

Criticism of the Neo-Classical Salafī Understanding Forming the Discourse of Religious Exclusivism

An Evaluation on the Specifics of the Critiques Aimed at Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī Regarding the Epistemological Value of Language

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Abstract: Al-Rāzī stated that specific criteria should exist for interpreting religious texts, with one of the two in particular prioritizing the conflict of *ʿaql* [reason] and *naql* [revelation]. Accordingly, he developed the theory of the hypothetical nature of linguistic evidence. According to al-Rāzī's theory, literary evidence have been exposed to possible errors from transferring *al-naḥw* [lexicography, morphology, and grammar] rules to the present day; different linguistic possibilities such as figurative speech homonymy and transfer of meanings (*naql al-luḡha*) are likely to have occurred in the process. Therefore, religious texts do not express certainty when *qarīnas* [contextual clues] are absent. Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, leading names in the neo-classical Salafī understanding, described the view that literal evidence does not express *ʿilm* [definitive knowledge] but rather expresses *ẓann* [speculative knowledge] as *taghūt* [an idol], criticizing it to have a marginalizing and exclusionary style. The present article will examine the discourse of religious exclusivism produced within the framework of the hypotheticality of language and will show that this discourse is caused by Ibn Taymiyya's and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's words being misunderstood. This study will first explain what is meant by religious exclusion and provide the intellectual background of the theory of the hypotheticality of language. Next, it will cover Ibn Taymiyya's and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya's questioning of al-Rāzī's religiosity, and finish with how the accusations against Rāzī had stemmed from a misunderstanding of his ideas.

Keywords: Religious exclusion, neo-classical Salafī understanding, hypotheticality of language, Fakhr ad-Din ar-Rāzī, Ibn Taymiyyah, Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya

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I. Introduction

The concepts of religious exclusivism, religious inclusivism, and religious pluralism entered the field of philosophy of religion in the 20th century as a result of an effort to define religious differences. While religious exclusivism means that only one religion is true and that salvation can only be achieved by following this religion, religious inclusivism means that more than one religion can lead to salvation. As for religious pluralism, it suggests that all religions are equal in terms of achieving salvation.¹

Pertaining to religious exclusivism, the exclusivist attitude generally relates to believing that something is true. This is because most of the time, having such a belief is an indication of assuming the wrongness of things that fall outside this belief. Therefore, a follower of a religion marginalizes and excludes other religions as the follower considers other religions to be untrue. However, this approach is deemed unreasonable by the adherents of religious pluralism and is interpreted as arrogant and selfish.²

Religious exclusivism is condemned by the adherents of religious pluralism and usually appears in a way where a believer of a particular religion regards their belief as true and marginalizes other religions and their adherents, sometimes excluding fellow believers of the same religion when they have different opinions for various reasons (e.g., ideological or sectarian fanaticism). Coreligionists' marginalization of those who are not like them is associated with the assumption that following the same religion is not enough for salvation: Having the same thoughts and principles is also necessary.

Claiming that the ideas and theories based on Western philosophy's religious exclusivism are present in the Islamic tradition is incorrect. However, when disregarding the cultural and academic background that allowed the origination of this concept in the West and only taking the literal meaning of the term into consideration, incidents and cases indicated by this concept can be said to exist in the tradition of Islamic thought. In this context, the criticisms of Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), who represents the neo-classical Salafî understanding in the Islamic

1 For a detailed analysis of these terms, see "Felsefî ve Teolojik Bir Problem Olarak Dinî Çeşitlilik", *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 15/1 (2011), 79–97.

2 M. Kazım Arıcan, "Batı Düşüncesinde Dinî Dışlayıcılık/Tekelcilik Paradigması ve Eleştirisi", *Cumhuriyet Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 15/2 (2011), 46.

tradition in terms of establishing the discourse of religious exclusivism, and of his student Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) toward al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) are ideal examples of this exclusivism. Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya appear to have had exclusivist attitudes on various issues, condemn their opponents in an alienating way while criticizing the idea that linguistic signification does not produce definitive knowledge but supposition (*ẓann*). Because the criticisms Ibn Taymiyya penned on the hypotheticality of language are not extant,³ this study will be based on the criticisms of Ibn Qayyim, who recounted his master's ideas in his book *al-Şawā'iq al-Mursala*.

In order to prevent ambiguity, what is meant by Neo-classical Salafi should be clarified. In this study, Neo-classical Salafi is used as a term for the current of thought that emerged as a reaction to the thought systems not based on literal scriptural meanings and that claim to revive *al-Salaf al-ṣaliḥin's* understanding of religion after becoming systemized under the guidance of Ibn Taymiyya. Moreover, this paper first presents the intellectual background of the hypotheticality of language so that the criticisms directed toward Rāzī by the Neo-classical Salafi understanding regarding the epistemological value of language can be discussed on a sound basis.

II. Background of the Theory of the Hypotheticality of Language

The tradition of Islamic thought has seen various theories developed about how religious texts should be understood. The debate on whether the intra-textual or extra-textual elements should be taken into consideration when interpreting texts has led to the rise of different methods and opinions, even though they were all based on the same sources. Intra-textual elements signify the lexical context, which interprets a text within the rules of language; the extra-textual elements, however, refer to the factual context, as in the case of non-contradiction with the basic principles of the mind. More clearly, understanding a statement, including those in religious texts, is directly related to the lexical context that provides the grammatical connotation of an expression as well as the factual context that demonstrates the correspondence between the reality of the external world and the statement itself.⁴

3 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Şawā'iq al-mursala fi al-radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya wa-l-Mu'atṭila* [Editor's note], (Riyad: Dār al-'āsima, 1408), 2, 634.

4 For the discussion, see. Ömer Türker, *Erken Dönem Tefsirlerinde Tevil Sorunu -Mukâtil B. Süleyman'dan Hareketle Bir İnceleme-* (İstanbul: Endülüs, 2017), 63-70.

While the lexical context is concerned with the interpreter's knowledge of vocabulary and grammar in the relevant language and correctly applying them to the text, the factual context is related to the context of the text not being in contradiction with the basic principles of the mind or external reality in the opinion of the interpreter. Contextual meaning cannot be discarded as long as the text's literal sense does not contradict external reality. Nevertheless, whenever the text is in contradiction with the factual context, the literal meaning is discarded, and the expression is reinterpreted to conform with the factual context.

Whether reason should be prioritized over scripture, which has been one of the fundamental problems in the tradition of Islamic thought, comes into question in terms of the lexical and factual contexts. Those who claim that reason should take precedence over scripture leave out the text's literal meaning when it disagrees with the factual context and push the limits of the lexical context in places. Contrarily, those who prioritize scripture over reason or who argue for agreement between *naql* [revelation] and reason contend that the literal sense should not be ignored based on deficient reason and inconsistency from those who claim to be intelligent. For instance, because the literal meaning of scriptural attributes of God such as hand and foot involves the presence of some qualities of the attributes belonging to originated beings in God, the Māturidite and Ash'arite kalam traditions regard the existence of these attributes in God in the literal sense as impossible. Therefore, they chose *tafwīd* [leaving knowledge about Allah to Allah] or *ta'wīl* [choosing from among different connotations of a word] when interpreting these kinds of attributes.⁵ Meanwhile, *Mushabbiha* and *Mujassima* do not refrain from ascribing anthropomorphic connotations to such attributes based on the literal understanding of scripture.

Because lexical and factual contexts are similar to the concepts of *muḥkam* [decisive] and *mutashābih* [allegorical], benefit will be had in looking at the relationship between these two notions. As indicated in Verse 7 of Sūrat *Āl 'Imrān*, some verses of the Qur'ān are *muḥkam* while others are *mutashābih*, and people whose hearts are inclined to deviate from the truth seek to explain *mutashābih* verses by way of provoking unrest and making arbitrary comments. However, only God and those who attain high ranks in knowledge know the interpretation of *mutashābihs*. In the verse above, *muḥkam* verses are noted to form the basis of the Qur'ān, and *mutashābih* verses should be understood in harmony

5 *Tafwīd*: A method that leaves the implications of obscure verses to Allah instead of trying to interpret them.

with the *muḥkam*. As a result, when disagreement occurs between *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* verses, kalam scholars have followed the *muḥkam* and preferred *tafwīd* or *ta'wīl* for the *mutashābih*. In the framework of those who prioritize reason over scripture, one can say that factual context corresponds to *muḥkam*, and lexical context correlates with *mutashābih*. To be more precise with respect to the schools that prioritize reason over the scripture (including the Māturīdī and Ash'ari kalām traditions), the factual context is not *muḥkam* per se; instead, it is an instrument for identifying *muḥkam* verses. In this very context, which of the two seemingly contradictory verses is the *muḥkam* verse has appeared as a serious problem in the tradition of Islamic thought. For instance, the Mujassima, who adhere to the literal meaning of the scripture when explaining the presence of the word hand in the Qur'an, consider the verse "There is nothing like Him"⁶ to be *mutashābih*, and the other verse where this attribute is mentioned to be *muḥkam*. Therefore, they do not interpret the attribute of *yad* [hand]. Al-Rāzī, drawing attention to this problem, claimed that different sects construe the *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* verses differently and that each sect thinks of supporting verses as *muḥkam* and opposing verses as *mutashābih*. Al-Rāzī gave the example of a Mu'tazili scholar describing the verse "... now whoever wants to believe may believe and whoever wants to become infidel may become infidel"⁷ as *muḥkam* and the verse "you cannot wish anything unless Allah wishes it"⁸ as *mutashābih*. He followed to tell of a Sunnī scholar who did the opposite, regarding the latter verse as *muḥkam* and the former as *mutashābih*.⁹

Based on al-Rāzī's words above, *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* (i.e., lexical and factual contexts) are understood to have been controversial among kalām schools. For example, while the Mushabbihā and the Mujassima hold that the lexical context is *muḥkam* by ignoring the factual concept, Māturīdites and Ash'arites state the opposite.

Al-Rāzī tried to substantiate the idea that whenever disagreement occurs between reason and revelation, reason as an element of the factual context should take precedence over revelation, using the theory of hypotheticality of language as is done with the interpretation of the scriptural attributes of God. According to

6 Al-Shūrā, 42:11.

7 Al-Kahf, 18:29.

8 Al-Insān, 76:30.

9 Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī, *Asās al-takdīs fi 'ilm al-kalām* (Cairo: Maktabat al-kulliyāt al-Azhariyyah, 1986), 234–35.

him, the epistemological value of the linguistic signification (i.e., whether a sign of a language implies definitive knowledge) pertains to the relationship between what it states and its meaning. Accordingly, differentiating between the feelings and thoughts of a person is needed before saying something, and these are the tools for expressing the meanings present in the mind. This is because *waq'* [conventional rules] and *muwāda'a* [consensus] are required in order for something said to denote a meaning, in contrast to meaning existing within a person. Furthermore, when a source (e.g., a speaker) says "come," the essence of this expression does not change depending on time and place; however, the statement used for it may change.¹⁰ Thus, language, which leads to the meanings existing in the mind, is not always sufficient to convey the speaker's intention (source).

In al-Rāzī's opinion, reason provides *qaṭ'i* [definitive knowledge], whereas revelation-based evidence yields supposition. Hence, as definitive evidence cannot contradict speculative evidence when revelation conflicts with reason, the latter should be prioritized. In this case, al-Rāzī needed to substantiate that lexical proofs lead to supposition, not definiteness. Therefore, he associated the fact that revelational proofs (i.e., linguistic signification) indicate supposition whether or not the *ihimālāt* [possibilities] are existent in the statement. Al-Rāzī's primary argument on this matter is the idea that the definitive nature of lexical proofs is contingent on speculative premises and that speculative premises produce speculative conclusions. According to al-Rāzī, the only thing that needs to be substantiated in this syllogism is that the semantic implication of lexical proofs is speculative. For this reason, he listed the possibilities preventing the semantic implication of lexical proofs in order to corroborate the premise: "There may be some problems in conveying the rules of grammar and syntax. Words may hold the possibilities of homophony, figurative speech, transfer of meaning, specification, ellipsis, priority-posteriority, abrogation, and rational contradiction."¹¹

Al-Rāzī, who wanted to build the idea of reason's precedence over revelation over a solid foundation, turned this idea into a theory maintained by his predecessors Ghazālī and Juwaynī;¹² al-Rāzī thought lexical proofs may be subjected to linguistic phenomena such as figurative speech, homonymy, and transfer of meaning.

10 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Khalq al-Qur'ān bayna al-Mu'tazila wa Ahl al-sunna* (Beirut: Dār al-jil, 1992), 52.

11 Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl fī 'ilm 'usūl al-fiqh* (Beirut: Muassasat al-risāla, 1412/1992), 390-91.

12 Imām al-Haramayn Juwaynī, *al-Irshād ilā qawāṭi' al-adilla fī uṣūl al-i'tikād* (Cairo: Maktabat al-saqāfat al-diniyya, 2009), 280-82; Yusuf Eşit, "Kelamcı Usulcülerin Usül Düşüncesinde Akıl-Nakil İlişkisi: Gazzālî Örneği", *Usûl: İslam Araştırmaları* 31 (2019), 70-72.

However, he asserted that reason is free from these. Consequently, the lexical signification indicates supposition whereas the principles of the mind indicate definitive knowledge. According to this theory, the difference between the lexical context and factual context causes a gap between a text's lexical and semantic structure, and the text in question is interpreted according to the factual context. In other words, when the meaning produced by the external data becomes the basis in interpreting a text, the semantic implication of the revelation becomes speculative.

Al-Rāzī's prioritization of reason over revelation and his claim about the hypotheticality of language were met with adverse reactions from various thinkers, in particular Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim. Ibn al-'Arabī (d. 638/1240) and Ibn Taymiyya, who had clashed with certain intellectuals such as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Rukn al-Dīn al-Āmidī (d. 615/1218) at the turning point of the tradition of Islamic thought, criticized their hermeneutic theories and resultant conclusions with a marginalizing and exclusivist language. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, regarded as the most important successor to Ibn Taymiyya, also drew attention to this situation and stated battling all his life with his hands, words, and heart against al-Rāzī's *tashkīkāt*,¹³ Ibn al-'Arabī's *ḥaqāiq* understanding, and Āmidī's *just*¹⁴ method.¹⁵

Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Qayyim, who believed that lexical proofs may indicate definitive knowledge, very harshly condemned the Ash'arī tradition in general and al-Rāzī in particular because of their claim that lexical proofs produce supposition and that, as a result, reason must come first when conflict occurs between reason and revelation. For instance, Ibn Taymiyya stated the following while explaining the lack of contradiction between reason and scripture:

*If rational evidence contradicts revelational evidence, one of these must be prioritized over the other. If revelational evidence is prioritized, its basis (rational evidence) gets damaged. On the other hand, if rational evidence is prioritized, necessarily known things that the Prophet brought should be refuted. This is utter blasphemy. [Therefore,] it should be addressed by saying that rational evidence indicating definitive knowledge does not contradict revelational evidence.*¹⁶

13 *Tashkīkāt*: It is the plural form of *tashkīk* and means that the author confuses the reader by giving a detailed account of the opposing view and mentioning his opinion in a line or two.

14 *Just*: It is a part of the *jadāl* discipline where all arguments including the *shar'ī* proofs are examined.

15 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala*, 3/1078–1079.

16 Taqī al-Dīn Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya, *Dar' ta'arud al-'aql ve'n-naql (Muwāfaqat sahih al-manqūl li-sarih al-ma'qūl, Muwāfaqat sarih al-ma'qūl li-sahih al-manqūl)* (Riyad: Jāmi'at al-Imām Muhammed ibn Su'ūd al-Islāmiyya, 1399/1979), 1/80.

Al-Rāzī, who was the target of such criticisms, was condemned in an alienating and exclusivist way by neo-classical understanding due to his theory on the hypotheticality of language.

III. Neo-Classical Understanding's Criticism of al-Rāzī

The first solid and systematic criticism against al-Rāzī's theory of the hypotheticality of linguistic proofs, which he employed to interpret the scriptural attributes of God in particular, was managed by Ibn Taymiyya and his student Ibn Qayyim. After addressing *ta'wīl* in the book *al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala*, Ibn Qayyim listed his criticisms against the four following methods of interpretation, which he described as *taghūt* [idolatry] and included the theory of the hypotheticality of linguistic proofs:

- i. The words of God and His Prophet are uncertain linguistic/literal proofs.
- ii. Verses and hadiths alluding to God's attributes have figurative not literal meanings.
- iii. When a conflict occurs between reason and revelation, reason takes precedence over revelation.
- iv. Accounts transmitted from the Prophet by a *al-rāwī al-'ādil* [trustworthy narrator] and are accepted by Muslims indicate speculation, not definitive knowledge.¹⁷

After recording the above premises, Ibn Qayyim states the following:

Here, these four idols do what they would do to Islam. They erased Islam's notions and symbols, burned its pillars, destroyed the scripture's dignity in the hearts, and caused infidels and heretics to damage the scripture. [Therefore,] one who produces evidence from God's book and His prophet's tradition against Islam happen to take refuge in these four idols and have used this view as a shield which restricts God's way. [However,] Allah has broken these idols one by one through His power and blessings, and might, as well as His prophets' heralds and successors.¹⁸

As is understood from the paragraph above, Ibn Qayyim labels al-Rāzī and his followers as people who distort Islam by considering themselves the Prophet's predecessor. Ibn Qayyim additionally assigned himself a sacred mission by saying that God has broken the previously mentioned idols using the prophet. Moreover,

17 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala*, 2/632.

18 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala*, 2/632–633.

his portrayal of the four views listed above as “the idols broken by God” brings to mind that the theories above contradict *al-ḍarūrāt al-dīniyya* [the main principles of Islam]; thus, advocating them is equal to supporting atheism and heresy. In other words, according to him, two irreconcilable ends are found for this issue. One is God’s way, and the other is the way of the idols that God has broken by means of His Prophets. The fact that Ibn Qayyim starts opposing the theory of the hypotheticality of linguistic proofs after drawing such a sharp distinction is worth noting in terms of showing that he used an alienating language and adopted an understanding that monopolizes religious exegesis. The following words Ibn Qayyim, whose discriminatory and exclusionary tone remained the same throughout the book, mentioned while criticizing those who prioritize reason-based proofs over revelation-based ones, can be given as an example in this context:

If you want to learn the truth, take a look at those who take revelational evidence and those who take rational and logical proofs as their bases! Compare knowledge, ‘ilm, belief, hidāya [guidance], and the lifestyle of those who prioritize revelational evidence and their kindness to people to knowledge and the lifestyle of those who prioritize reason over revelation, their harm to people, and how they expel people whom they claw from Islam.¹⁹

Based on our copy of the manuscript ascribing the theory of the hypotheticality of linguistic proofs to Ibn al-Khaṭīb (i.e., Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī), Ibn Qayyim allocated more than 150 pages of his book to criticizing this theory. He claimed this view to be false on 73 counts²⁰ and presented al-Rāzī as a Jahmī person who is not aligned with Ahl al-Sunna.²¹ When considering that Jahmiyya is represented in the books of the history of Islamic sects as a theological sect that fell apart after Jahm ibn Ṣafwan (d. 128/745-46) and had no members, the question comes to mind as to why Ibn Qayyim described al-Rāzī as Jahmī. In this context, saying that Jahmiyya had emerged as a response to Mushabbihā and Mujassima on theological issues such as God’s attributes, predestination, and free will would be correct. Because Jahmiyya members interpreted the *mutashābih* obscure verses and argued that reason might conflict with revelation, they believe revelation should be interpreted in line with the main principles of reason.²² Accordingly, when reason contradicts

19 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawā’iq al-mursala*, 2/765.

20 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawā’iq al-mursala*, 2/632–794.

21 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawā’iq al-mursala*, 2/456.

22 Şerafettin Gölçük, “Cehmiyye”, *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, 7/234.

revelation, reason is a source of knowledge that leaves out the literal meaning of scripture; however, this is not a reversible situation.

Being the first group in the history of Islamic thought to interpret scripture based on reason, Jahmiyya excessively used reason-based interpretations and prioritized reason over revelation; this led to backlash from other Islamic groups and to this group being labeled as non-Muslims.²³ Al-Rāzī's prioritization of reason over revelation when interpreting the scriptural attributes of God and his claim about the hypotheticality of linguistic proofs are analogous to Jahmiyya's ideas. This is why Ibn Qayyim used the term Jahmiyya while criticizing al-Rāzī. Here Ibn Qayyim's book should be noted as being titled *al-Şawā'iq al-mursala 'alā al-Jahmiyya wa-l-Mu'aṭṭila* [The Lightning Sent to Jahmiyya and Mu'aṭṭila]. Similarly, Ibn Qayyim had al-Rāzī and his followers in mind when he used the term *mu'aṭṭila*, which refers to people who do not accept God's attributes, because Ibn Qayyim believed al-Rāzī did not accept the scriptural attributes of God but had tried to interpret them. Therefore, Ibn Qayyim notably used the expression "Jahmiyya's *mukhannaths*" in this book of his in order to criticize the Ash'arī tradition, of which al-Rāzī was a member, because Ibn Qayyim was of the opinion that those who employ the kalām method, in particular the Ash'arīs, resembled a hermaphroditic man as they wavered between Salaf and Jahmiyya.²⁴

Ibn Qayyim associated the hypotheticality of linguistic signification with the sects charged with unbelief; thus, he implied that defending this theory leads to heresy. For instance, when he lists the objections to the conception that the linguistic proofs indicate supposition, he stated that those who discredit the possibility of knowing the meaning of the Qur'ān are more damaging than those who discredit its words, referring to Bāṭinīs. Rāfiqites destroyed the words of the Qur'ān, while Bāṭinīs destroyed its meaning. Though Bāṭinīs accepted that the Prophet's companions had conveyed the Prophet's statements correctly, they claimed that these sayings had different meanings than those Muslims took as the basis for the deeds. Ibn Qayyim considered al-Rāzī's assertion of linguistic proofs not indicating definiteness as the means by which Bāṭinīs had reached the idea above, because in order to interpret an expression, one must first accept that the indicated meaning of a word is not definite; then, this expression can be interpreted

23 Gölcük, "Cehmiyye", 234–236.

24 Harun Ögmüş, "es-Savāiku'l-Mürsele Adlı Eseri Çerçevesinde İbn Kayyim'in Rāzī'ye Yönelttiği Yorumla İlgili Tenkitler", *EKEV Akademi Dergisi* 38 (2009), 161–62.

in a way that other than its literal meaning. According to Ibn Qayyim, who stated a difference to exist between Bāṭinīs' claims and the theory of the hypotheticality of language, the idea of linguistic signification being speculative suggests that the meaning implied by such words is unknown. However, Bāṭinīsm is not like this because Bāṭinīs claim the *mutakallims*' intention is misunderstood, not unknown.²⁵ Similarly, Ibn Qayyim asserted the idea that linguistic proofs do not indicate definiteness to be utter nonsense and those who argue for it to be more detrimental than Lāadriyya and Bāṭiniyya.²⁶ How Ibn Qayyim equates Bāṭiniyya and Lāadriyya with the Ash'arīs of the later period is striking, even valuing these two sects above al-Rāzī and his followers in terms of how it shows Ibn Qayyim's opposition to al-Rāzī. Based on these sayings, one can further notice that Ibn Qayyim's harsh and judgmental tone gets ahead of his scientific identity and objectivity.

Associating al-Rāzī with infidel groups, Ibn Qayyim notably attempts to alienate and marginalize al-Rāzī while specifying his criticisms on the issue. For instance, Ibn Qayyim stated that no sect before al-Rāzī had established or justified the stated *taghūt* (i.e., the theory of the hypotheticality of linguistic proofs), alleging that even Mutazilites, Ash'arites, Shi'ites, and Kharijites did not accept this theory. According to these groups, definitive knowledge can be reached through the words of God and His Prophet. Although members of those groups have a train of thought on some issues similar to al-Rāzī's, none of them had argued for the unattainability of definitive knowledge based on the sayings from God and His Prophet.²⁷ The following paragraph can also be given as an example of Ibn Qayyim's exclusionist attitude toward the opposite idea:

Before those who refuted the definiteness of linguistic proofs, no group associated with Islam, Judaism, Christianity, or any other religion had been known to have this opinion as its falsity was apparent. Neither medical professionals, scholars of syntax, 'ilm al-ma'āni, 'ilm al-bayān, nor others.²⁸

In this context, the following couplets from Ibn Qayyim's *al-Qasīda al-Nūniyya* are noteworthy, where he describes those who subscribe to the idea of the hypotheticality of linguistic proofs:

25 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala*, 2/638-639.

26 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala*, 2/646-647.

27 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala*, 2/640.

28 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala*, 2/777.

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 لم تبد عن علم ولا إيقان إذ كل ذلك أدلة لفظية

Beware of the words of those who are divided into groups and become the followers of Shayṭān!

Ask someone who knows so they can explain their secrets to you with sincere advice and testimony,

They said: Divine guidance can be attained neither through the sunnah, hadith nor Qur'an.

For they are linguistic proofs; therefore, they do not indicate definitive knowledge.²⁹

The fact that Ibn Qayyim, who claimed the views of his opponents to contradict the Qur'an, pointed to the following verse by the first couplet given above is of particular interest in terms of showing the polarization between the two schools:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَرَّقُوا دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا شِيعًا لَسْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُمْ إِلَى اللَّهِ ثُمَّ يُنَبِّئُهُم بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ

Indeed, those who divide their religions and split into groups, you [the Prophet] do not have anything to do with them. Their judgement is only left to Allah. Then, He will inform them about what they were doing.³⁰

The previously described exclusionist attitude established around al-Rāzī and the theory of the hypotheticality of language can be seen while objecting to the premises on which the pertinent theory is based. Namely, al-Rāzī examined whether the extant knowledge of language meets the minimum requirements to indicate definiteness and decided that no uninterrupted transmission exists in language materials' transference based on two reasons; thus, transmitted information means nothing more than speculation. As the first reason, al-Rāzī claimed different opinions to be found on even the meanings of the words used frequently in daily life. For instance, whether the word Allah is Arabic or Syriac is unknown, as well as whether it is derivative or conventional; disagreement also exists about the origin of this word.³¹ He then goes on to conclude that words do

29 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Matn al-qasida al-nūniyya*, (2nd ed.). (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Taymiyya, 1417), 156.

30 al-An'am 6/159.

31 Those who say that "The name Allah is derivative" disagreed on whether the root of this word is له و له mi or له. Muhammad ibn Mahmūd al-Isfahānī, *al-Kāshif 'an al-Maḥṣūl fi 'ilm al-uṣūl* (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyya, 1419/1998), 1/467.

not indicate definitive knowledge. Al-Rāzī argued different views on the meanings of such words as *imān*, *kufr*, and *dhakāt* even exist, despite these terms being commonly used and needed. Therefore, the idea of an uninterrupted transmission in defining information about language and grammar rules is erroneous.³²

After relating the criticisms expressed above regarding the original meanings of the commonly used terms, Ibn Qayyim attacks al-Rāzī as follows:

*Look at this misunderstanding, misrepresentation, confusion, and disorientation! Everyone on Earth, regardless of being intellectual, ignorant, knowledgeable, or unknowledgeable about ishtiqaq [etymology], whether Arab or Persian, knows that the meaning of the name Allah is the owner of the worlds, the creator of the earth and the heavens, the one that kills and resurrects... Although disagreement has occurred over the etymology of the term salāt [prayer], what Allah and His Prophet indicate with the word salāt has never been argued.*³³

Al-Rāzī also considered the absence of proof based on revelation or reason against linguistic knowledge among the factors hindering the definiteness of language. While criticizing this factor, Ibn Qayyim considered the probability of absence of a reason-based proof to be the main principle of heretics and infidels and argued no other thing to exist that reduces revelation in rank as much as this factor does.³⁴ He removed the matter from a scientific ground, drew it into a sectarian controversy, and pointed out that this theory does not agree with Islam by including al-Rāzī's opinions alongside those of heretics and infidels; as such, a Muslim should not think in such a way. This exclusionist attitude from Ibn Qayyim, who maintained that the theory of the hypotheticality of language lowers the Qur'an's rank, additionally intended not just to banish him from Islam but to portray him as an opponent attacking Islam. Based on these expressions, Ibn Qayyim more clearly was alleging that the theory of the hypotheticality of language not only removes someone from religion but also declares war upon religion.

In addition to his discriminatory and exclusionist attitude described above in detail, Ibn Qayyim committed some ethical violations in his criticism of al-Rāzī. For instance, he only partially conveyed some of al-Rāzī's statements and attempted to construct an exclusionist language based on this. In particular, even though al-Rāzī affirmed in the following pages³⁵ that the proofs on the origin of the term Allah are

32 al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl*, 1/205.

33 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala*, 2/750.

34 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala*, 2/733.

35 al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl*, 1/216.

sophistry, Ibn Qayyim did not pay this any heed; therefore, he did not refrain from attacking al-Rāzī.³⁶

Ibn Qayyim's harsh and exclusionist attitude illustrated above impacted Salafi understanding as well. For example, after citing from al-Rāzī in his book *Wasatīyyāt Ahl al-sunna bayna-l-Firaq* with regard to the *al-qānūn al-kullī* that had been put forth as a hermeneutic theory and the hypotheticality of language, Ba Abdullah claimed the members of the Ash'arī school to think in the same way as Mu'tazila regarding conflict between reason and revelation in the past as was the case with the present. Afterward, he speculatively stated, "They regard reason as the base to be referred [in case of a conflict] and render conditional what the Prophet brought upon it. Therefore, they accept what is reasonable for them, and refute the unreasonable ones or interpret them." Having associated the matter with being a member of Ahl al-sunna, the author goes on to say the following:

Does this attitude of the Ash'arites toward sunnah in particular and revelational evidence in general make them Ahl al-sunna? How could such a thing happen! One of the principles distinguishing Ahl al-sunna from ahl al-bid'a is rendering the revelation and sunnah prior [to reason] and appointing them as the judge. In fact, Abū Muẓaffar al-Sam'ānī says as follows: "Know that reason is what distinguishes us from the heretics, because while Ahl al-sunna said that the foundation of religion is compliance and regarded reason as dependent on it, heretics established their religion on reason and regarded the hadith as dependent on reason. If what is fundamental in religion were reason, humans would not need revelation or prophets, the implications of the commands and prohibitions [present in the scripture] would be nullified, and everyone would say whatever they wanted."³⁷

As Ibn Qayyim said, the same author condemned Ash'arites' prioritization of reason over revelation in the reason-revelation conflict and their use of *al-qānūn al-kullī* while interpreting the scripture, asserting Ash'arites to have sometimes reached the same conclusions as the Jahmiyya and as the Mu'tazila other times. He consequently claimed the Ash'arites of the later period, including al-Rāzī, to not represent Ahl al-sunna.³⁸

As understood from the explanations given above, Ibn Qayyim discriminatingly criticized al-Rāzī due to his theory of the hypotheticality of language. Despite al-Rāzī's opinion using an exclusionist approach that achieving definiteness by means

36 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawā'iq al-mursala*, 2/750.

37 For Sam'ānī's words, see. Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Ṣawn al-mantiq wa-l-kalām 'an fann al'l-mantiq wa-l-kalām* (Majma' al-buhūth al-Islāmiyya, n.d.), 235.

38 Muḥammad Bā Karīm Muḥammad Bā Abdullāh, *Wasatīyyatu ahl al-sunna bayn al-firaq* (Riyad: Dār al-rāya, 1994), 70-72.

of contextual clues (*qarīna*) was impossible, al-Rāzī's neo-Salafi understanding had removed him from Ahl al-sunna and even from Islam; Ibn Qayyim had constructed a religiosity discourse about al-Rāzī based on a misunderstanding. Accordingly, criticisms above are formed around the claim that, according to al-Rāzī, linguistic proofs indicate speculation and attaining definiteness in language is impossible. However, al-Rāzī clearly expressed the possibility of achieving definiteness through both linguistic and non-linguistic contextual clues.³⁹ Nevertheless, the fact that he only dealt with the hypotheticality of language and had not included the theory on contextual clues in any of his books raises questions. Therefore, examining the definiteness of linguistic signification in Al-Rāzī's opinion in general terms would be fitting.

IV. A Misunderstanding: Hypotheticality of Linguistic Signification in al-Rāzī's Opinion

When looking at the works examining the hypotheticality of linguistic signification, opposing views are noted to have been attributed to al-Rāzī. Even though these views agree on the hypotheticality of language, they differ on certain issues such as the number of conditions for achieving definiteness and whether or not scriptural proofs indicate definiteness.

While Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥalli (d. 864/1459) ascribed the notion that linguistic proofs indicate definiteness directly to al-Rāzī using contextual clues,⁴⁰ Ibn al-'Irāqī (d. 826/1423) had a more cautious approach to associating the theory of contextual clues to al-Rāzī, stating, "That is the opinion that al-Rāzī puts forward in his books *al-Maḥṣūl* and *al-Arba'īn*."⁴¹ According to Zarkashī, however, al-Rāzī appeared to refute the definiteness of linguistic signification in *al-Ma'ālim* while arguing about the possibility of achieving definiteness through contextual clues in *al-Maḥṣūl* and *al-Arba'īn*. Therefore, according to al-Iraqī, the assertion that "al-Rāzī accepts the hypotheticality of linguistic proofs in an absolute sense" is incorrect.⁴²

39 For al-Rāzī's view on the hypotheticality of linguistic signification, see Mehdi Cengiz, "Fahreddin er-Rāzī'de Lafzın Manaya Delaleti Bağlamında Dilde Kesinlik Problemi" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Marmara University, 2020), 159–197.

40 Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥalli, *al-Badr al-tāli' fi ḥall Jam' al-jawāmi'* (Beirut: Muassasat al-risāla, 1426/2005), 1/181.

41 Abū Zur'a al-'Irāqī, *al-Ghays al-hāmi' sharḥ Jam'i al-jawāmi'* (Cairo: al-Fāruq al-hadītha, 1423/2003), 1/108.

42 Zarkashī, *Tashnif al-masāmi' bi-Jam' al-jawāmi'* (Cairo: Muassasatu Qurtuba, 1419/1999), 1/326–327.

The neo-classical lineage claim, particularly Ibn Taymiyya's, is based on al-Rāzī's decisive opinion in *al-Muḥaṣṣal*⁴³ that linguistic signification is hypothetical. In other words, as per his theory about contextual clues mentioned above, words can only signify meaning in a definite sense when all the possibilities al-Rāzī proposed are eliminated. However, this is unmanageable, for even if one examines the chances of a word implying a metaphor or allusion or having a rational contradiction and even concludes the word to be devoid of these possibilities, al-Rāzī persisted in discussing the matter on a speculative basis by saying, "Failing to find something does not mean that it does not exist." In this case, al-Rāzī can only be refuted by using the same argument. However, because the indication of '*adam al-wijdān* [not finding something] to '*adam al-wujūd* [the non-existence of that thing] is implausible, such arguments cannot go beyond being persuasive.

However, unlike *al-Muḥaṣṣal*, al-Rāzī did state in some of his other works (e.g., *al-Maḥṣul*) that linguistic signification conveys definiteness with the help of contextual clues transferred by way of observation or an uninterrupted transmission after confirming the hypotheticality of language.⁴⁴ For example, when someone tells a person that "The lion has come," that person may assume based on this phrase that something similar to a lion in courage or an individual with the name of Lion, or the wild animal known as a lion has come. In addition to these options, someone having come in the past or being in the process of coming, or people under the command of that person having come can be inferred from the expression "has come". Given that such possibilities exist in a language, claiming definiteness is quite challenging. However, when that person sees what is meant by the word lion and is present at the relevant time, the confusion resolves, and definitive knowledge about the word is attained. The phrase "Fatih Sultan Mehmed is the one that conquered Istanbul" can be given as an example of the definiteness of contextual clues transferred through an uninterrupted transmission. The fact that many people and sources have conveyed the occurrence of a war during the conquest (and other similar clues) renders this expression definite in terms of denoting meaning. What needs to be noted here is that the definiteness of linguistic signification derives from the contextual clues that can be described not from its nature but as environmental factors.

43 Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī, *Muḥaṣṣalu afkār al-mutaqaddimin wa-l-mutaakhhirin min al-'ulamā wa-l-hukamā wa-l-mutakallimin* (together with *Talkhis al-Muḥaṣṣal*) (Egypt: Maktaba al-kulliyāt al-Azhariyya, n.d.), 51.

44 al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣul*, 1/408.

According to al-Rāzī, after determining that scriptural proofs mean definiteness with the help of contextual clues, all possibilities should be noted to make linguistic signification speculative, or that some of them are dialectical arguments. In other words, al-Rāzī examined the possibility of *iḍmār* and *ḥadhf* preventing definiteness in language in his book *al-Arbaʿīn*, alleging that the negation word *lā* present in the verse “I swear by the Day of Judgment”⁴⁵ is an addition.⁴⁶ However, while interpreting the same verse in his exegesis, he asserted that arguing for this word being an addendum leads to negating the Qurʾān; thus, he was critical of this view⁴⁷ because if one admits a word has been added in the verses, an affirmative sentence has been able to be converted to a negative one (or vice versa). Accordingly, this possibility being included in *al-Arbaʿīn* appears to be a dialectical argument. Nevertheless, because Ibn Qayyim did not peruse other works from al-Rāzī and disregarded that al-Rāzī had analyzed all possibilities including false ones while giving his proof, Ibn Qayyim accused al-Rāzī of allowing heretics and infidels to distort Islam. Furthermore, he compared al-Rāzī to *Ahl al-kitāb* in terms of distorting the scripture.⁴⁸

The criticism from neo-classical Salafī understanding regarding the hypotheticality of linguistic signification stems from al-Rāzī’s works not being read in a comprehensive or unifying manner. When writing a book, al-Rāzī preferred to discuss the matter impartially, freeing it from the subjective perspectives of the parties instead of explaining his opinion. Despite this reason, he would only express his ideas in a couple of lines while relating opponents’ ideas for pages. Therefore, for almost all the issues he examined, al-Rāzī recounted how they had been treated by the parties to the debate as well as the arguments opposing the issue. He also included speculative argumentations in his books that had not been presented by the parties.

V. Conclusion

Different opinions on the epistemological value of linguistic signification have been introduced in the tradition of Islamic thought. Among these, the theory of the hypotheticality of language is one matter that has seen acrimonious debate

45 al-Qiyāma 75/1.

46 al-Rāzī, *al-Arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn* (Cairo: Maktabat al-kulliyāti al-Azhariyya, 1406/1986), 2/252–253.

47 al-Rāzī, *Mafātiḥ al-ghayb*, 30/719.

48 Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *al-Ṣawāʿiq al-mursala*, 2/711–712.

among scholars. This is due to definitive knowledge, which is based on this theory and required in some issues pertaining to *kalām* and *fiqh*, not being able to be attained through scripture; thus, all religious texts, especially those involving the revelational attributes of God, became open to interpretation.

Neo-classical understanding has ascribed the theory of the hypotheticality of linguistic signification to al-Rāzī and constructed a criticism of al-Rāzī based on this. According to this theory which has been associated with al-Rāzī, linguistic proofs do not indicate definiteness, as knowledge of the language has been exposed to transmission errors regarding grammar and syntax rules as well as various linguistic possibilities such as figurative expression, homonymy, and metonymy. This evaluation that formed based on certain books from al-Rāzī disregards his correction about *qarīna* [contextual clues]. As a result of this mistake, al-Rāzī has been attempted to be removed from Ahl al-sunna in a narrow sense and from Islam in a broader sense. These criticisms directed toward Ash'ari scholars, al-Rāzī in particular, derive from sectarian concerns and belonging rather than being scientific. Therefore, what is predominant in the criticisms described above is an effort to interpret al-Rāzī, not to understand him. However, the Salafi understanding that monopolizes the interpretation of religious texts has associated distortion movements with the idea of the hypotheticality of language and claimed that this theory is completely anti-religion. These criticisms detailed above result from not reading al-Rāzī holistically and not knowing the method of query that constitutes his writing style.

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