



Abū al-Mu‘in al-Nasafī’s Defence of Prophecy (*Nubuwwa*): An Examination of Prophecy and its Justification in Islamic Theology

Ebu’l-Mu‘in en-Nesefi’nin Nübüvvet Müdafaası: İslam Teolojisinde Nübüvvet ve Gerekçendirilmesi Üzerine Bir İnceleme

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Abstract

This article aims to investigate the rational arguments presented by Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī for justifying prophecy as a significant phenomenon in human history. The study begins by analysing al-Nasafī’s definition of prophecy, followed by examining its linguistic, philosophical, and theological implications. The possibility and necessity of prophethood are explored from two distinct perspectives: natural reason and divine wisdom. In terms of natural reason (*‘aql*), prophethood falls under the category of possibilities (*mumkināt*), which implies that its existence is not impossible according to reason. When it comes to the divine wisdom of God, prophethood is considered a necessity (*wājib*), as it would be inconceivable for God to abandon humanity without guidance in the realm of existence. The author presents numerous arguments supporting both categories. For instance, several factors justify the rationale behind the institution of prophecy, such as the limitations of the human mind in acquiring knowledge, the need to express religious knowledge with clarity and precision, and the significance of preserving this knowledge for future generations. Al-Nasafī argues that prophetic reality provides the most plausible explanation for our body of knowledge in various fields such as astronomy, more precisely “science or knowledge of the stars” (*al-‘ilm bi al-nujūm*), and medical science held by humanity. Moreover, essential skills and crafts passed down from generation to generation, such as farming and dressmaking, that are essential for human survival, can only be attributed to prophetic reality. Al-Nasafī also maintains that the institution of prophecy is the exclusive factor that can adequately explain the presence of various languages throughout the world. According to him, the first human language was taught by a prophet, and all subsequent languages are derived from this original language. The second part of the paper centres on al-Nasafī’s criteria for validating the authenticity of a prophetic assertion. In al-Nasafī’s view, miracles constitute the most critical means by which an individual claiming prophethood can demonstrate their claim. Following, the paper highlights al-Nasafī’s differentiation between magic tricks or illusions executed by skilled magicians and miracles performed by prophets. Although magicians can manipulate and fool their audience using sleight of hand, the allure and mystique surrounding their illusions start to fade away once the causes or mechanics of those illusions become apparent. Conversely, as miracles are investigated and pondered over, they become increasingly precise and powerful. Lastly, as per al-Nasafī, merely having an intellectual understanding or belief in God alone is inadequate to achieve the happiness promised by the religion. Only through the institution of prophethood, one can comprehend the meaning (*ḥikma*) of our existence or life on Earth and acquire the benefits that pertain to both this world and the afterlife. By offering a thorough analysis of the concept of prophecy and al-Nasafī’s rational arguments in support of it, this paper aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the notion of prophecy and its rational justifications in Islamic thought.

Keywords: Prophecy (nubuwwa or risāla), Defence of prophecy, Rational arguments for prophecy, Abū al-Mu‘īn al-Nasafī, Islamic theology (Kalām).

Öz

Bu makale, Ebu’l-Mu‘īn en-Nesefî’nin peygamberliğin aklî olarak gerekçelendirilmesine yönelik ortaya koyduğu rasyonel argümanlarını ele almaktadır. Makale, tartışmaya en-Nesefî’nin peygamberlik kavramından ne anladığını ele alarak başlar ve onun tarafından kavramın lügavî, felsefî ve kelâmî anlamlarına dair sunulan görüşler tasnif edilir. Ardından, en-Nesefî’de nübüvvetin, aklî açıdan mümkün ve Allah’ın hikmeti açısından vâcib olmak üzere, iki farklı kategorik açıdan ele alınışı işlenir. En-Nesefî nübüvvetin hem aklen mümkün oluşuna hem de onun Allah’ın hikmeti gereği gerekli oluşuna dair birçok argüman sunar. İnsan aklının bilgiye ulaşma kapasitesinin sınırlı oluşu, dini bilginin açık ve sarîh bir şekilde ortaya konulmasının gerekliliği ve yine gelecek nesiller için bu bilginin korunmasına ve depolanmasına duyulan ihtiyaç peygamberlik müessesesinin makul, mümkün ve gerekli oluşuna dair çok değerli iç görüler sunar. En-Nesefî’ye göre “yıldızların ilmi veya bilgisi” ve tıp bilimine dair insanlığın sahip olduğu malumat, yine insanların yaşamlarını devam ettirebilmeleri için gerekli olan kimi sanat ve zanaatkarlığa dair önemli bilgilerin öğrenilip bu güne aktarılmış olması peygamberlik müessesesinin tarihte gerçekleşmiş bir vakia olduğunu gösteren aklî çıkarımlardandır. Dahası en-Nesefî’ye göre insanlar arasındaki ilk dil de bir peygamber tarafından öğretilmiş ve diğer diller bu ilk dilden türemiştir. Makalenin ikinci kısmı, en-Nesefî’nin nübüvvet iddiasında bulunan birinin iddiasının geçerli olup olmadığına dair sunduğu kriterler ya da kıstaslar üzerine yoğunlaşır. En-Nesefî peygamberlik iddiasında bulunan birisinin iddiasını temellendirmesinin etkili yolunu mucize olarak görür. Ardından mucizenin tanımına ve onun kelâmî ve felsefî gelenekler içerisinde nasıl anlaşıldığına dair bazı açıklamalar yapar ve mucizenin sıhhatine dair şartları tartışır. Örneğin mucizeler, becerilerini mükemmelleştirmek için yıllarını harcamış sihirbazlar tarafından gerçekleştirilen illüzyonlardan veya sihir numaralarından ayrılır. Bu kişiler, el çabukluğu kullanılarak olağanüstü görünen numaralar sergileyebilirler çünkü onlar

göz yanılması sayesinde izleyicileri aldatmaya yönelik zengin bir deneyim ve uzmanlığa sahiptirlir. Bununla birlikte, daha yakından incelenip derinlemesine düşünüldüğünde, illüzyon numaralarının ardındaki nedenler keşfedildikçe, hilelerinin gizemi ve gücü yavaş yavaş azalır. Fakat, mucizeler araştırıldıkça ve üzerine düşünüldükçe giderek daha kesin ve güçlü hale gelirler. Sonuç olarak en-Neseî'ye göre sadece entelektüel bir Tanrı anlayışı ya da inancı kişiyi din tarafından müjdelenen mutluluğa ulaştırmak için yeterli değildir. Kişinin dünya üzerindeki varlığını tatmin edici bir anlama (hikmet) bağlayabilmesinin, yine hem bu dünyaya hem de öbür dünyaya dair menfaatlerinin farkında olup onları elde etmeyi öğrenmesinin yegâne yolu peygamberlik müessesesidir. Özetle, bu makale, en-Neseî'de nübüvvet kavramının kapsamlı bir analizini ortaya koyarak ve onun nübüvveti destekleyen rasyonel argümanlarını tartışarak, İslam düşüncesinde nübüvvet kavramının ve nübüvveti getirilen akli savunuların daha derin bir şekilde anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunmayı ve yapılacak olan muhtemel modern akli savunuların hangi hususlara odaklanması ya da mecralara yönelmesi gerektiğinin ipuçlarını ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Peygamberlik (nübüvvet-risâlet), Peygamberliğin müdafaası, Peygamberliğe dair akli argümanlar, Ebu'l-Mu'în en-Neseî, Kalam.

Introduction*

The concept of prophecy or prophethood, known as “*nubuwwa*” or “*risâla*” in Arabic, holds a significant place in Islamic faith. It serves as the foundation for believing in and trusting divine guidance or Islamic revelation. For this reason, throughout history, the defence of prophethood by rational and historical arguments has been a topic of significant interest and discussion among Muslim scholars. One of the notable Islamic scholars who contributed greatly to the discussion is Abū al-Mu'în al-Nasafî (d. 508/1115), a prominent Islamic theologian of the 12th century.

If we look at the background of the discussion before moving on to Nasafî's thoughts, it becomes evident that a century and a half after the rise of Islam, as it expanded across a wide geographical scope, the Muslim community came into contact with diverse religious traditions and cultures. This interaction resulted in the emergence of various parties within these traditions, which began to express their disapproval and criticism towards Islamic beliefs. These parties not only rejected the prophethood of Muḥammad but also called into question and challenged the very concept of prophethood itself. They raised major doubts among ordinary believers regarding the possibility (*imkān*) and reality of prophecy. The Sumaniyya (Buddhists), Mu'aṭṭila (divestors, those who deny the reality of the divine attributes), Dahriyya (atheists or materialists), and Barāhima (the Brahmins and Brahmanism) can be cited as examples of those who rejected prophecy during this particular era.¹ The objections raised against the belief in prophethood, which stands as one of the fundamental pillars of the Islamic faith, by these circles were unequivocally considered unacceptable by the Muslim scholars engaged in the field of Kalām. Considering the potential threats that these groups could pose to simple-minded or non-specialist Muslims, al-Nasafî believed it was necessary to respond to their attacks by formulating comprehensive and rigorous counterarguments that support both the concept of prophecy and the reality of Muḥammad's

* The findings presented in this article were initially developed during the course of my doctoral studies at the University of Birmingham. This research is currently ongoing and focuses on the fundamental theological views of Abū al-Mu'în al-Nasafî.

¹ Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, ed. Bekir Topaloğlu and Muhammed Aruçi (İstanbul: İSAM, 2003), 271–75. ; Abū al-Mu'în al-Nasafî (d. 508/1115), *Tabṣirat al-Adilla fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. Hüseyin Atay and Şaban Ali Düzgün, vol. 2 (Ankara: Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı, 2003), 5. ; Yusuf Şevki Yavuz, “Nübüvvet,” *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, accessed May 21, 2023, <https://islamansiklopedisi.org.tr/nubuvvet>.

prophethood.² It is notable that al-Nasafī’s master, Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), was also driven by the same concerns when addressing the issue.³ It appears that the objections raised by these groups profoundly affected the Muslim community of that time, and they felt compelled to respond to the challenge.

This paper will discuss al-Nasafī’s views on prophecy, with a specific focus on his understanding of the concept, his arguments in defence of prophecy, and his criteria for evaluating the validity of a prophetic claim. When the need arises, there will be assessments and critical analyses, and the problem will be discussed within its historical context, with references made to other theological schools and Islamic philosophers as considered appropriate.

With this brief introduction, we can now proceed to the discussion.

1. Prophecy as a Possible (*Mumkin*) and a Necessary (*Wājib*) Reality

In his discussion on prophethood, al-Nasafī adopts a standard method by introducing the lexicographical meanings of the key concepts that he will later use to address the problem at hand. This approach is not new to al-Nasafī’s works, and it serves to orient the reader to the main terms and their usage. In this regard, he explains that “*risāla*”, according to Arabic lexicographers, denotes conveying a message with relevant proof (*dalāla*) to the intended recipient (*al-maḥṣūd*).⁴ Further, in the language of Kalām, “*risāla*” or “*nubuwwa*” signifies the servant’s “*sifāra*”, which refers to the state of being a messenger or intermediary between God and His rational creatures. The aim of this intermediary role is to address their deficiencies in matters that reason alone cannot comprehend regarding their interests or benefits (*maṣāliḥ*), both in this world and the next.⁵

With this introductory explanation of the key terms, we are now better equipped to delve into al-Nasafī’s actual discussion on prophethood.

Al-Nasafī initially states that the arguments he presents to justify the institution of prophethood are primarily intended for those who already accept the existence and unity of God. While these arguments may provide some insight to non-believers regarding the legitimacy of prophethood, al-Nasafī asserts that they must first be convinced of the existence and unity of God through conclusive evidence.⁶

Following these introductory statements, al-Nasafī argues that the possibility or necessity of prophethood should be examined from two distinct perspectives: natural reason and divine wisdom. From the perspective of natural reason, prophethood falls within the realm of possibilities (*mumkināt*), meaning that its existence is not intellectually impossible or contrary to logical thinking. However, from the standpoint of God’s divine wisdom, prophethood is deemed a necessity (*wājib*) as it is unthinkable for God to abandon humanity without guidance in the realm

² al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 1–2.

³ al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 271.

⁴ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 5.

⁵ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 5.

⁶ al-Nasafī, *al-Tamhīd fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, ed. ‘Abd al-ḥayy Muḥammad Qābil (Cairo: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1987), 11.

of existence. Therefore, in His infinite wisdom, God has deemed it crucial to send prophets to humanity for guidance.

Al-Nasafi's initial argument to justify prophethood is based on the premise that God, being the possessor of perfect wisdom, never engages in actions that are futile or useless.⁷ This principle applies to every action that God performs or refrains from.⁸ God is unique (*wāḥid*) and stands alone in His divinity, possessing exclusive ownership (*mālik*) over the universe and everything it contains. He is the only one who acts with perfect wisdom and knowledge (*ḥakīm*). God is the only true owner (*mālik*) of everything in existence, and all other entities are merely possessions (*mamlūk*) owned by Him. He is the Lord and Ruler (*Rabb*) of the universe, and everything else is subject to His control (*marbūb*).⁹

In al-Nasafi's thought, the idea of God's exclusive ownership over the universe and everything in it holds great importance in justifying prophethood. Being the sole owner, God possesses complete authority and control over all aspects of creation. Therefore, He has the right to send prophets to guide humanity towards the path of righteousness and fulfil His divine plan for creation. This is because every owner has the authority or right (*taṣarruf*) to use their property in any way they see fit, in proportion to their ownership. The concept of property ownership grants individuals the authority to undertake actions on their property commensurate with their level of ownership. Since God is the creator of everything *ex nihilo* and the true proprietor of all things, there is nothing irrational about Him being the only genuine lawmaker of His own property.¹⁰ As the eternal sovereign over His belongings, God may instruct humans to perform certain actions or refrain from doing certain things for their own welfare. This can be understood through reason, as there is nothing about it that reason would refuse or find impossible to comprehend. Each proprietor is entitled to exercise *taṣarruf* over their property in a manner that corresponds to their ownership, and this principle applies to God as the supreme owner of the universe.

Within Islam, human actions that God holds individuals accountable for can be classified as obligatory (*ijāb*), prohibited (*manʿ*), permissible (*ītlāq*), and actions that are recommended to avoid or better not to do (*ḥazr*). The resulting legal or moral responsibility regarding these actions is referred to as "*taklīf*".¹¹ God may reveal the law pertaining to these actions to His servants in whatever manner He chooses. He may choose to impart knowledge about the law directly into their hearts, or He may communicate it through a messenger who provides a comprehensive explanation or instruction (*tabligh*) of the law for their benefits (*maṣāliḥ*). According to al-Nasafi, God's decision to send prophets is crucial, as it provides human beings with a concrete model of

⁷ The word used by al-Nasafi in the original text is "*safa*" or "*safah*", see al-Nasafi, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 1, which can be translated as "futility," "uselessness," "worthlessness," or "pointlessness." It refers to actions or things that lack purpose, value, or benefit.

⁸ al-Nasafi, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 1.

⁹ al-Nasafi, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 7.

¹⁰ al-Nasafi, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 7.

¹¹ al-Nasafi, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 7.

how to effectively implement the law. Anyone with intellect and a moral conscience would acknowledge that prophecy is not a concept that defies human reason.¹²

According to al-Nasafī's second argument, human beings possess an innate inclination towards accepting wisdom (*ḥikma*) and knowledge (*ʿulūm*), which is inherent in their creation. Moreover, God has instilled within human nature a desire for attaining perfection (*kamāl*), a pursuit that can only be fulfilled through the guidance of a teacher (*murshid*) who leads them on the path of righteousness. The primary purpose of God in creating human nature in this way is to enable His servants to readily acknowledge and follow the prophets and their divine messages. This inherent disposition of human beings towards seeking knowledge and wisdom can be viewed as evidence for the plausibility of prophecy, particularly for those endowed with acuteness of thought or sharp insight (*baṣīra*).¹³ In al-Nasafī's opinion, the arguments presented thus far are sufficient to establish that prophecy, when considered from the position of natural reason, falls within the realm of possibility.¹⁴

As previously mentioned, al-Nasafī argues that prophethood is an essential (*wājib*) aspect of God's wisdom, which he supports through various arguments. For instance, he notes that God created human beings to depend on specific types of nourishment (*aghdhiya*) as part of His custom (*ʿādatullāh*).¹⁵ These nourishments are in harmony with the essence of living beings, and humans derive satisfaction and pleasure (*ladhdha*) from consuming them. To ensure the survival and continuity (*baqāʿ*) of the human species, God instilled a sense of pleasure within human nature, which compels them to seek nourishment.¹⁶ Furthermore, humans were created with a strong desire (*shahwa*) towards sexual satisfaction, which serves to promote the continuation of the human species through sexual relationships. This innate desire (*raghba*) compels humans to prioritise the continuity of not only their own lives but also the lives of their offspring.

God has endowed humanity with a diverse range of substances (*jawāhir*), including but not limited to nutrients, plants, and chemicals, that maintain good health and prevent illnesses. Throughout history, some of these substances have been used for medicinal purposes in treating various diseases. However, alongside these beneficial elements, God has also created matters containing deadly and destructive poisons, including plants and chemicals that can be indistinguishable from harmless substances based on human reason and sensory experience (*tajriba*) alone. In light of this, it is possible that the ancient medical knowledge and practices, which predate the modern era, were taught by chosen individuals, likely prophets, who possessed extraordinary insights beyond human perception and reasoning. According to al-Nasafī, these individuals were likely endowed with divine knowledge and understanding, which allowed them to impart advanced

¹² al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 7–8.

¹³ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 8.

¹⁴ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 11.

¹⁵ It is an Arabic phrase that can be translated to mean “the way of God” or “the custom of God.” The term is often used in Islamic theology and refers to the idea that God has a specific way of acting or a set of divine laws and principles that govern the universe and human behaviour. In this context, “*ādatullāh*” is often contrasted with “*ādat al-nās*,” which means the ways or customs of people.

¹⁶ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 13.

medical knowledge and techniques to humanity, laying the foundation for modern medical practices.

Al-Nasafi states that the human mind acts as a barrier to prevent individuals from consuming substances that may endanger their lives. This also encompasses refraining from instructing subordinates to taste or consume such substances. To support this idea, al-Nasafi, proposes us to imagine a hypothetical scenario where a master orders a slave to eat a specific food to determine if it is safe. However, even in this scenario, it would not be feasible because, as acknowledged by experts in this field, some poisons can have delayed effects. Thus, in this hypothetical scenario, if the food contains such a poison, both the slave and the community, including the master, would have consumed an imperceptible poison that would not exhibit its effects until a later time. This would result in the loss of lives or persistent health issues, making it impossible to sustain their lineage. Waiting a long time for the substance's effects to become apparent after the slave consumes the food is also illogical since all parties involved would likely perish from starvation or dehydration in the meantime.¹⁷ However, the fact that humans are still alive, and their lineage persists is evidence that they have sufficient knowledge about substances that can be dangerous or fatal to their health. According to al-Nasafi, humans have been given adequate knowledge about such substances through prophets, without which the human race would have ceased to exist long ago.

If humans were unable to taste or benefit from the nourishment surrounding us, then the creation of that nourishment and other blessings would be a futile and meaningless act that cannot be attributed to God.¹⁸ As the creator of the universe and everything within it, it is essential for God, in His divine wisdom, to inform people about the distinctive properties of substances, including whether they are safe or dangerous to consume, so that humans may benefit from them. If humans were not provided with ways to discern the benefits and dangers of various substances, it would imply that God created them with the sole purpose of fading away into nothingness. This notion, according to al-Nasafi, is illogical and goes against the very essence of God.¹⁹ If God did not create man for nothingness ('adam), then undoubtedly, He should send prophets to teach them how to survive.

At this point, several possible objections arise. One may argue, for instance, that these claims regarding the origin of our knowledge concerning the benefits and harms of substances present in nature are entirely subjective and rooted solely in a specific theological viewpoint. This objection can be equally raised when it comes to presenting prophethood as the source of our knowledge in the field of medical science.²⁰ Furthermore, it can also be argued that alternative

¹⁷ al-Nasafi, *Tabşirat*, 2: 13–14.

¹⁸ al-Nasafi, *Tabşirat*, 2: 14.

¹⁹ al-Nasafi, *Tabşirat*, 2: 14.

²⁰ According to al-Nasafi, the fields of knowledge that the prophets guided or taught humanity are not limited to merely medical science. As we shall discover in the following sections, he emphatically considers prophethood to be the origin of our knowledge in various areas such as "science or knowledge of the stars" (*al-ʿilm bi al-nujūm*) and "onomancy" (*sīmyāʿ*). This claim also includes essential human occupations like dressmaking and farming, which are crucial for maintaining the existence of human civilization. Thus, the audience should take note that the

perspectives on these matters, such as the influence of cultural and evolutionary factors on the development of human dietary habits, are not adequately taken into account. Again, one could argue that our body of knowledge on these matters emerges from collective human experience throughout history, rather than having a divine origin, and therefore, these claims are based on speculative assumptions and are devoid of empirical evidence.

In addition to these potential objections, is it not true that human agency, including his initiatives such as social learning and scientific advancements, plays a significant role in shaping our understanding of substances and their impacts? Does this argument not oversimplify human development by solely attributing it to divine guidance, disregarding the invaluable contributions of countless scientists, doctors, and researchers who have advanced knowledge through experimentation, observation, and critical analysis? Again, does this argument not undermine the significance of trial and error, human intellectual progress, cultural practices, and overlook the value of scientific research? In short, is it not overly simplistic to attribute the survival of the human race solely to divine guidance, without considering the numerous other influences and factors that contribute to human well-being and continuity?

The objections and counterarguments can be further extended. For instance, according to al-Nasafī, in the absence of knowledge about the benefits and harms of substances available in nature, their presence would hold no meaningfulness (*ḥikma*) or value. That is to say, he attributes the value and *ḥikma* of their existence solely to the benefits they provide to human beings. However, cannot "to exist" be perceived as an inherent value in itself? In other words, cannot existence itself or the act of being itself carry an intrinsic value, regardless of external factors? Furthermore, if it is incumbent upon God, due to His wisdom, to declare substances that are harmful to human beings, should not human beings be repeatedly informed by the prophets whenever they encounter harmful things throughout human history? For instance, our understanding of the detrimental effects of radiation began to emerge in the late 19th and early 20th centuries as researchers delved into the properties of radioactive substances. During this journey, many researchers experienced health issues as a direct consequence of their exposure to these radioactive materials. Given the premise put forth by al-Nasafī, where prophethood is suggested as an ontic necessity (*wujūb*) arising from divine wisdom and encompassing the preservation of human life and well-being, would it not be obligatory for God to have forewarned humanity about the detrimental consequences of radiation prior to our encounter with it? To put it simply, if we believe that prophets are needed for the sustenance of human life, then should we not have been informed about the harmful effects of radiation before we came across it? Furthermore, has humanity acquired all the knowledge that can be obtained about the universe, to the extent that God no longer needs to send prophets to expand our body of knowledge and understanding of the universe? Considering these aspects, it can be argued that if we accept the premises presented by al-Nasafī as true, then it logically follows that prophethood should have continued up until the present and should persist into the future. However, this does not align

assessments and potential objections presented now regarding the argument in question can be equally extended to al-Nasafī's similar claims.

with the reality offered by al-Nasafī, as he explicitly states that there will be no prophet after the Prophet of Islam.

The reader will appreciate that it is beyond the scope of this study to deal with each of these criticisms. Therefore, I will have to make do with pointing out that these objections can be responded to, to a certain degree, by slightly modifying al-Nasafī's argument. I suggest that the contribution of prophets to the advancement of humanity can be seen as providing fundamental principles in a variety of fields, including core human professions and sciences that are essential for human existence and well-being. An illustration of this is when we utilise essential or self-evident propositions (*al-ʿilm al-ḍarūrī*) to derive new propositions (*al-ʿilm al-istidlālī*) acquired through inferential reasoning and logical deduction. In a similar vein, one could make the argument that prophets provided people with first principles that functioned as core propositions on relevant matters. Consequently, the human race advanced in these fields and even established new branches of science grounded in these initial principles, using their inherent cognitive capacities, ultimately bringing us to the present era. In simpler terms, prophetic knowledge only unleashed or activated human nature's intrinsic potential to produce and store knowledge. In fact, it is noteworthy that al-Māturīdī, the master of al-Nasafī, draws attention to the very beginnings of human history in this context. According to him, it is clear that the human mind, without assistance, could not have known the essentials for sustaining life at the beginning of human history.²¹ Nevertheless, we must note that even this adjusted or modified form of the argument can only find resonance among those who primarily hold the belief in God and view the world through a particular religious lens, as al-Nasafī emphasised from the very beginning. This is because we are severely limited in presenting concrete evidence for the claims regarding the mentioned period of time. We are referring to the early stages of human existence, a historical era when writing had not yet been invented. For this argument to be presented objectively, it is critical to provide a range of historical and archaeological evidence that verifies the existence of such individuals believed to have received divine revelation at the very beginnings of human history. Moreover, it is also essential to carefully evaluate the content of the divine messages they are believed to have received and to authenticate their origin. However, given the lack of written records in an era when writing had not yet emerged, it becomes unfeasible to pursue these endeavours. As a result, the arguments in question are bound to persist as speculative discourses for those who insist on objective evidence.²²

If we return to al-Nasafī's arguments for prophecy, humans possess, as noted earlier, an inherent impulse to maintain their lives, which propels them to accumulate the required resources for their sustenance. However, the absence of a universally recognised law (*sharīʿa*) to ensure the durability of every individual's life hinders the establishment of social order and endangers the

²¹ al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 250–01. ; *Taʾwīlāt al-Qurʾān*, ed. Ertuğrul Boynukalın, vol. 5 (İstanbul: Mizan Yayınevi, 2006), 317.

²² According to Anthony Kenny, faith is only reasonable if several conditions are met. The first condition for a reasonable belief is that the existence of God should be rationally established outside the territory of religion. The second condition is that any historical events cited as constituting divine revelation must be independently established as historically certain, with a degree of certainty comparable to that of other historical knowledge. See Anthony Kenny, *What is Faith? Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 57.

survival of humanity. In such circumstances, the weak may struggle to survive, while the strong may resort to heinous acts to acquire the resources they need to sustain themselves. Ultimately, these irregularities can result in wars that could potentially lead to the extinction of humankind. Furthermore, human nature yearns for various material possessions, including spacious mansions, gardens, and agile mounts for riding. The ownership of these goods must be established and regulated by law to prevent malevolent individuals from wrongfully acquiring them. In the absence of the law, the possibility of conflicts and wars emerging between civilizations arises, which contradicts the ultimate objective of God's creation. It is, again, irrational to assume that humans were created solely for non-existence without any underlying purpose. To mitigate such adverse outcomes, it is vital for God to appoint prophets to elucidate the law, demonstrate its practice, and facilitate its peaceful establishment in society. Prophets act as intermediaries to prevent conflict, ensure fair distribution of resources, and promote harmonious coexistence among humans.²³

The argument in question brings to mind the views of the renowned Islamic philosopher Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) concerning the rational grounds of prophecy. According to Ibn Sīnā, the maintenance of human life relies on the mutual interdependence among individuals, which in turn necessitates the division of labour within society. For instance, one person engages in farming, another specialises in breadmaking, and yet another dedicates themselves to the craft of tailoring. Therefore, the social division of labour and urbanisation are essential for the sustenance and well-being of human life. Furthermore, according to Ibn Sīnā, the ultimate goal of human beings is to attain a state of perfection known as "*kamāl*," which represents the highest level of human fulfilment and ultimate happiness. The social division of labour and urbanisation play a crucial role in creating an environment conducive to contemplation and the pursuit of *kamāl*. This is because real happiness is the perfection of the rational soul through knowledge, and such an environment is essential for its actualisation. Nevertheless, in a society where the division of labour is established, social relations naturally emerge, and these relations need to be regulated by specific laws. The mission of establishing these necessary laws and norms cannot be placed solely in the hands of humans. For, if left to the discretion of individuals, everyone would assert that actions serving their own interests are just, while labelling opposing actions as cruelty. Consequently, the individual assigned with the task of formulating these laws must derive their authority from the Divine, indicating that the rule-maker must be a prophet.²⁴

One could interpret the apparent similarity or overlap between these two arguments as a sign of Ibn Sīnā's influence on al-Nasafī. However, making a hasty judgment in this regard would lack a solid foundation. Justifying such a claim requires presenting a wide range of examples and gathering additional evidence. Additionally, it is also necessary to look into the intellectual networks and relationships among other scholars during the time of Ibn Sīnā and al-Nasafī to identify if there were possible channels through which Ibn Sīnā's ideas might have made it to al-

²³ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 14–16; *Tamhīd*, 23–24.

²⁴ Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), *Kitāb al-Najāt*, ed. Muḥī al-Dīn Ṣabīrī al-Kurdī (Egypt: Maṭbaʿat al-Saʿāda, 1938), 334. ; *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbihāt*, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā, vol. 4 (Beirut: n.p., 1993), 60. ; İlhan Kutluer, *Akil ve İtikad Kelâm-Felsefe İlişkileri Üzerine Araştırmalar* (İstanbul: İz Yayıncılık, 1996), 95. ; Ömer Mahir Alper, *İslam Felsefesinde Akıl-Vahiy Felsefe Din İlişkisi -Kindî, Fârâbî, İbn Sînâ Örneği-* (İstanbul: Ayışığı Kitapları, 2000), 190.

Nasafī. Given the significant time gap of a century between Ibn Sīnā and al-Nasafī, this would require a comprehensive inquiry covering a large period of time. As the reader can understand and forgive, the burden of proof in question falls beyond the scope and limitations of the current study. Nevertheless, there is one thing that must be noted. We are aware that Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī, whom al-Nasafī holds in high esteem, did in fact propose a similar idea on this matter.²⁵ We also know that al-Nasafī diligently studied al-Māturīdī's works, interpreted them, and further developed the ideas therein, effectively restructuring and reshaping his master's theological views. Thus, if we are to mention someone's influence on al-Nasafī, it should be attributed to al-Māturīdī rather than Ibn Sīnā, as al-Nasafī has explicitly stated on many occasions that he was a devoted follower of al-Māturīdī.

If we return to al-Nasafī and his arguments for prophecy, he further argues that God has created humans with a natural inclination (*mayl*) towards perfection (*kamāl*).²⁶ Intelligent souls that strive towards perfection contemplate the essence of things (*ashyā'*) and endeavour to unveil their truths. However, although human nature was created with the inclination towards perfection, ignorance (*jahl*) overcomes every human being once they are born. As a result of their profound ignorance, they seek the guidance of an individual with a profound understanding of *ashyā'* to counsel and steer them. Furthermore, reason can distinguish between good (*maḥsana*) and bad or evil (*qabiḥa*) in a general sense (*kullī*), but it cannot determine whether each thing is inherently good or bad one by one.²⁷ This is where the role of prophets comes into play. Prophets are sent by God to instruct humans on every good deed, promote goodness, clarify the nature of evil, condemn it, and lead them towards perfection. Only by following the knowledge that comes through prophethood can humans attain high degrees and become righteous.²⁸ The limitations of reason in determining what is good and bad necessitate that all good and bad deeds be illustrated one by one. Otherwise, God's command for humans to do good and avoid evil would be meaningless. Therefore, prophethood is necessary, as it provides guidance on specific good and bad actions.²⁹ Moreover, the inherent nature of the human soul, which is inclined to seek goodness and avoid evil, is in alignment with the teachings of the prophets. The teachings of the prophets, in turn, harmonise with the human soul as they reflect God's command (*amr*) and prohibition (*nahy*). Humans are bestowed with this inherent nature by God to make the acceptance of prophecy easier for them. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with God sending prophets, as they hand over or convey to humans only what is compatible with their inherent nature. In essence, the harmony between the inherent nature of humans and the teachings of prophets provides another foundation for the reality of prophethood.³⁰

²⁵ al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 250–01. ; *Ta'wīlāt al-Qur'ān*, 317.

²⁶ al-Nasafī, *Baḥr al-Kalām*, ed. Waliyy al-Dīn Muḥammad Ṣāliḥ al-Farfūr, 2nd ed. (Damascus: Maktaba Dār al-Farfūr, 2000), 21.

²⁷ In Kalām literature, the problem at hand is often denoted by the terms “*ḥusn*” and “*qubḥ*”, which are also employed by al-Nasafī occasionally. For instance, see al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 17.

²⁸ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 16.

²⁹ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 17.

³⁰ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 17.

The inclination towards gratitude that God has placed in human nature is considered another evidence for the necessity of prophethood in al-Nasafī's teachings. According to him, showing gratitude or appreciation (*shukr*) in response to blessings is deemed good and pleasant by humans because of their nature, while ingratitude or ungratefulness (*kufrān*) is considered bad and ugly.³¹ God has endowed humanity with countless blessings, including being created in the most beautiful form (in the image of God). Everything on earth has been assigned by God for humans' command and service.³² The act of *shukr* should be commensurate with the blessing received and should be performed appropriately; failing to do so implies that the giver of the blessing is not appreciated justly.³³ Reason dictates that conforming to these conditions is the minimum requirement for the act of *shukr*. However, since God is the Most High and the sovereign Ruler of everything, it is beyond the power of humans to adequately appreciate even the smallest blessing. In fact, humans can know even the blessings of God only through the use of reason, which in itself is another blessing from Him. Given these limitations, it is necessary for humans to be fully informed of the details of *shukr*, including its form, amount, and time, so that they can praise God accordingly to the best of their ability. This fact highlights the necessity of prophethood to provide guidance to humans regarding matters related to *shukr*, including instruction on the various types of *shukr* in Islam, such as daily prayers and fasting. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that no one can thank God adequately for His endless blessings, yet He accepts our imperfect gratitude, thanks to His mercy.³⁴

Al-Nasafī also asserts that the human mind is inherently weak, even among those who have undergone significant intellectual development. Therefore, individuals require the guidance and support of their fellow humans to attain the necessary benefits (*maṣāliḥ*) for their life on Earth. This is exemplified by the critical role played by institutions such as schools in transmitting knowledge across generations, as well as the importance of exchanging views and engaging in discussions to advance scientific knowledge. These examples illustrate the need for individuals to seek guidance from others to enhance their level of knowledge. If obtaining simple knowledge required for life on Earth necessitates the help of others, then it logically follows that essential knowledge for the eternal afterlife, which holds greater significance, certainly requires guidance from prophets who possess that sort of knowledge. Al-Nasafī contends that relying solely on natural reason is inadequate in leading one to the required knowledge for the afterlife. Rejecting this idea would equate one's limited knowledge with that of God, which is an arrogant and misguided position. In summary, our need for knowledge, which is necessary to obtain benefits in both this world and the hereafter, serves as another argument that supports the necessity of prophecy.³⁵

Al-Nasafī's initial classification of human actions, as mentioned earlier, comprises four categories, yet he argues that a threefold division is equally valid. This classification includes obligatory or required actions (*wājib*), forbidden or prohibited actions (*mumtaniʿ*), and permissible or neutral

³¹ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 18.

³² al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 18.

³³ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 18.

³⁴ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 19–20.

³⁵ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 20–21.

actions (*wāsiṭ* or *mumkin*), which are neither obligatory nor forbidden. While the human mind can distinguish between obligatory and prohibited actions, it cannot determine the merit of neutral actions. Depending on the time and place, such actions may fall into either the category of meritorious or non-meritorious actions. To clarify when a permissible action is meritorious, an individual who has insight into permissible actions must explain it to others. For this reason, al-Nasafī argues that the limitations of the human mind regarding permissible actions provide another rationale for the necessity of prophethood.³⁶

Al-Nasafī categorises people according to their utilisation of reason and their commitment to contemplation and intellectual introspection, with the aim of acquiring true knowledge of things (*ashyāʾ*). The first group consists of individuals who abstain from bodily desires, such as sex, indulgence in food, and other cravings, by living on the verge of asceticism. This group resists bodily desires to avoid being consumed by carnal passions, which can be harmful to their souls. They prefer to contemplate God and other divine matters instead of indulging in worldly pleasures. The second group includes individuals whose capacity for reasoning is as strong as the first group. However, they are in a position in which they have to use their abilities to sustain their own lives and those of others around them. As a result, they cannot focus on fundamental matters related to divinity, as they are preoccupied with obtaining necessary benefits for the continuation of human life and distributing them to their fellow beings. The third group consists of individuals whose rational strength is impaired or distorted. Members of this group squander the priceless gift of life bestowed upon them by God on the pursuit of carnal desires. Even if we postulate that the first group may not necessarily require the guidance of prophets, it is undeniable that the remaining two are in dire need of prophetic guidance.³⁷ The reason why the second group necessitates prophetic guidance is that they dedicate their endeavours towards ensuring the essential needs for the perpetuity of human existence, and consequently, they are unable to create a suitable ambience and allocate time for contemplative practices. The last group, by their nature, is not suitable for reflection on divine matters since they are unsophisticated and

³⁶ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 21.

³⁷ It seems that al-Nasafī has been influenced by an elitist view of humanity espoused by the Falāsifa. For instance, al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), a prominent Islamic philosopher, posits that prophets possess a heightened imaginative faculty and intellectual capacity, which allows them to receive an overflow of intelligibles from the agent intellect (the tenth intellect). This sets them apart from philosophers. However, prophetic knowledge can also be attained through demonstration and intellection. According to al-Fārābī, only these two groups have the potential to achieve ultimate happiness. See Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 87, 146–48. Ibn Sīnā holds a similar perspective, see McGinnis Jon and David C. Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007), 205. Al-Kindī (d. 252/866 [?]) states that divine knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ilāhiyya*), holds a higher rank (*martaba*), than the human sciences (*al-ʿulūm al-insāniyya*). And divine knowledge can be attained without the need for study, effort, or human methods, and without the constraints of time, unlike the latter. The prophets' access to the truth is immediate, and without struggle and effort through the will of God because their souls have been purified and illuminated by Him. This, according to al-Kindī, serves as proof that their knowledge has a divine origin. See Peter Adamson, *Al-Kindī* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43. Al-Kindī also remarks that the unbelievers had previously challenged Prophet Muhammad to provide an explanation regarding how God would resurrect the dead bodies on the Day of Judgment, considering that the bones would have already decayed. Prophet Muhammad received a revelation as a response to this challenge, which al-Kindī admires as being more clear and brief than any explanation that could be ever provided by philosophy. Adamson, *Al-Kindī*, 43–44.

simple-minded, and they cannot relinquish earthly pleasures. Compared to the other groups, the first group is a minuscule minority and, therefore, negligible. Given that the majority of people are in need of prophetic instruction, the necessity of prophecy cannot be questioned simply because a few people do not require it.³⁸

Al-Nasafī argues that all finite beings are inherently weak and imperfect, in contrast to the infinite and eternal nature of God. As a result, human reason is also considered to be imperfect due to its finite and limited nature. Besides, there are various obstacles that can hinder reason from functioning properly, including emotions such as anger, frustration, and distress, as well as challenging circumstances and adversity. Alternatively, a disease might occur and weaken reason, leading man to withhold from contemplation. The number of those who are deprived of contemplation due to such situations is much greater than the number of those who can keep themselves away from all distractions and continue contemplation and meditation. This reality justifies that all matters that can or cannot be reached via contemplation should be sent and elucidated through prophets for the benefit of the majority. Apart from this, the process of acquiring knowledge through contemplation is arduous, demanding, and often painful. Therefore, it is also a mercy and blessing for people of reflection (*ahl al-nazar*) that all mankind is given such knowledge through divine revelation (*al-wahy al-samāwīy*). In this way, their task becomes easier, and they are protected from doubts and hesitations that are always present on the path of contemplation and reasoning.³⁹

Despite the fact that most people lack the time and ability for contemplation, those who follow the prophets from this group exhibit persistence and continuity in what is right (*ḥaqq*) and adhere to it steadfastly. On the other hand, philosophers, despite their reputation for possessing sharp intellects and their persistent pursuit of truth, tend to fall into blasphemy and heresy by gradually moving away from truth. The primary reason for these individuals to end up in such a state is either their lack of exposure to divine revelation or their conscious decision to disregard it. If one takes the ancient philosophers into account, it is unlikely that they will find anyone among them who embraced the belief in the unity of God (*tawḥīd*) and acknowledged the resurrection after death (*al-ḥashr wa al-maʿād*). However, some philosophers accepted and adhered to prophets and obtained knowledge from them regarding God and other religious subjects. This is clear evidence showing that even people of reflection require the institution of prophethood. The sending of detailed explanations through prophets to all human groups is a way by which God eases the trials (*imtiḥān*) and affairs of people in this world.⁴⁰

At this point, it is crucial to provide some commentary, as Nasafī's criticisms of philosophers also implicate well-known Islamic philosophers, al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037).

³⁸ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 21–23. ; *Tamhīd*, 33–34. Al-Nasafī is uncertain about the idea that there might be individuals who do not require prophetic guidance. Although it seems that he entirely opposes this idea throughout most of the discussion, his statements vaguely or implicitly suggest that there might be a few people who do not require prophecy. See al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 21, 22. Yet, in the passage above, al-Nasafī, without explicitly expressing his own opinion, states that even if we accept the assumption that there are a few individuals who do not require the light of prophecy, it does not alter the ultimate truth, namely the necessity of prophecy.

³⁹ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 23.

⁴⁰ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 23–24.

Without a doubt, they neither rejected the unity of God nor denied the idea of resurrection (*al-ma'ād*) after death. However, it must be acknowledged that their philosophical narratives or interpretations regarding the nature of *al-ma'ād* were in conflict with the teachings or literal meaning of certain passages in Islamic Scripture. They may have chosen this path to harmonise or reconcile with their philosophical systems, but it does not change the fact that certain philosophical remarks of theirs are at odds with the Scripture and sayings of the Prophet. For instance, according to al-Fārābī, the human soul persists in existence even after death, but souls that fail to attain perfection (*kamāl*) – particularly those belonging to the ignorant city-dwellers – will face eternal annihilation.⁴¹ He regarded nonexistence or nothingness as the ultimate punishment for such souls, rather than depicting them as residents of hell. This idea clearly contradicts the teachings of the Qur'an, as the Qur'an affirms that no human soul will perish forever; even if guilty, it will continue to exist and be punished in hell.⁴² Ibn Sīnā also shared the belief in the continuation of the human soul after death.⁴³ However, he tended to overinterpret the passages in the Qur'an that refer to bodily or physical (*jismānī*) resurrection within the framework of his theory of religious language. According to Ibn Sīnā, the Qur'an employs a "religious language" comprised of symbols and analogies. As a result, he believed that the meaning of these religious expressions or utterances, which evoke bodily resurrection, extends beyond their literal interpretation. According to his system of natural philosophy, a physical resurrection after death is regarded as impossible, leading to the notion of a spiritual (*rūḥānī*) resurrection instead. Additionally, he argued that describing resurrection solely as spiritual or non-physical would be detrimental to those lacking understanding, the average or simple-minded believers, which is why the Qur'an and the Prophet employed a symbolic language to convey the idea of resurrection. In short, according to Ibn Sīnā, divine truths in Shari'a are communicated in a language that average people can understand, in other words, what they cannot comprehend is conveyed in a more accessible manner through metaphors and symbolic utterances. If these truths in religions had not been elucidated and transmitted in this way, religions would certainly not serve any purpose for people.⁴⁴

The negative attitudes of Islamic Peripatetic philosophers towards physical resurrection stem from their belief that it is impossible to recreate or restore the *ma'dūm* (the thing that ceased to exist or is no longer present, in this case, the human body) to its original state. In other words, once the physical body of a soul has decayed and passed on (thus becoming *ma'dūm*), it is not possible to resurrect it or restore it to its original form. While it is true that God can create a new body and unite it with the soul, the notion of the same soul being united with different bodies implies reincarnation, which they consider a superstitious belief. From their perspective, resurrection after death or *al-ḥashr wa al-ma'ād* is related solely to souls, not bodies. Now, we

⁴¹ al-Fārābī (d. 339/950), *Uyūn al-Masā'il*, ed., Muḥī al-Dīn Ḥāṭib and 'Abd al-Fattāḥ Qaylān (Cairo: n.p., 1910), 17. ; *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, ed., Albert Nasri Nadir (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1991), 137–48.

⁴² The Qur'an, 3: 185. ; 69: 27.

⁴³ Ibn Sīnā, *Nafs/Kitāb al-Shifā' -Psychologie D'ibn Sīnā (Avicenne) D'après Son Oeuvre Aš-Šifā'*, ed. Ján Bakoš and Ivan Hrbek (Prague: Éd. de l'Acad. Tchecoslovaque des Sciences, 1956), 224.

⁴⁴ Ibn Sīnā, *Risālat al-Aḍḥawiyya fī Amr al-Ma'ād*, ed. Ḥasan Āsī (Beirut: Mu'assasa al-Jāmi'iyya, 1987), 91–126. ; *Ilāhiyyāt/Kitāb al-Shifā'*, ed., Georges Chehata Anawati and Sa'īd Zāyad, vol. 2 (Tehran: Intishārāt Nāṣir Khusraw, 1943), 423. ; *Kitāb al-Najāt*, 291.

must conclude the discussion here due to the limitations of the study. However, despite their contrary views to the literal text of the Qur'an, one fact remains true: they did not reject the concept of resurrection after death, which is one of the fundamental principles of the Islamic faith. Therefore, labelling them as heretics or apostates does not align with Islam's understanding of *takfīr*.

If we come back to our discussion, al-Nasafī further proposes us to imagine a hypothetical situation in which the mind is capable of achieving truth on its own without the aid of prophetic knowledge. He even goes one step further and suggests that we assume that even the idea that prophecy makes the path to salvation easier is also not correct. Even in this scenario, it would not necessarily follow that prophethood is a futile matter. Instead, as demonstrated by numerous examples in the world around us, it can be viewed as an act of grace and blessing. In other words, granting more than what is strictly necessary is not meaningless but rather a grace and a blessing. For instance, even if nourishments had had no taste or flavour, they would still have sustained life. However, God has chosen to provide a variety of flavours and aromas in nourishments, turning eating into a pleasurable experience. Similarly, while clothes that provide sufficient protection from cold and heat are enough, adding ornaments or other accessories to enhance their comfort is not pointless. Therefore, prophecy, like the examples mentioned above, can be seen as manifestations of grace and blessing (*faḍl*), bestowal and bounty (*inʿām*), and generosity and abundance (*ziyāda*).⁴⁵

In summary, al-Nasafī suggests that prophethood is a possibility (*mumkināt*) that can be rationally understood, but also a necessity (*wājibāt*) according to God's infinite wisdom. From a rational perspective, the emergence of prophets in human history with God's will is neither impossible nor unreasonable. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that although al-Nasafī considers prophethood to fall under the category of necessities according to God's wisdom, he does not intend to nullify God's attribute of will. In other words, God could have chosen not to send prophets if He had desired. However, due to God's infinite wisdom, compassion, and grace towards His servants, prophets emerged in the timeline of human history. The next step in our analysis is to investigate al-Nasafī's criteria for assessing the legitimacy of a person's prophetic claim.

2. Prophet or Imposter: The Criteria for Evaluating a Prophetic Claim

According to al-Nasafī, the most compelling evidence one can offer to establish one's legitimacy as a prophet is miracle (*muʿjiza*).⁴⁶ Prior to investigating the role of miracles as evidence of prophethood, it is essential to elucidate al-Nasafī's understanding of the term "*muʿjiza*". Al-Nasafī approaches the term by first exploring its linguistic meaning before delving into its terminological sense. Accordingly, the word "*muʿjiza*" is derived from the root word "*ʿajz*", which denotes desperation, incapacity, or inability to do something. *Muʿjiza* is called so because it renders the interlocutor or opponent helpless, leaving them unable to challenge or attack the claimant of prophethood. The letter *tāʾ marbūʿa* (ة) found at the end of the word indicates emphasis or exaggeration (*mubālagha*), similar to words such as "*ʿallāma*" (one who is knowledgeable or an

⁴⁵ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 24–25.

⁴⁶ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 29.

expert in a certain field), “*nassāba*” (one who is skilled in tracing their ancestry or family lineage), or “*rāwiya*” (one who narrates or tells a story or account very well). The purpose of *tā' marbūta* is to highlight the extent of helplessness or desperation experienced by the opponent in the aftermath of the miracle.⁴⁷

Al-Nasafi reports that according to *falāsifa*, *mu'jiza* is a divine act that surpasses the capacity of human power, both physical and mental. Specifically, it is a superb and particular (*juz'ī*) divine act that goes beyond both man's natural capability (*al-quwwa al-ṭabī'iyya*) and mental capability (*al-quwwa al-nafsāniyya*).⁴⁸

This view, attributed by al-Nasafī to philosophers without providing a specific name, appears problematic because the renowned Islamic philosophers al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, who extensively addressed and discussed the issue of prophecy within their philosophical frameworks, do not regard miracles as occurrences that surpass the capacity of human nature or violate the natural order. Aligned with their deterministic perspective, they perceive miracles as incidents that already exist within or are inherently part of the natural order. In other words, miracles are not events that violate or go against the laws of nature; rather, they are intrinsic to those laws. Such phenomena are considered extraordinary by ordinary individuals due to their limited perceptions. However, those who have attained a higher level of cognitive capacity understand that these events are already intrinsic to the natural order and, therefore, do not violate its established laws.⁴⁹ Moreover, according to Ibn Sīnā, the power to manifest miracles is an inherent aspect of prophets' nature. It is uncommon for matter (*hayūlā*) to take on its perfect form (*ṣūra*)

⁴⁷ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 30. Al-Nasafī's predecessor, al-Māturīdī (d. 333/944), defines *mu'jiza* as “an event that occurs in the hands of prophets and cannot be realised or brought about through means of learning or education.” see al-Māturīdī, *Kitāb al-Tawḥīd*, 289–290.

⁴⁸ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 30.

⁴⁹ Metin Pay, “İslam Düşüncesinde Bazı Mucize Telakkileri [Some Miracle Considerations in Islamic Thought],” *Dini Araştırmalar* 18, no. 47 (December 2015): 146–71, <https://doi.org/10.15745/da.18785>; Also see İsmail Erdoğan, “İslam Filozoflarına Göre Nübüvvet ve Mucize [Prophecy and Miracles in the View of Islamic Philosophers],” *Fırat Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 1 (June 1996): 436–37, 439. The deterministic understanding of nature embraced by philosophers was strongly criticised by al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111), the renowned contemporary of al-Nasafī. Al-Ghazali asserts that since we consistently observe things or events coming into existence in a specific order, the connection between cause and effect, we assume that these things/events are inherently interconnected. On what grounds can we confidently state that they are inherently connected in a causal manner? Or, in other words, by what authority do we claim that they are bound by an obligatory cause-and-effect connection or that they unfailingly occur in succession? All we observe is that the presence of one thing or event follows another. Philosophers have no evidence on this matter apart from the observation that, for instance, burning occurs when fire touches an object. Consequently, their justification for linking the occurrence of burning with the touch of fire rests entirely on their prior observations. However, this observation by itself does not furnish us with any grounds to assert an obligatory causal link between events. In short, our individual observations only indicate simultaneity, not causality. See al-Ghazali, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (Egypt: al-Maṭba'a al-Khayriyya, 1901), 65–9. It should be noted that al-Ghazali's critiques were not a total rejection of causality but rather a reassessment and reinterpretation within the framework of Islamic thought and values. He accepted that there are observable patterns of cause and effect in the natural world but believed that events are not bound by rigid causal chains and that the ultimate cause of all events lies in the will of God. For a detailed analysis of al-Ghazali's rejection of natural causality, see Michael E. Marmura, “Ghazali and Demonstrative Science,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 3, no. 2 (1965): 183–204.; George Giacaman and Raja Bahlul, “Ghazali on Miracles and Necessary Connection,” *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 9, no. 1 (2000): 39–50.

in the realm of nature. Yet, although such a remarkable event is extremely rare, it occurs when prophets enter this world. It is this very reason why they possess this unique power, which sets them apart from the rest of humanity. They can shape and alter natural phenomena without requiring any external means or agents, thanks to matter attaining its perfect form. However, as mentioned, this is a rare occurrence, which is why prophets very rarely emerged throughout history.⁵⁰ Now that we have highlighted the apparent differences between the definition of *mu‘jiza* attributed by al-Nasafī to the *falāsifa* and their actual views, we can shift our focus back to our main discussion.

Al-Nasafī next gives the definition of *mutakallimūn*, stating that they regard *mu‘jiza* as an event that occurs in the realm of legal responsibility (*dār al-taklīf*) and deviates from established norms or patterns (*‘āda*) in nature or the universe. These events are not within the power of humans, but God shows them through a prophet to prove their prophetic claim. Al-Nasafī adheres to the academic tradition of his time and states that every word or utterance in the definition of miracle serves a specific purpose. In other words, each word in the definition eliminates other possible meanings to achieve a perfect definition. For example, the phrase “*dār al-taklīf*” is used to indicate that the miraculous events that God will perform in the hereafter cannot be considered miracles.⁵¹

God has sent numerous prophets throughout history to guide people on the right path, and to demonstrate their divine mission, they performed miraculous actions with the will of God. Al-Nasafī provides various examples of such miracles, including those associated with the prophets *Ibrāhīm* (Abraham), *Mūsā* (Moses), and *‘Īsā* (Jesus). For instance, when Abraham was thrown into a raging fire by his enemies, God made the fire cool and peaceful for him, allowing him to escape unharmed. Similarly, in front of Pharaoh, Moses’ staff transformed into a snake, which he then used to divide the Red Sea and save himself and his followers from Pharaoh’s persecution. Jesus, on the other hand, was renowned for healing the blind and the lepers, resurrecting the dead, and giving life to birds formed from mud.⁵²

Although these miracles were witnessed first-hand (*mushāhada*) by those who were present, subsequent generations come to know the reality of these events through numerous reliable sources (*al-khabar al-mutawātir*),⁵³ which al-Nasafī considers to convey necessary knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-ḍarūri*). Reports of the *mutawātir* type form the foundation of our knowledge about various

⁵⁰ Hülya Alper, “İbn Sînâ ve Bâkılânî Örneğinde İslâm Filozofları ile Kelâmcıların Nübüvvet Anlayışının Kur’ânî Perspektifle Değerlendirilmesi [An Evaluation of the Understanding of Prophethood by Islamic Philosophers and Theologians from a Qur’anic Perspective: The Example of Ibn Sînâ and Bâqilânî],” *Marmara Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 28 (2005): 60-61.

⁵¹ For a detailed analysis of the reasons behind the preference for each word or expression in the given definition, see al-Nasafī, *Tabşirat*, 2: 30-31.

⁵² For further information regarding the aforementioned miraculous events, refer to al-Nasafī, *Tabşirat*, 2: 38.

⁵³ “*Al-khabar al-mutawātir*” is an Arabic term that is often used in Islamic epistemology and refers to a type of knowledge or information that is considered to be conveyed by a multitude of narrators in such a way that it is inconceivable that they could all have agreed upon a falsehood. In other words, “*al-khabar al-mutawātir*” refers to information that has been transmitted through a large number of reliable sources, to the point that it is considered beyond doubt or dispute. This type of knowledge is often contrasted with “*al-khabar al-wāhid*”, which refers to information that has been transmitted through a single narrator or source and may be subject to doubt or uncertainty.

matters, such as distant lands we have never visited or nations that have disappeared from the stage of history. According to al-Nasafi, the certainty of knowledge obtained from *al-khabar al-mutawātir* is equivalent to that acquired through direct observation. In other words, the level of certainty in both cases is the same, as if it had been witnessed first-hand. This is because it is illogical for a large number of people to converge on false news, given that individuals have different natures, desires, and objectives, which would lead to different motivations for lying.⁵⁴ The miraculous events in question were confirmed by multiple individuals through sensory knowledge (*ḥiss* or *tajriba*),⁵⁵ which al-Nasafi regards as one of the most reliable sources of knowledge. Consequently, the details of these remarkable events were transmitted to future generations in accordance with the rigorous transmission conditions of *mutawātir* news.⁵⁶ Therefore, according to al-Nasafi, individuals possessing this type of knowledge about miracles are on par with those who witnessed these miracles with their own eyes.

Al-Nasafi maintains that human reason is incapable of providing evidence to refute the existence of miracles. Claims that deny the presence of miracles, which rely on reason, are likewise subject to objections that can be raised by reason itself. Furthermore, human reason is limited to providing inferential (*istidlālī*) knowledge, which is always susceptible to error (*khaṭa'*). On the other hand, knowledge concerning the existence of miracles is acquired through the senses, which is immune to errors. And then this knowledge is transmitted through *al-khabar al-mutawātir*, which constitutes *al-ʿilm al-ḍarurī*, as previously mentioned. In the event of a contradiction between the two, either one must be rejected. Rejecting inferential knowledge, which is prone to error, is more appropriate than rejecting sensory knowledge, which is error-free.⁵⁷

Miracles are distinct from illusions or magic tricks that are performed by magicians who have spent years perfecting their skills. These individuals possess a wealth of experience and expertise that enables them to deceive their audience by showcasing extraordinary feats using sleight of hand. However, upon closer examination and reflection, the mystery and power of their tricks gradually diminish as the reasons behind the illusion are discovered. In contrast, miracles become increasingly certain and powerful as they are investigated and reflected upon. Unlike magic

⁵⁴ al-Nasafi, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 38. ; *Baḥr al-Kalām*, 46.

⁵⁵ It is possible to note a subtle distinction between these two terms. “*Ḥiss*” refers to the subjective sensation or perception of something. It can describe a physical sensation, such as touch, taste, or smell, or an emotional feeling, such as happiness, sadness, or anger. It pertains to immediate and personal experiences. On the other hand, “*tajriba*” refers to a broader and more objective sense of experience. It can provide a wider understanding of a situation or environment. *Tajriba* can also encompass knowledge or understanding acquired through the collective experiences of a diverse range of individuals. In summary, *ḥiss* primarily refers to the immediate and personal experience of something, while *tajriba* encompasses a broader range of experiences, both in terms of duration and scope, and includes the knowledge derived from those experiences.

⁵⁶ al-Nasafi, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 39. ; *Tamhīd*, 45.

⁵⁷ al-Nasafi, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 39–40. Al-Nasafi appears to regard sensory experience as infallible. However, his contemporary al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111) asserts, as famously known in his renowned work *Munqidh*, that knowledge acquired through the senses is prone to error. Consequently, al-Ghazali views the data in question with a degree of scepticism. For more information, see al-Ghazali, *al-Ghazālī’s Path to Sufism and His Deliverance from Error: An Annotated Translation of al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, trans. Richard J. McCarthy, pref. David B. Burrell, intro. William A. Graham (Louisville KY: Fons Vitae, 2006).

tricks, the influence and potency of miracles grow day by day, revealing themselves as something that is beyond human capability.⁵⁸ According to al-Nasafī, it is worth noting that while miracles and magic tricks may both elicit wonder and amazement, the former holds a deeper significance that transcends human capacity. Therefore, it is essential to differentiate between the two phenomena, as miracles are rooted in divine intervention and have a lasting impact on our beliefs and understanding of the world.

According to al-Nasafī, as stated many times, the reality of prophethood is irrefutable, and one of the most compelling proofs for this is our extensive knowledge of the true nature of substances (*jawāhir*). He divides the substances into three essential categories: food, poison, and medicine. Despite the fact that we cannot distinguish them from one another through reason or experience, we possess detailed information about them, such as the precise amount of a drug that will cause harm or benefit. This knowledge cannot be attained by even the most intelligent and perceptive individuals without the guidance of a master. According to al-Nasafī, those who possess insight into the nature of substances did not acquire it through reason or the senses but rather through the teachings of a master. If someone were to ask them where they obtained this knowledge, they would answer “Hippocrates (Buqrāt)”. If asked where Hippocrates obtained his knowledge, they would say “he received it from the supreme Asclepius (Isqilīnūs), who ascended to the heavens with his soul and acquired it.”⁵⁹ Al-Nasafī emphasises that this knowledge, which is crucial for human survival and well-being, could not have been obtained through human means alone and therefore serves as evidence of the divine origin of prophethood.

The accumulation of knowledge concerning “science or knowledge of the stars” (*al-ʿilm bi al-nujūm*)⁶⁰ serves as an additional piece of evidence for the veracity and reality of prophethood. Al-Nasafī asserts that acquiring such detailed and consistent information on celestial bodies is beyond human capability without proper tools or equipment, given the vast distance between us and them, which was inconceivable at the time. Therefore, al-Nasafī posits that even individuals possessing acute senses (*al-ḥawāss al-salīma*) and superior intellect (*al-ʿuqūl al-wāfira*) cannot acquire knowledge of these matters without external assistance. When asked about the origin of their knowledge, astronomers point to Hermes Trismegistus (Harmas al-Ḥakīm), a philosopher who is believed to have gained insight into the stars through direct observation (*mushāhada*) while wandering in the kingdom of the heavens (*malakūt al-samawāt*) after ascending there through his soul. Al-Nasafī states that many historians of his time recognized Harmas as the prophet Idrīs, a figure well known to the people of the Maghrib.⁶¹ Additionally, al-Nasafī reports that many of

⁵⁸ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 41.

⁵⁹ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 35–36.

⁶⁰ It refers to the traditional practice of studying the positions, movements, and patterns of celestial bodies such as stars and planets, and using this knowledge to make predictions about events on earth, particularly in the realm of astrology. In Islamic history, “*al-ʿilm bi al-nujūm*” was also associated with the development of astronomy, as Muslim scholars made significant contributions to the field of observational astronomy, and developed mathematical models to describe the motions of celestial objects. However, it is important to note that while astronomy is a legitimate scientific discipline, astrology is not considered a science, as it lacks empirical evidence and scientific methodology. So, while “*al-ʿilm bi al-nujūm*” can refer to the scientific study of the stars, it can also refer to the pseudoscientific practice of astrology.

⁶¹ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣirat*, 2: 36.

these historians asserted that the science of astronomy was revealed to the prophet Idris. In summary, al-Nasafi concludes that all knowledge concerning astronomy and the stars was transmitted through divine revelation (*bi-ṭariq al-wahy*), which he views as the most straightforward evidence of the authenticity of prophethood.⁶²

According to al-Nasafi, prophethood further played a crucial role in transmitting knowledge, artistry, and craftsmanship related to basic professions.⁶³ Knowledge of constructing sheltered dwellings to protect against adverse weather conditions and predatory animals, for instance, was conveyed through prophecy. The complex process of converting grain into bread, spanning from cultivation to consumption, is yet another illustration of knowledge that could not have been attained solely through experience but necessitated divine assistance. The interlinking of each phase of bread-making, along with the remarkable level of mastery that humans have achieved in it, is regarded as a testament to God's wisdom and the crucial role of prophethood in transmitting this knowledge. The skill of dressmaking, which is essential to human life, is also said to have been taught by prophets. After acquiring the basics from prophets, people developed their skills in these fields using their God-given reason and ability. Other knowledge, such as how to tame predatory animals and how to benefit from them, was also conveyed through prophecy. The existence of such knowledge among humans serves as evidence that prophethood played a crucial role in shaping human knowledge and skills. Overall, al-Nasafi argues that the vast array of knowledge, artistry, and craftsmanship related to basic professions that humans possess is a testament to the reality of prophethood.⁶⁴

According to al-Nasafi, not only were various professions transmitted to people through prophethood, but also the first language among people was taught by a prophet, and other languages emerged from this very first language.⁶⁵ Additionally, knowledge concerning human

⁶² al-Nasafi, *Tabşirat*, 2: 36.

⁶³ al-Nasafi, *Tabşirat*, 2: 36.

⁶⁴ al-Nasafi, *Tabşirat*, 2: 36.

⁶⁵ In his discourse on the origin of languages, al-Nasafi did not provide any specific information regarding the primordial language that served as the precursor to all contemporary languages. The origin of languages has been a topic of exploration in both the Islamic tradition and contemporary scientific fields focused on studying language and its origins, resulting in the emergence of diverse theories. The theory of *iştilâh* presents an interesting perspective, suggesting that language was established through the common consensus and agreement (*muwâḍa'a*). See, Mustafa Shah, "Classical Islamic Discourse on the Origins of Language: Cultural Memory and the Defense of Orthodoxy," *Numen* 58, no. 2-3 (2011): 315-16, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852711X562335>. This theory is commonly associated with the Mu'tazila school but has also been adopted by many Sunni theologians. Nevertheless, the theory of *tawqif*, which asserts that language was taught to human beings by God, is also widely accepted among Muslim theologians. See, Hulusi Arslan and Numan Karagöz, "Dilin Kökeni ve Teolojik Bağlamı [The Origin of Language and its Theological Context]," *Mesned İlahiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi [The Journal of Mesned of Theological Studies]* 12, no. 2 (Autumn 2021-2): 448-49, <https://doi.org/10.51605/mesned.929586>. There is also a plenty of theories put forth by linguists who are deeply engaged in this area of study. These theories include the Bow-wow Theory, the Pooh-Pooh Theory, the Gestural Theory, the Social Interaction Theory, and the Evolutionary Theory. However, the origin of language dates back to the very beginnings of humanity. Given that attempting to make definitive assessments about a period before the existence of prehistoric written culture is impossible, it seems that discussions on this subject will not exceed the boundaries of theory and will inevitably remain as speculative discourse. The ban imposed by the French Academy of Sciences in the 1860s on publishing research about the origin of human language signifies the prevailing belief that achieving definitive conclusions in this field is a formidable

reproduction and lineage perpetuation, as well as how to alter the natures of substances by utilising various processing methods (onomancy, known in Arabic as “*sīmyā*”),⁶⁶ were also conveyed to humanity by God through prophets.⁶⁷ The fact that this knowledge exists among people serves as evidence that prophethood has indeed occurred in human history.

In summary, al-Nasafī posits that acquiring all the knowledge and skills necessary for maintaining human life through reason and the senses alone is impossible. However, people possess the requisite knowledge and skills to sustain themselves, despite the unattainability of absolute truth in these matters. This, according to al-Nasafī, is compelling evidence affirming the reality of prophethood.

On the matter of miracles, al-Nasafī asks, “Once reason has established the existence of God, why do humans perceive miraculous events as implausible?” In the realm of existence, everything – whether it is an accident or a substance – is created by God, who possesses infinite power (*qudra*). Therefore, given that God has created all things from nothing, it is unquestionable that He is capable of manifesting supernatural events in the physical world. After all, God is the creator of the laws that govern the natural world.⁶⁸ From a theological perspective, divine intervention is possible because God is the creator of all things and, therefore, has the authority to alter the course of events in nature. Miracles serve as a means of demonstrating God’s power and reinforcing our faith in Him. Through miraculous events, we are reminded of God’s omnipotence and encouraged to submit ourselves to His will.

Lastly, al-Nasafī argues that the acceptance of the truths brought by prophets is necessary, even if they are not proven through miracles. These truths are self-evident and readily accepted by those who have preserved their original disposition (*fiṭra*).⁶⁹ Prophets convey messages that are

task. See, Szabolcs Számadó and Eörs Szathmáry, “Language Evolution,” *PLoS Biology* vol. 2,10 (2004): e346. doi:10.1371/journal.pbio.0020346. Therefore, since discussions on the origin of language are destined to largely remain speculative, it seems that the theory of *tawqif* will continue to be appealing to those who interpret life in a specific theological and religious manner, as al-Nasafī does, for the justification of prophecy. However, this argument lacks objectivity too, as the argument proposed by al-Nasafī regarding the source of our knowledge necessary for the sustenance of life during the early stages of human existence.

⁶⁶ “*Sīmyā*” refers to a specific branch of alchemy in Islamic tradition, which focuses on the transmutation of base metals into gold or the creation of an elixir of life. In this context, *sīmyā* is associated with the use of various processes and techniques to transform the properties of substances and create new materials with unique properties.

⁶⁷ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 36.

⁶⁸ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 40.

⁶⁹ “*Fiṭra*” (also spelled “*fiṭrah*” or “*fiṭrat*”) is an Arabic term that refers to the innate nature of human beings. It is the natural disposition or inclination that humans have towards recognizing and submitting to the existence of a higher power or God. In Islamic theology, it is believed that every human being is born with an innate inclination towards monotheism, and it is only through external factors and influences that they may deviate from this natural state. The concept of *fiṭra* is often used to argue for the existence of God, as it suggests that the human predisposition towards belief in a higher power is evidence of a divine creator. The term *fiṭra* appears in the Qur’an in the following context: “So set thou thy face steadily and truly to the Faith: (establish) God’s handiwork according to the pattern [*fiṭra*] on which He has made mankind: no change (let there be) in the work (wrought) by God: that is the standard Religion: but most among mankind understand not.” Qur’an 30: 30. [If not stated otherwise, the translations of the Qur’anic verses used in this study are from Yusuf Ali’s translation, which can be accessed at <https://corpus.quran.com/>, accessed November 10, 2022.] The term *fiṭra* is also found in the Hadith literature, for instance: “No one is born except according

implicit in human nature and are thus easily recognised by those who have maintained their innate nature. The call of the prophets carries certain characteristics and virtues that are familiar to human nature, such as seeking proximity or closeness (*taqarrub*) to God through inner purification and introspection, gratitude (*shukr*) for blessings, and sermons on ethical and political virtues (*al-siyāsā al-faḍīla*) that are necessary for living a dignified and honourable life. What the prophets bring are maxims that are necessitated by pure and upright reason (*al-‘aql al-ṣarīḥ*). Furthermore, *al-‘aql al-ṣarīḥ* shows that any beliefs or opinions contrary to these maxims are not reasonable.⁷⁰

According to al-Nasafī, it is important to note that the acceptance of prophetic messages is not solely dependent on the demonstration of miracles, but rather on the recognition of these inherent truths that resonate with the human nature. The call of the prophets is characterised by its innate goodness and ethical principles that align with the fundamental values of humanity. To conclude, the acceptance of prophetic messages is necessary, regardless of whether or not they are supported by miracles, as they align with the innate truths and values of human nature.

Conclusion

In his theological writings, al-Nasafī first examines the nature, origin, and extent of human knowledge, following the footsteps of his predecessors in the Māturīdī school. Having established the possibility of knowledge and its sources, al-Nasafī delves into ontology, aiming to clarify the existence of things and their origins. He posits that the universe came into being by God’s will, who possesses infinite power and wisdom to create as He desires. After establishing the possibility of knowledge and the origin of existence, the question arises: what is humanity’s position in the universe, and what is the purpose of our existence? Al-Nasafī argues that faith (*īmān*) in God and his prophets is necessary to comprehend our existence, as God’s infinite wisdom precludes Him from performing meaningless actions. In other words, there exists an inherent order in the universe surrounding us, and our minds are equipped to comprehend it. Thus, an individual who has maintained their original disposition (*fiṭra*) must inevitably be guided towards faith. Without

to intrinsic nature (*fiṭra*), but their parents make them Jews, or Christians, or Magians; just as a cow gives birth to a calf that is whole do you find it mutilated?” See *The Wisdom of the Prophet: Sayings of Muhammad*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston, London: Shambhala, 1994), 9. According to the Islamic tradition, the term *fiṭra* also refers to the innate or natural religion that existed before any religious obligations were revealed. This is the most cardinal view, shared by scholars such as al-Nasafī. Its origin is believed to trace back to the first human being and prophet Adam. See Arent Jan Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), 214–16. The central concept here is that every human being, due to their *fiṭra*, possesses an inherent inclination to believe in God and His oneness. As a result, submission to God in its purest form comes naturally to those who have maintained their *fiṭra*. The individuals who adhered to a particular manifestation of this natural religion, which was prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula before the emergence of Islam, were known as Ḥanīfīs. Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī, a Māturīdī scholar, argued that humans are created with this innate disposition and are, therefore, obligated to obey God’s laws. For more information, see; Abū al-Layth al-Samarqandī Naṣr ibn Muḥammad, *The Islamic Concept of Belief in the 4th/10th Century*, trans. Hans Daiber (Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1995), 243. ; Jon Hoover, “Fiṭra,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd ed., ed. Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. Consulted online on 19 October 2022, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_27155, first published online: 2016, first print edition: 9789004305755, 2016, 2016-2.

⁷⁰ al-Nasafī, *Tabṣīrat*, 2: 44.

it, finding a sense of purpose becomes an insurmountable task. A scenario where God is absent culminates in the preposterous notion that humans were created merely for the purpose of non-existence. According to al-Nasafī, it is impossible (*mustahīl*) to think otherwise. Therefore, God can send messengers as a means of increasing our knowledge about matters beyond human reason, as prophethood is the only feasible way of doing so. Consequently, according to al-Nasafī, there is a rational basis for accepting the teachings of prophets regarding matters that reason alone cannot explain.

Al-Nasafī held a deep admiration for his teacher, al-Māturīdī, who, like him, acknowledged prophecy as a fundamental necessity, value, and meaning (*ḥikma*) in understanding the ultimate purpose of our existence on earth, encompassing our actions and relationships with fellow human beings. According to al-Māturīdī, human actions and knowledge related to them can be classified into two categories: first, obligatory (*wājib*) actions, which are considered good (*khayr/ḥasan*), and second, prohibited actions (*mumtaniʿ*), which are considered evil (*sharr/qabīḥ*). Apart from these categories, which can be comprehended by human reason, there is also a third category which includes other fundamental *khayr(s)/ḥasan(s)* and *sharr(s)/qabīḥ(s)* that lie beyond the capacity of human reason. This is where the role of prophecy becomes apparent. *Nubuwwa* confirms and validates human reason regarding the first two categories, and in the case of the last category, it serves as a guiding force for humans to discern and know the inherent goods and evils within this category. For instance, reason recognises that everything in the realm of existence, of which it is a part, possesses a meaning or purpose (*ḥikma*). It establishes that beings exist for a “meaningful future” (*al-baqāʿ*), not for a “purposeless nothingness” (*al-fanā*).⁷¹ It is necessary (*wājib*) for things to be this way, or this state of affairs is obligatory, because *ḥikma* is inherently *ḥasan* and its opposite (*bilā ḥikma* or *safāha*) is inherently *qabīḥ*. Yet while human reason considers it as *mumtaniʿ* and *qabīḥ* for life to be aimless and meaningless, and concludes that human life should surely have a meaningful future (*al-baqāʿ*), it cannot attain the knowledge of exactly what this purpose and meaning are. At this point, it becomes clear why al-Nasafī and al-Māturīdī think that prophecy is within the realm of possibility in terms of reason but is a necessity within the realm of God’s divine wisdom. According to them, religion is grounded in reason when it comes to obligatory goods and prohibited evils, the first two categories. However, it relies on prophethood for other values and meanings, including acts of worship or religious rituals (*ʿibādāt*), that fall outside of those categories.

In conclusion, from the standpoint of both al-Māturīdī and al-Nasafī, the assertion put forth by materialist and naturalist philosophical circles that “life is merely comprised of living and dying” —implying that there is no deeper meaning or purpose to life— lacks sound reasoning and a solid foundation. Life is more than this simplistic materialist claim, as it cannot be reduced to the mere dichotomy of living and dying. According to the perspectives of al-Māturīdī and al-Nasafī, existence is characterised by having a specific purpose or meaning (*ḥikma*). In other words, to exist or the act of being implies holding a *ḥikma*. For the eternal continuity (*al-baqāʿ*) of human

⁷¹ See, for a detailed discussion of prophecy as a value and meaning (*ḥikma*) in al-Māturīdī, İbrahim Aslan, “İmâm Maturidî'nin Deist Eleştirilere Karşı Nübüvvet Savunusu [Al-Māturīdī's Defense of Prophethood Against Deistic Criticisms],” *KADER Kelam Araştırmaları Dergisi* 12, no. 2 (August 2014): 33–54, <https://doi.org/10.18317/kader.03592>.

existence, it is indispensable to have both the fulfilment of material necessities and the presence of moral principles that shape our value judgments in society. Without a solid foundation of values, both individual and collective life become devoid of meaning and are stripped down to mere bodily cravings and desires, ultimately drifting towards a form of extinction (*al-fanā*). Prophecy forms the cornerstone of our value judgments and moral principles that guarantee *al-baqā'* for humans and safeguard them against *al-fanā*. Prophecy is a divine call made by God, who possesses absolute wisdom and knowledge, towards goodness and meaningfulness. God created mankind with an inherent longing for eternity (*al-baqā'*). Therefore, since God (*al-Ḥakīm*) possesses infinite *ḥikma*, it is necessary for Him to respond to their yearnings and illuminate the paths towards eternity through the enlightening light of prophecy.

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