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Ibn Taymiyya's Epistemology of Prophethood and Miracles

Ibn Taymiyya's *al-Nubuwwāt* represents a comprehensive epistemological examination of belief in prophets, particularly in relation to miracles as proof of prophethood. He asserts that just as multiple signs indicate the existence and attributes of God, a similar plurality of indicators establishes the truth of prophets. Rejecting the exclusivity of miracles as the sole proof of prophethood, Ibn Taymiyya expands the scope of relevant evidential considerations that authenticate prophetic claims. He critiques the *kalām* theologians' reliance on miracles as the primary proof of prophethood. While Mu'tazilites deny supernatural acts by non-prophets to safeguard miracles as exclusive prophetic signs, Ash'arites concede that extraordinary feats can occur at the hands of saints (*awlīyā'*), sorcerers (*ṣaḥara*), and soothsayers (*kuhhān*). The Ash'arī criteria for distinguishing prophetic miracles—(a) a claim to prophethood, (b) citing the miracle as proof, and (c) issuing a challenge—are problematized by Ibn Taymiyya, who argues that proof cannot be established merely by the claim of the performer. Furthermore, he critiques Ash'arī theology for its inconsistency in divine omnipotence, by examining whether God could allow a false claimant to perform miracles indistinguishable from those of true prophets. To refine the concept of miracles, Ibn Taymiyya prefers the Quranic terms *āyāt* (signs) and *barāhīn* (proofs) over the *kalām* terminology of *mu'jiza* (miracle) and *khāriq lil-'āda* (extraordinary act). He argues that prophetic miracles must be uniquely beyond the capabilities of non-prophets and must be distinguished from supernatural feats of sorcerers and saints. Notably, he posits that feats assisted by angelic intervention are exclusive to prophets, while jinn-assisted feats may be attempted by false claimants to prophethood. Beyond miracles, Ibn Taymiyya introduces an ethical dimension to verifying prophetic truth. A true prophet's teachings align with rationality and *fiṭra*, advocating justice, monotheism (*tawḥīd*), sincerity (*ikhhlās*), and righteousness, whereas a false claimant promotes deceit and oppression. He critiques the Ash'arī commitment to Divine Command Theory, which precludes moral discernment as a criterion for evaluating prophets. While acknowledging that Avicennian philosophers correctly considered virtue in distinguishing prophets from sorcerers, he integrates this insight into a broader synthesis that upholds prophetic infallibility in divine communication. In summary, Ibn Taymiyya's epistemology of prophethood constructs a framework wherein belief in prophets is not solely contingent on miracles but is reinforced by moral integrity, rational coherence, and alignment with human nature.



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