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The analysis of Ibn Taimiyah's criticism against the religious philosophy of ikhwan al-Safa

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore Ibn Taimiyah's critique of the religious philosophy of Ikhwan al-Safa and analyze the underlying reasons for his criticism. It is library research with a descriptive qualitative nature. The historical-philosophical approach is used to trace the origins of Ibn Taimiyah's and Ikhwan al-Safa's thoughts, examining the background and influences that shaped their ideas. Ibn Taimiyah's comments on Ikhwan al-Safa's thoughts are analyzed to understand his attitudes and criticisms systematically. The findings reveal that Ibn Taimiyah lived in politically turbulent times, facing challenges from Mongols, Crusaders, and internal sect divisions among Muslims. Consequently, he engaged in criticism and refutation to purify religion from what he perceived as deviant sects. The religious philosophy of Ikhwan al-Safa, criticized by Ibn Taimiyah, encompasses topics such as the religion and philosophy harmony, the emanation theory, the prophecy concept, angels, devils, and the spirit resurrection. Ibn Taimiyah's criticism of Ikhwan al-Safa aligns with other scholars' philosophy critiques. He tends to generalize Ikhwan al-Safa with other philosophers, overlooking specific differences. Ibn Taimiyah labeled them as disbelievers with a specific takfir, lacking direct arguments due to the vast time gap between them, spanning three centuries. The implication of this research is to raise awareness among Muslims about the diversity of Islamic thought, making criticism and objections a common practice. Muslims are encouraged to engage with Islamic thought and conduct scholarly rebuttals and criticisms only after thoroughly understanding the ideas they critique.

Keywords: Criticism; Ibnu Taimiyah; ikhwan al-Safa; philosophy; takfir

1. INTRODUCTION

The encounter between Islamic civilization and philosophy has given rise to philosophers who are known in the history of Islamic thought. These philosophers, in their own ways, attempted to reconcile revelation and reason, religion and philosophy, rather than separating them as they are often accused of.¹ This is the school of *Mashsha'iyah*, which is considered as an early school of Islamic philosophy that synthesizes the teachings of Islam with Aristotelianism and Neoplatonism.²

The introduction of philosophy into the treasury of Islamic thought did not encounter smooth sailing. The Muslim community's response to philosophy can be divided into three categories: first, those who fully embraced philosophy, and these are the philosophers of the Islamic world; second, those who selectively adopted certain aspects of philosophy while rejecting others, and these are the proponents of Mu'tazilah and kalam, and third, those who rejected philosophy entirely, and this includes many scholars of hadith and Islamic jurisprudence.³ According to Harun Nasution, Islam as a true religion should not be viewed solely from one aspect but also from various aspects, including the philosophical aspect. Therefore, religion and philosophy should go hand in hand because Islam encourages philosophical inquiry.⁴ In Islam, philosophy is seen as a tool to strengthen the position of Islam, such as reinforcing the existence of Allah, and it can even be used to address new issues that did not exist during the time of the revelation of the Qur'an.⁵ Until now, the study of Islamic philosophy continues not only within the Islamic world but also in universities in America and Europe. This is evident through the numerous translations of works by Muslim philosophers into various languages, as well as international conferences and scientific studies in the form of theses and dissertations.

On the other hand, the rejection of philosophy has existed since the early introduction of philosophy into Islamic civilization. Imam al-Shafi'i (d. 204 AH/820 AD) stated that the reason for human ignorance and disputes is due to abandoning the Arabic language and relying on the language of Aristotle.⁶ One of the figures who

¹ A. Khudori Soleh, "Mencermati Sejarah Perkembangan Filsafat Islam," Jurnal Tsaqafah 10, no. 1 (2014): p. 63–84.

² Hasan bakti Nasution, "Mashsha'iyah: Mazhab Awal Filsafat Islam," Jurnal Theologia 27, no. 1 (2016): p. 73–102.

³ Ahmad bin 'Abd al-Halim bin 'Abd al-Salam bin Taimiyah Al-Harrani, *Majmu' al-Fatawa*, Jilid 9, (Madinah: Majma' al-Malik Fahd, 2004), p. 266

⁴ Ahmad Taofiq, "Agama dan Filsafat Dalam Perspektif harun nasution (Studi Analisis Faktor-faktor Kebangkitan islam Indonesia)," Jurnal Reflektika 13, no. 2 (2018): p. 153-179.

⁵ Azis Masang, "Kedudukan Filsafat Dalam Islam," *Jurnal Pilar* 11, no. 1 (2020): p. 30-55.

⁶ Jalaluddin Al-Suyuti, *Saunu al-Mantiq wa al-Kalam fi 'an Fanni al-Mantiq wa al-Kalam* (Kairo: Majma' al-Buhus al-Islamiyah, T.Tahun), p. 48

strongly responded to the presence of philosophy in Islamic thought was Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 728 AH/1328 AD). He considered philosophy to be a dangerous innovation (bid'ah) that contains denial of Islamic concepts of divinity (ilhad) and even deemed it more condemned than kalam. However, Ibn Taymiyyah maintained an objective stance and did not generalize his criticism to all philosophers.7 Ibn Taymiyyah maintained an objective and fair approach in presenting and criticizing philosophy. He was meticulous in quoting and trustworthy in his exposition. The criterion he used in presenting his views was the Qur'an and the Sunnah. He accepted what aligned with them and refuted anything that contradicted them using textual evidence and rational arguments, clearly pointing out the points of disagreement.8

One of the philosophical groups criticized by Ibn Taymiyyah was the group known as the Ikhwan al-Safa or Brethren of Purity. According to the Practical Encyclopedia of Religion, Sects, and Contemporary Thought, the Ikhwan al-Safa were a secret society that blended Greek philosophy, esoteric beliefs, and Islamic theology. This group emerged from the Batiniyah movement and was utilized by Shia and Sufi groups as a cover to disseminate their writings and ideas.9 It is mentioned that this group wrote those texts and concealed the identities of the authors, then spread them among the booksellers in the city of Basra. 10 The writings produced by this group are known as the "Epistles of the Brethren of Purity" (Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa' wa Khullān al-Wafā'). 11 Ibn Taymiyyah commented on the book "Epistles of the Brethren of Purity" by stating that it was written by a group of people from the Buwayhid dynasty in Baghdad. He described them as adherents of Sabianism who were influenced by philosophical and Hanifi religious beliefs. They incorporated altered Sabian religion, philosophy, and elements from Islamic teaching. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, the book contained numerous acts of disbelief (kufr) and ignorance (jahiliyyah).12 On the contrary, the Ikhwan al-Safa themselves stated in their Epistles that they were individuals who had been bestowed with knowledge and faith.¹³

⁷ Nurcholish Madjid, "Ibn Taymiyya on Kalam and Falsafa" (The University of Chicago, 1984), p. 150.

⁸ Salih Al-Gamidi, Mauqif Syaikh al-Islam Ibnu Taimiyah min Ara' al-Falasifah wa Manhajuhu fi 'Ardiha, (1st ed; Riyad: Maktabah al-Ma'arif, 2003), p. 592

⁹ Al-Nadwah al-'Alamiyah li al-Syabab Al-Islami, *Al-Mausu'ah Al-Muyassarah Fi Al-Adyan Wa Al-*Mazahib Wa Al-Ahzab Al-Mua'asirah vol. 2, (1st ed; Riyad: Dar al-Nadwah al-'Alamiyah, 2014), p. 960.

¹⁰ Abu Hayyan Al-Tauhidi, *Al-Imta' Wa Al-Muanasah* (Beirut: Al-Maktabah Al-Unsuriyyah, 2002), p. 163.

¹¹ Selanjutnya kitab Rasa'il Ikhwan Al-Safa' wa Khullan al-Wafa' akan disebut dengan Rasail

¹² Al-Harrani, Majmu' al-Fatawa, vol. 4, p. 79

¹³ Ikhwan Al-Safa, *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khullan al-Wafa*, vol. 4, (Qum: Maktab al-I'lam al-Islami, 1985), p. 64

The statement made by Ibn Taymiyyah regarding the Ikhwan al-Safa has indeed raised questions about whether his statements and criticisms were based on in-depth study and objective views. Whether the religious philosophy of the Ikhwan al-Safa is problematic and implies disbelief (*kufi*) is a matter that requires analysis and research. To analyze Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism of the works of the Ikhwan al-Safa, a comprehensive study is necessary. Such a study aims to understand the underlying reasons and arguments put forth by Ibn Taymiyyah, as well as examining the philosophical ideas and religious implications present in the works of the Ikhwan al-Safa. This analysis could provide insights into the differences in perspectives and the theological debates that existed during that period. It is important to note that academic research and scholarly discourse can shed further light on the topic, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of Ibn Taymiyyah's criticisms and the philosophical ideas of the Ikhwan al-Safa or Brethren of Purity.

2. METHODS

The type of research used in this study is qualitative descriptive library research. This type of research is useful for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism of the Ikhwan al-Safa's thought. The exploration of Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism and comments is based on general literary data, which are qualitatively analyzed to produce theories and conclusions. This research employs a historical-philosophical approach by tracing the historical roots of Ibn Taymiyyah's and the Ikhwan al-Safa's thoughts, examining their backgrounds and influences. Subsequently, it examines Ibn Taymiyyah's comments on the thought of the Ikhwan al-Safa and formulates structured perspectives and criticisms, as well as the underlying basis for these perspectives and criticisms. The process of data collection and analysis can be outlined as follows:

- a. Collecting data that has been manifested in various forms such as books, transcripts, proceedings, scholarly works, magazines, etc.
- b. Elaborating on the collected data by classifying it into primary and secondary data sources.
- c. Translating Arabic literature into the Indonesian language, which is used in this research.
- d. Conducting a careful analysis of the available data and information to generate outcomes that align with the research problem formulations in this study.

After completing all the aforementioned steps, the next step is to organize the research findings according to the predetermined structure. The collected data were

then analyzed using several methods, including interpretation and hermeneutics, induction, internal coherence, holism, and historical continuity. Here is an explanation of each method:

- a. The interpretation method is employed to achieve a true understanding of facts, data, and phenomena. Interpretation serves as the foundation of hermeneutics. It is possible that a thinker comes from a time, place, and social situation that are unfamiliar to readers and researchers. Therefore, three steps need to be taken: thoroughly investigating the process of interpretation, assessing the extent of subjectivity influencing the expected objective interpretation, and clarifying understanding.
- b. The induction method involves generalization. Cases and elements of the thinker's thoughts are analyzed and formulated into general statements.
- c. The internal coherence method is used to understand the thinker's thoughts accurately by examining all aspects of their thinking and their harmony with each other. Afterward, the most fundamental core of thought and central topics are determined. A study is then conducted to explore the logical and systematic arrangement within the object's thinking in order to discover the most substantial content of thought.
- d. The holism method is used by examining the object's thinking in its totality rather than in a partial manner.
- e. The historical continuity method involves tracing the common thread that connects the thinker's thoughts, including their historical environment, influences, and personal journey. The internal background is examined through an exploration of the object's biography, education, relationships, influences from contemporary thinkers, and various experiences. On the other hand, the external background is investigated by examining the object's life in terms of economic, political, cultural, and intellectual aspects.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ibnu Taimiyah was born in the city of Harran on Monday, the tenth or twelfth of Rabi' al-Awwal in the year 661 AH (1263 CE). ¹⁴ The birth of Ibn Taimiyah occurred only three years after the historic battle between the Mongols and the Muslim forces of the Mamluk Dynasty under the leadership of Saifuddin Qutuz, known as the Battle of Ain

¹⁴ Muhammad bin Ahmad Al-Maqdisi, *Al-'Uqud al-Darriyah fi Manaqib Ibnu Taimiyah*, (3rd ed; Riyad: Dar 'Ataat al-'Ilm, 2019), p. 5

Jalut, which took place in the year 658 AH (1260 CE).¹⁵ At the end of the sixth century and the beginning of the seventh century AH, the political conditions in the Islamic civilization were significantly different from the political conditions during the Umayyad and early Abbasid dynasties. Internally, the Islamic civilization was not united under one authority and was divided into several dynasties. Externally, there were two significant factors that had a major impact on the politics of Islam: the Crusades and the Mongol invasions.

The Islamic thought underwent development during the lifetime of Ibn Taymiyyah in the seventh century of the Hijri calendar. Ibn Taymiyyah engaged in numerous discussions and debates with various thinkers of his time, in addition to presenting rebuttals and criticisms through his writings. One of the ideologies he addressed was the Batiniyyah thought. Ibn Taymiyyah strongly criticized Batiniyyah, as he believed that this movement played a role in aiding the Crusader armies in their fight against Islam. ¹⁶ He argued that the ultimate goal of the Batiniyyah movement was to overthrow the Islamic caliphate and establish Shia imamate. ¹⁷

In addition to Batiniyyah, another influential school of thought during Ibn Taymiyyah's time was the philosophical Sufi thought known as al-Ittihadiyyah or the understanding of *wihdat al-wujud* (unity of existence). Someone once visited Ibn Taymiyyah and claimed that al-Hallaj was the seal of the saints (*awliya*) and that Allah spoke through him, saying, "I am the ultimate truth." Ibn Taymiyyah did mention that during his time in Damascus, there was a person who strongly adhered to the concept of al-Ittihadiyyah named Ibn Hud. This individual was known for his asceticism (zuhd) and engaged in various Sufi practices. He held a great reverence for Ibn Sab'in, a prominent figure within the mystical tradition. During Ibn Taymiyyah's time, there were followers of al-Ittihadiyyah who claimed that the difference between monotheism (*tauhid*) and pantheism (*ilhad*) was only a slight distinction. It is true that among the leaders of al-Ittihadiyyah, there were those who refused to engage in warfare against the Mongol invaders, while Ibn Taymiyyah motivated the Muslims to participate in the defense. The leaders of al-Ittihadiyyah argued that fighting against the Mongols was

¹⁵ Hafiz Ahmad Hamdi, *Al-Daulah al-Khawarizmiyah wa al-Mugul* (Kairo: Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi, 1949), p. 139

¹⁶ Muhammad Ahmad Al-Khatib, *Harakat al-Batiniyah fi al-'Alam al-Islami*, (2nd ed; Oman: Maktabah al-Aqsa, 1986), p. 445-446

¹⁷ Al-Khatib, *Harakat al-Batiniyah fi al-'Alam al-Islami*, p. 437

¹⁸ Al-Harrani, *Majmu' al-Fatawa*, vol. 2, p. 476

¹⁹ Ahmad bin 'Abd al-Halim bin 'Abd al-Salam bin Taimiyah Al-Harrani, *Bugyatu al-Murtad fi radd 'ala al-Mutafalsifah wa al-Qaramitah wa al-Battiniyah*, (3rd ed; Madinah: Maktabah al-'Ulum wa al-Hikam, 1995), p. 520

²⁰ Al-Harrani, *Majmu' al-Fatawa*, vol. 2, p. 196

equivalent to fighting against Allah.²¹ Ibnu Taimiyah did express the view that the al-Ittihadiyyah group shared similarities with the Batiniyah sect in their support for the Mongols and their desire for the Mongols' victory over the Muslims.²²

Shia, with its various factions, existed during Ibn Taymiyyah's lifetime, such as the Rafidah, Ismailis, Nusayris, and other Shia Batiniyah groups like the Druze. The downfall of the Abbasid Dynasty by the Mongols was also attributed to the betrayal of Ibn al-Algami, who was a Shia-affiliated minister. He had close ties with the Mongol leader Hulagu Khan, and together they massacred Sunni scholars in Baghdad.²³ Ibnu Taimiyah engaged in direct debates with several prominent leaders of the Rafidah Shia regarding the infallibility of Imam Ali bin Abi Thalib.²⁴ Ibnu Taimiyah also wrote his work entitled "Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah" in order to refute the Shia book titled "Minhaj al-Karamah" authored by Ibnu Mutahhir al-Hulli, under the command of one of the Ilkhanid Dynasty kings, Oljeytu Khan or Kharbanda, who held Shia beliefs.²⁵ Indeed, this motivated Ibn Taimiyah to engage in numerous refutations, particularly against Sufis, Shia, and Batiniyah. He saw the need to defend the orthodox Sunni beliefs and criticize what he perceived as deviant practices or ideologies within these groups. Ibn Taimiyah's refutations aimed to uphold what he considered to be the authentic teachings of Islam and to safeguard the purity of faith and religious practices.

Ibnu Taimiyah explicitly attributed the Ikhwan al-Safa to the Ismaili Batiniyah group known as the Qarmatians in his statements. However, the Ikhwan al-Safa themselves never explicitly identified as Ismailis or any other Batiniyah group. Nevertheless, there are acknowledgments within their Epistles (Rasail) that suggest the Ikhwan al-Safa had an affiliation with Shia Islam. They criticized those who merely claimed to be Shia as a facade without understanding its true essence and deviating from its teachings.²⁶ However, Ikhwan al-Safa differs from the Shia Isna'ashariyah in terms of their belief regarding Imam al-Mahdi. Ikhwan al-Safa believes that Imam al-Mahdi does not hide himself out of fear of his opponents, as believed by the Shia Isna'ashariyah. Instead, they believe that al-Mahdi continues to live among them and recognizes his followers, while his followers themselves do not recognize him directly.²⁷ Ibnu Taimiyah stated that the

²¹ Ahmad bin 'Abd al-Halim bin 'Abd al-Salam bin Taimiyah Al-Harrani, *Al-Istigasah fi al-Radd 'ala* al-Bakri, (1st ed; Riyad: Maktabah Dar al-Minhaj, 2005), p. 171

²² Al-Harrani, *Majmu' al-Fatawa* vol.2, p. 131

²³ Ali Muhammad Al-Sallabi, *Al-Muqul wa al-Tatar Baina al-Intisayar wa al-Inkisar*, (Beirut; Dar al-Ma'rifah, 2009), p. 198

²⁴ Al-Maqdisi, *Al-'Uqud al-Darriyah fi Manaqib Ibnu Taimiyah*, p. 233

²⁵ Ahmad bin 'Abd al-Halim bin 'Abd al-Salam bin Taimiyah Al-Harrani, *Minhaj al-Sunnah al-*Nabawiyah fii Nagd Kalam al-Syi'ah al-Qadariyah, vol. 1 (1st ed; Riyad: Jami'ah al-Imam Muhammad bin Su'ud al-Islamiyah, 1986), p. 4-7

²⁶ Ikhwan Al-Safa, *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khullan al-Wafa*, 4:148

²⁷ Ikhwan Al-Safa, *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khullan al-Wafa*, 4:148

Shia Rafidah believe that the Epistles of the Brethren of Purity and the Comprehensive Exposition are the words of Ja'far al-Sadiq, even though these epistles were composed around the middle of the fourth century, two hundred years after the death of Ja'far, specifically in the year 148 H.²⁸

Based on the examination of Ibn Taymiyyah's works, it is found that he criticized the religious philosophy of the Ikhwan al-Safa on five issues: the compatibility of philosophy and religion, the theory of emanation, the openness of prophethood, the nature of angels and demons, and the resurrection of the soul without a body. Despite his criticism, there were aspects of the Ikhwan al-Safa's thought that Ibn Taymiyyah did not deny. He acknowledged that their teachings encompassed mathematics, natural sciences, logic, theology, ethics, politics, and astronomy.²⁹ However, Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized that even though the Ikhwan al-Safa had accurate knowledge in fields such as medicine and mathematics, it did not mean that their understanding of matters pertaining to theology, prophethood, scriptures, angels, and the Day of Judgment was also correct. He argued that just as Jews and Christians excelled in the field of natural sciences, such as medicine and mathematics, it did not imply that they possessed true knowledge about God.³⁰ Generally speaking, Ibn Taymiyyah acknowledged that philosophers had a good understanding of material and natural sciences, but not when it came to matters of the unseen (*ghaib*).³¹

In the matter of harmony between religion and philosophy, Ibnu Taimiyah believed that the assumption that the statements of the prophets were in line with the statements of Greek philosophers was a sign of their ignorance regarding the words of the prophets as well as the words of the Greek philosophers. ³² Ibnu Taimiyah equated the thoughts of Ikhwan al-Safa with the ideas of the heretics from various religions, as well as those attributed to Shia and Sufism figures like Ibn 'Arabi and Ibn Sab'in. Furthermore, he went even further to state that Jews and Christians were still closer to Islam than the teachings of Ikhwan al-Safa, as the latter attempted to reconcile the words of the prophets with the ideas of philosophers.³³ Ibnu Taimiyah asserted that if someone truly understands the teachings of the prophets and the ideas of philosophers, they will find that ideologies like Ikhwan al-Safa are enemies to the prophets and a

²⁸ Al-Harrani, *Minhaj al-Sunnah al-Nabawiyah fii Naqd Kalam al-Syi'ah al-Qadariyah*, 2:465

²⁹ Al-Harrani, *Majmu' al-Fatawa* vol. 35, p. 134

³⁰ Ahmad bin 'Abd al-Halim bin 'Abd al-Salam bin Taimiyah Al-Harrani, *Al-Radd 'ala al-Syazili fi Hizbaihi wa ma Sannafahu fi Adab al-Tariq*, (3rd ed; Beirut: Dar Ibn Hazm, 2019), p. 195

³¹ Al-Harrani, *Majmu' al-Fatawa*, vol. 17, p. 335

³² Ahmad bin 'Abd al-Halim bin 'Abd al-Salam bin Taimiyah Al-Harrani, *Al-Jawab al-Sahih liman Baddala Din al-Masih*, vol. 5 (2nd ed; Riyad: Dar al-'Asimah, 1999), p. 39

³³ Al-Harrani, *Al-Radd 'ala al-Syazili fi Hizbaihi wa ma Sannafahu fi Adab al-Tariq*, p. 195

pollution to religions.³⁴ According to Ibnu Taimiyah, Ikhwan al-Safa adopted the philosophies of their predecessors and used Islamic terminology to present them, leading listeners or readers to believe that this was the true essence brought by the prophets and the reality demonstrated by reason.³⁵

Ibnu Taimiyah believed that the efforts made by philosophers to reconcile philosophy and Islam reached a dead end due to the stark differences between the two. It is impossible to reconcile philosophy and religion except by adjusting the thinking of one party to the other. Therefore, religious or legalistic thoughts must yield and adapt to philosophical thoughts. Based on this, the understanding emerged that the texts of the Qur'an and Hadith have an inner meaning that is different from the apparent meaning commonly read and heard by people.

In the issue of the theory of emanation, Ibnu Taimiyah viewed the concept of emanation as mere words without evidence, and regarded it as a fabrication concerning unseen matters. He believed that the concept of emanation is more flawed than the beliefs of the polytheistic Arabs and the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) in terms of both reason and religious law, especially when compared to the evidence from the Quran.³⁶ According to Ibnu Taimiyah, there is no concept of emanation in the creation of the universe. Allah created the universe out of nothingness, using preexisting materials that were created before the universe. As mentioned in the Quran, there was the Throne (Arsh) and water before Allah created the heavens and the earth. As for the statement of Allah that He created the heavens and the earth in six days, the term "day" in this context does not refer to a day based on the movement of the sun and the moon, as both are parts of the heavens. Therefore, there was no alternation of day and night before the creation of the heavens and the earth. Thus, the term "day" in the process of the creation of the universe refers to a day based on the rotation of other creatures.37

In the issue of the prophethood, Ibnu Taimiyah asserts that the belief that prophethood is still possible, open, and not closed is a viewpoint held by Sufi philosophers like Ibnu 'Arabi and Ibnu Sab'i'n, as well as by the Ikhwan al-Safa group of

³⁴ Ahmad bin 'Abd al-Halim bin 'Abd al-Salam bin Taimiyah Al-Harrani, *Bayan Talbis al-Jahmiyah fi* Ta'sis Bida'ihim al-Kalamiyah, vol. 5, (1st ed; Madinah: Majma' al-Malik Fahd, 2005), p. 280

³⁵ Ahmad bin 'Abd al-Halim bin 'Abd al-Salam bin Taimiyah Al-Harrani, *Al-Safadiyah*, vol.1 (2nd ed; Mesir: Maktabah Ibnu Taimiyah, 1986), p. 237

³⁶ Al-Harrani, *Majmu' al-Fatawa*, vol. 17, p. 286

³⁷ Ahmad bin 'Abd al-Halim bin 'Abd al-Salam bin Taimiyah Al-Harrani, *Dar'u al-Ta'arud al-'Aql wa* al-Naql, vol. 1, (Riyad: Jami'ah al-Imam Muhammad bin Su'ud al-Islamiyah, 1991) p. 123

Shia. Furthermore, Ibnu Sab'in claims that Prophet Muhammad closed the door of prophethood by stating that there would be no more prophets after him. ³⁸

In the matter of the essence of angels and demons, Ibn Taymiyyah states that Shiite Batiniyah groups like the Ikhwan al-Safa, Sufis like Ibn 'Arabi, and similar ones have a distorted understanding of Allah, angels, sacred scriptures, prophets, the Day of Judgment, jinn, and demons, without relying on authentic reports from the prophets.³⁹ Ibn Taymiyyah also states that whoever has heard the reports from the Quran and Sunnah about angels and demons will recognize the fundamental differences between what is conveyed by the philosophers. The philosophers and Mutakalim Sufis, in addition to using peculiar terminologies, also employ Islamic terminology found in the Quran and Sunnah and interpret it according to the understanding of the disbelievers or heretical individuals.⁴⁰ Ibnu Taimiyah also states that Ikhwan al-Safa and similar groups who follow Aristotle believe that angels do not die, while Islam, Judaism, and Christianity agree that angels will also experience death.⁴¹ Ikhwan al-Safa holds this belief because they argue that angels are souls (نفس) and souls are eternal, never dying or decaying⁴². According to Ibn Taymiyyah, the Muslim community has reached a consensus that angels are a'yan (physical beings) and not a'rad (non-physical entities). There is no disagreement among religions that angels are created beings with a physical form.⁴³

On the issue of the resurrection of the spirit without a body, Ibnu Taimiyah believes that the physical bodies will be resurrected, as mentioned in the Quran, the Sunnah and the consensus of the Muslim community. He holds the belief that even the inhabitants of paradise will engage in physical activities similar to those in the worldly life, such as eating, drinking, and engaging in marital relations.⁴⁴ Ibnu Taimiyah asserts that hypocrites among the Muslim community often misuse the words of the Quran, distorting their intended meanings to undermine the concept of the resurrection of souls. He specifically mentions groups like the Qaramitah Batiniyah and philosophers who claim affiliation with Islam, such as Ikhwan al-Safa. Ibnu Taimiyah strongly states that they are disbelievers (*kafii*) who must be killed according to the consensus of the

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³⁸ Al-Harrani, *Al-Radd 'ala al-Mantiqiyyin*, p. 531-532

³⁹ Ahmad bin 'Abd al-Halim bin 'Abd al-Salam bin Taimiyah Al-Harrani, *Al-Radd 'ala al-Mantiqiyyin*, (1st ed; Beirut: Muassasah al-Rayyan, 2005), p. 558

⁴⁰ Al-Harrani, *Bayan Talbis al-Jahmiyah fi Ta'sis Bida'ihim al-Kalamiyah*, vol. 5, p. 268

⁴¹ Al-Harrani, *Majmu' al-Fatawa*, vol. 4, p. 259

⁴² Ikhwan al-Safa, Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khullan al-Wafa, vol. 3, p. 290

⁴³ Al-Harrani, *Bugyatu al-Murtad fi radd 'ala al-Mutafalsifah wa al-Qaramitah wa al-Battiniyah*, p.

⁴⁴ Al-Harrani, *Majmu' al-Fatawa.*, 4:316

believers, as Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has clearly and unanimously explained this matter to the Muslim people. 45

Based on the above criticisms, it is found that Ibn Taymiyyah is in agreement with the scholars and *mutakallimun* in criticizing philosophy, especially the philosophy of the Ikhwan al-Safa. Many scholars reject philosophy, as mentioned by Al-Suyuti (d. 911 H/1505 CE), who stated that philosophy entered Islam in the first century when non-Arab territories were opened up, but philosophy was not yet well-known among the public because the Salaf forbade its study.⁴⁶ Imam Abu Hanifah (d. 150 H) also expressed his view on philosophy when asked about it. He advised that a person should adhere to the opinions and ways of the Salaf (early generations) and distance themselves from all new matters, as they are considered innovations (bid'ah).⁴⁷ Imam al-Shafi'i (d. 204 H/820 M) stated that the reason for people's ignorance and disputes is their abandonment of the Arabic language and their inclination towards the language of Aristotle.⁴⁸ Al-Nawawi (d. 676 H/1277 M) also mentioned that it is forbidden to study sciences outside of religious knowledge, such as magic, philosophy, astrology, and anything that only brings doubt to a person's religion.⁴⁹ Ibnu al-Salah (d. 643 H/1245 M) also stated that the study of logic (mantig) is the gateway to philosophy and the gateway to evil. None of the companions, successors (tabiin), the imams of jurisprudence (mujtahid), the righteous predecessors (salaf salih), or those who followed them permitted engaging in the study of this knowledge.⁵⁰ Imam al-Ghazali (d. 505 H) criticized those who rigidly adhere to the literal meanings without engaging their intellects. Similarly, he criticized those who excessively rely on their intellects, such as the philosophers and extreme Mu'tazilites, as they clash with fundamental principles of the religious law (shari'ah).51

In the matter of emanation, many scholars also reject it, such as Al-Ghazali, who states that the theory of emanation is merely a presumption and is nothing more than darkness upon darkness and empty talk.⁵² Additionally, Al-Shahrastani criticizes the

⁴⁵ Al-Harrani, *Majmu' al-Fatawa*, 4:314

⁴⁶ Jalaluddin Al-Suyuti, *Saunu al-Mantiq wa al-Kalam fi 'an Fanni al-Mantiq wa al-Kalam* (Kairo: Majma' al-Buhus al-Islamiyah, T.Tahun.), p. 44-45

⁴⁷ Jalaluddin Al-Suyuti, *Saunu al-Mantiq wa al-Kalam 'an Fanni al-Mantiq wa al-Kalam*, p. 66

⁴⁸ Jalaluddin Al-Suyuti, *Saunu al-Mantiq wa al-Kalam 'an Fanni al-Mantiq wa al-Kalam*, p. 48

⁴⁹ Yahya bin Syaraf Al-Nawawi, *Al-Majmu' Syarhu al-Muhazzab* (Kairo: Idaratu al-Tiba'ah al-Munirah, 1928), 1:27

⁵⁰ Usman bin Abdurrahman Ibnu al-Salah, *Fatawa Ibnu al-Salah*, vol. 1 (1st ed; Beirut: Maktabah al-'Ulum wa al-Hikam, 1983), p. 210

⁵¹ Abu Hamid Al-Gazali, *Al-Iqtisad fi al-l'tiqad*, (1st ed; Kairo: Dar al-Muqattham, 2020), p. 19

⁵² Abu Hamid Al-Gazali, *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (Beirut: Al-Maktabah al-'Asriyah, 2020), p. 96

theory of emanation, 53 as does Ibn Khaldun (d. 808 H), who views it as a false theory from every perspective. 54

In the matter of the resurrection of the soul without the body, Al-Ghazali states that denying the resurrection of the physical body, the physical pleasures of paradise, the physical torment of hell, and the existence of paradise and hell as described in the Quran is a thought that contradicts the religious law (*sharia*).⁵⁵ Ibnu al-Qayyim states that the *Salaf* believes that when a person dies, they will experience either blessings or punishment that apply to both their soul and body. The soul will remain after being separated from the body and will experience blessings or punishment. Sometimes, the soul will be reunited with the body, and both the soul and body will experience blessings or punishment together. Then, on the Day of Judgment, the soul will be returned to its body, resurrected from the grave for the sake of Allah. The resurrection of the physical body is a matter agreed upon by Islam, Judaism, and Christianity.⁵⁶ The philosophers' denial of the resurrection of the body is one of the reasons why al-Gazali stated the philosophers as disbelievers⁵⁷, and so did Ibn Taimiyah.

Although Ibn Taymiyyah agrees with many scholars in criticizing philosophy, specifically his criticism of the religious philosophy of the Ikhwan al-Safa, it is not done in detail and tends to be mentioned and equated with other philosophers. In his criticisms, Ibn Taymiyyah often compares them to figures like Ibn Arabi and Ibn Sab'in. For example, in the issue of emanation, Ibn Taymiyyah likens the views of the Brethren of Purity to those of Ibn Arabi and Ibn Sab'in, who argue that reason ('aql) is eternal and the active intellect is the god of everything below the celestial sphere. They also maintain that the first intellect is the god of the heavens and the earth, as well as everything in between. ⁵⁸ However, the Ikhwan al-Safa has a slightly different concept. According to their belief, the first created entity by Allah from His divine light is a simple substance (جوهر بسيط) known as the active intellect (العقل الفعال). This substance is considered as the divine knowledge that underlies everything in the universe. They use the analogy of the number two being formed from the repetition of the number one to illustrate the formation of the active intellect as a manifestation of pure divine knowledge. ⁵⁹ From the statement, it is clear that according to the Ikhwan al-Safa, the

⁵³ Muhammad 'bin Abdu al-Karim Al-Syahrastani, *Nihayatu al-Iqdam fi 'Ilmi al-Kalam*, 1st ed (Kairo: Maktabah al-Saqafah al-Diniyah, 2009), p. 49

⁵⁴ Abdurrahman bin Muhammad Ibnu Khaldun, *Muqaddimah Ibnu Khaldun* vol. 2 (1st ed; Damaskus: Dar Ya'rib, 2004), p. 322

⁵⁵ Al-Gazali, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, p. 215

⁵⁶ Ibnu al-Qayyim Al-Jauziyah, *Al-Ruh*, vol. 1 (3rd ed; Riyad: Dar 'Ataat al-'Ilm, 2019), p. 149

⁵⁷ Al-Gazali, *Tahafut al-Falasifah*, p. 225

⁵⁸ Al-Harrani, *Majmu' al-Fatawa*, vol. 17, p. 332-333

⁵⁹ Ikhwan al-Safa, *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khullan al-Wafa*, vol. 1, p. 54

active intellect is not considered eternal (qadim), but rather it is considered originated (hadith). Despite their adherence to the theory of emanation, the Ikhwan al-Safa maintain that the universe was created by Allah from non-existence as He will, by His command, "Kun" (Be). Therefore, the Ikhwan al-Safa not only differ from Ibn 'Arabi and Ibn Sab'in, but they also differ from al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. In the process of emanation, al-Farabi and Ibn Sina give the impression that emanation is a natural process without intention or planning. On the other hand, the Ikhwan al-Safa establish that the process of emanation is a result of the will and intention of God. ⁶⁰ Creating is an act of free will from God, carried out according to His own volition.⁶¹

Similarly, in the concept of prophethood, Ibn Taymiyyah equated the thinking of the Ikhwan al-Safa with Ibn 'Arabi and Ibn Sab'in, who stated that prophethood remains open and cannot be closed. However, in their treatises, the Brethren of Purity never explicitly stated that prophethood is open and can be sought. On the contrary, they emphasized that the Prophet receives revelation, and it is not something that can be sought or chosen by humans, but rather a gift from Allah. 62 According to the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwan al-Safa), revelation (wahyu) and inspiration (ilham) are meanings that are expressed into the thoughts of the soul through reason ('aql).63 In another sense, revelation (wahyu) is understood as the notification of unseen matters conveyed to the human soul through the senses, without intention or deliberate effort.⁶⁴ Indeed, there is a statement that could possibly be the basis for such accusations, namely the statement of the Ikhwan al-Safa that the perfection of prophethood lies in forty-six characteristics, and whoever among humans possesses these characteristics at any time and in any place is considered a prophet.65

The culmination of Ibn Taymiyyah's criticism of the Ikhwan al-Safa leads to his accusation of their disbelief. Ibn Taymiyyah states that the hypocrites among this community, who do not acknowledge the words of the Qur'an and the Sunnah, have distorted the intended meanings, such as the Qaramitah Batiniyah, philosophers, the authors of the treatises of the Ikhwan al-Safa, and others. He deems all of them as disbelievers who must be killed according to the consensus of the believers.⁶⁶ If we examine the criticisms expressed by Ibn Taymiyyah towards the Ikhwan al-Safa, the reason for the accusation of disbelief is due to the fact that Ikhwan al-Safa contradicts

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⁶⁰ Muniron, *Epistemologi Ikhwan As-Shafa*, (1st ed; Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2011) p. 135

⁶¹ Yohanna Qumair, *Ikhwan al-Safa Dirasat Mukhtarat*, (Beirut: Matba'ah al-Kathulikiyah, 1950), p.

⁶² Ikhwan al-Safa, Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khullan al-Wafa, vol 3, p. 303

⁶³ Ikhwan al-Safa, *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khullan al-Wafa*, vol 1, p. 392

⁶⁴ Ikhwan al-Safa, *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khullan al-Wafa*, vol. 4, p. 84

⁶⁵ Ikhwan al-Safa, *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khullan al-Wafa*, vol. 4, p. 125

⁶⁶ Al-Harrani, *Majmu' al-Fatawa*, vol 4, p. 314

the literal meanings of the Qur'an and even denies them. It has been mentioned that the Ikhwan al-Safa adhere to the Batiniyah Shia Ismaili school of thought, and many scholars consider Ismailis as a sect outside of Islam, like Al-Baghdadi, who included the Batiniyah in the group that claims affiliation with Islam despite being separate from it.⁶⁷ Al-Muhhibbi (d. 1111 H) mentioned that the disbelief of the Batiniyah is something agreed upon by the majority of Muslims, and whoever doubts their disbelief after knowing their beliefs, then they themselves are considered disbelievers. Furthermore, he even states that they are more disbelieving than Jews and Christians.⁶⁸ Al-Ghazali stated that, in general, the Ismailis outwardly appear as Shia Muslims, but internally they adhere to beliefs that are purely disbelief. He further asserted that their deviation from the Shariah is evident, and they generally agree with Jews, Christians, and Zoroastrians (Majus) in their beliefs.⁶⁹

It is mentioned that among the forms of disbelief attributed to the Ikhwan al-Safa is their assertion that it was Prophet Jesus (Isa) who was crucified on the cross and not someone resembling him. In their treatises, the Ikhwan al-Safa state that Jesus was indeed crucified, even pierced with a spear and buried.⁷⁰ The belief mentioned, that Jesus (Isa) was crucified according to the Ikhwan al-Safa, differs from the understanding in the Quran, which states that Jesus was not crucified. As such, this belief is considered a deviation from mainstream Islamic beliefs.⁷¹

The *takfir* (accusation of disbelief) made by Ibn Taymiyyah against the Ikhwan al-Safa specifically and against the Batiniyah in general has been carried out by other scholars as well and is based on Islamic textual evidence. Thus, Ibn Taymiyyah ensured that there were no longer any barriers to declaring *takfir* on the Ikhwan al-Safa, and he established arguments against them, deeming them deserving of being declared disbelievers, and even obligated their killing. However, it is indeed not possible for Ibn Taymiyyah to directly ascertain the absence of doubt (*syubhat*) and barriers to *takfir* on the Ikhwan al-Safa, as the time gap between the era of the Ikhwan al-Safa and Ibn Taymiyyah is significant. Declaring *takfir* on individuals who lived in a distant past is undoubtedly not an easy matter because it cannot be achieved through direct clarification, establishing arguments, or engaging in debates. This indicates that Ibn

⁶⁷ Abd al-Qahir Al-Bagdadi, *Al-Farq baina al-Firaq*, (1st ed; Kairo: Dar Ibnu al-Jauzi, 2014), p. 165

⁶⁸ Muhammad Amin Al-Muhibbi, *Khulasatu al-Asar fi A'yan al-Qarn al-Hadi 'Asyar*, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dar Sadir, T.Tahun), p. 269

⁶⁹ Abu Hamid Al-Gazali, *Fadaih al-Batiniyah*, (Kuwait: Muassasah Dar al-Kutub al-Saqafiyah, 2008), p. 37

⁷⁰ Ikhwan Al-Safa, *Rasail Ikhwan al-Safa wa Khullan al-Wafa*, vol 4, p. 31

⁷¹ E.J. Brill, *Mujiz Dairah al-Ma'arif al-Islamiyah*, vol. 5 (1st ed; Kairo: Markaz al-Syariqah li al-Ibda' al-Fikri, 1997), p. 1277

Taymiyyah based his declaration of takfir against the Ikhwan al-Safa on the following grounds:

- a. The ideas presented by the Ikhwan al-Safa in their book "Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa' wa Khullan al-Wafa'" were seen as explicitly contradicting the Quran and Sunnah.
- b. The position of "Rasa'il Ikhwan al-Safa' wa Khullan al-Wafa" as a reference book in Ismaili thought.
- c. The Ikhwan al-Safa were regarded as the originators of their own ideas and not mere followers, nor were they considered confused due to ignorance of the Islamic laws.
- d. The opinions of other scholars, specifically those who lived during or around the same time as the Ikhwan al-Safa, regarding the Ikhwan al-Safa and Ismaili Batiniyah in general.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Ibnu Taimiyah, a prominent Islamic scholar, was born in the year 661 AH (1263 CE), just three years after the historic Battle of Ain Jalut between the Mongols and the Muslim forces of the Mamluk Dynasty. During his lifetime in the 7th century of the Hijri calendar, the political landscape of the Islamic civilization was significantly different from earlier periods, marked by internal divisions and external challenges from the Crusades and Mongol invasions. Ibnu Taimiyah engaged in debates and discussions with various thinkers of his time, particularly criticizing the Batiniyyah thought and the philosophical Sufi thought of al-Ittihadiyyah. He was concerned about purifying Islamic beliefs from what he considered deviant ideologies. One of the key subjects he addressed was the religious philosophy of the Ikhwan al-Safa, which he strongly criticized. He accused them of aiding the Crusaders and having the goal of overthrowing the Islamic caliphate in favor of Shia imamate.

Throughout his writings, Ibnu Taimiyah expressed disapproval of certain aspects of the Ikhwan al-Safa's thought, particularly regarding the harmony of religion and philosophy, the theory of emanation, the nature of prophethood, the essence of angels and demons, and the resurrection of the soul without a body. He considered their ideas to be in conflict with the Quran and Sunnah. Ibnu Taimiyah's criticism of the Ikhwan al-Safa was part of his broader opposition to philosophy in general. He believed that philosophy contradicted Islamic beliefs and should not be pursued. Many other scholars of his time shared similar views, rejecting philosophy and its integration with Islamic thought.

Ibnu Taimiyah accused the Ikhwan al-Safa of disbelief, a serious accusation, which was also made by other scholars due to their perceived deviation from mainstream Islamic beliefs. He argued that their ideas were inconsistent with the core principles of Islam, and they deserved to be considered disbelievers according to Islamic textual evidence. In conclusion, Ibnu Taimiyah's critique of the religious philosophy of the Ikhwan al-Safa was rooted in his dedication to upholding orthodox Sunni beliefs and safeguarding the purity of Islamic teachings. His criticism, along with that of other scholars, is a testament to the complex intellectual and theological debates that shaped Islamic thought during his time and continues to influence Islamic scholars to this day.

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