

## **Evidence of the Early Conceptions of Natural Law and *Tabula Rasa* in the Islamic World: the Case of Theodore Abū Qurrah and Ibn al-Nafis**

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### *Abstract*

The study of philosophy commonly ignores the theological and Eastern influences of Western philosophy. In the Islamic golden age (900–1300 CE), a number of major religious polemics and philosophical advances were made. Whereas some works directly influenced the Enlightenment era, others, such as the ones discussed in this paper, indirectly contributed to the development of knowledge in the Islamic and Western worlds. The two texts analyzed in this paper are representative polemics—respectively Muslim and Christian works—that advocate for the use of rational inquiry to arrive at the concept of absolute truth: religion. It is shown that both of these works are similar in that they both advocate for ‘pure’ rational inquiry, and both attempt to use this inquiry to arrive at the concept of absolute truth. The texts are different in that the former is more philosophically advanced and applicable to modern philosophical dialogue than the latter.

### *1 Introduction*

Following the age of the Enlightenment and the post-Enlightenment period, in the 20th and 21st centuries, the dawn of a new philosophy came into existence. I refer to the global, globalized political agenda starting in the 20th century with a surge in international trade, communications technologies, and the preliminary developments of what some even call a global *moral status quo*, demonstrated through frameworks of global just war, human rights institutions and protections, the responsibly to protect, and global governance and international law in general (see for example: Pogge in Brock and Brighthouse 2005; Held 2013a 2013b ch. 6, etc). People are attempting to find a way to create a shared horizon of aspirations, to create a general, consensus-based policy with freedom and democracy, good governance, peace, and all of the other things we picture in our every-day typical utopias. Of course, this is not easy, and nobody has indicated towards its immediate practical possibility, but there is no doubt need to have some kind of a global agenda in our fractured world.

In this modern age, there has been a questioning of universal morals, i.e. a reconsideration and backlash against the realist-bent world that has been championed in recent decades, of what one can consider the ‘object’ in philosophical terms. Philosophers, moral philosophers in particular, are beginning re-examine the roots of philosophical discussion and debate, question, and construct new theories based on even the earliest philosophical thought (Foster 1985, ch. 1). It is in this light that provides the rationale for the following study.

This paper address two provocative and reverent works that characterize the vigour of knowledge and debate during the Islamic golden age. The first text examined is the so-called

‘Theologus Autodidactus’ of the well-known Christian medieval scholar, Theodore Abū Qurrah (750—820 CE), written in the 9th century. The treatise is entitled, “Treatise on the Existence of the Creator and the True Religion”. The second work, certainly more famous and studied, is the Theologus Autodidactus of the famous Muslim philosopher Ibn al-Nafīs, entitled *Risālat Fādil ibn Nātiq* (“The Book of Fādil ibn Nātiq”), written between 1268 and 1277 (Fancy 2006, 207). Both of the works are applications of reason and basic logic to address the ‘justification’ for their respective religions, as well as their methodologies for determining the validity of their claims. Since both of these works are largely understudied especially from a philosophical viewpoint, a study of the moral presuppositions and other epistemological concepts provide for the fulfilling of two major objectives the study attempts to shed light on. Firstly, the analysis shows the environment the respective scholars were living in based on the type and sophistication of the logic used—we will see that at times very limited absolute logic is used, whereas in other cases, the logic is still applicable today. In the latter case, where logic and rationality advanced in the work is still applicable to the modern world, positive moral-rational concepts will be advanced as potential points of future moral deliberation and discussion.

Prior to reviews of the works, it is worth noting on a contemporary basis that the period in which both scholars were writing are similar to the conditions we face today in a globalized world. Following the Muslim conquests of Byzantine and Sassanian lands in the 7th century, a new, unpredictable faith rose to prominence and engaged in fierce academic dialogue. Famous debates over morality, metaphysics, and most importantly, religion, were made. The iconoclastic controversy (of which Abū Qurrah himself took part in: Guillaume 1925), and other intense logical debates and polemics took the central stage. Likewise, the socio-political context that Ibn al-Nafīs lived in was even more turbulent—materially and potentially theologically. Of course, it was during this time that the violence and back-and-forth fighting during the crusades was taking place (Fancy 2006, 36). However, ideological positions at the time were generally centred towards intra-religious debate and dialogue, as the period commenced with the debates between Muslim ‘reason-oriented’ and ‘traditional, scripture-oriented’ styles of theological methodology (Abrahamov 1998, ch. 1).

## *2 Theodore Abū Qurrah’s “Existence of the Creator and the True Religion”*

Abū Qurrah’s work is a logic-driven enquiry into the validity of Christianity as a religion. Being centred in the age of the rational argument against Islam during Islam-Christian debates at the time, Abū Qurrah is considered a pioneering “Christian *mutakallim*” (Griffith 1994, 6). Although the theological justification he provides is not necessarily important to comparison to the epistemological issues discussed by Ibn al-Nafīs, the methodology he uses, as well as the logical inferences that he makes are what are of concern. This section highlights three important points of logical derivation. The first, perhaps the most important epistemologically speaking, is Abū Qurrah’s perception of truth. Instead of seeing truth as a transient, perhaps socially constructed concept (e.g., Zatzman et al. 2016), the concept of metaphysical truth is seen as absolute, singular, and objective. Secondly, a certain variation of Aristotle’s ‘original’ deductive logic is used: the logic of inference and application. The final subject of significance are the moral

assumptions and conclusions he makes, which touch upon the hotly philosophically contested topics of natural law, reason-based moral inquiry, and John Rawls' deliberation behind the 'veil of ignorance'.

The text starts with a methodology and Abū Qurrah's perception of religion and truth. The perception of truth illustrated is of course on basis of religion. Abū Qurrah's goal is to discern the truth provided any possibility to find it. Provided that God and truth exist, there must indeed be a way to find which (if any) of the religions proposing models are true. If this is the case, only a single perception of truth can be true. He illustrates this through the "parable of the hidden king", which provides both a justification of rationality without bias to find truth, and for a model of non-transient, absolute truth.

Abū Qurrah states that he sees himself, and all rational inquirers, as son of a 'hidden King'—one that nobody but his close advisors and friends have seen. His son takes care of a number of matters for him in distant lands. When the son falls ill, the King, concerned with his son's health, sends a letter through a messenger to his son. The letter explains a number of key points related to his son's sickness: a) the nature of the King himself, so that the son is able to identify his father, b) the habits and behaviours that lead to the sickness, as well as good habits and actions that bring good health, and c) the medicine prescribed to cure the sickness. However, upon hearing of this, those envious of the hidden King's power decide to each send fake messengers with fake messages. Consequently, the medicine, good and bad habits have a false depiction of the father (whom they did not see), bad actions prescribed as goods, good actions prescribed as bad, and where the medicine is poison. The son, who has a personal physician, is confronted with many competing messengers and messages each claiming their own messages to be genuinely from the King. The son gives his physician, who is well-versed in matters of medicine, the task of discerning the true message based on the contents of the messages.

Predictably, Abu Qurrah sees the King is God, the Messengers and letters as founders of religions and religious teachings, respectively. The son is Abū Qurrah (indeed, all humans who are capable of reason), and the Physician is the mind. He stipulates that one must use the mind to discern which is the true religious path by best knowing what God's features and prescriptions most likely are. Abū Qurrah assumes that only one religion can be true, because the concept of truth is viewed as mutually exclusive: if one person prescribes medicine, habits as such, and God's features as such, a religion that claims that a different set of teachings can logically not be the correct one. Assuming that there is a God, and that this God has tried to communicate with his people, there can—by the basic law of noncontradiction—only be one view of God as true, provided that (a) all descriptions of God are different from each other, and (b) that each claims to have the complete view of God. When (a) and (b) are held true, as is the case in Christian and Muslim views of God, then the Christian view and the Muslim view of God cannot both be true. In allegorical form: if one message prescribes poison, and the other prescribes non-poisonous medicine, then these messages cannot both prescribe non-poisonous medicine. Abū Qurrah's view of the concept of truth is therefore based on the following cognitive succession: if there is a

God, and there is a way God contacted its people, one of the many descriptions of God must be true, and therefore, the treatise is dedicated to ‘discerning the true religion’.

The cognitive sequence that Abū Qurrah follows is highly resembling of all of the other variations of *theologus autodidactus* found in historical literature, and indeed resembles the work of Ibn al-Nafis as described below. Abū Qurrah’s view of truth and its *potential* discerning as a starting point for further study marks an early attempt to fit such a logic to religious discussion. Whereas, as discussed in the latter sections, the western enlightenment philosophical tradition has used the ‘blank slate’ mentality observed in Abū Qurrah’s methodology to eventually adopt a concept of transient truth, cases that take a pro-absolute truth stance, such as Abū Qurrah, serve as a potential alternative to discourse that has diverged from what was once such a norm.

The text makes a number of logical inferences. Whereas some arguments can be considered ‘primitive’ in the formation of deductive logic, others (e.g. his influential methodology) shed positive light on the early use of such logic in coming to a number of definite conclusions. To highlight an example of a non-definite logical inference made by Abū Qurrah, I refer to the logical argument with which he purports to vindicate the concept of the Trinity—God being the head of God in three persons, one of whom is an emanation of God (the Holy Spirit), and the other being the son of God (Jesus). Although it would go beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the entirety of his deductive logic, it is important to simply understand that this logical inference relies upon the Christian concept of ‘deification’, which presupposes that human beings are created in the image of God, and that therefore, human virtues are God’s virtues. He affirms that there are a number of main areas of resemblance between humans and God: a) life: humans live, as does God, however God transcends the concept of human life and therefore does not die; b) wisdom, patience, mercy, and other virtues: humans have a limited level of all of these virtues, but God has unlimited extensions of them. To highlight this point, Abū Qurrah uses a ‘mirror’ example to highlight the notion of observing features that way humans reflect God: you can discern features from the likeness of a human (i.e. a mirror image); however, the features of the Human surpass and transcend that of a mirror image: one is perishable in a matter of seconds, the other exists and has its own life.

Based on this view, Abū Qurrah puts forward the following argument in the section “Human Nature as an Image of God”. Firstly, it is affirmed as a fact that the headship of humans over other humans is a virtue, as is having a son. He then states that Adam, the first man, was given this honour and virtue of headship over both a son and an emanation from himself (i.e. Adam’s emanation being Eve, from his rib). The logical inference he makes is the following: if Adam as a human had both of these virtues described above (headship and fatherhood), and God does not have these qualities as human have, then it is to say that Adam has respectable virtues that are not found in God. Because such a statement is a recognition of Adam’s superiority over God, the denying that God had both a son and headship over a son and an emanation (Jesus and the Holy Spirit, respectively), means that one dishonours God—which itself is contrary to God’s nature. In this example, one can highlight a number of undeveloped logical arguments used to make the inference. Firstly, recognition of Adam as the first human is a testimony of his lack of

substantive religious knowledge (i.e. there are other religions that deny such a man existed, indeed, that ‘the beginning’ of the universe even existed). Secondly, there is Abū Qurrah’s classification of ‘headship’ and ‘fatherhood’—as he understands the concepts—as ‘virtues’. If these qualities are not necessarily virtues, or at least virtues found in humans also found in God, it is impossible to make the inference that it is to dishonour God to deny that he has the attributions of headship and fatherhood. In fact, it was none other than Abū Qurrah himself who ridiculed other religions for putting God down to the levels of humans in an argument to discredit these religions of truly divine origins (*T.A.*, sect. “Discerning the Religions”).

In this exercise, I show that indeed, not all—or even the last majority—of the arguments made by Abū Qurrah are logical or worth further logical examination. The limits to the text and its logic have been established by making this clear. Knowing this prepares the reader for the existence of potential logical pitfalls in the discussion of the segment of the text dealing with moral philosophy; a discussion of historically significant arguments made. As will be evident in due course, I show that whereas Ibn al-Nafis’ logical model can be applied to the modern day, the substantive moral inferences made by Theodore Abū Qurrah can only be used as an appreciation of advanced logical thinking, and not a lesson to be learned for contemporary philosophical moral literature (in content).<sup>1</sup>

In the text, there are a number of relevant deductive moral conclusions Abū Qurrah makes from his early form of *tabula rasa*<sup>2</sup> methodology. One of the most distinctive when examined from a western philosophical lens, is a clear display of early natural law discussions applied to religious dialogue. In a refutation of other Abrahamic religions, Abū Qurrah once again points to his ‘reason’-backed view of the world. Of course, it is important to note that Abū Qurrah operated on the assumption—as was the assumption in all of the significant religions surrounding him at the time—that God wished good for us, and therefore communicated with humans on earth. If this is the case, it is possible to discern a ‘true’ religion from the reasonability of the content of the religion’s moral teachings. In other words, if a religion teaches morality that can be discerned moral using reason, then the source of this religion is divine. I show here that Abū Qurrah’s reasoning used to back his argument in favour of Christianity, as an example, serves as an argument pre-empting those of even enlightenment-aged natural law theorists:

“So too, the gospel records that Christ commanded his disciples to do what is permitted and to refrain from what is forbidden, to do what is good, to refrain from what is bad, and to be perfectly good, and this in a manner that accords with what our own nature... To this end, he [God] said, “Behold, what you do not like for other people to do to you, do not do to them, and what you like other people to do to you, do it to them.” He taught how one might acquire the ability to refrain from evil and to be perfectly good. This takes place in

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<sup>1</sup> I have already established that the essence of Abū Qurrah’s argument is one that bears high similarity to Ibn Tufayl’s and Ibn al-Nafis’ works. I refer here to the substantive moral arguments Abū Qurrah makes.

<sup>2</sup> Interestingly enough, the *tabula rasa* methodology first bloomed in the Islamic world (e.g. in the works of Ibn al-Nafis and Ibn Tufayl), and stemmed even from a number of theological Islamic teachings.

four different ways: first, abandon and reject the feelings of this world; secondly, love God and put him above the world; thirdly, love other people and put them above the world; fourthly, forego retaliation, cling to forgiveness, reward evil with good, and imitate God. The gospel thus commands us to do the same perfect good that our nature teaches...we see that not one of the other religions regained such things” (*Theologus Autodidactus*, D244-D246).

There are many points that can be referenced in regards to preliminary understandings of reason and natural law. Firstly, the concept of human nature being acquainted with moral good is evident. In fact, Abū Qurrah seems to indirectly allude to ancient Greek concepts of humankind being in alignment with the universal order. His primary argument applied to favour Christianity over other religions is its alleged alignment to “what our nature teaches”. It is worth cautioning, however, that the same reference is highly influenced by the theological concepts of *theosis* formulated as early as the 4th century by Saint Athanasius (Behr 2011, 167).<sup>3</sup> Thus, although the concept of human nature developed by Theodore Abū Qurrah is heavily influenced by Christian theology, it nonetheless can and has influenced the use of a ‘moral deciphering tool’, perhaps one that theologians have long been looking for amid rationalist criticism against religion. Although it would be a stretch to apply the same limited arguments as the text, due to Abū Qurrah’s personal limited knowledge and scope, it can be seen as a starting point to develop a rationalistic justification for religious revelation. In doing so, I cannot help but draw parallel with similar arguments made by Leo Strauss, who has been interpreted to provide a potential rationalist explanation behind revelation.

Although there is relatively less evidence for Strauss’ belief in a scientific rational justification for Biblical revelation, there is no doubt that he remained open to evaluating the idea (Deutsch and Nicgorski 1994, 103). Furthermore, in his works, he does not deny Abū Qurrah’s arguments, such as the one that there is a distinct “human goodness and badness” described and prescribed in Biblical texts (Strauss 1967). Thomas Aquinas provides a more matured argument providing a rational belief to justify and affirm genuinely divine revelation (*Summa theologiae*, I-II, Q109). Thus, although the parallels of natural law can be extended much more easily to Aquinas than to Strauss, the similarity of theosophical ideas can provide philosophers studying such topics with relevant theoretical concepts to further the knowledge that reason-based theology introduces.

In a similar argument, Theodore Abū Qurrah purports to show that Judaism and the Old Testament, among other religions, fall short of being able to fulfill the reason criteria for ‘divine revelation’:

“With regard to reason, the only religion we accept as divine is the gospel, because its message is so perfect and correct, as we have explained. From another perspective, however, we accept that Moses and the prophets, and no others, are from God, and this,

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<sup>3</sup> A famous quote in Greek puts the doctrine as such: "He was incarnate that we might be made God" (‘Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἐνηνθρώπησεν, ἵνα ἡμεῖς θεοποιηθῶμεν’).

for two reasons. [Firstly] [t]he gospel tells us that Moses and the prophets...were sent by God...Secondly, we inquired about the gospel and why God sent Moses with a defective religion. [for example] In describing the deity, why did he proclaim the father alone and summon to him alone? Why did he permit so many things? Why did he not bring a perfect understanding of the permitted and forbidden? When we inquired of the gospel about this, it is told that this was because of the people's weakness. As for his description of the deity, this is because people were worshipping innumerable devils and idols" (*Theologus Authodidactus*, D255-D256).

Abū Qurrah then goes on to give specific examples and explanations behind his objections to the lack of completeness in religious teachings. Abū Qurrah is clearly using rational techniques to discern the validity/invalidity of religions. This is a very important point on a moral philosophical note. Ever since the enlightenment, it was well-known that *moral* philosophy has more-or-less undergone a cleansing phase—a secularization—over the last centuries. Hence, the incorporation of religion, for example, into moral theory—i.e., religion as a basis for morality—is somewhat of a taboo subject for scholars to speak “approvingly” of (Fox 2013, 28). For the sake of knowledge and even the potential to discover absolute truth, it is important to highlight that there is no necessary harm done to the subject if rigorous re-examination of religious and non-religious metaphysical texts that claim absolute truth are studied from a lens of rationality. Indeed, if absolute truth were a possibility, any reasonable rationalist would argue, then one must cling to that piece of absolute truth and be able to derive a universal understanding of right and wrong from it. On this note, the case of Abū Qurrah's work can indeed be viewed as a relevant text of study in moral philosophy.

### *3 The Theologus Autodidactus of Ibn al-Nafīs: the Tabula Rasa and other moral concepts*

Ibn al-Nafīs, as we know, lived several centuries after Theodore Abū Qurrah. He was from Syria, and spent much of his career until his death in Cairo, Egypt, and spent his life as a practicing physician and a jurist, academically. Ideologically and materially, his life was a time of antagonism and conflict (Agachi 2016, 264; Griffith 1994). Whereas Theodore Abū Qurrah's period was relatively peaceful and polemics and antagonisms were mainly polemical, Ibn al-Nafīs' period in time was one of bloodshed during a continuation of the crusades, by now at its fifth. Although there was a less pronounced antagonism in religious polemics, the period in general was one where jurists and other scholars began to show increased interest in philosophy and the sciences. Thus, Ibn al-Nafīs' works could be seen more as a contribution to philosophy and theology rather than an apologetic polemical movement, as was the case with Abū Qurrah. The text itself is presented in a quasi-novel form, where a fictional figure, *Kāmil*, is guided from being created and spawned in a cave, to become a rational inquirer over his lifetime. There is no doubt that this same format of derivation from pure rational inquiry was inspired by the work of the philosopher Abū Bakr Muhammad Ibn Tufayl, entitled *Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān*. This work is of extreme significance to the west, as it is a polemic affirming and validating the use of rational inquiry, and had direct influence on a number of famous enlightenment figures (Russell 1994,

224-239; Toomer 1996, 220-221). The text is also known as a *Philosophus Autodidactus*, which was translated in the 17th century into English (Matar 1998, 99).

Ibn al-Nafīs' work is entitled *Al-Risalah al-Kamiliyyah fil Siera al-Nabawiyyah*, "The Treatise on Kāmil on the Prophet's Biography." The work, in part due to its theological nature and validation of Islam as an abstract religion, was less popular in the western world, although it did have a direct on the west, and most certainly influenced the advancement of knowledge at the time. There are again, three important points to highlight in relation to its moral and methodological characteristics. Firstly, is a clear similarity in the methods used in the work of Theodore Abū Qurrah; that is, rational inquiry, 'pure reason', and subsequent deduction of absolute truth is attempted. Secondly, I will make the case for the practical and current potential use of the work in philosophical literature. Thirdly, the moral value of the deductions made by Ibn al-Nafīs is noted in relation to the work of Abū Qurrah.

On the first point, as discussed in the previous section, it is clear that Theodore Abū Qurrah's work used the methodology of 'pure reason'; even if there was no emphasized explicit mention of the pure reason outlook, this lens of evaluation was observed with he discussion of his "Hidden King Parable". Indeed, following the rapid development of philosophical study in the Islamic world, Ibn al-Nafīs developed his work in a background where concepts such as hypothetical, pure natural inquiry were well-established. Thus, we observe that the philosophical method of deduction applied by Ibn al-Nafīs is more pronounced and recognizable to modern western eyes. As early as in the introduction of the treatise, a statement is made about the inadvertent methodology used by Ibn al-Nafīs in the treatise, where he arranges the development of Kāmil's rational inquiry and deduction as follows: (a) How Kāmil was created and how he used his given rational faculties to understand the basic workings of logic, and later of the life-story of the concept of God and prophethood; (b) How Kāmil used the concept of Prophethood in order to derive the validity of the prophethood of Muhammad; (c) How he then discerned religious divine law; and (d), how Kāmil was able to derive the concepts of the afterlife and future prophetic events.

Stages (a) through (d) explain what the ideal and true way of deciphering truth is when the human mind starts as a *tabula rasa*. In section (a), Kāmil comes to life and begins his rational observation of the natural world around him. This is demonstrated by the fact that Kāmil "noticed the space, the light, and the trees of that Island..." (*Al-Risalah*, 40), and later engaged in basic logical deduction, such as being able to observe that his ears are the source of the sense of sound, as "when he stopped [plugged] his ears with his fingers, the sounds disappeared, and when he opened them he perceived them again" (*Al-Risalah*, 41). This depiction of the human mind and experience as a model for future rational inquiry and deduction is, in its most raw and early form, the hypothetical *tabula rasa* method of deduction. In other words, Ibn al-Nafīs is using the hypothetical concept of natural, pure logic in order to discern truth. It helps this argument to notice that Kāmil's name is 'perfect', whereby alluding to the potential meaning that his treatise presents the 'ideal' or 'perfect' way of logical deduction (Mahdi 1970, 198). In comparison to the work of Theodore Abū Qurrah, the use of rational inquiry is more pronounced.



In essence, however, both of the methodologies applied to discern truth are the same or very similar; they both presuppose an unbiased evaluation of concepts in order to decipher the most reasonable conclusion and understanding of truth.

It is in section (b) where Ibn al-Nafis, however begins his future contribution to the concept of rationality-driven deduction. It is worth noting that in secondary literature, it is the following sections where Ibn al-Nafis received the most criticism—which explains the reason why scholars rarely see the work as an original contribution to knowledge. William M. Watt (d. 1969), for example, states that the text is “disappointing” because of his attempt “to work out from the first principles of reason what the life of the Prophet and the outlines of the history of his followers must have been,” thereby declaring its substantial philosophical value as very little. However, there is a strong argument to be made in favour of the highly useful value of the work in modern literature. For this, it is necessary to evaluate two major rational deductions made in the work in reference to the validation of religious principles through rationality.

One argument made is that God indeed does exist. Ibn al-Nafis argues that a ‘primary mover’<sup>4</sup> must have caused human existence to allow to exist in the first place, which, roughly, is based on the logical concept that “the existence or non-existence of something contingent cannot come about by itself” (*Al-Risalah*, 43). Indeed, this argument in its many forms is still applied in the most recent of philosophical and theological literature. Although I do not see the argument to further advance the state of knowledge at the time, such an argument clearly has value as a historical philosophical document. Furthermore, it is in the following argument that Ibn al Nafis brings an argument that may even deserve to be revisited in the modern day. That is, his argument justifying the concept of Islamic moral law as being an objective, logic-driven understanding of how laws ‘ought to be prescribed. This is highlighted in his (abridged) argument below:

“Society and intercourse of mankind can come to perfection only if their transactions are just, if nobody is harmed, and if nothing is allowed which leads to the neglect of common utility or contentment with laziness; for in human society everyone must fulfil a useful part...therefore anything which prevents the individual from being useful to the community should be prohibited, such as usury, pimping, etc., all of which nullify the production of useful work... He ought to [for example] make the share of the inheritance of males bigger than that of the females, because the males, although more easily able to earn, have to provide for their wives” (*T.A.*, 60-61).

There are a number of deductive points that Ibn al Nafis uses in order to provide examples for the dictation of *logically* moral law. Indeed, the idea of moral law as being something separate from divine law has been mainstream in the west for centuries. However, the use of such moral law in order to justify the morality of religious teachings would be radical to claim in modern

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<sup>4</sup> It is well-known the primary mover concept for the affirmation of God as rational was a classical Islamic argument later incorporated by Christians in the western philosophical tradition.

philosophical circles. This is what is undertaken by Ibn al-Nafis: as with Theodore Abū Qurrah, something is first logically established as ‘moral’, and then the moral argument is established as coinciding with what a religion teaches. Despite the modern application of the argument that, for example, women ‘ought to be given less inheritance than men because it is the man’s duty to provide for his own wife’, the style of argumentation itself poises for fruitful moral philosophical discussion. Even for the modern philosopher—perhaps especially for the post-modern philosopher—the (potential) antagonism between logic-derived law and divinely derived law is of utmost importance.

It is therefore worth stating that the purely ‘historical’ view of Ibn al-Nafis’ literature may prevent individuals from understanding the philosophically applicable weight of the arguments made in the text (e.g. Watt).

#### *4 Conclusion*

There are many similarities and differences between the two examined works. Among the similarities, it is significant that Abū Qurrah proposes that we consider a ‘blank slate’ process of deduction. Even though philosophers and historians have reasonable grounds to question the true objectivity of the arguments presented (which is implicit in the fact that Christianity and Islam cannot both be true), the fact of the matter is that philosophical discussions taking place to this very day stem from the early understandings of philosophy and rationalism listed above. Therefore, the texts, despite their implicit polemical disagreement, provide a valuable historical document, as well as philosophically dialectical document that can be used to discover and revisit philosophy of the past. Therefore, it would be inaccurate to purport that—as many historians have—the only value of these documents is to ‘gain insight’ into the understandings of scholars in that time period.

On a philosophical note, it is important to understand that it would be irrational to offer an *a priori* denial of religion and claims of divine revelation. It is always important to not jump to conclusions and carefully examine every step of logical inference made in any given study. I do not deny the limitations of the absolute value of Abū Qurrah’s or Ibn al-Nafis’ works. However, it would be against the inclination of reason to propose that one is to logically deny any potential truth of a methodology in a text due to the study’s limited perspective.

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