



An Analysis of the Debate between al-Ṭūsī and al-Kātibī on Contingency Argument*

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Abstract

This article addresses a written debate between Najm al-Dīn al-Kātibī (d. 675 AH/1277 AD) and Nasīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672 AH/1274 AD) on the contingency argument, which is one of the most well-known proofs offered in history regarding the existence of God. According to thinkers before al-Kātibī, the contingency argument verifies the Necessary Being, and then it debunks the possibility of infinite regress. By “earlier thinkers,” al-Kātibī means especially Avicenna (d. 428 AH/1037 AD) and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210). According to al-Kātibī, the notion of the Necessary Being was proved through the contingency argument they put forward, but a careful examination of their arguments indicates that they presented no definitive proof refuting the notion of infinite regress. Therefore, according to al-Kātibī, what Avicenna and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī claimed to prove the impossibility of infinite regress through the contingency argument is not valid. As al-Ṭūsī responded to al-Kātibī’s objections, a debate consisting of three letters from each side emerged between them. At the end of the debate, al-Kātibī found al-Ṭūsī’s explanations reasonable, and he admitted that they were correct. However, the parties did not mention the agreed version of the argument at the end of the debate. For this reason, I added this agreed argument at the end of this study in accordance with the parties’ declarations. The purpose of the present study is to analyse this debate in its natural order and to eliminate technical ambiguities it involves, defending Avicenna’s, al-Rāzī’s, and al-Ṭūsī’s philosophical position in the contingency argument about proving the impossibility of infinite regress through the argument. On the other hand, this debate is an epitome of the classical debate tradition. It is also significant in the sense that it reveals one of the best examples of the interdisciplinary discussion between kalām and philosophical schools, and the application of classical logic to theoretical disciplines. As a result of our analyses of the debate, we have concluded that the objections brought by al-Kātibī against the contingency argument in parallel with the conclusion of the debate accepted by the parties, maintain the contingency argument. According to this conclusion, the contingency argument is a proof which invalidates infinite regress while proving the existence of the Necessary Being.

Keywords: Philosophy, God, Debate, Infinite Regress, Contingency, Avicenna, al-Ṭūsī, al-Kātibī.

Ṭūsī ve Kâtibī'nin İmkân Delili Münâzarasının Tahlili

Öz

Bu makale, Necmeddin Kâtibī (ö. 675/1277) ve Nasreddin Ṭūsī (ö. 672/1274) arasında, Tanrı'nın varlığı hakkında getirilen en meşhur delillerden biri olan imkân delili hususunda gerçekleşen yazılı bir münâzarayı ele almaktadır. Kâtibī'den önceki düşünürlere göre imkân delili, Zorunlu Varlık'ı kanıtladıktan sonra teselsülün imkânını da çürütmektedir. Kâtibī'nin önceki düşünürlerden kastı özellikle İbn Sînâ (ö. 428/1037) ve Fahreddin Râzî'dir (ö. 606/1210). Kâtibī'ye göre onların ortaya koyduğu imkân delili Zorunlu Varlık'ı ispatlamaktadır; fakat argümanlar üzerinde dikkatli bir inceleme, onların teselsülü iptal etmek hususunda kesin bir kanıt ortaya koymadıklarını göstermektedir. Bu yüzden Kâtibī'ye göre onların imkân delili aracılığıyla teselsülün imkansızlığını ispat ettiklerine dair iddiaları geçerli değildir. Ṭūsī'nin Kâtibī'nin bu itirazlarına cevap vermesiyle, aralarında üçer mektuptan oluşan bir münâzara başlar. Tartışmanın sonunda Kâtibī, Ṭūsī'nin açıklamalarını mâkul bulur ve doğruluklarını itiraf eder. Fakat tartışmanın sonunda taraflar, argümanın uzlaşılabilir versiyonunu yeniden zikretmezler. Bu sebeple, tarafların beyanları çerçevesinde uzlaşılabilir argümanı bu çalışmanın son kısmına ekledik. Elinizdeki çalışmanın amacı sözü geçen münâzarayı doğal düzeni içerisinde analiz etmek, içerdiği teknik kapalılıkları gidermek ve İbn Sînâ, Fahreddin Râzî ve Nasreddin Ṭūsī'nin imkân delili aracılığıyla teselsülün imkansızlığını kanıtlama hususundaki felsefî pozisyonlarını savunmaktır. Diğer taraftan bu tartışma, klasik münâzara geleneğinin somut bir örneği olması ve kelam ile felsefe okulları arasındaki disiplinlerarası tartışma geleneğini ve klasik mantığın teorik disiplinlere uygulanışını en güzel yansıtan örneklerden biri olması sebebiyle önemlidir. Münâzaraya dair analizlerimiz neticesinde münâzaranın taraflarca da kabul edilen sonucuna paralel olarak Kâtibī'nin imkân deliline karşı getirdiği itirazların imkân deliline zarar vermediği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır. Bu sonuca göre imkân delili, Zorunlu Varlık'ın varlığını ispatlamasının yanında teselsülün imkansızlığını da kanıtlayan bir delildir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Felsefe, Tanrı, Münâzara, Teselsül, İmkân, İbn Sînâ, Ṭūsī, Kâtibī.

Introduction

Throughout history, proof of God's existence has been a topic of great interest in various schools of thought, particularly those with evidentialist tendencies. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, there are two major orientations that adopt an evidentialist approach. The first is the tradition of kalām (i.e., Islamic theology) with its various schools of thought, and the second is the tradition of philosophy, which also encompasses different schools.

The tradition of kalām represents the idea of seeking to prove a creator for the world based on the universe itself. In terms of its arguments, this tradition relies on the inductive method, moving from the created to the creator.¹ The general inductive argument they present for the existence of

¹This study is based on the master's thesis titled "Ṭūsī and Kâtibī's Debate on Proving the Existence of God" which was completed in 2020 under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Engin Erdem at Ankara University, Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy and Religious Sciences.

God is often called the “hudūth argument.” The term “ḥudūth” is used by theologians to describe something that comes into being out of non-existence. It implies that the universe did not exist before God brought it into being and built it. Theological books typically discussed the proof of God’s existence under the heading of “ithbāt al-ṣāni” (literally: proof of the builder or creator), which alludes to the same argumentative method.

In contrast, the tradition of Islamic philosophy, when it proves God’s existence, employs a deductive method, which begins with the general notion of existence. It describes the notion of existence through dichotomies such as contingent-necessary, potential-actual, and prior-posterior, which are about dividing existents into two contradictory groups. By analysing the components of these dichotomies, philosophy aims to arrive at general conclusions. Only because of analysing an all-inclusive concept and its all-inclusive two sides, I mean these contradictory dichotomies, can a judgement be made that encompasses everything and leaves no possibility outside.

The contingency argument that philosophers, notably al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and Avicenna (d. 428/1037), introduced to prove God’s existence is a deductive argument, based on one of the dichotomies mentioned above. The upshot of these dichotomies is that the existence of any entity is either contingent (*mumkin*) or necessary (*wājib*), based on the nature of that entity. Since the third option is impossible (*mumtaniʿ*), this is an absolute division. By analyzing the general concept of existence into two categories, philosophers conclude that there is an essentially necessary existent (i.e., God). Therefore, proofs of God’s existence in philosophical works are discussed under the heading of *ithbāt al-wājib* (proof of the necessary existent).

Although the first (inductive) method above is typically associated with theologians and the second (deductive) with philosophers, the theological tradition after al-Rāzī adopted many aspects of the philosophical method, including the contingency argument. The contingency argument should not therefore be considered part of the kalām tradition; rather, it is more accurate to say that post-Rāzī theologians followed the philosophical method in line with classical sources. This is because although these theologians attached more importance to contingency argument than to the hudūth argument (also known as kalāmi cosmological argument),² they continued to

¹ Engin Erdem, *Varlıktan Tanrı’ya*, 110.

² Sa’d al-Dīn Mas’ūd b. Fakhr al-Dīn ‘Umar b. Burhān al-Dīn Abdillāh al-Harawī al-Khorāsānī al-Taftāzānī, *Sharh al-Maqāsid*, 1:286.

refer to the contingency argument as the method of philosophers, and to the hudūth argument as that of theologians.³ This being the case, the above generalization should not be deemed mistaken on the grounds that the kalāmi method does not proceed completely from “the created” to “the creator” as some theologians adopt the contingency argument to prove God’s existence. It should be noted that theologians use the contingency argument, not as a method of kalām but as a method of philosophy. Therefore, instead of saying that the contingency argument was included in the system of post-Rāzī theologians, it would be more appropriate to say that the post-Rāzī theologians used the method of philosophers in their discussions on the contingency argument.

al-Kātibī, a prominent post-Rāzī theologian, placed the contingency argument at the centre stage of his intellectual system, deploying philosophical methods to prove God’s existence. However, instead of an unquestioning acceptance of the contingency argument, he approached it with some revisions. He wrote a letter to al-Ṭūsī, his teacher, in which he begins by an explanation of the contingency argument based on the works of earlier thinkers. Then he expresses his objections to the argument. After that, he analyses some of the arguments for the impossibility of infinite regress, voicing his objections to these arguments and claiming that infinite regress is possible. Finally, he objects to the claims of philosophers regarding the pre-eternity (*qidam*) of the universe and mentions his counterarguments. Consequently, three separate debates, in three correspondences, take place between al-Kātibī and al-Ṭūsī, where the latter represents philosophers in the issues. This article discusses the contingency argument as addressed in these written debates.

Compiled under the name *Mubāḥathāt bayn al-Ṭūsī wa-l-Kātibī*,⁴ these letters are known under the following titles, respectively:

al-Kātibī’s first letter: *Risāla fī ithbāt al-wājib al-wujūd*

al-Ṭūsī’s first letter: *al-Ta’līqāt alā mabāḥith risālat al-Kātibī*

al-Kātibī’s second letter: *al-Kātibī, Munāqashāt al-Katibī li-ta’līqāt al-Ṭūsī*

al-Ṭūsī’s second letter: *Naqd al-Ṭūsī ‘alā munāqashāt al-Katibī*

al-Kātibī’s third letter: *Khātima fī l-i’tirāf bi-l-ḥaqq li-l-Kātibī*

al-Ṭūsī’s third letter: *al-Shukr wa-l-taqdīr li-l-Tūsī*

³ Abū al-Ḥasan ‘Alī b. Muhammad b. ‘Alī al-Sayyīd al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Sharh al-mawāqif*, 3:15.

⁴ Abū Ja’far Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. al-Hasan al-Ṭūsī, *Mubāḥasat al-bayna al-Ṭūsī wa-al-Kātibī*, 109-154.

One article on this subject has previously been written. However it does not follow the natural order of the debate in a systematic manner.⁵ Our aim in this article is to place particular emphasis on ensuring coherence in the debate, as well as explaining ideas that require further clarification, drawing on the works of both parties to the debate and their associated intellectual systems. Additionally, we aim to clarify the position of each issue within the tradition of Islamic thought. To accomplish this, we follow the natural flow of the debate and assign letters to each of the premises. This study first presents the contingency argument, which al-Kātibī borrowed from Avicenna and al-Rāzī, and it explores the philosophical background of the premises of the argument. Next, it considers how al-Kātibī revised the original argument, again in line with the philosophical stance taken up by its proponents. Subsequently, this article analyses al-Kātibī's objections to and explanations of this argument. Then, it evaluates al-Ṭūsī's responses and the new issues that these responses provoked. Finally, the article presents that argument that both scholars ultimately agreed upon in the debate, considering al-Kātibī's acknowledgement that al-Ṭūsī's arguments were correct.

1. Presentation of the Contingency Argument

Before articulating his objections, al-Kātibī elaborates on the contingency argument that had been introduced by earlier thinkers, to lay the foundation for the ensuing debate. al-Kātibī provides two distinct versions of the argument, as in Avicenna's work *Kitāb al-Najāt* (Book of Salvation).⁶ However, al-Ṭūsī clarifies that both versions yield the same outcome in terms of the debate and the secondary arguments within it.⁷ Consequently, this study integrates both versions into a single argument and focuses on it, thereby encompassing both arguments.

- There is no doubt that some entity (K) exists.

⁵ Murat Demirkol, "Kātibī ve Ṭūsī'de Tanrı'nın Varlığını Zincirlemenin İptali Yoluyla İspatlama," 93-129. The result, unfortunately, is a somewhat incoherent treatment of the issue. For example, Demirkol translates al-Kātibī's usage of the term "mutekellim" to mean "the person who speaks". However, al-Kātibī referred to al-Rāzī who was a mutekellim, meaning theologian. For this reason, the writer confuses al-Kātibī's position in the arguments with al-Rāzī's position. This fundamental mistake affects the analysis in general and the natural flow of the debate is distorted. Nasîreddin et-Ṭūsî, *Felsefe Mektupları*, Translation: Murat Demirkol, Ankara: Fecr Yayınları, 2015, 193.

⁶ Abū 'Alī al-Ḥuşain Ibn 'Abd Allāh Avicenna, *Kitāb al-najāt fī l-ḥikma al-mantiqiyya wa-l-ṭabī'iyya wa-l-ilāhiyya*, 271-276.

⁷ al-Ṭūsī, "Mubāhasat al-bayna al-Ṭūsī wa-al-Kātibī," 122.

A) If K's existence is necessary by its essence (*māhiyya*), then QED (the desideratum is achieved).

B) If K's existence is contingent (*mumkin*) by its essence, it requires a cause (L).

B1) If L's existence is necessary by its essence, then QED (the desideratum is achieved).

B2) If L's existence is contingent by its essence, then it requires a cause (M).

B2A) An entity (M) cannot be an effect (*ma'lūl*) of itself (K, L).

B2B) Then, M's existence is something other than its effects (K, L).

B2B1) If this chain of causes ends somewhere, it ends in the necessary existent (*wājib al-wujūd*).

B2B2) If it does not come to an end, an infinitely regressive chain of contingent causes is required.

Then this infinitely regressive chain is itself a contingent entity, which also requires a cause.

B2B2-X) This cause cannot be the chain itself.

B2B2-Y) It cannot be a part of the chain, either.

B2B2-Z) Then, it is an individual from outside the chain.

Then, B2B2 was refuted with all its requirements, and then QED (the desideratum is achieved) in B2B1.⁸

This proof that al-Kātibī attributes to al-Rāzī in *Ḥikmat al-ʿayn*⁹ and cites in *Risāla* is in fact the same proof that Avicenna referred to in his book *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*¹⁰ (Remarks and admonitions), albeit with some minor discrepancies. The proof that al-Kātibī discusses in *Ḥikmat al-ʿayn* and *Risāla* fully matches the proof presented by Avicenna in his book *Kitāb al-Najāt*¹¹. al-Kātibī's report of this argument in *Ḥikmat al-ʿayn*, attributing it to al-Rāzī, was due to the fact that al-Rāzī had expounded upon the argument in the same manner as Avicenna had presented it in *al-Najāt*, as explained in *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt*.¹² The next section elaborates on the premises of the argument.

First premise: There is no doubt that some entity (K) exists.

⁸ Abū'l-Hasan Najm al-Dīn Dabīrān 'Alī b. 'Umar b. 'Alī al-Kātibī, "Risāla fī ithbāt al-wājib al-wujūd," 109-110.

⁹ al-Kātibī, *Ḥikmat al-ʿayn*, 104-109.

¹⁰ Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, 124-133.

¹¹ Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, 271-276.

¹² Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, 271-276.

Islamic philosophers became particularly interested in philosophy with regards to the notion of existence itself,¹³ as it is the most general concept conceivable. For a comprehensive and universal judgment about existence, it is not sufficient to consider only a particular aspect of it. Rather, it is necessary to contemplate existence qua existence.¹⁴

From this perspective, it can be argued that the starting point of the contingency argument is the same as that of philosophy. The argument starts with the proposition “There is no doubt that some entity exists.” This is followed by an analysis of existence qua existence in philosophy. Then, absolute divisions are made about the concept of existence, such as contingent-necessary, prior-posterior, cause-effect, actual-potential, *hadith* (incipient)-*qadīm* (pre-eternal), and each branch of these divisions is analysed. If we consider philosophy on a broader scale, then the contingency argument comes after the division of existence into necessary and contingent. This is because anything to which existence is attributed is either necessary by its essence or contingent by its essence.

Therefore, the proposition “There is no doubt that some entity exists” forms an absolute division with two options (A and B): “If the entity (K) that undoubtedly exists is necessary by virtue of its essence, then QED: a necessary existent exists. If it is contingent due to its essence, then it requires a cause (L).

A) If K’s existence is necessary by its essence (māhiyya), then QED.

The essentially necessary existent is an entity whose existence is due to its own essence; it does not depend on anything else to exist. Therefore, by definition, the necessary existent cannot have a cause. If it did, it would imply that its existence is contingent upon that cause, rather than being required by its essence alone. What cannot exist without a cause cannot be a necessary existent by its essence. This is because what is created by a cause and cannot exist without that cause is a contingent existent.

B) If K’s existence is contingent by its essence, it requires a cause (L).

An essentially contingent existent is an entity whose essence does not require its existence; that is, it needs something other than itself to exist. The existence of what is contingent is not necessary. The contingent existent then requires a cause to come into existence because its existence or non-

¹³ al-Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd al-i’tiqād*, 106.

¹⁴ Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Shifā’ Metaphysics I*, 1-7.

existence is not due to its essence, but because of something other than its essence.¹⁵

As the entity K needs a cause (L) if it is contingent due to its essence, as mentioned in B, then an absolute division into B1 and B2 is required: “If this cause (L) is necessary by its essence, then QED. If it is contingent due to its essence, then it requires a cause (M).”

B1) If L’s existence is necessary by its essence, then QED.

B2) If L’s existence is contingent by its essence, it requires a cause (M).

Then an absolute division into B2A and B2B is required: “The entity M is either one of its effects (K, L) or something other than its effects (K, L).”

*B2A) M is one of its effects (K, L).

In this case, a vicious circle follows. This is obviously not possible. To put it more explicitly,

K was created by L;

L was created by M;

If M is created by K, then it means that K existed before M and is the cause of not only itself but also its causes. B2A is not possible either as it is not possible for something to be present before itself and to cause itself and its causes.

*B2B) Or M’s existence is something other than its effects (K, L).

If M is something other than its effects (K, L), then an absolute division into B2B1 and B2B2 is required: “This chain of causes either ends or it does not.”

*B2B1) This chain of causes ends.

If it ends, it must end in the essentially necessary existent because every contingent existent needs a cause to be able to exist. This is the reason why it is impossible for the chain of causes to come to an end in a contingent existent. In that case, if this chain is to end, it has to “end in a necessary existent”, QED.

*B2B2) Or this chain of causes does not end.

If it does not end, it means that we never arrive at a necessary existent because the necessary existent, by definition, cannot have a cause. In contrast, an existent that requires a cause is called a contingent (*mumkin*)

¹⁵ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, 107.

existent. If contingent causes continue indefinitely, “the infinite regress of contingent causes” will follow.¹⁶

If an infinitely regressive chain of contingent causes arises, then its essence constitutes a contingent chain as it requires contingent individuals for its existence. Then this chain also entails a cause.

In this case, an absolute division into X, Y, Z follows, “This cause is the chain itself, a part of the chain, or an individual outside the chain.”

*X) The cause is the chain itself:

If the cause of the chain is the chain itself, then this implies a vicious circle, which clearly is not possible.¹⁷

*Y) The cause is a part of the chain:

This is not possible either, because the cause of the whole must be the cause of all its parts. One of the major points of debate between the parties is that this premise appears in Avicenna’s *Kitāb al-najāt* but not in his *al-Ishārāt*.¹⁸ On the other hand, in al-Rāzī’s commentary on *al-Ishārāt*, this premise included in the proof.¹⁹

When considering the requirements of B2B2, it should be noted that all the parts in the whole are contingent parts. Therefore, if one of these contingent parts is the cause of the whole, then since the cause acting on the whole must act on all of its parts, this part that supposedly functions as the cause will also be the cause of not only itself but also its causes, as it is the cause of the whole.²⁰ This is because it is contingent like all other parts and is included in the same whole. The same is true for the causes of this part. However, it is impossible for a being to be the cause of both itself and its causes because it implies a vicious circle.

*Z) Or the cause is an individual from outside the chain.

The only remaining option is that the cause of this chain is an entity outside of the chain. What is outside of the set of contingent causes cannot be a “contingent” entity; rather, it must be necessary; QED.²¹

¹⁶ al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 110.

¹⁷ al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 110.

¹⁸ Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, 272.

¹⁹ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, 2:349.

²⁰ al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 110. The statement “the cause acting on the whole must act on all its parts” should be understood as “if one thing is the cause of the whole as a whole, then this thing must first be the cause of the whole’s all parts” Throughout the text, we preferred the first usage, in parallel with the use of the parties, in order not to disrupt the natural order of the discussion. This premise will be discussed in detail in the title of “A Debate Over Perfect Cause”.

²¹ al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 110.

However, al-Kātibī notes that there is an issue that needs further scrutiny. Once we conclude that the cause of the chain is an external entity, we should not jump to the conclusion that this entity must be the necessary existent. This is because the only way for an individual to be the necessary existent outside of the set of contingent causes is that this chain encompasses all contingent existents. Only if this is the case is it proven that the entity outside of this chain is the necessary existent. However, it is not yet known at this stage whether there are other contingent individuals beyond this chain; that is, whether contingent existents form more than one chain. Then, as al-Kātibī points out, it is necessary not to rush to the conclusion that an individual outside of a chain of contingent causes is the necessary existent.²²

However, according to al-Kātibī, this does not affect the result. Whether it is a single chain or multiple chains, all the chains consisting of contingent causes are like a single chain if external contingent individuals are taken into account.²³ al-Ṭūsī also acknowledges that Avicenna and al-Rāzī are content with a single chain in the argument as the sum of multiple chains will also be like a single chain.²⁴ Consequently, it becomes clear that al-Kātibī's objection should be evaluated as a formal objection that does not affect the conclusion of the argument.

Having outlined the proof as presented by Avicenna in *al-Najāt* and al-Rāzī in *Sharḥ al-ishārāt*, al-Kātibī begins to present the proof more naturally, suggesting that the propositions can be summarized as follows:

If an existing entity (K), its cause (L), and its cause's cause (M) are not necessary by their essence, then one of the options below will follow:

This chain of causes:

*B2A) Either result in a vicious circle. This is obviously impossible.

*B2B) Or it does not create a vicious circle, in which case, there will be two options. In this case, the chain of causes:

*B2B1) Either ends in the necessary existent. QED.

*B2B2) Or it does not but continues as an infinitely regressive chain of causes.

Then the syllogism continues as outlined above.²⁵ al-Ṭūsī raises no objections to the summary provided by al-Kātibī.

²² al-Kātibī, "Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd," 111.

²³ al-Kātibī, "Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd," 110.

²⁴ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 121.

²⁵ al-Kātibī, "Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd," 110.

2. The Stances of the Interlocutors of the Debate

The contingency argument, as addressed so far, is mentioned in Avicenna's *Kitāb al-najāt*²⁶ and al-Rāzī's *Sharḥ al-ishārāt*²⁷ in the same way as reported by al-Kātibī.²⁸ To follow the natural order in the debate, this section first analyses al-Kātibī's stance, and it examines his objections to Avicenna's and al-Rāzī's versions of the contingency argument. Subsequently, the study goes on to elaborate on al-Ṭūsī's stance and his responses to al-Kātibī.

2.1. al-Kātibī's Stance in the Debate

In this section we shall address al-Kātibī's objections to Avicenna's and al-Rāzī's arguments separately. al-Kātibī's first objection targets the premise that the cause of the whole, with respect to its being a whole, must be the cause of all parts of the whole. In the upcoming sections of this study, al-Kātibī's articulation of this objection is referred to as Option Y. This is because this premise was put forward by Avicenna²⁹ and al-Rāzī³⁰ as the reason why Option Y is impossible.

The second major objection that al-Kātibī raised against Avicenna's and al-Rāzī's versions is the Argument of Option Z, which is also found in Avicenna's proof in *al-Ishārāt*³¹. In the Argument of Option Z, al-Kātibī notes that his opponents claimed that they disproved infinite regress even though they did not. Infinite regress was still valid since the condition is satisfied in Option Z, which is one of the requirements of infinite regress.³² The next sections consider both of al-Kātibī's objections in turn.

2.1.1 al-Kātibī's Objection to Option Y

According to al-Kātibī, the cause of a whole does not have to be the cause of all of its parts.³³ He expounds this objection in two different ways:

1) Why should it be impossible for a cause to be the cause of a whole, without being the cause of some parts of the whole, as these parts may not need a cause?³⁴

²⁶ Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, 271-276.

²⁷ al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, 2:345-353.

²⁸ al-Kātibī, "Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd," 109-114.

²⁹ Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, 272.

³⁰ al-Rāzī, *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, 2:349

³¹ Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, 128.

³² al-Kātibī, "Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd," 111.

³³ al-Kātibī, "Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd," 114.

³⁴ al-Kātibī, "Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd," 114.

2) Why isn't it possible for a cause not to be the cause of some of the parts -as they are created by some other cause- while it is the cause of the whole at the same time?³⁵

To illustrate his first objection, al-Kātibī gives an example of the necessary existent and a chain of all individuals. The necessary existent is the cause of all that comes after it. It is a member of this chain, but although it is the chain's cause, it does not have to have a cause just because of its membership in the chain, as it does not need a cause. Therefore, an individual that is the cause of the whole does not have to be the cause of itself just because of being a part of the chain.³⁶ With this refutation (*naqz*), al-Kātibī aims to show that the cause of the entire chain, whatever it is, is not necessarily the cause of all its parts.

According to Avicenna and al-Rāzī, however, the claim that the cause of the whole must also be the cause of all of its parts is valid only if it is assumed that all the parts of this chain are contingent entities.³⁷ This is because the discussion takes place on three options (X, Y, Z), which are the requirements of an infinitely regressive chain (B2B2) that consists only of contingent entities. If all parts of this chain were not contingent entities and the necessary existent were included in it, the condition would have already been satisfied in B2B1. The other possibility (B2B2) is that there is no necessary existent in the parts of this chain. Then this chain, the focus of the ongoing syllogism, consists of parts that all are made up of contingent causes. According to al-Ṭūsī, al-Kātibī's refutation of the proof does not match up with the argument, since it would be a "non sequitur syllogism" to object to the ongoing syllogism, involving a whole that merely consists of contingent causes, by using a chain that includes the necessary existent as a part.³⁸

al-Kātibī was alert to this problem, as he later abandoned his objection and focused on his second objection,³⁹ which is thus al-Kātibī's main objection to Option Y. The next phase of this study is the objection provided below in the discussion of Option Y.

In an attempt to show that the cause acting on the whole does not necessarily act on all parts of the whole, al-Kātibī argues, in his second objection, that the cause of some parts of the chain may be different from that

³⁵ al-Kātibī, "Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd," 114.

³⁶ al-Kātibī, "Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd," 114.

³⁷ Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, 272; al-Rāzī, *Sharh al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbihāt*, 2:348.

³⁸ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 123.

³⁹ al-Kātibī, "Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd," 114.

of the whole chain.⁴⁰ The explanation for this is as follows: While the cause of the whole acts on the whole in terms of its being a whole, the cause of some parts in the whole may be different from the cause that acts on the whole *qua* a whole.⁴¹ In that case, it seems that al-Kātibī preferred the method of “syllogism through reductio ad absurdum” (*qiyās al-khulf*) to explain this: if the cause acting on the whole had to act on all parts of the whole, one of the following two cases would follow:

- 1) Either the effect would temporally come after the “perfect” cause (*al-illat al-tāmma*),
- 2) or it would temporally come before the perfect cause.⁴²

Neither of these scenarios is possible since it is a must that the perfect cause and the effect be temporally concurrent. To clarify this thesis, al-Kātibī used the example of a “bed”, which al-Fārābī cited in *al-Madīnat al-fādila*⁴³ to explain the concepts of matter and form. The bed consists of two contingent parts, of which the first is temporally prior to the second. The material of the bed is wood, and its form (*sūra*) is its shape.⁴⁴ In this way, al-Kātibī wanted to emphasize that the wood temporarily precedes the shape of the bed. He goes on to explain the syllogism. If the perfect cause of the bed is also the cause of its parts (wood and its shape), then one of the following scenarios will follow:

- 1) The perfect cause of the bed is found either with the wood.⁴⁵

In this case, although there is a perfect cause with the wood, a temporal distance is involved in the realization of the effect (bed), and the perfect cause temporally precedes the effect.⁴⁶

- 2) Or the perfect cause of the bed is not found with the wood.⁴⁷

Since the perfect cause is the perfect cause of the bed, it must be present with the bed. The wood is temporally prior to the bed, and the perfect cause of the bed exists concurrently with the bed. Therefore, the wood is temporally prior to the perfect cause of the bed. As the perfect cause of the

⁴⁰ al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 114.

⁴¹ al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 114.

⁴² al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 114.

⁴³ Abū Naṣr Muhammad b. Muhammad b. Tarkhān al-Fārābī, *al-Madīna al-Fādila*, 90-91.

⁴⁴ al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 114.

⁴⁵ al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 114-115.

⁴⁶ al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 115.

⁴⁷ al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 115.

bed and that of the wood will be the same cause, in this case the wood would have temporally preceded its own perfect cause.⁴⁸

The premise (i.e., “the cause that acts on the whole must act on all of its parts”) is impossible, as it has merely impossible implications (i.e., “the perfect cause of the bed is either with the wood or not”). Therefore, al-Kātibī argues that we cannot accept the view that the cause that acts overall must also act on all of its parts. This is because, with the example of the bed, the impossibility of both implications of this premise is confirmed.⁴⁹

2.1.2 al-Kātibī’s Objection to Option Z

According to al-Kātibī’s articulation of a proof, which is the same as the articulation offered by Avicenna and al-Rāzī, it is necessary to focus on whether the desideratum is achieved in B2B1 as a result of the refutation of B2B2 (let us call it D), or it is achieved either in B2B1 and B2B2-Z as a result of the refutation of B2B2-X and B2B2-Y (let us call it F).

If D is accurate, as Avicenna⁵⁰ and al-Rāzī⁵¹ argued, the desideratum is achieved (that is, the necessary existent is proven), and infinite regress is refuted. However, if F is correct, as al-Kātibī claims, the desideratum is achieved, yet infinite regress is not refuted. The reason for this is that we can demonstrate that something is impossible only if we can demonstrate that all its implications are impossible. In that case, it would not be correct to claim the impossibility of a premise (B2B2, i.e., the infinite regress option) when one of its implications (Z) is considered possible.⁵²

If infinitely regressive contingent causes require that the chain’s cause must be an entity outside of this chain, and if the existence of the entity outside of the chain requires that this external cause must be the necessary existent, then it is endorsed that the necessary existent is required by an infinite regress. Therefore, al-Kātibī notes that it is not enough to disprove X and Y to show the impossibility of infinite regress. Furthermore, the impossibility of Option Z must also be proved since it is an implication of the infinite regress. If and only if when the impossibility of all three is shown, it can be argued that the desideratum is achieved in B2B1 as a result of the refutation of B2B2.⁵³ In this context, according to al-Kātibī, unless Avicenna

⁴⁸ al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 115.

⁴⁹ al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 115.

⁵⁰ Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, 272

⁵¹ al-Rāzī, *Sharh al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, 2:351.

⁵² al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 111.

⁵³ al-Kātibī, “Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd,” 112.

and al-Rāzī demonstrate that Option Z is impossible, they are not consistent in claiming that the desideratum is achieved in B2B1 by refuting B2B2. As al-Kātibī rightly complains, in fact Avicenna and al-Rāzī accept that B2B2 is not refuted (F) by accepting that the desideratum is achieved in Option Z.⁵⁴

2.2 al-Ṭūsī's Stance in the Debate

As a defender (*muallil*) at this stage of the debate, al-Ṭūsī first makes additions to the premises to respond to al-Kātibī's objections. He points out that the following premise must be added to help us to accurately understand the proof proposed by Avicenna and al-Rāzī: "Every cause in a chain consisting of causes and effects is a perfect cause as it necessitates its effect, and there is definitely a first cause (principle) in this chain."⁵⁵ It is worth noting that similarly the need for a cause is pivotal to the definition of "contingent existent", the need for a first cause (principle) in a chain is central to the definition of "contingent chain". This premise unveils the stance of each side in the debate, which helps clarify the discussion step by step. In the next phase of the debate, all al-Ṭūsī's answers and al-Kātibī's objections revolve around this premise.

2.2.1 al-Ṭūsī's Analysis of Option Y

Assuming that a chain is an effect, the only sufficient factor that contributes to the existence of the whole chain is the sum of all its constitutive parts. Hence, the proximal perfect cause of the whole cannot be anything but all its parts,⁵⁶ and according to al-Ṭūsī, it is insufficient to specify B2B2 as X, Y, and Z. This is because the cause of this chain cannot be a part of it as in Option Y does not mean that the sum of its parts cannot be the cause of the whole.⁵⁷ Thus, we need to add another option here: The cause of the whole chain is all its constituent parts. Let us call this option S.

al-Ṭūsī believes that when two things exist such that one is prior to the other by its essence, and the earlier one cannot be temporally separated from the later one, what comes first becomes the perfect cause of what follows it.⁵⁸ With respect to its essence, the whole itself follows all its parts; that is, all the parts are prior to the whole in their essence. So, the sum of the parts that are earlier in essence is the perfect cause of the whole that is later in essence.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ al-Kātibī, "Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd," 111.

⁵⁵ al-Kātibī, "Munākashāt al-Katibī li Ta'likāt al-Ṭūsī," 130.

⁵⁶ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 122.

⁵⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 124.

⁵⁸ al-Kātibī objects to this later, which I will analyse it in the title "A Debate Over Perfect Cause".

⁵⁹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 122.

However, al-Ṭūsī does not conclude the syllogism by merely demonstrating that the cause of the whole is all of its constituent parts (S). This is because all the parts of the whole are possible, and therefore, just like the whole itself, must have a cause.⁶⁰ The cause of all parts cannot be a direct cause of the whole because it is clear that the direct cause (proximal perfect cause) of the whole is all of these parts, and it is impossible for one effect to have two distinct perfect causes. Therefore, if it is known that the whole has a cause other than all of its parts, this cause can only be a distal one.

As a result, the definition of perfect cause would be contradicted if a cause existed that is the perfect cause of the whole *qua* a whole without being a direct or indirect cause of all its parts. The whole needs each of its parts to become a whole. A cause of the whole that excludes some of its parts clearly runs counter to the definition of perfect cause. Nevertheless, if we endorsed al-Kātibī's claim⁶¹ that the distal perfect cause of the whole acts on the whole but not on some of its parts, then what is called a "perfect cause" can no longer be considered a perfect cause.⁶²

In the case depicted above, some parts that make up a whole supposedly do not need this so-called perfect cause of the whole. When some of the constituent parts do not need something, then it cannot be the perfect cause of the whole because a perfect cause *per se* is sufficient to necessitate its effect. Here, the so-called perfect cause does not require the existence of the whole alone; on the contrary, it requires the whole together with some parts that do not need the cause. So, it is not a perfect cause.⁶³

In this case, the real perfect cause is the sum of "the cause that is initially assumed to be a perfect cause" and "the parts that do not need that cause". When the sum is the perfect cause, the agent (i.e., the real perfect cause) that acts overall also acts on all of the parts. Accordingly, this possibility contradicts al-Kātibī's argument but supports al-Ṭūsī's argument. As a result, it is impossible to have a distal perfect cause that does not act on all parts of the whole while acting on the whole so that it becomes a whole.⁶⁴

However, it is also necessary to focus on how the external cause, acting on all parts of the whole, engenders this effect. For, while al-Ṭūsī considers that the cause acting on the whole must primarily act on all parts of the

⁶⁰ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 122.

⁶¹ al-Kātibī, "Risāla fī Ithbāt al-Wājib al-Wujūd," 114.

⁶² After this stage, al-Ṭūsī became the one who asks questions in the debate.

⁶³ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 123.

⁶⁴ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 123.

whole, he hardly means that this cause directly acts on each part of the whole.⁶⁵ Both al-Kātibī⁶⁶ and al-Ṭūsī consider such an effect to be impossible. Al-Ṭūsī states that this cause directly and individually acts on "one" of the parts, and that this first effect in the chain itself acts on the next part directly. Accordingly, while this first cause directly acts on the first part of the whole, it indirectly acts on the other parts via the first part.

Applying these explanations to al-Kātibī's example of a bed would make the point even clearer. Since a bed requires no cause other than wood and a specific shape to become a bed, any distal perfect cause that acts on the bed must act on all the parts that the bed needs to be a bed. The proximal perfect cause of the wood and the proximal perfect cause of its shape are two different causes. This is because in the "bed" example, the wood temporally precedes the shape, but notwithstanding this, the wood is not the cause of the bed's shape, which comes after wood. However, the sum of their causes becomes the distal perfect cause of the bed through the wood and a specific shape. Therefore, when the proper sense of perfect cause is applied, since the perfect cause of the bed also includes the perfect causes of all its parts, the following thesis is established: "The distal perfect cause acting on the whole must act on all the parts that are the proximal perfect cause of the whole". This is because the cause of any of the parts (wood and shape), which constitute the proximal perfect cause of the bed, is not overlooked in the distal perfect cause of the bed (the sum of the causes of the wood and shape). Therefore, it is impossible to have a distal perfect cause that acts overall *qua* a whole but not on some of its parts.

2.2.2 al-Ṭūsī's Analysis of Option Z

If the causes in the chain infinitely regress, there is no first cause in that chain. al-Ṭūsī claims that when the perfect cause of a whole without the first cause is assumed to be an individual from outside the chain (Z), the individuals in the chain cannot be a perfect cause for the individuals coming after them. He further argues that the chain must come into existence with the emergence of all individuals; that is, the cause-effect relationship between them disappears.⁶⁷ However, at the beginning of the syllogism, what is meant by the whole was the one formed by individuals with a cause-effect relationship between them. This is a *khulf*.

⁶⁵ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 123.

⁶⁶ al-Kātibī, *Munākashāt al-Katibī li Ta'likāt al-Ṭūsī*, 128.

⁶⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 120.

If the external cause brings all members of the chain into existence at once without eliminating the cause-effect relationship between the individuals, then a contradiction arises because two perfect causes would engender one effect.⁶⁸

There is no backward first cause in a chain consisting of endless members. A chain consisting of contingent individuals without including the first cause is contingent. In that case, the whole chain needs a proximal perfect cause. As al-Kātibī admits, the proximal perfect cause of the whole of the chain cannot be the whole itself (X), nor can it be a part thereof (Y). al-Ṭūsī raises no objections against these two possibilities. However, unlike al-Kātibī, he claims that the proximal perfect cause of that chain cannot be an individual (Z) outside of that chain. This is because if it is possible for the proximal perfect cause of the entire chain to be an individual outside of that chain, the proximal perfect cause of the chain will be both this external individual and all the individuals in the chain (S). In the discussion of option Y, it was explained that the proximal perfect cause of the chain is all the individuals in the whole, and that a distal perfect cause acting on the whole must act on all the parts that are the proximal perfect cause of the whole. It is impossible, then, for this external cause to be a proximal perfect cause of the chain.⁶⁹

If the proximal perfect cause of the whole is all of the individuals in the whole, all of these individuals are contingent, so there is still a need for a cause. They must thus have a cause. Accordingly, the whole needs a distal perfect cause (principle). This cause is not all the parts (X), nor is it one of the parts (Y). So, it is an outsider.

In the discussion of Option Y, it was explained that for the external cause to be the distal perfect cause of the whole of the chain, it would first have to be a cause of all the parts of the chain that constitute the proximal perfect cause.

There are two ways of acting on the parts: The first (i) is to act on each of the parts directly, which removes the cause-effect relationship among the parts in the chain. In this case, the perfect cause of each part becomes the external cause. However, as noted earlier in the syllogism, each part's perfect cause is its preceding part.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 120.

⁶⁹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 120.

⁷⁰ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 120.

If this cause directly created all parts of the chain without eliminating the cause-effect relationship of the parts within the chain, then each part would have two proximal perfect causes. One is the part that precedes it, and the other is this external cause. In this case, the fact that the external cause directly creates all the members of the chain at once necessitates two causes in one effect, which is impossible under these circumstances.⁷¹

The second way (ii) in which the external cause could be the distal perfect cause of the chain is that it directly acts on the first member of the chain, and the subsequent members act on the members that follow them. It is impossible to act in this way on a chain without its first individual,⁷² because regardless of the external cause being the cause of whatever individual (T) in the chain, which is supposed to be made up of an infinite number of individuals, there are other contingent individuals in that chain that precede that individual (T). In this case, this external cause, which causes T, is not the distal perfect cause of the whole, as the whole also needs the parts before T to become a whole. The external cause is not the cause of those parts. It is impossible for the part that is not directly or indirectly the cause of all the parts to be the distal perfect cause of the whole. Therefore, it is not possible for the external cause to act on the chain through T (ii). Since the previous option (i) has also been disproved, it is now clear that the external cause cannot be a cause of this chain in any manner.

Then, the distal perfect cause of the infinitely regressive whole is not the whole itself (X); it is not all its parts (S); it is not a part of its parts (Y), and it is not an external individual (Z). Since all the options are refuted, the conclusion is as follows: An external cause cannot be the cause of this chain in any way.

This outcome is impossible as it leads to the impossible conclusion that a contingent being does not have a cause. Accordingly, based on the proof provided by al-Ṭūsī, Option B2B2 and all its requirements (X, S, Y and Z) are refuted, and the desideratum is achieved in B2B1. Therefore, the proof provided by al-Ṭūsī not only achieves the desideratum but also proves the impossibility of infinite regress.

On the other hand, the fact that the distal perfect cause of a chain is an individual outside of the chain means that the chain has a first part, and thus, the parts in that chain cannot infinitely regress. In Avicenna's approach, it is

⁷¹ al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 120.

⁷² al-Ṭūsī, *al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Kātibī*, 120.

necessary for the external cause to act on this chain from the end side of causes in the chain. If an end is needed there, then the causes come to an end because, in this case, the chain would be surrounded not only by the end side of causes but also by the end side of effects. Both interlocutors of the debate agree that the chain surrounded by both sides cannot consist of infinite parts. This being the case, the impossibility of the chain being composed of infinite parts becomes clear, and infinite regress is refuted.⁷³

Avicenna's and al-Rāzī's claim that the cause of the chain must be an external individual (Z) should also be evaluated in this line. If the cause of a chain is an external individual, it can exert an effect on the chain based on the second method (ii) mentioned above, which is that the chain must have a first part. A chain with a first part cannot go on infinitely on its side of causes. In this case, for the existence of a chain to be possible, it must not be infinitely regressive.⁷⁴

As a result, since Option Z requires the refutation of infinite regress, infinite regress is refuted regardless. B2B2 is refuted together with all its requirements, and the desideratum is achieved in B2B1.

3. A Debate over Perfect Causes

al-Kātibī stresses that the following claim made by al-Ṭūsī about perfect causes should be discussed first:⁷⁵

When there are two things, where one precedes the other, and when it is impossible to separate what is temporally earlier from what is later, the earlier one becomes the perfect cause of the later one. The whole in essence comes after all its parts, and it is not possible for all the parts of the whole to be temporally separate from the whole. In other words, it cannot be assumed that the whole came into existence after the time when all its parts were present but the whole did not exist. So, the perfect cause of the whole is all of its parts.⁷⁶

According to al-Kātibī, in the whole in question, the last part⁷⁷ and the formal part of that whole shape or composition (*hey'e or terkib*)⁷⁸ are prior to the whole, in essence, and it is impossible to temporally separate them from the whole. In this case, the last part and the shape or composition also

⁷³ Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt*, 129.

⁷⁴ al-Ṭūsī, "Naqd al-Ṭūsī alā Munākashāt al-Katibī," 144.

⁷⁵ al-Kātibī, *Munākashāt al-Katibī li Ta'likāt al-Ṭūsī*, 131.

⁷⁶ al-Ṭūsī, "al-Ta'likāt alā Mabāhisi al-Risālat al-Katibī," 122.

⁷⁷ al-Kātibī, *Munākashāt al-Katibī li Ta'likāt al-Ṭūsī*, 131.

⁷⁸ al-Kātibī, *Munākashāt al-Katibī li Ta'likāt al-Ṭūsī*, 132.

fit al-Ṭūsī's definition of the perfect cause. According to al-Ṭūsī's definition, the last part of the whole or the compound can also be the perfect cause of the whole. If this is accepted, the perfect cause of the whole must be some of its parts (Y) as the last part and the composition are also parts of the whole. However, al-Ṭūsī initially claimed that this option is impossible (Y). Therefore, further explanation is needed as to why al-Ṭūsī, after defining the perfect cause as above, subscribes to the idea that the sum of all the parts, not the last part or the composition, is the perfect cause of the whole.⁷⁹

According to al-Ṭūsī, what is meant by "preceding in terms of its essence" in the definition of the perfect cause is that what comes first precedes "by its essence" what comes later. Alternatively put, what comes earlier in al-Ṭūsī's premise precedes what comes later, not only in terms of its essence but also by its essence. The last part of the whole and the shape or composition are not like this because although the last part and the shape come before the whole "in terms of essence", this is not a "requirement by essence".

When considered in isolation, it is possible to temporally separate the last part from the whole as the last part does not require the whole by itself. The reason it is impossible to temporally separate the last part from the whole is that the parts preceding the last part essentially entail the last part and, hence, the whole. In this case, since what "essentially" precedes the whole is not the last part but all the parts, the perfect cause of the whole is not the last part but all the parts.⁸⁰

For further elucidation, consider the following example: the perfect cause of number 10, which consists of 1s, is not the last 1 added to nine 1s because the last 1 does not compose number 10 by itself. In fact, the perfect cause of number 10 is the combination of all ten 1s, composed by the addition of the last 1. By understanding "precedence in essence" in this way, one does not necessarily accept that the cause of the whole is the last part of the whole merely by saying that the cause of the whole is what essentially precedes the whole and cannot be temporally separated from the whole. In this case, as all parts of the whole essentially precede the whole, it is understood that what is meant by making all the parts a perfect cause of the whole is the fact that all the parts give existence to the whole,⁸¹ as al-Kātibī admits.⁸²

⁷⁹ al-Kātibī, *Munākashāt al-Katibī li Ta'likāt al-Ṭūsī*, 131.

⁸⁰ al-Ṭūsī, "Naqd al-Ṭūsī alā Munākashāt al-Katibī," 143.

⁸¹ al-Kātibī, *Munākashāt al-Katibī li Ta'likāt al-Ṭūsī*, 131.

⁸² al-Ṭūsī, "Naqd al-Ṭūsī alā Munākashāt al-Katibī," 143.

Likewise, shape comes earlier than the whole in terms of its essence, not by its essence, as in the discussion about the concept of the last part. This is because without the material parts of the whole, the shape *per se* is not enough to form the whole. Therefore, it is impossible for shape to be the perfect cause of the whole.⁸³

4. A Discussion of Option X: Vicious Circle

Based on al-Ṭūsī's explanations above, al-Kātibī admitted that al-Ṭūsī's arguments are cogent and accurate. At this point, however, al-Kātibī notes that another key issue needs to be clarified. Once this issue is resolved, there remains no reason for disputing the argument emerging from al-Ṭūsī's statements.⁸⁴

As al-Ṭūsī claims that if the perfect cause was the sum of the (material and formal) parts that a thing needs to exist, then, in al-Kātibī's view, the perfect cause becomes the thing itself. It is impossible for something to be the cause of itself as this leads to a vicious circle.⁸⁵

al-Ṭūsī draws attention to a distinction between the concepts of "the whole" and "the sum of the parts". This is because negligence of this distinction would lead to saying that something is a cause of itself. To explain this difference, al-Ṭūsī refers to a general division of causes (*'illa*) into four categories:⁸⁶ material (*hayūlāniyya*), formal (*sūriyya*), final (*ghā'iyya*), and efficient or agential (*fā'ila*). When a body (*jism*) is considered as an effect, the cause will be incomplete, and the body cannot come into existence unless these four causes come together. These four causes are not the body itself but are causes of it. The coexistence of all these causes is the perfect cause of the body. Since philosophers divide causes into four categories and distinguish them from effects in this way, they cannot accept the vicious circle of a cause and its effect being the same thing.⁸⁷

Material and formal parts, as causes of the whole, are prior to the whole in essence. Obviously, what is earlier in its essence and what is later in its essence cannot be the same thing. To illustrate the idea, al-Ṭūsī provides an example of a hypothetical whole consisting of necessary beings. Since such a whole would need its components to exist, it would not be a necessary existent but a contingent individual in essence. If the parts of the whole were

⁸³ al-Ṭūsī, "Naqd al-Ṭūsī alā Munākashāt al-Katibī," 146.

⁸⁴ al-Kātibī, *Munākashāt al-Katibī li Ta'likāt al-Ṭūsī*, 136.

⁸⁵ al-Kātibī, *Munākashāt al-Katibī li Ta'likāt al-Ṭūsī*, 136.

⁸⁶ Aristoteles, *Metaphysics*, 118-126.

⁸⁷ al-Ṭūsī, "Naqd al-Ṭūsī alā Munākashāt al-Katibī," 147.

the same as the whole itself, then something would have to be both necessary and contingent. Therefore, identification of the whole with the "sum of parts" leads to a contradiction. Accordingly, the sum of parts is not the whole itself, but the proximal perfect cause of the whole.⁸⁸

Another proof presented by al-Ṭūsī is that parts are things in which unification takes place. It is one thing to conceive these parts as unified and another thing to conceive them without being unified. The whole is the latter, which is distinct from the former. Therefore, the whole and all its parts are different things, not only semantically but also in actuality.⁸⁹

As in the "bed" example, the combination of two different parts is the perfect cause of the whole. While the wood is a material component, the shape of the bed is a formal component. "Co-occurrence" of these two parts is the perfect cause of the whole (bed).⁹⁰

The same holds true of number 10, which consists of 1s. The case in which the 1s are considered without integration is different from the case in which they are conceived as unified. Likewise, there will be a difference between when the union is considered without 1s and when it is considered together with 1s. When the 1s (material parts) and the combination of these parts (formal part) come together, the sum of all (material and formal) parts becomes the cause of the whole (i.e., number 10).⁹¹

Thus, the cause of the whole is not the whole itself, but the sum of its material and formal parts. As a result, when the perfect cause is defined accurately, the cause of the whole is not the whole itself, but the sum of its parts, and this does not lead to a vicious circle.

As a result of these explanations, al-Kātībī acknowledged that his concerns were thoroughly addressed, and he finally accepted the proof provided by al-Ṭūsī, his teacher, in the debate on the contingency argument. In his last letter, he admitted that his teacher was right in his arguments.⁹² After this humble confession of his student, al-Ṭūsī thanked al-Kātībī in turn for his goodwill and humility. In a final letter of appreciation, al-Ṭūsī addressed al-Kātībī with kind words and prayers.⁹³

⁸⁸ al-Ṭūsī, "Naqd al-Ṭūsī alā Munākashāt al-Katībī," 142.

⁸⁹ al-Ṭūsī, "Naqd al-Ṭūsī alā Munākashāt al-Katībī," 143.

⁹⁰ al-Ṭūsī, "Naqd al-Ṭūsī alā Munākashāt al-Katībī," 147.

⁹¹ al-Ṭūsī, "Naqd al-Ṭūsī alā Munākashāt al-Katībī," 149.

⁹² al-Kātībī, "Hātīmā fi al-Itiraf bi'l Hakk li al-Kātībī," 152-153.

⁹³ al-Ṭūsī, "al-Shukr wa al-Takdīr li al-Tusī," 153-154.

5. The Mutually Accepted Argument

Although al-Kātibī agreed that al-Ṭūsī's statements were correct, neither of the two provided a separate articulation of the argument they agreed upon. Below are the settled results of their debates as a single argument.

A chain of causes:

B2B1) If it ends in the necessary existent, the desideratum is achieved.

B2B2) If it does not end in the necessary existent, the contingent causes must infinitely regress.

If a chain of contingent causes is considered essential, an essentially contingent chain is formed, which needs its contingent parts. Every contingent existent necessitates a cause. This chain is also contingent and therefore it necessitates a cause. The cause of this chain is all the parts that make it up (S). The whole (composed of these parts) is also contingent; hence, each part also necessitates a cause. The proximal cause of "each" part is the part that precedes it. Therefore, the cause of all these parts must be the distal perfect cause, not the proximal perfect cause of "each" part. This cause could be called the principle of the parts of the whole.

The principle of the parts of the whole:

X-) is either the parts of the whole themselves,

This is impossible as it leads to a vicious circle.

Y-) or an individual part of the whole,

In this case, the part that is assumed as the principle will be the cause of both itself and its causes. This is impossible because it also implies a vicious circle.

Z-) or an individual outside of the parts of the whole.

A cause that is assumed to be outside of the parts of a chain can act on its parts only if this external cause acts on only one of the parts of the chain directly and on other parts indirectly (ii).

In this case, regardless of the part (T), on which the external cause acts as a direct cause, there are other parts preceding that part (T) in the chain. This is because it was assumed that the chain was infinitely regressive. It is not possible for the cause that is not the cause of the parts before (T) to be the perfect cause of the whole. So, the principle of the parts of an infinitely regressive chain cannot be an outside entity.

On this account, all the three implications of B2B2 (X, Y, and Z) are refuted. Accordingly, what option B2B2 implies is that a possible that is

assumed to consist of an infinite number of parts has no cause. Yet, this is impossible because it would mean the existence of a contingent entity without a cause. So B2B2 is false. Then, the desideratum is achieved in B2B1 by disproving all the implications of B2B2 (Options X, Y and Z). Accordingly, the necessary existent is proven, and infinite regress is disproved.

Conclusion

The analyses carried out indicate that the contingency argument presents a definitive proof for the existence of the necessary existent, as accepted by both interlocutors of the debate. Neither al-Ṭūsī nor al-Kātibī raised any objections to this. The author of the current study agrees with both sides that the contingency argument constitutes a conclusive proof for the existence of the necessary existent, both in the version approved by al-Kātibī and the one reformulated by al-Ṭūsī. This is because regardless of whether the contingency argument proves the impossibility of infinite regress as an essential consequence, the contingency argument proves the existence of the necessary existent in both cases. Whether the contingency argument also proves the impossibility of infinite regress requires further discussion.

Regarding the objections raised by al-Kātibī and al-Ṭūsī's response to these objections, our analyses indicated that although the objections were ultimately not valid, they were nevertheless critical as they helped make the argument more comprehensible. As a result of al-Kātibī's objections, al-Ṭūsī explained that it is possible for the necessary existent to act on the chain of contingent individuals only from the side of causes, and he showed that this chain is surrounded by the necessary existent and the last effect. Moreover, he demonstrated convincingly that the contingency argument provides proof that invalidates infinite regress by showing that a chain cannot be composed of an infinite number of parts if it is closed on both sides. Following al-Ṭūsī's explanations, al-Kātibī was convinced that the contingency argument ultimately invalidated infinite regress. A major conclusion drawn from this study is that al-Ṭūsī's answers and explanations were appropriate, and the contingency argument not only proves the existence of the necessary existent, but also conclusively demonstrates the impossibility of infinite regress.

Another finding of this study pertains to the intellectual fabric of the Islamic intellectual tradition. The study sheds light on a discussion where specific terminologies of logic, debate, and philosophy were used accurately

and without any exaggerated language, defamation, ignorance, or scholastic pressure.

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