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AL-RĀZĪ ON THE THEOLOGIANS' MATERIALISM

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Abstract. Late in his intellectual life, Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī espoused a dualistic position on the nature of the soul, denying that the soul is in any sense a material body. This view, which in broad terms concurs with Avicenna's, sets al-Rāzī in opposition to the theologians' materialistic stance. To make his position clear, in his last work *Al-maṭālib* al-Rāzī sets out a comprehensive case for the theologians' materialism, before critiquing that position. This paper offers a reconstruction of al-Rāzī's arguments for the theologians' materialism, providing an insight into arguments in the philosophy of mind during the Islamic Middle Ages.

Résumé. Tard dans sa vie intellectuelle, Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī a adopté une position dualiste sur la nature de l'âme, niant que l'âme est en tout sens un corps matériel. Ce point de vue, qui, de manière générale, concorde avec celui d'Avicenne, oppose al-Rāzī à la position matérialiste des théologiens. Pour clarifier sa position, dans son dernier ouvrage, *Al-maṭālib*, al-Rāzī expose un argument approfondi en faveur du matérialisme des théologiens, avant de critiquer cette position. Cet article offre une reconstruction des arguments d'al-Rāzī en faveur du matérialisme des théologiens, offrant une perception des arguments dans la philosophie de l'esprit pendant le Moyen Âge islamique.

1. INTRODUCTION

Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1150-1210) is known for his careful expositions and rebuttals of his opponent's arguments, whereas he generally sets out his own stance rather concisely. His adoption, late in his intellectual life, of a dualistic position on the nature of the soul, a position which in broad terms concurs with Avicenna's, and his consequent repudiation of the thesis that the soul is in any sense a material body, put al-Rāzī in opposition to the materialistic theologians. Accordingly, in his last work *Al-maṭālib* we find al-Rāzī setting out a comprehensive case for the theologians' materialism, and critiquing their arguments one by one, before indicating his own view. Al-Rāzī's reconstruction of the theologians' arguments for materialism provides an insight into the philosophy of mind as it was practiced in the Islamic Middle Ages. While many studies of the materialist theologians have drawn on the original sources,¹ none so far has explored al-Rāzī's presentation of their arguments. Yet the significance of al-Rāzī's exposition is manifold: it is compendious, seemingly encompassing everything that a materialist theologian of al-Rāzī's era might say about the materiality of the soul. Further, it provides insights into al-Rāzī's own intellectual development: his critical scrutiny of materialism in *Al-maṭālib* has no parallel in any of his earlier theo-

¹ See, for example, Ayman Shihadeh, "Classical Ash'arī anthropology: Body, life and spirit," *The Muslim World*, vol. 102, no. 3-4 (2012), p. 433-77. On Aš'arī atomism, see Abdelhamid Sabra, "Kalām atomism as an alternative philosophy to Hellenizing *fal-safa*," in J. Montgomery (ed.), *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy: From the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank* (Peeters, 2006), p. 199-272; Richard M. Frank, "The Ash'arite ontology, I: Primary entities," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 9 (1999), p. 163-23; Richard M. Frank, "Bodies and atoms: The Ash'arite analysis," in M. Marmura (ed.), *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani* (State University of New York Press, 1984), p. 39-53 and 287-93. See also Majid Fakhry, "The Mu'tazilite view of man," *Recherches d'islamologie: Recueil d'articles offert à Georges C. Anawati et Louis Gradet par leur collègues et amis* (Leuven, 1977), p. 107-21; Sophia Vasalou, "Subject and body in Baṣran Mu'tazilism, or: Mu'tazilite Kalām and the fear of triviality," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 17, no. 2 (2007), p. 267-98; Alnoor Dhanani, "The physical theory of kalām: Atoms, space and void in Basrian Mu'tazilī Cosmology," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 116, no. 2 (1996), p. 318; Margaretha T. Heemskerk, "Abd al-Jabbār al-Hamadani on body, soul and resurrection," in C. Adang, S. Schimdtke and D. Sklare (ed.), *A Common Rationality: Mu'tazilism in Islam and Judaism* (Wurzburg, 2016), p. 127-56; Wilferd Madelung, "Ibn Al-Malāḥimī on the human soul," *The Muslim World*, vol. 102, no. 3-4 (2012), p. 426-32. For studies on other relevant traditions, see H. Hugonnard Roche, "La question de l'âme dans la tradition philosophique syriaque (vi^e-ix^e siècle)," *Studia graeco-arabica*, vol. 4 (2014).

logical works, and indicates a substantial departure from the Aš'arite affiliations of his earlier life. This departure reflects al-Rāzī's independence and eclecticism, particularly manifest in *Al-maṭālib*, even while his treatment of some aspects of the arguments, particularly on the nature of the relation between the soul and the body, seems to reflect his own enduring doubts about the viability of dualism.

Al-Rāzī's exposition and rebuttal of the arguments for materialism represents the thesis stage in a dialectical triad he pursues throughout *Al-maṭālib*; after rebutting the arguments for materialism, he will then turn to the antithesis, this being an exposition and rebuttal of Avicenna's arguments for dualism, before proposing his own version of dualism as a synthesis drawing on the preceding stages. The present paper is concerned solely with the thesis stage of al-Rāzī's argument, namely al-Rāzī's reconstruction of the arguments of the materialist theologians and his own replies; exploration of his synthesis stage, his own arguments for the immateriality of the soul, will be the subject of a forthcoming study.

It is important to emphasise that his arguments are indeed reconstructions. Al-Rāzī never attributes any of these arguments to a specific scholar, confining himself to remarking that they comprise all the lines of argument that materialist theologians have proposed; and for this reason the present paper is not concerned with establishing a relation between the arguments that al-Rāzī attributes to the *mutakallimūn* and the arguments found in the pre-Rāzian *kalām* literature. A detailed comparison of the *kalām* literature with al-Rāzī's reconstructions, as well as further exploration of his corresponding discussion of the arguments found in the Aš'arite and Mu'tazilite literature, would be of great interest, but must also be postponed to future work.²

Al-Rāzī's treatment of the materialist theologians' arguments is contained in the first and second articles of book 7 of *Al-maṭālib*.³ The argu-

² An insightful study containing a list of Aš'arite works treating the subject matter of the ontology of man (*ḥaqīqat al-insān*) is Shihadeh, "Classical Aš'arī anthropology."

³ It is worth remarking that al-Rāzī alludes to the materialistic stance of the theologians in his other works, setting out some of their arguments for materialism rather briefly before going on to reject them. In *Al-mabāḥiṭ al-mašriqiyya*, for example, he rejects the theologians' materialism and presents two arguments to prove that it is fallacious, based on (1) his own version of the Flying Man argument, and (2) the persistence of identity over time: see *Al-mabāḥiṭ al-mašriqiyya fī 'ilm al-ilāhiyyāt wa-l-tabī'iyyāt*, ed. Muḥammad al-Mu'tašim bi-l-llāh al-Baġdādī (Tehrān: Dawī al-Qurbā, 2007), p. 238-39. In *Nihāyat al-'uqūl* he writes: "No rational person holds that the true nature of man is the mere body:" see *Nihāyat al-'uqūl fī dirāyat al-uṣūl*, ed. Sa'īd Fūdāh (Beirut: Dār al-Ḍaḥā'ir, 2015), vol. 4, ch. 1, p. 77.

ments can be divided into four headings with one subdivision as follows:⁴

- *Ontological Arguments (OA)*, namely arguments which appeal to ontological considerations in order to deny the existence of immaterial substances *tout court*. These arguments appeal to a worldview which affirms that all that exists in the temporally originated world is ultimately material.⁵ In replying to these arguments al-Rāzī is seeking to establish the positive thesis that immaterial substances do exist and that they are causally effective; although we shall briefly mention his positive arguments, the focus will be on his exposition and rebuttal of the theologians' position.

- *Epistemological Arguments (EA)*, which appeal to the self-evident knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-badīhī*)⁶ each person is said to possess in order either to prove that the soul is a material substance (positive arguments), or to critique the claim that the soul is immaterial (negative arguments). This category subdivides naturally into arguments based on self-evident knowledge we are said to have either of our *own agency (EA1)* or of our *own self (EA2)*.

- Arguments based on the *Agency of the Body (AA)*, which aim to prove that the true agent of the person's actions is the body; hence, the person is said to be equivalent to the body and nothing more.

In *Al-muḥaṣṣal*, *Al-arbaʿīn* and *Maʿālim uṣūl al-dīn* he explicitly rejects the theologians' notion that the soul is the body frame: see *Muḥaṣṣal afkār al-mutaqaddimīn wa-l-mutaʿaḥḥirīn min al-ʿulamāʾ wa-l-ḥukamāʾ wa-l-mutakallimīn*, ed. Ṭāhā ʿAbd al-Raʿūf (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariya, 1905), p. 223; *Al-arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Maḥmūd ʿAbd al-ʿAzīz Maḥmūd (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya 2009), p. 259 and *Maʿālim uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. Nizār Ḥammādī (Kuwait: Dār al-Ḍiyāʾ, 2012), p. 133. Interestingly, in none of his works does al-Rāzī mention or refer to any specific scholar who espouses materialism: he merely states that this notion is embraced by the majority of the theologians.

⁴ Book 7 of *Al-maṭālib* consists of five articles (*maqālāt*, sg. *maqāla*), the first of which is entitled "On the preliminary principles" (*fī al-muqaddimāt*) and is devoted to exploring the ontological underpinnings of his philosophy of mind. The second and the third articles, which are composed of 7 and 23 sections respectively, comprise the subject matter of his philosophy of mind. The fourth and the fifth, which study the souls of jinn, devils, spheres and plants, are not of great relevance for the present discussion.

⁵ Al-Rāzī was at one point among the adherents of this viewpoint. He writes in *Kitāb al-iṣāra*: "Know that in the chapter on the temporal origination of the world (*fī bāb ḥudūt al-ʿālam*) we have established that the [only existing contingent beings] (*inḥiṣār al-mumkināt*) are bodies and what inheres in them (*al-aḡrām wa-l-qāʾim bi-l-aḡrām*)" (Al-Rāzī, *Al-iṣāra fī ʿilm al-kalām*, ed. Hānī Muḥammad Ḥamid [Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Azhariyya li-l-Turāt, 2009], p. 376)."

⁶ The term *al-ʿilm al-badīhī* may be translated either as "self-evident knowledge" or "primitive knowledge;" I use the former translation throughout the paper.

- Arguments based on critiquing the possibility of body-soul *Causal Relations (CRA)*, which concern the difficulties which arise from supposing that the soul and the body, posited as two utterly different substances, can causally interact.

Chapter 3 of article 1, entitled “On the preliminary principles” (*fī al-muqaddimāt*), contains three arguments (OA1-OA3) based on ontological considerations. OA1 and OA3 turn on the uniqueness of God, while OA2 turns on the sufficiency of God’s causality. Chapter 2 of article 2, entitled “On the exposition of the proofs advanced by those who say that the soul must be a material substance” (*fī hikāyat dalāʿil al-qāʿilīn bi-anna al-nafs yağibu an takūna ġawharan ġismāniyyan*),⁷ contains ten arguments (A1-A10) for the theologians’ materialism. Arguments A1, A6, A9 and A10 are epistemological, and subdivide as follows: A1 concerns self-evident knowledge of our own agency (EA1), while A6, A9 and A10 concern self-evident knowledge of our own self (EA2). Arguments A2, A4, A7 and A8 are concerned with the agency of the body (AA). Arguments A3 and A5 are concerned with causal relations (CRA). (Table 1 summarises.) I set out the ontological arguments in section 2, epistemological arguments in section 3, arguments concerning the agency of the body in section 4, and causal relations in section 5.

2. ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS (OA)

The majority of Muslim theologians, al-Rāzī remarks, claim that the existence of a contingent being that is neither space-occupying (*mutaḥayyiz*), nor inherent in a space-occupying substrate (*ḥāll bi-l-mutaḥayyiz*), is impossible,⁸ and he sets out three arguments that the theologians have proposed in support of their claim. The thrust of these arguments is that the existence of immaterial substances – whether

⁷ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib al-ʿāliya min al-ʿilm al-ilāhī*, ed. M. ʿAbd al-Salām Šahīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 1999), vol. 3, book 7, p. 26-34.

⁸ The speculative theologians (*al-mutakallimūn*) reject the notion that the soul is an immaterial substance. Although they admit that accidents are by definition not space-occupying entities (*lā yataḥayyaz ʿind al-wuğūd*), they reject the existence of immaterial substances. Marmura remarks that the vast majority of the *mutakallimūn* were atomists, upholding a materialist conception of the soul. There were exceptions and variations: the Muʿtazilite al-Nazzām (d. 845), for example, rejected atomism, maintaining that the soul is a subtle material substance that is diffused throughout the body, rendering it animate. For this reason, many Islamic theologians found materialism an intuitively coherent position on the nature of the soul and personal identity. See Michael Marmura, “Avicenna’s Flying Man in context,” *The Monist*, vol. 69 (1986), p. 383-95.

TABLE 1: Al-Rāzī's reconstruction of the theologians' arguments in vol. 3, book 7 of *Al-maṭālib*

Category		Principal claim	
Ch. 3, Art. 1	Ontological arguments	OA1	No created being could share in constitutive property of God
		OA2	Sufficiency of God's causality
		OA3	Absurdity of positing a unity between God and any being
	Epistemological argument (EA1)	A1	Self-evident knowledge of our own agency
Ch. 2, Art. 2	Epistemological arguments (EA2)	A6	Self-evident knowledge of our own self
		A9	Self-evident knowledge of our own self
		A10	Self-evident knowledge of our own self
	(AA)	A2	Agency of the body
		A4	Agency of the body
		A7	Agency of the body
		A8	Agency of the body
	(CRA)	A3	Body-soul causal relations
		A5	Body-soul causal relations

these be souls, intellects, etc. – would infringe either God's uniqueness, or the explanatory sufficiency of God's causality. Arguments OA1 and OA3 address God's uniqueness, while OA2 pertains to the sufficiency of God's causality.

2.1. *The uniqueness of God*

Argument (OA1) is intended to establish the absurdity of affirming the existence of a being which could share in the property that is constitutive of God (*al-ṣifa al-muḥawwima li-l-dāt* or *al-ṣifa al-kāšifa ʿan al-ḥaqīqa*), and thus aims to reject the existence of immaterial substances *tout court*. Argument (OA3) seeks to establish the absurdity of positing a unity between God and any being, and thus aims to reject the existence of intellects and souls *per se*.

2.1.1. *The rejection of immaterial substances (OA1)*

[The theologians] say that it is established by proof that the God of the world (*ilāh al-ʿālam*) can be neither space-occupying nor inhering in a space-occupying substrate. Thus, if we suppose another existent with this

attribute, then this existent would be equal to God Almighty, in that it is neither space-occupying nor inhering in a space-occupying substrate. And an equivalence in assigning this [attribute] (*wa-l-istiwā' fī hādā al-ḥukm*) entails the equivalence in quiddity (*yūğib al-istiwā' fī al-māhiyya*). The proof is that if we wanted (*bi-dalīl annā*) to mention an attribute in God in virtue of which His essence is differentiated from others' essences, we could do no more than mention this attribute, namely, that He is an Essence which is neither space-occupying nor inhering in any space-occupying substrate. And if this attribute is [of the kind] that unveils the truth [about the nature of the essence] (*kāšifa 'an al-ḥaqīqa*) then sharing in it entails sharing in the truth [of the divine essence]. Thus, it is proven that if such an existent does exist, then it would be equivalent to God. And two equivalent beings (*al-mitlān*) must be equal in all concomitants (*yağib istiwā'uhumā fī ġamī' al-lawāzim*). This entails either that both are necessary Gods, or that both are contingent slaves. Insofar as both options are absurd, then the affirmation of the existence of such an existent is impossible.⁹

The argument which al-Rāzī sets out in the above passage rests on two assumptions: (i) that the constitutive attribute of God (*al-ṣifa al-kāšifa 'an ḥaqīqat dātih*) is His being neither space-occupying nor inhering in a space-occupying substrate; and (ii) that this attribute is a positive attribute (*ṣifa tubūtiyya*).

In response, al-Rāzī rejects both (i) and (ii). Against (i) he argues that the constitutive attribute of God has nothing to do with space-occupation; rather, it is His necessity in Himself (*al-wuğūb bi-l-dāt*) which is constitutive. As such, the existence of self-subsisting immaterial substances would neither interfere with nor diminish God's particular nature and uniqueness. If this is the case then the theologians' rejection of the existence of immaterial substances based on the assumption that they would share with God the constitutive character of His essence has no force.

Against (ii) al-Rāzī asserts that being neither space-occupying nor inhering in a space-occupying substrate is a negative attribute (*ṣifa salbiyya*), by which he means that it merely negates a claim regarding the occupation of space: it provides no basis from which to prove that any positive attribute may be shared by two entities. Al-Rāzī gives this proposition substantial weight in several places in book 7. He maintains that an equation in negation never entails an equation in quiddity: it is not inconceivable for two distinct realities to share the negation of other realities – in fact, it is quite reasonable that they should share such a negation. To illustrate, consider that red and green share the

⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 15.

fact that both of them are not white or yellow; in fact there are myriads of attributes with which red and green share the fact of “non-being;” however, despite this sharing of countless negations, no one would argue that red and green are identical in terms of their *per se* quiddity. From the two premises “red is not white” and “green is not white” no equality between red and green can be deduced. Similarly, the two premises “God is not a space-occupying entity” and “the immaterial substance is not a space-occupying entity” provide no grounds to infer an equality between God and the immaterial substance.¹⁰

2.1.2. *The rejection of intellects and souls (OA3)*

Expanding on his objection to argument OA1, al-Rāzī adds that even if A and B do share some attributes, this would not entail that A and B are equal in quiddity. The fact that red and green share the attribute of being colours does not entail that red and green are identical; and the fact that the immaterial substance shares with God the attribute of being neither space-occupying nor inherent in a space-occupying substrate does not entail that they are equivalent. Al-Rāzī employs this latter argument to rebut (OA3), which he expounds as follows:

[This argument] concerns denying the [existence] of intellects and souls. They [theologians] said that these intellects and souls which philosophers claim are eternal, are not distinct from God’s essence in virtue of time and place or of existence and privation. [This is because] insofar as [they regard them as eternal], it becomes impossible to differentiate each one from the other [that is, God and intellects] in virtue of the way things really are (*im-tana^c imtiyāz ba^cdihā ‘an ba^cd fī nafs al-amr*), which entails the identity of the two (*itihād al-itnayn*) which is absurd.¹¹

In reply to the argument expressed in this passage al-Rāzī asserts that it is not inconceivable that two distinct entities/realities should exist in the same time and place and yet preserve their distinctive identity. For instance, knowledge and power (*al-‘ilm wa-l-qudra*) are in the way they really are (*fī nafs al-amr*) two distinct accidents, yet they could occur in the same place (inhere in the same substrate) at the same time. The fact that they share the same space-time coordinates does not prevent their being distinct in themselves. This applies to the argument in the extract above, in that although God and intellects are (according to philosophers) indiscriminable in respect of being non-spatial and

¹⁰ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 16.

¹¹ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 15.

eternal, they are still distinct in their *per se* identity. As such, the theologians' rejection of the existence of intellects and souls on the ground of their being indiscriminable from God is invalid.

2.2. *The sufficiency of God's causality (OA2)*

Sense perception indicates the existence of both space-occupying [entities] and the properties which subsist in them. But the [existence] of the third division, [that which is not space-occupying,] can only be proven if one of the other two divisions is [causally] reliant on it (*illā li-ʿaḡl iftiqār aḥad hādāyn al-qismayn ilayh*). This is because, if knowledge of the existence of a given thing is not self-evident, a path to its proof is only permissible if the mind judges that that which is known to exist needs [the existence of the thing to be proved] to exist (*illā idā qaḏā l-ʿaql bi-ḥtiyāḡ mā ʿulima wuḡūduh ilayh*). Yet, since we admit that God Almighty is neither space-occupying nor inheres in a space-occupying substrate, His existence must be sufficient to account for the existence of these space-occupying substances (*al-mutaḥayyizāt*) and of the accidents subsisting in them. If this is the case [that is, that God's existence explains all space-occupying entities and the accidents subsisting in them], then there remains no proof for the existence of any other non-space-occupying entities. The attempt to establish the existence of that for which there is fundamentally no proof, leads to a number of ignorant claims (*mūḡiban li-l-ḡahālāt*).¹²

This passage implicitly expresses the Ašʿarite theory of causation,¹³ namely occasionalism, which ascribes causality exclusively to God. Occasionalism, according to Ulrich Rudolph, “emphasizes God's absolute

¹² Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 15.

¹³ The problem of causation in Islamic philosophy and theology has generated a substantial corpus of modern scholarship. For further details, see Richard M. Frank, “The structure of created causality according to Al-Ashʿari: An analysis of the ‘Kitāb al-luma’”, Sections 82-164,” *Studia Islamica*, no. 25 (1966), p. 13; Blake D. Dutton, “Al-Ghazālī on possibility and the critique of causality,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology*, vol. 10, no. 1 (2001), p. 23-46; Jon McGinnis, “Occasionalism, natural causation and science in al-Ghazālī,” in Montgomery (ed.), *Arabic philosophy, Arabic philosophy*, p. 441-63; Alnoor Dhanani, *The Physical Theory of Kalām: Atoms, Space, and Void in Basrian Muʿtazilī* (Brill, 1994); Amos Bertolacci, “The doctrine of material and formal causality in the ‘Ilāhiyyāt’ of Avicenna's ‘Kitāb al-ṣifā’,” *Quaestio*, vol. 2 (2002), p. 125-54; Michael Marmura, “The metaphysics of efficient causality in Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā),” in Marmura (ed.), *Islamic theology and philosophy*, p. 172-87; Kara Richardson, “Avicenna's conception of the efficient cause,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, vol. 21, no. 2 (2013), p. 220-39; and Robert Wisnovsky, “Final and efficient causality in Avicenna's cosmology and theology,” *Quaestio*, vol. 2 (2002), p. 97-124; Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), and Frank Griffel, *The formation of post-classical philosophy in Islam* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2021).

power by negating natural causality and attributing every causal effect in the world immediately to Him.”¹⁴ The theologians’ endorsement of occasionalism, the view that God is the only true cause, emerges, as Majid Fakhry puts it, from “the vindication of the absolute omnipotence and sovereignty of God and the utter powerlessness of the creature without Him.”¹⁵ In the above extract al-Rāzī attributes to the theologians an empiricist account according to which they place restrictions on claims about the existence of objects which are inaccessible to sensation:¹⁶ since the primary source of knowledge is sensory experience, knowledge of the existence of the corporeal substances which are accessible to sensation along with the accidents subsisting in them is self-evident. On the other hand, the existence of objects which are inaccessible to sensation (immaterial substances) is speculative (inferred), that is to say attainable only through reflection and investigation. According to the theologians, any argument concerning the existence of beings outside the material realm is sound if and only if the existence of material substances (whose existence is primitive) is reliant on them, or in other words if they are the cause of something in the material world.¹⁷ This is because there is a tight connection between knowing a thing and knowing the cause of it: in fact, to know a thing is to grasp the “why” of it, which is to grasp its

¹⁴ Ulrich Rudolph, “Occasionalism,” in Sabine Schmidtke (ed.), *The Oxford handbook of Islamic theology* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2016), p. 1. See also, Dominik Perler and Ulrich Rudolph, *Occasionalismus: Theorien der Kausalität im arabisch-islamischen und im europäischen Denken* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000).

¹⁵ See Majid Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and the Critique by Averroes and Aquinas* (London: George Allen, 1958). There are many variations of Islamic occasionalism, but to discuss them would take us far beyond the scope of this paper.

¹⁶ It should be noted that the theologians admit the existence of metaphysical creatures such as angels and jinn, although they are inaccessible to sensation, basing their belief on the divine text which explicitly mentions their existence. However, there is no text that says explicitly that the nature of the human soul is an immaterial substance. Therefore, they limit their acceptance of objects that are inaccessible to sensation to those that are clearly mentioned in the text, and those for which there is a causal need that justifies searching for their existence.

¹⁷ Strikingly, modern physicalism relies, *inter alia*, upon the causal closure of the physical world to deny the existence of immaterial substance, that is, the soul/mind. However, the principle on which physicalists rely is the opposite of that utilized by the theologians. While physicalists affirm physical causation in nature, full-blown occasionalism vehemently rejects it. The former proclaims that the causal circle is closed by appealing to physical laws, while the latter bases its claim on the existence of God as the exclusive efficient cause. Whilst occasionalism and physical causation are diametrically opposed, they both share the idea that the causal circle is closed in the sense that it does not permit the existence of a cause inaccessible to senses: the immaterial substances (mind, intellect, soul).

primary cause. In the theologians' conception of causation, the causal circle encompasses only God; therefore His existence is sufficient to explain the existence of the material world, and seeking knowledge of the existence of other immaterial substances is not only superfluous but also a sign of ignorance.¹⁸

In responding to this argument, thus reconstructed, al-Rāzī seems to depart substantially from the Aš'arite conception of causality. While the latter leaves no room for causal power outside the divine circle, al-Rāzī permits the causal circle to encompass God, intellects and the soul, in addition to natural causation. However, we must differentiate here between three kinds of causal efficacies to which al-Rāzī implicitly refers: (1) causality with respect to existence itself, that is, bringing to life or creating *ex nihilo*; (2) natural causality; and (3) the causality of governance and conduct. As regards (1), al-Rāzī is clear that this kind of causation is exclusive to God. For him, God is the sole creator of all contingent beings, and hence he rejects the philosophers' "emanation theory" by which they permit a mediating role in the creation process to be ascribed to the intellects. As regards (2), al-Rāzī seems to accept that there are natural causal relations between the interactions of physical effects and the natural phenomenon which result from this interaction, supporting this stance by reference to the traditional example of fire and burning.¹⁹ As regards (3), al-Rāzī affirms that immaterial soul is related to the material body by way of conduct and governance (*'alā sabīl al-taṣarruf wa-l-tadbīr*). This latter kind of causation will be central to the discussion in section 4.

2.3. *Al-Rāzī's positive critique of the ontological arguments*

Al-Rāzī's strategy in critiquing the theologians' ontological arguments has a negative and a positive aspect. The negative aspect is that he proves that the arguments are fallacious, as we have seen above; for the positive, he follows two methods: (1) establishing the existence of immaterial substances, and (2) establishing their causal efficacy. Having explored the negative aspect of his reply, we now turn to explicate the positive.

¹⁸ For more details about the argument from ignorance (*argumentum ad ignorantiam*), see Ayman Shihadeh, "The argument from ignorance and its critics in medieval Arabic thought," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 23, no. 2 (2013), p. 171-220.

¹⁹ See al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 10.

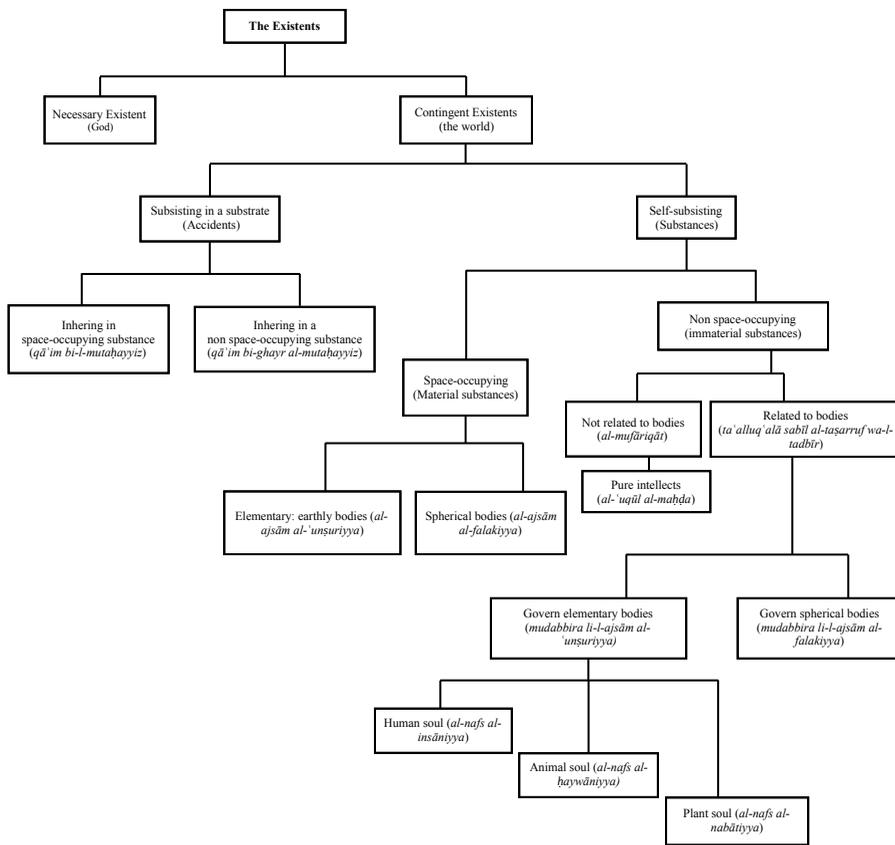


FIG. 1: Al-Rāzī's taxonomy of being

2.3.1. Proofs of the existence of immaterial substances

Al-Rāzī pursues two routes to prove that immaterial substances do exist. First, he presents a classification of existents based on their essence. I illustrate al-Rāzī's taxonomy of being in the following diagram (figure 1), which shows that he includes immaterial substances as an integral part of the created (existing) world: they are a subdivision of the self-subsisting things (substances), which are in turn a subset of contingent existents (the world, as opposed to God).

Second, he offers three examples of existing immaterial substances, namely time, space and Platonic forms. He first proves that time *qua* time, space *qua* space and Platonic forms are immaterial substances, and then argues that they do exist in reality. Insofar as these three immaterial substances do exist, then it is not inconceivable that the imma-

terial substance exists.

Concerning time (*al-mudda*), al-Rāzī argues that it is an existent (*mawğūd min al-mawğūdāt*) which is not supervenient on motion; rather it is a self-subsisting substance independent of motion and its concomitants. He adds that this substance is not a body, for if it were a body then it would have spatial relations with other bodies, and hence if it were a body it would not be able to keep the same distance in relation to other bodies; but time relates to all material bodies in the same way. Since no material body can act in such a way, time therefore is not a material substance. But it is a substance, hence it must be an immaterial substance which exists in reality. And this is what is sought.²⁰

Concerning place, al-Rāzī defines the void (*al-ḥalāʾ*) as self-subsisting immaterial extension (*al-buʿd al-muğarrad al-qāʾim bi-l-nafs*).²¹ This extension (*al-buʿd*) is not a material body, for a material body is a substance which moves from one point in space to another. But extension itself cannot move, therefore it is an immaterial substance.²²

Third, al-Rāzī posits that there are immaterial indivisible substances that exist in reality. These substances represent the quiddities, or the universal meanings, instantiated by particulars that share these meanings.²³ He argues that these universal meanings are tantamount to the Platonic forms.²⁴

²⁰ Al-Rāzī remarks that the proof of the substantiality and immateriality of time and space which he presents here is concise. He refers to a full account in book 2 of *Al-maṭālib*, “On the glorification of Allah the Almighty” (*Tanzih Allāh taʿāla*), and book 5, “On time and place” (*Fī al-zamān wa-l-makān*).

²¹ Al-Rāzī employs place (*makān*), space (*faḍāʾ*), extension (*buʿd*) and location (*ḥayyiz*) as synonyms.

²² It would take us too far afield to dwell on al-Rāzī’s account of time and place; we only glance at his discussion of this subject insofar as it meets the need of this section. For further details on al-Rāzī’s treatment of place, see Peter Adamson, “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on place,” *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy*, vol. 27, no. 2 (2017), p. 205-36, and Peter Adamson, “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī on void,” in Abdelkader Al Ghouz (ed.), *Islamic Philosophy from the 12th to the 14th Century* (Göttingen: Bonn University Press, 2018), p. 307-24. For his discussion of time, see Peter Adamson and A. Lammer, “Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s Platonist Account of the Essence of Time,” in Ayman Shihadeh and Jan Thiele (ed.), *Philosophical Theology in Islam* (Brill, 2020), p. 95-122, and Peter Adamson, “The existence of time in Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī’s *Al-maṭālib al-ʿāliya*,” in Dag Nikolaus Hasse and Amos Bertolacci (ed.), *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna’s Physics and Cosmology* (De Gruyter, 2018), p. 65-100.

²³ Al-Rāzī discusses the extra-mental existence of the quiddities and the universal meanings partaken of by particulars in *Al-maṭālib*, book 2, p. 8-13, and book 7, p. 17-18.

²⁴ It is worth noting that al-Rāzī shows an inclination towards Platonism in his treatment of universals. In book 2, p. 7-15 of *Al-maṭālib* he establishes a significant cri-

2.3.2. Immaterial substances can be causally efficacious

In respect of their causal efficacy (ability to affect and to be affected), al-Rāzī classifies existents into the following categories:²⁵

(i) That which affects but is not affected (*alladī yu³attir wa-lā yata²attar*): God.

(ii) Those which never exert any effect and are always affected: prime matter.

(iii) Those which have both been affected and exert effect: souls and intellects.

(iv) Those which have never been affected nor do they affect: nothing, because no existent escapes the omni-causal power of God, namely that of bringing to existence.

Al-Rāzī focuses on category (iii), offering a lengthy discussion of the plausibility of ascribing causal power to immaterial substances (intellects and souls). He first advances three arguments to invalidate the ascription of the power of creation to anything but God,²⁶ and then he concentrates on physical causation, noting that the majority of scholars affirm it. He then maintains that souls are related to bodies by way of conduct and governance (*ta^calluq^calā sabīl al-taṣarruf wa-l-tadbīr*). Based on this conclusion he offers a hierarchal arrangement of the world of intellects and souls on the basis of their causal relations to bodies.

tique of nominalism by arguing that universal meanings as well as abstract entities do exist in reality. These findings are significant if one seeks to trace the further development of Platonism in Islamic philosophy in the centuries after his death. It is worth mentioning also that al-Rāzī's stance regarding the Platonic forms changed throughout the course of his intellectual life. For instance, in *Al-mabāhīt* and *Nihāyat al-^cuqūl* he denies the existence of Platonic forms and affirms that universals exist only mentally. However, in his *Al-mulaḥḥaṣ* he not only denies mental existence and asserts that universals exist as immaterial substance in reality, but also he confirms that he supports Platonic forms. He writes: "The forms which are copied (*al-manqūla*) from Plato: that there must be an immortal, persistent and eternal (*bāqī, abadī, sarmadī*) being in every qualitative nature (*ṭabī^ca nauⁱyya*), and we have endorsed this notion in ontology." He also writes: "Those who affirm the mental forms affirm them as imprinted in mind (*munṭabi^ca fī al-dīhn*). But we affirm them as self-subsisting forms just like what the Great Plato says." See al-Rāzī, *Al-mulaḥḥaṣ fī al-ḥikma wa-l-mantiq*, MS Berlin Staatsbibliothek Or. Oct. 629. See also Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Zarkān, *Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī wa-ārā²uhu al-kalāmiyya wa-l-falsafiyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1963), p. 501-9.

²⁵ See al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 8-14, and Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Kitāb al-nafs wa'l-rūḥ wa ṣarḥ quwāhuma*, ed. Mohamad Ṣaḡīr Ḥasan al-Ma'ṣūmī (Cairo: Maktabat al-Thaqāfah a-l-Dīniyyah, 2009), p. 31-37.

²⁶ In other words, he gives three arguments to prove that only God can exercise the power of bringing to existence or the act of creation *ex nihilo*.

In this hierarchy, the more lofty the immaterial being is, the more distant is its relation to bodies. In a similar vein, the loftier the soul is, the higher-ranked is the body it governs. As such, the pure intellects (*al-^ʿuqūl al-mahḍa*), according to the philosophers' nomenclature (or *al-malāʾika al-muqarrabūn*, according to al-Rāzī's), have no relation with any body whatsoever. However, the power they possess is manifested by the emanation of the light of knowledge to the intellect below it in the hierarchy and so on. After the pure intellects come the practical angels (*al-malāʾika al-^ʿamaliyyūn*), or what the philosophers term the souls (*al-nufūs*). The role of souls is to govern the world of bodies (*tadbīr ʿālam al-aḡsām*). At the bottom of this arrangement come the human souls which govern the human body, then the animal souls, and finally vegetative souls.

Unlike the ontological arguments, for which Al-Rāzī presents a direct refutation, he simply leaves the remainder of the arguments for materialism to stand without offering a refutation. Notably, as we will see, some of the arguments which al-Rāzī puts in the mouths of the theologians comprise logical fallacies, some of which, as in A1, might go unnoticed, while others, such as in A6, are explicit. Perhaps al-Rāzī intended the fallacious formulations to demonstrate their weaknesses. For the purposes of this paper I simply underline the fallacies in the arguments as he presents them, leaving the refutations of A1-A10 for another occasion, as they fall within al-Rāzī's positive account of theory of the soul.

3. EPISTEMOLOGICAL ARGUMENTS (EA)

The materialist theologians' epistemological arguments (EA), as al-Rāzī expounds them, divide into two sets: argument EA1, in which appeal is made to the self-evident knowledge each of us is said to have of own agency to argue that the agent of our actions is our material body; and EA2, which appeal to the self-evident knowledge we are said to have of our self to argue that the true nature of man is the material body.²⁷ Prior to framing these arguments, al-Rāzī lays the ground by emphasising the significance of self-evident knowledge (*al-^ʿilm al-badīhī*). He defines self-evident knowledge as pre-reflective knowledge: that which is immediately accepted by the untrained mind without any need for further reflection or demonstration. He maintains that there must be self-evident knowledge, otherwise there could be no acquired knowledge

²⁷ As shown in table 1, EA1 comprises one argument A1 according to al-Rāzī's listing, while EA2 comprises three arguments A6, A9 and A10.

(*al-‘ilm al-kasbī*), since the former is the basis for the latter.²⁸ The certainty of self-evident knowledge plays a key role in al-Rāzī’s exposition of the epistemological arguments.

3.1. Epistemological Argument (EA1)

As noted in the introduction, only a single argument for materialism (A1) is posited based on our self-evident knowledge of our own agency. Al-Rāzī formulates the argument in a syllogistic form, and then elaborates each premise. He writes: “What indicates that the soul is a specific body is that the knowledge of the properties of the self is self-evident (*badīhī*); if so, then the knowledge of the self (*al-‘ilm bi-l-dāt*) is self-evident. This entails that our knowledge of our specific self (*dātunā al-maḥṣūṣa*) is self-evident too. If this is established, then our own self must be a body.”²⁹

The syllogism may be set out as follows:

(A1-1) Knowledge of the properties of the self is self-evident (*badīhī*)

(A1-2) If the knowledge of the properties of the self is self-evident, then the knowledge of the self is self-evident

From which he will conclude:

The self must be this body

I now explicate each premise of (A1) according to al-Rāzī’s own exposition.

(A1-1) Knowledge of the properties of the self is self-evident

Our knowledge of the properties of ourselves is self-evident (*‘ilm badīhī*). This is because I necessarily know that I see, hear, say, know, think, desire, rage, enter a house, leave, travel to a certain country and return from there [and so on]. Those who dispute that these kinds of knowledge are self-evident would be disputing the most obvious and sturdy self-evident knowledges. Hence, it is proven that one’s knowledge of the properties of one’s self is self-evident.³⁰

²⁸ See al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 26.

²⁹ See al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 26.

³⁰ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 26.

In defending this premise, al-Rāzī argues that we all possess a subjective awareness of our agency over our own actions, or in other words we have pre-reflective knowledge that it is *we* who initiate, execute and control *our* own volitional actions. This sense of agency is tightly integrated with the sense of ownership, which is the implicit sense that we are the owners of our own actions. Al-Rāzī describes the actions carried out by the agent as being properties of that agent or the marks of one's character.³¹

Al-Rāzī considers that this establishes that the attribution of one's action to one's self, or, as he puts it, the knowledge of the properties of the self, is self-evident knowledge (*'ilm badīhī*). This concludes his reasoning in favour of premise (A1-1).

(A1-2) If the knowledge of the properties of the self is self-evident, then the knowledge of the self is self-evident

Here a problem arises. We may quote al-Rāzī's exposition of premise (A1-2), underlining the statements which appear most problematic.

The second premise states that: if the knowledge of the properties of the self is self-evident then the [1] *knowledge of the self* [as distinct entity] (*al-'ilm bi-dāt al-nafs*) must be self-evident too. The proof is that my knowledge that I see, hear, reason and reflect, is a judgment on myself that these properties are positively attributed to it [my self] (*ḥukmun 'alā nafsi bi-tubūt ḥādih al-ṣifāt la-hā*). And the one who attributes something to another thing must first know both parts [properties and self]. Thus, if my knowledge of [2] *the existence of my self* (*'ilmī bi-wuḡūd nafsi*) is acquired, then I must have been doubtful of *the existence of the self* before acquiring this knowledge. He who doubts *the existence of the self* would never know the specific properties attributed to it (*al-ṣifāt al-maḥṣūṣa bi-hā*). As we have established [in premise (A1-1)] that this [the knowledge of the properties of the self] is self-evident, then the knowledge of [2] *the existence of the self must be self-evident too* (*waḡab ann yakūn al-'ilm bi-wuḡūd al-nafs badīhī*).³²

The major premise (A1-2) is intended to be the bridge to establishing that the attribution of our actions to ourselves is a case of self-evident knowledge. The argument for this premise is based on implicit appeal to

³¹ For more details on al-Rāzī's theory of action, see Ayman Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Brill, 2006).

³² Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 27. Here is a summary of the ambiguity in this passage: (i) Al-Rāzī promises to establish that [1] knowledge of the self is self-evident (l. 1-2). (ii) He then switches to [2] the knowledge of the *existence* of my self in the argument, treating it as if it were identical to [1] (l. 7-8). (iii) The conclusion establishes [2]: that the *existence* of the self is self-evident (l. 9-10).

a principle I call Logical Rule 1 (LR1): knowing the relation between x and y presupposes prior knowledge of both x and y . Based on this principle, the argument underpinning (A1-2) then runs that insofar as the attribution of actions to the self comprises a case of self-evident knowledge, then prior to this attribution one must possess self-evident knowledge of both the actions and the self. Hence, the knowledge of the self is self-evident, and (A1-2) is established. We should note, however, that in the way al-Rāzī formulates it, (A1-2) contains an ambiguity. It is articulated in a way that invites the reader to understand it as referring to the knowledge of *the self* (*al-‘ilm bi-dāt al-nafs*), which is the thesis al-Rāzī intends to establish, whereas what is established by this premise is in fact the knowledge of the *existence of the self*. But the knowledge of *existence of the self* does not appear in (A1) as a premise, nor does he seek to prove it. It is a foreign thesis.

Hence in the first lines of the extract above al-Rāzī promises to prove [1]: that the knowledge of *the self* is self-evident, then he interpolates a foreign proposition about the knowledge of *existence of the self*, ending up concluding [2]: that the knowledge of the *existence of the self* is self-evident. These two propositions [1] and [2] are by no means interchangeable: there is quite a difference between our saying that one knows x and that one knows that x exists, the former entailing further knowledge (the perception of something as a distinct or discrete entity) that knowledge of mere existence need not include.

Surprisingly, although the premise (A1-2) concludes [2] that “the knowledge of the *existence of the self* is self-evident” as shown in the text, al-Rāzī overlooks this and uses [1] that the knowledge of the *self* is self-evident’ as if it were the consequent of the major premise (A1-2). Then he applies it in deriving the conclusion of argument A1 (explained below).

Conclusion of A1: The self must be this body

As we have seen, although the second premise above does not establish that *knowledge the self* is self-evident, this claim nevertheless plays an essential part in drawing the conclusion to A1. The argumentation underlying the conclusion can be formulated as follows.

Insofar as the knowledge of the self is self-evident, then the self must be this body. This is because proving the existence of a thing which is neither a body nor a part of a body is not self-evident; such proofs depend on reflection and demonstration. In other words, the thesis that the self is an immaterial substance is not self-evident, whereas the claim that the

self is a body can be established on self-evident grounds. Consequently, the self must be this body and nothing beyond it.

3.2. *Epistemological Arguments (EA2)*

EA2 encompasses A6, A9 and A10, which are based on self-evident knowledge of one's self; of these, A6 philosophically speaking is the most interesting.

3.2.1. *Argument A6*

The overall structure of A6 is as follows: Self-knowledge is the most fundamental and certain kind of knowledge. Hence, knowledge of anything else other than one's own self is corollary to self-knowledge (*tābi'un li-'ilmī bi-nafsī*). Therefore, if the true nature of the self were that it is an immaterial substance, then necessarily one would know (*ya'lam bi-l-darūra*) that it is so. Yet no one possesses necessary knowledge (*'ilm darūrī*) that he is an immaterial substance. Thus, the original assumption, that the self is immaterial substance, is absurd.³³

In formulating argument A6, al-Rāzī affirms that the awareness of one's self is peculiarly direct, in both an epistemic sense and a metaphysical sense. It is epistemically direct in that one is not aware of one's self by being aware of something else. It is metaphysically direct in that no event or process mediates between one's awareness and one's own self. Hence, unlike A1, which attempts to deduce the self-evident nature of self-knowledge from our primitive awareness of our agency over our actions, argument A6 simply allows that self-knowledge is the most fundamental and immediate kind of knowledge, which cannot be inferred from any more immediate knowledge, and is in a sense infallible and immune to the kinds of error that are brought about by misidentification or flawed deduction. Evidently, the presupposition which affirms the immediacy and fundamentality of self-knowledge in A6 is philosophically plausible *per se*; however, it transpires that in the argument it is fallaciously employed. This is because the argument commits a category mistake: it interprets *self-knowledge* as though it were equivalent to *knowledge of the self*, yet the former corresponds to the direct first-person knowledge of one's self which is self-evident, whereas the latter corresponds to the knowledge of the essence of the self which is attainable only by reflection and demonstration. The direct epistemic first-person access to

³³ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 29-30. See also, al-Rāzī, *Al-iṣāra*, p. 376.

the self is neither identical with, nor tells us anything about, the ontological status of the self; for the former belongs to the epistemological realm while the latter pertains to the ontological realm. The unjustifiable jump that A6 commits between these two distinct realms makes the argument fallacious. Interestingly, al-Rāzī, so it seems, grounds A6 on such a logical fallacy intentionally, since this has the effect of weakening the theologians' materialist argument internally. That al-Rāzī was not himself fooled by this fallacy is evident from elsewhere in his *Al-maṭālib* where he gives a clear account of the distinction between self-knowledge and the knowledge of the essence of the self.³⁴

3.2.2. Argument A9

Argument A9 is based on the philosophers' definition of man (*ḥadd al-²insān*).³⁵ According to this definition, man is a material substance (*ḡawhar ḡismānī*) that possesses six properties: nourishing (*muḡtaḍī*), growing (*nāmī*), reproducing (*muwallid*), perceiving (*ḡassās*), volitional movement (*mutaḡarik bi-l-irāda*) and rationality (*nāṡiq*). The argument then posits that these properties, according to the philosophers' definition, are descriptive of a material body, not an immaterial substance. As such, man is the material body that possesses these properties. Accordingly, the philosophers' proposal that man is not a material body but rather an immaterial substance will contradict their original definition of the man as stated above.

Al-Rāzī then considers a reply (on behalf of the philosophers) as follows: Suppose we accept the assumption that man is this material body that possesses these properties; still, though, we need to know whether there is an immaterial substance which governs this body. Al-Rāzī replies (on behalf of the theologians) that what this reply posits is a governor of this body, which takes us far afield from the original inquiry (the nature of man *per se*). Notwithstanding, even if we accept the

³⁴ Al-Rāzī makes this distinction in a response to a hypothetical contender who raises the following question: if self-knowledge is the most immediate and self-evident kind of knowledge, then why is the designation of the essence of the self subject to such massive debate? Al-Rāzī replies first by an elaborate explication of the immediacy and infallibility of self-knowledge. Second, he affirms that this kind of knowledge is self-evident, therefore it is not sought for by demonstration. And third, he indicates that what is sought for by demonstration is not the aforementioned kind of self-knowledge, rather, it is the knowledge of the essence of the self (that it is an immaterial substance which is neither space-occupying nor inherent in a space-occupying entity). See al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 22-5.

³⁵ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p 33.

philosophers' reply, and turn instead to investigate the governor of the human body, we must likewise reject the thesis that the governor of the human body is a separate immaterial soul, for agency (causality) is to be ascribed exclusively to God. This latter reply proposed by al-Rāzī on behalf of the theologians bears on occasionalism, on which al-Rāzī rests the bulk of the theologians' ontological arguments, as shown earlier.

3.2.3. *Argument A10*

The final epistemological argument appeals to the folk identification of the nature of man, or the definition of man which is obtained from pre-theoretical conviction.³⁶ According to this argument, if any sensible person is asked what man is, she will point at the external body frame. And if that sensible person was challenged by someone who claimed that the true nature of man is an immaterial substance, not this body, she would reject this claim as counterintuitive. Al-Rāzī remarks that this is the central argument used by most theologians in defending their materialistic stance (*al-ḥuġġa allatī ʿalayhā taʿwīl al-mutakallimīn*).³⁷

4. ARGUMENTS BASED ON THE AGENCY OF THE BODY (AA)

The arguments based on the agency of the body correspond to A2, A4, A7 and A8 according to al-Rāzī's listing. The notion of agency plays a crucial role in the materialists' attack on dualism. This is because substance dualists hold that a person is composed of two parts: a body and a soul; or, to be more precise, the fundamental part that is essential to a person and which constitutes her identity is the immaterial soul, i.e. a person is identical with a non-physical soul. Conversely, materialists (monists) such as the theologians who allow only one ontological reality in the created world, deem the person to be identical with the material body. However, they maintain that a person is not just any body; persons are bodies that can do a certain array of activities, such as think, communicate, feel, etc. For ease of exposition, let us refer to these arrays of activities which mark what a person is as "*p*-functions," and the activities done in order to fulfil those functions as "*p*-activities." So, according to the materialist, a person is a body which has the ability to fulfil various *p*-functions – or, we might say, a person is *p*-functioning body. As such, the dualist ascribes the agency behind the *p*-activities, as well as

³⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 34.

³⁷ See Shihadeh, "Classical Ashʿarī anthropology," p. 437ff., and Vasalou, "Subject and body in Baṣran Muʿtazilism."

perceptions, to the immaterial soul, whereas the materialist attributes them to the material body. One critique a materialist could pose against dualism is to invalidate the ascription of agency to the immaterial substance based on the spatial discontinuity between the material and the immaterial. In a similar vein, a materialist can defend his position by maintaining that the fact that *p*-activities are performed exclusively by the material body is based simply on common sense. Al-Rāzī, speaking on behalf of a materialist theologian, pursues these two main pathways in setting out the ways to establish materialism based on the notion of agency. Thus he considers a negative pathway, corresponding to arguments A2 and A8, which critiques the attribution of agency to the immaterial soul based on spatial discontinuity; and a positive pathway, corresponding to arguments A4 and A7, which seeks to prove that the agent of the person's actions and perceptions is the material body.

4.1. Arguments A2 and A8

The critique of the ascription of agency to the immaterial soul is taken up in arguments A2 and A8. The thrust of the arguments which Al-Rāzī expounds is that if a person is an immaterial soul, then common ascriptions of agency, such as I moved, I walked, I ate etc., will constitute erroneous statements, because the immaterial soul cannot be the agent of these actions.

If the soul is an immaterial substance – not a body nor inhering in a body – then the notions: I moved, rested, entered the house and left it, went to the market and returned to the mosque, would entail erroneous statements (*aqwāl bāṭila*). This is because all these attributions cannot be affirmed for the incorporeal substance (*mumtaniʿat al-tubūt fī haqq al-ḡawhar al-muḡarrad ʿan al-ḡismiyya*). Yet these claims are self-evidently correct, because, pre-philosophically, every rational person knows necessarily the truth of his saying: I entered the house and left it, as he knows the truth of his saying: I learned such-and-such, and understood such-and-such. Thus to attack [the credibility of these propositions] (*al-qadh fihā*) is to attack the most obvious self-evident knowledge (*yakūn qadḥan fī aḡhar al-badīhiyyāt*).³⁸

Al-Rāzī then posits a counterargument which contends that the argument in the above extract rests on the ordinary usage of an expression which could nevertheless be metaphorical, and so be subject to interpretation: so, when I say “I entered the house” I perhaps mean *my body* entered the house. If this is the case then the above argument would no

³⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 27.

longer hold, because the actual meaning of the statement does not entail the ascription of agency to the immaterial substance. Al-Rāzī replies to his counterargument that the original argument does not rest on terms and expressions which are prone to different interpretations: it relies on social-linguistic norms which point to one specific meaning. In other words, what a person actually means when she says that she entered the house is that she herself entered the house, which is to say, she is the agent of the action. Therefore, to claim that a person is equivalent to the immaterial substance (soul) would be to claim that the immaterial substance entered the house, which is absurd. Moreover, if the true nature of a person is the immaterial substance, and the body is nothing but an instrument that this immaterial substance possesses, then there should be no difference between someone's saying that her body entered the house and that her horse entered the house, insofar as she possesses a body and she possesses a horse. However, every sane person knows the difference between these two statements (my self and my horse). Since claiming that the true nature of the person is an immaterial substance would eliminate this important difference, the latter claim must therefore be fallacious.

Al-Rāzī pays particular attention to the claim that it is inconceivable to ascribe agency to the immaterial soul given the discontinuity between the material (spatially extended) and the immaterial (non-spatially-extended). This objection applies both to the agency of the soul, and to the accounts of the relation between the soul and the body which presuppose an immaterial governor (the soul) of a material governed (the body). Thus in an arresting passage Al-Rāzī writes:

If the soul is an immaterial substance devoid of volumetric magnitude and extension (*muğarrad ʿan al-ḥağmiyya wa-l-taḥayyuz*), then its actions will not depend on the direct contact with the locus of action (*la-ḥtanaʿ an yatawaqaf fiʿluḥā ʿalā mumāssat maḥall al-fiʿl*). Because the unextended [object] cannot be in direct contact with the extended [object] (*li-ʿanna mā lā yakūnu mutaḥayyizan ḥtanaʿ an yaṣīra mumāssan li-l-mutaḥayyiz*). If this is the case, then the action of [the immaterial soul] will be a matter of invention (*ʿalā sabīl al-ḥtiraʿ*) without the need for direct contact (*mumāssa*) or juxtaposition (*mulāqāh*) between the agent (*al-fāʿil*) and the locus of action (*maḥall al-fiʿl*). If this is the case, then one should be able to move bodies without touching them nor touching something that touches them. This is because [we conclude from the assumption that] the soul is able to move [its] body without the need for touching it that the soul should be able to move [any] body without the intermediary of contact. All bodies are equally movable, and the relation between the soul and all bodies is equal; since the soul is able to move some bodies without contact, it must be able to move

the rest without contact. Yet this [conclusion] is self-evidently false (*bātil bi-l-badīha*). Consequently, the soul is only able to move [a given thing] on condition that it is in direct contact with something in direct contact with it. But any object in direct contact with any given body is itself extended [space-occupying], [and] as such, the essence of the self must be extended [space-occupying].³⁹

Thus it appears that although al-Rāzī endorses dualism at this late stage of his intellectual life, he still seems uncomfortable with the idea of the discontinuity between the extended and the unextended. Perhaps this was due to his inability to offer a plausible explanation for the agency of the immaterial soul over its body (controlling and governing it) and its agency over the *p*-activities of the human being (actions and perceptions). In other words, he was not able to demystify the enigma of what is now known as the problem of mind-body causation. This sceptical stance, however, should come as no surprise, given that in the contemporary philosophy of mind this problem is neither resolved nor even fully explained, eight centuries after al-Rāzī's death. As such, al-Rāzī's perplexity regarding this issue is not only entirely comprehensible, but also represents a novel philosophical insight into a genuine philosophical problem.

4.2. Arguments A4 and A7

The aim of arguments A4 and A7 is to prove that the material body is the agent of actions and perceptions (both particular and universal). The overall structure of arguments A4 and A7 can be formulated along the following lines:

- (i) A man is a substance (*ḡawhar*) capable of performing *p*-activities
 - (ii) The actual agent of *p*-activities is the material body
- therefore,
- (iii) A man is a material body

Premise (i) is self-evident,⁴⁰ in his exposition al-Rāzī therefore focuses on establishing premise (ii). Argument A4 is designed to establish that the body is the actual agent of *p*-activities because every single function of the *p*-activities is done by a specific body part.⁴¹ For example,

³⁹ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 32. This argument, which casts doubt on the causal interaction between the immaterial soul and the material body, appears for the first time in *Maʿālim uṣūl al-dīn*, p. 136.

⁴⁰ Al-Rāzī writes: "If the self-evident knowledge (*al-badīha*) judges that I see and listen, then it must judge that I am characterised by these properties." Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 28.

smiling is a function of the lips, tasting food is the function of the mouth, and even thinking and reflection are functions of the brain. No single human activity necessitates an explanation above and beyond the body parts. As a result, if man is a substance capable of fulfilling *p*-activities and all *p*-activities are done by body parts, then the man must be this body.

Perhaps the only human activity whose ascription to the body requires further elaboration is the perception of universals. Therefore, al-Rāzī allocates argument A7 to proving that the agent of universal and particular perceptions is the material body. The argument is intended to show that this body is the seat or house of particular and universal perceptions, as well as the agent of intentional apprehensions and movements (*al-idrākāt wa-l-taḥrīkāt al-irādiyya*). Hence, this body and its components are the person. He divides A7 into three premises and a conclusion.

In premise (A7-1), al-Rāzī affirms that the body is the locus of particular perceptions. He argues that what distinguishes a living body from a non-living object is the feelings or the particular perceptions. For instance, if someone touches a fire with her hand, she will feel pain in her hand. Thus, there happens in the body of man certain distinctive feelings the occurrence of which means nothing but the attainment of particular perceptions in that body.

Premise (A7-2), which represents the thrust of the argument, posits that the body is the locus of universal perceptions. Al-Rāzī then argues, based on the first premise, that if the body is the locus of particular perceptions, then the body must be the locus of universal perceptions too. This is because, taking the perception of the particular pain as an example, the constitutive essence (*al-dātī al-muqawwim*), or what makes pain pain, is the universal quiddity (pain-ness). Therefore, the perceiver of the particular pain must perceive the constitutive components of it (pain-ness) which is a universal meaning. Based on that, the perception of the particular pain presupposes the perception of the universal pain. Thus, if the body is the locus of the particular pain (first premise), then it must be the locus of the universal pain too. As such, the body is the locus of universal perceptions.

Premise (A7-3) is the claim that the body is the agent of intentional actions and apprehensions. Al-Rāzī presents an argument that the

⁴¹ Al-Rāzī mentions this argument in *Al-mabāḥiṭ* as a counter-argument to the claim of the immateriality of the soul. Then he refutes it outright. See, al-Rāzī, *Al-mabāḥiṭ*, vol. 2, p. 389-90. See also *Al-muḥaṣṣal*, p. 225

agent of intentional movement (*al-muḥarrik bi-l-irāda*) must possess prior knowledge of the object it intends to move, because “it is impossible to intentionally move an object which is neither conceived nor felt.”⁴² Hence, the agent of intentional action (*al-fā‘il al-muḥtār*) must be an apprehender (*mudrik*) in the first place. Based on the first two premises, the apprehender of both particular and universal perceptions is the body; so the agent of intentional actions must be the body too. Consequently, if the body is the agent of all the human perceptions and actions and the person is nothing but a substance capable of performing these actions and perceptions, then human beings must be their bodies.

5. ARGUMENTS BASED ON BODY-SOUL CAUSAL RELATIONS (CRA)

In the expositions of the fourth and final set of arguments (A3 and A5), those based on body-soul causal relations, we glimpse some of al-Rāzī’s genuine doubts about substance dualism. Substance dualism states that a person is composed of two fundamental parts, an immaterial soul (mind) and a material body, where the former constitutes the essential part (the one that is identical to the person). Given this thesis, the person (the soul) is connected to its body via a kind of mysterious causal relation which al-Rāzī usually refers to as conduct and governance (*al-taṣarruf wa-l-tadbīr*).⁴³ This means that the soul does not reside within the body, nor is it connected to it through any physically explicable sort of connection. Rather, it gives commands to its body without being in direct contact with it. Furthermore, the exact location of the soul is indefinable. Al-Rāzī states that it is neither in the world nor outside it, and neither connected to the world nor separated from it (*mawḡūd lā dāḥil al-‘ālam wa-lā ḥāriḡ ‘anhu wa-lā muttaṣil bi-l-‘ālam wa-lā munfaṣil ‘anhu*).

Arguments A3 and A5 are intended to attack the idea of there being causal relations between the body and the soul. Al-Rāzī expounds an argument to the effect that if the soul/person is an immaterial substance which is related to the material body in the way of control and governance (*‘alā sabīl al-taṣarruf wa-l-tadbīr*) then it is not inconceivable that this relation should cease to exist.⁴⁴ Insofar as there is no plausible

⁴² Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 32.

⁴³ Al-Rāzī usually refers to the causal relation between the soul and the body by the term *ta‘alluq*, hence *ta‘alluq ‘alā sabīl al-taṣarruf wa-l-tadbīr*.

⁴⁴ Al-Rāzī refers to the separability and independence of the soul from its body. Ac-

reason why there should be a specific connection between this particular soul with this particular body, then the soul could leave one body and connect to another body. However, this case has never occurred. As such, the soul (the person) is not an immaterial substance. Al-Rāzī then posits a counter-argument which maintains that perhaps each soul has a natural love (*ʿišq ṭabīʿī*) for its specific body and not for any other body, and therefore sticks to its body and does not transfer to another. He replies that this claim is weak because it offers no plausible explanation for the specification of each soul to a specific body. The notion that the soul has a kind of love for this body is equivalent to the notion that the soul enjoys sensible pleasure, and in this way the body represents a mere tool for the soul to attain these pleasures. But these pleasures can be attained by using any sound body. As such, the problem of specification remains.

It is worth noting that the above counter-argument (the love relation between the soul and its body) is not posited just for the sake of argument (as many of al-Rāzī's counterarguments in fact are); rather, it is indeed Avicenna and al-Baġdādī's own explanation of the nature of the connection between soul and body.⁴⁵ That al-Rāzī seems unconvinced by this explanation is shown by the fact that he repeatedly raises concerns about the nature of the connection between the body and the soul in different places in his *Al-maṭālib* as well as his *Maʿālim uṣūl al-dīn*. This indicates that although he accepts substance dualism, specifically al-Baġdādī's version, he nevertheless finds soul-body causal relations problematic. Al-Rāzī allocates a special section⁴⁶ to hypothetical thought experiments aiming to cast doubt on the separability of the soul from the body. This chapter comes just after establishing his own theory of the nature of the soul (a theory that concurs well with al-Baġdādī's). He entitles it "On the [question] that: Is it conceivable to have one soul governing two bodies and/or two souls governing one body?"⁴⁷ After discussing both possibilities, he concludes that if one believes that the per-

ording to a substance dualist, the immaterial soul is not embodied within its body, rather, it is utterly separated from it and only related to it in a way that enables it to govern and control it.

⁴⁵ See Abū al-Barakāt al-Baġdādī, *Al-muṭabar fī al-ḥikma*, 3 vol. (Hayderabad, 1358), vol. 2, p. 345. Al-Rāzī also mentions the love relation (*taʿalluq al-ʿāšiq bi-l-maʿšūq*) between the body and the soul in *Al-mabāḥiṭ*, vol. 2, p. 392-3, where he remarks that it is a weak stance. Alternatively, he affirms that the connection between the soul and the body is of a kind that entails control and governance (*taʿalluq ʿalā sabīl al-taṣarruf wa-l-tadbīr*) rather than love. Yet this remark does not resolve the explanatory problem of the causal reaction between the material and the immaterial.

⁴⁶ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, book 7, article 3, ch. 12, p. 145-7.

⁴⁷ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 145-6.

son is identical with an immaterial soul which is connected to her body in a way of conduct and governance (*‘alā sabīl al-taṣarruf wa-l-tadbīr*), then both hypothetical proposals, having one soul governing two bodies and/or two souls governing one body, must not be inconceivable (*yağību an lā yakūna mumtani‘an*). But both possibilities are bizarre. Therefore, there must be something awry about the original assumption (substance dualism) as it leaves the door open for these bizarre outcomes.

If the soul is an immaterial substance distinct from the body, then it must be possible (*la-kāna yağību an yaṣiḥḥa ‘alayhā*) for [this soul] to transfer from this body to another; and then, after a while, to return to the [first] body (as we elucidated in “On the use of instruments”). As long as this is not the case, then our claim that the soul is an immaterial substance which is neither a body nor inhering in a body, is problematic (*muṣkil*).⁴⁸

It is important to note that although al-Rāzī finds body-soul causal relations problematic, he by no means abandons dualism outright. Rather, he proposes a potential explanation for this problem which amounts to the suggestion that there might exist a specific quality (*ḥāṣṣiyya*) for each soul and body which makes each specific soul exclusively suitable for a specific body. It is worth remarking, however, that the explanation al-Rāzī proposes adds nothing to al-Bağdādī’s love relation, if the latter is understood correctly. Indeed, al-Rāzī seems to misinterpret the love relation posited by al-Bağdādī as being a love which attains to materialistic pleasures; in fact, according to al-Bağdādī it can be interpreted as a specific kind of attractive force that occurs between a specific body and a specific soul.⁴⁹ This attractive force is not far from al-Rāzī’s “specific quality” that characterizes a specific body and makes it the one to which a specific soul connects. Certainly, al-Rāzī realises that neither his explanation nor al-Bağdādī’s is demonstratively sufficient; he adds, therefore, that one should accept that it is impossible for human minds to discover the secrets of God’s creatures in their totality. And the enigma of the soul is the foremost of these secrets.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 146.

⁴⁹ Al-Bağdādī states that the relation between the soul and the body is a revelational natural relation which resembles love (*‘alāqa ṭabī‘iyya ilhāmīyya ka-l-maḥabba*). In this sense, it is neither volitional (*irādiyya*) such that one can cease it at any time, nor coercive (*qasriyya*) such that the soul is forced to connect to a body while hating this connection. See al-Bağdādī, *Al-mu‘tabar*, vol. 2, p. 345.

⁵⁰ Al-Rāzī, *Al-maṭālib*, vol. 3, book 7, p. 146.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper has offered a description and analysis of al-Rāzī's reconstruction of the materialist doctrine proposed by medieval Muslim theologians in respect to the nature of the soul. Although al-Rāzī alludes to the theologians' materialism in almost all his works, a comprehensive analysis of the arguments for this stance appears only in *Al-maṭālib*, wherein al-Rāzī himself espouses dualism. Indeed, al-Rāzī had rejected the notion the soul is the body frame (*hādā al-badan*) throughout his intellectual life.

In his reconstruction of the theologians' materialism al-Rāzī displays two main approaches to arguing that the soul (the true nature of man) is nothing but a material substance: a global approach according to which one denies the existence of immaterial substances *tout court*; and a specific approach according to which one attacks the dualistic outlook which holds that the true essence of man and the agent of all his perceptions and actions is an immaterial substance that is causally related to the material body. Al-Rāzī employs these two approaches to state the case for the theologians' materialism. Hence, as this paper shows, his methodology can be reconstructed according to the following classification:

- the global approach, which encompasses one set of arguments (ontological arguments); and,
- the specific approach, which encompasses three sets of arguments: Epistemological Arguments, Arguments based on the Agency of the Body, and Arguments based on body-soul Causal Relations.

Our review of the arguments for materialism set out by al-Rāzī offers significant insight into the methodology through which scholars engaged in the philosophy of mind during the long medieval era; many of the arguments they employed, notably concerning doubts about body-soul causal relations or the denial of the existence of substances outside the material realm, remain among the most contested issues in contemporary philosophy of mind.

Acknowledgements. I am immensely grateful to Dr Tony Street for discussing the first draft of this paper with me and offering valuable insight and guidance; I am also indebted to Dr Benedict Young for assistance with copyediting and proofreading; I extend my gratitude to Dr Mohammad Saleh Zarepour for his useful comments on the first draft of the paper; and I gratefully acknowledge the Hartwell Trust for support in conducting this research.