

**Philosophizing in the Style of Commentaries:
Indefinability of Existence in the Tradition of *Tajrīd al-i'tiqād* of al-Ṭūsī (d. 1274) ¹**

Ayşe Betül Dönmez Tekin

The commentary and gloss tradition had emerged from the beginning of Islamic history. Although these genres were celebrated for much of Islamic history, they came under attack since the encounter with European colonial powers. In order to explain away the power imbalance between Europe and the Muslim world, it was claimed that these kinds of genres prevented writing original works, which was judged by Europeans as being a sign of underdevelopment. In the last few decades, many scholars have critiqued this orientalist approach, which assumes that the Islamic intellectual tradition declined after al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) attacks on the philosophers, particularly on Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), in his *Incoherence of the Philosophers* despite Ibn Rushd's (d. 595/1198) defense of philosophy.² According to Toshihiko Izutsu (d.1993), the reason for this orientalist assumption is that there was no major Muslim philosopher who influenced Western philosophy after Ibn Rushd.³ In fact, since the nineteenth century, many Muslim scholars adopted this Orientalist view. For instance, Jamāl al-dīn al-Afghānī (d. 1897) and Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938), even though they criticized Ernest Renan's (d. 1892) attacks, they acknowledged his claims about Persia's superiority in science and philosophy, and about the decline theory.⁴

¹ This paper is based on the introduction of my PhD dissertation (Marmara University Institute of Social Sciences, 2013) and a version of it was presented at MISSC 4th Annual Graduate Student Symposium in May 2014 in Montreal, Canada.

² Dimitri Gutas, "The Study of Arabic Philosophy in the Twentieth Century: An Essay on the Historiography of Arabic Philosophy," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, V. 29, No. 1 (May 2002), pp. 5-25.

³ Toshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, Tokyo, 1971, p.58.

⁴ Ernest Renan, "Islamism and Science," in *The Poetry of the Celtic Races and Other Essays by Ernest Renan*, translated by William G. Hutchison (London: The Walter Scott Publishing, 1896), p.86, 94.

Orientalist perceptions are also manifested in the attitude toward forms of writing such as commentaries and glosses. In other words, there has been a degrading approach to the commentary tradition. Many Muslim scholars, such as Fazlur Rahman (d. 1988),⁵ approved that commentaries and glosses prevented progress in intellectual activities. In his *Islam and Modernity*, Rahman argues that studying commentaries instead of original texts brought about preoccupation with details. Secondly, he asserts that the main texts, which can easily be memorized without understanding (for instance *Tajrīd al-i'tiqād* of al-Ṭūsī) resulted in wasting intellectual energy in writing commentaries on them.⁶ Therefore, he claims that there were no original and innovative works due to an obsession with commentaries and super-commentaries.

In this paper, I discuss two issues. First, I note the recent critiques of the Orientalist view of Islamic intellectual history. Second, I look at the commentaries on *Tajrīd al-i'tiqād* (Abstraction of Belief), a Shī'ī creedal handbook, of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274). I examine the definition of existence and non-existence from the *Tajrīd* and its commentaries. We will see that commenting on a concise main text is not only explaining its ambiguous meanings but also the site of encountering views of other scholars, completing the core text, raising new issues, and expressing one's ideas. I conclude by suggesting the importance of studying commentaries to understand the development of Islamic intellectual thought.

As a critique of the Orientalist view of Islamic intellectual history, Ismail Kara suggests that it entails a myth of originality which arises from Enlightenment thought.⁷ The development of Islamic thought is viewed against the backdrop of European thought, with a fixation on finding the same trajectory. However, as Kara notes, this Eurocentric view of Muslim intellectual history does not consider novelties in commentaries and margins of the texts.⁸

George Saliba, who mainly worked on astronomy in the Islamic world, writes that “if we only look at the surviving scientific documents, we can clearly delineate a very

⁵ See. Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

⁶ Fazlur Rahman, *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982, p.37-8.

⁷ Ismail Kara, *Ilim Bilmez Tarih Hatırlamaz Serh ve Hasiye Meselesine Dair Birkac Not*, Istanbul: Dergah Yayinlari, 2011, p.91.

⁸ Kara, *ibid*, p.98.

flourishing activity in almost every scientific discipline in the centuries following Ghazālī.”⁹ Followers of the Orientalist approach did not believe that there was any significant intellectual activity in the post-classical era; thus, they did not study works written in this period. Saliba’s work is significant as it especially notes contributions of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, who established the Marāgha observatory, and had composed important works in mathematical sciences. Although his contributions to astronomy have been acknowledged, al-Ṭūsī’s studies on philosophical theology have been neglected so far, despite the fact that he is the foremost Shī‘ī scholar. Below, we will look at al-Ṭūsī’s *kalam* book to see debates on one metaphysical issue.

Al-Ṭūsī and his *Tajrīd al-i‘tiqād*

Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī was born into a Twelver-Shī‘ī family in Ṭūs, in modern day Iran. He lived in the thirteenth century when the Islamic world was fragmented into various dynasties as a result of the declining authority of the Abbasid caliphs and the Mongolian invasion. Despite this political fragmentation, there was a vibrant intellectual environment.¹⁰ Ṭūsī had a critical position in this period as he was working with the leaders, especially being the adviser of the Mongolian ruler Hulāgu Khan, which gave him influence. Owing to his ties with Hulāgu, he was able to convince him to build an observatory in Marāgha.¹¹ This observatory played a significant role in the transmission of philosophical sciences as it brought together many leading scholars such as Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311), Mu‘ayyad al-Dīn al-‘Urḍī (d. 664/1266), etc.

⁹ George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance*, Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011, p.21.

¹⁰ For more information on al-Ṭūsī’s life and biography see Mudarris Razavi, *al-‘Allāma al-Khawāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī Ḥayātuhu wa-Athāruhu*, Mashhad: Bunyad-i Pizhuhishha-yi Islami, Astan-i Quds-i Razavi, 1419, pp.11-38.

¹¹ According to Mojan Momen, Khwāja Naṣīr became Hulagu Khan’s astrologer in 1256 and was able to save many of the valuable manuscripts in the libraries of Alamut and Baghdad from destruction at the hands of the Mongols. (Mojan Momen, *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam: The History and Doctrines of Twelver Shi‘ism*, Yale University Press, 1985, p.322)

In the thirteenth century, Ibn Sīnā's philosophy became widespread in the Islamic world. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī was among those who propagated his philosophy. Gerhard Endress mentions the existence of a philosophical tradition based on Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt* per a report by Ibn al-Akfānī (d. 749/1348) about chain of transmission of this text. This chain, beginning with Ibn Sīnā, includes Bahmanyār b. al-Marzubān, Abū al-Faṭḥ b. al-Khayyāmī, Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mas'ūdī, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, Quṭb al-Dīn Ibrāhīm al-Miṣrī, Athīr al-Dīn al-Abharī, to Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī.¹² This chain of transmission also shows the transmission of philosophical knowledge from Ibn Sīnā to al-Ṭūsī. In fact, al-Ṭūsī wrote one of the most well-known commentaries on *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*, entitled *Ḥall mushkilāt al-ishārāt*, in which he defends Ibn Sīnā against Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's criticism. al-Ṭūsī is both a commentator (*shāriḥ*) and a verifier (*muḥaqqiq*) in the late kalam tradition.

Al-Ṭūsī wrote dozens of books on subjects ranging from philosophical sciences to religious sciences.¹³ However, it was his *Tajrīd al-i' tiqād*, which became an authoritative textbook in the madrasas. Studying the *Tajrīd* and its commentaries is very crucial for understanding post-classical Islamic thought.¹⁴ It consists of six chapters: (i) General matters, (ii) Substances and accidents, (iii) Proofs for the existence of the Creator, His attributes and His acts, (iv) Prophethood, (v) Imamate, and (vi) Hereafter/Resurrection (*ma'ād*). These chapters are the main issues of late *kalam* thought. This division of a theology book became a model for late kalam texts. The first and second chapters are on the subjects of *falsafa*, i.e., metaphysics and natural philosophy. They occupy more than half of the book. After these two chapters, he begins his theology and deals with an argument on the existence of God using Ibn Sīnā's evidence from contingency. Al-Ṭūsī's theology is based on Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics which makes a distinction between necessary

¹² Gerhard Endress, "Reading Avicenna in the Madrasa: Intellectual Genealogies and Chains of Transmission of Philosophy and the Sciences in the Islamic East", in *Arabic Theology, Arabic Philosophy, from the Many to the One: Essays in Celebration of Richard M. Frank*, ed. James E. Montgomery. Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2006, p. 420.

¹³ For al-Ṭūsī's works on mathematics and astronomy see George Saliba, "Tusi, Nasir-al-Din", *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 20 July 2009. <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/tusi-nasir-al-din>

¹⁴ For a list of the commentaries and glosses on the *Tajrīd*, see. Robert Wisnovsky, "The Nature and Scope of Arabic Philosophical Commentary in Post-Classical (CA.1100-1900 AD) Islamic Intellectual History: Some Preliminary Observations", *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies, Special Issue: Philosophy Science & Exegesis*, Volume 47, February 2004, pp. 182–3.

and contingent existence and rejects atomism. In other chapters, al-Ṭūsī uses Ash‘arī or Mu‘tazilī views. Hereby, as a post classical work, *Tajrīd* integrates *falsafa* and *kalam*.

With *Tajrīd al-i‘tiqād*, al-Ṭūsī systematized Twelver Shī‘ī theology, and became the founder of philosophical theology in the Shī‘ī world. The *Tajrīd*, as a canonical work, took the interest of many commentators both Sunnī and Shī‘ī for centuries. Many Sunnī scholars such as al-Iṣfahānī (d. 749/1349), al-Jurjānī (d. 816/1413), al-Qūshjī (d. 879/1474), and al-Dawānī (d. 908/1502), wrote commentaries and glosses on it. Some of those commentaries were used as textbooks in madrasas, and thus they became more popular than others. In madrasas, usually instruction in a specific subject was based on brief texts, and commentaries were studied in a later stage. Besides, the prevalence of memorization in the madrasa system was one of the stimulants for writing and teaching condensed or abstract texts such as the *Tajrīd*.¹⁵

In Shī‘ī madrasas, the *Tajrīd* was usually taught with the following commentaries:

1. *Kashf al-murād fī sharḥ tajrīd al-i‘tiqād* of ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī,
2. *Tasdīd al-qawā‘id fī sharḥ tajrīd al-‘aqā‘id* of Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī,
3. *Sharḥ tajrīd al-kalām* of ‘Alā al-Dīn al-Qūshjī,
4. *Shawāriq al-ilhām fī sharḥ tajrīd al-kalām* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Lāhijī.¹⁶

The *Tajrīd* was studied along with these authoritative commentaries in both Sunnī and Shī‘ī madrasas. Among these commentators, ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī (d. 726/1325) and ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Lāhijī (d. 1072/1662) were Shī‘ī scholars. Al-Ḥillī was a student of al-Ṭūsī and he was responsible for the conversion of the Mongol ruler Sultan Khudābandah (Oljeitu) to Shiism.¹⁷ The commentaries of al-Iṣfahānī and al-Qūshjī were studied in the Sunnī madrasas of the Ottoman Empire as well. Nevertheless, they criticize al-Ṭūsī’s Shī‘ī doctrines, particularly in the chapter on the imamate.

Al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī’s gloss was known as *Hāshiya-i Tajrīd* among Ottoman scholars. It was written on the first two chapters of al-Iṣfahānī’s commentary. Some sultans made this gloss a required textbook. As a result, its glosses and superglosses

¹⁵ For more information on the education in the madrasas see. George Makdisi, *The Rise of Colleges: Institutions of Learning in Islam and the West*, Edinburgh University Press, 1981.

¹⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “The Traditional Texts Used in Persian "Madrasahs"”, *Islamic Quarterly*, 19:3/4 (1975: July/Dec.), p.181.

¹⁷ Momen, *An Introduction to Shi‘i Islam*, p.313.

increased.¹⁸ According to regulations of the Sultan Mehmed II, al-Jurjānī's gloss was taught at the lowest level madrasas, which were also known as *Ḥāshiya-i Tajrīd Madrasas*.¹⁹ However, 'Alī al-Qūshjī's commentary was studied at upper-level madrasas. Those commentaries were studied systematically. The development of commentary/gloss writing is related to this kind of education system in the madrasas.

Orientalists put all the commentaries in the same category. However, when we look at this style of writing, we can see that this is not the case. There is not just one purpose of writing a commentary (*sharḥ*) or a gloss (*ḥāshiya*). Some commentaries were written for education, and some to show the problems of the text. Some of them first try to explain the main text, then discuss other views on the topic, and finally, express their objections to other views, if they disagree. Robert Wisnovsky in his recent article clarifies the function of commentaries. Their function is verification (*taḥqīq*) of the core text, which has a spectrum from philological to philosophical.²⁰ Thus, commentaries play different roles and there is not just one category of commenting. Wisnovsky also suggests treating post-Avicennian *kalām* texts and commentaries as serious philosophy,²¹ since commentaries on *kalām* texts include sophisticated philosophical discussions.²² Similarly, Asad Ahmed demonstrates the growth of philosophical discourse in a commentary/gloss tradition.²³

According to Kātip Chelebī (d. 1067/1657), there are three forms of commenting: 1. *qāla-aqūlu* (he said-I say) commentary, 2. *qawlihi* (his expression) commentary, and 3. *mamzūj* (mixed) commentary. Most of the *muḥaqqiqūn* (verifiers) from the *muta'akhhirūn* (post-classical) period preferred to use the third method.²⁴ According to this division, commentators and glossators of the *Tajrīd* used all of three of these forms.

¹⁸ Kātip Chelebī, *Kashf al-Ẓunūn 'an Asāmī al-Kutub wa-l-Funūn*, Cairo: Dār al-Ṭibā'a al-Miṣriyya, 1858, v.1, p.192.

¹⁹ Tashkubrīzādah Ahmed Efendi mentions that he studied and taught *Ḥāshiya-i Tajrīd*, as a curricular text in Ottoman madrasas, while writing his autobiography (*al-Shaqāiq al-Nu'māniyya fī 'ulamā al-dawlat al-Uthmāniyya*, Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-'arabī, 1975, p. 328.)

²⁰ Wisnovsky, R. (2013). Avicennism and Exegetical Practice in the Early Commentaries on the *Ishārāt*. *Oriens*, 41(3-4), 349-378.

²¹ Wisnovsky, Avicennism, 2013, p. 350.

²² Wisnovsky, Avicennism, 2013, p. 351.

²³ Ahmed, A. Q. (2013). Post-Classical Philosophical Commentaries/Glosses: Innovation in the Margins. *Oriens*, 41(3-4), 317-348.

²⁴ Kātip Chelebī, 23.

Al-Ḥillī used the first method. He first wrote the text starting with “*qāla*” and then wrote his comments starting with “*aqūlu.*” al-Jurjānī used the second method, which distinguishes the texts from gloss by starting with “*qawlihi.*” This kind of gloss did not include all the text. Al-Qūshjī and al-Lāhijī used the third method, a combination (*mazj*) of the core text and the comments. In this method, the text is distinguished with a line drawn on it from the commentary part. If there are different explanations (*taqrīr*) of the main text, al-Qūshjī presents them and then writes his own evaluations. At the end, he gives his view on the subject. Among the four commentaries mentioned above, al-Lāhijī’s is the latest and the most comprehensive one. He quotes extensively from previous eminent scholars and theologians such as al-Fārābī (d. 950), Ibn Sīnā (d. 1037), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 1209), al-Iṣfahānī (d. 1348), ‘Aḍud al-Dīn al-Ījī (d.1355), al-Taftāzānī (d. 1390), al-Jurjānī (d. 1413), Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (d. 1502), and Saḍr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 1636). He also presents his own views after lengthy quotations from such scholars.

Defining Existence and Non-existence

After the standard prayers, al-Ṭūsī begins his text by discussing general ontology (*al-umūr al-‘amma*) which includes three sections: existence, quiddity, and causality. In the first section, al-Ṭūsī deals with the indefinability of the concept of existence (*wujūd*) and non-existence (*‘adam*). According to Ibn Sīnā and al-Ṭūsī, there is nothing more knowable than existence. Existence is the most general concept. Therefore, existence is indefinable.²⁵ It is common to everything. Yet, non-existence is not a common thing, but it is the counterpart of existence. Al-Ṭūsī recounts two definitions of existence and non-existence given by previous scholars and points out that all of them are circular. He concludes that it is impossible to define existence and non-existence. He states:

Their [*wujūd* and *‘adam*] definitions are made with subsistent identity (*thābit al-‘ayn*) and negated identity (*manfī al-‘ayn*); or that which can be predicated of (*yukhbar ‘anhu*) and its opposite; or anything else (*bi-ghayr thālik*), which involve an apparent circularity (*dawr*).²⁶

²⁵ Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd al-‘aqā’id*, ed. ‘Abbās Sulaymān, Alexandria: Dār al-Ma‘rifā al-Jāmiyya, 1996, p. 63; Alparslan Acikgenc, “The Concept of Existence in Tusi’s Philosophy”, *Dokuz Eylul Universitesi Ilahiyat Fakultesi Dergisi*, 1985, v. 2, pp. 125-126.

²⁶ al-Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd al-‘aqā’id*, p.63.

This statement shows that there were at least three definitions of existence and non-existence before al-Ṭūsī. ‘Allāma al-Ḥillī, who wrote the first commentary of the *Tajrīd*, i.e., *Kashf al-murād* (Unveiling the Intention), discloses these definitions. According to al-Ḥillī, the first definition, which existence is the subsistent identity, belongs to the theologians; and the second definition belongs to the philosophers, who see existence as a predication. Moreover, al-Ḥillī agrees with al-Ṭūsī that these definitions are circular because they are made by synonymous phrases since existence and subsistence have the same meaning. Al-Ḥillī also notes that the third definition of existence, which is not mentioned by al-Ṭūsī, is one of the false definitions, without explaining what it is.²⁷ Nevertheless, this false definition is included in Shams al-Dīn al-Iṣfahānī’s commentary, *Tasdīd al-qawā‘id* (*Fortification of the principles*): “Existent is agent (*fā‘il*), and non-existent is passive (*munfa‘il*, i.e., being acted upon)”.²⁸ In his gloss on the *Tasdīd*, al-Jurjānī states that this definition has an error. Based on Ibn Sīnā’s *al-Shifā*, he corrected the third definition as: “Existent is either agent or passive, non-existent is neither agent nor passive.”²⁹ Here we can see how a later gloss amends a mistake in a commentary.³⁰

Jurjānī clarifies the reasons of circularity for each definition. The first is defined with the concept of existent. In fact, it is defining something with itself. Thus, it is similar to circular definition which requires the trouble of something being prior to (*taqaddum*) itself. As for the second one it is said because “which (*alladhī*)” points to the existent and its outcome is what is possible to subsist in the predicate, it is similar to say “it is the existent which has predicate with possibility”. As for the third one it is circular because the agent is the effective existent.³¹ The third definition is further discussed in detail by later commentators such as ‘Alī al-Qūshjī who notes that it is circular because the verb “to be” in the definition is synonymous with existence, and the words “being active and passive” together are also synonymous with existent.³²

²⁷ Ibn al-Muṭahhar al-Ḥillī, *Kashf al-murād fī sharḥ Tajrīd al-i‘tiqād*, Beirut: Mu’assasat al-‘Ālamī, 1988, p.4.

²⁸ al-Iṣfahānī, *Tasdīd al-qawā‘id fī sharḥ Tajrīd al-‘aqā‘id*, ed. Khālīd b. Hammād al-‘Adwānī (Kuwait: Dār al-Ḍiyā’, 2012), v. I, p. 183.

²⁹ al-Sayyid al-Sharīf al-Jurjānī, *Hāshiyā ‘alā Sharḥ Tajrīd li-Iṣfahānī*, Istanbul: Suleymaniye Library, (MS Damad İbrahim Paşa 785), 1074/1663, fol. 9a.

³⁰ ‘Alī al-Qūshjī, *Sharḥ Tajrīd al-Kalām*, lithograph, Tehran, 1301 [1884], p.4.

³¹ al-Jurjānī, *Hāshiyā*, 9a.

³² al-Qūshjī, *Sharḥ*, p.4.

Al-Lāhijī relates two classifications as the third definition, *bi-ghayr thālik*, in his commentary. The first is defining existent as that which can be categorized as active (*fā'il*) or passive (*munfa'il*), and the second is that which is categorized as created (*ḥādith*) or eternal (*qadīm*). The non-existent is defined by the negation of these definitions of existent. According to al-Lāhijī, both of these definitions belong to the philosophers, and they are circular as well.³³ Here we see the complementary function of commentaries by expanding the text.

Another issue that is raised while discussing definitions of existence is whether existence and existent are synonymous. Al-Ṭūsī does not discuss this issue in his text, but commentators/glossators examine it in detail. For instance, al-Qūshjī asserts that there is no difference between “existence” and “existent,” in other words, they have the same meaning. Jurjānī explains this by utilizing arguments from semiotics (*'ilm al-waḍ'*):

The concept of existent (*mawjūd*) contains two things: the concept of existence, and the meaning of the accusative form (*maf'ūl*). Since the meaning of derivative words are known by everybody who knows the language, one would understand the meaning of existent if they understood the meaning of existence.³⁴

Al-Lāhijī discusses the difference between existence and existent too. Drawing from al-Fārābī, al-Lāhijī states that existence is the possibility of being active or passive, while existent is the thing that brings about that possibility.³⁵ Ibn Sīnā also makes a similar distinction between existence and existent.³⁶

Al-Ṭūsī concurs with Ibn Sīnā that a real definition of existence is not possible; however, all those definitions can be considered as nominal/dictionary definitions. He states, “What is meant here is the definition of the utterance (*lafẓ*), as nothing can be known better than existence.”³⁷ Al-Ṭūsī rejects all these definitions because they yield a vicious circularity. The aim of these kind of definitions could be definition of the notion. According to al-Ṭūsī, these definitions are not real. Existence does not need any definition because it is so clear; it is self-evident.³⁸ Nevertheless, it is possible to refer them as nominal

³³ 'Abd al-Razzāq al-Lāhijī, *Shawāriq al-Ilhām fī Sharḥ Tajrīd al-Kalām*, ed. Akbar Asad Alizadah, Qum: Mu'assasat al-Imām al-Ṣādiq, 2005, pp.102-3.

³⁴ al-Qūshjī, *Sharḥ*, p.5; al-Jurjānī, *Ḥāshiya*, 10a.

³⁵ al-Lāhijī, *Shawāriq*, p.100.

³⁶ For more information see Parviz Morewedge, *The Metaphysica of Avicenna*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1973, pp.161-173.

³⁷ al-Ṭūsī, *Tajrīd*, p. 63.

³⁸ The next discussion of al-Ṭūsī is on the proofs for being self-evident of existence.

definition, which is elaborated by the commentators/glossators. Nominal definition is replacing a notion with another one. An example is given by Jurjānī. “Ghazanfar is lion; it is like a description with a synonym word.”³⁹ Al-Ḥillī points out that real definitions (*taḥdīd*) entail a new form of the concept, while nominal definitions only replace the concept with a more commonly known word.⁴⁰ Al-Iṣfahānī asserts that by dictionary definition he means “that for which the word is posited, corresponding to it, is known insofar it is, but unknown insofar it is the signified by the word. Hence that thing is defined by it from that perspective. Insofar as it is signified by another word it is known that it is signified by it. Definition in this way is not circular.”⁴¹

Besides al-Ḥillī and al-Iṣfahānī point out that nominal definitions are frequently used with regard to necessarily be known things (*al-ma‘luma al-ḍarūriyya*). Because obtaining what is already obtained is impossible, defining something self-evident is impossible.⁴² al-Iṣfahānī writes: “Self-evident concepts (*bedīhiyyāt*) can only be defined nominally, but they cannot really (*haqīqah*) be defined. Acquired concepts (*kasbiyyāt*) can be defined with both of them. Synonym words are proper for the definition if they are more common.”⁴³ In other words, real definition is impossible for a priori things such as existence and nonexistence, but they can be known through these nominal definitions. Herewith, Jurjānī inserts his view that if we have a good opinion of the definers that they meant their definitions are nominal, otherwise the definitions are defective. Here again, the commentators played a dynamic role as Wisnovsky suggested. They are doing *taḥqīq* (verification) through intervening, revising, repairing, and completing the author.⁴⁴

I would like to note the conflict between Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī (d. 908/1502) and Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Dashtakī (d. 903/1498) as manifested in their glosses on ‘Alī al-Qūshjī’s commentary on the *Tajrīd* as an example of the different uses of the *sharḥ* and *ḥāshiya* style. In his recent book, Reza Pourjavady discusses the philosophical disagreement between al-Dawānī and al-Dashtakī. He points out that they held different views on many issues such as the liar paradox, the distinction between existence and existent, and mental

³⁹ al-Jurjānī, *Hāshiya*, 9b.

⁴⁰ al-Ḥillī, *Kashf*, p.5.

⁴¹ al-Iṣfahānī, *Tasdīd*, p. 184.

⁴² al-Ḥillī, *Kashf*, p.5; al-Iṣfahānī, *Tasdīd*, p. 184.

⁴³ al-Iṣfahānī, *Tasdīd*, p. 185.

⁴⁴ Wisnovsky, *Avicennism*, pp. 356-7.

existence.⁴⁵ This dispute shows that scholars did express their ideas and object to their opponents through commentaries and glosses.⁴⁶

As noted above, recently theories on the commentarial writing have changed. The importance of commentary traditions in post-classical *kalam* and *falsafa* has been acknowledged. When we examine the commentaries in this period, we can see that Muslim scholars used different writing styles in order to present their views. All of these forms of writing are venues for expressing “original” ideas and should be considered as primary sources. By looking at how a subject of al-Ṭūsī’s *Tajrīd* was commented on, we saw these different forms of writing, and the expansion of the text by either explaining its meaning, enlarging it with further examples, criticizing a misconception, or challenging other commentaries. I suggest that by studying commentaries and glosses we can gain valuable insight into the intellectual development in the Muslim world. When we study a commentary tradition, we will know how commentaries as a genre of writing are original and useful.

There is no doubt that al-Ṭūsī had an important role in the continuation of philosophy. As Henry Corbin (d. 1978) says, “it could be said that if Irannian Avicennism, unlike the Latin Avicennism which died a premature death, has continued down to our days, it was Nasir Tusi who was its chief agent.”⁴⁷ However, as I have mentioned above, al-Ṭūsī’s book was studied in the madrasas and was commented upon by Sunnī scholars. Thus, I assert although Corbin and Nasr rightly point out the continuation of philosophical thought in Persia; they have neglected the trajectory of philosophy in the Sunnī Ottoman lands. They claimed that philosophy was only alive in Iran owing to Shiism, while it was dying in other parts of the Muslim world.⁴⁸ After the death of Ibn Rushd, Izutsu articulates, “a kind of philosophy” which is known as *ḥikmat* developed in Persia among the Shī‘a.⁴⁹ In his book entitled *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, Izutsu uses the term “Iranian”

⁴⁵ Reza Pourjavady, *Philosophy in Early Safavid Iran Najm al-Din Mahmud al-Nayrizi and His Writings*, Brill 2011, pp.75-105; cf. Kātip Celebī, *ibid*, p.194.

⁴⁶ Al-Dashtakī’s father was also a scholar, and he wrote many glosses. Al-Dashtakī writes that his father “chose to write most of his works in the form of glosses, since in glosses there is no need to benefit others by repeating what has already been said in other texts and the commentaries”. (Pourjavady, *ibid.*, p.23)

⁴⁷ Corbin, Henry, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, London: The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1993, p.320.

⁴⁸ Corbin, *ibid*, p.320.

⁴⁹ Izutsu, *ibid*, p.59.

to identify Eastern philosophy. This thought may seem true, but we do not have enough analysis on Ottoman sources to make this inference. As we can see from the commentaries of the *Tajrīd*, which includes many philosophical issues, they were read both in Sunnī and Shī'ī madrasas. Brief texts were used as textbooks in madrasas and memorization of them was easier for students. However, they were so condensed that they needed to be commented on. The philosophical discussions were elaborated in the commentaries and glosses.

One thing we can infer from this prevalence of the *Tajrīd* and its commentaries is that they disprove the Orientalist view that philosophy was not studied after the twelfth century in the Islamic world. Intellectual activity did not stop after al-Ghazālī, but rather it arose in the thirteenth century and developed as philosophical theology. The *Tajrīd* combines philosophy and theology. As our discussion of existence shows, such issues were discussed not based on scriptures, but based on human reason. Philosophical contributions of the commentators are in many aspects. Therefore, if one looks for philosophical discussions of existence in the postclassical Islamic world, then it is necessary to study books such as *Tajrīd al-i'tiqād* and their commentaries and glosses, which number more than two hundred.