

The Disagreement between Avicenna and al-Ghazali on the Issue of the Pre-eternity of the Universe, how their Arguments Originated from Greek Philosophers and their Effect on Muslim Philosophers

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of MRES Philosophy in the department of Humanities and Performing Arts

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ABSTRACT

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TITLE OF THESIS	The Disagreement between Avicenna and al-Ghazali on the Issue of the Pre-eternity of the Universe, how their Arguments Originated from Greek Philosophers and their Effect on Muslim Philosophers
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The aim of this thesis is to explore one of the three condemnations by al-Ghazali of Avicenna in his widely publicised book ‘Incoherence of the Philosophers’. The paper will focus on one of these three specific issues because it was these topics that were used by al-Ghazali to insinuate that Avicenna had transgressed the boundaries of valid traditional Islamic belief (*kufi*). The refutation of al-Ghazali are found in three parochial topics: (I) pre-eternity of matter and temporal nature of the world (II) God’s knowledge of particulars and universals, (III) the relationship between the resurrection of the body and the soul. The focus of this thesis will be on the issue of presenting the opinions of both the proponents of pre-eternity of matter as well as advocates of the universe being created out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*). It will explore the opinion of Greek philosophers leading up to Avicenna, then will navigate through the opinion of Muslim philosophers and theologians and then finally moving onto the opinions of contemporary philosophers and scientists. The thesis will first explore the opinion of Avicenna regarding the pre-eternity of the universe and whether his position traversed the boundaries of Islam and into heresy. The thesis will then move onto looking into the opinions and positions of Greek and Muslim philosophers, to enquire into the accuracy of the perception that the position of Avicenna was a ‘rogue’ position that was rejected by Muslim philosophers. The contention of al-Ghazali and the opinions of latter Muslim theologians will be explored in order to give the reader a holistic understanding of these issues so that one can determine whether it was philosophically sound for latter scholars to anathematise Avicenna. Finally the thesis will explore the relevance of the Avicenna amongst philosophers and scientists in current times.

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed: Sulaiman Ahmed (candidate)

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STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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Literature Review

There have been a significant number of scholars from a wide variety of backgrounds who have contributed to the discussion about the pre-eternity of the universe. This includes the contribution made by Muslim scholars in the field of Islamic philosophy. Based on this it wasn't prudent to include the positions and arguments of all scholars who have contributed to this field. Therefore there was a need to choose specific scholars and as such there were a number of factors involved in deciding which scholars to include in this thesis. The focus of this thesis is on al-Ghazali and Avicenna and the interaction of their arguments with past and contemporary scholars, because al-Ghazali took this disagreement a step further by issuing a statement that the position of Avicenna is tantamount to disbelief (kufr). This led to the perception that Avicenna was completely abandoned and due to this he was considered a heretic by Muslims within the field of Islamic scholarship.¹ In this literature review I will attempt to explain my reasoning for including the specific scholars that I have chosen for my thesis.

The objectives of the thesis was to analyse the arguments of Avicenna and al-Ghazali, to compare their positions to the accepted beliefs within Islamic philosophy and theology. To examine the positions of Greek philosophers and whether these positions were introduced into Islamic

¹ Ahmad bin Hanbal, 'Ar-Radd Jahmiyyah waz-Zanaadiqah' (Daaruth-Thabaat, 1st edition), Page 143-146
Taqī ad-Dīn Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah Majmoo' al-Fataawa (King Fahd Publications, Saudi Arabia 2004), Volume 9
Page 135-138

Taqī ad-Dīn Ahmad ibn Taymiyyah, Ta'aradh al-'Aql wan-Naql (Dar-ul-Imaam Ahmad), Volume 5, Page 65

Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, Eghaathat al-Lahfaan, (Al Ashqar University, Riyadh, 2003), Volume 2, Page 287

Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani, Lisan al-Meezaan, (Maktab al-Matbu'at al-Islamiyyah Beirut, Lebanon, 2002), Volume 2
Page 293

Yahyah J. Michot, MAMLŪK THEOLOGIAN'S COMMENTARY ON AVICENNA'S "RISĀLA AḌḤAWIYYA": BEING A
TRANSLATION OF A PART OF THE "DAR' AL-TA'ĀRUD'" OF IBN TAYMIYYA, WITH INTRODUCTION, ANNOTATION,
AND APPENDICES: PART I, Journal of Islamic Studies Vol. 14, No. 2 (May 2003), Page 149-203

Accessed 27/08/2018

[<http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/index.php?page=showfatwa&Option=Fatwald&Id=87783>]

Accessed 27/08/2018 <http://www.asharis.com/creed/articles/mrsit-why-ibn-sina-you-exceedingly-shrewd-kafir-thank-you-for-supporting-our-aristotel.cfm>

Muhammad Saalih al-'Uthaymeen, At-Ta'leeq al-Mukhtasar 'al-Qasidah an-Nooniyyah, (Unpublished), Volume
3, page 1328

philosophy. Was the position of al-Ghazali original or did he fall into the same trap that he claims that Avicenna fell into by parroting the positions of Greek philosophers? Was Avicenna's position unique only to him or was it a position that was accepted by other Islamic philosophers and theologians? Did the entirety of Islamic scholarship consider his position heretical or were they scholars from orthodox Islam who either accepted his position or remained neutral on the issue? Therefore there were specific related reasons for including the philosophers that have been chosen to be included into this thesis.

There were a number of reasons for including the position of Aristotle in this thesis. One of the arguments of the opponent of Avicenna was that he distorted Islamic philosophy and theology by introducing Greek philosophy into Islam through the ideas of Aristotle. They went further by claiming that Avicenna was merely re-producing the position of Avicenna without much innovation. The position of Aristotle was discussed in the debate between Al-Biruni and Avicenna where they deliberated on the specifics of Aristotle's model of the universe and whether his model includes the existence of a creator. As such we will analyse his arguments and look at whether the charges levelled at Avicenna hold merit.

Philo of Alexandria was a Greek philosopher who held that the universe was eternal. The reason why it was felt that his argument was pertinent enough to be included into this thesis was because he wrote against the Stoics who held that that world is temporal. Now in the thesis we will explore the positions of al-Ghazali and one of the arguments that will be made is that al-Ghazali replicated some of the arguments of the stoics, and as such Philo's refutation of the stoics is relevant to the debate that will be presented in the thesis.

The arguments of Proclus were included by John Philoponus in his book in order to refute them. Proclus was a famous proponent for the eternity of the universe. The arguments of John Philoponus were later reproduced by al-Ghazali and later Asharis and therefore it became necessary to include both Proclus and John Philoponus in order for the reader to understand the origins of some of the arguments of Al-Ghazali. If one of main insinuations made on Avicenna was that he introduced

Greek Philosophy into Islamic philosophy then what makes such an argument all the more interesting is that despite the accusations made by al-Ghazali he fell into the same problem by reproducing many of the early arguments of the Stoics, John Philoponus and other early Greek/Christian/Jewish philosophers who argued for the temporal nature of the universe.

Al-Maturidi is the founder of one of the major orthodox Sunni schools which followed the doctrine of Imam Abu Hanifa. Now Avicenna was rejected by orthodox Muslims and he was considered a heretic due to his opinions and ideas. This thesis presents his idea from a multitude of angles and one of these angles is whether his position falls in line with accepted orthodox position of Islam despite the fact that he was considered a renegade by Muslim philosophers and theologians. The thesis in fact goes one step further in arguing that his position falls far more in line with orthodox Islam compared to the position of al-Ghazali. Now a possible counter to this argument is that al-Maturidi argued that the universe is temporal and therefore the position of Avicenna does not fall in line with orthodox Islam. Therefore it became important to present a detailed analysis of the arguments of Maturidi, in order to show the readers that his position was not refuted by al-Maturidi and in fact Maturidi looks at the eternity of the universe from a different angle. Another important reason for including Maturidi is that there is limited work done on him both in Arabic and English, and therefore it gives the reader of the thesis a unique opportunity to understand the arguments of Maturidi. The thesis will show that the arguments of Avicenna are in line with theological 'principles' of the Maturidi School.

More time is spent with the arguments of Avicenna and al-Ghazali, as the main basis of the current problem lies with them. But it was important to maintain a balance, because after a careful analysis of the positions of al-Ghazali and Avicenna, another important aspect of the thesis is the origination of their ideas as well as how scholars who came later dealt with the positions of these scholars. Was it that Avicenna was not accepted by Muslim scholars for over a thousand years or was it an idea concocted with those who had the loudest voices and the most power, and it was due to this that it

became known as the ‘truth’, which is that Avicenna was a heretic and had traversed the boundaries of the orthodox Islam?

Al-Biruni was included in the thesis as he was a contemporary of Avicenna, and their exchange of letters, where they debated multiple issues which included the matter of the eternity of the universe², which was well known during that time and it still remains known in current times. Al-Biruni was a scholar of the Royal Palace and he was given the duty of debating with Avicenna, and this discussion occurred over multiple letters. This letter exchange is very interesting, not only due to the fact that Al-Biruni was a famous scholar who disagreed with Avicenna but also due to the political dynamics that were involved within the discussion. Had Avicenna ‘slipped up’ it may have resulted in imprisonment or death, as such a careful reply was imperative.

The addition of Ibn Tufayl to the thesis was interesting due to him clearly respecting Avicenna. This can be seen by the fact that he titled his allegory ‘Hayy ibn Yaqzan’³, the same name that was used by Avicenna in his very own famous allegory.⁴ Despite him admiring Avicenna he analyses the issue of eternity of the universe and comes to the conclusion that both arguments fall within the framework of Islamic philosophy and theology and that he feels that one argument isn’t any stronger than the other argument.

Averroes is well known for his famous refutation ‘The Incoherence of the Incoherence of the Philosophers’ on the book of al-Ghazali called ‘The incoherence of the philosophers’.⁵ He was an advocate of the philosophy of Avicenna and was very vocal in his support of the position of the pre-eternity of the universe. He felt that the arguments of al-Ghazali were weak, lacked substance and foresight. The sole purpose of his book was a rebuttal of the book of al-Ghazali. As such it imperative to include his position and ideas into this thesis.

² Berjak R, *The Medieval Arabic Era: Ibn Sina-Al-Biruni Correspondence*, Trans by Rafik Berjak, (2005)

³ Ibn Tufayl, *Hayy Ibn Yaqzan*, Trans Goodman L. E, (The University Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009)

⁴ Corbin H, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, (Princeton University Press, 2014)

⁵ Averroes, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, (Dar al-Ma’arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1964),

Fakhr al-Din al-Razi was a famous Ashari scholar, a group within Islamic theology which have followers that make up around ninety percent of the Sunni Muslim world. The Ashari School is considered one of the two orthodox Sunni Muslim schools. Razi is considered one of the founding fathers of the school, because despite the fact that the school is named after Abul Hasan al-Ashari, a huge proportion of his positions are not found in the Ashari School. Instead the ideas of Razi, Ghazali and Juwayni were the foundational pillars of the theological and philosophical ideas that are found within the school. The fact that Avicenna is considered a heretic amongst orthodox Muslims and even more so by adherent of the Ashari school it was important to show that despite this Razi, a leading Ashari, did not consider the position of Avicenna to be heretical and actually in fact he felt that Ghazali did not understand the position of Avicenna, and that in his opinion the disagreement between them was merely semantics.

Tusi was another vocal follower of the position of Avicenna. He wrote *Sharh al-isharat*⁶ which is a commentary on Avicenna's book *Al-isharat wa al-Tanbihat (Remarks and Admonitions)*.⁷ He argued against the position of Razi and felt that the disagreement between al-Ghazali and Avicenna was a real and substantial disagreement. He argued for the pre-eternity of the universe, and did this from multiple angles, he was a clear follower of the methodology of Avicenna.

Adhudiddin al-Iji and Sayf al-Din al-Amidi are famous Ashari scholars, and were substantial in the development of the positions of the school. So after the positions of Razi, Ghazali and Juwayni laid the foundations of the schools, it was scholars such Iji and Amidi and their ideas that were important in the expansion of the school. Therefore when they argue that the positions of Avicenna are not heretical and instead fall within the acceptable framework of the theology and philosophy of the religion it has a significant impact on a huge proportion of Muslims. This is quite important in the thesis as it shows for the first time that not all scholars rejected Avicenna and considered him a heretic.

⁶ Tusi N, *Sharh al-Isharat Wa Al-Tanbihat*, (Cairo, Egypt, Dar al-Marifa, 1996),

⁷ Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Dar al-Ma'arif, (Cairo, Egypt, 1985)

Instead it was only a few scholars such as al-Ghazali who had a large impact on the perception of the rest of the Muslim world.

At this point we have seen that the position of Avicenna that the world is eternal was not rejected by all orthodox Muslims and nor did they consider him heretic. We have in fact shown that significant figures from within the Ashari School, did not feel that his position was heretical and instead it fell within the accepted framework of the philosophy and theology of the religion. Next the thesis look at Ibn Arabi a famous Sufi scholar. Again the perception amongst Sufi is that the position of Avicenna was heretical and therefore demonstrating to them in this thesis that in reality Ibn Arabi held the same position that the universe was eternal and he argue that he came to hold the position through spiritual enlightenment. Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi was another Sufi mystic. One of his teachers, Majd al-Din al-Jili was also the teacher of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, the famous Ashari scholar we mentioned previously. Al-Suhrawardi was also an ardent follower of the philosophy of Avicenna. His inclusion in the thesis shows that despite being a Sufi, in his philosophy he followed Avicenna and due to both of these factors he held that the universe is eternal.

Jurjani was a famous Hanafi scholar and as such was a follower of the second orthodox Sunni theological school which are the Matuirids. He supported the position of the pre-eternity of the universe despite being traditional Sunni scholar of Islam. Therefore his inclusion in the thesis shows that once again, not only was Avicenna not considered a heretic by all, but instead in some instances his position was regarding the pre-eternity of the universe was followed by prominent scholars.

The intended outcome of this thesis is to show the positions of the Greek philosophers and to demonstrate that despite the refutation and claim of al-Ghazali, many of his ideas originated from Greek philosophers and other philosopher such as John Philoponus. Despite the claim of al-Ghazali, Avicenna did not mimic the position of Aristotle and instead his ideas were original to him. The thesis then moves onto analysing the position of Avicenna, the analysis of the refutation of al-Ghazali and Al-Biruni and the retort of Averroes and Tusi regarding the specific issue of the pre-eternity of the universe. After this we looked at whether Avicenna really was rejected by all scholars and whether

his positions were considered heretical. As such we look at scholars from the two main Sunni schools of theology which are the Ashari and Maturidi School, and through this analyses we find that famous Ashari scholars such as Razi, Iyji and Amidi, as well as a famous Maturidi scholar such as Jurjani all argued that the position of Avicenna fell within the accepted framework of Sunni theological Islam and some even went further to argue for the position of the pre-eternity of the universe. The thesis then also included famous Sufi scholars such Ibn Arabi and Suharwardi, both of whom argued for the pre-eternity of the universe demonstrating that believing in the pre-eternity of the universe does not take someone out of the fold of Islam. As such this thesis was the first to tackle the issue of the pre-eternity of the universe from a wide variety of angles and we saw that the perception of Avicenna is far from the reality.

Prologue

My aim in this thesis to understand how we arrived at today's theological and philosophical ideas concerning one of the three areas of interest to Avicenna and the Peripatetic School (broadly (I) The pre-eternity of matter and temporal nature of the world (II) God's knowledge of particulars and universals, (III) The relationship between the resurrection of the body and the soul) - both in general and in Islam in particular. This thesis will focus on the first issue which is the topic of the pre-eternity of the world. Avicenna has been almost completely abandoned and rejected by modern day Muslim theologians (beyond lip service) as part of an exile that has existed for a thousand years, with the mere mention of him in a positive light resulting in you also being harassed in today's Islamic theological and philosophical community. In short, Avicenna is considered a heretic.⁸ His 'exile' is famous and the reason understood by many is that it was due to his positions on these three issues, all which were, according to most Muslims, refuted by the 11th century theologian Imam Ghazali. I believe that in reality, it was his ideology that was disliked and these issues were merely used as excuses.

After the time of the Prophet Muhammed, there were many Muslim camps, with different ideologies, philosophies, theologies, legal jurisprudence and methodologies. If one were to simplify their positions then one could put them into two distinct camps. Both camps believed in the Quran being a religious text that should be followed, but what should be used after this is where they disagree and what has resulted in a huge conflict within Sunni Islam. The first camp believed in the importance of using the intellect. They believed that one should only be using *Hadith* (purported sayings of the Prophet Muhammad - a secondary source according to this group) where they conform to the principals of the Quran as well as the intellect. It meant that this group rejected many hadith. Based on the importance they placed on the intellect, they were responsible for many if not all of the Islamic advancements in science, mathematics and philosophy. Groups that were included in this camp were the *Maturidi's*, *Mutazalite*, and the *Mutjai* and generally these groups followed the Hanafi Jurisprudential School. Avicenna, Abu Mansur Al Mautridi and Imam Abu Hanifa were included in this group. The second camp did not believe in the

⁸ Shahrastani, *The Summa Philosophiae of al-Shahrastiani*, Trans A Guillaume (London, 1934), p33

importance of the intellect and viewed *hadith* as almost to the same level as the Quran itself. They believed in following the sources without questioning their authenticity (for example if a *hadith* is narrated in a famous collection such as Bukhari, it was considered heretical to question its authenticity). This camp includes the Hanbalis⁹, the modern day Salafists as well as the Shafis, and it would include people such as al-Ghazali, Imam Shafi and Imam Ahmed. These camps were in an academic and literal battle during the beginning of Islam and once the second group won it meant that Avicenna and people who agreed with his ideology were discarded. In order to survive, the first camp incorporated many of the principles and ideologies of the second camp into the makeup of their group to the point where over time both became almost indistinguishable. It meant Avicenna was not really accepted by either camp. Ideas such as killing apostates, burning homosexuals, beating wives and typically extremist ideas, which were taken from secondary sources such as hadith become the 'Islam' that were followed by many if not most Muslims. This wasn't the only problem that people had with Avicenna and anyone who held these ideas and positions. Another issue was that he opposed the theology of the Hanbalites (and their contemporary inheritors the Salafists). They believed in anthropomorphist ideas such as God having physical body parts and other theological positions such as the Quran being uncreated. As the ruler during the time of Avicenna was Qadr Billa an adherent follower of the Hanblite ideology he was an opponent of Avicenna and anyone who held the same positions. Despite Avicenna being in the service of the ruler of Bukara, he also lived through the reign of the infamous Muslim Caliph Qadir Billa. Qadir Billa forced the Hanafi Mutazalites to make public repentance for the theological positions that they held, he also banned them as well as the *Rawafidh* (Shia) from holding any public discussions, and therefore they had to speak about their positions in secrecy. Prince Mahmud under the instructions of Qadr Billa burnt, killed, imprisoned and banished many of the Hanafi *Mutazalites* and *Shia*. He also ordered that people should curse them in the mosques as they were heretics.¹⁰ He even made a ruling that whoever says the Quran is created is an apostate and he must be killed.¹¹ (This was a theological discussion

⁹ (الحنبلي) The transliteration is Hanbali, it can be referred to as Hanabila depending on context. Also see (<http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e799>)

¹⁰ Ibn al-Jawzi, Al-Muntazam fil Akhbar al-Muluk wa'l-Umam, (Hyderabad, Dairatul-Ma'arifil-Uthmaniyyah, 1939), Volume 7, Page 287

¹¹ Ibid, Page 289

Islamic Encyclopaedia, (Markaz al-Shariqah lil-Ibda' al-Fikriyy), Page 234

between the Hanafis and the Hanbalis, the main contributors to the disagreement were Abd al Aziz al-Makki and Bishr al-Marisi¹²). Qadr Billah's tough stance against the Hanafi *Mutazalite*, *Shia* and Philosophers included them being killed and their books were burnt.¹³ Due to this Avicenna was disliked by the Ghazanawid kings who wanted him killed due to Avicenna working against them in Isfahan.¹⁴ By the end of his reign Hanabli Islam was in complete authority and all opposition, namely the Hanafis and Shia had been completely subjugated. The reason why this is relevant is that not only was Avicenna a philosopher but his ideas conflicted with the Hanabali ideology of Qadr Billa. His position on the pre-ternity of the universe, Gods' knowledge of particulars and the destruction of the soul are clear examples of this disagreement.

These theological and philosophical battles that Avicenna faced and lost due to those in power holding the opposite positions meant that Islam morphed into what is followed by many extremists today - the ideology propagated by his opponents. It meant that Islam became an anti-intellectual religion where it is not permissible to question the status quo. The intellect has been relegated to something which has no significance. Even though Avicenna was despised by the opposing groups, what caused him to become more completely rejected was the later 11th century Sunni theologian al-Ghazali. The eradication of Avicenna from the history of Islam and even by his own group of Hanafis and those who opposed anthropomorphism was fuelled by al-Ghazali, a theologian, philosopher and Sufi Mystic that is accepted by Sunni Muslims. He was considered the person who was helping to preserve Islam from the destruction caused by Philosophers such as Aristotle who had influenced a new generation of Muslim theologians and philosophers such as Avicenna. His book '*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*' was considered a work that was written to help preserve Islam from its alleged enemies - the philosophers and Avicenna. The three issues that were dealt with by al-Ghazali and were considered a refutation of Avicenna and the philosophers, was one of the main reasons for Avicenna being considered a heretic and his ideas being discarded. His opponents used this refutation to further support their ideas and positions. It means that

¹² Ibn al-Jawzi, *Al-Muntazam fil Akhbar al-Muluk wa'l-Umam*, (Hyderabad, Dairatul-Ma'arifil-Uthmaniyyah, 1939), Volume 7, Page 289

¹³ Jazari, A, *al-Kamil fi al-Tareekh*, (Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Lebanon, 1987), Volume 8, Page 171

¹⁴ *Islamic Encyclopaedia* (Markaz al-Shariqah lil-Ibda' al-Fikriy), Page 234

it is important that we analyse these ideas to see if al-Ghazali right in his refutation of Avicenna or was this refutation severely lacking and only gained traction due to the huge negativity against Avicenna.

I am going to attempt to show that the ideas of Avicenna on the issue of pre-eternity of matter and the temporal nature of the world was not heretical and that in actual fact it was a position that should be held by Muslim who don't agree with anthropomorphist ideas. Another allegation made against Avicenna is that he was merely mimicking the positions of Aristotle and other Philosophers and that al-Ghazali's was attempting to save Islam from the influence of the philosophers. We will see in the thesis that in actual fact although many of his positions were held by Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, he did develop and shed light on these ideas from an alternative angle. Also in terms of al-Ghazali, his positions were also not solely from Islamic theology, but in fact he did take his positions from Greek philosophers such as the stoics as well as other theologians such John Philoponus.

It is also thought amongst Muslims that the position of Avicenna regarding these issues was completely ignored by Muslim theologians as they understood that the positions will lead to the person to be thrown out of the fold of Islam. But in reality this was not the case. I will attempt to show in this thesis that there were many theologians from the opposing group who also either held the same position as Avicenna or felt that these wasn't issues that should result in anathematisation. This was a position held by theologians, philosophers and Sufi Mystics who are considered important figures from Sunni Islam and are followed and accepted by a huge proportion of contemporary Muslims.

We will also look at whether the position of Avicenna is relevant to current arguments on this issue. In terms of pre-eternity of the universe the argument in current times has been taken over by physicists such as Roger Penrose and his 'Conformal Cyclic Cosmology' argument or Lee Smolin's book 'Time Reborn'. We will also look at more current philosophical positions on the issue of time such as the argument of McTaggart against the reality of time.

I believe that Muslims are facing a crisis of identity with the current version of Islam which is the result of the political defeat of the ideas of Avicenna and those who agree with his positions. Ideas such killing apostates, burning homosexuals, beating wives and extremism can be found in the version of Islam by Avicenna's opponents. People do not have an alternative because the people who held alternate ideas are considered heretics and disbelievers due to the positions that they held and the fact that they value the

importance of intellectual thought. These scholars hold a blind adherence to the text of past scholars, without questioning any fallacies that may come about from these statements and texts. Now the text of these scholars does hold some importance but what is more imperative is that one compares these statement to the *Usul* (principles of the religion. Some modern writer such as Shahab Ahmed have presented a picture of the religion which involves detaching Islam from all principles and text, but this idea is not accepted by any Muslims.¹⁵

Even though in recent times Avicenna has been embraced by Western academics and orientalist, this affect has not trickled down to Muslim scholars and Muslims in general. As such the relegation of Avicenna into the fringes of scholarship due to his alleged 'heresy' remains a pertinent issue. The reason why these often violent and problematic hadith, issue and views about scholars such as Avicenna are even more problematic when found in Islam is because of the psychology and the level of adherence of its followers. Let's take for example a verse from the Bible: *"If, however, the charge is true and no proof of the young woman's virginity can be found, she shall be brought to the door of her father's house and there the men of her town shall stone her to death."*¹⁶ In current times, generally speaking, amongst Christians you will have three types of people, the first are those who know about this law and if given the opportunity would follow it, the second category of people are those who know about the law and don't/won't follow it and the third group of people are those who are completely ignorant/unaware of this legislation. And of course, the first group is by far the smallest and the last two the biggest vis a vis Christians (and others) today. On the other hand, amongst Muslims, generally speaking you won't find the second category of people. Muslims are either aware of the law and the position of the scholars and follow it without questioning or they are ignorant/unaware of the legislation. As such, a great emphasis is placed upon us to filter out the extreme, violent and problematic hadith, rulings or dismissal of certain scholars such as Avicenna who are rejected due to their alleged heresy. When these Hadith, rulings or allegation against scholars such as Avicenna are examined, one finds that they have some problem with either the matn (text), the isnaad (chain) or in the case of Avicenna and scholars of his ilk the reality is different to the

¹⁵ Ahmed Shahab, *What is Islam?: The importance of being Islamic*, (Princeton University Press, 2015)
Averroes, *Summary of Aristotle Physics*, Rasail ibn Rushd (Hyderabad, 1947) 266a, Page 6-9

¹⁶ Deuteronomy 22:20-21

perception. The truth of the above can be seen from the frequent strategy of Islamophobes in our time – they realise that Muslims as a group, are more ‘practising’ and more willing to defend the authenticity of their texts – not just the Quran but also the often spurious fatwas and hadith of sources effectively treated as infallible – Imams like Ghazali, Shafi or Bukhari. This banal tendency is very effectively weaponised by Islamophobes, who when ignoring violent passages from the Bible or other religions, merely point out that no Christian follows these or believes in them – effectively giving the ‘Judeo-Christian’ civilization a free pass because hardly anyone in the public eye really believes in its foundational dogmas or texts any longer. Hence the frequent references from these people to show violent hadith and then to opinion polls from the Muslim world claiming to show the percentages of people who ‘believe’ in these hadith or more often ‘Sharia’. This is a perverse and false argument, but there is a need amongst these religious clergy who then affect the entire Muslim population that religion be exclusivist and difficult to rationalise, difficult to practice and nigh on impossible to defend to show how ‘authentic’ and heroic they are (for example, because of the idiosyncratic and difficult way they dress or arrange their facial hair and social interactions) and how much ‘faith’ they display. But the whole process is demonstrably false – Muslims have been largely persuaded to defend to the hilt every hadith of ‘Bukhari’, every ruling and position of scholars, without ever knowing what these are and if such defence is necessary or traditional: had they been properly informed about either, by their self-appointed religious leaders. It is due to this that when past scholars such as al-Ghazali have relegated philosophers such as Avicenna to the fringes of the religion and argue that he is a heretic, this affects religious leaders, who in turn affect the psychology and opinions of the rest of Muslims.

The abandonment of intellectual thought has resulted in Muslim Philosophers and theologians stagnating, from previously having luminaries such as Avicenna - the first to perform the appendectomy - or Jabbar ibn Hayyan who was considered the father of chemistry and the first to work on Artificial Intelligence or the works of Averroes. All of these developments were by scholars who followed the position of the first camp, the people who lost due to the strength of the political powers. It resulted in the use of the intellect not being accepted. By tackling the issues that caused Avicenna to be labelled a heretic we can help towards bringing back these philosophers and more importantly their ideology of using the intellect, and

secondary sources only being accepted if they meet a vigorous authentication process of being compared to the Quran as well as the intellect.

Disagreement between Avicenna and al-Ghazali

It is imperative that the three issues which were used to by latter day theologians and philosophers to judge Avicenna as a 'heretic' and a 'disbeliever' are discussed in detail in this dissertation, so that one can understand the positions from both contrasting viewpoints. As a result one will be able to appreciate that Avicenna being declared a 'heretic' is not as clear cut as is presented by the majority of Muslims in current times. The fact that Avicenna was refuted by al-Ghazali resulted in him being disowned by the Muslim world, which had a detrimental impact in progress in philosophy, theology and science. Avicenna's world view as we will see is very complex and is the complete opposite to the prevalent anthropomorphist view that has seeped into Muslim theology in current times. We will see that the position of Avicenna was due to him holding a rigid stance in ensuring that God was never relegated to the same level as his creation.

In his famous book 'Incoherence of the Philosophers' al-Ghazali refuted philosophers on twenty points, seventeen of them are considered issues of 'heresy' and three of them are considered issues of 'disbelief'. The difference between these two categories is that when one is declared a 'heretic' it means that he is still a Muslim but his view is considered outside the mainstream view within Islam. As such he is a Muslim but the view is considered an abomination. On the other hand, when something is considered an issue of disbelief it means that the contravening view is such that it is outside the accepted tenants of Islam, and as a result a person can longer be considered a believer. After careful analysis of the refutations of the philosophers from al-Ghazali one comes to the realisation that Avicenna did not hold the entirety of the twenty positions and there is even a disagreement about whether Avicenna actually held the three positions that al-Ghazali used to issue *Takfeer* (a statement of disbelief) on Avicenna. Although he never mentioned Avicenna by name when speaking about these three issues, many later scholars took this as a specific refutation of Avicenna. This caused many scholars who came later to speak out against Avicenna as well as his positions, although there were some scholars who supported his position, either specifically by writing a detailed response to the positions of al-Ghazali or by holding the same position as Avicenna which is displayed in their books, whilst there were some who felt that there wasn't a real substantial disagreement between Avicenna an al-Ghazali and as such remained neutral on the issue.

The first issue of contention and one of the three fundamental issues that al-Ghazali believed was an issue of disbelief that was held by Avicenna was about the pre-eternity of the universe. Due to the word limit and to give the topic justice, this will be the focus of the thesis. This topic deals with the two distinct opposing views. Both groups agree that God is the eternal creator of the universe, the disagreement is regarding the created universe. One group of people hold that the universe has a start point in time, whereas the other group hold that that there is no start point in time and instead the universe is eternal. The origin of the universe is a pertinent question debated, discussed and researched by philosophers and scientists throughout time. In current times the research and analysis of this issue has mainly being overtaken by physicists. The most common held position amongst scientists in current times is the 'Big Bang' theory. But the questions is that have scientists and more specifically physicists and philosophers answered important questions such as was there time and space before the big bang (because time is the measurement of matter)? Can the matter which exploded, exist outside of time and space? When did time actually begin? Was there a start point for space? Despite this theory being prevalent there are alternative models researched by scientists such as 'Conformal Cyclic Cosmology' a position held by Roger Penrose. He argued that the 'Big Bang' was not the start point of the universe but instead it was an evolution point as it moved back and forth between points of expansion and contraction over time. For the philosophers who are specifically dealing with this, the question is whether the universe had a start point or whether the universe is pre-eternal. Some misunderstand this disagreement by simplifying it into two separate positions, those who believe in the start of the universe and God and those who hold the position of pre-eternity and therefore do not believe in God. But in fact this is an error because Avicenna held the position that despite the created universe having no beginning, he still believed in a creator but instead he attempted to absolve the creator from any type of affect from time or space, which is something we will explore later in this dissertation. Avicenna even defended Aristotle by explaining that his position of pre-eternity did not mean that the universe did not have a creator.

Brief Biography of Avicenna and al-Ghazali

It is important to read a brief biography of these two major personalities of history in order to understand the motivation behind their books and more specifically their ideas which are related to this issue.

Al-Ghazali

Abu Ḥamid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghazali famously known as al-Ghazali is an eleventh century Muslim sufi, theologian and philosopher. He was born in Tabaran a district of Tus located in Iran. Imam Ghazali was given the title of Hujjatul Islam, as he was considered by his peers as well as latter day scholars as the defender of Islam.¹⁷ Al-Ghazali explained that his initial intention for studying theology and jurisprudence was due to his desire for wealth and fame.¹⁸ Although later in life he changed his intentions when he had his spiritual epiphany. When al-Ghazali was twenty he went to study at the renowned educational Nizamiyyah Academy in Nishapur. He studied under the famous Ashari scholar Abu al-Ma'ali al-Juwayni better known as Imam al Haramayn, who even until current times along with al-Ghazali is considered a pillar of Ashari theology. Al-Ghazali was appointed director of theology in the Nizmiyyah Academy by Nizam al-Mulk, the vizier of the ruler Malikshah. This position was the highest academic position that could be held in the Muslim world and al-Ghazali at the age of thirty four was the youngest person to achieve it. He studied philosophy extensively and it was during this time that he came to the realisation that once cannot achieve certainty of belief by reasoning alone. Due to this reason he went into seclusion, in order to master the way of the Sufis and to connect to God - this part of his journey took eleven years. It was after this journey he wrote his famous work 'Ihya ulm al-Din' (The Reviving of the Sciences of Religion). His movement towards Sufim left him disliked by scholars who were anti-Sufi and

¹⁷ Al-Ghazali, *Al-Munqidh Min al-Dalal*, Trans by W. Montgomery Watt in his *Faith and Practice of al-Ghazālī*, (London, 1953), Page 75

¹⁸ Al-Subki (Taj al-Din), *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyyah al-Kubra*, (Cairo, 1906), Volume 4, Page 102

it is this anti-Sufi ideology that can be found in current times amongst the Hanablites and Salafists. For example Ibn al-Jawzi a twelfth century Hanabli-Salafist scholar states that look at how cheaply al-Ghazali has traded orthodox theology for Sufism.¹⁹ Ibn Taymiyyah a fourteenth century Hanbali-Salafist scholar, who is the ideological father of contemporary Salafism stated that al-Ghazali had left theology for philosophy. Qadi Ibn Hamdin actually issued a legal ruling (*fatwa*) that the book of al-Ghazali should be burnt and destroyed throughout Spain.²⁰ His books were ordered to be destroyed in North Africa too during the reign of Sultan Tashifin. His book the *Ihya* was also ordered to be destroyed, by way of another legal *fatwa* by the now famous judge al-Mazari, a Maliki-Ashari scholar. So despite the fact that al-Ghazali was considered as the defender of ‘orthodoxy’ he still wasn’t considered orthodox by many of his peers or latter day scholars who themselves are considered orthodox. To make matters even more complicated, Averroes who wrote a refutation of the book of al-Ghazali called “The Incoherence of the Incoherence” and accused al-Ghazali of being a hypocrite and insincere as he argues that al-Ghazali’s attack on the Philosophers was merely to appease and garner support from the scholars who were considered orthodox.²¹

After his return from seclusion, he felt that it was his duty to destroy what he believed was the heresy and disbelief that were found in many Islamic ideologies and he took it upon himself to be the saviour of Islam. Also during this time Fakhr al-Mulk, the son of Nizam al-Mulk, and the vizier to Sultan Sanjar, gave him his old position as chair of theology, which after some reluctance he accepted. After a short period of time he retired from this position and open his own centre of learning. He followed the Ashari theological school although after his journey of *tassuwuf* (Sufi spirituality) and some of his opinions morphed to include a more rational approach. Therefore, one may find that some of the opinions that are found in his refutation of the philosophers were actually later incorporated by Imam Ghazali into his own belief system. His refutation of the neo-Platonist philosophy resulted in relegating philosophy to the periphery of Islamic thought and according to some was the single most defining factor that resulted in the freeze of scientific progress within the Islamic world. His famous work ‘Incoherence of the

¹⁹ Jamal al-Din ibn al-Jauzi, *al-Namūs fi Talbis Iblis*, (Cairo, 1921), Page 377

²⁰ Nadawi M.H, *Afkar-i Ghazālī*, (Lahore, 1956), Page 61-73

²¹ Averroes, *Kitab al-Kashf an Manahij al-Adillah*, (Cairo, 1901), Page 57

Philosophers' was a book solely dedicated to be a refutation of those scholars he felt were proponents of incorporating Greek Philosophy into Islamic ideology. One of the main perpetrators of this philosophy according to him was Avicenna. There were three main issues that he believed that Avicenna had transgressed into the realm of disbelief and these issues were the pre-eternity of matter, God's knowledge of particulars and the resurrection of the body and the soul.

Avicenna²²

Avicenna²³ was a Muslim philosopher, theologian, physician and mathematician. He was famous in the West for being the pioneer of the appendix operation. He is also well known in the philosophical community for his contribution and his propagation of Aristotelian philosophy into Islamic thought.. Avicenna was born in Afshana²⁴ and later moved with his parents to Bukhara. His father moved to the city of Bukhara to work as a governor of Kharmitan. His father and brother were highly respected amongst the Isma'ilis²⁵ and would present the Isma'ili doctrine to Avicenna but he explained that although he understood their position he did not accept it as the doctrine did not appeal to him. Once he was proficient in Hanafi jurisprudence²⁶, his father sent him to study philosophy such as the works of Aristotle and more specifically the "Introduction"²⁷ to Aristotle's "Categories" under the tutelage of Abu Abd Allah al-Natili. Avicenna was prodigy and stated in his biography that he mastered jurisprudence, logic, and philosophy. He also claimed that he had read the first five of Euclids' theories before undertaking the solutions of the rest of the book himself. Despite his thirst for mastering academia, he was still deeply spiritual as he explained that when he would reach a

²² Gutas D, Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works (Brill, Leiden 2014), Page 10-11

²³ The biography of Avicenna was dictated to his student Juzjani at his request.

²⁴ Afshana is a village in modern day Uzbekistan

²⁵ Isma'ilis are a sect within Shi'ism

²⁶ Aisha Khan (2006). Avicenna (Ibn Sina): Muslim physician and philosopher of the eleventh century, An Annotated Bibliography on Ibn Sina (1970-1989), Volume 1 By Jules L. Janssens

²⁷ Isagoge – This term was used as transliteration from the Greek

problem that puzzled him he would often visit the mosque to worship and pray to God, until God made what seemed difficult easy for him.

Avicenna was also a keen herbalist and when the ruler of Bukhara had an illness for which the doctors were unable to find a cure, they called upon Avicenna who helped facilitate his treatment. Due to his success in treating the ruler of Bukhara he was recruited into the ruler's service. Later in his life, after he was relieved from his position at the royal palace, the Prince Shams al-Dawla became ill and summoned Avicenna to his palace so that he could be treated. Avicenna was then appointed to the position of Prime Minister by Shams al-Dawla. Later, due to there being friction within the court, he was imprisoned by the army who pressured Shams al-Dawla to sentence him to death. Although Shams al-Dawala refused to carry out this punishment, in order to stop the internal disagreement he made Avicenna resign his position.²⁸ Despite Avicenna resigning from his position he was later re-appointed as Prime Minister by prince Ala al-Dawla and he remained in that position until his death.²⁹ Despite Avicenna being in the service of the ruler of Bukara, he also lived through the reign of the infamous Muslim Caliph Qadir Billa. Qadir Billa was a staunch Hanbalite and as such was against the ideology of Avicenna, the Shia and the Hanafi Mutazalites in general due them holding positions that were the polar opposite to the Hanablites. It was the hatred of Qadr Billa which influenced the Ghazanawi kings who then wanted Avicenna killed.³⁰ By the end of his reign Hanabli Islam which is considered Sunni Islam was in complete authority and all opposition to them namely the Hanafis and Shia had been completely subjugated. The greatest irony is that later in life Avicenna died of the same Colic illness³¹ that shot him to fame after he had cured it two times earlier, and had resulted in him gaining senior governmental positions. Although no one has theorised this presumption, it would not be too

²⁸ Usaibi'ah, A Uyun al-Anba Fi Tabaqat al-Atibba, (Institute of Arabic and Islamic studies, Frankfurt University), [online] available at (<https://www.wdl.org/ar/item/7476/>) Volume 2, Page 5

Dhahabi, M, Siar A'laam al-Nubala, Muassasah al-Risalah, (Beirut, Lebanon, 1996), Volume 17, Page 533

²⁹ U Usaibi'ah, A Uyun al-Anba Fi Tabaqat al-Atibba, (Institute of Arabic and Islamic studies, Frankfurt University), [online] available at (<https://www.wdl.org/ar/item/7476/>) Volume 2, Page 6 and 30

Houtsma, M, Arnold, T Mujaz Dairah al-Ma'arif al-Islamiyyah, Markaz al-Shariqah lil-Ibda', (Sharjah, UAE, 1998) Volume 1, Page 234

³⁰ Islamic Encyclopaedia' (Markaz al-Shariqah lil-Ibda' al-Fikriy), Page 234

³¹ Gohlman W, The life of Ibn Sina, (State University of New York Press, New York, 1974), Page 83-89

farfetched to propose that there is a possibility that he was in fact killed by his opponents and the Colic
Illness was merely used as an excuse.

Pre-eternity

The subject of the pre-eternity of the universe is a very complex issue and has been discussed, debated and researched for a thousand years. We have philosophers and theologians who fall into three categories in terms of their opinion on the pre-eternity of the universe. The first category includes the philosophers who believed in the pre-eternity of the universe without the existence of a creator. The second category includes the philosophers who also argued in conformity with the idea of the pre-eternity of the universe but still believed that there was an eternal being who created the universe. The third category of thinkers believed that the universe was created out of nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) by a creator. Despite many philosophers falling into one of the three categories mentioned above, some philosophers such as Galen argued that despite the strong arguments on both sides he is left to the fall-back position, namely that he is not sure whether the universe is pre-eternal or temporal.³² The fact that Galen and many other philosophers held the position of being non-committal was commended by many later theologians such as Fakuruddin Razi who pointed out that he felt that Galen was an honest person whose sole goal was to find the truth, that his stance clarifies that this specific issue of the pre-eternity of the universe is extremely complicated, an area which many people have misunderstood or do not have the ability to comprehend the intricacies of the topic, despite them having a strong background in philosophy and theology³³ Therefore, in this thesis we will explore each of the three ideas, we will analyse which previous philosophers, whether Greek, Islamic or contemporary held one of the three positions. We will also look at the view held by latter day orthodox Sunni scholars to see if they really did hold the position that the universe is temporal and it was created out of nothing as is being claimed by nearly all Muslim scholars in current times.

³² Ijjiy, A, Jurjani, A, Sharh al-Mawaqif, Dar al-Kutub al-ilmiyyah, (Beirut, Lebanon, 1998), Page 245
Al-Ghazali, Tahafut al-Falasifah, Trans Marmura M, (Brigham University Press, 2000), Page 9

³³ Ghazali, M, Tahafut al-Falasifah, Dar al-Ma'arif, (Cairo, Egypt, 1966), Page 307

Aristotle and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

The first philosopher we will be exploring in this thesis is Aristotle. Aristotle is relevant to this thesis due to a number of reasons. Firstly, he held the position that the universe is eternal. We will see that there is a disagreement amongst philosophers such as Avicenna and Al-Biruni about whether in his model of an eternal universe he believed in a creator. Another reason why his position must be explored is that an accusation that is levelled at Avicenna is that he is merely parroting the theory of Aristotle, as well as the allegation that Avicenna has committed the ‘crime’ of introducing Greek philosophy through the ideas of Aristotle into Islamic philosophy.

According to Aristotle, metaphysics should present the strongest evidence, as it is the basis of all knowledge, and God should stand at the epicentre of the entire system. The origin of the argument supporting the position that the universe is eternal is from Aristotle. Before him the philosophers believed that the world came into being either out of nothing, or from primeval matter, or after a number of other worlds. Aristotle used a few arguments to demonstrate his position of the eternity of the cosmos, one of these arguments was change within the universe. Aristotle contends that there must be three aspects of all instances of change.³⁴ Aristotle opposes Plato that the subject of change must be two opposite pairs of properties.³⁵ The three aspects that Aristotle asserts are (I) an underlying subject, (II) a form, (III) a lack of that form. Aristotle provides the following argument with a similar example:

- A. A woman who never wrote became a writer
- B. A red jumper became worn and turned white

³⁴ Aristotle, *Physics*, Trans by R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye, [online] available at (<http://www.logoslibrary.org/aristotle/physics/17.html>), Book 1, Chapter 7.

³⁵ *Ibid* 191a6-7

In case (a), the subject is woman, the form is writer and the lack of that form is that she never wrote. In case (b), the subject is jumper, the form is whiteness and the lack of that form is redness. The subject the woman or the jumper, remains throughout the change. Of the other terms involved, the earlier ones which is that she never wrote or the redness cease to exist, while the later ones becoming a writer or turning white come into existence. Both of these are examples of something ‘coming’ into existence, since a lack of form is replaced by a form. So the whiteness exists and the redness no longer exists. Using this argument as a start point he posited that form and matter are eternal by the following argument³⁶: The universe is a combination of matter and forms. Therefore, if God was to cause the creation of the universe, he would have to create matter and forms. But for Aristotle, as we have seen, for something to come into being requires the underlying subject upon which change occurs, the matter, as well as the form that has been created and later the annihilation of that form. Therefore, for there to be a creation of matter and forms, they must already exist, which is completely contradictory. Thus one cannot postulate the contrary preposition that matter has been created in finite time, or out of nothing. As such based on this according to Aristotle the universe is eternal.

Aristotle argues that the world cannot have been created out of nothing as there is no beginning. Everything that is, has come from another, and that thing came from something ad infinitum. A clear example of the viewpoint of Aristotle is his well-known response to Parmenides.³⁷ His argument is that when something comes into being, that object exists. Parmenides then provides two explanations from where it has come from which is that it has come from what is or what is not. If the object that it comes from is something and what it becomes is the same thing, then no change has taken place and therefore one cannot say that it has become something. Alternatively, if the initial something is nothing, this is also impossible, because nothing can come to be out of nothing (*ex nihilo nihil fit*). Aristotle responds to Parmenides preposition that ‘something comes to be from what is or from what

³⁶ Aristotle, *Physics*, VIII I, 251a8–b10, where the argument is in terms of that which is capable of undergoing motion, namely, matter. Also see Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, VII (Z) 7–8.

³⁷ Aristotle, *Physics*, Trans by R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye, [online] available at (<http://www.logoslibrary.org/aristotle/physics/17.html>), 191a28-29

is not'.³⁸ Aristotle responds to this by proposing that the something that comes to be and what it comes from is both a being and a not-being. So in the argument of Parmenides the original and subsequent object are simple, being and not being. But as we have seen that according to Aristotle they are compounds. So the initial object is something (in our example a woman) and it is not something (a writer). Aristotle obviously agrees with the second argument of Parmenides that nothing can come from nothing.³⁹ But as Aristotle explains that he agrees with a caveat that something cannot come from nothing without a 'qualification'. Aristotle clarifies that *'we say that things come to be in a way—for instance, coincidentally—from what is not. For something comes to be from the privation, which in itself is not and does not belong to the thing [when it has come to be].'*⁴⁰ What he means is that the writer is a product of a compound, a non-writer and a woman. Because according to Aristotle the initial state of not possessing the quality of a writer is in a way not being (as the quality of being a writer does not exist, but what does exist and something that is ignored by Parmenides is the woman. Therefore, one aspect of the compound exists (the woman) and one does not exist (the writer), that's why Aristotle argues the Parmenides is both right and wrong.

Avicenna stated in his letter to Al-Biruni which was a debate about eighteen issues, ten of which were related to points mentioned by Aristotle in his book 'On the Heavens' the following *"And you should also know that when Aristotle said, «the universe has no beginning», he did not mean that the universe did not have a Creator; rather, he intended to exalt and protect the Creator from the charge of inaction"*⁴¹ Therefore according to the information presented by Avicenna, Aristotle falls into the second category which the philosophers mentioned, which is that he believes in the pre-eternity of matter whilst still holding the position that there is a creator.⁴² Also, we know that Al-Biruni contends

³⁸ Aristotle, Physics, Trans by R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye, [online] available at (<http://www.logoslibrary.org/aristotle/physics/17.html>), (191a30)

³⁹ Ibid, (191b14):

⁴⁰ Ibid, (191b15)

⁴¹ Berjak R, The Medieval Arabic Era: Ibn Sina-Al-Biruni Correspondence, Trans by Rafik Berjak, (2005) Page 24

⁴² Averroes, Summary of Aristotle's Metaphysics, Tafsir Ma Ba'd al-Tabiah, (Beirut 1938-1952) Volume 7, Comm 41, Page 324

Aristotle proves that there is an unmoved mover, who was later referred to as God, for example see the comments in: McGinnis J, Avicenna, (Oxford University Press, London, 2010), Page 167

that Aristotle believes in a creator. Now in this model proposed by Avicenna and attributed to Aristotle by Avicenna (which will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis), we find that he held that the Universe is eternal, and he rejects any possibility of it being temporal. He also argues that the creator is also eternal and that it is not possible for something temporal to come from something eternal. Further to this point and to be more specific, the main problem that they have with those that hold that the universe is temporal is that it means that one is applying time to God. That there was a time 'before' the creation where God was not creating, then after a period of time God decided to create the universe. Applying the terms before and after to God means that one is reducing God to the level of his creation, in this case the creation is time. Another problem that Avicenna had with this view point is that according to this it means that God had a change of intention. What is meant by this is that in the first instance God did not intend to create the universe and later he decided to create it. These contentions resulted in philosophers such as Avicenna and Aristotle arguing for the position of the universe being eternal. These arguments will be discussed in detail in the Avicenna section of the thesis. It is common for many people to misunderstand the position of Aristotle, for example according to Rhazes the position of the Greek philosophers and more specifically Aristotle is that there are two types of time; temporal time and pre-eternal time. Temporal time is the measurement of movement and bodies within the universe. Whereas pre-eternal time is infinite. According to Rhazes Aristotle believed that both types of time were infinite, but according to Avicenna this position had been incorrectly attributed to Aristotle.

Aristotle in his book '*On the Heavens*', in the first book, states that if one were to subtract a finite amount of time from a finite amount of time, you would be left with a finite amount and that finite amount must have a beginning and end. Also, if there is a beginning time of a journey then there must also be a beginning for the movement and as such the beginning of the distance travelled. This principle according to Aristotle is applied universally.⁴³ Here Aristotle is claiming that time does have

⁴³ Aristotle, *On the Heavens* (in the collection of 'The complete works of Aristotle'), Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J.[online] available at (<https://archive.org/details/AristotleCompleteWorksVol1>), (1991), Page 9

a beginning, and because time is the measurement of the movement of matter then matter also has a beginning. Matter comes together to make up the universe and therefore its matter has a start point then conversely the universe must also have a start point. The problem with this statement of Aristotle is that it contradicts his popularised position of matter being pre-eternal. Later philosophers such as Al-Biruni pointed out this contradiction of Aristotle when he stated that *“And nothing caused the emergence of this objection except what has been accepted as a necessity of the limit of the motions and times from their initial beginnings. Aristotle himself admitted this fact when he was explaining impossibility of the existence of infinity. When he evaded elaboration on this topic, he merely followed his caprice.”*⁴⁴

Aristotle argued that it is impossible that the universe could have been created temporally by a pre-eternal creator.⁴⁵ The premise of another of his arguments is that God is implementing a new ‘idea’. The theologians would argue that this is impossible for God. A change in God which in this case is God having a ‘new idea’ or making a ‘new decision’ would mean that there would be a material change in God. First there was no creation, then God ‘decided’ to create and then the universe came into existence. Aristotle argues that all changes are in an initial state of potentiality and for this potentiality to be enacted it requires someone to bring it in into effect. The basis of the argument for those who hold that the universe is pre-eternal relies on the eternity of time. According to the theologians God cannot be the simultaneous cause of time, because time means movement and that would mean that would be impossible as God's existence cannot infer time since his eternal existence is not linked with time. What needs to be answered regarding this position is that this would then mean that since all causes infer time vis a vis there is no causal link between God and the Universe.

Another proof of Aristotle which was highlighted by Al-Biruni in his exchange of letters with Avicenna was that he argued that the universe must have a beginning before it existed or on the other hand it must be eternal. Now if we have an object that moves, then before this movement there must have

⁴⁴ Berjak R, *The Medieval Arabic Era: Ibn Sina-Al-Biruni Correspondence*, Trans by Rafik Berjak, (2005), Page 24

⁴⁵ Averroes, *Summary of Aristotle Physics*, Rasail ibn Rushd (Hyderabad 1947) 266b, Page 12-13

been previous movement and as such a type of change, which means the previous beginning and ending before the current movement began after not moving. Now this current movement must have a state where there was an ability of being moved or for movement to be caused at its start point. On the other hand, the idea whether this object always existed without there being any motion is not a fruitful argument according to Aristotle. Therefore, if there wasn't always movement then the object must have been in a state where it was possible for it to be moved so that there could be movement, and one of them must have been in the process of change.⁴⁶ What Aristotle means by this and as he further elaborates is that if one thing is the double of the second when previously this was not the case, it would mean that one of them and possibly even both are in the process of change. This would mean that there would be a process of change which came before this and one which came before that.⁴⁷ Al-Biruni would later argue that if we were to follow through on this argument of Aristotle it would mean that he was not a believer in God, as change cannot happen to God. Despite this theory of Aristotle having some weakness as explained by Al-Biruni, it is farfetched to surmise that he is not a believer of God. As we will see when we present the arguments of the opponent of Avicenna that one can come to a similar conclusion about their argument but it would not be pragmatic to state that they are not believers of God.

Another argument for the pre-eternity of the universe is based on the idea of possibilities. Aristotle held the position whenever something is in the state of possibility that potentially is always realised and it comes into effect and by the same token the impossible never comes into reality. Therefore, if something eternal was possible it would certainly come into effect and as such cannot be possible but instead necessary and if it did not come into effect then it would be something that is impossible rather than possible.⁴⁸ The premise of his argument is that possibility is not possible when exploring pre-eternity, because either it is impossible or it necessary, but for the temporal something can be

⁴⁶ Averroes, Summary of Aristotle Physics, Rasail ibn Rushd (Hyderabad, 1947) 266a, Page 6-9

⁴⁷ Aristotle, On the Heaven (in the collection of 'The complete works of Aristotle'), Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J.[online] available at (<https://archive.org/details/AristotleCompleteWorksVol1>), (1991), Page 110

⁴⁸ Averroes, Summary of Aristotle, De Caelo I, 281b Page 18-25

possible, impossible or necessary.⁴⁹ The Asharis hold that everything is possible for God, despite God according to their ontology being eternal. We will explore this further when we analyse the position of latter Muslim philosophers and theologians.

Aristotle's arguments for the pre-eternity of the universe are multi-layered as he first deals with the issue by explaining why he believes in the pre-eternity of the universe and he later moves onto explaining the weaknesses in the arguments of those who believe in a temporal world. Despite there being a disagreement between Avicenna and Al-Biruni regarding whether he believes in a creator whilst also believing in the eternity of the universe, the fact that he comments that he believes in a creator in his other works, would mean that we can place Aristotle in the category of philosophers who believe in an eternal world whilst still believing in a creator.

Philo of Alexandria and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

Critolaus was a Greek philosopher born on 118CE who came from Phaselis.⁵⁰ He was a follower of the Peripatetic school.⁵¹ None of his writings have survived, but many of his positions and ideas can be found in other writings such as the work of Philo of Alexandria 'On the Eternity of the World'.⁵² He was a follower of the Aristotelian position on the eternity of the world and like many philosophers who held this position he wrote against the Stoics who held that that world is temporal. The Peripatetics used a number of well-known arguments such as *'if the world has come to be, it is necessary that the earth too has come to be; if the earth is subject to coming-to-be, certainly the human*

⁴⁹ Adamson P, From the Necessary Existent to God, Essay is found in 'Interpreting Avicenna' Edited by Adamson P, (Cambridge University Press, London, 2013), Page 171-174

⁵⁰ Dorandi, Tiziano, "Chapter 2: Chronology". In Algra, Keimpe; et al. The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), Press. Page 50

⁵¹ Sharples, R, The eternity of the world. In Peripatetic Philosophy, 200 BC to AD 200: An Introduction and Collection of Sources in Translation (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), Page 175-179

⁵² Philo of Alexandria was a Jewish philosopher from Alexandria who was also known as Philo Judaeus and was born in 20BC.

race [will be so too]; but man is not subject to coming-to-be, since the race has existed from eternity, as will be shown. So the world too is eternal."⁵³ Or another argument of Critolaus which was simplistic in its nature was *'what is the cause of its own health does not suffer disease. What is the cause of its own wakefulness, too, does not sleep. But if this is so, what is the cause of its own existence is eternal. But the world is the cause of its own existence, if it is the cause [of the existence] of all other things. So the world is eternal.'*"⁵⁴

The result of this argument is that if the universe is eternal then there are an infinite number of causes and vis a vis an infinite number of effects, it means there will be an infinite number of chicken and eggs and in this argument it will not result in there being a first cause, which for followers of the Abrahamic religions is God. Although for Aristotle in the eternal world, causes are finite as well as effects, despite his model of the universe being eternal. He believes that it isn't possible that movement could have started or can continue on its own. Avicenna's counter argument to those who believe in an eternal world without a first cause is that, this is only the case when you apply space and time to God. If time is not applied to God then under his proposition there is an eternal universe and there is an eternal God on whom time cannot be applied. That he is the creator of the universe and it is from him that world emanates eternally. The position of emanation that forms the main basis of the argument of Avicenna states that an eternal God that cannot be changed, is linked to an eternal universe that is the subject of change, with God being the cause of the world. On the other hand those who argued against this position proposed that if there is causal link between an eternal God and the eternal universe, then no preceding movement can be the cause of movement that comes after, and this would continue *ad infinitum*, for example the sequences of father and sons would result in infinite regress.⁵⁵ Whereas in the position of Avicenna God is not the first cause, but instead God is the continuous cause of everything.

⁵³ Sharples, R, *The Eternity of the World, In Peripatetic Philosophy, 200 BC to AD 200: An Introduction and Collection of Sources in Translation* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010), Page 175-179

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, Page 175-179

⁵⁵ Averroes, *Kitab al-Kashf an Manahij al-Adillah*, (Cairo, 1901), Page 37, For other argument for infinite regress see Juwayni's *Irshad fi Usul al-Itikad*

Proclus of Alexandria and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

Proclus was located in the Roman Empire during the third century and he was reported to have died on 281 AD. Proclus was a supporter of the notion of the pre-eternity of the universe. The books that have been written by Proclus are lost but what we do have is the book of John Philoponus who reproduced the arguments of Proclus in order to refute them so that he could put forward his position of the temporal nature of the universe. It was the translation of his ideas which were produced in Arabic⁵⁶ that were later used and developed by Muslim philosophers to form their position of the pre-eternity of the universe with an eternal God, based on the theory of emanation.⁵⁷ His argument was on the basis of the idea of applying time to an eternal being (God). He contended that this would mean that at a specific point in time it was the first point of creation, meaning that there was a time when God was not creating and as such at that time he was not a creator, then after this came a time when God was creating and thus at this time he became a creator.⁵⁸ This would mean that there was a change in God and if there was a change, then in its very nature change only occurs in temporal entities.⁵⁹ A problem with this idea is that if one accepts that there was a first instance of movement when the universe began to move, and there was no movement before this point then there would have been a time when there was no matter, as time is merely the measurement of the movement of matter. Therefore, to argue that there was a time when there was no matter, means that there was a time when there was no time which is contradictory and therefore impossible.⁶⁰ The most important idea of this position is that if there is a first instance of creation then there is a time before this where God is not creating or time before this where there is no matter. Those who disagreed with this position and advocated the eternal nature of the universe argued that using the term 'before'

⁵⁶ Badawi, *al-Aflatuniyya al-Muhdatha 'ind al-'Arab*, (Wikalah al-Matbuat el-Kuwait, 1977), Page 34-42.

⁵⁷ Al-Alousi H.M, *the Problem of Creation in Islamic Thought*, (Baghdad, 1968), Page 239-41.

⁵⁸ Proclus, *On the Eternity of the World*, Trans Lang H.S, Macro A.D, (University of California Press, London, 2001), Page 57

⁵⁹ McGinnis J, *Avicenna*, (Oxford University Press, London, 2010), Page 157

⁶⁰ Proclus, *On the Eternity of the World*, Trans Lang H.S, Macro A.D, (University of California Press, London, 2001), Page 51

or 'preceding' does not point to there being time before the first instance of creation, as time was also created in the first instance of creation with the rest of the universe. They argued that what this means is that God is prior to the world in his essence but not prior to in terms of time such as how a cause is prior to an effect.⁶¹ Avicenna's example to explain his own model of the universe is where he states that there is an eternal God and there is an eternal universe, but the former is the cause of the latter, such as where a person turns a key and a lock opens. The key turning and the hand turning occur together in their essence but the hand is the cause of the key.

John Philoponus and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

John Philoponus was a Neoplatonist Christian theologian from the sixth century who believed in the temporality of the universe. Many of his arguments were later reproduced by Ghazali and latter Ashari scholars. According to Philoponus and as such Ghazali and other Asharis, in his sixteenth argument he stated that it is imperative that one differentiates between God eternally willing things into existence and his eternal will being applied onto things. For example, it is not in the nature of Sir Isaac Newton to exist before Albert Einstein, but instead before Einstein existed God had willed that Newton should come into existence. He willed for this to occur in eternity so that when the time came for Newton to be born he came into existence. He argued that when one says that God 'came before' it was not in time.⁶² Averroes argues that the argument of Philoponus and Ghazali is flawed as there is a difference between willing something and actually doing it. You can make the decision that you will drive your car tomorrow but the actual willing to drive the car can only occur in the exact

⁶¹ Avicenna, *Kitab an-Najat*, (Cairo 1913) Page 367

⁶² Philoponus *Against Proclus On the Eternity of the World*, Editor Sorabji Richard, (Gerald Duckworth & Co, 2015), Page 78-87

moment you actually do it, and there cannot be any delay between the cause and effect. The decision of driving the car is not enough but you also require that this is coupled with the act of actually driving the car being performed. Therefore, this would mean that for God there would have to be a 'new' act to create and it is this change that is impossible for God. Averroes also argues that an additional flaw of the argument of Ghazali and Philoponus is that it reduces the will of God to that of a will of a human. Desire and will are only present in a being that has a need and God does not have any need or choice for when God acts, he always creates the best possible thing. The will of God is different to the will of a human.

The position that was stated above by Philoponus was as a response to his detractors. But he presented some potent points against those who support the pre-eternity of the universe. He stated that an eternal universe would mean that something that is eternal has come into existence and which contradicts the very nature of an eternal. It would also mean that we would have different types of eternals of different sizes and types.⁶³ One of the arguments has been presented by Simplicius⁶⁴ and it relies on three premises. The first is that for something to exist it requires that something else before it and if the thing that came before did not exist then the resulting thing cannot also exist.⁶⁵ The second is that a number itself cannot be infinite, it cannot be changed, moved nor can it increase.⁶⁶ The third is that something cannot come into existence if its existence requires the existence of an infinite number of other things, where these things come from one another. This results in the idea that a temporally infinite universe with a successive causal chain is impossible. It would mean that if the universe was eternal there would be a number of different types of infinities and these infinities could increase.⁶⁷ For example, the planets have different periods of orbits and the various planets in a variety

⁶³ Philoponus Against Proclus On the Eternity of the World, Editor Sorabji Richard, (Gerald Duckworth & Co, 2015), Page 78-87

⁶⁴ On the Contingency of the World (De contingentia mundi), Trans. S. Pines, 'An Arabic summary of a lost work of John Philoponus', Israel Oriental Studies 2 (1972): 320-52; D. Furley, C. Wildberg, Philoponus, Corollaries on Place and Void with Simplicius, Against Philoponus on the Eternity of the World, (London, Duckworth, 1991), Page 95-141

⁶⁵ Averroes, Epitome of the Physics, (Hyderabad 1947), P110

⁶⁶ Averroes, Summary of Aristotle Physics, Rasail ibn Rushd (Hyderabad, 1947) 204b, Page 5

⁶⁷ Wildberg, Christian, "John Philoponus", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), [Online] Access at (<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/philoponus/>)

of years have a different number of orbits, some that are larger than others.⁶⁸ The assumption that is made regarding their motion throughout eternity would mean that infinity can increase which is against the Aristotelian position that numbers cannot be infinite.⁶⁹

Some of the arguments of Philoponus were developed from the positions presented by St Augustine, a Christian philosopher from the fourth century. For example, St Augustine argues in his book *De Civitate Dei* that God is eternal and that after a certain period of time, without there being a change in his will, he created the universe, something he did not wish to create before his decision to create at that point. This is quite relevant, and a strong argument can be made that just as some of the arguments of Philoponus are taken from St Augustine, similarly some of the arguments of al-Ghazali were taken from John Philoponus. For example, an important feature to remember about St Augustine is that like Ghazali and John Philoponus he argued that God coming before does not refer to being 'before' in time.⁷⁰ Therefore we find that John Philoponus, as well as St Augustine fall into the third category, which are the philosophers who believe in a God who created a temporal universe at a specific point in time.

Al-Maturidi and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

Abu Mansoor al-Maturidi was a Hanafi scholar who was born in the village of Maturidi in the region of Samarqand in Uzbekistan. He was born around 852⁷¹ most scholars agree that he died 944. He is the founder of one of the major orthodox Sunni schools which followed the doctrine of Imam Abu Hanifa. To describe al-Maturidi as a 'follower' of Abu Hanifa would be a gross oversimplification as

⁶⁸ Ibid

⁶⁹ Ibid

⁷⁰ Augustine, *The Confessions*, [online] available at (http://www.albatrus.org/english/potpourri/historical/augustine_confessions_book_11.htm), Book 11, Chapter 10–28.

⁷¹ This is an estimation as the exact date of his birth is not known.

he introduced, developed and systemised Maturidi theology to the Muslim world. The theological issues that were prevalent during the time of Avicenna were also being dealt with by al-Maturidi a century earlier, examples of this can be seen through their works such as the both of them refuting the positions of al-Kaabi a prominent Mutazalite scholar. The theological and philosophical methodology of al-Maturidi lends towards a rational approach. This can be seen by the fact that in his arguments he does not use the hadith tradition as proof for his position, which is a process that was used by many of his peers as well as his predecessors. Further, in his book *Kitaab at-Tawheed*, he only uses only a small amount of proof from the Quran to prove his position, although this can be counter balanced by the fact that he has written a detailed commentary on the Quran which is called *Ta'wilat Ahl As Sunnah*. What makes the position of al-Maturidi all the more relevant when speaking about Avicenna is that through the detailed reading and analysis of both classical personalities, their positions on a variety of issues do not differ. What makes it even more interesting is that in this issue one may argue that Avicenna was following the methodology of al-Maturidi more than anyone else, as he took it upon himself to ensure that he did not anthropomorphise God by applying time to him. Despite the both of them holding similar views one became the founding father of Sunni theology whilst the other was discarded and rejected, considered a heretic to the extent that it was not deemed appropriate to teach his works within the realm of Islamic learning.

Al-Maturidi used both texts (*Nasus*) as well as rational proofs to form his theological and philosophical arguments in his books *Kitaab At-Tawheed and Tawilat Ahl as-Sunna*. An important point to note is that when al-Maturidi presents his argument he is not attempting to refute the philosophers such as Aristotle. He was also born a century before Avicenna and therefore his arguments had not been produced at the point of his writing. Avicennas' sole purpose for writing his position was to prove the existence of God. He did this by attempting to prove that the universe is eternal. Al-Maturidi held the position that the universe was temporal, that it was created by God but he does not deal with the ideas that were discussed by Avicenna and al-Ghazali, such as God creating the universe at a specific point in time and what the result of this would be if this idea is applied to God. Al-Maturidi leans heavily on rational proofs but does not ignore Quranic textual proofs to form

his arguments. Therefore as proof against the pre-eternity of the universe he used the Quranic verses: *“God is the Creator of all things, and He is in Charge of all things”*⁷² *“Originator of the heavens and the earth. Whenever He decrees a thing, He says to it, “Be,” and it becomes.”*⁷³ *“Originator of the heavens and the earth—how can He have a son when He never had a companion? He created all things, and He has knowledge of all things.”*⁷⁴ *“To God belongs the sovereignty of the heavens and the earth. God has power over all things.”*⁷⁵ *“In fact, you are humans from among those He created. He forgives whom He wills, and He punishes whom He wills. To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth and what lies between them, and to Him is the return.”*⁷⁶

Al-Maturidi presented his own argument by making a distinction between the substance and accidental. He said that movement and stillness, durability and destruction, amalgamation and separation are all accidentals which are different to substances. We know through our own observations that movement follows stillness, and that amalgamation follows separation and that something coming into existence follows non-existence. These ‘accidentals’ cannot be the same as the main body which is the ‘substance’, because if it was the same then the substance would not be able to hold the two opposing qualities such as movement and stillness. Therefore, this clearly shows that the substance and accidental are two very different things.⁷⁷ Due to these opposites not being able to be together, there is a succession such as from stillness to movement, which shows that these accidentals are temporary.⁷⁸ Al-Maturidi also argued that based on our senses we can observe that the universe is not eternal, because we see that matter depends on being a substance and is dependent on accidentals for its existence. Eternity is not dependent on anything because by its nature it must be independent, therefore the universe cannot be eternal.⁷⁹ Al-Maturidi argues that since matter has these opposite natures, there must be an external force that brings all of these parts together. As

⁷² Quran Surah Az-Zumar, Verse 62

⁷³ Quran Surah Al-Baqarah, Verse 117

⁷⁴ Quran Surah Al-An'am, Verse 101

⁷⁵ Quran Surah Aal-'Imran, Verse 189

⁷⁶ Quran Surah Al-Ma'idah, Verse 18

⁷⁷ Al-Maturidi, *Kitaab At-Tawheed*, (Dar al-Kotob Al-Ilmiyah, Lebanon 2006), Page 16

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, Page 13

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, Page 11

matter relies on something external it must thus be of a temporary nature.⁸⁰ He also argued that the finite nature of substances which we observe proves the finite nature of the universe itself. We know the world consists of these finite objects as we see that they come into existence after not existing so they are also temporal in terms of time. Therefore, the universe has substances that are finite and it is not possible to have objects which are temporal and infinite together.⁸¹

The most potent of al-Maturidi's arguments against the pre-eternity of the universe is based on the accidentals of motion and stillness being temporary. Al-Maturidi explained that it is not possible for matter to have neither motion nor stillness, one of these attributes must exist at one time, which means that at least one of them must be temporary, and as they rely on one another then the other accidental must also be temporary.⁸² Another of his main arguments is regarding the nature of the world and that there can be the following possibilities: One can either make the proposition that the world is still eternal despite accidentals such as movement and stillness, durability and destruction, amalgamation and separation which are all temporary accidentals as explained earlier. If this is the case, then the entire universe must be temporal because anything that relies on the temporal must itself be temporal. If the World is then temporal then it cannot be eternal. If this is not the case, then the Universe is not relying on any of these temporal qualities and therefore its origination must be from something that is not temporal. The alternative is that initially the Universe did not possess these accidental qualities but later they came into existence. It is within this statement that you can find the views of those who believe in the pre-eternity of the universe. We will explore these opinions later in the thesis but it is important to understand the argument of Avicenna doesn't reside in this proposition, as we will see when we tackle his ideas. A point to note is that al-Maturidi obviously lived before Avicenna and therefore did not comment on the specifics of the argument of Avicenna. Another of the arguments of al-Maturidi is regarding cause and effect. He proposed that just as all

⁸⁰ Ibid, Page 13

⁸¹ Ibid, Page 12

⁸² Ibid, Page 12

effects must have a cause then the universe must also have a cause and in terms of the universe the cause of it is God.⁸³

Al-Maturidi continued that another proof for the temporal nature of the universe is the possibility of life existing in the dead, because it has life after not existing, and it is now living after once having the possibility of life within it. It proves that the things that have life are temporal just as those things that have death, as things move from life to death, which demonstrates its temporal nature.

Al-Maturidi used his arguments for the temporal nature of the universe as one of his proofs for the existence of God. Proofs for the existence of God are not relevant to the purposes of this thesis as this dissertation is more specific and about the argument for and against the pre-eternity of the universe. In addition, the conflict between al-Ghazali and Avicenna is not about the existence of God, as they both agree that there is a creator but instead their disagreement is specifically about the pre-eternity of the universe.

Al-Maturidi opposed the position of the pre-eternity of the universe and strongly espoused the position of there being a temporal world and there being an unoriginated creator of the Universe. The main basis of the arguments of al-Maturidi are based on the notion that that substances must always hold temporal qualities and is therefore temporal in nature. Al-Maturidis argued that the arguments of the advocates of the pre-eternity of the universe during his time, can be summarised into three succinct arguments. His first argument is that those who support the pre-eternity of the universe do so out of blindly following the arguments of their predecessors – that they merely follow those who came before them without making an attempt to analyse or understand the rationale behind the arguments. Al-Maturidi argued that it is a hopeless endeavour to debate with these types of people and that one should not waste ones' time engaging with these people.⁸⁴ Al-Maturidi explains that their second argument is regarding cause and effect, that it is impossible for something to come out of nothing. That everything that there is, comes from something else, which comes from another

⁸³ Ibid, Page 15

⁸⁴ Ibid, Page 13-18

ad infinitum and that this is the makeup of the eternal structure of the universe.⁸⁵ That the universe cannot have an originator which is external to the world as it is something that cannot be recognised by the senses or understood by the intellect.⁸⁶ The third argument of those who support the pre-eternity of the universe during the time of al-Maturidi was the argument of the Dualists. They held that there were two originators of the universe, that good and evil which are diametrically opposite and cannot be from the same entity, so that one of these gods is the originator of all things that are good in the universe and the other god is responsible for everything that is evil in the universe. They considered it to be impossible for a good and merciful God to be responsible for all of the evil and destruction in the world.⁸⁷ Al-Maturidi explained that the position of the Dualists gives them a stronger right to believing in the pre-eternity of the universe. This is as they believe that evil and good or darkness and light are two separate entities which amalgamated together so that the universe came into existence, as we know that when things are mixed and come together they are temporal in nature, because before they were mixed together they were unmixed and when they were not mixed they were not what we call the universe. Unless they say that light and darkness are two separate entities that were confused from their original state but they were initially in their own place. In the place of light all of it was good and in the place of darkness all of it was darkness and evil. This rejects the belief in the pre-eternity of the universe which includes that these entities were mixed together. It also refutes the pre-eternity of the mixed universe especially the statement of al-Mani where he says when the light was in the presence of the darkness and the darkness was scratching it and mixing into it, so the light created this universe to separate itself from the darkness, so this universe according to this statement came into existence after these two entities mixed together, which means that according to them the temporal came into being after a pre-eternal accident. This idea is irrational according to al-Maturidi because their position necessitates disability of light at the peak of its strength when it was with all of its soldiers and all of its good but was not able to defend itself from the darkness forcing

⁸⁵ Ibid, Page 30

⁸⁶ Ibid, Page 30

⁸⁷ Ibid, Page 37

itself into it. It necessitates the ignorance of the light when the strength of the darkness forced itself onto it so that it was unable to escape from it, and that it then created the universe due to its inability to defend itself from the strength of the darkness. This idea according to al-Maturidi is theologically absurd.⁸⁸ In terms of the Dualists, not all of them held the same view and there were a number of different positions held by the various groups of Dualists. An example of this is Thanaweas who disagreed on what is meant by the two entities merging together. They disagreed whether this merging occurred naturally or it was a deliberate act by the darkness.⁸⁹

Al-Maturidi attributed the arguments that would later be found in the works of Avicenna to the Bataniyya group. He explained that those who propose this argument hold that the universe is eternal but that the universe also has a creator, that these Muslim philosophers classify God as the perfect cause and that the universe is the necessary effect of this perfect cause. And that it is not possible for there to be an effect without a cause and vis a vis a cause without an effect. Therefore, if the cause, which in the case of Avicenna is God, is eternal then the effect must also be eternal.

Al-Maturidi did not accept the notion that when there is a cause then there must be an effect when it related to God, as it would mean that God would be forced to create and it impossible for God to be forced to create, because if the creator is forced then it is not possible for him to be the originator of the universe.

What is accepted by both sides is that the universe was created and that the universe is comprised of a variety of fundamentals. The one who creates this universe cannot be forced into doing so, that the nature of the universe is such that it is not controlled by the laws of cause and effect such that God is the necessary cause. But al-Maturidi clarifies that what he means by this is that if his opponents state that God creates the world without being forced to do so then calling him the causer (without choice) is inaccurate.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Ibid, Page 31

⁸⁹ Ibid, Page 31

⁹⁰ Ibid, Page 33

The naturalists hold the position that the world is made up of the four elements: fire, earth, air and water. These elements are mixed to form all aspects of the universe. Although there are some naturalists who consider one of these elements as the building block of the universe. Similar to the previous argument, al-Maturidi argues that their position is flawed for the following reasons; these elements are naturally caused and are forced to act based on that which is naturally caused. According to the naturalists other than that which has been naturally caused by these elements, everything else can increase or decrease or be reduced to neutral and therefore these elements cannot be the cause of the universe but instead there must be a creator who is not forced to act based on the natural laws of the universe.⁹¹ The naturally caused elements will only effect those things that they are naturally built to effect and therefore will not affect those things that it is not in their nature to effect, due to this there cannot be things that have been affected but there is no cause, thus there must be someone who combines the effect of the natural and non-natural cause, and the combiner of these two aspects is God.⁹²

Al-Maturidi explains that Aristotle was *Ashab al-Hayula*, who holds the position that the entire universe came from prime matter (*Hayula*), which is matter without size or shape, it is neither accidental nor substance, and it has no qualities and is infinite in quantity. All of the fundamental building blocks in the Universe, which includes all substances and their accidentals, all types of change, cause and effect, are caused by this dormant power (*Quwwa*) which comes from the nature of the prime matter.⁹³ Al-Maturidi identified a number of problems with the beliefs of the *Ashab al-Hayula*, firstly that the world cannot be eternal because it is produced through changes that occur due to the latent power (*Quwwa*) in this prime matter (*Hayula*). If this change occurs and the prime matter which is eternal changes to this universe, then the prime matter no longer exists and instead it has changed to this world which is instead temporal. This contradicts the basis of the position held by Aristotle that a pre-eternal cause cannot create a temporal world but in this case the philosophers

⁹¹ Ibid, Page 6-13

⁹² Ibid, Page 117

⁹³ Ibid, Page 147

have in the end produced the same argument and replaced God with prime matter. Another problem according to al-Maturidi is that if the prime matter (*Hayula*) is without size or shape then how can accidents occur within it? According to the *Ashab al-Hayula*, the latent power (*Quwwa*) changes the nature of the prime matter (*Hayula*) and therefore there should be no time where they are separate from one another. Al-Maturidi argues that what this means is that the world was produced at a specific time even in the case of the pre-eternity of the world, it means that the *Quwwa* is not caused naturally but instead it must have free choice. If the *Hayula* had these qualities which were innate to it then it would be a contradiction as it would then be without shape, size or character but still have these qualities. But if they were to maintain that the *Huyula* does not have any of these characteristics, then it means that what it produces will not be due to the prime matter nor the latent power as both of these do not have any of the characteristics. Due to this there must be an outside force which made these qualities come into existence.⁹⁴

As Maturidi explained earlier that if the universe has come from the *Hayula* then they would be from the same substances and therefore as this world is temporal then it would mean the prime matter must also be temporal. If the prime matter is not related to this universe but the world is still as a result of it, then it gives the following possibilities for its conception: Firstly, it could be that there are some qualities within the prime matter which change its substance from a sizeless, shapeless entity to the entity that we see in this world which is temporal and has the ability to change. In this instance the *Hayula* no longer exists and is instead replaced by this world which allegedly has been created by something which is external to them.⁹⁵ Or the second alternative is that this universe had a dormant existence within the prime matter and it later comes into existence. Al-Maturidi rejected this notion as he stated that the *Hayula* has does not have intelligence and therefore it does not have the control or will to bring itself into existence.⁹⁶ The third possibility is that they believe that the *Hayula* brings the universe into existence after previously not existing by its own free will. If this is the argument,

⁹⁴ Ibid, Page 149

⁹⁵ Ibid, Page 62

⁹⁶ Ibid, Page 63

then al-Maturidi postulates that the only difference between this and his own belief is that his name for prime matter is Allah whereas his opponents name it *Hayula*.⁹⁷

Another group of philosophers held that the changes in the universe are as a result of the eternal movement of the stars. Al-Maturidi opposed this opinion by presenting the alternative idea that all forms of movement have a beginning and an end. That the start of every movement is the end of previous movement and it is not possible to have an end of a movement without there being a beginning and therefore if the movement has such a temporal nature it cannot be eternal.⁹⁸

Al-Maturidi links this argument to his previous contentions that stars move in a circular motion, and so suppose that this circular path was made into a linear path it would mean the end of one motion would be the beginning of a different motion. If you were to contend that the universe is eternal, then it would mean that these movements would have both an existence and non-existence which is eternal, and this would result in an impossibility. Therefore, these movements must have a start point.⁹⁹ Al-Maturidi continues by saying that if two objects both move in a straight line and one of these objects is in front of the other, the reason for this is either that one of these objects started before the other, or the two objects are moving at different speeds, or the two objects have different start points, and that these possibilities prove that movements have a beginning.¹⁰⁰ He continues that the perpetual movement of the stars shows that this occurs as a result of an external force, otherwise they themselves would have chosen a less complicated method of controlling the universe and the origin and complexities of the universe cannot be the result of a self-determination.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Ibid, Page 65

⁹⁸ Ibid, Page 144

⁹⁹ Ibid, Page 144

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, Page 144

¹⁰¹ Ibid, Page 145

Avicenna and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

In order to judge the position of Avicenna, it must be analysed by variety of angles, the first being his position, then how his ideas relate to his predecessors such as Aristotle, why his ideas were refuted by Ghazali such that he was considered a disbeliever as his position was considered to have traversed the boundaries of accepted Islamic scholarship, and then finally was his position truly rejected or were the blueprint of his ideas about the pre-eternity of matter held by both Islamic and non-Islamic scholars who came after him.

In order to understand the negativity towards Avicenna, one needs to look into his background and theology and how this correlated with the rulers of that time. Avicenna was an Islamic scholar who was Hanafi in his jurisprudence. In theology, his ideas were more closely matching the Maturidi and Mutazalite School, the latter was considered a heretical school by the rulers who were Hanbalites. The main conflict between these two parties was theological - their understanding of God. The Hanbalites were anthropomorphist in nature whereas the Maturidi and Mutazalite were not and rejected any notion of applying physicality to God. This resulted in battles between the two parties and a shift in power from a Mutazalite leader to a Hanbalite leader resulted in the persecution of tens of thousands of Hanafis (who were Mutazalite and Maturidi in theology). This historical background is relevant to Avicenna in so far as he opposed the Hanbalites politically as well as theologically. Avicenna in his philosophy was the polar opposite of the Hanbalites even more so than the Maturidis and Mutazalites. It meant his idea of metaphysics and more specifically the pre-eternity of the World was rejected by Muslims and considered heretical. We have read a more detailed account of this in the introduction as well as the biography of Avicenna earlier in the thesis.

Avicenna took it upon himself to analyse and where it was needed refute those theologians and philosophers who attempted to refute Aristotle and this was especially the case for arguments that he also held to be true. For example Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Razi better known as by his Latin name Rhazes from the tenth century was known for his criticism of Aristotle. When

speaking about the issue of pre-eternal time and temporal time, Avicenna claimed that Razi incorrectly attributed this position to Aristotle when in fact Aristotle held a different position when referring to time, as we explained earlier.¹⁰²

Before speaking about the pre-eternity of the universe, Avicenna defines the specific terminologies that he will be using in the text that follows. Therefore, any definition that precedes this must be based on the model of the world that is defined based on the definition provided by the writer. Avicenna defines ‘*sunan*’ (creation) using the following explanation - “*Creation according to the philosophers is referring to something which has to do with the possible things and does not have time or matter preceding it.*”¹⁰³ When Muslim philosophers use the term *Ibdaa* they mean the possibility, which is not similar to the explanation provided by Avicenna, which is that it is something which does not have time or matter preceding it. So, before he begins explaining the pre-eternity of matter, which is creation, he defines what *he* means by creation. Therefore, it is un-academic to apply the definition of other philosophers on the explanation of Avicenna. This definition of Avicenna is clearly showing that he does not view God and creation as the same eternal entity. Instead, for Avicenna creation is something that is possible which means that it may or may not exist, whereas God is necessary as he must exist.¹⁰⁴ Also for Avicenna creation is something that does not have time or matter preceding it, which means that there cannot be time before creation as both it and time are created entities, as well as the fact that once there is matter, meaning creation, that is when there is time, as time is merely the measurement of the movement of matter. Therefore, we cannot have time before creation.¹⁰⁵ This definition clearly would negate the position of those who attempt to refute Avicenna by calling him a heretic and a disbeliever. But we will continue looking at the arguments presented by Avicenna and his opponents in more detail.

¹⁰² Razi, M, Al-Qawl fi al-Hayula, (University of Fuad al-Awwal, Faculty of al-Adaab, 1939), Page 304

¹⁰³ Avicenna, Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat, Dar al-Ma’arif, (Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 67-86

¹⁰⁴ Avicenna, Kitab an-Najat, (Cairo 1913) Page 412

McGinnis J, Avicenna, (Oxford University Press, London, 2010), Page 163-164

Adamson P, From the Necessary Existent to God, Essay is found in ‘Interpreting Avicenna’ Edited by Adamson P, (Cambridge University Press, London, 2013), Page 171-174

¹⁰⁵ Avicenna, Kitab an-Najat, (Cairo 1913) Page 416

Looking at the definition of creation according to Avicenna we know that something that is ontologically possible may or may not exist. Anything that has a possibility of existence or non-existence cannot be God.¹⁰⁶ The Asharis and Maturidis explain that what is meant by something being possible is that it has the possibility of God bringing it into existence. Avicenna makes a distinction that the possibility of existence does not necessarily mean that it is under the Will of God, as such the possibility of something coming into existence is not something that comes after Will, but instead it is something that comes after non-existence. Avicenna is attempting to try to refute the position of the later Asharis and Maturidis on this issue. This would mean that it is not possible within itself as its existence depends on another and we understand that something that is created out of nothing relies on something to bring it into existence. The existence of any eternal being must be *wajib* (necessary). In the ontology of Avicenna, God is the only Necessary existent (*Wajib al-Wajud*), therefore God doesn't come into existence by something else nor does he require this external agent to keep him in existence.¹⁰⁷ The second aspect of the point is that creation is something that does not have time or matter preceding it. Avicenna's point is that creation is something that does not have time or matter before it. This means that there is no creation before time, therefore the only way this would be tantamount to disbelief is if one believes that time and matter are applicable on God. God is not bound by time, the term 'before' is a construct of time because in time 'before' precedes the present and the future. Thus, applying the term 'before' to God is actually a statement of disbelief.¹⁰⁸ In terms of Avicenna's opinion about pre-eternity, as demonstrated, he explained the terminology and the definition of the term, so based on this definition the statement of disbelief in Islam made by Imam Ghazali misses the mark, although this misunderstanding of Avicennas' view is common amongst Muslim theologians and orientalis and is most likely due to the complex nature of his argument.¹⁰⁹ He has a tendency to give his own definitions of things earlier in his writings and then

¹⁰⁶ Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, Trans Marmura E, (Brigham Young University Press, 2005), Page 326

McGinnis J, *Avicenna*, (Oxford University Press, London, 2010), Page 151

¹⁰⁷ Goodman L.E, *Avicenna*, (Cornell University Press, London, 2006), Page 49 and 65

¹⁰⁸ Avicenna, *Kitab an-Najat*, (Cairo 1913) Page 416

¹⁰⁹ Zedler, Beatrice H, "Saint Thomas and Avicenna in the 'De Potentia Dei'," *Traditio* 6, (1948), Page 122

expects the reader to have read, understood and to be able to apply these definitions when reading him later.

Avicenna explains that the lay person generally holds the position (and later we would find that it was a view held by al-Ghazali and many other Asharis) that we have something called the effect and another thing we call the agent. The agent is the one doing the act and bringing something to existence, shaping and causing it. The effect is the thing that receives the act from the agent, as such it came into existence and has been shaped and constructed. What this means is that something came into existence due to another, after not existing.¹¹⁰ What makes this interesting is that according to Avicenna, this is basic position held by the lay person without giving the matter any in-depth thought. He is dismissing it as a basic understanding, although this was not an attempted slight by him about his detractors and especially al-Ghazali. This is because al-Ghazali as well as many of the vocal opponents of this position came later. His debate with Alberonius on the issue did not cover the issue that deeply.

Avicenna then pointed out that there is a position held by some that once the thing is brought into existence there is no longer a need for the agent. For example, imagine a building that has been built by a builder. Once constructed the building is no longer in need of the builder, despite the fact that one would be able to see the effect of the builder on the building. Similarly, the universe would only be in need of a creator to bring it into existence after previously not existing. There would not be a need for the creator once the universe was created. This would then bring forth the question that if everything that exists needs something else to bring it into existence, then the same can be said of the creator and so on which would continue and result in infinite regress.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Dar al-Ma'arif, (Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 67-86
Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Trans Inati, Shams C, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2014), Page 132

¹¹¹ Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Dar al-Ma'arif, (Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 67-86
Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Trans Inati, Shams C, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2014), Page 132-133
Averroes, *Kitab al-Kashf an Manahij al-Adillah*, (Cairo, 1901), Page 37

The meaning of something not having a necessary existence by its essence but through something else does not contradict due to two reasons.¹¹² The first is having necessary existence by something else all the time or necessary existence by something else temporarily. Necessary existence by something else could meet them in both ways, and it will contradict having necessary existence by itself, unless something external has an effect on it and anything which came into being after not existing has only one of the two ways which is more specific than the second meaning. Both of these meanings are caused by that connection that occurs due to something else. Therefore, as long as one of the two meanings are more general than the second, then the meaning is related to both of them. This is because initially the meaning is related to the one that is general by itself and for the more specific as secondary, as the meaning is not connected to the more specific after being connected to the more general, without it being connected the other way around. Even though if it didn't come after not existing but it will result in it existing by something else. Which would be possible by itself, but that connection would not be innate, as such it clarifies that this connection is due to some other reason. Although this argument from Avicenna is quite lengthy it is necessary to understanding the basis of his argument regarding the pre-eternity of the universe. The reason for this is that this attribute is infinitely causing its effect and not only while it is affecting, that's why this connection will be all of the time. Also, if it would be the case that it came after not existing then it does not mean that the connection happened after only coming from not existing which would then mean that after that there would be no need for an agent.¹¹³

Avicenna explained that which begins to exist after not existing has a 'before' in which it did not exist. But this concept of being 'before' is not based on time such as the number one being before the number two. So it is not that one has to come 'before' or 'after' the other but instead it is the concept of before by which after cannot exist. This concept of 'before' is not due to non-existence because non-existence can come 'after'. Also, it is not the essence of the agent itself because the agent can also

¹¹² Avicenna, *Kitab an-Najat*, (Cairo 1913) Page 367

¹¹³ Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Dar al-Ma'arif, (Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 67-86
Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Trans Inati, Shams C, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2014), Page 133-135

be before, during or after - it is something different in which the issue of renewing and extinction will continue to happen continuously.¹¹⁴ Thus, this type of sequence and continuity which is similar to movement in terms of continuity, cannot be composed except for non-divisible parts¹¹⁵

Avicenna continues that something cannot be renewed or enacted unless there is a material and real change of status, because before when there was no change there was no creation and something has to have changed for there now to be a different effect. It is impossible for this change of status to occur unless there is a potential ability for the status to be changed. Therefore, the connection between the two is between the connection of movement with the moving subject, and to be more specific the change that is occurring and subject upon which change is being applied, especially if the two cannot be connected or disconnected as this will result in a circular argument. This connection must meet the measurement because if it came before it could have been considerably earlier or it could have been just before the current time.¹¹⁶ Therefore there can be a large difference in the measurement when it happened ‘before’ as well as there can be a difference in the thing that can be measured and as such it can be changed. What is being explained in terms of the quantity of measurement is in fact time. But this time cannot be in terms of using the terminology of ‘before’ or ‘after’, what we can see is that for one to oppose the explanation of Avicenna you would have to admit that time is applicable to God.¹¹⁷

At times Avicenna can be deeply philosophical and quite dry in his writings to the point where many people who read him can misunderstand his point when it comes to the issue of God and his relation to creation, he ensures at many point in his writings that there is a distinction. For example, he states that *“It is well known and understood that anything that comes into existence from nothing is due to*

¹¹⁴ Avicenna, Kitab an-Najat, (Cairo 1913) Page 416

¹¹⁵ Avicenna, Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat, Dar al-Ma’arif, (Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 67-86
Avicenna, Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat, Trans Inati, Shams C, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2014), Page 133-135

¹¹⁶ Avicenna, Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat, Dar al-Ma’arif, (Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 67-86
Avicenna, Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat, Trans Inati, Shams C, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2014), Page 133-135

¹¹⁷ Avicenna, Kitab an-Najat, (Cairo 1913) Page 416

the First mind".¹¹⁸ By the First mind he means God and his knowledge and what he is alluding to is that when it comes to the creation it is up to the Will and decision of God regarding whether he gives priority to one of the two sides in terms of whether he brings something into existence or leaves it as not existing. It means that God holds the position of superiority according to Avicenna and as such when he is stating that the universe is eternal he is not stating that there is some sort of equality or similarity between God and the universe. He explains that the universe comes into existence due to holding necessary or possible existence.¹¹⁹ If it comes from something whose existence is possible as opposed to being necessary, then we have to look for another reason that is actually necessary and that is impossible as it will result in infinite regress because we know that the reason for the existence is something that is compulsory.¹²⁰

Avicenna relays the following position in *Isharaat* pertaining to the relationship between the cause (God) and the effect (universe). He explained that as long as the cause exists as a cause, then the effect should also exist, as the effect is related to the cause and the relationship between the two is based on the cause being in such a way that it will be caused¹²¹ (in which it produces 'something' or it effects something to 'happen') and this can happen either naturally or by choice¹²² or by some other means.¹²³ What Avicenna means here is that when we see that a cause has resulted in an effect, this can happen in three ways. The first is that it can happen naturally without there being an intention of someone to bring it in affect. For example, those who do not believe in a creator who argue that the universe came into existence naturally without there being the intention of a creator to bring it into

¹¹⁸ Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Dar al-Ma'arif, (Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 67-86
 Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Trans Inati, Shams C, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2014), Page 133-135

¹¹⁹ Adamson P, *From the Necessary Existent to God*, Essay is found in 'Interpreting Avicenna' Edited by Adamson P, (Cambridge University Press, London, 2013), Page 171-174

¹²⁰ Averroes, *Kitab al-Kashf an Manahij al-Adillah*, (Cairo, 1901), Page 37

Inati S, *Ibn Sina*, Essay can be found in *History of Islamic Philosophy* Edited by Nasr S.H, (Routledge, London, 2001), Page 240

¹²¹ McGinnis J, *Avicenna*, (Oxford University Press, London, 2010), Page 195

¹²² Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Dar al-Ma'arif, (Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 67-86
 Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Trans Inati, Shams C, (Columbia University Press, New York, 2014), Page 133-135

Juwayni, *Irshad fi Usul al-Itikad* (1938), Page 16-18

¹²³ Avicenna mentions that it can happen naturally, by choice or by some other means. When he writes 'by some other means' he is referring to a non-real option that a person has not considered.

existence. The 'Big Bang' happened naturally and this resulted in the expansion of the universe but no one caused this 'Big Bang' instead it happened naturally. The second option is that it happened by choice which mean that the cause resulted in the effect due to the choice something that wanted this to happen. For example, a snooker player choosing to use the white ball to hit the red ball. This doesn't happen naturally where the white ball automatically hits the red ball, but instead this happens due to the choice of the snooker player who chooses to use the white ball to hit the red ball. Avicenna continues his explanation by stating that this cause must be external to the effect, which means that it should not be related to the effect in such a manner that it makes the cause occur naturally. Avicenna provides an explanation for this to show how the cause must be external, so that it cannot occur naturally without there being a choice of something external such as in terms of equipment. For example a carpenter needs something external such as axe, it is this choice of using the axe on the material which shows that it is created due to an external choice as opposed to the axe somehow automatically creating the material (naturally) without there being any choice involved. Or for example in terms of matter, the carpenter would need wood, or the seamstress would need the help of a needle or in terms of time, a human would need summer. Now the reason for the effect can be a provoking reason such as the need for the one who eats to eat so that he is no longer hungry or the removal of a barrier such as the person who washes needs to the clouds to disappear so that he can place his clothes outside so that they can be dried. Avicenna explained that for the effect to not come into existence it would mean that the cause is not in the status or position so that it would bring the effect into existence or to not be in the way so that it can cause the effect naturally or its essence is in such a way that it naturally causes the effect to come into existence or to not come into existence at all (this is the point that al-Ghazali catches on Avicenna which we will explore further in this thesis).¹²⁴

As long as there is nothing stopping the cause from the outside or the doer exists by itself, but itself is not the cause, then in this scenario the effect will be depending on the existence of the above mentioned condition. But if that condition exists irrespective of whether it is natural or by an

¹²⁴ Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 74
Avicenna, *Kitab an-Najat*, (Cairo 1913) Page 367

independent Will or by any other means, it will necessitate that the effect should also exist. If these conditions of the causes are not present, then it will necessitate the opposite which is that the effect also does not exist. On the other hand, if any of the causes exist continuously then the effect will also be continuous and similarly if the cause is temporary then the effect will also be temporary. If the cause is similar to itself and it never changes and it causes a specific result then it is appropriate to conclude that the effect will be existing infinitely with the cause (which means that its effect will be existing from it, which in our scenario is the universe). But if it is not called the affected thing because it did not have non-existence then that this is not a problem as long as the meaning mentioned above is obvious.¹²⁵ So if God existed without the universe, then nothing affected his Will to cause him to create the universe as there is nothing in existence except for God and as such he would have remained in this condition or status without there being a universe for eternity. So, if he had not created it immediately he would not have created it 'later'. But the universe was created and that it was created by God, and as such that creation must be eternal. To summarise the position of Avicenna, he argues that because God is eternal and he is the cause then the effect must also be eternal as the cause and effect are linked. A temporal cause results in a temporal effect and an eternal cause results in an eternal effect - because we have an eternal God then the universe must also be eternal.

Avicenna discusses the relationship between cause and effect from a variety of angles, which for him is important as a key aspect of his argument for the pre-eternity of the Universe relies on cause and effect. He argues that cause can affect the effect in three manners. (I) That it will be causing all the time and therefore the effect will be occurring all the time infinitely. (II) That it is a temporary natural cause. (III) That it is a temporary cause based on its Will. An example of temporary natural cause would be a magnet which does not intend to pull something but its cause happens naturally due to the nature of the magnet. The problem with this is that a lack of will cannot be attributed to God as he would lose his Godliness. In terms of God willing something then whatever will be happening will

¹²⁵ Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 74

occur by the desire of God or by some other means that were not explained by God. The ancient Greek philosophers describe God and his acts as natural. But Muslim philosophers including Avicenna argue that God causes by his will, so God is not forced to produce without his will. In this specific text Avicenna did not state whether he supported that it is a natural cause and effect. Although in the book he did not support the opinion that it occurs by Will but in many other places and books he affirms that God Wills things into creation. Some do misunderstand Avicenna's view and believe that the process of creating the universe is an automatic or natural process such as the emanation of light from the sun or the flowing of water from a spring¹²⁶, natural affects that deny the effect of Gods' Will.¹²⁷ Imam Ghazali's refutation of Avicenna does not mention the issue of him affirming or denying the (*irada*) will of God, therefore it is safe to assume that al-Ghazali was aware of Avicenna's position and that he believed that creation was by the Will of God. The issue Ghazali had with Avicenna was that he split the cause into several categories such as the causer holds the condition of being the cause infinitely and therefore rationally it will cause the effect infinitely. If this was not the case then God would be unable to create as God would have a desire to create but he is not able to do it, therefore disability is attributed to God and this is impossible.¹²⁸ Another categorisation is that the causer will come into the condition to cause the effect temporarily in specific times, then the result of this cause will also be temporary. The problem with this approach according to Avicenna is the cause being enacted in bursts means that time is applicable on God. Because at one point he is not causing so there is no effect and later he is causing and there is an effect. The third is the causer will hold the status of being a cause but there will be a barrier to triggering the effect and therefore the result will not be present. This would mean that there is something that is blocking God from causing the effect, which means that he is disabled from preventing the block and not powerful enough to stop the barrier. We have also discussed in detail the issue of there being a delay in the effect after it has been enacted by the cause. All of the possible conditions that are mentioned are based on rational thought,

¹²⁶ Zedler, Beatrice H, "Saint Thomas and Avicenna in the 'De Potentia Dei'," *Traditio* 6, (1948), Page 122

¹²⁷ Kogan, Barry S. (1981), *Averroës and the Theory of Emanation*," (*Medieval Studies* 1981, 43) Page 385

¹²⁸ Avicenna, *Kitab an-Najat*, (Cairo 1913) Page 416

therefore they can only be dismissed by an equivalent rational repost. So the only way that the position of Imam Ghazali can be supported is with the added condition that nothing in God changes, although many would argue that the problem with the position of al-Ghazali is that it does infer a change in God. The countering position of Avicenna is that if God is in that status and he does not change then the result should always be present.

The opinion of Avicenna is often misconstrued and presented as being the same as the Mutazalite opinion, which was presented by Kaabi. His style of writing in the *Isharaat* is not to mention the name of the group from whom he is presenting the ideas. He explains that some of the Mutazalites argue that when the effect came into existence there is no longer a need for the causer. So even if the cause does disappear then the subject will continue existing, for example, imagine a builder constructs a building if the builder perishes the building will continue to exist. The consequence of their position is that the universe would continue existing even if God disappeared, as the universe only needed God to bring it into existence. The Mutazalite position is that bringing something into existence means that it comes from non-existence and as long as he is the cause and he brought something into existence after it not existing, why is there a need to continuously keep bringing it from non-existence to existence? If it needs God for continued existence then this will necessitate that anything whose existence needs someone else to bring it into existence even if that need is for God, which would result in infinite regress.¹²⁹

Another argument regarding the pre-eternity of the universe from Avicenna is the issue of the possibility of something coming into existence, that there was a determining factor at the exact instance of creation because if it were not then it would have remained in pure equilibrium with the possibility that it may or may not be created. If then something has caused this thing to exist then that thing must also have a determining factor, and similarly that determining factor should have another determining factor *ad infinitum*. Based on this one must accept this argument or look for alternative which is in God from whom comes new determining factors which are eternal. But the problem is

¹²⁹ Averroes, *Kitab al-Kashf an Manahij al-Adillah*, (Cairo, 1901), Page 37

that those who accept an eternal God do not accept that there could be new determining factors which in this case would also be eternal. The reason for this is that it would mean that God is changing which is not possible for an eternal God. This argument of Avicenna although presented from an alternative angle has roots in Aristotelian philosophy. Before we move onto the argument of change we need to analyse the issue of possible, impossible and necessary existence in more detail. Greek as well as Muslim philosophers from a variety of camps have spoken about it in great detail. In the Philosophy of Avicenna, and the same can be said of Aristotle, substances come before accidents. Basic substances from which specific substances such humans, plants and so on are formed are from form and matter.

Avicenna had a large number of arguments to prove his position for the pre-eternity of the universe as well his numerous refutations against those who believe in the temporal nature of the universe. But his most prominent and in my opinion the most effective and detrimental to those who believe in the temporal nature of the universe is related to the issue of creating the universe in time. Avicenna explains the concept of 'before' and 'after' by explaining that we know that something exists after another thing and this can be in terms of time and space. Even if they exist at the same time their existence in relation to one another is based on the spacial location from one another.¹³⁰ The argument of Avicenna is the following: if the existence of A comes after the existence of B, then the B is not because of the existence of A. Therefore, the existence of A can only come by due to the existence of B and things happened to A only because of B. But as for B it does not rely on A to exist and there is no intermediary between B and A so that B can exist. Therefore, the existence of B is not due to A, as well as the fact that A only exists due to its dependence on B. An example of this is the idea that when I moved my hand the key also turned, you never describe this as the key turned and then your hand turned even though they both occurred simultaneously. The fact that one is appearing to occur after the other is not due to time and space but instead it is by essence.¹³¹ Therefore one is occurring with the other by essence and not due to time and space. From this we

¹³⁰ Avicenna, *Kitab an-Najat*, (Cairo 1913) Page 416

¹³¹ Avicenna *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 76

can deduce that the status of something which is gained by the essence without being due to something else and without the status of the other thing being before not by time and space but instead by essence. Anything whose existence comes due to another thing, if that other thing was not present it would also not exist. As such, its existence relies on the existence of another. This thing that relies on the existence of another is considered something that is created out of nothing by essence. So God created the universe not by time and space but instead by essence, as the creation of the universe relies on God and anything whose existence relies on another it is a created entity, but by essence.¹³² Avicenna, like the Muslim theologians that oppose him, believes that the universe was created by God. The main disagreement between them is their understanding of 'subsequent'. Avicenna holds that it is by essence and whereas the differing theologians state that it is by time. Those hold the second and third position that the universe was created by God both posit that time was created by God and that this created time cannot be applied to God. The reason for this is that it results in the following impossibilities. By applying time to God, it would mean that there is some form of change in God. It would mean that God was present in the universe for 'some period' of time, he 'then' created the universe and the universe 'then' came into existence. It means that God was not creating and then he decided to create. This would be change in the Will of God, so initially he had no will to create, then there was a point when he decided to create and later when this Will was accomplished he then may or may not have stopped creating.¹³³ To add to this, that would also mean that when he stopped creating there was then a further change in God. There may be some that would argue that God is now continuously changing and if that is the case then it would mean that God has to be forced to in the situation of continuously creating so that he is not affected by change. This means that there are several points in 'time' where the Will of God changed. Also by bringing the universe into existence after it not existing means that one is applying time to God,¹³⁴ which in turn means that there was a point in time where there was no creation then there was a later point in time where God

¹³² Avicenna, *Kitab an-Najat*, (Cairo 1913) Page 367

¹³³ Avicenna *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 73

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, Volume 3, Page 77

decided to create the universe. Another problem with attributing time to God is that the result cannot come into effect randomly and without a cause but there must have been something that caused this effect, and like anything that causes an effect, that cause must be external to the effect (in this case the 'new' Will of God), this cause will make a change in the effect and this would result in a new state that was not present before the effect of the cause.¹³⁵ To be in a state where one can be affected by another is also impossible for God. Something can only be effected by a cause if it meets all of the conditions of being affected at that point. Therefore, the effect coming later, which in this case is the creation of the universe, can only happen if one of these conditions were previously missing and as such it did not fulfil the condition of being able to cause an affect and only once this new condition came to be was it made it made possible for God to have an effect on something and as such create the world. As Avicenna declared, it is impossible for God to have a 'missing' condition.¹³⁶

It was Avicenna's insistence that time, which is a creation of God, cannot be applied on God. As such in Avicenna's model of the universe, God and the world are not related to each other by time.¹³⁷ Instead, Avicenna holds the position that God and the universe are related to each other by essence, which means that God created the universe, so he is the creator and is superior to his creation which is the universe.¹³⁸ The universe is a creation of God and as such it is dependent on God. It is important to note in this juncture that when Avicenna states that they are related to each other by essence¹³⁹ he doesn't mean a physical connection as that would also be impossible for God. Therefore, this position of superiority over the universe is not one that is related to time, which is the position held by al-Ghazali and later theologians but instead it is a position of superiority due to essence. As we explained above in regard to the nature of cause and effect, Avicenna tries to give an analogical example where he states that it is as a person who opens a lock on a door and when our hand turns

¹³⁵ Ibid, Volume 3, Page 76

¹³⁶ Ibid, Volume 3, Page 76

¹³⁷ Avicenna, Kitab an-Najat, (Cairo 1913) Page 416

¹³⁸ Nasafi, A, Khiali, Manuscript of Hashiah al-Khiali Ala al-Aqaid al-Nasafiyyah, (King Saud University Library, 214/H.KH), Page 22

¹³⁹ Avicenna, Kitab an-Najat, (Cairo 1913) Page 367

the key turns with it.¹⁴⁰ Once again he does not mean this by the physical sense but he is trying to show that they are not related in time but despite this they both exist and one relies on the other. It is regarding this issue that latter theologians used to state that Avicenna is a disbeliever as they claim that he states the universe is uncreated. Avicenna as we have seen has stated in many occasions that the universe is created therefore claims made against Avicenna regarding this point have no basis. Avicenna famously rebuking al-Biruni for insinuating that Aristotle did not believe in a creator in his model of pre-eternity of the universe. *“Your claim that when Aristotle said «the universe has no beginning» he did not mean that it does not have a Maker has no validity, because surely if actions have no beginning it is impossible to imagine that the universe has a creator.”*¹⁴¹ According to al-Biruni the opinion of Aristotle will mean that the Universe has no creator, if you say that it has no beginning. In order for anything to have a maker, it has to have a starting point, for if it never started then there cannot be a maker of it, because the maker should exist first. Therefore saying ‘Has no beginning’ is the same as to say ‘Has no creator’. Despite this claim of al-Biruni, as we have explained, Avicenna does believe in a creator but instead negates time being applied to God and he is adamant that Aristotle also believes in a creator.

The best summary of the position of Avicenna can be read in his own writings where he explains that God is unique, and his existence is necessary due to himself and the necessary existence is due to his attributes and his pre-eternity.¹⁴² The Universe is his creation and relies on him to bring it into existence.¹⁴³ It is not possible that there is a new Will or desire that occurs for God when he decides to create, without there being some reason to cause this change in his Will or desire. It cannot occur spontaneous or naturally.¹⁴⁴ It is also not possible for God to create the universe at a specific point in time. As this would mean that there was a period of time ‘before’ God created the universe, and then ‘later’ he decided to create the universe.¹⁴⁵ The relationship between God and the universe is one of

¹⁴⁰ Avicenna Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat, (Dar al-Ma’arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 87

¹⁴¹ Ibid, Volume 3, Page 87

¹⁴² Ibid, Volume 3, Page 67-86

¹⁴³ Ibid, Volume 3, Page 67-86

¹⁴⁴ Avicenna, Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat, (Dar al-Ma’arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 67-86

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, Volume 3, Page 67-86

God being superior to his creation which in this case is the universe. God is the cause of the universe and the reason for the possible thing (the world) comes into existence, after previously not existing. This clearly demonstrates the concept of the universe being in need of God. Time is merely the measurement of the movement of matter, as such time was created with matter, as they are linked by virtue of one being the measurement of the other. Therefore, they are both pre-eternally linked, whenever there was time there was matter. The link of God and the universe is not due to time but essence.¹⁴⁶

When one reads the story of Avicenna and more so thinks about his legacy, it is one of the greatest tragedies to have occurred in history and more so in the Muslim World. He was a pioneer in a wide range of academic fields. In medicine he was at the forefront in his time, being the first person to operate on the appendix, a treatment which in modern times has become very common. He was at the forefront of theology and philosophy and developed ideas that are still used in current times. For example, his books in logic are still taught in modern universities. But it was the resistance of his opponents who were in positions of power in terms of authority, money and religious influence that caused him to be exiled. This judgement of heresy and disbelief from al-Ghazali caused him to be abandoned in the Muslim world and stopped the progress that he had made in the field of science and philosophy. Had Avicenna not been ostracised the advancements made in the twenty first century would have happened centuries earlier. As it was the Western world who were the true inheritors of Avicenna, and developed his thoughts and ideas, but they began from a less advanced position than the Muslim World. The issue of the pre-eternity of the Universe presents one of the greatest ironies in the history of Islam. Al-Maturidi and al-Ashari are considered the fathers of Sunni Islam because their groups oppose the anthropomorphists (modern day Salafists), in that they reject the idea of applying human attributes to God, such as God having a body and limbs, God being within the universe etc. The position of Avicenna was to apply this methodology consistently and perfectly. He rejected the fact that one could apply time to God or that God can have a change of Will or desire.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, Volume 3, Page 67-86
Avicenna, Kitab an-Najat, (Cairo 1913) Page 367

He did this as he saw time as a creation and a creation cannot be applied on God. He therefore was ensuring that he did not anthropomorphise God, something which makes sense based on his own methodology. The methodology of Avicenna was not the only factor but also the fact that his direct opponents at the time were the Hanablite rulers, who themselves held anthropomorphist views. Despite him not anthropomorphising God, he was considered a heretic and a disbeliever due to al-Ghazali, whereas al-Mauidi whose school became famous for holding similar views remained accepted as the pillar of Sunni Islam.

Al-Biruni and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

Al-Biruni was a scholar and a scientist born in Khawarazm¹⁴⁷ in the tenth century.¹⁴⁸ Al-Biruni worked for the leader Mahmud of Ghazna as a court appointed astronomer, astrologer and scholar. Later he would continue working under the sponsorship of his son Masud. Al-Biruni is well known for being vehemently against Avicenna and his position of pre-eternity of matter.¹⁴⁹ What makes their dispute all the more logical is that al-Biruni was working for those who were in power, whereas Avicenna was in fact despised by those in power. His debate with Avicenna via an exchange of letters is famous where they had a dialogue about eighteen issues. It is possible that this debate from the point of view of al-Biruni was at the request or a method to show his support of those in power. In the debate, one of the topics they contested was regarding the pre-eternity of matter.

Al-Biruni was a vehement supporter of the position that the universe was created out of nothing (*Creatio ex Nihilo*) and was a strong advocate against the position of the universe being eternal. He is strong in opposition against those who believe in an eternal universe to the extent that he does not

¹⁴⁷ Shawqi, J, Biography of Abu Raihan Biruni, (Cairo University 1978), Page 3
Islamic Encyclopaedia (Markaz al-Shariqah lil-Ibda' al-Fikriy) Page 2039

¹⁴⁸ Translated by Dr Sachau E.C, Chronology of Ancient Nations, (London. W.H.Allen, 1879), Page 7

¹⁴⁹ Nasr, Syed Hossein, An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines, (State University of New York Press, New York 1993), Page 108

hold back in his attack against them, for example he states that *‘Other people, besides, hold this foolish persuasion, that time has no terminus quo at all.’*¹⁵⁰ This strong attack of his opponent can be seen in his letter to Avicenna where he argues that when Aristotle could not defend the position and he was following his own desire rather than searching for the truth. For example, he states that *“Nothing caused the emergence of this objection except what has been accepted as a necessity of the limit of the motions and times from their initial beginnings. Aristotle himself admitted this fact when he was explaining impossibility of the existence of infinity. When he evaded elaboration on this topic, he merely followed his caprice.”*¹⁵¹ Al-Biruni is arguing that Aristotle is inconsistent in his point about time and motion. He argues that Aristotle initially accepts that time and movement are limited at the start point but then later contradicts himself by claiming that the universe does not have a start as it is pre-eternal. Time is the measurement of the movement of matter, and matter is the building block of the universe. The universe is the composite of these parts which come together to create time. If time and matter are limited at their start point, then matter must also be limited at its start. If matter has an origin then the universe also has a start point. In terms of his criticism of the contradiction contained within the argument of Aristotle, then on the surface of it Al-Biruni does make a strong argument. But what Aristotle is arguing is that time and motion are limited in the sense that they are created entities which move from one point to another or from movement to non-movement. So God created the universe and this was not in time but instead by essence. The universe and time are therefore eternal.

Al-Biruni began the argument by dealing with the issue of the universe having no beginning but yet still having a creator. *“Your claim that when Aristotle said «the universe has no beginning» he did not mean that it does not have a Maker has no validity, because surely if actions have no beginning it is impossible to imagine that the universe has a creator.”*¹⁵² Al-Biruni’s focus in the letter exchange between himself and Avicenna regarding pre-eternity of matter was the position of Aristotle regarding

¹⁵⁰ Translated by Dr Sachau E.C, Chronology of Ancient Nations, (London. W.H.Allen 1879), Page 116

¹⁵¹ Berjak R, The Medieval Arabic Era: Ibn Sina-Al-Biruni Correspondence, Trans by Rafik Berjak, (2005), Page 24

¹⁵² Berjak R, The Medieval Arabic Era: Ibn Sina-Al-Biruni Correspondence, Trans by Rafik Berjak, (2005), Page 24

this issue. *“And if Aristotle's belief were that the world has a beginning in the terms of the initiator but not in time, what [business] does he have in mentioning the sect and their testimonies about the changes of attributes not necessitating changes in essence!”*¹⁵³ As explained throughout this thesis, there were a variety of proofs presented by Aristotle regarding the pre-eternity of matter. One of these was that it would mean that there has been a change in the Creator. Al-Biruni used this position of Aristotle to attempt to prove that Aristotle believed that the universe has no creator. Al-Biruni uses the argument of Aristotle that the Universe coming into existence after not being is a change and is using this to disprove the ‘sects’ that hold an alternative opinion which according Al-Biruni would mean that Aristotle did not actually believe in a creator as claimed by Avicenna. If there was a change in the creator of universe then it would mean that there has been a change in the effect. Therefore, despite the plea of Avicenna that Aristotle does believe in a creator, in reality he does not. Al-Biruni also argued that that an aspect of time that must be considered is its qualitative nature, something he learnt due to his travels to India and his research into Hindu ideologies. This was the idea that if something existed at one time, which was accurately recorded, it may have existed in another time and may have a greater influence on the cosmic environment of that specific period, in which events unfold according to the universal laws of the universe which operate at each point in time.¹⁵⁴

Al-Biruni was a scholar who was headstrong in his belief that the universe was created out of nothing. He was proud of the fact that he believed that he was following the textual evidence of the religion without being influenced by Greek philosophers such as Aristotle.¹⁵⁵ He was alive during the time of the Avicenna, but his debate with Avicenna on this issue did not have the depth or length to cover the intricacies of the issue. One may argue that this could be due to the fact that Avicenna delegated the responsibility of continuing the debate with al-Biruni to his students. If the debate had been more fruitful it may have given people are better understanding of the position of Avicenna regarding the

¹⁵³ Berjak R, *The Medieval Arabic Era: Ibn Sina-Al-Biruni Correspondence*, Trans by Rafik Berjak, (2005) Page 24-25

¹⁵⁴ Nasr, Syed Hossein, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, (State University of New York Press, New York 1993)

¹⁵⁵ Nasr, Syed Hossein, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, (State University of New York Press, New York 1993), Page 117

pre-eternity of the world. Although on the other hand, a misstep, or a perceived unacceptable position could have also resulted in his execution by those in power.

Al-Ghazali and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

Al-Ghazali was highly critical of Muslim philosophers to the point that he insinuated that they were disbelievers, as he explained they left their religion to follow the philosophers. He was aware that the philosophers held a variety of ideas and positions, but the focus of his refutation was Aristotle because according to him he was the most famous and successful in his refutation of the other philosophers. The main objective of his famous book ‘The Incoherence of the Philosophers’ is to disprove the positions of his opponents as opposed to the book being used for a higher purpose such as being a proof for the existence of God. As such, the first chapter jumps right into the topic of the pre-eternity of the universe. In the book he refutes twenty issues that are supported by the philosophers, three of these issues held more significance than the rest because these issues according to al-Ghazali were positions held by the philosophers which included Avicenna, that were tantamount to disbelief. These issues were (I) The issue of the pre-eternity of the universe, where they hold that all substances are eternal, (II) The belief that God’s knowledge does not include knowledge of particulars (individual objects), (III) The rejection of the resurrection of the physical body. Al-Ghazali argued that all three of these theories are in direct opposition to the teachings of Islam.¹⁵⁶ Al-Ghazali was very headstrong about this issue, stating that anyone who believes in these issues has gone to the extent of accusing the prophets of falsehood and that their teachings are hypocritical misrepresentations of

¹⁵⁶ Ghazali, M, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, (Dar al-Ma’arif, Cairo, Egypt 1966), Page 249

Islam whose sole purpose is to appeal to the crowds. This according to al-Ghazali is blasphemy and there are no Muslim groups that would agree to this proposition.¹⁵⁷

Imam Ghazali was very critical of the philosophy of Avicenna and what he believed to be clear links to Aristotelian philosophy. He argued that it is related from Plato that the universe was created within time, but then the philosophers inferred his position as being metaphorical, refusing to accept his clear and unambiguous statement that the universe is temporal.¹⁵⁸ The irony of the attack of al-Ghazali on the philosophers is that many of the arguments used by al-Ghazali are in fact from philosophers. Most of the arguments of al-Ghazali are based on Ashari theology¹⁵⁹, and Asharis took from the Stoics the idea of irrationality in theological concepts and their philosophical speculations, which is mixed with theories of Scepticism. Al-Ghazali took many of his positions from the Stoics¹⁶⁰, as well as other philosophers¹⁶¹ such as the idea of the impossibility of infinite succession of temporality limited worlds.¹⁶² The Asharis and Stoics hold the middle way between the traditionalists who reject all types of reasoning and those who use reasoning without the need for religious scripture.

He began by explaining that he believed that the Universe came into existence out of nothing due to the eternal Will of God, who decided that it came into existence at a specific time¹⁶³, and that it was God who decided that Universe was initially in a state of non-existence and that it remained in this state of not existing until he decided that it would no longer be the case and that the universe would be created.¹⁶⁴ Al-Ghazali is attempting to prove that the universe is temporal and that it came into existence after previously not existing. Al-Ghazali was insisting that in his model there was no change in God and nor was there a missing condition in God that initially was not present but later came into existence. Instead he argued that God always has the ability to create and nor was it that the Will of

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, Page 249

¹⁵⁸ Ghazali, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, Trans Marmura M, (Brigham University Press, 2000), Page 9

¹⁵⁹ Bakillani, *At-Tamhid* Edited by R. J. McCarthy, (Beirut 1957), Page 39

¹⁶⁰ Goodman L.E, *Avicenna*, (Cornell University Press, London, 2006), Page 49 and 57

¹⁶¹ Ibid, Page 49 and 52

¹⁶² Averroes, *Kitab al-Kashf an Manahij al-Adillah*, (Cairo, 1901), Page 35

¹⁶³ Ghazali, M, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt 1966), Page 239

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, Page 16

God did come to be after not existing and nor was there a missing condition that later came to be so that something can be created. Al-Ghazali argues that the will of God to create is pre-eternal and therefore has always existed but it was God who chose to use this pre-eternal Will to create the universe at the point it was created¹⁶⁵, and it was not created before this because he had not willed for it to be created prior to this point.¹⁶⁶ The example many theologians give on this issue is that of musician, can someone be called a musician before he has played a piece of music? They argue that even though he never played an instrument, the musician always possessed the ability to play the instrument and he merely decided to make it a reality when he chose to play the instrument. There are clear deficiencies in this argument of al-Ghazali, the main one being, which Avicenna has explained, that he is applying time to God. The main problem that he is attempting to counter by mentioning this point is the problem with this idea linking with some form of 'change in God'. Avicenna has already explained that if we were to say that the universe is not eternal, then this will result in one of following impossible conditions, which is that either the will of creating occurred to God after not being, or it was the case that God always possessed this will but due to other factors was unable to create as witnessed by the fact that God did not create or he was missing a condition that allowed him to create which he later was possessed so that he was able to bring the universe into existence.¹⁶⁷ In terms of the Will being delayed from the action, al-Ghazali argues that the universe came into existence at a time appointed by God and that God may have placed certain conditions in the laws of the universe such that when these conditions came into place the will was enacted and the universe came into existence.

Another argument of al-Ghazali is the classical first cause argument. He argued that it is not logical to reject the idea that something like the created universe which is temporal can come from something eternal such as God. Examples of this can be seen in the created world, where certain temporal things

¹⁶⁵ Ghazali, M, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt 1966), Page 239

¹⁶⁶ Ghazali, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, Trans Marmura M, (Brigham University Press, 2000), Page 15

¹⁶⁷ Ghazali, M, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt 1966), Page 32

Avicenna, *Al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat*, Dar al-Ma'arif, (Cairo, Egypt, 1985), Volume 3, Page 90-95

are the cause of other temporal things. It is impossible to believe that one temporal thing is the cause of another temporal and that is the cause of another temporal thing and this would continue ad infinitum.¹⁶⁸ This is not logical and as such is not possible, what this means is that in order to break this link of causes ad infinitum one would need to introduce an eternal creator who is the first cause of the universe.¹⁶⁹ Al-Ghazali is attempting to show that there is no problem with attributing an accidental effect to an eternal cause, which is God. Take for example one accidental (such as the colour white) which is caused by another accidental (such as the colour red fading out of existence). There are only two options; either the affected accidental, which is the colour white, is dependent on the previous accidental the colour red and that accidental is depending on another and this continues ad infinitum, or the alternative option is that the first of these accidentals relies on an eternal cause which does not rely on something else to exist. He continues that if this means that it is not possible for the first accidental to have a beginning then it means that this first accidental relies on something that is eternal. This means that according to al-Ghazali there is no problem with believing that something temporal can come from something eternal. There are a couple of problems with this argument of al-Ghazali. Firstly, he is bringing God down to the level of creation because for him in the first cause argument he needs there to be the first cause that pushes the second effect to come into existence. The second problem is that he argues that all of the temporal accidents do not have a beginning as one is the cause of other and that is cause of another and this continues ad infinitum and because none of these have a beginning the chain of causation needs to have a first cause who is God, but in the model of al-Ghazali God also doesn't have a beginning and he is still the first cause¹⁷⁰ and he hasn't given a clear enough explanation as to why the result of there being no beginning for accidentals would mean that there has to be a creator. A creator who according to al-Ghazali also doesn't have a beginning.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ For other argument for infinite regress see Juwayni's *Irshad fi Usul al-Itikad*

¹⁶⁹ Ghazali, M, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt 1966), Page 32

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, Page 323

¹⁷¹ For other argument for infinite regress see Juwayni's *Irshad fi Usul al-Itikad*

Al-Ghazali questions whether the philosophers position regarding the impossibility of an eternal Will related to a temporal creation is based on the necessity of reason or based on theoretical reflection. He argues that if their position is based on the method of theoretical reflection then the philosophers have failed to demonstrate the strength of their position. On the other hand, if their position is based on the argument of necessity of reason, then he argued that why is it that a large proportion of people who oppose the position of an eternal universe do not subscribe to it.¹⁷²

Al-Ghazali also responds to the argument of the philosophers that if God did create the universe in time, why did he choose this time as opposed to a different time? Because no one time would be better than another, as in all situations God would create the best possible universe. And as such if there is there is no difference between any time, then that negates choice. Al-Ghazali argues that this is like when it comes to a choice, and one chooses between two similar options and of those options one chooses the best option.¹⁷³ Al-Ghazali continues that God could have easily have created the universe differently and it would have operated effectively in a different manner, for example the planets rotating in the opposite direction. Obviously, Averroes disagreed with this position and stated that the universe as we see it has been created in the best possible way. He also argues that in this scenario it's no choice between two similar choices, but instead it's a choice between something either coming into or existence or not existing and that God knew from eternity that our universe was the best incarnation and such it was created eternally as it was better that it was in existence as opposed to not being in existence.¹⁷⁴

Al-Ghazali does not really deal with the most pertinent point in a detailed manner, which is the application of time on God. He merely presents the argument of Avicenna and states that God being before¹⁷⁵ the world does not mean that one is applying time to God.¹⁷⁶ The problem with this statement of al-Ghazali as we mentioned earlier is that he is applying the word 'before' to God. 'Before' being

¹⁷² Ghazali, M, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt 1966), Page 32

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, Page 38

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, Page 39

¹⁷⁵ Ghazali, M, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt 1966), Page 20

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, Page 35

a moment in time that precedes the current moment in time. Therefore al-Ghazali is applying time to God which is the reason for Avicenna, Averroes and many other Muslim philosophers rejecting this notion and arguing for the position of the eternal universe. When one reads the works of al-Ghazali, you see that he devotes a large proportion of his writing to disprove the position of those that he opposes, but he doesn't take enough time in his writing to explain his own position or arguments. As such, he never fleshes out the proofs and argument for his own position. This is because his writing style in 'Incoherence of the Philosophers' is to display the arguments of his opponents at length and then for him to respond to those arguments, which at times can be quite brief and even when they are not brief, this still does not respond to the argument of his opponents in an effective manner.

Ibn Tufayl and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Muhammad Ibn Tufayl is a famous Muslim scholar from the twelfth century who born in a small town in Spain. He was a philosopher as well as a Sufi mystic. His main works is 'Hayy ibn Yaqzan' (The Living Son of the Vigilant). The title of his book is taken from the famous treatise of Avicenna. Both of them use the story to express their ideas through an allegory.¹⁷⁷ The story of Ibn Tufayl has some similarities to the famous 'Jungle Book', as it is about a young child who is the only human on the island and is brought up by a deer. He used the book to explain the role of a human and the development of the rational process in one's life. In the first stage of his life, which consists of seven years, he is cared for by the deer until she died. In these seven years he had learnt to imitate other animals, by copying their speech and the fact that he should cover his private

¹⁷⁷ Ibn Tufayl, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, Trans Goodman L. E, (The University Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009)

parts - which he noticed the animals had covered by their hair. In his attempt to understand the reason for the death of the deer, he dissected her, whereby he achieved a better understanding of the anatomy of an animal and of what is the source of life. The next two stages of his life, which are fourteen years, Hayy learns by learning, exploring and gaining knowledge about the things around him, such as anatomy, movement and numbers etc. It was during this period of learning and exploration that he comes to the belief that there must be a creator of the universe. The final stage of his life was his desire for spiritual fulfilment. He did this by imitating heavenly bodies and then later understanding that using a mechanism which in this case was physical movement, does not bring him closer to God. Ibn Tufayl neither disagreed with nor supported the position of the pre-eternity of the universe. He was neutral on the matter although he did analyse the issue through the thoughts of his titular character Hayy ibn Yaqzan.¹⁷⁸

Ibn Tufayl was a great supporter and advocate of Avicenna this can not only be seen by the fact that he names his work 'Hayy ibn Yaqzan' after the work of the same name written by Avicenna, but also the fact that he doesn't criticise Avicenna in his book despite criticising scholars such as al-Farabi for having inconsistent views. He also explains that he will explain the statements and positions of Avicenna in the rest of his book. In his book he covers the issue of the pre-eternity of the universe through the analysis and deep thought of his titular character Hayy ibn Yaqzan. Hayy is in deep thought where he debates with himself whether the creation of the universe existed within time after not previously not existing and its existence was *Creatio Ex Nihilo* or whether the world is pre-eternal without anything coming before it. He explained that he felt that both of these ideas were equally strong and it gave him many doubts about which idea was stronger. The reason for this was that when he thought about the position of the pre-eternity of the universe, he felt that there were a number of flaws with the idea, such as he felt that the position of an eternal existence conflicts with the idea of infinite extension. Therefore, if this is the case, then as such this eternal being would not be free from

¹⁷⁸ Ibn Tufayl, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, Trans Goodman L. E, (The University Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009), Page 93-166

new accidents that are created, which they themselves should be newly created, because they cannot come before the accidents preceding them. What this means is that if something cannot exist before the accidents that are created within time must also be created within time. Whereas, alternatively for those who disagree with the pre-eternity of the universe, if he considers that it was a newly created, then the problem with this idea is that it is impossible for it to be newly created, unless one assumes that time came before it, whereas time is an entity that is linked to the universe and it cannot be detached from it, as time is the measurement of the movement of the universe. Therefore, the universe cannot have been created after time. He then argues that when something is created it needs to have someone who created it. And if this is the case then why did the creator decide to generate the universe at that time as opposed to before or after it was created? Was it because of chance? Or was it because of something new that had happened to this creator that caused this creation? But this is not possible as there is nothing that existed with God other than himself. So if this is the case then it would mean that there would be a material change in the nature of God which caused him to create the universe and there has to be a reason for that change.¹⁷⁹

He felt that both of these opinions were alike in the sense that both had strengths and weaknesses. If the universe had been created in time and had come into existence after coming from nothing, it would then mean that it did not come into existence by itself, without the help of something eternal that created it and that this creator must be such that we cannot comprehend him by our created senses, because if he could fall within the parameters of our senses then he must have a body, and if he is body then he must be an element of the universe and therefore based on this he would be a created being as opposed to be the creator. It is the same as one who is in need of another to create him, and if this creator was a body then he would depend on another who would then also depend on another and it would be continue like this ad infinitum, which is not possible. Therefore, the creation of the universe is in need of a creator who is not a body, and if this creator is not a body then it

¹⁷⁹ Ibn Tufayl, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, Trans Goodman L. E, (The University Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009), Page 93-166

impossible for us perceive him through our senses, because the senses can only comprehend material bodies or accidents that are linked to these bodies. If the creator of the universe cannot be comprehended by our senses, then it is impossible for him to be perceived by our imagination, because the imagination uses the forms of thing in their absence, which is used to comprehend information before it is funnelled through to our senses. If the creator is not a body, then one cannot attribute to him any properties of a body, nor can one attribute to him any elements that are linked to bodies, as he is free from any of them. If God is the creator of the universe, then he holds dominion over it as well as possessing all there is to know about it.¹⁸⁰

Now when it comes to the position of supporting the pre-eternity of the universe, that the universe is eternal and always existed without there being something before it, then it would mean that movement is also eternal, as there cannot be any rest before it from the point that it will begin its movement. All types of movement require someone to cause it to move, and this mover must be a force through some body, and that body should be through a body of a being which has an ability to move by itself, or moves through some other body, or it is through a force that doesn't go through a body. Every force which moves through a body increases or decreases if the body itself increases or decreases. Ibn Tufayl gives the example of the weight in a stone, which moves downwards, if you split the stone into two parts then the weight is also divided by two and similarly if you were to add to double it then the weight would be doubled. And if one were to add stones ad infinitum, then the weight would also increase ad infinitum. Similarly, if the stone would increase by a certain size then the weight increases by the same amount. But we are aware that all bodies cannot be infinite and instead must be finite and as such the force which is in the body must also be finite. Therefore, if there is an external agent that can produce an effect that is infinite that external agent cannot be a body. We can see that that heaven moves through continuous movement, without ever stopping, as we know that the heaven is eternal. We know that the force that causes the movement of the heavens is not within its own body,

¹⁸⁰ Ibn Tufayl, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, Trans Goodman L. E, (The University Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009), Page 93-166

nor is it in any exterior body, but it continuous from something which is separate to the body and it cannot be demonstrated by a physical body or physical assets. As Ibn Tufayl explained through his character Hayy ibn Yaqzan, he previously understood that the true reality of the body comprised of its form, whose nature is linked to various types of movements, but the reality which comprises its matter is limited and can be conceived. As such, the normal way of the universe is that it is linked to motion, by the person who causes the movement, who is not affected by matter or the attributes of a body, which is not linked to anything that we can understand through our senses or our imagination can comprehend. Therefore, if the creator of the universe is the proficient cause of the movement of the heavens, which he produces by his action and will, where there is no deficiency, no removal and or no termination, then there is no doubt that he has power over the universe as well as having knowledge of it. After contemplating all of these arguments, both supporting and rejecting both arguments, he came to the understanding that there is no harm in believing in either the pre-eternity of the Universe and or in Creatio ex Nihilo, as it was clear to him that despite the differences in both opinions, the most important aspect of both positions is that they both required a belief in a creator of the universe, namely God.¹⁸¹

Averroes and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

Averroes is a scholar from the twelfth century who wrote his book ‘Incoherence of the Incoherence’ as a refutation of the work of al-Ghazali. Averroes was a big supporter of Avicenna and his works and he maintained that many of the arguments of Ghazali were merely ‘statements of sophistry’.¹⁸² He

¹⁸¹ Ibn Tufayl, Hayy Ibn Yaqzan, Trans Goodman L. E, (The University Chicago Press, Chicago, 2009), Page 93-166

¹⁸² Averroes, Tahafut al-Tahafut, (Dar al-Ma’arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1964), Volume 1, Page 64
Averroes, Tahafut al-Tahafut, Trans Van Der Bergh, (Oxbow Books, Oxford, 195), Page 3

argued that al-Ghazali failed to deal with the arguments presented by Avicenna and instead went on a tangent. Averroes argues that the position of Ghazali - that there was a time before the creation of the universe where God did not create and then later God decided to create and that this does not mean that one is applying time to God as he always had the ability to create - was an extremely weak argument. He argued that even if one were to accept the notion that creation occurs after a period of time after the Will, it is not possible that there would be a delay in God willing and then the creation coming into effect.¹⁸³ This would mean that there was some type of deficiency in God because he want to create something and he wills it to happen but this will only come into effect after a certain period of time. This delay in creating after something being willed is not possible for the perfect attribute of willing for God.

Al-Ghazali argued that despite the contention of the philosophers that the temporal cannot absolutely come from that which is eternal. Because if we imagine that the temporal universe did not come from an eternal God, then the reason that the temporal universe did not come into existence was due to the fact nothing gave it push so that it would exist and instead it would remain in the state of having the possibility of existing without really existing.¹⁸⁴ Now, if after this state of having the possibility of existing but not existing, the universe then came into existence, it means that something pushed it into existence and this pushing into existence would have either occurred a 'new' or it was did come into existence a 'new'.¹⁸⁵ That means that if it didn't occur a 'new', the universe will remain as an absolute possibility as it was before. Now if this push into existence occurred, then we have to speak about what brought it into existence, and why was it brought into existence now as opposed to before or later. If this is the case, then there are only two options the first is that that these accidents go back infinitely as we explained earlier in the thesis or it was a pre-eternal creator who caused it or pushed

¹⁸³ Averroes, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1964), Volume 1, Page 64
Urvoy D, *Ibn Rushd, Essay can be found in History of Islamic Philosophy Edited by Nasr S.H, (Routledge, London, 2001), Page 339*

¹⁸⁴ Juwayni, *Irshad fi Usul al-Itikad* (1938), Page 16

¹⁸⁵ Juwayni, *Irshad fi Usul al-Itikad* (1938) Page 16

it into existence.¹⁸⁶ Averroes wasn't too impressed with this position of al-Ghazali; he felt that al-Ghazali was being unnecessarily argumentative without presenting an argument that is logical and can provide certainty.¹⁸⁷ It seems like Averroes is being unfair to the statement of al-Ghazali because although al-Ghazali has left pertinent questions unanswered such as applying time to God and the act coming after a period after the will, there isn't a flaw in the position of possibility, which he has presented. Averroes begins by explaining that using the word *mumkin* (possible) is not completely accurate in this context, because the term *mumkin* (possible) things refers to things that have a greater chance of occurring, such as for example a seventy percent chance, or it could be used for a possible thing which has a smaller chance of occurring such as thirty percent chance and it could likewise refer to something which has a fifty-fifty percent chance of occurring. The problem is that in this situation something having the possibility of existing would only be a fifty percent chance of occurring and not occurring before something gives it a 'push' to bring it into existence.¹⁸⁸ Averroes also argued that when something has a possibility of existing, which in reality is a form of measuring possibility, it is not necessary that it has to be 'pushed' into existence by someone who is external to it, but instead it can give itself a 'push' from being a possibility of existing to coming into existence. Averroes argues that this would then also mean that this form of possibility would not only just be applicable on the one who is receiving the act (in this case the created universe) but it would also apply to the one who 'causes' it to come into existence, because it is possible that he brings it into existence but it is equally possible that he may not bring it into existence.¹⁸⁹ What is obvious is that the need for it to be brought into existence does not automatically give it a 'priority' to bring it into existence. The reason for this is that it is understood that the possibility of the object coming into existence, which receives the act is in need from the one who 'pushes' it into existence. This can be seen by the practical examples we see around us, although natural events might leave some ambiguity. This is because for most of the natural things which initiate a form of change, in the first instance the change actually happens to itself

¹⁸⁶ Averroes, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1964), Volume 1, Page 55

¹⁸⁷ Averroes, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, Trans Van Der Bergh, (Oxbow Books, Oxford, 195), Page 9

¹⁸⁸ Juwayni, *Irshad fi Usul al-Itikad* (1938) Page 16

¹⁸⁹ Averroes, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1964), Volume 1, Page 64

and as such most people think that the thing that is moving or in our case the thing that is being ‘pushed’ is actually being pushed by itself. As such the reason for the movement is the result of that actual movement. It is not known by common sense that the movement of each single thing has been caused by something external that caused it to move. Thus, it is not known whether there is something innate inside the object which causes itself to move and that is why some of the earlier philosophers did some research on this topic. This is also the case for the alternative, where there are many philosophers who believe that it is not necessary for something which is external to it to bring it into existence.¹⁹⁰ The problem is that some people such as al-Ghazali think that there is no change in the condition nor anything that causes or makes the being who ‘pushes’ the universe to come into existence to change it from a state of being inactive (where he didn’t push the universe to come into existence) to a state of activity (where he pushed the universe to come into existence).¹⁹¹ A similar example to this would be a teacher who goes from being someone who isn’t teaching to go into teaching. It needs something eternal to cause it to change its state from being a non-teacher into a teacher. All types of change are in need of the thing that causes them to change. The thing that has caused the other objects to change is happening due to a change in either the substance, or either in its state, or its quantity or on its locality or any of the other basic foundational states. According to many philosophers, we can use the concept of pre-eternity for something which is innately pre-eternal or it pre-eternal due to something else. Some have also argued that it is possible for there to be a occurrence of change on a pre-eternal entity. For example, according to the theological group the Karamites, something that is pre-eternal can have a non-eternal will. Such as according to some of the Greek philosophers the possibility of the destruction of the prime matter (*Hayula*) even though according to them it is pre-eternal and something that is the product of the creator who is pre-eternal. It is also the case according to them that the one who ‘pushes’ something to come into existence can do at times do it by themselves or it can at times occur due to nature. Then in terms of how it is possible that the act occurs from the one who ‘pushes’ it into existence to the both of them are not

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, Volume 1, Page 78

¹⁹¹ Juwayni, *Irshad fi Usul al-Itikad* (1938) Page 16

exactly the same thing in terms of them being in need of the reason that ‘pushes’ them into existence. The question then arises whether both of these categories that are ‘pushed’ by the creator are limited in any capacity or whether there is any explicit analogy which makes the creator different to the creator that causes by his own nature and then who causes without his own will. Both of these issues are much larger and must be clarified and explained separately according to the earlier philosophers. Picking and dealing with one of the issues as opposed to all of the relevant issues related to this matter is one of the seven sophistic arguments of the sophistic philosophers. This error in dealing with one of the fundamentals will result in there being a large number of errors in terms of testing issues related to the existing things.¹⁹²

Imam al-Ghazali argued regarding the position of Avicenna that there are two main problems with his position. The first is that there is no logical reason for rejecting the statement of the people who state that the universe came into existence by the pre-eternal will of God which pre-eternally necessitated the existence of the universe in the specific time that it came into the existence. Then the universe remained in the state of non-necessity up until the time that someone external, such as the pre-eternal creator, specifies that it comes into existence and as such its existence began at the point that it was specified that it would come into existence. As such, how is it not possible that it was ready to come into existence before the specified time, but it never did as no one willed for it to come into existence and as such it never became a reality then its existence came under the pre-eternal will of God and as such it became a reality?¹⁹³ Averroes was not impressed with the position relayed by al-Ghazali, he argued that it lacked detail and was not well thought out. He argued that the reason for the statement was that he was unable to argue against the fact that the effect of the act cannot be delayed, but instead he claimed that the effect of the will can be delayed, which means that it is possible for there to be a delay in an act that comes from the will. But as for the act of the one who performs the action, it cannot be delayed, so when one performs the act it should happen

¹⁹² Averroes, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, (Dar al-Ma’arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1964), Volume 1, Page 55

¹⁹³ Averroes, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, (Dar al-Ma’arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1964), Volume 1, Page 64

immediately. Another problem with this position is that as well as the issue of the act being delayed from the will, the act cannot be delayed for the one who has the free will to choose that he performs an act. Which means that there is a further flaw in the argument of al-Ghazali and as such he has to make one of two arguments. The first is that the act of the one who performs an action doesn't cause a change within him, which means that it would be necessary that the change has come from something external or that some of these changes occur due to a thing that is changeable itself without there being any need of an external effect that causes it to change. Therefore, there are some changes that can happen to something that is pre-eternal without anything external causing it to change and this is the reason as to why al-Ghazali should be using one of these two arguments as his opponents are focused on the latter argument. The first problem with this position is that when one performs an act it necessitates a change within him and anything that changes requires something external to have caused it to have changed. The second problem is that something which is pre-eternal cannot be affected by change and something al-Ghazali has had great difficulty in trying to explain. The Ashari scholars have left themselves in quite a bind on this issue unless they accept that the status of the one who causes the effect of creating the universe is not the same and nor is it in the same condition as it was before or whilst it was creating it. It will most definitely necessitate that there is some form of renewing or some form of connection that did not previously exist either in the one who caused the creation the universe or the thing that has been affected or both of them. If that is the case, then it is called renewing. If we accept that any type of new state needs something to have caused it to be brought into that state, then we have to accept that the one who caused this new state is a different causer, this would then mean that the first causer would not actually be the first and as such it will not be self-containing in terms of its act but instead it will need something else to have caused the change, unless the reason for being in that state is that there is some type of condition in the act of the one who causes the change himself. What this means is that the act that is coming from him will not be coming from him sequentially one after the other, but instead it will be due to a condition in the subject in which it is affecting change and as such as you can see his position is

unavoidable.¹⁹⁴ Unless one were to accept that some of the conditions that occur in the one who causes it do not need someone external from it to cause them, but to accept that is quite far-fetched unless there are a group of people who think that things can occur spontaneously without there being any reason for them to occur, which was the belief of the people who deny the existence of God and the weakness of this statement is quite clear. Also, the criticism of al-Ghazali is contradictory as he argues that the pre-eternal will and the will which is not pre-eternal can occur in a similar manner. The reason for this is that the will that is witnessed by us demonstrates some type of potentiality in the person, in terms of them doing one of two possible different things. It can also be used in the possibility of the subject being affected by it in an equal manner. Because the will is the desire of the one who causes the act towards the act and when the act is actually performed the desire to complete it disappears because the goal has been accomplished. This desire of performing the act and the act coming into reality is equally workable with the opposite things. When we claim that there is a person who wills one of the two opposite things, that will is pre-eternal, so that will transform the state from being possible into being necessary. But if they claim that the will is pre-eternal then it would mean that the will does not disappear even after achieving the goal, since this will does not have a beginning and so is not limited to one time.¹⁹⁵ In terms of achieving that goal, unless we believe that there is something which is causing the existence of the causer and this is not due to natural affects nor by his will and that is what is known as will. Averroes continued that there is some strong analogical link that proves that is some form of link between these two opposites, such as for example existence which is not in the universe and is not outside the universe.¹⁹⁶

Al-Ghazali says that according to the philosophers, the universe coming into existence after not being would mean that there has been a change in God and thus they instead believe in the eternity of the universe. But according to al-Ghazali the model followed by the philosophers still leaves them with the same problem, which is that there is some kind of change in God which is that the universe has

¹⁹⁴ Averroes, *Summary of Aristotle Physics*, Rasail ibn Rushd (Hyderabad 1947) 266b, Page 15

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 207a, Page 7-9

¹⁹⁶ Averroes, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1964), Volume 1, Page 64

been created in this specific way as opposed to being created in a different way. What he means by this is that the universe and everything that comes within the creation of the universe works within a specific manner, whether it is the direction of the wind, the movement of the planets, and the laws of nature. The fact that the universe has been created in this specific way is because of God making a choice to do so, and if he had chosen the alternative then everything would be different, but the fact that they are as we see them is because of God choosing it to be like this. He argues that if God choosing for the universe to be in a specific way does not mean that there has been a change in God then similarly God creating the universe out of nothing also does not entail that there has been a change in God.¹⁹⁷ Although al-Ghazali has made a strong point he doesn't really counter the point of Avicenna with his position, because Avicenna does not say that by God choosing the universe to be in this specific way as opposed to a different way is a decision in 'time' according to Avicenna, but instead in his position Gods' creation of the universe out of nothing and for that creation to be in a specific manner is not in time but instead by essence. If either are in time then according to Avicenna one is applying time to God and this would mean that one is diminishing God to the level of his creation. Therefore al-Ghazali is still left with the same dilemma which is that he has still not answered the two points which were posited by Avicenna, which is the idea of time applied to God in the temporal model followed by al-Ghazali and the fact that there is delay in the action between God willing for something to happen and then for this will to come into existence after a period of 'time'. Averroes attempts to refute the second argument of al-Ghazali pertaining to the possibility of the temporal being as a result of an eternal.¹⁹⁸ He argues that the position of Ghazali would only be valid if we consider God to be like creation, meaning that in the first cause argument he proposes he argues that each accidental that is caused had an accidental before it and that accidental had another accident preceding it and as such there must be a first cause.¹⁹⁹ Like a set of dominoes that fall one on top of another, each piece of domino that falls needs the previous domino to fall onto it and that domino

¹⁹⁷ Ghazali, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1966), Page 30-31

¹⁹⁸ Averroes, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1964), Volume 1, Page 124

¹⁹⁹ Averroes, *Summary of Aristotle Physics*, *Rasail ibn Rushd* (Hyderabad 1947), Page 58

needed a previous domino and this would continue until we get to the first domino which in the case of al-Ghazali would be God. The problem with this argument is that God is being relegated to the same time and space as his creation as the first domino in relation to the second domino is the same as the third domino in relation to the second the only difference is that the first domino preceding it. Therefore, in terms of time-space it is the same as the other temporal entities.

Averroes does not accept the argument of al-Ghazali that God being before the universe does not mean that there is time. He argues that based on the weakness of the argument al-Ghazali, it would mean that either one believes that God is before the universe in time, which would then mean that there is pre-eternal time which was not created by God, or one has to agree with the premise of Avicenna and Averroes that God is not related to the universe by time, which will mean that universe is eternal but created by God.²⁰⁰ Averroes does not deny that God has a will, but the will of God is not like that of a human. He rejects the possibility that God can do two exact opposite actions, such as it is a necessity that God always chooses the best, which would that mean that God will always do what is best, but this conflicts with the idea that God has a choice and he wills and therefore it would mean that the world is naturally caused meaning without a choice.

Razi and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

Fakhruddin Razi was a scholar from the twelfth century who was born in modern day Iran. One of the people he studied with was the pupil of Majd al-Din al-Jili, who himself was the student of al-Ghazali. Fakhruddin Razi was one of the founding fathers of modern Ash'ari theology. In current times a large proportion of Sunni Muslims follow Ashari theology. Contemporary Ashari theology,

²⁰⁰ Averroes, *Tahafut al-Tahafut*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1964), Volume 1, Page 135-137

is based on positions that are narrated by a handful of classical scholars, two of which are Fakhruddin Razi and al-Ghazali. The basis of the arguments of al-Ghazali are considered as the presentation and defence of the position of the Ashari School. Therefore the position of Fakhruddin Razi is very relevant to the current discussion to see if it was the case that the entirety of Muslim Scholars agreed with the abandonment of Avicenna.

According to Fakhruddin Razi, Imam Ghazali did not specifically target Avicenna but instead he was speaking about philosophers in general as he was comparing the position of Avicenna to the statement of Aristotle who said matter is pre-eternal or Plato who said that it is not pre-eternal. Fakhruddin Razi argues that al-Ghazali did not understand the point that was being made by Avicenna. He not only confirms that there is no theological problem with the position of Avicenna about the pre-eternity of the matter, but more than that he states that the disagreement is only verbal and not real.²⁰¹ Quite likely Razi is trying throw water onto the situation, which could mean that this was Razi's way of agreeing with Avicenna without having the weight of the enemies of Avicenna against him.

Tusi and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi is a scholar from the thirteenth from Persia. He was an ardent follower of the Avicennian tradition. He wrote *Sharh al-isharat* which is a commentary on Avicenna's book *Al-isharat wa al-Tanbihat* (Remarks and Admonitions). He wrote this as a defence of the position of Avicenna. He disagrees with the position of Fakhruddin Razi who argued that the disagreement between al-Ghazali and Avicenna was not a real disagreement and was merely a polemical disagreement without

²⁰¹ Razi F, *Sharh al-Isharat*, (Dar al-Ma'arif, Cairo, Egypt, 1961), Volume 2, Page 394-395

any real substance. He states that Fakhruddin Razi made this judgment ‘*without the agreement of the two opponents*’. Tusi explains that when theologians write their books they start their books by first presenting the proof of the universe coming into existence after not existing. They form this argument without mentioning the name of the agent (the creator), never mind the fact that they do not present whether it was this creator who brought this universe into existence and whether this creation occurred by his free choice or without it. They then normally precede to mention that if the universe came into existence after not being, then it needs someone to bring it from non-existence into existence. They then proceed to argue that the one who brings the universe into existence has to have his own choice or will since if he does not have his own will then the act would come into existence without his will, which means that it would occur naturally as opposed to a pre-emptive decision being made by a creator and this would then necessitate that the universe is also pre-eternal which is incorrect. Because of what they mentioned before and based on this they made their statement about the will and the established the will on the *hadith (Bringing something into existence out of nothing)*. Tusi further elaborates that in terms of rejecting the notion of cause and effect then this issue not agreed upon by the detractors of Avicenna. This lack of consensus amongst the detractors of Avicenna was explicitly confirmed by the Mutazalite scholars as well as according to Nasir al-Din al-Tusi ‘the virtuous person’ (he is referring to Fakhr al-Din al-Razi).²⁰²

Nasir al-Din al-Tusi further elaborated that the Ashari scholars believe in the philosophical position of the eight pre-eternals which they call the initial attributes. Within the Ashari scholars there is a disagreement regarding the specifics of this position. Some of them believe that the necessary existence by its own essence is the ninth pre-eternal whilst others believe that necessary existence by its own essence is the cause of the other eight pre-eternals. This entire issue is related to cause and effect. Regarding this issue even though the Asharis are avoiding admitting it explicitly in its essence it is unavoidable. From this what we understand is that the matter of cause and effect is not an agreed upon issue but what is agreed upon by them is the universe being created out of nothing. But as for the Philosophers, they do not deny that the pre-eternal can cause by his own will, but they say that a pre-eternal act is impossible except by

²⁰²Tusi N, *Sharh al-Isharat Wa Al-Tanbihat*, (Cairo, Egypt, Dar al-Marifa, 1996), Volume 3, Page 69

the pre-eternal cause who is perfect in this attribute of being the cause. Based on this, it is impossible for his act to also be pre-eternal. Because according to them the creation of the universe is a pre-eternal act, so they have attributed it to the pre-eternal cause whose attribute of causing is perfect.

In terms of the start point (the creator), he is pre-eternal, perfect in his attribute of creating, so that the universe which is his act is also pre-eternal and these ideas are dealt with in the subject of metaphysics. But they did not say that his the almighty or the all willing. Instead all they said was that his power and his will do not necessitate plurality (non-uniqueness) in his essence. His attribute of creating is not the same as the attribute of willing and creating of a human nor as the attribute of creating of one who was forced to cause an effect such as those that come from natural matters.²⁰³

Adhudiddin al-Iji and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

Imam Adhudiddin al-Iji was a fourteenth century scholar born in Ij near Shiraz. He is a famous Ashari scholar and his books on Ashari theology are considered the main sources of reference for those followers of Asharism. Therefore, if he holds a specific position it has a huge impact on the followers of Ashari theology. His positions are therefore generally considered reliable for the followers of the school. The fact that one cannot apply time on God is agreed upon between Philosophers and Theologians even though their resulting reasoning may differ. Adhudiddin al-Iji presents the argument that God is not in time. This was a position that was agreed upon by scholars of religions. He explained that according to the philosophers, time not being applied to God is based on the idea that time is the length of the movement of the finite things, and this time being applied is not possible for the something that does not have any movement or direction such as an eternal being who is God. Iji explains that according to theologians, he himself falling into this category, that in terms of the impossibility of time being applied to God, that is because when we have an accidental

²⁰³ Tusi N, *Sharh al-Isharat Wa Al-Tanbihat*, (Cairo, Egypt, Dar al-Marifa, 1996), Volume 3, Page 69

that can change such as the universe and that relies on another changing accidental for its measurement such as time, then both of these accidentals cannot be connected to God and as such time cannot be applied to God. As such, irrespective of which of the two positions one follows, whether it is the temporal modal or the eternal modal, one cannot apply time to God. Therefore, Iji explains that if one were to believe that the universe is related to time based on both of them being accidentals such as the position he himself follows as well as the rest of the Ashari scholars or it is related by its essence as is the position of Avicenna and Aristotle, the pre-existence of God is not related to time according to the opinion of both parties, nor does it mean that his continuous existence relies on him existing in two separate times, nor does it mean that by God being pre-eternal he existed in a time before all time.²⁰⁴

Sayf al-Din al-Amidi is an Ashari scholar from the thirteenth century. His positions are also relied upon in the Ashari School. He is a respected scholar and his position is considered authoritative. Iji relayed the position of Amidi who also stated that the consensus that the creation of the universe does not depend on the one who has the ability to choose. In essence what they are saying is that the cause of the universe can occur naturally without their being someone who wills it into existence. The Philosophers argue that the existence of the universe does not depend on the one who causes who causes due to himself. The theologians accept the fact that the creator causes by himself and if this is the case then there is no issue with the universe depending on him and it is agreed that it is possible for the universe to come into existence by someone who created it. It was in this aspect that Ghazali was over stretching in his *Takfeer* (statement of disbelief about the issue of pre-eternity), because did God create the universe by himself or by his choice, so it will depend on God and this is not based on choice. Therefore, it is agreed upon by the scholars that the existence of the universe is depending on the causer and the effect of the one who causes will exist eternally as his essence. According to Iji it not an agreed upon that there is a consensus that the universe came into existence and is dependent on the *Mukhtaar* (the one who has a choice). Because the act of the one who has a choice will come

²⁰⁴ Al-Iji, Aḍad al-Din, *Kitab al-Mawaqif fi Ilm al-Kalam*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Alam al-Kutub 1969), Page 274

into effect when his desire to create comes into effect, which will necessitate time, that the time of desire is actually not relevant because you ‘first’ desire something ‘then’ the resulting effect occurs, so the actual time of the desire is not relevant. Therefore, the real disagreement should only be regarding whether God necessitates the creation of the universe or whether it is by choice. Iji explained that Nasir al-Din al-Tusi said that God is not like a magnet where things are caused by him without his will, because holding the position of the pre-eternity of the universe does not mean that God doesn’t have a choice.²⁰⁵

Amidi continued that he found the statement of scholars who rejected and accepted both positions. Amidi said that God creating it is possible it came from non-existence, if you say God created by himself or by his choice, latter Asharis admonish Amidi regarding this issue as he is basically stating that there is no problem with holding either one of the positions. It is the same as the pre-eternity of the universe necessitates the superiority of the essence and not because of time, the situation is exactly the same here as time comes first. According to Iji there is no difference between those who hold the position of pre-eternity of the universe and those who hold the position of creating the universe out of nothing then in terms of negating pre-eternity and something coming before something else. Iji, the renowned Ashari scholar further explains that the disagreement between the two contesting parties is superficial.²⁰⁶ Therefore what we can see is that these two renowned, authoritative Ashari scholars do not adhere to the perception that the position of Avicenna was heretical and was not accepted by Muslims.

²⁰⁵ Al-Iji, Aḍad al-Din, *Kitab al-Mawaqif fi Ilm al-Kalam*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Alam al-Kutub 1969), Page 74-75

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, Page 74-75

Ibn Arabi and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

Ibn Arabi who was also known as Shaykh Al-Akbar, "the greatest master", was a Sunni scholar of Islam from the thirteenth century who was a Sufi mystic and philosopher. The position of Ibn Arabi holds a lot of weight on this issue because of the acceptance and respect he holds with followers of mainstream Sunni Islam. Generally, the Sufi mystics held that the universe was eternal but it was created by God. Ibn Arabi was a known for holding the position of the universe being eternal and this was especially the case with those who considered him as their enemy. For example, Ibn Daqiq al Eid narrated that he heard Izzuradeen Ibn Adus Salaam talking about Ibn Arabi and he was stating that he is a liar and an evil scholar, as he believes in the pre-eternity of the universe and doesn't believe in the prohibition of fornication.²⁰⁷ It wasn't just Ibn Arabi from the Sufi mystics who held this position but it was generally the agreed upon position amongst the Sufi mystics. For example, Abdurrahman al-Jami explained that the Sufi Mystics supported the position of the pre-eternity of the universe being created by an eternal God. It was based on this idea that they merged the idea of the eternal will of God and his eternal effect which is the created universe. The Sufi Mystics claimed that they came to this position based on *Kashf* (divine enlightenment)²⁰⁸ that through this divine enlightenment they came to the understanding that if an eternal being is the cause of something else such as the universe by its essence, then it will be connected to it continuously as long as its essence exists, which means that both the eternal creator and the creation of the universe existed together eternally.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁷ Ibn Arabi, Siyaar, Page 48-49

²⁰⁸ The linguistic meaning of *Kashf* is unveiling. Which means the barriers of world being lifted. According to the Sufi Mystics it is the knowledge of the heart instead of the knowledge of the intellect. *Kashf* is considered a divine opening that unveils the realities of the universe to a person.

²⁰⁹ Jami, A, Al-Durrah al-Fakhirah fi Tahqiq Madhab al-Sufiyyah wa al-Mutakallimin wa al-Hukama al-Mutaqaddimin (Muassasah Mutala'at Islami, Tehran, Iran, 1979), Page 28-29

Suhurwardi and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi was a Sunni scholar of Islam, Sufi mystic, and philosopher from the twelfth century. One of his teachers, Majd al-Din al-Jili was also the teacher of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi. Al-Suhrawardi was also known as *shaykh al-ishraq* (Master of Illumination) and was a follower of the Avicennian Peripatetic tradition.

Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi was one of the main proponents for the pre-eternity of the universe. He argued the position from a variety of angles. He argues that motion is a quality that never remains, which means that it is an accidental and anything that comes into existence after time is temporal. Any entity which depends another temporal entity cannot be pre-eternal but instead must in itself temporal. This is because something temporal cannot bring itself into existence, since something has to give it a push to make it to come into existence.²¹⁰ If the one who causes will keep it as it was at before coming into existence, it will always remain as it was, meaning that it will never come into existence. If we believe that this accidental came into existence before another accidental and that accidental came before another it will go back infinitely which is impossible. So that proves the pre-eternity of the universe, because then there would be an endless chain and we would need to question what created or caused the first accidental to exist. So that's why in existence there are accidentals which are renewable and that have always existed.²¹¹

Jurjani and the Pre-eternity of the Universe

Ali ibn Mohammed al-Jurjani also known as al-Sayyid al-Sharif was a sunni Hanafi scholar from the fourteenth century from Astarabad. Al-Jurjani in his book '*Sharh Mowaqif*' deals with the issue of the pre-eternity of universe. Al-Jurjani brought the statement of Amidi where he states that pre-eternity can only

²¹⁰ Juwayni, *Irshad fi Usul al-Itikad* (1938) Page 16

²¹¹ Suhurwardi S, *Falasaifa Ishraaq*, (1964) Page 172-177

be the attribute of the one who has a choice, so al-Jurjani says that the statement of Amidi is confirmed by the Philosophers and that there is a consensus amongst them that the causer effects things by choice rather than them occurring naturally such as a magnet. This is because if he does something it is because he wants to do it, but he does not do it as this would require time. Anything he wants exists pre-eternally and anything that he doesn't want to exist does not happen. Al-Jurjani then gave some examples, such as that the Maturidis and Asharis believe that bringing something into existence and existence are not detachable, and if this is the case then if the bringing something into existence is eternal then the existence is also pre-eternal. Then Iji brought forward the refutation of Fakhr al-Din al-Razi against Avicenna, which wasn't really a refutation but more of a suggestion, therefore both Iji and Jurjani rejected this so-called refutation. Iji then brought forth five criticisms mentioned by the opponents of Avicenna about which Iji responded. Jurjani commented that three of the criticisms are weak, whilst the others he responded to by supporting the position of Avicenna. Jurjani supported the position of the pre-eternity of the universe despite being traditional Sunni scholar of Islam. Therefore, once again we see that the position of the universe being eternal was held by many prominent traditional scholars.²¹²

²¹² Jurjani A, *Sharh al-Mawaqif*, (Beirut, Lebanon, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1998), Page 183-188

Legacy of the Argument

In the main body of the thesis we focused on the analysis of past scholars from Greek philosophers to Muslim philosophers regarding their position on the pre-eternity of the universe. This section will look at the relevancy of the argument of Avicenna regarding the pre-eternity of the universe in current times. We will look at the theories that are presented by physicists and philosophers. This topic in current times is often dealt with by physicists with the Big Bang Theory being at the forefront of current research. Stephen Hawking quite confidently declared that 'Philosophy is dead' because these fundamental questions of the nature of the universe are now dealt with by scientists.²¹³ There have been major developments in this issue from the Big Bang theory, to Penrose's Cyclic Conformal Cycle to Hawking's M-Theory²¹⁴. For the purpose of this thesis, due to the main focus being the classical position of Avicenna, I will only select a few contemporary arguments relayed by physicists and philosophers, to see if the positions of Avicenna are still relevant in current times. I believe that it would be fruitful for someone to write a thesis focusing purely on this issue.

Penrose and Conformal Cyclic Cosmology

Roger Penrose, a leading physicist in current times, in his book 'Cycles of Time', writes about the theory of Conformal Cyclic Cosmology (CCC). He explained that the Big Bang was a transition point within the history of the universe and that in the future of the current universe there will be another Big Bang, and before the Big Bang of the current universe there was another Big Bang ad infinitum,

²¹³ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/google/8520033/Stephen-Hawking-tells-Google-philosophy-is-dead.html>

²¹⁴ Hawking S and Mlodinow L, *The Grand Design*, (Bantam Books, UK, 2010)

with space and time merging at the end point of each cycle. Penrose deals with the issue of entropy within the universe. In his model of CCC, he states that entropy was low at the point of the Big Bang and then increases as the universe expands. He then explains that then entropy is lost when matter enters a black hole. Then in the future when all matter is absorbed by black holes, something will then form the next Big Bang. Then this cycle will continue into the next universe, as it occurred in the previous universe, before the existence of the current world. He explains that data is being gathered by satellites. As such this is a theory that can be tested in current times. This theory of Dr Penrose proposes that the universe is eternal moving from one cycle to another. When looking at Avicenna's model of the universe it fits in with Penrose's theory of Conformal Cyclic Cosmology because both models result in an eternal world. It means that scientists in current times are dealing with the same question that was being dealt with Avicenna in medieval times. The formation and existence of the universe, how we got here, is the universe eternal or temporal, are all very relevant questions that are being answered by physicists.²¹⁵

Smolin and Time Reborn

Lee Smolin argues that time is in fact real and not artificial, which has become a common theory due to the theory of relativity. Smolin argues that time is real and we can see this based on the evolution of the universe that we have witnessed through experimentation and observation. He explains that black holes are gateways to new universes and that time is the fourth dimension in space and time. He believes that time is a more fundamental dimension than the spatial ones. Once again, the theory of time being something that is real but is a measurement of matter is very relevant. Although the difference between the arguments of Avicenna and Lee Smolin is that in the model of Smolin, time is

²¹⁵ Penrose R, *Cycles of Time*, (Vintage Books, London, 2010)

a more important dimension in the space-time model, whereas for Avicenna time is merely the measurement of the movement of matter. The issue of time being real or unreal was dealt with by modern philosophers such as McTaggart who argued that time is not real. This discussion of time being real or unreal is quite relevant because in the case of Avicenna and Ghazali the main disagreement was whether one could apply time to God. If in current times the discussion has moved to whether time is real or whether it is linear, then it adds a new dimension to the disagreement of Avicenna and al-Ghazali.²¹⁶

McTaggart and the Unreality of Time

What makes the argument of Dr Smolin all the more relevant is the position relayed by McTaggart, a twentieth century philosopher, who argued that time was not real. He stated that *'I believe that nothing that exists can be temporal, and that therefore time is unreal'*. McTaggart makes a distinction between A-Series Properties and B-Series Properties. He explained that B-Series Properties are first class properties which are temporal, permanent and include terms such as 'earlier than' and 'later than', for example if A occurs before B, then it means A will always occur before B. A-Series properties are second class properties which are temporal but not permanent, which includes past, present and future. So if an event is in the future it doesn't always mean that it will be in the future. McTaggart argued that nothing contains A-Series properties, and if this is the case then nothing exists in time. He continues that time cannot only be a B-Series property, because a B-Series does not contain the idea of change. He then argues that time forming in an A-Series is contradictory. Since in both Series when one analyses all possibilities of how reality can be temporal, it does not result in an adequate, non-contradictory response and as such McTaggart reaches is that reality is not temporal, and therefore

²¹⁶ Smolin L, Time Reborn, (Penguin Books, London, 2013)

time is unreal.²¹⁷ The fact that modern philosophers such as McTaggart, Wittgenstein and Van Inwagen²¹⁸ are dealing with the issue of time being real or temporal or non-linear shows that this argument is still relevant in current times.

²¹⁷ MacTaggart J.E, The Unreality of Time, Published in *Mind: A Quarterly Review of Psychology and Philosophy* 17 (1908), 456-473

²¹⁸ Van Inwagen P, *Metaphysics*, (Westview Press, USA, 2015)

Conclusion

The topic of the pre-eternity of the universe is an issue that has been presented, analysed and debated from the time of Greek philosophers to the time of Muslim philosophers to contemporary philosophers and physicists. The reason why a greater emphasis was placed on this issue within the Muslim world was because of the charge of 'heresy' and 'disbelief' that was placed on Avicenna by al-Ghazali. The perception amongst Muslims was that Avicenna was a disbeliever due to the position he held and that he was a single rogue that had gone against the accepted position of Muslims during his time and throughout the intellectual history of Islam. Therefore it was important to analyse whether Avicenna was wrong in the position that he held, whether he truly was a 'rogue' scholar as was claimed or were there other scholars who held the same position as him and finally whether the arguments of Avicenna are relevant in current philosophical and scientific discussions.

Through the analysis of the debate between Avicenna and al-Ghazali we found that things were not actually as they were presented. The basis of the position of Avicenna was to ensure that time or change was not applied to God and so that God was not relegated to the level of his creation. He did not agree with the position of al-Ghazali that there was no universe and then later at a specific point in time God decided to create the universe. This according to Avicenna means that his opponents who believe in a temporal world are applying time to God as well as the fact that it means that there was a change in God. We have analysed the different aspects of change and how they would apply to God when it comes to God deciding to make a decision at a specific point in time. Avicenna has shown his commitment to the fundamentals of Islam by ensuring that this humanisation of God doesn't occur as he is the creator and creation cannot be applied to him. Avicenna therefore presents his model of the universe where the world is eternal, where time is not applied to God, that God created the universe not in time but instead by essence and as such has superiority over the eternal universe. Therefore the charge of the universe being equivalent to God becomes muted.

The second question the assignment looked to answer was whether Avicenna truly was a rogue scholar who held that the universe is eternal, where he was 'exiled' by Muslim scholars and his position was not accepted. We have analysed the positions held by past scholars on this issue and found that this wasn't actually the case. In fact many scholars either held the same position as Avicenna or remained neutral on the issue. We read that the Maturidi and Ashari (the two theological Sunni schools) scholars held either the same position as Avicenna, remained neutral as they believed that the argument is not real and the difference is merely semantics or they held that Avicenna did not traverse the bounds of Islam as he still held that God was the creator but instead did not want to apply time to God. Although the position that the difference between them is merely semantics is quite weak, the fact that these scholars held these positions shows that the so called 'heresy' of the position of Avicenna is not as clear cut as has been presented by Muslim scholars through the last thousand years.

The last question that was covered briefly (something that can be undertaken as a specific thesis) was the relevance of the position of Avicenna in current times. When Avicenna was disowned by the Muslim world, and it was deemed unacceptable to read and teach his works, many of his arguments were relegated to unread positions of heresy and disbelief. We have seen that the issue of pre-eternity of matter as well as issues related to time are still analysed in current times by philosophers and scientists. The fact that it was impermissible to use the positions of Avicenna means that there was a void in the development of scientific research and philosophical enquiry. Had this not happened maybe the developments that occurred in the field of science would have occurred earlier. We are now finding out that modern theories such as Dr Penrose's Conformal Cyclic Cosmology which propose an eternal universe develop the medieval position of Avicenna based on modern day research and ideas. I believe that further research in this specific area would be beneficial once many in the Muslim world move past the intellectual hang-up that it is not permissible to study the works of Avicenna.

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