create.

Probably due to his focus on love theory, Bell does not notice that Ibn Taymiyya is often content to leave the explanation for evil at the level of God's wise purpose without going on to God's love. He also does not mention that Ibn Taymiyya uses other theological idioms to speak of the substance of God's creative and legislative wills. Both points will become apparent in Chapter Three below. However, metaphysical difficulties in Ibn Taymiyya's notion of wise purpose do prompt Bell to discuss God's self-sufficiency.

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12 Bell, *Love Theory*, 46–49, 74–91. On worshipping God for His essence, see above Chapter One, as well as below Chapter Three, where parallels are noted between God's divinity, His command and His very self, in which case perhaps Bell and Laoust are both correct: loving God's command is loving God in His essence.
13 Bell, *Love Theory*, 69, explains that bikma is translated better as “wise purpose” than as “wisdom” because it envisions some end or reason that is sought or loved. In addition to evidence presented by Bell, the translation of bikma as “wise purpose” is supported by the fact that Ibn Taymiyya occasionally uses it synonymously with the term ʿilla ghā'iyya (final cause) denoting purpose and aim (see Irāda, MF 8:88 and Hasana, MF 14:299).
Bell correctly observes that Ibn Taymiyya employs the term *hikma* to give moral significance to the created world in the face of the Ashʿarī denial that God performs acts on account of causes, reasons or purposes. However, he also argues that Ibn Taymiyya uses *hikma* instead of *gharad*, a common Muʿtazilī term for purpose, in order to bypass the Ashʿarī objection that *gharad* implies need in God. According to Bell, the shaykh believes that God wills and creates for a “cause, reason or end” but yet that “God is definitely not moved by a ‘purpose.’”\(^5\) Bell’s distinction is not sufficiently precise. While it is true that Ibn Taymiyya prefers *hikma* to *gharad*, Bell does not point out that the shaykh still takes it upon himself to defend *hikma* against the same objections that the Ashʿarīs level against the Muʿtazilīs understanding of *gharad*. It entails need in God, temporal origination (*hudūth*) in God, and an infinite regress. Examination of Ibn Taymiyya’s response to these three Ashʿarī charges will take up the bulk of the present chapter, and this will show that God’s acts in his view are purposive in a stronger sense than that held even by the Muʿtazilīs.

Bell falters because he misapprehends Ibn Taymiyya’s reason for rejecting *gharad*. In *Minhāj*, from which Bell derives his argument, the shaykh understands *hikma* and *gharad* to have identical senses, but he prefers to carry out his discussion in terms of the former. Before responding to Ibn al-Muʿtahhar al-Hilli’s claim that the Sunnis believe that “God has no *gharad* in his acts,” Ibn Taymiyya shifts the discussion to the equivalent *hikma*: “the *gharad* which is the *hikma*,” and, “for a *gharad*, that is, a *hikma*.”\(^6\) Then, he notes that the rejection of purpose, whether under the name *gharad* or *hikma*, is limited only to a few Sunnis such as al-Ashʿarī and his followers. Rather, “Most Sunnis establish wise purpose (*hikma*) in the acts of God—Exalted is He—and that He acts to the profit and benefit of His servants.”\(^7\) Ibn Taymiyya explains elsewhere in *Minhāj* why he prefers *hikma* to *gharad*. Those who affirm *hikma* but reject *gharad* do not use *gharad* with respect to God because it may connote injustice and need in common usage. The shaykh continues, “When people say, ‘So-and-so did that for a *gharad*’, and, ‘So-and-so has a *gharad* toward someone’, they often mean by this some blameworthy intention such as injustice, abomination, etc.”\(^8\) Thus, the


\(^6\) Al-Hilli’s comment is as quoted in *Minhāj*, 3:7/1:264–5. The two cases in which Ibn Taymiyya shifts from *gharad* to *hikma* are found in *Minhāj*, 3:14/1:266.

\(^7\) *Minhāj*, 3:14/1:266. Al-Hilli himself, as quoted in *Minhāj*, 1:125/1:30 and 1:454/1:126, uses *hikma* as a synonym for *gharad*, as does Ibn Taymiyya in *Nubuwwāt*, 143.

shaykh eschews *gharād* not to avoid purpose in God’s acts but only to avoid the negative connotations *gharād* may carry in ordinary speech. This sort of linguistic analysis is identical to what Bell observes in Ibn Taymiyya’s rejection of the term *‘ishq* (passionate love). The shaykh believes that *‘ishq* could be applied to divine love but should not be because it may carry connotations of excessive passion and earthly pleasure. Moreover, *‘ishq* need not be used because it is not found in revelation.¹⁹

Although momentarily sidetracked claiming that Ibn Taymiyya’s God is not moved by a purpose, Bell does observe that the shaykh still has a problem with God’s sufficiency when engaging the Muʿtazilis. For the latter, God acts for a reason or a purpose that benefits humankind, not God Himself. Ibn Taymiyya retorts in *Irāda* that this is irrational. Some measure of pleasure, reward or praise returns to the agent for the wise purpose in his act.²⁰ But does this not imply a God who acts out of need? Bell argues that the shaykh solves this problem—or rather evades it—with God’s love of His wise purpose. He states, “Having asserted that the relationship between God and his *hikma* was one of love, Ibn Taymiya felt himself unobliged to deal with the problem of a need or a lack on the part of God which the concept of *hikma* might otherwise have entailed.”²¹ Drawing on *Minhāj* and *Irāda*, Bell explains that Ibn Taymiyya takes refuge in the Neoplatonic notion of God’s self-love employed by medieval Sufis—we may add Ibn Sinā—and that the shaykh often expresses this in his own idiom as God’s self-praise. God’s self-love and self-praise far outstrip His love for creatures and their love and praise of Him, and this renders Him completely sufficient apart from them.²²

This is not quite the whole story. Contrary to what Bell might have lead us to believe earlier, Ibn Taymiyya does respond to the Ashʿarī objection that *hikma* implies need in God, and, as we will see below, he does so by shifting the meaning of God’s sufficiency (*ghinā*) from God’s essential indifference to the world—the Kalām view—to God’s lack of need for help in creation. Bell does in fact note this in an overly concise final paragraph on the topic of God’s sufficiency. Drawing again on *Irāda*, he explains that Ibn Taymiyya’s God is free of want and deficiency because “everything worthy of love in his creatures is God’s own work.” Bell then concludes that creation does not

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²⁰ *Irāda*, MF 8:89–90, as discussed in Bell, *Love Theory*, 69–70.
arise from need in God but from the “natural and logical” outworking of God's attributes—especially love—through God's acts.²³ Since “natural” and “logical” imply necessity, is then creation necessary and even eternal for Ibn Taymiyya? This question Bell does not answer.

Although halting at times, Bell breaks important new ground and is accurate in his basic intuitions. His difficulties derive from failing to bring out two key concepts in Ibn Taymiyya's theology. First, as Bell begins to perceive in the remark just noted, the shaykh agrees with the Neoplatonism of Ibn Sinā that God is essentially productive. Second, Ibn Taymiyya easily dispenses with creation as eternal emanation because he reconfigures the nature of God's essence. For both Ibn Sinā and the Kalām theologians, timeless and unchanging eternity is what ultimately characterizes the perfection of God. Ibn Taymiyya breaks with this mainstay of the Greek and Islamic intellectual traditions and envisions God's essential perfection as perpetual dynamism. Purposive activity is of the very essence of God—God is indeed moved by purposes, but purposes that are His own—and God has been creating for wise purposes from eternity. At the level of creation itself, nothing created is eternal, but there have always been created things of one sort or another. What follows below is closer analysis of relevant material in Irāda, Minhāj and a few other texts showing how Ibn Taymiyya works out this theological vision in response to Kalām, and especially Ash'ari, objections to wise purpose in God's acts.

Ibn Taymiyya's Classification of Views on Wise Purpose/Causality in the Will of God

In the fatwa Irāda, Ibn Taymiyya elaborates on God's willing for a wise purpose in response to an inquiry concerning causality (taʿlīl) in the will of God. The fatwa inquiry outlines the metaphysical options concisely and provides a useful entry into Ibn Taymiyya's typical classification of views on this question:

Concerning the goodness (busn) of the will (irāda) of God—Exalted is He—in creating creatures and bringing forth the human race. Does He create for a cause (ʿilla) or for other than a cause? If it is said, "not for a cause," He is aimless—Exalted is God above that. If it is said, "For a cause," and if you say

²³ Bell, Love Theory, 73, based on Irāda, MRK 1:375–6, which is equivalent to MF 8:146–7.
that it is pre-eternal, it follows necessarily that the effect is pre-eternal (\textit{lam yazal}).\footnote{I usually translate Arabic terms implying some dimension of eternity as follows: \textit{abad} (post-eternity), \textit{abadi} (post-eternal), \textit{azal} (pre-eternity), \textit{azali} (pre-eternal), \textit{qadim} (eternal), \textit{lam yazal} (had been/has been/was...pre-eternal/from eternity). The literal meaning of \textit{lam yazal} is ‘has not ceased...’ but this translation is avoided because it often yields cumbersome double negatives in English.} And if you say that it is originated (\textit{muhadatha}), it follows necessarily that it has a cause, but an endless chain is absurd.\footnote{\textit{Ir\ıda}, MF 8:81.}

Ibn Taymiyya identifies the advocates of each metaphysical position mentioned in the inquiry as follows.\footnote{\textit{Ir\ıda}, MF 8:83–93.} Those who deny that God wills for a cause are the Ash'arīs and the Zāhīris, among them Ibn Hazm (d. 456/1064). Ibn Taymiyya identifies those who maintain that God acts for an eternal cause entailing an eternal effect as the philosophers upholding the eternity of the world. The shaykh then divides those who teach that God acts for an originating cause into two groups. First are the Mu'ūtazilīs who claim that the cause or wise purpose is a created thing disjoined (\textit{munfasil}) from God, which consists only in His beneficence to creatures and giving them opportunity to earn reward. In this view, however, God Himself is indifferent to His wise purpose: “No judgment (\textit{hukm}) returns to Him from that.”\footnote{\textit{Ir\ıda}, MF 8:89.} Second are those who disagree with the Mu'ūtazilīs on this point: jurists, hadith scholars, Sufis, Karrāmīs and some philosophers. This latter group maintains that a judgment from God’s act returns to Him and that He does what He does “for a wise purpose that He knows.”\footnote{\textit{Ir\ıda}, MF 8:93.}

A similar classification in the first volume of \textit{Minhāj} leaves out the philosophers, but identifies more adherents of the other views. Ibn Taymiyya notes that the Islamic tradition is agreed that God is endowed with wisdom (\textit{hikma}), but he points out that there is no agreement on what God’s wisdom implies. Jahm b. Ṣafwān and the Ash'arīs deny causality in the will of God, but most Sunnis uphold it, believing that God has a wise purpose in His creation and His command. The shaykh adds that not only the Mu'ūtazilīs and Shi‘īs following Mu'ūtazili theology adhere to this but also Sufis, hadith scholars and the Karrāmīs, as well as followers of each of the four Sunnī schools of law. Among the Šāfī‘īs, he names Abū ‘Alī b. Abū Hurayra (d. 345/956) and Abū Bakr al-Qaffāl (d. 365/975–6). Among the Ḥanbalīs, he lists Abū al-Ḥasan al-Tamīmī (d. 371/982) and Ibn ‘Aqīl, and he mentions that Abū Ya‘lā sometimes upholds one position and sometimes the other. As in
Irāda, Ibn Taymiyya sets the Mu’tazilis and their Shi’i followers apart from the rest of the Sunnīs because they hold the view—irrational in the shaykh’s eyes—that the cause is disjoined from God and God is indifferent to whether it exists. For Ibn Taymiyya, the cause is not disjoined from God, and God is not indifferent to His wise purposes. The shaykh elaborates the theology that sustains these convictions in the course of refuting arguments for the Ash’arī position, and to these arguments we now turn.

The Ash’arī Case against Causality in the Will of God: It Entails Imperfection and Origination in God, as well as an Infinite Regress

In Irāda Ibn Taymiyya sets out the Ash’arī case against causality and wise purpose in God’s will as follows. First, causality in God’s will makes God imperfect: “If [God] created creation for a cause, He would be imperfect without it and perfected (mustakmal) by it.” In Minhāj Ibn Taymiyya relates the same argument thus: “Whoever acts for a cause is perfected by it, because if the occurrence of the cause were not better than its nonexistence, it would not be a cause. One who is perfected by another is imperfect in himself. This is impossible for God.” This form of the argument makes explicit the premise that the cause allegedly perfecting God arises from outside God Himself. As we will see below, this argument does not undermine Ibn Taymiyya’s theology because he locates the cause within God’s essence and reinterprets the meaning of God’s perfection and sufficiency.

The second objection reported by Ibn Taymiyya in Irāda follows the sequence of dilemmas outlined in the inquiry prompting the fatwa. For the sake of argument, the Ash’arīs admit the Avicennan proof for the eternity of the world: “If [the cause] is eternal, the eternity of the effect is necessary.” Then, they pose a dilemma, the first horn of which reads, “If it were said that [God] acts for an eternal cause, it follows necessarily that no originating events originate, but that is contrary to what is observed.” Here our experience of temporal origination in this world is taken to preclude the eternity of its cause. This is the primary argument Ibn Taymiyya himself employs

30 Irāda, MF 8:83.
31 Minhāj, 1:145/1:35.
32 Irāda, MF 8:83.
against the philosophers, but it raises the question of how the eternal God brings forth originating events in time.\textsuperscript{33}

The second horn of the dilemma states, “If it is said that [God] acts for an originating cause, two prohibited things follow necessarily.” The first “prohibited thing” mentioned in Irāda is that God becomes “a substrate (mahall) for originating events (bawādīth).”\textsuperscript{34} In Minhāj Ibn Taymiyya reports how the Muʿtazilis evade this with their doctrine that God acts for a cause that is disjoined from His essence. However, the Ashʿarīs counter that this cause must have some impact on God. Otherwise, it would not be a cause. If then it is disjoined from God—as the Muʿtazilis say—His acting for its sake implies that the cause—which is something outside of Himself—perfects Him. Conversely, if the cause is “subsisting in Him (qaʾim bihi),” the Ashʿarīs argue, “it necessarily follows that He is a substrate for originating events,”\textsuperscript{35} in which case God becomes subject to temporal origination. As Ibn Taymiyya notes, the Muʿtazilis do not believe that the cause has any impact on God. God is indifferent in Himself to whether the cause brings something into existence or not.\textsuperscript{36}

Ibn Taymiyya sets out the two horns of this dilemma posed by the Ashʿarīs somewhat differently in Irāda: “[1] If the cause is disjoined from Him, and if no judgment (hukm) returns to Him from it, its existence will not be worthier of Him than its nonexistence. [2] If it is supposed that a judgment returns to Him from it, that [judgment] is originating, and thus originating events subsist in Him.”\textsuperscript{37} Below it will become clear that Ibn Taymiyya adopts the second horn of the dilemma as his own view, although he prefers to speak not of originating events subsisting in God’s essence but rather, equivalently, of God’s voluntary acts.

In Irāda the second “prohibited thing” ensuing from originating causality in God’s acts is an endless chain or infinite regress (tasalsul). As the Ashʿarīs see it, a cause precipitating God’s act must itself be originated and so requires an originated cause of its own, and so on \textit{ad infinitum} in an endless chain...


\textsuperscript{34} Irāda, MF 8:84.

\textsuperscript{35} Minhāj, 1:145/1:35.

\textsuperscript{36} Minhāj, 1:145/1:35.

\textsuperscript{37} Irāda, MF 8:84.
of originating events.\textsuperscript{38} The impossibility of an infinite regress is also a key argument in the Kalām arsenal against the eternity of the world doctrine held by philosophers like Ibn Sinā. For this reason, Ibn Taymiyya gives considerable attention to the doctrine of creation when discussing causality in the will of God.\textsuperscript{39}

Exposition of Ibn Taymiyya’s responses to these Ashʿarī arguments will be in reverse order of the latter’s presentation here. Thus, we begin with his rejoinder to the Ashʿarī contention that causality in God’s will leads to an endless chain and then move to his replies to the charges that this involves originating events in the essence of God and God’s imperfection.

\textit{Ibn Taymiyya’s Case for a God Who Acts Perpetually for Wise Purposes and Creates from Eternity}

In the edited version of \textit{Minhāj}, Ibn Taymiyya’s response to the Ashʿarī objection that wise purpose in God’s will entails an endless chain or infinite regress takes up over 270 pages of the first volume.\textsuperscript{40} As this treatment far exceeds any other in length and detail, it constitutes my primary source. By the same token, however, this is not the place for an exhaustive account of this long passage, and I will thus highlight only its main arguments. Ibn Taymiyya first explains very briefly that the sequence of God’s wise purposes constitutes an endless chain of originating events into the future, not into the past:

\begin{quotation}
When [God] performs an act for a wise purpose, the wise purpose obtains after the act. When from this wise purpose another wise purpose is sought after it, this is an endless chain into the future. This wise purpose which has occurred is beloved to Him, and it is a cause of a second wise purpose. He—Glory be to Him—does not cease originating, with respect to wise purposes, what He loves and making it a cause of what He loves.\textsuperscript{41}
\end{quotation}

Here Ibn Taymiyya gives wise purpose the sense of the fully realized objective or final cause for which acts are carried out, and he momentarily bypasses

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Irāda}, MF 8:84. Cf. \textit{Minhāj}, 1:145/1:35.
\textsuperscript{39} In what follows, I leave aside Ibn Taymiyya’s many writings on God and creation that do not fall within treatments of causality in God’s will. See for example \textit{Dar}, passim; \textit{Nubuwwat}, 71–92; \textit{Saḥābiyya}, passim; and \textit{Imrān}, MF 18:210–243, which is translated in Hoover, "Perpetual Creativity," 300–329. For overviews of medieval Islamic arguments for and against creation \textit{ex nihilo} and the eternity of the world, see the works of Davidson, \textit{Proofs for Eternity}, and İskenderoğlu, \textit{Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī}.
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Minhāj}, 1:146–420/1:35–117.
\textsuperscript{41} \textit{Minhāj}, 1:146/1:35–6. Cf. MF 8:380.
the fact that the wise purpose had a prior existence as an intention in the mind of God. The shaykh reasons that there should be no objection to an endless chain in the future because the great majority of Muslims and even non-Muslims believe that Paradise and the Fire will be perpetual.\textsuperscript{42} After this, Ibn Taymiyya’s turns in Minhāj to the question of an endless chain into the past. He first sets out the position that he will defend:

[God] has been active from eternity when He willed with acts that subsist in His self by His power and His will one after another… He has been speaking from eternity by His will, and He has been acting from eternity by His will one thing after another…Everything other than God is originated, created [and came into] being after it was not. In the world, there is nothing eternal accompanying God.\textsuperscript{43}

The question of God’s acts subsisting within Him will be taken up later. First, however, we are concerned with Ibn Taymiyya’s claim that God’s creative activity extends back in time to pre-eternity while no one created thing has existed from eternity. To make intellectual space for this vision of God and creation, Ibn Taymiyya must refute both Kalām arguments for creation \textit{ex nihilo} and philosophical arguments for the world’s eternity.

\textit{The Philosophers’ Argument that God Is an Eternal Cause Implies that Nothing Originates}

The first of the philosophers’ arguments that Ibn Taymiyya addresses in Minhāj was noted when discussing Ashʿarī arguments above. As the philosophers see it, the Creator is a complete cause (\textit{ṭilla tāmma}) necessitating in His essence and necessarily entailing His effect (maʿlūl), that is, the world, without a delay in time. Thus, the world is the eternal effect of God.\textsuperscript{44} For Ibn Taymiyya, however, an eternal complete cause entirely precludes any kind of origination in time, which manifestly contradicts human experience of temporal origination:

Temporally originating events are observed in the world. If the Artisan were necessitating by His essence [and] a complete cause necessarily entailing its

\textsuperscript{42} Minhāj, 1:146/1:36.

\textsuperscript{43} Minhāj, 1:147–8/1:36. For Ibn Taymiyya’s understanding of God’s speech, see Hoover, “Perpetual Creativity,” 296–9.

\textsuperscript{44} Minhāj, 1:148/1:36; and Irāda, MF 8:85. This argument goes back to the fifth century Neoplatonist Proclus who maintains that creation would involve change or prior imperfection in the cause of the world. See Davidson, \textit{Proofs for Eternity}, 56–67, for proofs of this kind from Proclus to Aquinas.
effect, not one originating event would originate in existence since it is impossible for what originates to emanate from a pre-eternal, complete cause. If the world had been eternal, its Creator would have been a complete cause. Nothing of the effect of a complete cause comes after it. So, it follows necessarily from that that nothing originates in the world. Therefore, the origination of events is a proof that their Agent is not a complete cause in pre-eternity, and, when the complete cause in pre-eternity is disproved, holding to the eternity of part of the world is vain.\[45\]

Under the conviction that nothing temporal can originate from the eternal, Ibn Taymiyya expends much effort to show that the philosophers’ attempts to arrive at temporal origination by way of intermediaries fails. He reports that the philosophers themselves do not say that events arise out of a pre-eternal complete cause. All agree that a complete cause necessarily entails its effect without any delay between the cause and the effect and that the cause of an originating event only becomes complete or decisive at the very instant that the event comes into existence. Rather, the philosophers—here he mentions Ibn Sīnā explicitly—explain that God is the pre-eternal complete cause of the eternal elements of the world such as the celestial spheres (aflāk). The eternal motion of the spheres is then the source of the change that occurs in the world by functioning as the cause of receptacles (qawābil) and preparednesses (isti‘dādāt) that regulate the perpetual emanation of the First Cause.\[46\]

Ibn Taymiyya does not accept such explanations of how change and motion arise in the world. He maintains that it is incongruous for any events whatsoever to originate from an eternal complete cause, whether directly or indirectly. When originating events such as the receptacles are traced to God, it implies that God is not the eternal complete cause of them. Conversely, if God is the eternal complete cause for any so-called originating events, these events must be either eternal or nonexistent. God as an eternal complete cause ultimately “implies the nonexistence of originating events or the eternity of originating events, and both of them oppose what is observed.”\[47\] The shaykh concludes that the philosophers posit motion arising out of nothing. Since the motion of the celestial spheres, which is the cause of all other motion, cannot arise from a pre-eternal complete cause, the spheres must be moving of their own accord. Ibn Taymiyya rejects this as inadequate, and he asserts

\[45\] Minḥāj, 1:148/1:36.
\[47\] Minḥāj, 1:344/1:95.
that there must be something above the celestial spheres necessitating their motion. The Philosophers Argue Correctly that the Kalām Theologians Posit Temporal Origination without a Cause

A second proof for the eternity of the world that Ibn Taymiyya attributes to the philosophers, and to Ibn Sīnā in particular, reduces the Kalām view that God created the world ex nihilo to absurdity. In Minhāj the shaykh presents the proof as follows:

The philosophers’ support for the eternity of the world is their view that the [temporal] origination of originating events without an originating cause is impossible. Positing an essence stripped (mū‘attal) of acting that was not acting [but] then acted without an originating cause is impossible.

Ibn Taymiyya denies that this argument proves the eternity of the world: “This view does not prove the eternity of any individual thing belonging to the world, the celestial spheres and otherwise. It proves only that [God] has been acting from eternity.” Elsewhere in Minhāj, he explains further: “All of what you [philosophers] and those like you mention proves only the perpetuity (dawām) of action, not the perpetuity of an individual act and not of an individual enacted thing.” What this argument proves for Ibn Taymiyya is only that God has been acting from eternity. Against the philosophers, he denies that it implies the eternity of any particular part of the world. The shaykh also points out that the philosophers’ argument for the eternity of the world from an eternal complete cause falls afoul of the very principle of origination that they use in the present proof against the Kalām theologians. As noted in the previous subsection, the shaykh argues that the philosophers cannot adequately explain the origin of movement in the celestial spheres unless they permit the origination of events without a temporally originating cause.

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49 Minhāj, 1:154/1:38. For this argument in Ibn Sīnā, see al-Najāh (Cairo: Matba‘at al-sa‘āda, 1331/1913), 412–422; and Al-Mabda‘ wa al-ma‘ād, 46. For its history, see Davidson, Proofs for Eternity, 51–6.
50 Minhāj, 1:148/1:36.
51 Minhāj, 1:148–9/1:36.
52 Minhāj, 1:351/1:97.
53 Minhāj, 1:177/1:44.
Beyond this, Ibn Taymiyya does agree with the philosophers that their proof refutes the Kalām doctrine of creation ex nihilo. The shaykh attributes the denial of God’s perpetual activity to the Muʿtazilis, the Ashʿarīs, the Karrāmīs and the Shiʿīs, and he traces the foundation of this Kalām position to Jahm b. Ṣafwān and Abū al-Hudhayl al-ʿAllāf who presuppose that originating events without a beginning are impossible and that the genus of events must have had a beginning. Ibn Taymiyya argues that positing a necessary beginning to the genus of temporally originating events renders the origination of any events prior to the emergence of the whole genus impossible. Since the genus of events has a beginning, no origination of events could have occurred prior to this beginning. This raises the question of how the genus of originating events itself became possible after having been impossible. Ibn Taymiyya follows the philosophers in asserting that such a transition was impossible unless a cause emerged to produce it. However, this poses the problem of how a cause could originate before origination was possible. For the shaykh, all of this ends in absurdities, and he concludes that origination must have been possible from eternity since there could not have been an origination of the possibility of origination.54

God Wills with an Infinite Regress of Willings

Ibn Taymiyya also casts this argument of the philosophers in terms of the principle of preponderance. That is, every possibility requires a complete preponderator (murajjih tāmm) that tips the scales in favor of its existence over its nonexistence, and, in refutation of the Kalām doctrine of creation ex nihilo, God cannot change from the impossibility of acting to the possibility of acting without a preponderator.55 According to the philosophers and Ibn Taymiyya, the difficulty with the Kalām outlook is that the world originates in time without a cause preponderating its origination. Al-Ghazālī responds to this problem in his Tahāfut al-falāsifa by giving the function of preponderance to the eternal divine will. He argues that it is in the very nature of God’s eternal will to have designated the time at which the world originated. The world did not come into existence until the point at which God in His eternal will had set, and He had not willed it to be created prior to that.56 Ibn Taymiyya rejects this, and, in the first volume of Minhāj, he

asserts that al-Ghazālī erred in adopting this Kalām position, that is, the idea that “one who is powerful and choosing preponderates one of his two possibilities over the other without a preponderator.” 57

Ibn Taymiyya denies that an eternal will can give rise to temporal origination, and he asserts that it is impossible for God to will a concrete individual in eternity. 58 The shaykh argues that if God had an eternal will that applied in general to all things, then everything would be eternal and nothing could originate. This denies the origination and motion that we actually see, such as the motions of the sun, moon, celestial bodies, wind, clouds, living beings and plants. Rather, God’s willing of something to happen occurs at the time that it happens. 59

The dynamic quality of God’s will in Ibn Taymiyya’s thought becomes clearer in his criticism of the philosopher Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī (d. ca. 560/1165). The shaykh reports that Abū al-Barakāt in his Mu’tabar posits two divine wills: an eternal will to will what is eternal—the celestial sphere—and successive wills or newly arising willing (irādāt mutajaddida) subsisting in the essence of God to will successive originating events. 60 The shaykh first notes that an object of will is necessarily originated in time: “Something being willed necessarily entails its origination.” 61 What is eternal cannot be an object of God’s will. Thus, Ibn Taymiyya believes that it is totally unnecessary to posit an eternal divine will because everything other than God, including the celestial sphere, is originated. 62 Originating events may be accounted for adequately with successive willing: “If it is permissible that He has successive willing perpetual in species, it is not impossible that everything other than Him originate by these willing.” 63

The shaykh elaborates a bit more elsewhere in the first volume of Minhāj on the operation of God’s will and power using the conceptual framework of complete causality. His fundamental premise is that someone who wills decisively to do something that he is able to do will necessarily produce the act. Applied to God, “Whatever God wills is, and whatever He does not will is not. Truly, He is powerful over what He wills. With complete power

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58 Minhāj, 1:165/1:41, 1:75/1:43.
61 Minhāj, 1:179/1:44.
63 Minhāj, 1:179/1:44–5.
(al-ğudrâ al-tâmma) and decisive will (al-mâshî’a al-jâzima), the existence of the act is necessary.”64 God is the one Necessitating in His Essence (al-mūjib bi-l-dhât), not in the philosophers’ sense of being an eternal complete cause, but as “necessitating what He originates by His will and His power.”65

Ibn Taymiyya’s notion of God’s decisive and necessitating willing as a complete cause faces philosophical difficulties. By virtue of Ibn Taymiyya’s adherence to the principle of preponderance, each originating act of “decisive will” must be activated by a prior originating cause that makes its existence preponderate. The shaykh may say that “Whatever God wills is, and whatever He does not will is not,” but there still must be a complete cause precipitating each act of willing. If we posit an infinite regress of decisive divine wills and complete causes whose effects are immediately necessary, we may inquire into the ground of this whole infinite regress. Is the series as a whole self-preponderating just as Ibn Taymiyya believes the eternal motions of the spheres to be for the philosophers? Or does it go back to a First Cause that preponderates the existence of the series? If it does go back to a First Cause which is eternal and complete, it would seem that the chain of complete causes and decisive wills must lock up into a timeless series under the eternal complete First Cause, which would yield the eternity of the world. As we will see, the shaykh resists this conclusion by insisting that willed or created things come into existence in time after they did not exist.

Ibn Taymiyya may not be able to evade the difficulty of explaining how temporal origination arises without violating the principles of preponderance and originating causality that he employs polemically against his adversaries. What is significant, however, is that he locates the boundary between the eternal and the temporal at a different point from either the Kalâm theologians or the Neoplatonic Islamic philosophers. Whereas the latter explain temporal events as the product of the eternal motion of the celestial spheres and al-Ghazâlî explains them with God’s eternal and unchanging will whose nature it is to preponderate in time, Ibn Taymiyya posits their source in an infinite regress of divine willings within God. Although Ibn Taymiyya does not say so explicitly, he places the boundary between time and eternity in God’s very essence.

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64 Minhâj, 1:405/1:113.
God in His Perfection Acts, Wills and Creates from Eternity

To this point, the arguments surveyed have been largely deconstructive. Ibn Taymiyya maintains that the eternal divine will of the Kalām theologians and the eternal complete cause of the philosophers cannot explain the emergence of originating events. Every such argument founders on the shoal of the principle of preponderance or originating causality. The alternative set forth by Ibn Taymiyya is that God has been willing and acting from eternity, with eternity here meaning not timelessness but time without beginning. The shaykh also proves his position positively from the necessity of God’s perfection.

Invoking considerations of God’s perfection discussed above in Chapter One, Ibn Taymiyya first explains in Minhāj that the Creator has a greater right to perfections found in creatures than do the creatures themselves because creatures derive their perfections from the Creator. Likewise, God has an even greater right to be exonerated of imperfections from which creatures exonerate themselves. With these principles in place, the shaykh argues that activity is not neutral with respect to perfection because creating, which he takes here to be synonymous with acting, is better than not creating. Moreover, in an obvious stab at the philosophers, Ibn Taymiyya argues that one who performs successive acts is better than one who has something conjoined to him from eternity:

People from the Muslim, Jewish and Christian religious communities say also that acting is an attribute of perfection. They reply to the Kalām theologians who say that it is neither an attribute of perfection nor imperfection: He—Exalted is He—has said, “Is then He Who creates as one who does not create? Will you not then remember?” (Q. 6:7). That being the case, it is reasonable that the agent who acts by his power and his will is more perfect than one having no power and no will. The powerful, freely choosing (mukhtār) agent who performs acts one after the other is more perfect than one the product of whose act is necessarily concomitant with him [and who] is not powerful to originate anything or to change anything from one state to another.

Ibn Taymiyya also casts the latter part of the quoted argument into a contrast between the whole species of acting and an individual eternal act. First, he

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67 The antecedent of the third person plural pronoun hum beginning this sentence is found a few pages earlier in Minhāj, 1:367/1:102, at the beginning of a series of proofs against those who believe in the eternity of the world.
says that the eternity of the species of enacted things in the world is more perfect than the eternity of one individual. Then, he argues that agency over a species of things occurring successively is more perfect than agency over an individual thing. He adds that the perpetuity of agency over an individual thing is an unknown concept and that the perpetuity of agency does not entail the perpetuity of an individual. What it does entail is the origination of the individuals of the species.69 In sum, Ibn Taymiyya maintains that God’s perfection requires that He has been acting and creating the species of originating things from eternity. God’s ultimate perfection is found not in the Kalâm theologians’ and philosophers’ ideals of eternal stillness and changelessness, but in God’s eternal activity and creativity.

No One Originating Event Is Eternal, but the Genus of Originating Events Is Eternal

This brings us to closer consideration of Ibn Taymiyya’s view of the created world itself. In Minhâj the shaykh claims that God’s perpetual activity does not mean that any one thing in the world is eternal. God is “perpetual of agency (dâ‘în al-fâ‘îliyya),” but, “it does not follow necessarily from the perpetuity of His being an agent that there is an individual, eternal enacted thing with Him.”70 Rather, originating events come into being after they were not, and all things other than God are originated and created: “Everything except God is created [and came into] being after it was not.”71

With the phrase, “being after it was not (kâ‘în ba‘d an lam yakun),” the shaykh denies the eternity of any individual thing apart from God and also distinguishes himself from Ibn Sinâ and others who speak of the world as eternal but originated and possible. The issue turns on Ibn Sinâ’s understanding of possibility and causal priority. The philosopher maintains that the world can be eternal but yet possible (mumkin) in the senses that it is not self-sufficient and that it might not have been. Considered in itself, the world is possible. It only becomes necessary through another, namely, God who is the eternal efficient cause of the existence of the world. Ibn Taymiyya’s summary of this idea reads, “The world is an effect (ma’llûl) of [God’s]. He is necessitating it and emanating it. He is prior to it in honor, causality and nature. He is not prior to it in time.”72 Moreover, according to the shaykh,

69 Minhâj, 1:387/1:108.
70 Minhâj, 1:336/1:92.
72 Minhâj, 1:149/1:36.
Ibn Sīnā calls the world originated (muhdath) only in the sense of its being the effect of an eternal cause.73

Against Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Taymiyya marshals the support of Aristotle and Ibn Rushd to show that what is possible originates in time and that something originated and possible must be preceded by nonexistence in time.74 The shaykh writes, “Aristotle and the ancients among his followers along with the rest of the people of reason say that the possible whose existence or nonexistence is possible is only originated, being after it was not.”75 For Ibn Taymiyya, it is not possible that something eternal could have been nonexistent. Likewise, it is not possible that something possible be eternal.76

Ibn Taymiyya asserts in Minhāj that everything except God is originated and preceded by nonexistence and that there is nothing eternal in the world.77 However, he also maintains that there have always been originating events of one sort or another in the universe. Moreover, the perpetuity of God’s creative activity requires this. While there is no one thing in the universe that is eternal, the species or genus of originating events is eternal.78 The shaykh gives a number of examples to tease out the difference between an eternal species and its originating individuals. In some cases, individuals and species are qualified in a similar way. When, for example, all of the individuals of a species are qualified as existent, possible or nonexistent, the species itself must also be so qualified. Ibn Taymiyya cites the following example: “If each one of the Zanj is black, then the whole group is black.”79 However, the individuals of a species do not necessarily have to share the same attributes as the species itself, as when individuals are qualified by origination and passing away while the species as a whole is perpetual. As an example of this distinction, Ibn Taymiyya cites quranic verses on the provision of Paradise, “Its food is eternal, and its shade” (Q. 3:35), and, “Truly, this is our provision which has no end” (Q. 38:54). What is perpetual here is the species of provision and not the individual units that go out of existence. No one piece of food is perpetual. The shaykh probes this distinction further by observing that

73 Minhāj, 1:200–1/51.
75 Minhāj, 1:236/1:62.
79 Minhāj, 1:430/1:119.
the attributes of individual parts of something may not qualify the whole and vice versa. Certain parts of a house, a human being or a tree may be long or wide, but this does not necessarily mean that every part is long or wide. If one says that this day or that prayer is long, it does not mean that all parts of this day or that prayer are long. Similarly, the origination and passing away of individual units does not necessarily entail the origination or passing away of the whole species of originating events.80

If the species of originating events is eternal, we may ask what Ibn Taymiyya believes existed prior to this present world. He asserts that the celestial sphere was originated in time, and he does not rule out the possibility that there were other celestial spheres prior to this one.81 He also indicates that this present world was created out of pre-existing matter. He explains that Aristotle was the first to claim that the celestial sphere was eternal, but he notes that the philosophers before Aristotle believed “that this world was originated, either in its form (ṣūra) only or in its form and matter (mādda). And most of them maintain the priority of the matter of this world over its form.”82

Ibn Taymiyya shows that the revealed tradition also indicates that other things existed before the creation of this world and that this world was created out of pre-existing matter. In support of this, he cites the following quranic verses: “[God] created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His Throne was on the water” (Q. 11:7), and, “He rose toward heaven when it was smoke, and He said to it and to the earth, ‘Come under coercion or obediently’. They both said, ‘We come obediently’” (Q. 41:11). In this regard, he also notes two hadiths: “Truly, God determined the determinations of created things before He created the heavens and the earth by fifty thousand years, and His Throne was on the water,”83 and, “God was, and there was nothing before Him. And His throne was on the water. And He wrote everything in a Reminder. Then He created the heavens and the earth.”84 The shaykh says that traditions from the Companions and the Followers affirming God’s creation of the heavens from water vapor, that is, smoke, are abundantly transmitted (mutawātir).85

82 Minhāj, 1:360/1:100. Unfortunately, Ibn Taymiyya does not provide names of any pre-Aristotelian philosophers.
83 Muslim, 4797, Al-Qadar, Hijāj Ādam wa Mūṣā.
84 Bukhārī, 6868, Al-Tawḥīd, Wā kān ārshuhu ‘alā al-mā’. . . . The variant readings of this hadith are discussed in Hoover, “Perpetual Creativity,” 300–1.
85 Minhāj, 1:360–1/1:100. Ibn Taymiyya’s interpretation of the quranic verses listed here resembles that of Ibn Rushd in Kitāb fasl al-maqāl, ed. George F. Hourani (Leiden: E.J. Brill,
In interpreting these texts, Ibn Taymiyya reports debate over whether God first created the Pen—as in the hadith, “The first thing God created was the Pen,”66—or the Throne. The shaykh explains that God most likely created the Throne first. Then, the Pen was the first thing created of this world for the purpose of writing down the determinations fifty thousand years before the creation of the heavens and the earth. He adds that there must have been time prior to the creation of this world so that God would have had some measure by which to say that He had created it in six days.87 Ibn Taymiyya also notes that the Torah says much the same thing: the earth was covered with water and the wind was blowing over it before God created the heavens and the earth in several days’ time (Genesis 1:1–2). He then cites some unnamed scholars among the People of the Book to the effect that this means that God created from matter and in time.88

The shaykh does not discuss whether the Throne itself, as the first created thing, was also created from pre-existing matter. The logic of God’s perfection would appear to entail that there has always been one created thing or another, even before the Throne. Yet, the shaykh does imply that there was in some sense a first created thing by asserting that it is in God’s perfection that He is prior to all others in every respect.89 Although Ibn Taymiyya does not himself suggest the possibility, we might imagine that the infinite regression of originating events in this world approaches God’s pre-eternity asymptotically. The regression grows ever closer to pre-eternity but never touches it, and, so, it may still be said that God is prior to every originating event in time.

Refutation of Kalām Arguments against an Infinite Regress

Although most of Ibn Taymiyya’s polemic in the first volume of Minhāj uses the principle of preponderance or originating causality to reduce the Kalām position of creation ex nihilo to absurdity, he also seeks to undermine positive Kalām arguments against the eternity of the world.90 Refutation of these proofs is especially important to Ibn Taymiyya in order to open the door to
the possibility of an infinite regress of causes or wise purposes in God’s will. The main Kalām proofs are based on two arguments for the impossibility of an actual infinite stemming from the sixth-century philosopher John Philoponus (d. ca. 570). The Kalām theologians conclude that, since any actual infinite is impossible, the world must have a beginning.91

One of John Philoponus’s arguments asserts that the passing of time increases the number of past events. However, infinites cannot be increased. So past events cannot be infinite.92 From the notion that an infinite cannot be increased, Ibn Sinā, with precedents in the philosopher al-Kindī (d. ca. 252/662), developed the application (talḥīq) argument to show that magnitudes must be finite. The argument may be summarized as follows. Suppose that a magnitude A is finite on one end and infinite on another. Some length is added to the finite end of A yielding a new magnitude B. The finite end of B is then “applied” to the finite end of A, and it is noted that the two infinite ends no longer match. This is absurd and disproves the possibility of infinite magnitudes. Ibn Sinā does not use this argument against an infinite regression of causes and effects, but the Kalām theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī does, and al-Rāzī’s form of the argument is what Ibn Taymiyya refutes in Minhāj.93

Ibn Taymiyya presents al-Rāzī’s argument as follows. If the series of originating events from the time of the Hijra to infinity is compared with the series of originating events from the time of the Flood of Noah to infinity, the one series will be longer than the other by the difference between the Flood and the Hijra. Since disparity between two infinites is impossible, an infinite series of originating events is impossible.94 For Ibn Taymiyya, such a disparity is not impossible. From the Flood to future infinity is greater than from the Hijra to future infinity. Likewise, what is between the Hijra and past infinity is greater than what is between the Flood and past infinity even though both lack a beginning. The disparity, however, occurs only between the two finite ends, in this case between the Flood and the Hijra. It does not

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92 Davidson, Proofs for Eternity, 88–9.
94 Minhāj, 1:432/1:120.
occur in the infinite ends. Infinity itself is not subject to specific measurement such that one infinite may be said to be commensurate to, greater than, or less than another infinite. To illustrate his point, Ibn Taymiyya compares the concept of infinity to multiplicity. The numbers 1, 10, 100, 1000, etc. all share in multiplicity, but this does not mean that they all have the same value. Likewise, infinites may entail diverse values from one perspective, yet all share in infinity from another. Ibn Taymiyya also recounts Ibn Sinā’s refutation of the Kalām use of the application argument. In Ibn Sinā’s view, the application argument against an infinite regress of causes and effects is just a mental exercise. It does not correspond to anything in actuality because everything in the past no longer exists and everything in the future does not yet exist. The application argument against an actual infinite is only valid for what actually exists.

The second argument from John Philoponus exploited by the Kalām tradition maintains that an infinite cannot be traversed. This being the case, something in the present cannot be preceded by an infinite regression of events. In Minhāj Ibn Taymiyya refutes the defense that al-Juwaynī gives for this argument in his Kitāb al-īrshād. Al-Juwaynī argues that positing an originating event preceded by originating events without beginning is like saying to someone, “I will not give you a dirham unless I give you a dinar before it, and I will not give you a dinar unless I give you a dirham before it.” Under these conditions, al-Juwaynī concludes that no dirham or dinar will ever be given. He argues that the only way that this statement can be turned into a valid condition is to say, “I will not give you a dinar unless I give you a dirham after it.”

Rephrasing al-Juwaynī’s formulas slightly, Ibn Taymiyya agrees that it is possible to say, “I will not give you a dirham unless I give you a dirham

95 Minhāj, 1:432–4/1:120.
96 Minhāj, 1:434–5/1:120–1. For the attribution of this argument to Ibn Sinā, see Davidson, Proofs for Eternity, 128–9. Davidson, Proofs for Eternity, 89, 122, also distinguishes a third argument from John Philoponus that carried over into the Kalām tradition even though it is merely a variation of the second. Rather than assume that an infinite cannot be added to, it assumes that an infinite cannot be multiplied. The Kalām theologians argued that the revolutions of the planets could not be infinite because it was known the planets revolved at different speeds. If the planets had revolved from eternity, each planet would have revolved an infinite number of times proportionally different from the other planets. This was rejected as absurd. Ibn Taymiyya does not treat this argument nor does he need to since he permits infinites that are not commensurate.
97 Davidson, Proofs for Eternity, 87–8, 119–120.
after it.” However, he believes that it is wrong-headed and impossible to say, “I will not give you a dirham until I give you a dirham before it,” because this negates that something will happen in the future until the same thing happens in the future. The argument as stated is invalid, and does not deal with an infinite regress in the past. The shaykh believes that the statement should instead read, “I have not given you a dirham unless I have given you a dirham before it.” This is a negation of a past event until another past event has occurred prior to it, and this is possible. So, by correcting al-Juwaynī’s formulation to make it properly applicable to an infinite regress in the past, Ibn Taymiyya believes that he has eliminated any difficulty that al-Juwaynī’s argument might pose for an infinite regress of events.\(^{100}\)

By refuting the Kalām arguments against an actual infinite, Ibn Taymiyya clears the way for the possibility of an infinite regression, and, as we have seen, he upholds an endless chain of originating events into the past and into the future. However, he clarifies in Minhāj that he admits only an infinite regress of effects (āthār), not an infinite regress of causes, creators, agents and originators. Causes and agents in an infinite regress are all possible, originated and nonexistent in themselves and must be given existence by another. In fact, he notes, the longer the chain of these agents becomes, the greater is its need for an agent who is “only existent in Himself, necessarily existent, not admitting nonexistence, eternal and not originated.”\(^{101}\) Yet, Ibn Taymiyya does not explain how this eternal and necessary First Cause gives rise to a regress of temporally originating events.

Summing up the present discussion, Ibn Taymiyya agrees with the Ashʿarīs that wise purpose and causality in the will of God lead to an infinite regress, but he denies that this constitutes grounds to reject God’s rationality. The shaykh refutes the arguments for the impossibility of an actual infinite that the Kalām theologians use to disprove the eternity of the world, and he maintains that the perfection of God requires that God create and will originating events from eternity. Using the principles of preponderance and originating causality, he deconstructs the cosmologies of the Kalām theologians and philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā. He argues against the philosophers that originating events in the world cannot arise from an eternal complete cause and against the Kalām theologians that events cannot originate from an eternal divine will. Rather, he maintains that there is an infinite regress

\(^{100}\) Ibn Taymiyya gives al-Juwaynī’s argument fuller treatment in Darʾ, 9:186–8, and concludes that al-Rāzī and al-Āmidī had already detected the argument’s weakness.

\(^{101}\) Minhāj, 1:436–8 (quote on 437)/1:121.
of God’s willings corresponding to the originating events that God creates in the world.

**Ibn Taymiyya on God’s Voluntary Acts Subsisting in God’s Essence**

Besides an infinite regress, a key Ash’arī objection to wise purpose in the will of God is that it makes God a substrate for originating events. In the first volume of the edited *Minhāj*, Ibn Taymiyya traces this objection’s root to the Jahmī argument that God’s attributes must subsist outside of Him because originating events (i.e. the attributes) only subsist in originating bodies and God is not an originating body. Ibn Taymiyya himself does not take God to be an originating body, but he rejects as fallacious the claim that originating events subsist only in originating bodies. Despite this, the shaykh is reticent to affirm explicitly that origination, much less time, subsists in God’s essence. Although he does on rare occasion allow that originating events subsist in God, he typically states the doctrine in other terms. He hints at why in *Minhāj*.

Ibn Taymiyya argues in *Minhāj* that the Mu’tazilis and their Shi‘ī followers must admit originating events in God because they say that God became an agent after He was not one, that is, He was subject to a change in state when He began to create the world. The shaykh adds that all groups, including the philosophers, must admit this doctrine, an argument Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī makes as well without working out its implications in his theology. Perhaps with some exaggeration, Ibn Taymiyya goes on to claim that, in addition to Abū al-Barakāt, the pre-Aristotelian philosophers, the Karrāmīs and others, the mainstream Sunnī tradition does in fact uphold this doctrine: “As for the great majority of the People of the Sunna and the Hadith, they speak of it or its meaning, even if some of them choose to speak only in legislated terms (*al-alfāz al-shar‘īyya*) and some of them express the legislated meaning with expressions indicating it.” Here, Ibn Taymiyya draws a distinction between those who use the technical term ‘originating events’ to identify this doctrine and other scholars who seek to speak of the doctrine in terms

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102 *Minhāj*, 1:311/1:85.
103 In *Furqān*, MF 13:156, Ibn Taymiyya states briefly but explicitly that the Salaf uphold originating events subsisting in God.
104 Al-Ｒāzī, *Al-Maṣāliḥ al-‘alīyya*, 2:106–7. For further discussion of this argument in al-Rāzī, see Hoover, “God Acts by His Will and Power.”
closer to the authoritative texts. It seems apparent that Ibn Taymiyya takes
the latter path since he studiously avoids 'originating events' in his own doc-
trinal affirmations and speaks instead of God’s attributes or acts which are
‘voluntary’ (ikhtiyāriyya). While the very term ikhtiyāriyya does not appear
in the Qur’an or the Hadith, other forms of the verb ikhtāra (to choose),
from which it is derived, do occur. 106

Ibn Taymiyya’s Minhāj discussion of Ibn Sīnā’s denial of change in God’s
essence illustrates his typical idiom in this respect. Ibn Taymiyya argues that
when God the Agent remains in one state, there is no way to explain the
difference and origination that arise in the world. While there are enacted
things, there is no act to bring them into existence. Rooting himself in the
authority of the prophets, the Salaf and unnamed pre-Aristotelian phi-
losophers, Ibn Taymiyya argues that there must be voluntary acts in God’s
essence in order for change to arise in the world. 107 To deny acts subsisting
in God is to deny that He is acting and originating. 108 Rather, he affirms,
“The Lord must inevitably be qualified by acts subsisting in Him one after
another . . . like His will subsisting in His essence, His words subsisting in His
essence, and His voluntary acts subsisting in His essence.” 109

With this, Ibn Taymiyya leaves aside the ideal of the philosophers and the
Kalām theologians that God is timelessly eternal and replaces it with a God
whose essential perfection consists in perpetual dynamism. In this theology,
the question of the origin of the causes or wise purposes giving rise to God’s
acts of will poses no difficulty because they are simply prior and posterior
acts of God extending backwards and forwards forever in God’s eternal activ-
ity. It remains to address how Ibn Taymiyya conceives God’s self-sufficiency.
An infinite regress of God’s acts implies an infinite regress of the objects of
those acts. If then there has always been one world or another, in what sense
is God sufficient apart from the worlds?

106 For example, “I [i.e. God] have chosen you (ikhtartuka). So, listen to what is revealed”
(Q. 20:13). In Ikhtiyāriyya, MF 6:217–267, a treatise devoted to the active quality of God’s
attributes, Ibn Taymiyya also rejects the Kalām position and upholds the substance of originat-
ing events subsisting in God’s essence while avoiding the very words and speaking instead of
God’s voluntary attributes. For analysis of Ikhtiyāriyya and further contextualization of Ibn
Taymiyya’s position in the tradition of later Kalām, see Hoover, “God Acts by His Will and
Power.” Ibn Taymiyya, MF 8:380, also speaks of “voluntary matters (al-umūr al-ikhtiyāriyya)”
subsisting in God’s essence.


108 Minhāj, 1:352–3/1:97. See Irāda, 8:149–151, for polemic against the Mu’tazilis in
this regard.

In order to guarantee God’s sufficiency apart from the world, the Ash’arīs deny that God acts for wise purposes lest He be perfected (mustakmal) by those purposes and imperfect beforehand. The Mu’tazilīs affirm that God acts on account of wise purposes, but, again to protect God’s sufficiency, these are disjoined from God and yield a return of beneficence and profit only to creatures. Ibn Taymiyya adopts a decidedly different and apparently paradoxical stance. He asserts God’s sufficiency (ghinā), but he also maintains that God acts on account of wise purposes that return to God. Qudra, a treatise on God’s power, contains a clear and concise statement of the shaykh’s view:

God has a wise purpose in everything that He creates. As He said, “The handiwork of God who perfected everything” (Q. 27:88), and He said, “Who made good everything He created” (Q. 32:7). He—Glory be to Him—“is sufficient apart from the worlds” (Q. 3:97, 29:6). The wise purpose includes two things. First is a wise purpose that returns to Him (ta’ūdu ilayhi), which He loves and with which He is well pleased. The second [returns] to His servants, which is a blessing for them at which they rejoice and in which they take pleasure. This is in things commanded and in things created.110

With respect to things commanded, Ibn Tamiyya goes on in Qudra to explain that God loves obedience and rejoices when His servants repent. There is happiness in this for servants as well: “In what He has commanded of acts of obedience is its praiseworthy end which returns to Him and to His servants. In it, He has a wise purpose, and His servants have a mercy.”111 The same applies to created things: “Likewise, what He created He created for a wise purpose which returns to Him and which He loves, and for servants He created it to be a mercy from which they profit.”112

Taken by other concerns, Ibn Taymiyya does not respond to Ash’arī and Mu’tazili objections against his view of wise purpose in Qudra, but he does so in Irāda and Minhāj. In Irāda the shaykh identifies contradiction in the Muʿtazili view. The Muʿtazilis, he argues, maintain that God created and

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110 Qudra, MF 8:35–36.
111 Qudra, MF 8:36. Ibn Taymiyya, Qudra, MF 8:39, also explains that God created servants to worship, praise, laud and glorify him, and he devotes most of the rest of Qudra to an explanation of “I did not create the jinn and humankind except that they might worship Me” (Q. 51:56).
112 Qudra, MF 8:37.
commanded creatures for the wise purpose of showing them beneficence and giving those who are legally obligated their reward. However, they claim that no judgment (*hukm*) returns to God for His beneficence, and they make God indifferent to His own acts by asserting that His acts do not subsist in His essence. But, Ibn Taymiyya continues, someone who is beneficent is praised, and it is the judgment that returns to the beneficent that makes beneficence praiseworthy. Moreover, someone who is beneficent is not indifferent to his acts: “The generous soul rejoices, is glad and takes pleasure in the good that proceeds from it to another.” Conversely, it is irrational that someone not seek gain through his acts: “Anyone who commits an act in which there is neither pleasure, nor benefit nor profit for himself in any respect, neither sooner nor later, is aimless, and he is not praised for this.” Thus, the Muʿtazilīs end up in contradiction by portraying God as aimless in the very act of trying to protect Him from the aimlessness of the Ashʿarī position.

Ibn Taymiyya’s argument gives short shrift to disinterested beneficence and makes a measure of self-interest intrinsic to what constitutes rational and praiseworthy action. Implied, but left unstated, is that God is perfect and praiseworthy because of the rationality in the things that He does. From this, it could be understood that God acts rationally in order to elicit His servants’ praise for the sake of His perfection. However, this would run counter to what we find for example in a blustery passage on God’s sufficiency in *Nubuwāt*, Ibn Taymiyya’s book on prophecy. He seeks to allay Kālām fears that love, wise purpose and the like lead necessarily to God’s need for His servants by denying that God’s servants can profit Him or that He needs their profit. Likewise, God has no need to fear creatures. Unbelievers cannot harm Him, and it does Him no harm when people fail to keep His commands. The shaykh’s defense here offers no theological analysis; it is limited to negations.

Ibn Taymiyya does more substantial theological work on God’s sufficiency in *Irāda* and *Minhāj* by considering the all-comprehensive character of God’s acts instead of their ethical quality. Here is how the shaykh replies briefly in the first volume of *Minhāj* to the Ashʿarī charge that wise purpose in God’s will implies that God is perfected by another and was imperfect beforehand:

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113 *Irāda*, MF 8:89.
114 *Irāda*, MF 8:89–90.
115 *Nubuwāt*, 135–6.
When [God] is powerful over [and] the agent of everything, He does not need another in any respect. On the contrary, the causes enacted are objects of His power and will. God—Exalted is He—inspires His servants to invocation and He answers them. He inspires them to repentance, and He rejoices at their repentance when they repent. He inspires them to deeds and rewards them when they perform deeds. It will not be said that the creature impacts the Creator or makes Him act to answer, reward and rejoice at their repentance. He—Glory be to Him—is the Creator of all of that. To Him is sovereignty, and to Him is praise. He has no associate in anything of that, and in it He has no want of another.\textsuperscript{16}

What Ibn Taymiyya leaves unsaid is that he does not accept the presupposition provoking the Ash\’arī objection. The Ash\’arīs posit creation as an utterly free and arbitrary act of God that could just as well not have occurred without any loss to God being God. If God acts or creates for a purpose, this detracts from His freedom by making the act essential to His perfection. For Ibn Taymiyya, however, God’s creative activity is not free in the sense intended by the Ash\’arīs. Instead, perpetual creativity is intrinsic to God’s perfection, and the existence of the genus of created things follows necessarily from this. What would detract from God’s perfection is someone else controlling or helping God in what He wills to create. God’s sufficiency and lack of need consist in God alone creating all things with no one else helping Him or influencing Him in that.\textsuperscript{17}

Ibn Taymiyya responds to the Ash\’arī objection more comprehensively in \textit{Irāda} in five points. Leading up to this is a discussion of love that sets the theological context. On the authority of texts from the Qur\’an and the Hadith, Ibn Taymiyya argues that God’s servants should love God in Himself and love other things only for God’s sake. Conversely, God loves His servants who believe in Him and do what He loves. Much as we find in Ibn Sīnā, Ibn Taymiyya locates the source of God’s love for His servants in God’s love for Himself: “What God loves of worship of Him and obedience to Him follows from love for Himself, and love of that is the cause of [His] love for His believing servants. His love for believers follows from love for Himself.”\textsuperscript{18} That is, God’s love for Himself is primary, and God’s love for

\textsuperscript{16} \textit{Minhāj}, 1:421/1:117. The translation, “…that the creature impacts the Creator or makes Him act…,” follows the text of \textit{Minhāj} which reads: inna al-makhlūq aththara fī al-khāliq aw ja\’alabu fā’ilan. \textit{MinhājB} reads somewhat differently: inna li-l-makhlūq athban fī al-khāliq ja\’alabu fā’ilan.

\textsuperscript{17} See similar arguments at MF 8:379.

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Irāda}, MF 8: 140–4 (quote on 144). Similarly in \textit{Nubuwwāt}, 111, Ibn Taymiyya writes, “The Lord—Exalted is He—loves Himself, and among the necessary concomitants of His love of Himself is that it is a love willing what He wills to do. What He wills to do, He wills
human beings follows on from that secondarily. On this basis, Ibn Taymiyya argues comparatively that God’s self-love, self-praise and self-laudation so greatly exceed human love, praise and laudation of God that God has no need of them. More decisively, however, the shaykh leaves the human vantage point aside completely and adds that God has no need because it is He who creates the love and good deeds of His servants:

[God] is the Sufficient-in-Himself (al-ghanī bi-nafsihi). He does not need anyone else. Even more, everything other than Him is in want of Him . . . When He rejoices at the repentance of the repenting, loves whoever draws close to Him with supererogatory deeds, is well pleased with the earliest predecessors and such like, it is not permissible to say that He has want of another in that. He is not perfected by another. It is He who created them, and it is He who guided them and helped them so that they did what He loves, is well pleased with and rejoices at. 19

As in the argument cited from Minhāj above, Ibn Taymiyya here preserves God’s sufficiency not by making the world arbitrary—as the Ash’arīs do—but by crediting all that occurs within it to God’s creative acts. One might ask what role volition plays in the shaykh’s understanding of human agency, but answering this question must await Chapter Four. Continuing on in Irāda, Ibn Taymiyya identifies the argument above as that of “the great majority who affirm in [God’s] acts a wise purpose which is linked to Him, which He loves, with which He is well pleased, and for the sake of which He acts.” 20

After this, the shaykh takes up his five point response to the Ash’arī objection that this makes God “perfected by another and imperfect prior to that.” 21 Four of the five points made in Irāda are arguments from reason. The first point states that only someone perfected by his acts is rational. We have already seen this premise at work in Ibn Taymiyya’s polemic against the Mu’tazili notion that God acts for wise purposes that do not return to Him. The second point briefly sets aside the Ash’arī theology of a God who acts without cause: a God not able to act for a wise purpose would be imperfect. This is expanded in the fifth point where the shaykh explains that reason knows that someone able to bring events into existence for a wise purpose is more perfect than someone not able to do that. Probably with the philo-

for an objective (ghāya) that He loves. Love is the final cause (al-waṣīla al-ghābīyya) because of which everything exists.” Although not explicitly stated, the context indicates that the final cause here is God’s very essence. My translation differs somewhat from that of Bell, Love Theory, 80, who quotes it for other purposes.

19 Irāda, MF 8:145.
20 Irāda, MF 8:145.
21 Irāda, MF 8:146–7 (quote on 146).
phers in mind, he adds that it does not matter that these events originate temporarily and are not eternal. In fact it is of the perfection or character of an originating event not to exist prior to its origination. In his fourth point, and arguing in a similar vein, Ibn Taymiyya takes on the Ash‘arī complaint that God’s acting for a cause makes God imperfect prior to His alleged perfection. The shaykh replies that perfection is the existence of something only when wise purpose requires. Imperfection is its existence at other times. Thus, imperfection is not the nonexistence of something as such, but only its absence when it should exist. Ibn Taymiyya notes that God is ascribed with both negative and positive attributes, both of which imply His perfection, and greater perfection is not always attained through addition.

The third point has been saved for last because it is not properly a rational argument but a clarification. Ibn Taymiyya explains that God is not perfected by another, as the Ash‘arīs surmise. Rather, God is perfected by His own will and power without help from any other. God’s sufficiency is brooking no rivals in the act of creation; it is not indifference to creation as such. If it should still be thought that God somehow gains something from others through His acts, he adds, “When it is said that He is perfect through (kamula bi) His act in which He does not need anyone else, it is as if it were said that He is perfect through His attributes or perfect through His essence.”22 From this angle, God’s acts are just as constitutive of His perfection as His attributes and essence. God’s activity is a necessary concomitant of God’s perfection, and in no way does God acquire perfection through His acts.23

**Conclusion**

Ash‘arī objections to rationality in God’s will present a major obstacle to articulating a theodicy, and Ibn Taymiyya must face these objections squarely in order to carve out intellectual space for his own view. The shaykh’s insistence that God acts rationally on account of wise purposes or causes in a self-interested sense strongly suggests that God needs creatures to manifest His perfection. The shaykh thus appears to fall afoul of the Ash‘arī charge that causality in the will of God endangers God’s self-sufficiency. Ibn Taymiyya sidesteps the Ash‘arī allegation by explaining that it is God who creates

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22 *Irāda*, MF 8:146.
23 Cf. *Kasīb*, MF 8:387, which is translated below in Chapter Four, n. 122.
both creatures and their responses. God is sufficient in the sense that He needs no help in creating all that is in the world. The shaykh also employs the Avicennan notion that while the world is a necessary concomitant of God’s perfection and self-love it is not essential to who God is. God has no need of the world. He loves, praises and lauds Himself primarily, and from that flows the world only secondarily, even if necessarily.

The Ashʿarīs also argue that causality in God’s will entails an infinite regress and subjects God to temporal origination, both of which the Ashʿarīs take to be impossible. In response, Ibn ʿTaymiyya refutes Ashʿarī arguments against an infinite regress and turns perpetual origination in God’s essence into a virtue of God’s perfection. However, the shaykh prefers to speak not technically of originating events subsisting in God’s essence but more scripturally of God’s voluntary attributes and acts, which He exercises by His will and power. This is much the same as when Ibn Taymiyya indicates causality in God’s will with the term wise purpose (ḥikma) instead of purpose (gharaḍ) in order to avoid negative connotations attached to the latter term in everyday speech. In sum, God in His perfection has been willing and creating originated things of one kind or another for wise purposes from eternity by means of His will and power.

This perpetually dynamic vision of God’s essence sets Ibn Taymiyya apart from much, perhaps all, of the preceding Islamic philosophical and theological tradition and especially from fellow optimist Ibn Sīnā. The shaykh rejects the Kalām doctrine that creation had a definite beginning, and he jettisons Ibn Sīnā’s emanation cosmology and timeless God. However, he retains the necessity of optimal productivity inherent in Ibn Sīnā’s notion of God. Ibn Taymiyya portrays God’s creation of the world as voluntary and dynamic, but this dynamic and voluntary creativity is nonetheless a necessary concomitant of God’s essential and self-sufficient perfection.