

Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī as a precedent to Ibn Taymiyya on Allāh's perfection and
perpetual activity

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative study of the theology of Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī and Ibn Taymiyya. Ibn Taymiyya's theology is unique in Sunni Islam as it is distinct from the dominant Ash'arism of the Kalām theologians and the non-cognitivism of the Hanbalites. There are many predecessors who Ibn Taymiyya read and appropriated in order to develop his unique views, and Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī is one who he quotes in many of his works; yet the relationship between the ideas of both has not previously been explored. This dissertation will demonstrate how Ibn Abū al-Barakāt is a striking precedent to Ibn Taymiyya in various elements of his theology. Chapter One discusses the understanding of Allāh's perfection according to both. Chapter Two discusses Allāh's will and perpetual activity according to both, which is how both characterise Allāh's perfection. Chapter Three discusses the understanding of time in relation to Allāh according to both as it is necessary to understand the relationship between time and Allāh in order to fully understand the nature of Allāh's perpetual activity.

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Introduction

Ibn Taymiyya (d.1328) was a famous Muslim jurist and theologian whose views were controversial and remains so amongst Muslims today. Despite his controversy, his contributions cannot be overlooked as he has written works in almost every field of the Islamic sciences, though his theological writings are particularly interesting. This is because the dominant theology of Sunni Islam in his day was Ash‘arism, which al-Ghazālī (d.1111) and al-Rāzī (d.1210) were instrumental in disseminating. Of course, there also existed the Māturīdī Hanafites and the non-cognitivist Hanbalites. However, Ibn Taymiyya did not take any of these appropriations as suitable and sought to develop his own theology in response to the dominant Ash‘arism of al-Ghazālī and al-Rāzī. It was a theology which Ibn Taymiyya based on the apparent texts of revelation according to his understanding of clear reason or *sarīh al-‘aql*. In this regard, Ibn Taymiyya’s views on Allāh’s attributes and how they interact with His creation are seemingly unique, particularly his views on Allāh’s perfection being characterised by his perpetual activity, and the infinite regress of temporal existences.

Understanding Ibn Taymiyya’s contributions is not possible without understanding who he may have been influenced by, which can only be identified by knowing who he read from his predecessors. As is clear from his writings, he was a prolific reader as he quotes from and discusses many theologians and philosophers. However, due to the sheer volume of Ibn Taymiyya’s contributions, there is still much scholarly effort to be exerted in understanding how he understood those he read and what influences he may have taken from them. Jon Hoover has stated, “Much work remains to clarify how Ibn Taymiyya appropriated the thought of those he read, especially Ibn Sīnā, Ibn ‘Arabī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, as well as Ibn Rushd and Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī. The latter two figures have received

comparatively less attention in this study, but they may well be no less important to Ibn Taymiyya's intellectual formation".¹ From these individuals mentioned by Hoover, Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī is one that Ibn Taymiyya has not only quoted from in his *Dar al-Ta'ārud, Minhāj al-Sunnah* and other works, but someone whose views are incredibly similar to his own in the issues of Allāh's perfection being characterised by his perpetual activity. These similarities are intriguing and exploring them will be fundamental in the greater project of understanding Ibn Taymiyya's theology.

Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī was a philosopher who was born into a Jewish family around 1077 according to Roxanne D. Marcotte, though Frank Griffel asserts that it was more likely to be around 1085². Abū al-Barakāt is an important figure as he did not have a distinctly Aristotelian philosophy, which is shown through his disagreement with the prime mover argument. He also disagrees with Avicenna in many places, particularly with the concept of emanation and instead, he developed his own ideas on the origins of existence such as a theory of Allāh's perpetual wills and creative activity which are responsible for the origination of temporal existences in the world. Abū al-Barakāt was unique in his thought as he did not ascribe to any of the dominant philosophical schools of his time, but developed his own views and in doing so, opened new discussions on God and His creation. Abū al-Barakāt's magnum opus is his *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar* or *The Carefully Considered Book*, in which he analysed and considered the ancient philosophies and those prevalent in his time

¹ Jon Hoover, *Ibn Taymiyya's Theodicy of Perpetual Optimism*, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 237.

² Frank Griffel, *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 204.

to arrive at the one he considered correct, a method which he called *i'tibār* or careful consideration. His work is divided into three sections: logic, the natural sciences and metaphysical theology. I have utilised the third section concerning metaphysical theology in my research due to its relevance.

My research is a comparative study of the theology of Ibn Taymiyya and Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī since the relationship between the two has not been previously explored. It is my assertion that for Ibn Taymiyya to develop his theology, Abū al-Barakāt is an essential piece of his puzzle, who Ibn Taymiyya read and potentially drew from. As mentioned, Abū al-Barakāt responded to the philosophies of his time with his own views, and in doing so, he opened the discursive space on the issues. This meant that successors such as Ibn Taymiyya could also engage with these discussions and provide their views. Exploring the relationship between Abū al-Barakāt and Ibn Taymiyya can be done by identifying where Ibn Taymiyya has quoted Abū al-Barakāt and how he has utilised him in his writings. However, this will give us a very limited insight into the relationship between the two as it will only highlight Ibn Taymiyya's direct usage of Abū al-Barakāt in certain places. For this reason, I have analysed the views of both to demonstrate the similarities between them and how Ibn Taymiyya potentially drew from Abū al-Barakāt in his theology, particularly regarding the Allāh's attributes and the creation. In doing so, the theology of Ibn Taymiyya can be better understood, particularly regarding his seemingly unique views on the attributes. To my knowledge, nothing has been written on the similarities between Abū al-Barakāt and Ibn Taymiyya and the former's potential influence on the latter, though research has been done into the theology of both individually.

My research comprises of three chapters; the first is concerning Allāh's perfection, as it is the understanding of Allāh's perfection for both Abū al-Barakāt and Ibn Taymiyya which is the basis for understanding Allāh's attributes. Both Ibn Taymiyya and Abū al-Barakāt establish Allāh's perfection through a form of analogy asserting that the presence of any quality of perfection in the creation indicates its existence in the creator. Both also utilise the terminology of *'illah* (necessary cause) for Allāh and *ma'lūl* (effect) for the creation to express that any perfections that exist in the creations are caused and derived from the creator. Subsequently, both conclude that it is Allāh who is more worthy of possessing these perfections as He is the cause, and He possesses these qualities of perfection in their utmost. I will explain the details of both each of their views and will demonstrate where they are similar and where we can potentially say that Ibn Taymiyya may have appropriated Abū al-Barakāt.

My second chapter concerns Allāh's will and perpetual activity as both Abū al-Barakāt and Ibn Taymiyya characterise Allāh's perfection through His wills and perpetual activity. Abū al-Barakāt traces the origins of existence back to Allāh's first will and states that the existence of temporal creations is due to Allāh's perpetual wills which manifest according to their determining factors and are also temporal. In asserting this view, he rejects Ibn Sīnā's emanation as the cause of existence as he wishes to establish creation as Allāh's own intrinsic action and also that temporal existences cannot manifest without temporal causes. Simultaneously, Abū al-Barakāt affirms that all this perpetual activity is directed by wise purposes at every level. Ibn Taymiyya also affirms that Allāh is perpetually willing with temporal wills and in doing so has also opted to move away from the Ash'arī understanding of the will as an eternal attribute. Rather, Ibn Taymiyya affirms that Allāh's wills are temporal and manifest in accordance with His wise purpose in everything that He does. Ibn

Taymiyya does so due to the understanding that Allāh remaining idle for some time is impossible, just as temporal existences being originated through an eternal cause are impossible according to him. The only viable solution for Ibn Taymiyya, like Abū al-Barakāt, is to affirm that Allāh has been perpetually willing and creating from pre-eternity. I will explain these similarities and the differences, such as the affirmation of an eternal will alongside the temporal wills according to Abū al-Barakāt and its negation according to Ibn Taymiyya.

Finally, understanding Allāh as perpetually active can only be understood if we understand how time relates to Him and so the final chapter concerns Allāh and time. Abū al-Barakāt's assertion is that time is a measure of existence rather than motion and he affirms that Allāh is also characterised by time, since any existence including Allāh's existence cannot be perceived without time. Abū al-Barakāt asserts this view to demonstrate that Allāh has always existed alongside His creation without a temporal gap between them. This allows him to establish that Allāh has been perpetually active and not idle for a moment in His existence. Ibn Taymiyya states that time can be understood in two ways; one is a mental conception, and one is relative to the motion of any specific object. The second understanding is crucial as Ibn Taymiyya affirms that time is connected to the constant motion of objects which Allāh creates one after another. Time is therefore a product of Allāh's perpetual creativity, not a measure of existence though Ibn Taymiyya does agree that there cannot be time without existence. Ibn Taymiyya's motives for presenting this understanding are the same as Abū al-Barakāt's: to establish Allāh's perpetual activity as the cause of existence and that Allāh has always been active rather than idle. These similarities will be analysed as well as key differences in the ideas of both.

The purpose of this will be to demonstrate that Abū al-Barakāt is a striking precedent to Ibn Taymiyya in his views on Allāh's perfection and dynamism.

Alongside providing further insight into the origins of Ibn Taymiyya's theology, this study will open the door for further research to be done on the relationship between Ibn Taymiyya and Abu al-Barakāt and the latter's influence on the former, particularly through analysing Ibn Taymiyya's quotations of Abū al-Barakāt and how he utilises his opinions.

Chapter 1: Allāh's Perfection

1.1: Abū al-Barakāt on Allāh's perfection

Establishing Allāh's perfection is the foundation of Abū al-Barakāt's theology as it is through this that he establishes His attributes and actions. Shlomo Pines has commented on certain elements related to this discussion as will be shown but to my knowledge, this has not been expounded in the manner that I will here. After presenting several arguments for Allāh being the first source (*al-mabda' al-awwal*) of all existence, Abū al-Barakāt mentions that Allāh has completeness (*al-tamām*) and perfection (*al-kamāl*), which is intrinsic and from His own essence, neither derived nor possessed by another. He states, "He (Allāh), does not have anything with Him or before Him in existence, such that He derives His perfection or completion from it."³ Abū al-Barakāt defines this perfection and completion as, "a completion and perfection which is part of its natural disposition (*sha' ni ṭabī' atihī*) that it possess those attributes and then it possesses them without lacking in any of them".⁴ In other words, for something to be truly perfect and complete, it must possess all of the characteristics that something of its nature should possess and not be without any of them. Abū al-Barakāt explains this through an analogy of two entities of the same species (*naw'*). If one possesses all the qualities of perfection that an entity of such a type is expected to

³ Abū al Barakāt al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar fi al-Hikmah*, 3 vols. (Hyderabad: Jam'iyyat Dā'irat al Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyyah, 1357-58/1938-39), 3:105.

⁴ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:105.

possess, it will be considered as perfect and complete as compared to an entity of the same species (*naw'*) who is deficient in some qualities. He writes,

The perfect (*al-kāmil*) is that which has a healthy temperament, proportional limbs, power upon movement, power to set other things into motion, intelligence by strength of mind, perfection through awareness of all knowledge that is in its nature to know and of all crafts that is in its nature to do. In that case, it is called perfect (*kāmil*), most perfect (*akmal*) and most complete (*atamm*) in terms of it possessing all attributes that it should possess. This is in comparison to another entity from its type (*naw'*) that only possesses some of those attributes and not all of them such as a healthy temperament without beauty and proportional limbs or both of those without intelligence or intelligence without learning and neither a practical ability (*malaka*) with which it can act. Therefore, the first will be called complete, perfect, more complete, and more perfect than the second.⁵

In summary, a perfect entity must possess all the attributes that something of its type is expected to possess and if it does not, it will be incomplete and imperfect in comparison to that which does possess them. Allāh cannot be described as imperfect, but He is perfect and complete and will therefore possess everything that He should possess. Abū al-Barakāt's analogy may be problematic when used to understand Allāh as the measuring of perfection in his analogy is between two entities which are of the same species. If one of them possesses

⁵ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:105-106.

all the attributes that it should possess, it is more perfect than the other which does not. However, Allāh's perfection cannot be measured through such an analogy as there is nothing of the same species to compare Him to. Abū al-Barakāt does not raise this question, nor does he provide any answer to it. Nothing in existence is the same species as God, such that we can compare Him and say He is more perfect. If Abū al-Barakāt is intending that God is more perfect in comparison to His creation, then His analogy is incorrect as His analogy is specifically regarding two things of the same species in which one does not possess than that which it should possess, hence less perfect than the other. Furthermore, if God is compared to anything, it must be understood that perfection is relative as what is considered a perfection for something from one species may not be a perfection for another. As humans do not know the Allāh's nature and reality, how can we determine which perfections He should possess such that if He possesses them, we consider him to be perfect and complete? Abū al-Barakāt does not shed any light on this matter. It is for this reason that al-Ghazālī from the Ash'arī's established a principle of incomparability for Allāh by arguing that He is dissimilar to His creation, not simply due to specific attributes, but due to His specific essence. In the commentary of Allāh's name, *al-Qudūs*, al-Ghazālī explains, "He is free from every attribute of perfection which most of His creation believe to be a perfection for Him".⁶ He continues, "*Allāh* is free from their attributes of perfection, just as He is free from their attributes of deficiency, but rather, every attribute which is perceived for the creation, then He is free and pure from it and that which is like it. If not for the mentioning of the dispensation and

⁶ Muhammad Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fī Sharḥi Asmā illāh al-Ḥusnā*, (Beirut: Dar al-Minhāj, 2017), 132.

permissibility in using them, it would be impermissible to use most of them for Him”.⁷ Allāh’s perfection for al-Ghazālī lies in His absolute dissimilarity and incomparable nature, such that even those things we perceive as perfections are deemed imperfections for Allāh due to His incomparable nature. Abū al-Barakāt suggested ascribing perfection to Allāh in comparison to His creation, which leads to the problem of comparing Allāh with His creation and not being able to determine which perfections to ascribe to Him. Al-Ghazālī’s answer to this is simple; Allāh is incomparable so cannot be put in an analogy with His creation and any perfections we believe Him to possess, are a deficiency for Him as He is incomparable by nature.

Abū al-Barakāt’s understanding of Allāh’s perfection is distinct to the Ash'arī affirmation of Allāh’s dissimilarity as His perfection. However, we must now understand Abū al-Barakāt’s evidence for the establishment of Allāh’s perfection and the methodology he utilises to establish it. Abū al-Barakāt expresses dissatisfaction with the argument of motion for the God’s existence, criticising it as unclear and inconsistent and states that “the only way which can be traversed (to recognise God) is from the perspective of the effects (*ma'lūlāt*) towards their causes (*'ilal*) and creations (*mubtad'āt*) towards their originators (*mabādi' ihā*)”.⁸ This methodology of moving from effect to the cause (*burhān inna*), is the same methodology Abū al-Barakāt uses in order to prove Allāh’s perfection. Shlomo Pines has also provided insight into this methodology by mentioning that there is a “causal

⁷ Al-Ghazālī, *Al-Maqṣad al-Asnā*, 132.

⁸ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:133.

relationship between the attributes of God and the corresponding attributes found in other existents".⁹

Abū al-Barakāt argues that the existence of knowledge in the world points towards the first knowledge (*al-‘ilm al-awwal*), and states that it is “the cause (*‘illah*) for every knowledge after it and not caused (*ghayr ma‘lūl*) by the knowledge existent before it”.¹⁰ His evidence for this is based upon the fact that every *ma‘lūl* that we see ultimately returns to one uncaused cause. In this argument, Abū al-Barakāt utilises knowledge as a demonstration of how *ma‘lūlāt* pointing towards their *‘ilal* ultimately leads us to prove Allāh’s existence. Any knowledge possessed by any individual is only achieved through a teacher imparting that knowledge. This chain of teachers, either is continuous without an end, which is an infinite regress and a logical impossibility for Abū al-Barakāt, or it ends at an entity whose knowledge is uncaused, and this is Allāh who is the first knower (*al-‘ālim al-awwal*). This argument demonstrates Abū al-Barakāt’s methodology is establishing Allāh’s existence and His attributes, which is the movement from *ma‘lūl* to the *‘illah*.

After understanding Abū al-Barakāt’s methodology, we can see how he uses it to establish Allāh’s perfection. Just as knowledge in the created world is traced back to *al-*

⁹ Shlomo Pines, “Studies in Abu’l Barakāt Al-Baghdādī Physics And Metaphysics” in *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines Volume 1*, (Jerusalem: The Magens Press, 1979), 165. Pines has also written on Abū al-Barakāt in the French language which I am unable to access due to a language barrier.

¹⁰ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:133.

‘ālim al-awwal, perfection and beauties in the world can be traced back to their cause which is the one who is the most perfect. Abū al-Barakāt writes,

We describe things in existence with completion, perfection, magnificence, beauty, gracefulness, majesty which are complete for the entity in whose status it is to possess them. Therefore, they are described with them and praised and exalted more than those entities in whose status it is to possess them, but they do not, or those in whose status it is not to possess them. All these entities and their perfections are existent from the first cause (*al-mabda’ al-awwal*) who is necessarily existent, since these entities and their perfections are either from Him directly, or from that which is from Him.¹¹

Therefore, all things which possesses any degree of perfection are all from the first cause who is Allāh, as they exist as His direct creations or from that which is from His creation. Regardless of the number of intermediaries (*wasā’ it*) in between, they will all be traced back to the ultimate cause. These entities with their perfections are therefore the *ma’lulāt* and they can be traced back to their original *‘illah* who is Allāh.

¹¹ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu’tabar*, 3:106.

After establishing Allāh's perfection through tracing back the *ma'lūlāt* to their *'illah*, Abū al-Barakāt now proceeds to explain the relationship between the perfections we see in the world and Allāh in terms of the disparity between them. He explains that Allāh is the giver (*mu'tī*) of every quality that anything possesses, not by way of transferral (*naql*) but by way of origination (*ījād*) and causality (*tasabbub*) just like light which comes from a lamp; its own light does not decrease by giving out light. In the same way, it is not possible for anything in existence to have more of any quality than Allāh as He is the *'illah* and the *'illah* always gives less than that which itself possesses without decreasing in its own attributes. He writes,

It is not correct for the cause (*'illah*) to give more than that which it possesses within its species (*naw'*), meaning (*ma'nā*) and essence (*jawhara*) which is its qualitative image (*ṣūrah naw'iyah*), just as a heater does not heat something and make it hotter than itself and just as a light does not illuminate something and make it brighter (*anwar*) than itself. Therefore, every beauty, magnificence, perfection, and completion which belongs to any entity, is only existent with it from the first cause (*al-'illah al-ūlā*) and the first cause will have more of that attribute than everything else that is described with it.¹²

All entities which have any degree of perfection indicate towards the existence of absolute perfection in Allāh. He is the uncaused cause of all perfections and through granting a degree of perfection or completion to anything in existence, He does not decrease in His own perfection, rather, His perfection will always be greater than everything else in existence as

¹² Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:107.

He is the cause. The effect will never possess an attribute granted to it by the cause in a greater degree than the cause itself.

Subsequently, after establishing Allāh's perfection, Abu al-Barakat wishes to clarify which words can be used to describe Allāh and the nature of their application for Him. As Allāh is the possessor of every perfection, all words of praise (*alfāz al-madā'ih*) can be used to describe Him in the most complete manner (*mubālaghah*). When we ascribe these words for Him, we intend, "the utmost pinnacle (*al-ghāyat al-qaswā*), which no other shares with Him".¹³ For Abū al-Barakāt, we can therefore utilise any word of praise for Allāh, with the understanding that we will intend the word in an exaggerated meaning, which reflects the utmost pinnacle of that meaning. Abū al-Barakāt states that these meanings will be the positive attributes of Allāh (*al-ṣifāt al-ijābiyyah*).¹⁴

Though Abu al-Barakat has now clarified what we can attribute to Allāh, there is still not a great deal of clarity as to what attributes we should ascribe to Him. The utmost that Abū al-Barakāt has suggested is that we use words of praise (*alfāz al-madā'ih*), whilst knowing that they are meant in their most exaggerative form. But what is a praise when discussing Allāh? That which is considered as a word of praise or honorific by some is a matter of dishonour according to others, and when discussing Allāh, the matter becomes far more difficult and contentious. Abū al-Barakāt seems to have left the door wide open for any individual to ascribe an attribute to Allāh if they understand it to be a word of praise.

¹³ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:107.

¹⁴ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:107.

A final issue remains to be clarified which is how to understand how attributes such as knowledge, will and power are understood for Allāh in comparison to His creation. Abū al-Barakāt answers, “Therefore, He is the Living, the Powerful, the Willing, the Commanding, the Self-Sufficient, the Generous, the Lofty, the Great, the Pure, the Knowing. Everything that is described with any of these attributes, is only described with them metaphorically (*‘alā sabīl al-majāz wa al-isti‘ārah*) and a portion of the meaning (*ba‘ḍ al-ma‘nā*) whilst the literal meaning (*al-ḥaqīqa*) and original formulation (*al-waḍ‘ al-awwal*) with its complete meaning (*tamām al-ma‘nā*) belongs to Him”.¹⁵ Therefore, any term of praise utilised for Allāh will be utilised in its literal and most complete meaning, whereas it is used in its metaphorical meaning (*majāz*) for anything else. Human beings may possess knowledge, but a human can only be described as knowledgeable metaphorically. The one who is literally knowledgeable is Allāh, and the same is understood with all His other attributes.

¹⁵ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:109.

1.2: Ibn Taymiyya on Allāh's perfection

Ibn Taymiyya's approach to Allāh's perfection is similar to Abū al-Barakāt's though his views on Allāh's distinction from created things are different. Ibn Taymiyya also establishes Allah's perfection through his methodology of the *qiyās al-awlā* and discusses it in detail in his *Risāla al-Akmaliyya*. The *Akmaliyya* is a text that has not been studied on its own terms before, except by Caterina Bori and Jon Hoover who utilises it in his monograph *Perpetual Optimism*. However, my usage of it in this discussion to seek insight on its formulations from Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī has not been done previously to my knowledge. In the *Akmaliyya*, Ibn Taymiyya just like Abū al-Barakāt, also mentions that "the utmost (*aqsā*) of any possible perfection whereby there is no perfection devoid of any imperfection, does not exist except that it is established for The Lord most High, and He is deserved of it due to His divine essence".¹⁶ Notice how Ibn Taymiyya also establishes the 'utmost' of any perfection for Allāh, explaining that Allāh is attributed His perfection, not due to any external factor but due to His very essence. This perfection necessitates "the negation of their opposites"¹⁷, meaning that any perfection that is established for Allāh, its opposite which is an imperfection is necessarily negated for Allāh. "The establishment of life necessitates the negation of death, the establishment of knowledge necessitates the negation of ignorance...".¹⁸ This understanding

¹⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, "Akmaliyya", in *Majmū' fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya*, ed. 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad ibn Qāsim and Muḥammad ibn 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Muḥammad, (Medina: Mujammā' al-Malik Fahd, 2004), 6:71.

¹⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmaliyya*, MF 6:71.

¹⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmaliyya*, MF 6:71.

of Allāh’s perfection for Ibn Taymiyya, is thus far, similar to Abū al-Barakāt’s with regards to affirming the utmost of any perfection for Allāh.

Additionally, a similarity can be seen in the methodology of both. Jon Hoover explains Ibn Taymiyya’s methodology stating that “when discussing the methodology of theological argument, Ibn Taymiyya condemns the use of both analogy and categorical syllogism and he explains that the discussion of God’s attributes and acts must occur in *a fortiori* mode”.¹⁹ Regarding the juristic analogy, it will always be “invalid because it brings God and creatures into a relationship of direct comparison”,²⁰ which is “tantamount to idolatry”.²¹ As for the categorical syllogism, though Ibn Taymiyya accepts its “formal validity,”²² “he rejects the power of this syllogism to give certain knowledge”²³ and because it “places God and creatures as different syllogistic terms on the same level”.²⁴ Therefore, to avoid this comparison of creature and creator, Ibn Taymiyya chooses the methodology of *qiyās al-awlā*, which is the *a fortiori* argument asserting that *Allāh* is more deserved of any perfection that His creation possess. Hoover has translated the relevant quote from Ibn Taymiyya who explains,

¹⁹ Hoover, *Optimism*, 57.

²⁰ Hoover, *Optimism*, 57.

²¹ Hoover, *Optimism*, 57.

²² Hoover, *Optimism*, 57.

²³ Hoover, *Optimism*, 57.

²⁴ Hoover, *Optimism*, 58.

Instead, [in theological propositions], the *a fortiori* argument (*qiyās al-awlā*) is used, whether by means of an analogy or a syllogism, as He—Exalted is He—said, “To God belongs the highest similitude” (Q.16:60). For example, it is known that [concerning] every perfection (*kamāl*) established for the possible or originated thing in which there is no imperfection (*naqs*) in any respect—for and existent, this is a perfection entailing no nonexistence—the Eternal Necessary [Existent] is all the worthier of it (*awlā bihī*). [Concerning] every perfection in which there is no imperfection in any respect and whose species is established for a creature that is governed, caused, and lorded over, [that creature] derives (*istafāda*) [the perfection] only from his Creator, his Lord, and his Governor, and He is worthier of it than he is.²⁵

Ibn Taymiyya explains his methodology in detail here and how to understand Allāh’s perfection. The perfections which are established for the creation and for *Allāh*, are those which have no imperfection in them from any perspective (*lā naqsa fihī bi-wajhin min al-wujūh*). Where Abū al-Barakāt expressed that *alfāz al-madā’ih* are understood in most exaggerated meaning for God, Ibn Taymiyya also expresses that it must be those perfections which have no imperfections in them from any perspective and only then can they be attributed to Allāh. Furthermore, the wording of Ibn Taymiyya is incredibly interesting here. He uses the term *ma’lūl* for the creation, implying that *Allāh* is necessarily the ‘*illah* of

²⁵ Jon Hoover and M.A.G Mahajneh, “Theology as Translation: Ibn Taymiyya’s Fatwa permitting Theology and its Reception into his *Averting the Conflict between Reason and Revealed Tradition* (*Dar’ Ta’arūḍ al-‘Aql wa l-Naql*). In *Muslim World*, 108: 58.

creation and any perfections they may possess, a view also affirmed by Abū al-Barakāt. Finally, he has mentioned that creations have derived (*istafāda*) their perfections from Allāh, just as Abū al-Barakāt mentioned that all perfections in creation can be traced back to the first cause (*al-mabda' al-awwal*). Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of Allāh's perfection now seems even more concordant with the understanding of Abū al-Barakāt.

Thus far, it seems that Ibn Taymiyya's establishment of Allāh's perfection is incredibly similar to Abū al-Barakāt's and so it must be examined as to the sources that Ibn Taymiyya draws upon for his argument. Ibn Taymiyya presents evidence from the Qur'ān for Allāh's perfection. He quotes an exegesis from Ibn 'Abbās in the commentary of *al-Ikhlāṣ* verses one and also bases his argument on verse seventeen of *Sūrah al-Naḥl*. Alongside Qur'ān, Hoover quotes from Ibn Taymiyya who states that this methodology was utilised by "the *Salaf* and the Imams in such matters as these just like Imam Ahmad". Jon Hoover comments on this mentioning, "I have not found the shaykh showing how the *Salaf* and Ibn Hanbal use the *a fortiori* argument".²⁶ In the footnote of this Hoover mentions a possible source of this argument from *Al Radd 'alā al-Zanādiqa wa al-Jahmiyya* attributed to Ahmad Ibn Hanbal. However, Hoover mentions in a later article from Andrew G. McLaren argues "little if any of this Hanbalī text derives directly from Ahmad b. Hanbal himself".²⁷ It is therefore not

²⁶ Hoover, *Optimism*, 59.

²⁷ Hoover, Jon. "God Spatially Above and Spatially Extended: The Rationality of Ibn Taymiyya's Refutation of Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Aṣ'arī Incorporalism", *Arabica* 69, 6 (2022): 626-674. See footnote 11 on Pg. 629.

possible for us to state that this is the source from Ahmad ibn Hanbal that Ibn Taymiyya drew from.

The first who claimed to utilise this method from the Kalām theologians is Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī²⁸ who states, “I have not found it in its form and explanation from anyone other than me”.²⁹ After claiming that it is his original method, he explains it saying, “The meaning of all of these aforementioned attributes, is that they are attributes of excellence for their possessor. Otherwise, the state of the one who is described with them in the visible world would be deficient compared to one who is not described with them”.³⁰ Referring to the attributes of Allāh, al-Āmidī is explaining that they must be attributes of perfection, otherwise those who possess them in our existence would be imperfect, which is untrue. If we take knowledge as an example, it must be an attribute of perfection for Allāh, because we understand that anyone who does not possess knowledge is deficient compared to the one who does. Likewise, all other attributes of Allāh are perfections in the same way. He then explains, “If the Creator most High was perceived to be without these attributes of perfection, He would be deficient (*nāqis*) compared to the one who is described with them from His

²⁸ This has been identified and mentioned by Farid Suleiman in his book in pages 241-253. However, due to it being in the German language I am unable to read his contribution. It is clear from the footnotes however that Suleiman has identified Ibn Taymiyya usage of al-Āmidī in *Dar’*.

²⁹ Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī. *Abkār al-Afkār*, ed. Ahmad Muhammad al-Mahdi 4 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub wa al-Wathāiq al-Qawmiyya), 1:676.

³⁰ Al-Āmidī, *Abkār*, 1:676-677.

creation, and it is impossible that the creator be deficient in comparison to the creation”.³¹ This is al-Āmidī’s analogical method of establishing Allāh’s attributes. He further mentions regarding Allāh’s will in his *Ghāyat al-Marām*, , “If Him being the possessor of will was not true, then Him being a non-possessor of will would be true, and everything that does not possess a will is deficient in relation to the one that does”.³² He continues, “if Him being the possessor of will was not true, it would necessitate Him being deficient in relation to the one who did have a will and how can it be perceived that the creation is more perfect (*akmal*) than the creator?”.³³ Al-Āmidī is therefore a predecessor to Ibn Taymiyya in the usage of the *qiyas al-awlā* methodology to establish Allāh’s attributes of perfection.

However, Ibn Taymiyya is distinct in utilising the *qiyās al-awlā* in the manner that he did. Ibn Taymiyya generalised the usage of the *qiyās* to establish many attributes for Allāh that al-Āmidī did not. An example of this is his establishment of attributes such as coming, going, ascending, descending. Ibn Taymiyya mentions regarding these attributes,

If we imagine two entities possessing these attributes; one of them is able to act independently, can come and go, descend and ascend, and do types of actions which are established with him and the other is unable to do so, and none of these actions

³¹ Al-Āmidī, *Abkār*, 1:677.

³² Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī. *Ghāyat al-Marām fī 'ilm al-Kalām*, ed. Hasan al-Shāfi'ī (Cairo: Dār al-Salām), 93.

³³ Al-Āmidī, *Ghāyat al-Marām*, 93.

can take place from him, the one from whom the actions take place, is more perfect (*akmal*) than the one from whom they do not take place.³⁴

He also mentions regarding Allāh's pleasure,

If two are imagined, one of them loves qualities of perfection and is happy with them and pleased with them and the other one is indifferent towards qualities of perfection and imperfection, and does not love this nor that, and not pleased with this nor that, and is not happy with this nor that, the first is more perfect (*akmal*) than the second.³⁵

Regarding the usage of His hands and approaching with His face he writes,

If two are imagined; one is able to do something with his hands and approach with His face and the other is unable, either because of the inability of him having a face and hands or because of the inability of action and approaching with the hands and face, the first is more perfect than the second.³⁶

Ibn Taymiyya has therefore taken the *qiyās al-awlā* and generalised it to establish all such matters for Allāh on the basis that if He was not described with them, it would mean that Allāh's creation is more perfect than Him. No such generalisation of this *a fortiori* analogy is used by al-Āmidī to literally establish matters such as coming, going, happiness etc.

Particularly for the Kalām theologians, such matters are *ḥawādith* (temporal existences),

³⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmaliyya*, MF 6:90.

³⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmaliyya*, MF 6:92.

³⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmaliyya*, MF 6:92.

and Allāh cannot be a substrate for *hawādith*, or else He would be *hadith* (temporal). Ibn Taymiyya has his reasons for adopting his generalisation of the *qiyās al-awlā* to establish all such attributes for Allāh. He responds to this Ash‘arite notion stating that it is akin to saying that eternal attributes existing with Allāh necessitates *hawādith* existing with Him as well, though the Asha‘rīs believe that He has attributes existent with His essence without any reservations. For Ibn Taymiyya, Allāh’s attributes must all be ascribed to Him as they have been mentioned without making a distinction between some attributes and others, based on them necessitating Allāh being a substrate for *hawādith*. Such paradigms are innovated according to Ibn Taymiyya, and in opposition to the language of the Qur’ān and the Salaf. Ibn Taymiyya writes,

If some specific terminology is intended by *a‘rāḍ* and *hawādith*, then that has only been innovated by the people of kalām and this is not the language of the Arabs, neither of any of the nations, not the language of the Qur’ān and neither other than it, neither common terminology nor the terminology of most of those concerned with knowledge. Rather, the innovators of this terminology are the people of innovation in the community who are included in the blame of the Prophet.³⁷

Therefore, for Ibn Taymiyya, this plain language reading of the Qur’ān takes precedence over the Asha‘rī attempt to exonerate Allāh from what they consider to be temporal existences according to their own innovated terminology. The Ash‘arīs naming of such attributes as temporal existences does not prevent them from being perfections which the

³⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmalīyya*, MF 6:91.

Qur'ān has established for Allāh. He explains, “This mere terminology and naming of them *a' rād* and *hawādith*, does not remove them from being an excellence, such that the one described with them is more perfect (*akmal*) than the one who cannot be described with them”.³⁸ Therefore, the basis of establishing any perfection for Allāh is the apparent text of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah which mention the attributes of Allāh and all of these perfections apply to Allāh through the *qiyās al-awlā* and cannot be negated from Him on the basis on innovated terminology.

Ibn Taymiyya proceeds to establish how all those matters mentioned in the Qur'ān are perfections for Allāh when understood correctly and how the *qiyās al-awlā* is used to establish them. He mentions regarding mercy that it means “weakness and cowardice in the nature and pain for the one to whom mercy is shown (*marḥūm*)”.³⁹ He explains, “if it is assumed that it necessitates that in the creation, it is not necessary that it necessitates that in the creator”.⁴⁰ Therefore, “We know with certainty, if we perceived two entities, one of them is merciful to another, facilitates benefit for him, dispels harm from him, and the other is indifferent to these things, does not have that which can facilitate benefit or dispel harm, the first will be more perfect (*akmal*)”.⁴¹ He mentions regarding laughing (*dīḥk*), “Laughing in its suitable place is an attribute of praise and perfection (*ṣifātu madḥin wa kamālin*) and if

³⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmaliyya*, MF 6:91.

³⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmaliyya*, MF 6:117.

⁴⁰ Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmaliyya*, MF 6:118.

⁴¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmaliyya*, MF 6:118.

two are perceived, one laughs at that which should be laughed at, and the other never laughs, the first is more perfect (*akmal*) than the second".⁴² Therefore, any attribute mentioned for Allāh in the Qur'ān and the Sunnah can be understood in its apparent meaning as a perfection for Allāh and we can establish it as a perfection for Him through the *qiyās al-awlā*. This demonstrates to us further how Ibn Taymiyya has taken the *qiyās al-awlā* methodology and has generalised it to establish every attribute or action of Allāh mentioned, as a perfection for Him through its apparent meaning. Though Ibn Taymiyya cited Imam Ahmad as a source, no usage of the *qiyās al-awlā* is found from him. As for al-Āmidī, who claims to be its originator, he also does not use it to establish the attributes of Allāh that Ibn Taymiyya does. However, Abū al-Barakāt did generalise the establishment of Allāh's perfection through his usage of analogy, stating that all words of praise (*alfāz al-madā'ih*) can be established for Allāh, in the most exaggerated way. Perhaps Ibn Taymiyya utilised this understanding of Abū al-Barakāt, but where Abū al-Barakāt did not mention exactly which words can be used and did not address the issue of relativity in understanding perfection, Ibn Taymiyya has utilised the apparent texts of the Qur'ān and Sunna to select which words of perfection can be utilised for Allah.

Subsequently, Ibn Taymiyya also directly addresses the issue of relativity in understanding perfection for Allah and in doing so answers the potential problem in Abū al-Barakāt's understanding. He mentions in answer to the problem of something being a perfection for one entity and a deficiency for another, "We say that perfection in which

⁴² Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmalīyya*, MF 6:121.

there is no deficiency for the contingent existence is an absolute perfection (*kamāl muṭlaq*) for everything that is described with it”.⁴³ He further explains, “that which is a deficiency in some cases and a perfection in others, is a perfection for a type of existence and not others, and so it cannot be a perfection for an existent entity from the mere perspective of its existence”.⁴⁴ Therefore an absolute perfection is not relative, rather it is a perfection in all cases, for all things, and only such a perfection is established for Allāh. The way Ibn Taymiyya suggests we differentiate between an absolute perfection and a relative one is again through the *qiyās al-awlā*. “If we perceive two entities, one described with this and the other with its opposite, then it will be apparent which one is more perfect. And when it is said something is more perfect from one perspective and another is deficient from another perspective, it is not an absolute perfection”.⁴⁵ Therefore, an absolute perfection, which is not a deficiency from any perspective is that which is applicable to Allāh in all His attributes and the manner in which we can decide as to whether it is an absolute perfection for Allāh or not is through the *qiyās al-awlā*.

One final issue remains to be discussed here, which is how Ibn Taymiyya understands the relationship between Allāh’s attributes and the creation. For Abū al-Barakāt, the attributes of *al-mabda’ al-awwal* are understood for Him literally (*ḥaqīqah*), and metaphorically (*majāz*) for His creation. Ibn Taymiyya utilises his understanding of the *qiyās al-awlā* to

⁴³ Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmalīyya*, MF 6:140.

⁴⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmalīyya*, MF 6:140.

⁴⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmalīyya*, MF 6:140.

establish the relationship between Allāh’s attributes and His creation through modulation (*tashkīk*). He mentions that the *qiyās al-awlā* establishes attributes of perfection for Allāh in more perfect (*akmal*) manner than they are established for other Him, “alongside a disparity which cannot be perceived by the intellect, just as this disparity cannot be perceived between the creator and creation”.⁴⁶ What he is intending to explain is that when we utilise the *qiyās al-awlā* to establish Allāh’s attributes of perfection, we establish them in such a manner that the disparity between Allāh’s attributes and those of His creation is so great that it cannot be perceived by the intellect. Rather, the *qiyās al-awlā* grants us knowledge of “a matter that the Lord is specified with alongside knowledge of the genus of that matter”⁴⁷, meaning that we learn of the genus of the attribute and know that Allāh possesses it in a degree so perfect that our intellects cannot be perceive it. He then mentions that the experts have stated that the names which are used both for Allāh and others, are spoken upon Allāh by way of modulation (*tashkīk*) and univocity in meaning (*al-ishtirāk al-ma‘nawī*) whose members have disparity. He explains this by saying, “the names which have modulation (*al-asmā al-mushakikah*) must have a universal, univocal meaning which they share amongst themselves”.⁴⁸ This can be understood through an example which Ibn Taymiyya presents of the colour white. Many things may share in the having the name white apply to them but differ in their whiteness. The whiteness of snow is much more intense

⁴⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Kitāb al Radd ‘alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, Ed. ‘Abd al-Ṣamad Sharaf al-Dīn al-Kutubī. (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Rayyān, 1426/2005), 197.

⁴⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Radd ‘alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, 197.

⁴⁸ Ibn Taymiyya, *Radd ‘alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, 198.

that the whiteness of ivory, but both are named white. White is therefore the universal, equivocal meaning shared amongst all objects which possess whiteness, though the names are applied by way of modulation. If we apply the same understanding to the attributes of Allāh, one name may be shared between the creator and creation but with a great difference between them that the intellect cannot determine. Hoover explains,

We recognize that both snow and ivory share something in common with each other that we call whiteness even though the whiteness of snow is much more intense than the whiteness of ivory. Yet despite observed similarities, the Shaykh asserts that the abstract universal of whiteness of any other name has no existence outside the mind. Applying this nominalism in the realm of theological language, there is no longer any similarity between the referents of identical names when they are particularized in the creator and the creature apart from the very names themselves.⁴⁹

Therefore, creature and creator share attributes from the perspective of the names only and both share in a universal, univocal meaning but with great disparity in the perfection of the attribute when it is understood for Allāh as opposed to His creation. Ibn Taymiyya provides a theological example through the attribute of existence (*wujūd*) and its application to the creation and Allāh. He explains,

⁴⁹ Hoover, *Optimism*, 59.

When it is said existence (*wujūd*) divides into necessary (*wājib*) and contingent (*mumkin*), then the source of the division is shared (*mushtarak*) between its types. Then, the existence of this necessary entity (*wājib*) being more perfect (*akmal*) than the existence of the contingent entity (*mumkin*) does not prevent existence itself being a universal which is shared between them.⁵⁰

After explaining that the relationship between Allāh's attributes and His creation is understood by way of modulation (*tashkīk*) in a univocal meaning (*ma' nā kullī mushtarak*), Ibn Taymiyya concludes by saying, "And likewise is the case in all the names and attributes which are applied upon the creator and creation like the name the Living, Knowing, Powerful, Hearing, and Seeing. And likewise in His attributes such as His knowledge, mercy, good pleasure, anger, happiness and everything that the messengers have spoken about regarding His names and His attributes".⁵¹

⁵⁰ Ibn Taymiyya, *Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, 198.

⁵¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Radd 'alā al-Manṭiqiyyīn*, 198.

1.3: Conclusion

In summary, Allāh's perfection according to Ibn Taymiyya is based on establishing all attributes mentioned in the apparent texts of the Qur'ān and Sunna, all of which are perfections. Ibn Taymiyya utilises the *qiyās al-awlā* as the evidence for the establishment which is based on the understanding that if Allāh was not described with them, it would necessitate His creation being more perfect than Him which is impossible. For Ibn Taymiyya, Allāh's exoneration from imperfections cannot lead to negation of those attributes He has chosen to describe himself with based on an innovated terminology which is unfounded in the Qur'ān and Salaf. The Shaykh also chose to move away from the Ash'arī understanding of Allāh's dissimilarity and incomparability as chosen by al-Ghazālī, as this leads to the negation of Allāh Himself. If all His attributes that He has described for himself are negated, what remains and how can Allāh be worthy of worship? In fact, for Ibn Taymiyya, Allāh has only mentioned these attributes "to establish the attributes of perfection as a refutation of the people of nullification (*ahl al-ta'ṭīl*) and in order to explain that He is the only one worthy of worship and there is no deity save Him, as a refutation of the idol worshippers".⁵² Therefore, Allāh's perfection is found in establishing every perfection for Allāh and the basis of their establishment for Allāh is the *qiyās al-awlā*.

Furthermore, Ibn Taymiyya claims to have taken this methodology from the Qur'ān, and the Salaf including Ahmad ibn Hanbal and the *mutakallimūn* who preceded him such as al-Āmidī. No evidence of Ahmad ibn Hanbal using this methodology has been found, though

⁵² Ibn Taymiyya, *Akmalīyya*, MF 6:83.

Farid Suleiman has shown Ibn Taymiyya appropriating from al-Āmidī. The evidence also suggests that he adopted the methodology of Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, particularly in suggesting that all perfections in creation are *ma‘lūlat* of Allāh who is the *‘illah*. There is also similarity in both utilising a form of analogy to establish Allāh’s perfection as both have suggested that whatever perfections apply to creation, the creator is more deserved of them and possesses them in a greater degree. Finally, both generalise the type of perfections that can be applied to Allāh; the distinction is that Ibn Taymiyya qualifies these attributes of praise through the apparent texts of the Qur’ān and Sunnah whilst Abū al-Barakāt, though he mentions Allāh’s positive attributes (*al-sifāt al-ijābiyyah*), he left much of the understanding of Allāh’s perfection without qualification when stating that all words of praise can be utilised for Him. In these matters, Abū al-Barakāt is a striking precedent to Ibn Taymiyya and we can suggest that Abū al-Barakāt opened the discursive space on these matters by presenting them in the way that he did, which then allowed Ibn Taymiyya to appropriate them and develop them further.

Chapter 2: Allāh’s will and perpetual activity

2.1 Abū al-Barakāt on Allāh’s will and perpetual activity

Both Abū al-Barakāt and Ibn Taymiyya established a general perfection for Allāh but as will be seen, both believe Allāh’s perfection to be characterised through His will and so this is the next discussion. Andreas Lammer has compared Abū al-Barakāt’s views on Allāh’s will with those of the Ash'arī theologian al-Shahrastānī (1153). This is a useful piece as it directly relates to some of my discussion, and Lammer has provided some insights on the issue of God, creation, and time which I will refer to later in this chapter. Lammer notes in the conclusion that though an understanding of when the world came into existence has been reached, “we have learnt almost nothing of how it did”.⁵³ The issue of how the world came into existence according to Abū al-Barakāt, is something I have explained in detail in this chapter. I will also proceed to compare the views of Abū al-Barakāt on Allāh’s will to those of Ibn Taymiyya to demonstrate how Abū al-Barakāt is a striking precedent to Ibn Taymiyya on his views such that we can strongly suggest that Ibn Taymiyya appropriated Abū al-Barakāt’s views.

As explained earlier, the methodology of Abū al-Barakāt is the indication of the *ma'lūl* upon the *'illah* which was utilised to establish Allāh’s perfection through demonstrating how perfections in the world must lead back to a pre-eternal cause (*'illah azaliyyah*). Abū al-

⁵³ Andreas Lammer. “Two Sixth/Twelfth Century Hardliners on Creation and Divine Eternity: Al Šahrastānī and Abū l-Barakāt al Bagdādī on God’s Priority over the World,” *Islamic Philosophy from the 12th to the 14th Century*, (Gottingen: Bonn University Press at V&R Unipress, 2018), 275.

Barakāt establishes Allāh’s will in the same way as he explains that all wills must return to and indicate the presence of the first will (*al-irāda al-ūlā*). Shlomo Pines has previously highlighted this stating that Allāh’s will is “an attribute of active essences and every will must in the last resort derive from the first will”.⁵⁴ Abū al-Barakāt explains why he believes this, stating, “If there was a will, then the first one must be without a preceding will. And it is necessary for the first (will) since the means (*asbāb*) and causes (*musabbibāt*) do not go towards infinity”.⁵⁵ As infinite regress is a logical impossibility (*istiḥāla*) according to Abū al-Barakāt; every will must eventually return to the first will which itself must be uncaused and without the choice of the agent (*fā’il*). If the first will is uncaused itself and is without the choice of the agent, what is the nature of this first will? Abū al-Barakāt answers stating, “The first will is by nature (*bi al-tab’i*) not by a desire (*lā bi-irādatin*) and in this case, by nature means, that which stems from the essence of its being, not from any effective agent (*lā min mu’aththir*) or the action of any agent in it (*fā’ilin fa’ala fihā*)”.⁵⁶ Abū al-Barakāt is explaining that the first will is a result of the very nature of Allāh’s essence and it is His essence which demands that He be the first will preceding all others, and this first will is not an act of choice (*ikhtiyār*). Rather it is a necessary result of Allāh’s essence.

⁵⁴ Pines, “Studies in Abu’l Barakāt”, 166.

⁵⁵ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu’tabar*, 3:102.

⁵⁶ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu’tabar*, 3:102.

Another element in Abū al-Barakāt's understanding of Allāh's will is the fact that it is preceded by knowledge. Allāh's will precedes all creation, but it itself is preceded by knowledge. He states, "He is the agent by deliberation (*fa' il bi al-rawiyyah*), and the meaning of deliberation in this case is that knowledge precedes the action (*an-yataqaddama al- 'ilmu al-fi' la*) and then the will and resolve take place after the knowledge (*ba' da al- 'ilmi takūnū al-irādatu wa al- 'azīmatu*)."⁵⁷ Allāh does not will, except that He knows what he is doing, unlike humans who have "actions taking place from them, some of which they do not know and are unaware of like the digesting of food".⁵⁸ Rather, Allāh's knowledge precedes His will and His will precedes all other wills, directing them towards an end goal (*ghāyah*). To demonstrate this, Abū al-Barakāt presents an example of human society in which there is a one who cultivates, one who sows the seeds, one who harvests, one who kneads, bakes and likewise with other such human activities. These activities "all unite in a system which leads to an end goal which is the continuation of humanity and their good living".⁵⁹ Abū al-Barakāt explains that in the same way, all things in existence, such as plants, animals and humans can all eventually can be traced back to,

an action which is the end goal, and that action is from a precedent knowledge (*'ilm sābiq*) and this sequence is from a wise, all knowing, willing, recognising entity.

⁵⁷ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:102-103.

⁵⁸ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:103.

⁵⁹ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:103.

Therefore, all willed actions and wills have a first originator (*al-mabda' al-awwal*) and just as the origin of all existence is the first existence, the origin of all knowledge is the first knowledge and the origin of all wills is the first will...therefore the first originator is the origin of all wills, based on the existence of wills in creation.⁶⁰

Everything in existence is united in a system leading towards an end goal and such a system in which the components have their own wills indicates towards the existence of Allāh's first will. The wills of the creation in this system of existence are all *ma'lūlāt* from their *'illah*, which is Allāh's first will, and that stems from His very essence and is preceded by knowledge, though not by another will.

A question which can be posed here towards Abū al-Barakāt is that if he believes the first will to stem from Allāh without choice yet simultaneously preceded by knowledge, does that not negate the free choice (*ikhtiyār*) of Allāh? According to Abū al-Barakāt's own understanding of perfection, every perfection that exists in the creation also belongs to Allāh. If this is the case, then a human who is free and autonomous is considered more perfect than one who is not. Similarly, if Allāh is more perfect, then Ash'ārī' Kalām theologians would certainly assert that He must be completely autonomous and have the free choice to create or not create, rather than being a *fā'il* without any *ikhtiyār*. Abū al-Barakāt may be able to offer a solution to this criticism of the Kalām theologians through his understanding of God's perpetual will and activity.

⁶⁰ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:104.

Abū al-Barakāt has explained that the existence of the world can all be traced back to *al-mabda' al-Awwal* as its *'illah*, and it is the uncaused cause of creation and the first will preceding all wills. This explains the beginning of creation, but Abū al-Barakāt intends to explain Allāh as the one who wills the ever-manifesting, temporal existences as well. Allāh's will according to him is therefore of two types; the first will (*al-irāda al-ūlā*) which is eternal and the many wills (*irādāt kathīrah*) which are perpetual and manifest in accordance to their many determining factors (*muqtaḍiyyāt kathīrah*). Abū al-Barakāt states,

Allāh—in accordance to that which is obligatory from Him being the first originator, His power and His wisdom—has willed the creation entirely, in a general way (*arāda al-khalqa 'alā ṭarīq al-jumla*) for the origination of every possible existence. Then, (He willed) in a detailed way (*'alā ṭarīq al-tafṣīl*) for the origination of every possible existence in conception (*taṣawwur*) and determination (*taqdīr*) into actuality according to its determination and fulfilment, eternally and temporally.⁶¹

Allāh has willed creation generally with His *al-irāda al-ūlā* and that is due to Him being *al-Mabda' al-Awwal* who is all powerful and wise. He then wills creation in a detailed way to bring every single individual entity from conception and determination, into existence. This idea of bringing the creation into existence from conception and determination is difficult to

⁶¹ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:160.

grasp, though it appears to be like the Ash‘arī understanding of Allāh’s will⁶². Al-Ghazālī explains that Allāh’s will “determines one possible existence from its like”⁶³ and this determination is in accordance with Allāh’s precedent knowledge. The Ash‘aris therefore believe that Allah’s will is in accordance with His precedent knowledge, and this helps us understand Abū al-Barakāt’s previous statement. He is expressing the fact that Allāh’s will is in accordance to His precedent perception and determination of it. Allāh perceives and determines everything that comes under His will and then wills it into existence.

Abū al-Barakāt then explains that this subsequent will of Allāh which originates existence into actuality, connects all of existence back to the first will. He states,

Allāh wills the temporal things for the temporal, the latter for the former, the former for the latter, the individual for the species—from the perspective of its continued existence—and the species for the individual from the perspective of it achieving existence. Therefore, many things come forth from existence which Allāh is the intrinsic agent of (*fā’il bi dhātihī*) and their coming forth from them is from Him intrinsically. He does things from which some of His creation will be tools and means,

⁶² Frank Griffel has highlighted that there are similarities between Ash‘arism and Abū al-Barakāt’s teachings in his *Post-Classical Philosophy*. See page 211.

⁶³ Muhammad al-Ghazālī, *Al-Iqtisād fī al-‘Itiqād*, (Beirut: Dar al-Minhāj, 2019), 254.

either in their coming forth into existence or either in their being in accordance to His wisdom.⁶⁴

Abū al-Barakāt is asserting that Allāh wills all things into existence due to a particular reason as each thing has a role to fulfil in the greater picture of existence. An individual is willed into existence for the purpose of continuing the existence of the species, just as a species is willed into existence for the individual entities of that species to achieve existence. The species of human cannot continue to exist unless its members exist, and its members cannot exist had the species not been existent in the first place. Therefore, all existence is willed for a purpose. Allāh is the intrinsic agent of them and they come forth from His will, and He has willed that some of creation be as tools and means for other things to take place. Ultimately, everything is the product of Allāh's will. He states, "therefore, all of that (existence) is arranged based upon His first will through the elaboration of the many wills which are by their many determining factors (*muqtaḍiyyāt kathīrah*) perpetually in any given time".⁶⁵ All of existence is therefore a product of Allāh's first will, which has willed everything in a general sense, and then all of creation which comes into existence are willed by subsequent wills of Allāh in accordance to their determining factors. Allāh's subsequent wills are perpetual, taking place in any given time and are willing all things into existence due to a wisdom, though everything is initially arranged and can be traced back to His first

⁶⁴ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:160.

⁶⁵ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:160.

will. Abū al-Barakāt also expounds further the nature of the perpetual wills manifesting in accordance with wisdom. He compares Allāh to a human who does any action which will always be in accordance with an instigator or any influencing factor and then acts in accordance with that. In the same way, “Allāh most Lofty, acts in accordance to the determining factors of wise purpose (*bi ḥasab al-mūjibāt al-muqtaḍiyyah li ḥikmatihī*)”.⁶⁶ Therefore, Allah’s perpetual wills are responsible for creation and are directed by His wise purpose and they can all be traced back to His first will.

Another matter that Abu al-Barakat clarifies is the nature of creation coming into existence through Allāh’s wills. As mentioned previously, Lammer concluded his work stating that research into how the world came into existence according to Abū al-Barakāt remains to be done. I will now clarify this matter here so that a complete understanding of Allāh’s will according to Abū al-Barakāt can be attained. Roxanne D. Marcotte has already provided us with the insight that Abū al-Barakāt disagreed with the dominant Peripatetic theory of existence and instead chose to develop his own ideas of existence, namely “a theory of successive divine volitions”.⁶⁷ I will therefore proceed to explain these successive divine volitions as Abū al-Barakāt’s theory of existence.

As previously explained, Abu al-Barakāt believes that existence is willed by Allāh in a general way and then subsequent creations are willed in accordance to Allāh’s wisdom. The question

⁶⁶ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:161.

⁶⁷ Roxanne D. Marcotte, “Abū l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī,” *Encyclopedia of Medieval Philosophy: Philosophy between 500 and 1500*, 10-12.

is how do these subsequent creations come into existence? Abū al-Barakāt explains that “The one with His one generosity, and one will, nothing stems from Him except for one existent entity”.⁶⁸ He further states, “Allāh most Lofty is one, singular independent, based upon what has been said, one in essence, generosity, and will. Therefore, that which is originated from Him by His essence in the beginning of His existence is only one without a doubt”.⁶⁹ As Abū al-Barakāt considers Allāh to be the first *‘illah*, he asserts that only one *ma‘lūl* will stem forth from His essence directly. The rest of creation is willed by Him in succession to the first one through a chain of wills. He states,

Then He creates because He wills and then He wills another will which is results from a will (*zurīdu irādatan tatasabbabu min irādatin*) and a creation because of a creation, so His origination does not stop at one creation but rather, some existent entities are originated due to His essence, and some are originated from Him because of an existent entity which is originated from His essence.⁷⁰

Abū al-Barakāt is asserting that Allāh’s first will acts as a catalyst for a subsequent chain of wills, through which Allāh originates His creation. Allāh originates some creation, particularly the first creation, which is one entity resulting from His one will and from this will, other wills

⁶⁸ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:161.

⁶⁹ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:161.

⁷⁰ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:162.

are caused (*yrīdu irādatan tatasabbabu min irādatin*) which brings subsequent creations into existence. The first creation is a direct result of His essence, and the subsequent creation are originated by the wills which are caused by the first will and they are willed for the sake of His creation. Therefore, as asserted by Abū al-Barakāt previously, all creation is connected through Allāh's will in a chain of wills which begins with the first will that stems directly from the Allāh's essence.

A chain of wills responsible for creation stemming from one *'illah* is like Ibn Sīnā's view of emanation. Ibn Sīnā affirms the premise that Allāh is the one Necessary Existent and only one effect can therefore stem from Him, asserting that duality in action necessitates duality in the agent. Jon McGinnis explains this stating, "Since the Necessary Existent is absolutely simple, however, Avicenna does not think that it can be the direct or immediate cause of the necessary existence belonging to all the various Intellects and different kinds of possible existents below it".⁷¹ Therefore, Allāh will only produce a single, necessary effect. Subsequently, that which results from Allāh is only the first intellect (*al- 'aql al-awwal*) which is the cause of the furthest celestial sphere. The first intellect is in turn the cause for the second intellect, and this chain of causality continues until it reaches the tenth intellect which is the cause of the closest celestial sphere in which exists the moon. McGinnis describes this process stating,

When the first Intellect contemplates itself as something merely possible in itself, there emanates from it a certain celestial body, whereas when it contemplates itself as necessary through another, it emanates that celestial body's soul. This process

⁷¹ Jon McGinnis, *Avicenna* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); 204.

continues at the level of the second Intellect. Now, however, the second Intellect contemplates its relation to the first Intellect and the Necessary Existent. This emanative process continues cascading downward with new Intellects, souls, and celestial bodies being produced until it reaches the Active Intellect or Giver of Forms, which is the Intellect that produces the Moon and lunar soul.⁷²

As for our world, all its temporal occurrences manifest through their submission to the regulation of the tenth intellect. The first premise of Ibn Sīnā's emanation theodicy regarding the oneness of God leading to only one effect is a premise that Abū al-Barakāt also affirmed. Likewise, a chain of causality causing the multiplicity of creation also sounds like Abū al-Barakāt's chain of wills being responsible for creation. However, Abū al-Barakāt ardently disagrees with Ibn Sīnā on several issues and takes him to task on just how the multiplicity of creation is resulted from this causal chain. He states, "if only one stems from the One, then in accordance to this, existence would necessarily be a cause and effect upon an arrangement from the first to the final effect (*al-m'alūl al-ākhar*) and it will not have multiplicity except in length".⁷³ He demonstrates this further saying, "A will be a cause for B and B a cause for C and C a cause for E and likewise until the final effect whatever it may be. And no two entities come into existence simultaneously except that one of them is the cause (*'illah*) for the other or its effect (*ma'lūl*), and we see innumerable entities in existence, some of which are not a

⁷² Jon McGinnis, *Avicenna*, 204.

⁷³ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:151.

cause for others and neither effects for them".⁷⁴ A causal chain therefore does not explain multiplicity of creation according to Abū al-Barakāt, as from the beginning of the chain to its end, there is only ever one cause and one effect and what we witness in the physical world around us is contrary to this.

Abū al-Barakāt's chain of wills is distinct on the basis that creation is never the action or result of anything other than Allāh himself. Where Ibn Sīnā mentions that the subsequent intellects are each responsible for their effects, Abū al-Barakāt does not accept any subsequent entity creating or originating. Creating is the intrinsic action of Allāh only. He states, "Allāh has created all existence, so it is originated from Him or from that which is from Him. That which originates from Him, some of it is for that existent entity itself and some of it is for that which will come from it".⁷⁵ For Abū al-Barakāt, Allāh is the creator of everything at every level, whether it is the original existent entity or that which stems from that entity, which he creates for the original entity. Abū al-Barakāt explains with an example of plants stating,

In this way, the rain descends and causes the flowers to grow, then the rain descends and waters them, then the plants bear fruit and then it emerges for the preservation of the species (*naw'*) from the individual...so He has created an entity because of another entity and so some entities come from others like a partial fire (*nār juz'iyya*)

⁷⁴ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:151.

⁷⁵ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:159-160.

from a fire and they all stem from the first causes (*al-‘ilal al-uwwal*) like the complete fire (*nār kulliyya*) from its creator.⁷⁶

Where Ibn Sīnā envisioned a causal chain where the effects are ascribed to their nearest cause, Abū al-Barakāt clearly establishes that existence is the sole effect of Allāh and no other cause. Allāh created the precedent just as he created the subsequent and He created one thing for the sake of another. Abū al-Barakāt has also answered the issue of the multiplicity of creation which he criticised Ibn Sīnā for. He states, “All existence is from Allāh, as existence includes that which is from Him directly, and that which stems from that which is from Him. And from existence is that which is due to His essence and that which is from His essence”.⁷⁷ That which is from Allāh directly can be understood as the primary creation and that which stems from that which is from Him are the features it requires. Abū al-Barakāt gives the example of the eyes, which Allāh has made the head for, and then the hair which Allāh has made for the head and teeth to chew and so on. He concludes by stating “From Him the multiplicity begins in that which is from Him and in that which is from that which is from Him vertically and horizontally”.⁷⁸ Multiplicity in existence manifests due to Allāh’s subsequent wills which create all subsequent creations after His first will. Therefore, existence is not the result of a causal chain in which A leads to B vertically, rather, Allāh’s numerous wills which

⁷⁶ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:160.

⁷⁷ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:162.

⁷⁸ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:162.

take place in accordance with His wisdom provide creation with the horizontal dimension and its multiplicity.

Abū al-Barakāt has clarified that Allāh has created the first existence with His first will and has created subsequent creations with subsequent wills. He has also ruled out an Aristotelian understanding of a cause that starts the chain of causality and is thereafter uninvolved, by negating the idea of a causal chain. He instead chooses to establish that Allāh is involved with His creation through His wills. He states,

From the actions of Allāh, there are those which are eternal (*qadīm*) such as the originating of creation and there are those which are temporal and originated (*ḥadīth, muḥdath*) in the particulars which are renewed (*al-juz'īyyāt al-mutajaddada*) such as the sending of rain, directing of the wind, strengthening the heart of one and weakening the heart of the other, giving life to one and giving death to the other, answering the supplicant, delivering justice for the oppressed to the oppressor and everything that is attributed to Him in terms of the particular actions in different times (*al-af'āl al-juz'īyyah fi al-awqāt al-mukhtalifa*).⁷⁹

Moving away from Ibn Sīnā's causal chain, where the first cause is uninvolved with creation, Abū al-Barakāt has established Allāh's temporal wills as the explanation of the ever-materialising creation that we see before us. Allāh's actions which He performs with His will

⁷⁹ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:160.

are of two types according to Abū al-Barakāt; the eternal which is not preceded by time and the temporal through which he interacts with His creation. The former includes, “His knowledge of His own essence and of the existence and those entities which come forth from Him through His essence”.⁸⁰ The latter includes “that which He does because of temporal existences and changing matters such as the signs and miracles which none other than Him are capable of doing and neither can they be attributed to anyone other than Him”.⁸¹ Therefore, Allāh’s will is actively involved with creation and with it, Allāh creates the ever-changing temporal existences. Abū al-Barakāt’s conception of Allāh is of a personal, dynamic entity, who is responsible for originating all temporal existences through His temporal wills and is involved with His creation.

Thus far Abū al-Barakāt has established Allāh’s temporal activity as being responsible for the temporal occurrences which manifest in His creation. Abū al-Barakāt then connects this temporal activity with Allāh’s perfection, to establish that Allāh is perpetually willing and creating and has been doing so from eternity. Allāh is perfect as previously established and this perfection is exemplified in Allāh’s generosity (*jūd*). Abū al-Barakāt states, “There is no cause to his generosity except the generosity, which is from him and belongs to him, so he is truly generous.”⁸² Allāh is unlike any other entity in His generosity and His generosity is intrinsic and uncaused. Based on this premise, Abū al-Barakāt asserts that we cannot perceive

⁸⁰ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:162.

⁸¹ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:162.

⁸² Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:109.

a time where Allāh did not will and create existence, as that would be contrary to His generosity. He writes,

The creator of the universe was forever existent, all-powerful not unable, generous not stingy and there is no opposite preventing him or rival sharing with him in his originating and creation...and if Allāh is all-powerful, knowledgeable, generous then he has forever been a creator and an originator and the created universe which is his creation, has forever been existent with him and it cannot be perceived nor understood that the universe preceded in a time when Allāh was existent and not a creator but idle and inactive. He is the powerful who is not unable, and the generous, who is not stingy so how is it possible that it be said that he remained existent for an unlimited amount of time then began to create?⁸³

Allāh's temporal activity is something that has been perpetual from eternity as if we perceive that there was a period where Allāh did not create, it would be contradictory to His generosity. If He is truly generous, He must always be creating and willing. Furthermore, if we state that Allāh chose to create at a particular time in existence, it leads to the problem of saying that Allāh was idle for some time which is also contradictory to His all-powerful nature. Lammer explains this stating that for Abū al-Barakāt "the only way to do justice to God's divine character is to accept an eternal world as both His eternal gift and a demonstration of His

⁸³ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:28.

complete perfection”.⁸⁴ For this reason, Abū al-Barakāt states that Allāh has always been willing due to His perfect and generous nature. Therefore, Abū al-Barakāt does not establish Allah’s as being a necessary cause in the way that Ibn Sīnā has. Rather, Allāh’s first will and His subsequent, perpetual wills which are preceded by knowledge and are directed by wise purpose are all a necessary result of Allāh’s perfection and generosity. On this basis, Lammer has also mentioned, “there is no distinction between bringing something into existence (*ijād*) and necessitating the existence of something (*ijāb*) for Abū al-Barakāt—he treats both along the same lines...the world must be conceived as the eternal and necessary effect of God’s divinity.”⁸⁵ Abū al-Barakāt has therefore established that Allāh’s will is the necessitating cause of the creation and His subsequent wills which are perpetual, are the causes of the temporal existences which manifest and all of this is the necessary result of Allāh’s perfection and generosity. It is also this perfection and generosity which has led Abū al-Barakāt to give preference to this view over Allāh being a necessary cause and catalyst of a causal chain in the way that Ibn Sīnā has.

Allāh’s perpetual wills and His temporal activity are not without certain philosophical difficulties. The first issue is Allāh’s perfection being dependent upon His perpetual wills and temporal activity. Abū al-Barakāt has argued that there cannot be a moment where Allāh does not create as it would be contradictory to his generosity. This leads to him saying that Allāh is perfect by way of his perpetual activity. From the perspective of the Ash‘arīs, such as al-Rāzī, this would mean that Allāh perfection is completed by something external to His

⁸⁴ Lammer, “*Hardliners*”, 263.

⁸⁵ Lammer, “*Hardliners*” 269.

essence, which for them would mean that He is not perfect intrinsically. However, Abū al-Barakāt explains that “on any possibility, He is the ultimate end (*al-ghāyat al-qaṣwā*) in His actions, loftier (*a’lā*) than being like a doctor who treats to cure or a generous person who is generous in order to take pleasure from His generosity”.⁸⁶ In other words, Allāh’s wills do not materialise in order for Allāh to benefit from them in any way; they are simply a result of His perfection as He is His own end. Abū al-Barakāt further states,

The generosity of the most generous (*jūd al-jawwād al-awwal*) is not from those things that He has derived (*istafāda*) from other than Him or originated (*aḥdatha*) after it was previously non-existent. Rather, He in eternity (*fī mā lam yazal*) was the most generous and in eternity has taken pleasure from His own generosity. His generosity is for Him, from Him and His pleasure is for Him, from Him and with Him, and not through anything else such that He was in an imperfect state and then perfected by other than Him.⁸⁷

Abū al-Barakāt’s solution lies in the fact that Allāh is the end for His own actions, and not anything external to Him. He has always been generous and has always taken pleasure from His own generosity, not from anything external and neither is He perfected by anything external. However, this is a circular argument as Allāh has always been willing and creating

⁸⁶ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:68.

⁸⁷ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:68.

because He is the most generous and perfect; yet his generosity and perfection depends on the fact that He must constantly be willing and creating. Abū al-Barakāt cannot escape this logical problem with His argument.

Another issue with Allāh's temporal wills is the fact that it makes Allāh a substrate for temporal existences (*maḥal 'al-ḥawādith*). This is something that the Ash'arīs such as al-Rāzī have stated is impossible. In fact, al-Rāzī quotes Abū al-Barakāt in his *Arba'īn* as the one of the most senior philosophers to hold this opinion. Al-Rāzī criticises this opinion of Abū al-Barakāt in two ways; his first criticism is based on what has been mentioned regarding Allāh's perfection being dependant on the manifestation of temporal wills, which means that He would be incomplete without them. His second criticism is based on the impossibility of temporal existences being eternal. He states,

If Allāh's essence accepted a temporal attribute (*al-ṣifah al-muḥdatha*), then this acceptance of such attributes would be from the necessary qualities of His essence (*min lawāzimi dhātihī*) and this acceptance would be eternal (*azalī*). Then, the establishment of this acceptance necessitates the possibility of the existence of that which is accepted (*ṣiḥat wujūd al-maqbūl*). If the acceptance of the temporal attributes was eternal, the existence of temporal existences in pre-eternity would be possible. However, this is impossible since temporal existences (*ḥawādith*) have a

beginning and pre-eternity (*azal*) has no beginning, and combining them is impossible.⁸⁸

Al-Rāzī asserts that if the temporal attributes are existent with Allāh, they would be existent with His essence since pre-eternity. If they did exist in pre-eternity, it would mean that something temporal which has a beginning is now eternal and has no beginning. This is a gathering between two opposites and is a logical impossibility. Through this, the distinction between Abu al-Barakāt's conception of Allāh's attributes and that of al-Rāzī's can be seen clearly. Abū al-Barakāt considers Allāh's temporal wills to be the same as His eternal attributes in terms of their existence with Allāh and therefore just as the eternal attributes are part of Allāh's perfection, the temporal wills are also part of it in the same way. For al-Rāzī however, such an equation is not possible as the temporal and eternal are completely distinct from one another. Though al-Rāzī and the Ash'arīs do affirm that Allāh's perfection is characterised through His attributes, they still affirm that the attributes are completely eternal unlike Abū al-Barakāt who asserts that the temporal wills are necessary for the Allāh's perfection though they are not eternal.

However, Abū al-Barakāt does respond to this criticism from the Kalām theologians. In explaining the debate between the eternalists—whom Abū al-Barakāt sides with, and those who accept the finite nature of the universe, he responds to the criticism of Allāh being a substrate for temporal existence. He states,

⁸⁸ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Arbaʿīn fī Usūl al-Dīn* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 2004), 119.

If they say how does a will manifest after another will and how does He have a temporal state (*ḥāl muntaẓara*) which manifests after it was previously non-existent and how is He a substrate for temporal existences (*maḥal 'al- ḥawādith*)? It will be said to them, how is He a substrate for something other than temporal existences; meaning the eternal will?⁸⁹

For Abū al-Barakāt, if we can ascribe eternal attributes to Allāh, then we can also attribute his temporal wills to Him in the same way. The eternal will belongs to Allāh from eternity just as the “temporal wills belong to Him from eternity because the preceding existence from His generosity which is with a precedent will (*al-irāda al-sābiqa*), necessitates (*awjaba*) with Him a subsequent will (*al-irāda al-lāḥiqqa*). He creates a creation after a creation with a will after a will which is necessitated in His wisdom”.⁹⁰ However, al-Rāzī does respond to this argument by stating that there is a clear difference between the eternal attributes existing with Allāh from eternity and the temporal qualities, and the difference is not restricted to the former being eternal and the latter being temporal. He states, “Why is it not possible that these attributes are dissimilar to those by their very essences and specific realities?”.⁹¹ Al-Rāzī asserts that temporal qualities, are essentially different to Allāh’s eternal attributes.

⁸⁹ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar* 3:45.

⁹⁰ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar* 3:45.

⁹¹ Al-Rāzī, *Al-Arba‘īn*, 120.

Even if the temporal wills have been manifesting since pre-eternity, Abū al-Barakāt cannot escape the fact that each one of these wills is manifested from non-existence into existence and this is different to Allāh's eternal will which is truly eternal in the sense that it has never been in a state of non-existence just like Allāh's essence. Therefore, Abū al-Barakāt's answer is not without issue and the criticism of al-Rāzī stands. Making Allāh a substrate for temporal wills does indeed have some philosophical difficulties as al-Rāzī has demonstrated.

2.2: Ibn Taymiyya on Allāh’s Will and Perpetual Activity

Ibn Taymiyya’s understanding of Allāh’s will is based on Allāh being wise (*Hakīm*) in everything that He does. A thorough explanation of Allāh’s will can be found in his *Minhāj al-Sunna*, which Jon Hoover has explained in *Perpetual Optimism*. Hoover furthers previous discussions on the issue of Allāh’s wise purpose and perpetual activity, and how they lead to the conclusion of Allāh only ever doing that which is best, hence the perpetual optimism. Much has been discussed in this work, though Hoover’s second chapter on Allāh’s perpetual creativity is most relevant to my discussion. Hoover demonstrates how Ibn Taymiyya attempts to establish how “God’s creative activity extends back in time to pre-eternity while no one created thing has existed from eternity”⁹² and in order to do so, he refutes “both Kalām arguments for creation *ex nihilo* and philosophical arguments for the worlds eternity”.⁹³ Hoover then proceeds to explain Ibn Taymiyya’s views on Allāh’s infinite regress of wills and identifies Ibn Taymiyya’s criticism of Abū al-Barakāt concerning Allāh’s eternal will. He explains that since the “eternal cannot be an object of God’s will”⁹⁴, it is “wholly unnecessary to posit an eternal divine will because everything other than God, including the celestial sphere, is originated”.⁹⁵ Of course, it was not Hoover’s objective to compare Ibn Taymiyya with Abū al-Barakāt, and therefore he has not explored the similarities or

⁹² Hoover, *Optimism*, 81.

⁹³ Hoover, *Optimism*, 81.

⁹⁴ Hoover, *Optimism*, 85.

⁹⁵ Hoover, *Optimism*, 85.

differences between the two. This is what I have resolved to discuss further here to better understand the culmination of Ibn Taymiyya's theology. Continuing from Hoover's initial work, I have looked further into Ibn Taymiyya's views on God's will and have compared it to Abu al-Barakat's views.

Hoover has also fleshed out the understanding of Allāh's will in his essay on Allāh's voluntary attributes. This is a notable contribution as he has brought to light the understanding of the voluntary attributes, a concept which is essential in understanding Taymiyyan theology. Another contributor on this subject is Sophia Vasalou who in her *Theological Ethics* has discussed certain elements of the wise purpose behind Allāh's actions according to Ibn Taymiyya. I have utilised elements of these contributions though my objective is to compare Ibn Taymiyya's view to those of Abū al-Barakāt.

Ibn Taymiyya begins his discussion by establishing wise purposes as an intrinsic part of Allāh's will. He asserts that a will is of no significance unless it is connected to some form of wise purpose. He states,

Rather, He is Wise (*Ḥakīm*) in everything that He does. Wise purpose is not mere will since if that was the case, not everyone who wills would be wise and it is known that will can be divided into the praiseworthy (*maḥmūda*) and the blameworthy

(*madhmūma*). Rather, wise purpose indicates what is in His creation and His command in terms of praiseworthy outcomes and beloved objectives.⁹⁶

For Ibn Taymiyya, there is no purpose in establishing a mere will for Allāh if it is not inclusive of some wise purpose as a will itself can be blameworthy or praiseworthy. Vasalou has also noted that the Ash'arīs affirmed, “All acts are equal to God; there is nothing in their inherent qualities to explain why God should attach positive value to one and not the other”.⁹⁷ She further notes that Ibn Taymiyya’s disagreement with this is based on its “specific exclusion of beneficence (*al-iḥsān ila 'l-khalq*) as the factor that gives God’s will its rational ground and makes it lean (*tarajjahā*) towards one direction as against another”.⁹⁸ Therefore, Vasalou has demonstrated for Ibn Taymiyya there cannot be divine will without wise purpose. Stating that Allāh’s will does not lean towards wise purpose is to exclude beneficence from His will.

Subsequently, Allāh’s will must not be motivated by any wise purpose according to the Ash'arīs as it would lead to infinite regress. Allāh acts by a purpose, and this purpose would also require a cause and so on to *ad infinitum*, which for them is an impossibility. However, Ibn Taymiyya affirms an endless chain of actions which are performed for wise purposes

⁹⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj al-sunna al-nabawiyya fī naqḍ kalām al-Shī'a al-Qadariyya*, ed. Muḥammad Rashād Sālim, 9 vols. (Riyadh: Jāmi'at al-Imām Muḥammad b. Su'ūd al-Islāmiyya, 1406/1986) 1:134.

⁹⁷ Sofia Vasalou, *Theological Ethics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 141.

⁹⁸ Vasalou, *Theological Ethics*, 141.

into the future as something which is not only possible but “permissible according to the majority of the Muslims and others who ascribe or do not ascribe to the religions (*ahl al-milal wa ghayr ahl al-milal*)”.⁹⁹ He asserts that,

When He performs an action for a wise purpose, this wise purpose is achieved after the action. Then, when this wise purpose seeks another wise purpose after it, it is a continuous chain into the future. And this wise purpose which is attained is beloved to Him and a cause for a second wise purpose. So, He—Glory be to Him—is constantly originating wise purposes that He loves and makes it a cause of what He loves.¹⁰⁰

Therefore, Allāh is constantly willing that which is wise and and this wise purpose becomes a cause for the next wise purpose and so on to *ad infinitum*. His evidence for this infinite manifestation of existences in the future is “the rewards of paradise and the punishment of the fire are both continuous alongside a renewal of the temporal existences inside of them (*tajaddud al-ḥawādith*)”.¹⁰¹ Allāh will constantly renew and re-create the rewards of heaven and hell, and this will be infinite. In the same way, Allāh has always been creating due to wise purposes which He loves and makes them the cause of other, wise purposes. In this

⁹⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj* 1:146.

¹⁰⁰ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, 1:146.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, 1:146.

regard, Ibn Taymiyya's view is similar to Abū al-Barakāt's who also affirmed that Allāh "is the ultimate end in His own actions"¹⁰² as mentioned earlier.

We have previously encountered the same reasoning of perpetual wills for wise purposes from Abū al-Barakāt who asserted that "Allāh, most lofty, acts in accordance to necessitating incentives of His wisdom (*bi ḥasab al-mūjibāt al muqtaḍiyya li-ḥikmatihī*)".¹⁰³ Abū al-Barakāt views creation as a product of Allāh's perpetual wills which manifest in accordance with their determining factors (*muqtaḍiyāt kathīra*). We can clearly see that Ibn Taymiyya and Abū al-Barakāt share a very similar understanding of Allāh's will so far. Both have moved away from understanding the will as only an eternal attribute and have instead opted for the view that Allāh's will is something which is perpetually active and newly manifesting in accordance with Allāh's wisdom. Abū al-Barakāt asserted this due to a conviction that temporal existences cannot come into existence through an eternal cause and neither a causal chain as believed by Ibn Sīnā and his followers, and Ibn Taymiyya also follows suit. The difference is that Abū al-Barakāt asserts that Allāh has an eternal will which precedes everything, unlike Ibn Taymiyya who believes that Allāh has been perpetually willing with temporal wills. Ibn Taymiyya has negated the eternal will as he asserts that eternal matters do not need something to bring them into existence.

¹⁰² Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:68.

¹⁰³ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:161.

Ibn Taymiyya now wishes to explain the origin of the ever-manifesting temporal existences in the world and how they are the evidence of Allāh's perpetual wills. He states,

The temporal existences (*ḥawādith*) are witnessed in the universe. So, if the creator was an intrinsically necessitating agent (*mūjib bi dhātihi*) of a complete cause which necessitates its effect (*mustalzimātun li ma'lūliha*), no temporal existences would materialise since a temporal existence cannot materialise from a complete, eternal cause.¹⁰⁴

Eternal causes produce their effects without any delay and in the world around us, we witness new things materialising in time, one after the other. If they were caused by an eternal cause, they could not possibly be delayed and materialise in time as they do. The fact that new things are coming into existence constantly indicates that Allāh is constantly willing and creating. Ibn Taymiyya then states,

The materialising of temporal existences is evidence that their agent is not an eternal cause from eternity. And when the eternal cause is negated, the opinion of the universe being eternal is also disproven. However, it does not negate the fact that

¹⁰⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, 1:148.

Allāh has continuously been speaking when He wishes and has continuously been living, acting (*fa‘āli*) for whatever He wishes.¹⁰⁵

Therefore, according to Ibn Taymiyya, the materialising of temporal existences is evidence of Allāh’s perpetual activity. An eternal cause cannot be responsible for temporal existences, rather they require a temporal cause. Otherwise, an eternal cause would mean the eternity of the universe itself which is something that Ibn Taymiyya negates. He therefore tackles this assertion of the Falāsifa stating that the basis of their evidence for the eternity of the universe is the impossibility of temporal existences manifesting without temporal causes and the impossibility of a God who is not acting and then acts without the manifesting of a cause for Him to begin acting. Where these two impossibilities led the Falāsifa to establish the eternity of the universe and the subsequent causal chain, for Ibn Taymiyya, all this proves is that “He has continuously been acting (*lam yazal fa‘ālan*)”.¹⁰⁶ Ibn Taymiyya has therefore taken the assertion of the Falāsifa regarding temporal existences requiring temporal causes but has utilised this argument to establish Allāh as being perpetually active and the universe being finite and temporal not eternal. He explains,

If it is imagined that He is acting with acts subsisting in His essence or temporal objects of his creation (*maf‘ūlāt ḥāditha*) one after the other, this would be doing

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, 1:148.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, 1:149.

justice to this evidence. This is alongside the fact that everything other than Allāh is an originated creation which was previously non-existent just as the Messengers have informed that Allāh is the creator of everything. And even if the species (*naw'*) is constantly renewing—just as the temporal existences that manifest in the future—each individual one is temporal and created and He is continuously originating one thing after another.¹⁰⁷

Therefore, the idea of temporal existences requiring temporal causes and Allāh remaining idle being impossible are both correct according to Ibn Taymiyya. However, drawing the conclusion that the universe is eternal and Allāh is the eternal cause for a subsequent causal chain which leads to the creation of the world and its temporal existences is incorrect.

Rather, the correct conclusion is to assert that Allāh is perpetually creating the temporal existences from pre-eternity. Based on what the Messengers have informed us, the only cause of existence is Allāh, and everything other than Him is a creation and temporal. And whilst the species (*naw'*) of existences may be eternal from the perspective of the constant renewal, each individual existence is temporary and created.

Of course, a similar argument has already been made by Abū al-Barakāt. Abū al-Barakāt rejected the idea of Ibn Sīnā's causal chain since "Allāh has created all existence, so it is originated from Him or from that which is from Him. That which originates from Him, some of it is for that existent entity itself and some of it is for that which will come from it".¹⁰⁸ He,

¹⁰⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, 1:149.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:151.

like Ibn Taymiyya, disagreed with the idea that there is another cause in the universe other than Allāh. Everything is caused by Allāh, and this is the only way to explain the multiplicity of creation. As mentioned previously, Abū al-Barakāt negates a causal chain as the origin of existence as it cannot explain the multiplicity in creation. His solution as mentioned by D. Marcotte is “a theory of successive divine volitions”¹⁰⁹ which “introduced a plurality, pre-eternal or coming into being in time of causes”.¹¹⁰ Therefore, Abū al-Barakāt and Ibn Taymiyya agree in their understanding of temporal existences being originated through Allāh’s temporal wills and His perpetual action, and both assert that the only way to understand the origination of temporal existences in the world is to affirm the understanding of Allāh’s temporal wills.

After establishing that Allāh’s temporal wills and perpetual action are the only way to explain the manifestation of temporal existences in the universe, Ibn Taymiyya presents another evidence for adopting this view, which is based on Allāh’s perfection. He states, “The Muslims have said that with a complete power and definitive will the non-existence of the action (*‘adam al-fi’l*) is impossible. Non-existence of action cannot be perceived except due to the absence of the perfection of the power (*‘adam kamāl al-qudra*) or absence of the perfection of the will (*‘adam kamāl al-irāda*)”.¹¹¹ Therefore, Ibn Taymiyya also affirms as Abū al-Barakāt did, that Allah’s perfection means that He is perpetually acting and creating

¹⁰⁹ D. Marcotte, *Medieval Philosophy*, 10-12.

¹¹⁰ D. Marcotte, *Medieval Philosophy*, 10-12.

¹¹¹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, 1:163.

since non-action is an imperfection. Abū al-Barakāt affirmed “He is the powerful who is not impotent, and the generous, who is not stingy; so how is it possible that it be said that He remained existent for an unlimited amount of time and then began to create?”¹¹² Thus far it seems, the understanding Abū al-Barakāt and Ibn Taymiyya regarding Allāh’s temporal wills and perpetual activity is very similar. One may go so far as to say that Ibn Taymiyya has used concepts found in Abū al-Barakāt’s work and has moulded it into an Islamic theodicy that fits the framework of his understanding of the Qur’ān and Sunna.

It must be noted here that the same criticisms that al-Rāzī directed towards Abū al-Barakāt can also be directed at Ibn Taymiyya. For example, stating that Allāh must be a creator as otherwise he would be deficient, leads to the problem of Allāh requiring His creation to be perfect though this negates Allāh’s independence (*ikhtiyār*). However, Ibn Taymiyya not only affirms perpetual wills manifesting in Allah’s essence but states that the temporal objects of His will (*maf’ūlāt ḥāditha*) also subsist in His essence as shown from *Minhāj* previously. If this is the case, then Allāh is a locus of temporal existences that He has created. This is an incredibly difficult matter to comprehend and Ibn Taymiyya provides no clarity on this matter.

Another important element in Ibn Taymiyya’s understanding of the temporal wills and Allāh’s perpetual activity is in his view on the nature of Allāh being a *mūjjib bi al-dhāt*. As demonstrated previously by Lammer, Abu al-Barakat believes that Allāh creating (*ijād*) and necessarily causing (*ijāb*) to be one and the same thing. Allāh is the only creator of every

¹¹² Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu’tabar*, 3:28.

element of the universe; yet He is also its necessary cause since it cannot be perceived that He would not create whilst having complete power, will and perfection. Ibn Taymiyya also addresses the issue of Allāh being a *mūjib bi al-dhāt* in *Minhāj* and provides his understanding of the term when applying it to Allāh in a manner that is concordant to his understanding of the Qurʾān and Sunna. He explains, “He is not a necessary cause in the meaning that He is an eternal cause which necessitates its effect and neither in the meaning that He is a necessary cause without a will or power. Rather, He is a necessary cause with His will and His power for whatever He wills to exist and this is the all-Powerful, the autonomous”.¹¹³ Hoover has provided this insight previously explaining that, “God’s volition remains the instrument by which God works out the divine decree and its exercise depends on what has come before it.”¹¹⁴ In other words Allāh is a necessary cause through His wills in that whatever He wills, will take place. Ibn Taymiyya explains further, “If (*mūjib bi al-dhāt*) is explained in a way that dictates that whatever He wills will be and whatever He does not will, will not be, then it is the truth”.¹¹⁵

Additionally, Ibn Taymiyya negates Allāh’s will in pre-eternity instead opting for a conception of the will as an entirely temporal attribute. Lammer previously explained that for Abū al-Barakāt, “the world must be perceived as the eternal and necessary effect of

¹¹³ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, 1:163-164.

¹¹⁴ Jon Hoover, “God acts by His Will and Power: Ibn Taymiyya’s Theology of a Personal God in His Treatise on the Voluntary Attributes,” in *Ibn Taymiyya And His Times* ed. Yossef Rapoport and Shahab Ahmed (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010), 66.

¹¹⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, 1:165.

God's divinity".¹¹⁶ Similarly, for Ibn Taymiyya, the world is the necessary effect of Allāh's divinity in the meaning that whatever Allāh wills, will be without exception, not that the world is an eternal effect of Allāh's will. Rather, for Ibn Taymiyya, the species of the world may be infinite due to Allāh's perpetual creation, yet the world itself is finite and temporal, and is the result of a temporal will. Therefore, Ibn Taymiyya utilises the same terminology as Abū al-Barakāt in calling Allāh a *mūjib bi al-dhāt* but with the distinction of the will only being temporal rather than eternal in the understanding of Ibn Taymiyya. It can therefore be concluded that Ibn Taymiyya does not accept an eternal will of any kind unlike Abū al-Barakāt and in this lies a distinction in the understanding of both. Ibn Taymiyya negates the eternal will due to his assertion that eternal matters do not need a will to bring them into existence. The result of this is that for Ibn Taymiyya, Allāh's wills have an infinite regress which for Ibn Taymiyya is of no issue, rather it is part of Allāh's perfection and permissible. Abū al-Barakāt states that an infinite regress is impossible; therefore, the subsequent perpetual wills require the initial eternal will.

Ibn Taymiyya's view of Allāh's perpetual action and temporal wills may not be as unique as previously understood. He and Abū al-Barakāt thus far, appear to be incredibly closely related in their views on Allāh's will. Yet there is another element to understanding Ibn Taymiyya's view on Allāh's will, which is the connection of the voluntary attributes (*al-ṣifāt al-ikhtiyāriyya*) to Allāh's will. Hoover has provided an explanation of Ibn Taymiyya's epistle regarding these attributes in which he mentions, "Ibn Taymiyya subsumes God's speech, God's creativity and a number of other divine attributes like hearing, mercy and sitting

¹¹⁶ Lammer, "Hardliners", 269.

under the more general rubric of God’s voluntary attributes”.¹¹⁷ What this means is that Ibn Taymiyya not only establishes Allāh as being perpetually active in His will and creation as explained in *Minhāj*; rather many of His other attributes are also active and perpetual. Hoover then points out, “This gives God a distinctly personal character in that God’s voluntary attributes interact with the world within its own sequential vicissitudes of time”.¹¹⁸ This explains to us that for Ibn Taymiyya, Allāh is active and involved with His creation through His will and creation and through many of His other attributes, though as Hoover has explained, it is Allāh’s will which is the core attribute that makes Allāh personal.¹¹⁹ Hoover translates from Ibn Taymiyya who defines the *al-sifāt al-ikhtiyāriyya* stating,

[The voluntary attributes] are affairs by which the Lord is qualified—He is the Almighty and Great—which subsist in His essence (*taqūmū bi dhātihī*) by His will (*mashīʾa*) and His power (*qudra*) such as His speech, His hearing, His sight, His will, His love His good pleasure, His mercy, His anger, and His wrath, and such as His creating, His beneficence, His justice, and such as His sitting, His coming, His arriving

¹¹⁷ Hoover, “Voluntary Attributes,” 57.

¹¹⁸ Hoover, *Voluntary Attributes*, 57.

¹¹⁹ Hoover, *Voluntary Attributes*, 56.

and His descending. And such like from among the attributes of which the precious book and the *Sunna* speak.¹²⁰

Ibn Taymiyya asserts that Allāh’s activity is through His will and power, and He is qualified with all of His attributes which are expressions of His activity. Allāh can be described as hearing, speaking, sitting, coming and all other such temporal matters which are understood face-value from the Qur’ān and Sunna and all of these matters take place through His will. What is important for us is to understand is why Ibn Taymiyya chooses to understand all these matters as Allāh’s temporal attributes. To support his understanding, Ibn Taymiyya presents many verses of the Qur’ān and *aḥādīth* which indicate towards Allāh doing one thing after another to demonstrate the temporal nature of the voluntary attributes. One example from the *aḥādīth* he utilises will suffice; “I am in the thought of My servant of Me and I am with him when he remembers Me. If (in) he remembers me in a group, I remember Him in a group better than them”.¹²¹ He then explains, “the particle ‘in’ is a conditional particle and the response materialises after the condition (*al-jazā yukūnu ba’d al-shart*). So this clarifies, that Allāh remembers the servant if he remembers Him in himself”.¹²² Ibn Taymiyya has utilised the apparent wording of the *ḥadīth* here to demonstrate that Allāh is acting in response to His creation. Allāh’s remembrance of His servant is a recompense of

¹²⁰ Hoover, *Voluntary Attributes*, 57.

¹²¹ Hoover, *Voluntary Attributes*, 62.

¹²² Ibn Taymiyya, *Ikhtiyariyya*, MF, 6:141

the servant remembering Allāh and manifest as a temporal matter subsisting in His essence. This same explanation has been provided by Abū al-Barakāt who asserts that Allāh has temporal actions which include His answering of prayers, giving life and death and other such temporal actions which manifest in various times.¹²³ Abū al-Barakāt affirmed this because according to him, there is no way to explain the origination of temporal existences in the world except through asserting that Allāh is perpetually active and has perpetual, temporal wills responsible for them. As demonstrated from *Minhāj*, Ibn Taymiyya also asserted this and what has been demonstrated here in *Ikhtiyāriyya* is how Ibn Taymiyya applies this understanding to the texts of the Qur'ān and Sunnah.

Once again it seems that Abū al-Barakāt's theology provides another piece of the puzzle for Ibn Taymiyya to develop his views. Hoover has demonstrated that Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of the Qur'ān and Sunnah from their apparent wording are key sources for his understanding. However as demonstrated, Ibn Taymiyya's views are similar to Abū al-Barakāt's who developed these views before him which strongly suggests that Ibn Taymiyya drew from him.

Ibn Taymiyya's view of qualifying Allāh with these voluntary attributes which he does through His will and power is intriguing as it demonstrates that for Ibn Taymiyya, Allāh is qualified by all those matters that He is described with equally. Where the Ash'arīs, such as al-Rāzī made a clear distinction between Allāh's eternal attributes and His attributes of action, Ibn Taymiyya believes that all of them are Allāh's attributes in an equal manner and

¹²³ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:160.

states this is the view of most Muslims. He states, “As for the *salaf* and the Imāms of the *Sunna* and Ḥadīth, they say, “He is qualified by that [i.e., the voluntary attributes],” as the book and Sunna speak of it, and this is the view of many among the *kalām* theologians and the philosophers, or most of them”.¹²⁴ The Ash‘arī view draws a distinction between the eternal attributes and the attributes of action, understanding the latter as a manifestation in time of Allāh’s eternal will rather than being attributes which exist as part of Allāh’s essence. The reason for their view is that qualifying Allāh with such attributes existing in His essence leads to Allāh being a substrate for *ḥawādith* (temporal existences). Ibn Taymiyya accepts this and has no problem with this stating in *Minhāj*, “And so if they say to us, “this necessitates that there will be temporal existences (*ḥawādith*) existing in Him (*qāmat bihī*)”, we will say, “and who has denied that before you from the *salaf* and the Imāms. And the texts of the *Qur’ān* and *Sunna* denote that alongside explicit intellect (*ṣarīḥ al-‘aql*).”¹²⁵ Abū al-Barakāt responded in a similar manner to the same question saying,

If they say how does a will manifest after another will and how does He have a temporal state (*ḥāl muntaẓara*) which manifests after it was previously non-existent and how is He a substrate for temporal existences (*maḥal ‘al-ḥawādith*)? It will be

¹²⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Ikhtiyariyya*, 131.

¹²⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, 2:381.

said to them, how is He a substrate for something other than temporal existences; meaning the eternal will?¹²⁶

Abū al-Barakāt, like Ibn Taymiyya, had no qualms accepting that Allāh is a substrate for temporal existences and treated all the attributes as equal in this regard. Just as Allāh is qualified with eternal attributes, Abū al-Barakāt affirmed that qualifying Him with temporal wills is the same. Ibn Taymiyya also affirms that Allāh is a substrate for temporal existences and reconceives the understanding of Allāh's attributes in a way that is different to the likes of al-Rāzī and the Ash'arī's. For Ibn Taymiyya, whatever Allāh has described himself with is His attribute, whether temporal or eternal. Just as Abū al-Barakāt had no qualms with having temporal matters subsisting in Allāh's essence, Ibn Taymiyya also views this as perfectly acceptable as demonstrated from *Minhāj*¹²⁷.

Of course, Ibn Taymiyya's understanding here is not without some issues. We have already seen Al-Rāzī criticise the understanding of temporal matters subsisting in Allāh's essence as being impossible due to it being a gathering of two opposites. If Allāh's essence accepted temporal attributes, this acceptance of them would be eternal and you would have temporal existences having a pre-eternal existence which is a gathering of opposites and impossible. Ibn Taymiyya is unable to escape this problem. Secondly, his claim that this view is the view of the *salaf* and the Imams is something that must be analysed to see just

¹²⁶ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar* 3:45.

¹²⁷ Ibn Taymiyya, *Minhāj*, 2:381.

how accurate he is in making this claim, though this short dissertation is not the place for the analysis of his claim.

2.3: Conclusion

To conclude, Ibn Taymiyya's conception of Allāh's will is similar to Abū al-Barakāt's as he also asserts that it is temporal and perpetually active. He believes the species (*naw'*) of Allāh's will to be eternal but believes that each individual will is temporal and manifests according to Allāh's wise purpose. These temporal wills are responsible for the ever-manifesting temporal existences in the world and through these wills, Allāh is personally involved with His creation. He also asserted that Allāh's temporal wills are part of His perfection as without them it would lead to Allāh being conceived as idle. Establishing temporal wills and objects of the wills as subsisting in Allāh's essence is not an issue, rather for Ibn Taymiyya, it is clearly indicated from the Qur'ān and Sunnah, at least according to his understanding. Abū al-Barakāt asserted this same view before Ibn Taymiyya stating that Allāh is temporally willing in accordance to His wisdom, and also stating that the ever-manifesting temporal existences in the world are caused by these temporal wills. He also asserted that Allāh is personally involved with His creation through these wills, hence their invoking Him. Temporal matters subsisting in Allāh's essence was also affirmed as not being problematic. The distinction is that Abū al-Barakāt believed an infinite regress to be impossible; hence he asserted that there must be an eternal will which is the catalyst of all the subsequent temporal wills. Ibn Taymiyya disagreed with this premise and believed that infinite regress is perfectly possible in the past and future drawing on the traditions concerning the never-ending rewards of paradise as evidence. The similarity in the views of both strongly suggest that Ibn Taymiyya drew from Abū al-Barakāt in these views or at least

that Ibn Taymiyya could not have developed his theology without Abū al-Barakāt opening the discursive space on these matters before him.

Chapter 3: Time and Allāh

3.1: Abū al-Barakāt on time and Allāh

Both Abū al-Barakāt and Ibn Taymiyya establish characterise Allāh’s perfection through His perpetual activity and both assert that we cannot perceive a time where Allāh was not willing or creating. The question which follows is how do both understand time in relation to Allāh? The issue of Allāh and time is one that has been discussed a great deal amongst Kalām theologians and philosophers just as Hoover has explained since there is a “need to bridge the gap between a God who is timelessly eternal and a world of temporality”.¹²⁸ The Kalām theologians assert that the world is temporal (*ḥādīth*) and reject its eternity based on two main proofs; one is the impossibility of an infinite regress (*tasalsul*) which means that the world must have had a beginning, and the second is the argument of temporal origination (*ḥudūth*). Of course, both are rejected by philosophers such as Ibn Sīnā who asserts that an infinite regress extending into the past is possible and explains the creation of the world and its temporal existences through his theory of emanation. Hoover states that Ibn Sīnā “rejects the Kalām notion that God originated the world temporally. If the world has a beginning, some prior cause would have had to emerge to prompt God to begin creating”.¹²⁹ Where the Kalām theologians assert that Allāh is timeless and the world is

¹²⁸ Jon Hoover, “The Muslim Theologian Ibn Taymiyyah on God, creation and time” in *Temporality and Eternity Nine Perspectives on God and Time*, ed. Marcus Shmücker, Michael T. Williams and Florian Fischer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), 92.

¹²⁹ Hoover, *God, creation, and time*, 92. For More detail on the arguments of the Kalam theologians and philosophers, refer to Jon Hoover’s article.

temporally originated, and philosophers such as Ibn Sina assert that the world is not temporally originated but instead a necessary result of God's perfection, Abū al-Barakāt presented his own solution to the problem of God and time. In the physics of his *al-Mu'tabar*, he has a section dedicated to the nature of time (*zamān*) in which he discusses the various opinions on the matter and, amongst these opinions, criticises the Aristotelian and Avicennan notion that time is a measure of motion. However, in the metaphysics of his *al-Mu'tabar*, he has a discussion entitled 'concerning time in a manner that is relevant to this knowledge' (*fī al-zamān 'alā wajhin yalīqu bi hādha al-'Ilm*).¹³⁰ It is this section that concerns us as it is here that he discusses time in relation to Allāh. Following this, I will also discuss Ibn Taymiyya's views on time and similarities between the two.

In defining time, Abū al-Barakāt mentions that time "has a connection in the mind (*ta'alluq fī al-dhihn*) and a consideration with motion (*al-i'tibār bi al-harakah*)".¹³¹ He explains,

Today (*al-yawm*) is spoken for the time which is measured by the movements of the sun (*al-mutaqaddar bi ḥarakāt al-shams*) from when it rises until it returns and rises again. And the term 'distance of a day or two is spoken' (*yuqāl masāfat yawmin aw yawmayn*), meaning the distance that an indicated mover (*al-mutaḥarrrik al-mushār*

¹³⁰ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:35.

¹³¹ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:36.

ilayhi) moves in one day or two. Therefore, sometimes the distance of movement is known as time and sometimes time is known as the distance of movement.¹³²

However, Abū al-Barakāt asserts that this measure of movements is not time but simply how we perceive time and dedicates the next two pages to explaining how we perceive time. His own definition of time is that it is the measure of existence (*miqdār al-wujūd*) and he explains that existence “measures stillness (*sukūn*) as well as motion, and the moving object and the still object both share in existence”.¹³³ If time was a measure of motion, how does time apply to something which is motionless? Yet we know for certain that the still object is in time. Therefore, the thing that both a still and moving object share is their existence and it is the measure of their existence that we know as time. Abū al-Barakāt explains this further stating, “time measures existence, not as a secondary matter (*‘araḍ*) in existence but that it is a mental consideration (*‘itibār dhihnī*) for something which has been in existence longer than that which has been in existence less”.¹³⁴ Therefore, time is something which the mind applies to the duration of the existence of any object and there can be no consideration of time without existence.

¹³² Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:36.

¹³³ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:39.

¹³⁴ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:40.

Abū al-Barakāt then explains time as a measure of existence through the customary usage of language. He asserts that time is understood as the continuation of existence and as long as the existent entity is present, time can also be understood to be continuous. He states,

When someone says in his invocations for a person, “May Allāh elongate your remaining (*aṭāl Allāhu baqā ’aka*)” then he has said for him, “May Allāh elongate your existence (*aṭāl Allāhu wujūdaka*)” not your time. For indeed time is only with the existent entity with the continuation of its existence (*al-zamān innamā yukūnu li al-mawjūd bi wujūdihi al-mustamirr fīhi*). Otherwise, time does not extend or shorten but it is in continuity (*istimrār*).¹³⁵

Abū al-Barakāt has demonstrated through the usage of language and through our understanding as human beings that time and existence are connected and inseparable as we only ever understand the continuity of time to be the continuity of an existence, and this is the meaning intended when we utilise phrases such as “may Allāh elongate your remaining”.

¹³⁵ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu’ tabar*, 3:40.

Abū al-Barakāt also clarifies how time is connected to all existence, whether temporal or eternal. As explained previously and as will be further demonstrated at the end of this discussion, Abū al-Barakāt believes that creation has always been existent alongside Allāh’s existence which suggests that Allāh and His creation have always been in time. Shlomo Pines has previously provided us with this insight stating that for Abū al-Barakāt, “time is bound up with being”¹³⁶ and that “God is not beyond time”.¹³⁷ Andreas Lammer has also mentioned whilst discussing Abū al-Barakāt’s negation of God’s temporal priority over the world that “God does not precede the world but exists eternally with the world.”¹³⁸

Abū al-Barakāt states, “Whoever says that time is temporal, has said that existence is temporal; otherwise, time does not have an independent existence (*wujūd mujarrad*) and self-subsisting reality (*huwiyyah qā’imah bi nafsihā*)”.¹³⁹ Time is therefore not an independently existent entity; it is only connected to everything that exists and is a measure of the existence just like “bodily size (*al-miqdār al-jismānī*) does not have independence from a body.”¹⁴⁰ This leads him to conclude,

¹³⁶ Pines, “*Studies in Abu’l Barakāt*”, 128.

¹³⁷ Pines, “*Studies in Abu’l Barakāt*”, 128.

¹³⁸ Lammer, “*Hardliners*”, 260.

¹³⁹ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:40.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:40.

How can it be said that there was no time before the existence of the world? This is something that the minds cannot accept, when reason (*al-naẓar*) obliges that time cannot be non-existent without the non-existence of existence itself and existence does not become non-existent. Therefore, existence is something which does not become non-existent nor existent.¹⁴¹

In this crucial explanation, Abū al-Barakāt has clarified that time is always connected to existence, just as size is connected to a body. Time is not an independently existent entity but can only be perceived as connected to existence. Furthermore, existence (*wujūd*) is not something that comes into existence or non-existence such that it can be said that time did not exist before the existence of anything. Rather, time has always been existent as existence, in one form or another, has always been existent. Allāh has always been existent since pre-eternity and has been creating since pre-eternity which leads to the conclusion that the creator and creation have always been characterized by time. Abū al-Barakāt explicitly states this, asserting, “The minds cannot perceive any form of existence, neither the existence of the Creator nor the creation which does not have a duration (*muddah*) or time (*zamān*)”.¹⁴² Therefore, both Allāh and His creation are characterized by time since they are existent, and no existent entity can be free of time. All the previous explanations that we have mentioned from Abū al-Barakāt regarding Allāh’s will and His perpetual

¹⁴¹ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:40.

¹⁴² Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:40-41.

activity can now be placed within Abū al-Barakāt's understanding of time. Allāh is not simply the pure actuality suggested by Ibn Sīnā, nor is He the timeless, unchanging perfection as understood by the Kalām theologians. Rather, Abū al-Barakāt believes that Allāh possesses the pinnacle of perfection, and that this perfection is characterized by His perpetual activity, and this can only be comprehended by saying that Allāh's existence is temporal. He wills one thing after another, creates one thing after another and is involved with His creation as He is characterized by time.

Abū al-Barakāt also wishes to respond to those who try to establish Allāh being outside of time and state that time is a measure of motion. Though Abū al-Barakāt does not mention explicitly whom he is referring to, we can understand that he is referring to Ibn Sīnā and even the Kalām theologians, both of whom establish that Allāh is timeless. Abū al-Barakāt accuses them of a semantic evasion when negating time from Allāh, as both Ibn Sīnā and the Kalām theologians state that Allāh has been continuously existent in endless duration, which Abū al-Barakāt terms as *al-sarmad*. Abū al-Barakāt questions as to the difference between affirming that Allāh has always been existent in an endless duration (*al-sarmad*) and Allāh being in time from eternity. For Abū al-Barakāt, they appear to be one and the same thing. He states,

And we have clarified that the existence of every existent entity is in a duration (*muddah*) which is time (*zamān*) and an existence cannot be perceived which is not in time. Those who separate (*jarradū*) their Creator from time say that He is existent in eternity (*al-dahr*) and endless duration (*al-sarmad*). Rather, His existence is

eternity and endless duration. So, they have changed the word time, but they have not changed its meaning.¹⁴³

Abū al-Barakāt's clarifies here that time, being the measure of existence, is eternal. Time has existed as long as existence has since time is not an independently existent entity and Allāh has always existed, therefore so has time. Allāh's very existence is time and eternity. As for those who say He is outside of time but establish that He has existed for an endless duration, they are saying the same thing, though they are using different terminology.

This account of time is not without issue, and it is al-Rāzī who once again criticises Abū al-Barakāt. As Adamson and Lammer have noted in their article on al-Rāzī's Platonist essence of time, al-Rāzī "does state clearly which understanding of time he prefers, namely the position he ascribes to Plato: time is independent and self-subsisting".¹⁴⁴ Time for al-Rāzī is not a measure of existence but a separately existent entity. On this basis, he explains why time cannot be a measure of existence as mentioned by Abū al-Barakāt. He explains,

The extension of existence is an expression for the remaining, persistence and continuation of the thing. This remaining and persistence are either something additional to that which itself remains (*'alā dhāt al-bāqī*) or not. But the remaining

¹⁴³ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:41.

¹⁴⁴ Peter Adamson and Andreas Lammer, "Al-Rāzī's Platonist Essence of Time" in *Philosophical Theology in Islam Later Ash'arism East and West* ed. Ayman Shihadeh and Jan Thiele (Boston: Brill, 2020), 97.

and persistence of each thing is an attribute that subsists through it. Also, the remaining and persistence of each thing is not the remaining or persistence of something else. So, if time were understood in this way, it would follow that there would be a number of times gathered together in this single hour, given the number of things that are remaining in this hour. But we have shown that the claim that many times are gathered all at once is absurd.¹⁴⁵

Adamson and Lammer after providing this translation explain it stating that “The problem is that there will be a distinct time for each instantiation, including instantiations that are simultaneous-but one cannot have two distinct, yet simultaneous times.”¹⁴⁶ And in simpler words, “The accounts of Abū al-Barakāt and Aristotle would make two different times occur at the same time.”¹⁴⁷ It is due to this that al-Rāzī moved away from Abū al-Barakāt’s understanding of time in favour of his Platonic account. If time is a measure of existence, it would mean that every existent entity has its own time, and then there must be a third time by which both can be measured, and this continues *ad infinitum*. Al-Rāzī therefore adopts the view that time is a “substance subsisting in itself and independent in itself (*jawhar qā’im bi nafsihī wa mustaqill bi dhātihī*)”.¹⁴⁸ The issue with this as noted by Adamson and Lammer,

¹⁴⁵ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya min al-‘ilm al-ilāhī*. Edited by Aḥmad Ḥijāzī al-Saqqā. 9 vols. (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 1987) as translated by Adamson and Lammer in Al-Rāzī’s Platonist Essence of Time, 101.

¹⁴⁶ Adamson and Lammer, Al-Rāzī’s Platonist Essence of Time, 101.

¹⁴⁷ Adamson and Lammer, Al-Rāzī’s Platonist Essence of Time, 102

¹⁴⁸ Adamson and Lammer, Al-Rāzī’s Platonist Essence of Time, 109.

is that “by making duration a self-subsisting entity, it threatens to put it on par with God”.¹⁴⁹ Of course, al-Rāzī answers this issue, as Adamson and Lammer have demonstrated by explaining that “the difference between duration and God is that God is “necessary of existence in every respect, which rules out any association with change or potentiality. By contrast, duration is a locus for change which apparently taints its existence with some degree of contingency”.¹⁵⁰ For al-Rāzī, Allāh is not a locus for change as that would necessitate temporality in His essence, neither does Allāh “acquire an extrinsic association (*muqārana*) with changing things, unlike time which does since time has before-ness and after-ness in relation to any event.¹⁵¹ Therefore, Abū al-Barakāt’s account of time does have issues as he cannot escape the problem of infinite regress which is necessitated by suggesting that time is a measure of existence. Every existent entity would then have its own time, and a third would be required for both to exist in it and this continues *ad infinitum*.

Following Abū al-Barakāt’s explanation of the nature of time and its relationship to Allāh, he discusses temporality (*ḥudūth*) and eternity (*qidam*) and their relationship to Allāh with regards to His willing and creating existence. Abū al-Barakāt affirms that there is no temporal gap between Allāh and His creation, which have the relationship of ‘*illah* and *ma’lūl*. Rather, creation exists alongside Allāh, just as a *ma’lūl* will exist alongside the ‘*illah* though the ‘*illah* has a natural priority over the *ma’lūl*. He states, “And exhaustive reasoning

¹⁴⁹ Adamson and Lammer, *Al-Rāzī’s Platonist Essence of Time*, 114.

¹⁵⁰ Adamson and Lammer, *Al-Rāzī’s Platonist Essence of Time*, 117.

¹⁵¹ Adamson and Lammer, *Al-Rāzī’s Platonist Essence of Time*, 118.

reveals that the creation is the created effect (*al-ma‘lūl al-maf‘ūl*) and that its agent (*fā’il*) does not precede it by time but rather, it is with it in existence, in a manner that cannot be negated by the sound mind.”¹⁵² Previously Abū al-Barakāt has established that Allāh is perpetually active. Here, Abū al-Barakāt has now established that Allāh’s creation is always alongside him in existence and that Allāh, being the *fā’il* and the *‘illah*, does not precede His creation by time; rather, His creation is alongside Him just as an *‘illah* is alongside its *ma‘lūl*. He explains this latter issue further stating, “it is not necessary that time (*zamān*) has an intrusion between the cause and effect, the agent and the object as a condition in the cause, effect, agent and object.”¹⁵³ In other words, the agent and cause, who is Allāh, is not separated from His effect and object, which is the world, but Allāh simply has a natural priority over His creation in the way just as an *‘illah* has natural priority over its *ma‘lūl* and there is no temporal gap between the creation and Allāh.

Abū al-Barakāt’s motives in establishing this matter are made clear in his next discussion as he now presents a debate regarding the eternity (*qidam*) of the world versus its temporality (*ḥudūth*) and wishes to establish the matter of Allāh’s perpetual activity and creation as part of His generosity. The purpose of discussing time’s relationship with Allāh is therefore to refute the Kalām theologians who assert a starting point to the world. He presents their argument first stating,

¹⁵² Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:41.

¹⁵³ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu‘tabar*, 3:41.

Those who affirm the temporality of the universe (*al qā'ilūna bi al- ḥudūth*) state that the creator has created the universe after He did not create and became active after He was previously inactive. And, that He was a non-creator (*ghayr khāliq*) and inactive (*ghayr fā'il*) for any creation or objects in pre-eternity (*al-azal wa al-qidam*) in time which preceded the existence of His creation. He remained existent like that and there was nothing else existent alongside Him for a duration without a beginning (*muddat ghayr mutanāhī al-bidāyah*) and the end of this time was with the initiation of the creation of the universe. This duration (*muddat*) was time without a doubt.¹⁵⁴

Abū al-Barakāt has demonstrated how in his understanding, the Kalām theologians speak of the beginning of this world as something that manifested much later in time to Allāh's existence in pre-eternity. Allāh existed for a long period of time and chose not to create, and then chose to create, meaning that He remained inactive for a long period of time before He decided to create. It is this temporal gap between creation and creator whilst the creator was seemingly inactive that Abū al-Barakāt disagrees with as it is contrary to Allāh's generosity. He responds in the following paragraph from the perspective of those who affirm the eternity of the universe stating,

¹⁵⁴ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:41-42.

When those who affirm the eternity of the universe (*al-qā'ilūna bi qidam al-'ālam*) ask, what is your opinion regarding time (*zamān*), duration (*muddat*), eternity (*dahr*) and endless duration (*sarmad*) in your various forms of expression, is it created or not? If you state it is created, then does its Creator precede it by time or not? If he precedes it by time, then a time has preceded the time and likewise, eternity and endless duration and everything else that is spoken for it. If its creator does not precede it by time, then you have found a created object (*makhlūq maf'ūl*) whose agent did not precede it by time, so why do you not say this about all other creations like this? And your belief and statement will not compel the disabling (*ta'ṭīl*) the most Generous of His generosity and His creation for an unlimited time.¹⁵⁵

This paragraph is crucial in explaining Abū al-Barakāt's views on Allāh and the created universe. Abū al-Barakāt poses the question of whether time is created or not according to those who believe in the temporality of the universe. Of course, they affirm that time is also a creation, to which Abū al-Barakāt presents two possible conclusions; Allāh precedes time by time, in which case time exists before time was itself was created which is illogical, or Allāh does not precede the universe by time, in which case the universe is a created object whose creator does not precede it by time. This is what Abū al-Barakāt argued previously and is the only conclusion that seems logical to him. Therefore, what is stopping us from saying this about all other creations, i.e., that Allāh does not precede them by time, but that

¹⁵⁵ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:42.

His creations are with Him as a necessary result of His generosity, just as an *'illah* with its *ma'lūl*. This explanation solves the issue of rendering Allāh inactive for any amount of time and thereby disabling His generosity.

However, Abū al-Barakāt seems to have misunderstood the Kalām view as they do not believe that there is temporal gap between Allāh and His creation such that he can be described as idle and then active. In other words, Allāh is not in time such that he can be described as idle and then active. Time is only applicable to creation and before the universe there was no time such that we can say that Allāh was inactive in this time and then became active. Abū al-Barakāt has not understood this view of the Kalām theologians and has therefore wrongly accused them of establishing idleness for Allāh. Lammer has highlighted this criticism and has mentioned from the Ash‘arī theologian and contemporary of Abū al-Barakāt, Al-Shahrastānī, who responds to this criticism. Lammer mentions, “He argues that his opponent is cheating, for when he formulates God’s initial idleness from creating the world and His subsequent activity of creating in terms of what was “before” and what is “now,” he actually postulates the existence of two times: one devoid of God’s activity and another filled with it”.¹⁵⁶ Lammer further mentions that al-Shahrastānī states that “there is no time prior to the world which would document God’s idleness, for God exists entirely exalted above time, thus not being “temporally prior” either”.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, Abū al-Barakāt’s

¹⁵⁶ Lammer, “Hardliners”, 246.

¹⁵⁷ Lammer, “Hardliners”, 246.

attempt to characterize Allāh by time in order to establish His perpetual activity is not without issue as demonstrated through al-Shahrastānī's criticism of this view.

In summary, time for Abū al-Barakāt is a measure of existence, inseparable from it, and every existent entity including Allāh is characterised by time. The only priority that Allāh has over His creation is a natural priority like an *'illah* over its *ma'lūl*, which means that Allāh is not separated from His creation by any duration of time. Rather, His creation is with Him as a necessary result of His unlimited generosity. The purpose of Abū al-Barakāt's rejection of the Avicennan notion of time being a measure of motion, and the Kalām theologians' timelessness for Allāh is to affirm Allāh's generosity and perpetual activity. His generosity and perpetual activity cannot be perceived as idle for even a moment as that is contrary to Allāh's perfection.

3.2: Ibn Taymiyya on time and Allāh

Ibn Taymiyya has his own views on time, which are crucial to understand his views on Allāh's perpetual activity. To my knowledge, Ibn Taymiyya does not have a dedicated work to the subject, but his views on time can be found in many of his theological writings, *Kitāb al-Şafdiyyah*, and his commentary on the *ḥadīth* of Imrān ibn Ḥussain, which Hoover has translated. Ibn Taymiyya's definition of time and its reality can be understood through his criticism of Aristotle's views of the eternity of the universe. For Ibn Taymiyya, time has two perspectives; the first is the genus of time as a measure for the genus of movement and the second is specific time which is a measure of a specific movement. The first is eternal whereas the second is temporal. He writes,

The first of the philosophers from whom the opinion of the eternity of the planetary spheres is known is Aristotle and his evidences in this are extremely weak and do not indicate towards his objective. Rather, his reasoning is upon the eternity of time and that it is a measure of motion which necessitates the eternity of motion. Then he assumed that the genus of time (*jins al-zamān*) is a measure of the movement of the planetary sphere, and this is greatly incorrect. Indeed, the genus of time, if it is said that time is a measure of motion, then it is a measure of a genus of motion not a specific motion. Rather, a specific time is a measure of a specific motion.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁸ Ibn Taymiyya. *Kitāb al-Şafdiyyah*, ed. Muhammad Rashād Sālim (Mansura: Dār al-Hady al-Nabawī) 2:167.

Here Ibn Taymiyya has distinguished between time as a genus and time which relates to the motion of any particular object. The movement of the planetary sphere is the basis of a particular time, and this is other than the genus of time which is a measure of the genus of motion and not attached to any specific motion. It therefore cannot be the basis of the eternality of a specific motion such as the motion of the planetary spheres. Rather, specific time which is a measure of a specific motion is temporal, unlike the genus of time which is not the measure of any particular object and is therefore eternal. Ibn Taymiyya explains this further stating,

Due to this, the genus of time is ever-lasting (*bāqī*) according to the believers after the day of judgement, the splitting of the sky, the rolling up of the sun. And the people of paradise will have times which are the measures of motion there other than the motion of the planetary sphere and they will have a day of increase (*yawm al-mazīd*) in the afterlife which is the Friday (*yawm al-jumu‘ah*) alongside the fact that paradise does not have a sun nor bitter cold but rather other lights and motions.¹⁵⁹

Therefore, the genus of time is not a measure of a specific motion but rather it is something everlasting and will remain even after the earth and the sun are no longer existent such that

¹⁵⁹ Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Safdiyyah*, 2:167.

even the people of paradise will have a Friday. Time can therefore be understood in two ways according to Ibn Taymiyya; the genus of time which is connected to the genus of motion and is everlasting and specific time which is attached to the specific motions of specific bodies. This second understanding of time begins and ends with the beginning and ending of the motion of any particular body. The first is therefore unrelated to the motion of any specific object whereas the second is related to the motions of specific objects and is a measure of their motion.

After having clarified Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of time, his understanding of its relation to Allāh and His creation remains to be expounded. To do this, we must understand how Ibn Taymiyya understands *azal* (pre-eternity) in relation to Allāh. Hoover clarifies, "Ibn Taymiyya emphasises that God's creative activity has no beginning and that there is no beginning to created things in the past".¹⁶⁰ In other words, for Ibn Taymiyya, Allāh existing in pre-eternity (*azal*) means that He must have always been active and creating. Hoover quotes from Ibn Taymiyya explaining how "the past will always be preceded by the fullness of pre-eternity".¹⁶¹

Even if one posited the existence of cities many times (the number of) the cities of the earth, each city with as much mustard seed as to fill it and (then) supposed that with each passing of a million years one grain of mustard seed disappeared, all the

¹⁶⁰ Hoover, *God, creation, and time*, 97.

¹⁶¹ Hoover, *God, creation, and time*, 97.

mustard seed would disappear and the pre-eternity would not (yet) have ended. And if one supposed many, many times that, it would (still) not have ended. There is no time that might be posited that is not such that pre-eternity was before it.¹⁶² And there is no time in which an action took place, except that it was possible (*mumkin*) before that. And if it was possible, then what is the cause of specifying the action of creating to the present rather than that which was before it in endless pre-eternity?¹⁶³

This final part of the quotation is key in understanding Ibn Taymiyya's reasoning. According to him, when it is possible for Allāh to create before it is said that He created, then why is His creating limited to the present? Rather, it is much more appropriate to establish that Allāh has always been creating and has been perpetually active as opposed to limiting His activity. We can see clearly how Ibn Taymiyya's views are similar to Abū al-Barakāt here who also affirmed the same thing. Furthermore, this leads us to understand that since Allah has always been creating, there has always one creation or another and as has been clarified previously, time is related to the existent object as a measure of its motion. This leads us to conclude that time has been existent for as long as existence has, which according to Ibn

¹⁶² Hoover, *God, Creation, and Time*, 97.

¹⁶³ Hoover, Jon. "Perpetual Creativity In The Perfection Of God: Ibn Taymiyya's Hadith Commentary On God's Creation Of This World." *Journal of Islamic Studies* 15, no. 3 (2004): 287–329.

Taymiyya has always been existent as Allāh has always been active. It appears that Ibn Taymiyya, like Abū al-Barakāt has also misunderstood the Kalām view. The Kalām theologians do not believe that Allāh was in time prior to the creation of the universe such that He was idle and then became active.

With regards to Allāh’s relationship with time, what can be deduced is that the first understanding of time, which Ibn Taymiyya calls *jins al-zamān* (genus of time), is a mental concept with no actual existence. The second, which Ibn Taymiyya calls *al-zamān al-muqayyad* (concretised time), is relative to the movement of any specific object and is a measure of its motion. If Allāh has been perpetually active since pre-eternity, then it seems that time is a measure of His perpetual activity, which is why Ibn Taymiyya considers *azal* (pre-eternity) as an attribute of Allāh. Ibn Taymiyya explains,

Our saying, “He has always remained powerful” (*lam yazal qādir*) is equal to our saying “He is constantly powerful” (*huwa qādir dā’iman*) and Him being powerful is a perpetual attribute which has no beginning (*wasf dā’im lā ibtidā’ lahū*). Therefore, just as it is said “He has always remained speaking when He willed and has always remained doing whatever He wills”, it dictates Him perpetually speaking and being active with His will and power.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶⁴ Ibn Taymiyya, *Commentary on the Hadīth of Imrān ibn Hussain*, MF 18:239.

What this clarifies for us is that Ibn Taymiyya believes that time is connected to the constant motion of objects which are created one after another. In this understanding, time is a product of Allāh's perpetual activity which is without beginning and end. Therefore, according to Ibn Taymiyya, Allāh is not in time, but time is the result of Allāh's perpetual activities and a measure of them taking place one after another.

Ibn Taymiyya explains further that Allāh's perpetual activity does not necessitate that anything in the universe is eternal alongside him; it simply means that Allāh has constantly been creating. He writes, "There is nothing eternal alongside Him and when it is said that 'He has always been creating', it means that He has always been creating one creation after another (*lam yazal yakhluq makhlūqan ba'da makhlūqin*) just as He will continue creating in post-eternity."¹⁶⁵ According to Ibn Taymiyya, this does not mean that anything exists alongside Allah in eternity, rather it means that the *naw'* (species) of his creations are alongside Him and this is part of His perfection. He explains, "If it is assumed that its species remained alongside Him, then neither the law nor intellect negate this, rather this is from His perfection. Allāh-most High-states, "Is the one who creates like the one who does not?"¹⁶⁶ Therefore, the species of Allāh's creation has always been alongside Him in existence, and this, according to Ibn Taymiyya, does not necessitate the eternity of any creation as each individual creation is preceded by non-existence and they are therefore temporal. What we can conclude from this regarding Ibn Taymiyya's understanding of time is that since one creation or another has always existed, time must have always existed as

¹⁶⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Commentary on the Hadīth of Imrān ibn Hussain*, MF 18:239.

¹⁶⁶ Ibn Taymiyya, *Commentary on the Hadīth of Imrān ibn Hussain*, MF 18:239.

time is simply a measure of the motion of any object. Since Allāh has always been creating one object after another, time has always been existent as a measure of their motion.

In this latter deduction, Ibn Taymiyya's view seems very similar to Abū al-Barakāt's opinion of time being a measure of existence. Abū al-Barakāt asserted that there is no time without existence, and here it appears that Ibn Taymiyya is asserting the same. Time only exists if there is existence, yet according to him there has always been existence due to Allāh's perpetual activity, which means that time has always existed. Furthermore, as clarified in the discussion of Allāh's will, Ibn Taymiyya asserts the infinite regress of existents in the past as well as its continuation into the future *ad infinitum*, which therefore means that time has been infinitely existent in the past and will be so in the future. Another similarity can be seen in Abū al-Barakāt's criticism of the Kalām theologians of utilising a semantic evasion to avoid saying that Allāh is in time, even though they affirm that Allāh is existent in *sarmad* (endless duration). He states that "they have changed the word 'time', but they have not changed its meaning."¹⁶⁷ In this regard Ibn Taymiyya also shares similarities to Abū al-Barakāt, as it seems that he is affirming that time is also an endless duration which has been existent infinitely in the past and will continue to endure in the future. The difference is that Ibn Taymiyya does not affirm that Allāh himself is in time, rather he has explained time as a product of Allāh's perpetual activity. Of course, Ibn Taymiyya's motives for presenting this understanding are clear. He wishes to establish Allāh's perpetual activity and refute the Kalām theologians whose views according to Ibn Taymiyya necessitate the inactivity of Allāh which is contrary to His perfection. In this

¹⁶⁷ Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Kitāb al-Mu'tabar*, 3:41.

regard, his motives are the same as Abū al-Barakāt's and hence the similarity in the views of both.

Conclusion

To conclude, in this essay I have demonstrated how Abū al-Barakāt is a striking precedent to Ibn Taymiyya in some of his most important views with regards to Allāh's attributes. At the very least, we can say that Abū al-Barakāt opened the discursive venue on these issues which allowed Ibn Taymiyya to provide his views on these matters. However, the similarities in terminology and explanation provided by both allows us to go further and say that Ibn Taymiyya appropriated Abū al-Barakāt's views. Regarding Allāh's perfection, both emphasise a causal relationship between Allāh and His creation and assert that Allāh is the *'illah* of all perfections in existence and they are His *ma'lūlāt*. Both utilise an analogy-based methodology to establish Allāh as the possessor of all perfection existent in creation to their utmost (*al-ghāya al-qaṣwā*). Abū al-Barakāt's analogy is based on drawing a comparison between two entities, one possessing all that an entity of its species should possess and is therefore more perfect and complete than the one that does not. Ibn Taymiyya's analogy is an *a fortiori* argument, expressing that Allāh is more deserved of all perfections found in creation. Abū al-Barakāt did not clarify which specific perfections can be ascribed to Allāh, though Ibn Taymiyya qualified these perfections through the Qur'ān and Sunnah.

Subsequently, both characterize Allāh's perfection through His will. Regarding Allāh's will, both moved away from the understanding of Allāh's will being an entirely eternal attribute as both asserted that temporal existences cannot manifest with eternal causes. In doing so, both rejected the Aristotelian notion of an uninvolved god who is pure causality. Both also asserted a perpetuality to these wills, asserting that we cannot perceive a time when Allāh was not creating or willing as that would be contrary to His generous and perfect nature. In asserting this, both disagree with the Kalām theologians, who affirm a starting point to the

universe and that Allāh has eternally willed its existence. Abū al-Barakāt and Ibn Taymiyya both challenge this on the basis that it leads to Allāh being idle prior to the creation of the universe and that an eternal cause cannot be responsible for temporal existences. A distinction in Abū al-Barakāt's view is that he asserts an initial eternal will for Allāh which is responsible for willing existence in a general sense and is the catalyst for the subsequent, temporal wills whereas Ibn Taymiyya believes Allāh's wills to be entirely temporal. Al-Rāzī criticised Abū al-Barakāt's assertion of temporal wills on the basis that it leads to temporality in Allāh's essence which is an impossibility as it is contrary to His divine eternity. However, Abū al-Barakāt believes that Allāh can possess temporal attributes in the same way he can possess eternal ones. He also believes Allāh's perfection to be characterized in such a way. Ibn Taymiyya also asserts that temporal wills are part of Allāh's perfection and that establishing an eternal will for Allāh would lead to the ultimate imperfection which is idleness. However, as I have demonstrated, both may not have been accurate in criticising the Kalām theologians that Allāh was idle before creation. Rather, the Kalām theologians believe that Allāh is not characterized by time such that we can say He was idle for a time and then active for a time. He is completely timeless and so both Abū al-Barakāt and Ibn Taymiyya have been inaccurate in criticising the Kalām theologians for this view. Additionally, both assert that these wills manifest in accordance to Allāh's wisdom and Allāh's precedent knowledge.

Finally, both have attempted to bridge the gap between a timeless, eternal God and a temporal world. Abū al-Barakāt responded to the Kalām theologians and those who assert the temporality of the universe by establishing that Allāh is characterized by time, since no existent entity can be perceived except that it is in time. There is also no temporal gap between Allāh and His creation, rather creation is a direct effect (*ma'lūl*) of Allāh's

perfection and generosity. Abū al-Barakat once again, chose to adopt this view to avoid the issue of rendering Allāh idle at any time in His existence as that would be contrary to His perfection. However, as al-Rāzī has mentioned, there are fundamental problems with his understanding of time. If time is a measure of existence, each object has its own time, and a third time is required to measure both of them, and this continues *ad infinitum*. A Kalām theologian would state that another issue with his understanding is the fact that he has affirmed eternity to the universe and temporal existences subsisting in Allāh's essence. For Abū al-Barakāt, this is not an issue, rather it is part of Allāh's perfection. As for Ibn Taymiyya, he responds to the Kalām theologians and philosophers such as Aristotle. In his response to the Kalām theologians, he like Abū al-Barakāt, has asserts that we cannot perceive of any time where Allāh has not been creating as that would be contrary to His perfection. Allāh has therefore always been active, and time is a measure of the motion of the creations that Allāh creates, one after another. He rejects Aristotle's understanding of time being a measure of motion itself, as he disagrees with Aristotle's view on the eternity of motion, which he used as a basis for the eternity of the universe. Ibn Taymiyya's solution to both the issues of Kalām understanding and the philosopher's understanding is to assert that time is a product of Allāh's perpetual activity and a measure of the motion of the objects that Allāh creates, one after another.

These similarities most certainly demonstrate that Abū al-Barakāt is a striking precedent to Ibn Taymiyya, though further research remains to be done on further elements of their theology which I could not include in this short essay. An example is the views of both regarding Allāh's knowledge, His divine decree. Another element which remains to be explored, is Ibn Taymiyya's direct usage of Abū al-Barakāt in his writings so we can further understand how Ibn Taymiyya appropriated from him in a more direct sense. My research

has opened the doors for this future work which will be vital in the greater project of understanding Ibn Taymiyya's theology.

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