

Historicizing Ghazali's Critique of Ibn Sina and Its Influence on Islamic Science

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## Abstract

Ghazali was one of the most influential thinkers in the history of Islam. Yet there exists much controversy about his views and his influence. Some have hailed him as a reviver of the sciences (both religious and secular), whereas others hold him responsible for the supposed decline of Islamic science, and philosophy.

This thesis aims to better understand Ghazali and the factors which motivated him. The study will include an examination of influences upon Ghazali during his formative period and during his academic career. It will study Ghazali's relationship with Islamic philosophers which preceded him, the most important of which was Ibn Sina. It will attempt to understand the nature of Ghazali's critique of causation. Finally, it will consider other facets of Ghazali's legacy and their influence upon later Islam.

It is hoped that Ghazali can be better understood when he is placed in his appropriate historical context. Placing him in this context allows for a finer differentiation between the thought of Ghazali and Ibn Sina on the one hand and an appreciation for their similarity on the other. Ghazali's famous critique of causation can also be best understood, not as a purely philosophical argument, but by understanding the reasons why Ghazali chose to address the problem of causation. This will allow for a richer appreciation for the life and influence of one of history's greatest thinkers.

Dedication

For Mom and Dad

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Ghazali is widely regarded as one of the most influential thinkers in the history of Islam. The role and influence of Ghazali in the subsequent development of Islamic civilization, thought, philosophy, science, and theology has been the subject of intense scholarly study. The extent of Ghazali's influence is summarized by M. M. Sharif:

His works have been and still are being read and studied from West Africa or Oceania more than those of any other Muslim writer, and his teaching has been accepted and made a rule of life more than that of any other theologian.<sup>1</sup>

In the wide variety of thought on this issue, some have held Ghazali responsible for the decline of Islamic civilization and science.<sup>2</sup> Others such as Ibn Khaldun, have argued that he was the reviver of these sciences. Commenting on the study of logic he writes:

It should be known that the early Muslims and the early speculative theologians greatly disapproved of the study of this discipline. They vehemently attacked it and warned against it. They forbade the study and teaching of it. Later on, even since Ghazali and the Imam Ibn al-Khatib (al-Razi), scholars have been somewhat more lenient in this respect. Since that time, they have gone on studying [logic]...<sup>3</sup>

In either case, the enormous influence of Ghazali on Islamic civilization is undeniable. Richard Frank describes his status within Islamic history:

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<sup>1</sup> M. M. Sharif, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, vol. 1 (Karachi: Royal Book Company, 1963), 637.

<sup>2</sup> George Saliba, *Islamic Science and the Making of the European Renaissance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 234. Saliba summarizes this view: "Ghazali was single-handedly held responsible for the decline of rational, read scientific, thought in Islamic civilization in these later centuries."

<sup>3</sup> Kojiro Nakamura, "Was Ghazali an Ash'arite?" *Memoirs of the Toyo Bunko* 51 (1993): 1.



Al-Ghazali (d. 505/1111) dominates the history of Muslim thought, and even though so categorical an assertion may be subject to qualification, there is no denying that he was the most important sunni theologian at a crucial turning point in the history of orthodox Muslim theology.<sup>4</sup>

This is underscored by Walter Skellie who writes: “With him [Ghazali] the religious philosophy and experience of Islam reached its zenith, and the system of ethics which he produced has become the final authority for orthodox Islam.”<sup>5</sup> To help better determine the influence of Ghazali, this thesis project attempts to historicize Ghazali. That is, it will attempt to determine the circumstances around the life of Ghazali that contributed to the development of his thought. What was the influence of the political and educational institutions (such as the Nizamiyya colleges) on Ghazali? What role did the contemporary theological debate of his time (Ashari, Mutazilite, and Hanbalite theologians) play in the development of his thought? Why was Ghazali critical of Neoplatonic and Aristotelian philosophy and philosophers (Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina)? What was his motivation for writing his famous texts, such as *Tabafut Al-Falasifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers) and *Ihya Ulum-ad-Deen* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences)? What was the purpose of Ghazali’s classification of knowledge? Why did he suffer his intellectual crisis? And how did he see the role of Sufism in Islam?

Understanding the answers to these questions will help us determine the motives and purpose of Ghazali’s intellectual enterprise. It will help us better place Ghazali in proper historical context, and therefore place us in a better position to assess his subsequent influence.

Taking events and texts from Ghazali’s life out of their historical context and paralleling them to later developments results in attributing to them an undue and inaccurate

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Frank, “Al-Ghazali’s Use of Avicenna’s Philosophy,” *Revue des Etats Islamiques*, (1987-89): 55-57.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Skellie, *Al-Ghazali The Marvels of the Heart*, xi.

influence. This is seen in the works of many modern-day scholars who blame Ghazali for the decline of a wide range of sciences, including the physical sciences and philosophy, due to his classification of knowledge and refutation of causation, and Neoplatonic philosophy. Some credit him for the creation of an Islamic orthodoxy and the creation of the concept of heresy (*takfir*) due to his writing of the *Ihya* and *Faysal-Tafriqa* (The Decisive Criteria for Distinguishing Islam from Masked Apostasy), respectively. Others, such as Muhammad Iqbal, charge him with the rise of fatalism within the Islamic world due to his implicit support of Ashari theology.

In order to better determine the validity of any of the above claims, one must look comprehensively at Ghazali's life, and examine the historical circumstances in which he operated and the specific scenarios in which he issued his comments and statements. Once these are understood, then a more accurate judgment regarding both his intentions and his influence can be made. This thesis project will then attempt to do just that.

## Chapter II

### Early Life and Education

Ghazali's life has been divided into three periods by Kojiro Nakamura. These serve as a template for the purpose of this thesis. The three periods are divided as follows:

1. Learning
2. Highest Ranking Orthodox "Doctor"
3. Retirement

Abu Hamid Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Muhammad ibn Ta'us Ahmad al-Tusi al-Shafi'i was born in the year 450 AH/ 1058 CE in Tabaran near the city of Tus, in modern day Iran, near the modern-day town of Meshed. On this there is broad agreement in the historical sources.<sup>6</sup>

Ghazali's family history is subject to debate amongst historians. Some, such as the historian al-Subki, have claimed that the family profession was spinning wool, based upon the etymology of the family name. However, according to Griffel, the name had been in use for several generations, and there is no evidence that this was the actual profession of Ghazali's immediate family or father.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 582.

<sup>7</sup> Frank Griffel, *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 26.

In fact, Ghazali came from a family of learned scholars. Another famous Ghazali lived two or three generations before him, who was likely his paternal granduncle or great granduncle. This elder Ghazali was a famous theologian and jurist (d. 435/1043-44).<sup>8</sup>

According to al-Subki, Ghazali's father was a Sufi.<sup>9</sup> However, Ghazali became an orphan and grew up in the company of a pious Sufi friend of his father. On the other hand, Griffel, doubts this story. According to his analysis, it may be part of the embellishments and myth of Ghazali's early life after his father left the family with few resources. Griffel cites a biographer, Abd al-Ghafir al-Faris, who does not report this early Sufi friend.

Ghazali studied theology and law early, while still a child. His first teacher was Shaikh Ahmed ibn Muhammad al-Radhkani al-Tusi and his second teacher was likely Imam abu Nasr al-Isma'ili in the city of Jurjan. He also studied under the Sufi shaykh Yusuf al-Nassaj.<sup>10</sup>

Radkhani, who had himself studied under the elder Ghazali, taught the junior Ghazali *fiqh* (Islamic law). Radkhani was also the maternal uncle of the powerful grand vizier Nizam al-Mulk (d. 485/1092). His half-brother Abdul Qasim Abdallah ibn Ali was likely the head teacher of the Nizamiyya madrasa in Nishapur before Ghazali was appointed to this post in 499/1106.

It is possible that this connection to the Nizam al-Mulk played a role in Ghazali's later career advancement. Griffel describes the influence and power of the Nizam al-Mulk:

Second in power only to the Seljuq Sultans Alp-Arslan (reg. 455–65 / 1063–72) and Malikshah (reg. 465–485 / 1072–92), Nizam al-Mulk formulated the religious policy for an area that stretched from Asia Minor to Afghanistan. In the intellectual centers

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<sup>8</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 583. Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 583.

<sup>10</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 583.

of the Seljuq Empire, he founded religious madrasas (so-called Nizamiyya madrasas), which institutionalized the teaching of Sunni jurisprudence and Asharite theology.<sup>11</sup>

The Nizam al-Mulk happened to be from the village of Radhakan near the city of Tus. Therefore, it is likely that Ghazali made connections with the larger family of these influential figures during his early education. Griffel argues that he may have had family ties to other major Shafii scholars of Khorasan including the Nizam al-Mulk himself, who was a Shafite-educated jurist in the small town of Tus, where scholars were likely to know each other fairly well.

Therefore, according to Griffel, the early life of Ghazali was probably much less humble than commonly believed and reported by M.M. Sharif.

Griffel related and critiqued another famous story concerning Ghazali and the Nizam al-Mulk.

The Nizam al-Mulk told the story of how the Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, the Sufi, once traveled to study with, and take notes from, Abu Nasr al-Ismail in the city of Gurgan. On the way back, Ghazali was robbed of his bag of books and notes. Ghazali demanded that the robbers return his books. The robbers asked him, “How can it be that you have learned things that you get rid of when this bag is taken away from you? And now you remain without knowledge?” Ghazali took this as a message from God, and devoted the subsequent three years to memorizing all his books and notes.<sup>12</sup>

The validity of the above story has been questioned by Griffel. It was related by al-Subki and traced to an early colleague of Ghazali, Asad al-Mayhan (d. 523/1129 or 527/1132-3), and the Nizam al-Mulk himself. However, according to Griffel the story likely originates from a single source, the historian al-Samani, whose account is related by the historian of

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<sup>11</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 65.

<sup>12</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 27.

Aleppo ibn al-Adim (d. 660/1262). In this account the story relates to the Nizam al-Mulk and his nephew Shihab al-Islam Abd al-Razzaq (d. 525/1130) who later became a famous vizier.<sup>13</sup> In addition, Abd al-Ghafir, the other major biographer of Ghazali, never mentions Ghazali studying in Gurgan. Griffel writes:

The teacher is not correctly identified, and the context of the report is anecdotal, pedagogical, and somewhat ahistorical. Most important, however, the nephew addressed by Nizam al-Mulk is only ten years younger than al-Ghazali and studied himself with al-Juwayni, indicating that al-Ghazali could not yet have been a famous Sufi when the story was allegedly told.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 28.

<sup>14</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 28.

### Chapter III

#### Formal Education at Nizamiyya College

When Ghazali was about twenty, he enrolled in the prestigious Nizamiyyah Academy of Nishapur to study under the famous al-Ma'ali al-Juwaini. He was a distinguished Asharite theologian and was known as Imam al-Haramain (since he had studied in the two holy cities of Islam: Mecca and Madina).<sup>15</sup>

Al-Juwaini was in exile to flee the persecution of the Asharite theologians by the Abbasid rulers of the time. McCarthy writes that Ghazali “frequented the lectures of the Imam al-Haramayn ... [and] worked so hard and seriously that he finished his studies in a shorter period of time than expected. He out stripped his fellow students and mastered the Quran, and became the best reasoned [anzar] of the men of his time and matchless among his fellows in the days of the Imam al-Haramayn.”<sup>16</sup>

After the death of Toghril-Bey in 455/1063, the policy of persecution of Asharites was reversed by the Nizam al-Mulk, who ascended to power and was sympathetic to Asharism. Several Nizamiyya madrasas were established including ones at Marw, Baghdad, Herat, and Nishapur. All of these were open to the theological tradition of al-Ashari (d. 324/935-36). Consequently, Al-Juwaini was offered the position of main chair of the madrasa at Nishapur.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 583.

<sup>16</sup> R.J. McCarthy, *Deliverance from Error: An Annotated Translation of al-Munqidh Min al Dal al and Other Relevant Works of Al-Ghazali* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 1999), 14.

<sup>17</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 29.

Al-Juwaini was the first major Muslim theologian to systematically study the works of Ibn Sina. Griffel writes: “by the time of the mid-fifth/eleventh century, the philosophical tradition in Islam had evolved from its foundational texts—translations of Aristotle and their commentaries—to being dominated by the works of the Muslim philosopher Avicenna (Ibn Sina, d. 428/1037).”<sup>18</sup>

Ghazali realized the usefulness of the philosophical arguments in solving many of the problems facing the Asharite theologians of his time. At the same time he wrestled with the philosophical arguments that claimed to prove that the world was pre-eternal (*qadim*) and not created in time like the theologians asserted.<sup>19</sup>

The academy had a wide-ranging curriculum ranging from logic, natural sciences, and philosophy to Sufism and theology. M.M. Sharif writes:

Imam al-Haramain allowed full freedom of thought and expression to his pupils; they were encouraged to engage in debates and discussions of all kinds. Al-Ghazālī gave early proof of great learning and also of a tendency towards philosophizing. Imam al-Haramain described him as “a plenteous ocean to be drowned.”<sup>20</sup>

Despite being trained by him, al-Juwaini was envious of his student and a strong rivalry likely existed between the Imam al-Haramain and Ghazali. McCarthy writes:

The Imam despite his high rank and lofty diction and the speed of his flow in speech and discussion, did not have as sincere private regard for Ghazali because of his dislike for his speed in expression and his natural ability, nor was he pleased by his literary undertakings, even though Ghazali had been trained by him and was associated with him, as is not unknown regarding human nature.<sup>21</sup>

Abd al-Ghafir al-Farisi, an earlier biographer, writes that the young Ghazali had shown some “filthy strains” in his character. He was full of haughtiness and looked down on

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<sup>18</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 30.

<sup>19</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 583.

<sup>21</sup> McCarthy, *Deliverance*, 14.



people with defiance. Griffel writes: “He had a vain pride and was blinded by the ease with which God had provided him to handle words, thoughts, expressions, and the pursuit of glory.”<sup>22</sup>

One of his earliest books was *The Sifted among the Notes on the Methods of Jurisprudence*. This book was a compilation of notes from al-Juwaini’s class on Islamic law. However, Ghazali significantly added to it and organized the contents. Ghazali writes that he “took great pain to organize the book into sections and chapters in order to facilitate the understanding when the need for consultation arises.” This method of organized content was a classic feature of all of Ghazali’s works. This book, reports Ibn Jawzi, was published during al-Juwaini’s lifetime, and may have contributed to the rift between them, since Ghazali disagreed with his teacher and the caliber of this book seemed to surpass those of his teacher’s.<sup>23</sup>

Campinini summarizes Ghazali’s education as follows:

He received a good traditional education first at Jurjan and then Nishapur, the provincial capital, where he attended the lessons of the most distinguished theologian of his time, the Ash’arite Imam al-Haramayn Abu’l-Ma’ali al-Juwayni. Under his guide, al-Ghazali adopted the main principles of the Ash’arite kalam, to which he remained faithful until the end of his life.<sup>24</sup>

The assertion by Campinini that Ghazali remained loyal to Ashari theology has been challenged by some historians such as Richard Frank. While in Baghdad, Ghazali wrote only one treatise dedicated to scholastic theology, the *al-Iqtisad fi’il-’tiqad*. Although his general

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<sup>22</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 30.

<sup>23</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 30-32.

<sup>24</sup> Massimo Campanini, “Al-Ghazali,” *Al-Ghazali Online Project*, last modified June 6, 2006, <http://www.ghazali.org/articles/gz2.htm>.

world view was compatible with Asharism, it is not clear that Ghazali makes a compelling argument for the kind of occasionalism espoused by the Asharites.<sup>25</sup>

#### Al-Farmandhi

In Nishapur Ghazali also studied under the famous Sufi scholar abu ‘Ali al-Fadl ibn Muhammad ibn ‘Ali al-Farmadhi al-Tusi. Farmadhi was a student of the famous theologian al-Qushairi (d. 465/1074) and of Ghazali’s own uncle. In fact, Farmadhi may have been the supposed Sufi that played an important role in Ghazali’s early childhood.<sup>26</sup> However, during this time, Ghazali failed to personally achieve the states promised by the Sufi methodology.<sup>27</sup> Because of this he became dissatisfied with the Sufi practices. He also found flaws with the speculative systems of the scholastic theologians.<sup>28</sup>

Ghazali writes in his autobiography: “The thirst for understanding the essence of things was my persistent habit from my early years and the prime of my life.” He claimed this was a God-given inclination towards seeking the truth. Griffel writes: “This yearning, al-Ghazali says, was not a matter of choosing but a personal instinct and a natural disposition (*gharīza wa-fītra*) that God had given him. This disposition allowed him to scrutinize the intellectual environment he grew up with and to throw off ‘the bounds of emulating others’ (*rabīṭ at al-taqīd*).”<sup>29</sup> Because Ghazali had a fiercely independent mind he critiqued everything he was taught and became an outstanding debater and orator.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Massimo Campanini, “Al-Ghazali,” *Al-Ghazali Online Project*, last modified June 6, 2006, <http://www.ghazali.org/articles/gz2.htm>.

<sup>26</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 585.

<sup>28</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 583.

<sup>29</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 29.

<sup>30</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 584.

## Chapter IV

### Ghazali as the Highest Ranking Orthodox “Doctor” of Islam<sup>31</sup>

When his teachers al-Farmadhi and al-Juwaini died in 1084 CE and 1085 CE respectively, Ghazali moved to the capital of Baghdad where he was taken under the patronage of the Nizam al-Mulk, the great vizier of the Seljuq king Malikshah (d. 1092 CE). He was eventually appointed Chair of Theology at the Nizamiyya Academy at Baghdad at the age of thirty-four. Ghazali was a phenomenal success, and word of his eloquence and dialectical skills grew fast throughout the Muslim world. Because of his popularity he “came to wield influence comparable to that of the highest officials of the State.”<sup>32</sup>

While in Baghdad, Ghazali studied the sciences of “ilm al-usul” and wrote books on science. “He refurbished the (Shafai) school (of jurisprudence) and wrote works on it; and he molded *al-khilaf* [i.e. a branch dealing with differences in jurisprudential matters] and also composed new works on that.”<sup>33</sup>

### Becoming a Famous Jurist and Theologian

The transitory period between Ghazali leaving Nishapur and arriving in Baghdad is not well recorded in the historical sources. According to Abd al-Ghafir al-Farisi, Ghazali first joined the travelling court (*muaskar*) of the Nizam al-Mulk. The Seljuq court would travel the countryside in the Turkish nomadic tradition along with notables such as Ghazali.

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<sup>31</sup> Kojiro Nakamura, “Al-Ghazali, Abu Hamid” *Al-Ghazali Online Project*, last modified January 25, 2008, <http://www.ghazali.org/articles/gz1.htm>.

<sup>32</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 584.

<sup>33</sup> McCarthy, *Deliverance*, 15.

When Sultan Malikshah came to power in 465/1072, Ghazali spent most of his time in the city of Isfahan with frequent visits to Baghdad.

Ghazali entered Baghdad in Jumada 484 (July 1091) as a newly selected professor at the Nizamiyya madrasa appointed by the Nizam al-Mulk. Here he would receive titles such as, “Brilliance of the Religion,” “Eminence among the Religious Leaders,” and “Proof of Islam.”<sup>34</sup>

Two teachers<sup>35</sup> had to vacate their positions to make room for the appointment of al-Ghazali to the Nizamiyya College of Baghdad. Although his tenure at the Nizamiyya only lasted four years, during this period he produced over seventy books while he was teaching over three hundred students in a single class.<sup>36</sup>

McCarthy describes that while in Baghdad Ghazali’s rank and entourage became so great that it surpassed the entourage of the nobles and the princes and even the residence of the caliph.<sup>37</sup>

Ibn al-Jawzi reports that all major scholars of Baghdad, among them the leading Hanbali jurists, sat at his feet and “were astonished by his words; they believed these teachings had great merits, and they used them in their own books.”<sup>38</sup> Amongst the books Ghazali wrote during this period are:

*The Extended One, Middle One (rulings in Shafite fiqh)*

*Incoherence of the Philosophers*

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<sup>34</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 34.

<sup>35</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 297. The two scholars were Abu Abdallah al-Tabari and Abu Muhammad al-Fami al-Shirazi).

<sup>36</sup> Mustafa Abu-Sway, *Al-Ghazzaliy: A Study in Islamic Epistemology*, (Kuala Lumpur, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1996), 19.

<sup>37</sup> McCarthy, *Deliverance*, 15.

<sup>38</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 35.

*The Standard of Knowledge in Logics*

*The Touchstone of Reasoning in Logic*

*The Balanced Book on What-To-Believe*

*The Scandals of the Esoterics and the Virtues of the Followers of Caliph al-Mustazhiri*

*The Weak Positions of the Esoterics*

*The Straight Balance*

Ghazali claims in his autobiography that he found time to study philosophy during his busy teaching schedule at the Nizamiyya. However, Ghazali may be defending himself against those who claimed he studied philosophy prior to the study of the religious sciences. Ibn Jawzi's comments on Ghazali should also be taken skeptically, as he too was a critic of Ghazali.<sup>39</sup>

Griffel writes: "It makes little sense to assume that al-Ghazali arrived in Baghdad in the summer of 484/1091 with empty notebooks, so to speak, without having written or drafted at least parts of the many books he would publish between his arrival at the Nizamiyya in Baghdad and his departure four and one-half years later."

Maurice Bouyges and George F. Hourani<sup>40</sup> both concur with Griffel that even if the books were actually published in Baghdad, the groundwork and preparation of these books must have been in the works during Ghazali's extensive education in Nishapur.

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<sup>39</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 36.

<sup>40</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 35.

### Ghazali's Political Involvement and Philosophy

In addition to being the most prominent teacher of Muslim law and theology, Ghazali was also an official of the Seljuq Empire, someone who, as Ghazali himself later put it critically, “consumed the riches of the ruler.”<sup>41</sup>

Four years into Ghazali's career in Baghdad, political turmoil began to develop. The Nizam al-Mulk was murdered in 485/1092 by an Ismailite. Sultan Malikshah appointed Taj al-Mulk, a long time rival of the Nizam, as the new vizier. Taj al-Mulk was also assassinated only three months later in Muharram 486 / February 1093, likely by members of the Ismailite sect, after being accused of being responsible for Nizam al-Mulk's killing.<sup>42</sup> A month later Malikshah himself died. On the following day, 15 Muharram / 4 February, the Caliph al-Muqtadi died, apparently of natural causes. Griffel describes that “within sixteen months of Nizam al-Mulk's assassination, the whole political elite of the Seljuq state was dead, including the caliph.”

All of the upheaval and death led to a situation in which, according to the historian Ata-Malik Juvayni (d. 681/1283), “the affairs of the realm were thrown into disorder and confusion; there was chaos (*barj va-marj*) in the provinces . . . and turmoil and uproar in the kingdom.” Several commentators have questioned the two theories that these deaths were a coincidence or were targeted killings by the Ismailites. Instead they argue that they were largely an attempt by Terken Khatun, in collaboration with the Nizamiyya, to install her son Mahmud as the Sultan. As one of Malikshah's widows, she had been attempting to convince the caliph al-Muqtadi to appoint her five-year-old son, Mahmud, as Sultan.

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<sup>41</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 106.

<sup>42</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 38. Ghazali's student Abu Bakr ibn al- Arabi, Glassen's and Hillenbrand's analysis.

The ruling caliph, however, declined to accept the appointment saying that Islamic law did not allow him to hand over such power to a minor. Ghazali supported this assertion by the caliph. He stated, “Your son is a minor and the religious law (*al-shar*) does not allow his installation as a [full] ruler.” Other scholars from the Hanafite school supported the claims of Terken Khatun, but Ghazali prevailed. Eventually, Terken Khatun had to compromise and accept the appointment of her son to a less powerful position.<sup>43</sup> Ultimately, Terken Khatun, her son, and the Caliph al-Muqtadi, also passed away, and what they had negotiated was of no value to later caliphs.

Whether Ghazali did this in order to boost the power of the caliph or that of the Nizamiyya is unclear. Ghazali argued in favor of strong governing bodies, either caliphs or sultans, that could enforce the religious law effectively. Ghazali’s objection to the child caliph may have been religious. However, it may have also been political owing to his support for Caliph al-Muqtadi and for maintaining a strong vizierate for the Nizamiyya *party*, which could dominate a weak sultan and a weak caliph.

Ghazali’s analysis of the deaths of the four viziers, Nizam al-Mulk, Taj al-Mulk, Majd al-Mulk, and Muayyad al-Mulk, relates to their moral corruption, corruption that continued to worsen with their successors. In regards to the subsequent tyrannical vizier Mujir al-Din, he writes: “You should know that none of the four viziers had to confront what you have to confront, namely the kind of oppression (*ẓulm*) and desolation (*kharab*) there is now.”<sup>44</sup>

Ghazali takes a firm stance against tyrants and their collaborators and warns them of harsh punishment in the hereafter for their evil acts. Ghazali dissociated himself from Mujir

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<sup>43</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 40

<sup>44</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 136.

al-Dīn and refused to collaborate with rulers even though he was still part of the Nizamiyya in 485/1092.

Ghazali writes in his *Council for Kings* (written at the request of Sanjar, the Vice-regent of Khorasan) that “true faith was rare with the government officials of the day; he wonders whether an official who squanders thousands of dinars on one of his confidants truly has anything left of his faith. On Judgment Day, this money will be demanded back from him, and he will be tormented for his waste of the community’s wealth.”<sup>45</sup>

Ghazali received some criticism for his strict moral stance. A famous vizier, Anushirwan ibn Khalid (d. 532/1138), is reported to have stated, in essence, that Ghazali, who once tried to outdo others in beautiful garb and honorific titles, had instead turned to outdoing others in moralistic posturing, which was most popular at the time.

The events of 485/1092 and the year after must have appeared as a serious political challenge to the patrons of the Nizamiyya madrasa and to Sunnism as a whole. Underlying the political chaos was the intellectual chasm between Sunni theology and Ismailite Shiite challengers. The Ismailites were never able to overthrow the state, but they did cause significant unrest in several cities. Ibn al-Jawzi refers to these events as “the days of the Esoterics.”<sup>46</sup>

#### Influence of Religious Establishments on Ghazali

Ghazali famously suffered an intellectual and emotional crisis at the end of his tenure at the Baghdad Nizamiyya College. The cause of his crisis is often attributed to his inability to find certain knowledge via the philosophical and theological discussions of his time and

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<sup>45</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 137.

<sup>46</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 142.



turns to Sufism to find that certainty. This assertion that Ghazali makes in his *Deliverance from Error* has been questioned by some scholars such as Duncan Black Macdonald and Farid Johre who claim Ghazali left because he felt unwelcome in the city. MacDonald claims this is so because he fell out of favor with the ruling Seljuks and Johre claims his life was threatened by the batinites.<sup>47</sup> After his departure from Baghdad he visits the Islamic holy cities of Jerusalem, Madina and Mecca. He would return to Persia after this spiritual retreat to write his magnum opus the *Ihya Ulum-ad-Deen* (Revival of the Religious Sciences).

In this thesis, another theory for Ghazali's sudden departure will be examined, namely the nature of the Nizamiyya madrasa system. The circumstances in which Ghazali was operating may have played a significant role in his crisis. Ghazali's rapid rise to fame and power was facilitated by the Nizamiyya institutions. These institutions were different from the traditional Islamic learning institutions in many ways. Their difference in character may have contributed to Ghazali's dissatisfaction with the intellectual atmosphere of his time.

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<sup>47</sup> Abu-Sway, *Al-Ghazzaliy*, 21-22.

## Chapter V

### Structure of Nizamiyya

The situation with regards to Islamic educational institutions during this period is best described by Makdisi.<sup>48</sup> Two of the largest learning institutions in Baghdad at the time, both founded in the same year, were the Shrine College of Abu Hanifa and the Nizamiyya College. Other institutions of learning in the Muslim world included: masjids, jamis, and other mosque-colleges.

The Nizamiyya colleges, however, receive significantly more mention in historical sources compared to other colleges. This is particularly puzzling for historians since the Abu Hanifa College, which was founded in the same year as the Nizamiyya College, was equally large and influential. Both had large living quarters for students. Both were wealthy, with rich endowments, and gained large sums of money as annual income. The Abu Hanifa college was for Hanafites and the Nizamiyya college for Shafi'ites.

Makdisi argues that the Nizamiyya colleges achieved more fame and renown due to the nature of its structure. There was a fundamental difference between the Nizamiyya colleges and all the other institutions of learning in Baghdad.

Unlike the Nizamiyya, the professorial chairs of all the other institutions were appointed by the caliph himself, and there was little turnover in these positions. Makdisi describes the succession in colleges like the Abu Hanifa college as follows:

Each law college had only one chair of law, and each was founded with someone in mind for its chair. When the incumbent died, his successor was someone he had

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<sup>48</sup> George Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions of Learning in Eleventh Century Baghdad," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 1961): 1-56.

designated, or someone decided upon by a council of learned elders. The succession usually went to the best disciple, following the rule of seniority.<sup>49</sup>

From the year of its founding (459/1067) for approximately sixty years the Shrine College of Abu Hanifa had only two professors whose appointments were made by elders of the Hanafite school. At the Nizamiyya, however, during this same period of time, there were at least fourteen appointments given to eleven different professors by its founder or the founder's son. This rapid turnover of faculty made news. The historians recorded each appointment and departure of a professor increasing the mention of the Nizamiyya in the historical sources, raising its profile and status, and likely leading to its popularization amongst people.

#### Executive Control of Nizamiyya

Unlike the other colleges and mosque-colleges in Baghdad, Nizamiyya was not a public institution, that is, sponsored by the caliph; it was an exclusive private institution. This system of colleges was owned and controlled by the Nizam al-Mulk himself. Makdisi writes: "The Nizamiyya was the property of Nizam al-Mulk" he could hire and fire its professors at his discretion.<sup>50</sup> The professors at the Nizamiyya were normally appointed from Persia, not from Baghdad, as were the professors of the other colleges. However, the Shrine College of Abu Hanifa was the property of the Hanafite community, its administration being placed in the hands of a committee representing the community in question.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions," 16-17.

<sup>50</sup> Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions," 19.

<sup>51</sup> Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions," 51.

According to Makidisi, the Nizam al-Mulk founded the network of Nizamiyya madrasas to implement his political policies throughout his vast empire.<sup>52</sup> For other religious institutions such as the masjids, or mosque-colleges (*jami*), the caliph was the final appointing authority. The other traditional madrasas were controlled by an administrative committee representing the community of the local school of law. They were funded by endowments, or received donations from prominent patrons and philanthropists who often times remained anonymous, donating for the sake of God. Makdisi writes: “to manipulate a cathedral mosque or a mosque-college was out of the question.” The Nizamiyya colleges provided Nizam-al-Mulk with an instrument for his policies in a way that kept the administration outside the reach of the caliph’s authority, an authority that also had its place in public opinion.<sup>53</sup>

The development of the madrasas in general, in eleventh-century Baghdad changed the dynamics for the professional scholars. For the first time, they could be employed as full-time professors and earn a decent living teaching in their own fields. Prior to this, they had to hire themselves out as copyists or calligraphers in addition to their teaching duties.

The Nizamiyya colleges provided an organized way of harnessing this great potential of power of the learned men of the religious sciences to control the masses. In building his network, Nizam al-Mulk provided himself with an organization that would draw upon this reserve of power for the first time in a systematic way. It also attracted many students, including from other schools, to the school of law. Students often chose the Nizamiyya madrasas because of the scholarships offered. This upset other elements including the

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<sup>52</sup> Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions,” 52.

<sup>53</sup> Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions,” 51.

Hanbalites who condemned those changing their allegiance for monetary gain, since it resulted in them losing followers.<sup>54</sup>

Makdisi argues that the Nizamiyya madrasas were an innovative tool created by the Nizam al-Mulk that gave him effective control over the populous and provided him with an instrument to be used for political purposes. The madrasa was the only institution that he could control in this way, unlike the masjid and jamis, which were under the caliph's control. The Nizam kept for himself complete administrative control over the institution. Makdisi writes:

Nizam's control over appointments was similar to the control exercised by the Caliph over appointments in the cathedral mosques, but with this important distinction: that his control was really more effective than the Caliph's by virtue of his abolition of the principle of permanent tenure for its professorial chair.<sup>55</sup>

After the death of Nizam al-Mulk (1092 CE) and the return to power of the caliph in Baghdad, the Nizamiyya colleges declined and a new type of institution developed similar to the jami. The most famous of these was the Madrasa Mustansiriya, named after the Caliph al-Mustansir. Unlike the Nizamiyya this was not an exclusive mosque-college in which only a particular school of thought was taught. Instead it was unrestricted, and all four schools of law were taught and represented. The Nizamiyya declined in importance after the death of Nizam al-Mulk; and this can be seen, among other things, in the financial difficulties which it experienced soon afterwards.

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<sup>54</sup> Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions," 53-54.

<sup>55</sup> Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions," 53-54.

## Chapter VI

### Ghazali, Nizamiyya and Ashari Theology

Both Ghazali and the Nizamiyya colleges are often held responsible for the victory of Ashari theology in Islam. The famous orientalist scholar Goldziher has been the primary proponent of this view, which has become a fairly standard part of the discussion on Islamic history. Goldziher writes that:

For a long time it was not possible for [the Ash'arites] to teach theology in public. It was not until the middle of the [fourth] eleventh century, when the Wazir of the Seljuqids, Nizam al-Mulk, created public chairs in the great schools founded by him in Nisabuir and Baghdad for the new theological doctrine, that Ash'arite dogmatic theology could be taught officially and was admitted into the system of orthodox theology; its most illustrious representatives could have chairs in the Nizamiyya institutions. It is therefore here that the victory of the Ash'arite school was decided in its struggle against Mu'tazilism on the one hand, and intransigent orthodoxy on the other. The era in which these institutions flourished is therefore important, not only in the history of education, but also in that of Muslim dogmatic theology.<sup>56</sup>

At their peak the Nizamiyya colleges were linked to Ghazali, who played an important role in the prestige of the college itself.<sup>57</sup> However, the popular idea that the Nizamiyya were the standard bearers of Ash'arism has been questioned by Makidisi. The Vizier Nizam al-Mulk did attempt to bring Ash'arism into the college, but these attempts were met with resistance. Whenever this happened the Hanbalites who “constituted the strongest element in the city and were deadly enemies of Ash'arism”<sup>58</sup> would riot in the streets.

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<sup>56</sup> Lewis Goldziher, *Introduction to Islamic Theology and Law* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 68.

<sup>57</sup> A. L. Tibawi, “Origin and Character of ‘al-madrasah,’” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25, no. 1/3 (1962): 225.

<sup>58</sup> Makdisi, “Muslim Institutions,” 47.

The Nizamiyya did not have a public chair of theology. While the Nizam al-Mulk did attempt to use the college for propagating Ash'arism, to say that they were official Ash'ari colleges is inaccurate. Makdisi rejects the claim that Ash'arism triumphed in Baghdad in the fifth/eleventh or sixth/twelfth century. Contrary to Goldziher's view, Makdisi writes:

Ghazali had nothing official to do with its [Ash'arism's] propagation there that we know of, and it remained, in its version from Khurasan, a hated importation which was repeatedly rejected, and especially so after the middle of the eleventh century and the foundation of the Nizamiyya.<sup>59</sup>

The Nizamiyya was seen to serve in an indirect way the purposes of Ash'arism, which was considered a foreign Persian importation in Baghdad. It was therefore opposed by the native conservative element in the city, namely the Hanbalites, and the Traditionalists of the other schools of law.<sup>60</sup>

Makdisi's thesis has come under criticism from A. L. Tabawi who has questioned several of Makdisi's assertions. According to Tabawi the confidence with which Makdisi describes the structure of educational institutions in Baghdad and their curriculum is not fully justified given the limited historical data we have at this time. He writes that "we have no direct evidence of the content of what exactly was taught in this and other similar institutions."<sup>61</sup> He also warns against studying the madrasa's in Baghdad in isolation from similar institutions in Cairo and Cordova. He writes: "The rapidity with which ideas and scholars moved in those days of slow communication is often underestimated."<sup>62</sup> There was significant interaction of scholarship throughout the Islamic world and studying one city in

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<sup>59</sup> Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions," 47.

<sup>60</sup> Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions," 47.

<sup>61</sup> Tibawi, "Origin and Character of al-madrasah," 228.

<sup>62</sup> Tibawi, "Origin and Character of al-madrasah," 235.

isolation may result in overlooking themes common to Islamic institutions throughout the world. Tibawi writes: “Nisabur, Baghdad, Jerusalem, Cairo, Qairawan, and Cordova, in spite of distance, shared not only the common heritage in theory, but its outward manifestation in practice.”<sup>63</sup>

Tibawi also questions Makdisi’s assertion that the madrasas were primarily organized for the teaching of Fiqh or Islamic law and did not focus on other subjects such as theology. He takes Ghazali’s writings as a template for what might have been taught at the Nizamiya. Ghazali, according to Tibawi, “deploras the zeal for *fiqh*, a zeal which tended to restrict the wide connotation of *‘ilm* to a narrow sphere.”<sup>64</sup> Therefore teaching at the Nizamiya should have included the other Islamic sciences as well. According to Tibawi, Asharism was part of the Nizamiya from the beginning and Ghazali helped in its propagation. He writes: “Asha’arism was more likely to permeate orthodox thought and teaching through men of al-Ghazali’s stature than through any other of his contemporaries.” This statement not only assumes Ghazali’s affiliation with Asharism, but also that Ghazali was a proponent of Asharism in the Nizamiya madrasas. He goes on to write that “Ash’arism had already existed in the Nizamiya of Baghdad before al-Ghazali.” The traditions of Mu’tazilah and Falsafah were both already in decline before the era of the madrasa according to Tabawi. The Nizamiya from the very beginning was an Asharite institution and was often at odds with Hanbalism. Tabawi writes: “The principal teacher for whom this instution was reputedly built was known to favour Ash’arism and to deprecate Hanbalism.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Tibawi, “Origin and Character of al-madrasah,” 235.

<sup>64</sup> Tibawi, “Origin and Character of al-madrasah,” 228.

<sup>65</sup> Tibawi, “Origin and Character of al-madrasah,” 237.



For a long period of time Mu'tazilite theology was the official doctrine of the Abbasid empire. According to Goldziher, the Nizamiyya colleges and Ghazali played a role in the demise of Mu'tazilism and the rise of its main rival in scholastic theology, namely Ash'arism. Abul Hasan al-Ashari was a scholar in the Mu'tazilite school when he claimed to have seen a dream in which the Prophet told him to return to orthodoxy. Ashari's role, according to Goldziher, is often seen as a mediator between the conservative Hanbalites and the rationalist Mu'tazilites. Goldziher, however, claims that Ashari himself essentially capitulated to the Hanbalites in many important matters such as the primacy of revelation over reason. Nonetheless, Ashari theologians would later continue the Mu'tazilite legacy of rational theology. In this way Ash'arism can be seen as an offshoot of, and part of, the evolution of Mu'tazilism.<sup>66</sup> Goldziher writes,

The principal leaders of the Asharite school followed in several particulars the Mutazilite road, and remained faithful to the method which, as I have just shown, their *imam* attacked and persecuted with all the weapons in his dogmatic and philological arsenal.<sup>67</sup>

Ash'arism thus replaced Mu'tazalim as the dominant form of scholastic theology in Islam. Makdisi, however, argues that it was, in fact, Hanbalism and other traditionalist forces that, contrary to Goldziher's theory, were responsible for the defeat of Mu'tazilism and that Ash'arism later tried to "step into the place vacated by Mu'tazilism."<sup>68</sup> According to Makdisi these attempts also failed, and in the sixth/twelfth century there was a flourishing of Hanbalite colleges in Baghdad at the same time the Nizamiyya colleges were on the decline.

Makdisi's view is questioned by Tibawi, as discussed above. At the very least, it seems Asharism and Hanbalism did have an active interaction, more than the former simply

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<sup>66</sup> Goldhizer, *Islamic Theology and Law*, 103-106.

<sup>67</sup> Goldhizer, *Islamic Theology and Law*, 106.

<sup>68</sup> Makdisi, "Muslim Institutions," 47-48.

filling the void left by the defeat of Mutazalism. Montgomery Watt writes: “Of the continuing tension in the heartlands, that between the Ash’arites and the Hanbalites seems to have been the most creative.”<sup>69</sup> Ash’arism would go on to become the dominate form of Islamic theology to be challenged occasionally by Hanbalism.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Montgomery Watt, *Formative period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1973), 317.

<sup>70</sup> Hamza Yusuf, interview with author, Flint, MI., June 1, 2012.

## Chapter VII

### Ghazali's Critical Ideas

Ghazali's contribution to intellectual history is encyclopedic. It is therefore impossible to address all of his key ideas within the scope of this thesis. This thesis will, therefore, restrict itself primarily to a few key issues in historicizing Ghazali's ideas. It will also focus upon his famous text *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, and particularly its 17<sup>th</sup> *Discussion* in an attempt to contextualize its origins, its ideas, and its consequences. In order to do this, three key contentions have been identified that will be used as a basis for this project. These three are intertwined but discernible since they have caused controversy and confusion in the lay and some scholarly literature as well. These contentions are the following:

1. Ghazali's *Tabafut* destroyed Islamic philosophy
2. Denying causation undermines science
3. Denying causation supports Ash'arite theology

There is an oft-repeated narrative that states that in many ways Ghazali was responsible for the "decline"<sup>71</sup> of Islamic civilization. The opinion of historians, commentators, and even popular writers will first be reviewed to provide an appreciation for the extent of damage to Islamic civilization that is often attributed to Ghazali and how this apparent damage is traced back to Ghazali's discussion on causation.

In this context the views of the primary apparent targets of Ghazali's critique: Aristotle, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina will be discussed. This is important to determine what

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<sup>71</sup> Placed in quotations since the theory of decline has been questioned by historians such as George Saliba.

exactly Ghazali is criticizing? Is the criticism valid? Who the criticism is directed against? And if the views of all three can be easily lumped together?

This will be followed by an examination of Ghazali's 17<sup>th</sup> discussion on causation. I will review the various ways in which this discussion has been interpreted and I will put forth a hypothesis regarding his attitude and motive.

In the following chapter, I will review Ghazali's legacy as it relates to philosophy, theology, and science. Finally, since Ghazali has received criticism in some quarters for contributing to theological intolerance and to the decay of legal sciences in Islam, I will also briefly examine his influence upon these topics.

#### Ghazali's Tahafut Destroyed Islamic Philosophy

In modern times, Ghazali has come under significant criticism and has been held at least partially responsible for the decline of Islamic philosophy. An example of this can be seen in the writing of A. J. Arberry in his book *Revelation and Reason in Islam*. He writes:

It fell to al-Ghazali ... to deal the fatal blow to philosophy in Islam; his qualifications to be executioner-in-chief were a mind of extraordinary suppleness, a truly devastating gift for polemic, a high degree of sincerity which did not prevent him from being quite ruthless if need be, and an acute sensitivity to the changing temper of the times. His main attack, the climax to a series of preliminary preparations, was delivered in the famous *Incoherence of the Philosophers*.<sup>72</sup>

He goes on to write that "the defeated philosopher's final recourse was therefore to silence."<sup>73</sup> This notion is reinforced by the way Ghazali's critique is presented. Oliver Leaman, for example, titles his section on Ghazali, "Al-Ghazali's attack on philosophy."<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> A. J. Arberry, *Revelation and Reason in Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1957), 61.

<sup>73</sup> Arberry, *Revelation*, 65.

<sup>74</sup> Oliver Leaman, *An Introduction to Classical Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 40.

This could be taken to imply that Ghazali was against philosophy as a discipline. George Saliba, commenting on the influence of Ghazali's book *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, describes the commonly held view. He writes:

The conclusion that is usually drawn from the success of Ghazali's religious thought is that this triumph must have caused the death of its counterpart, the rational scientific thought. Thus in a simple fashion, Ghazali was single-handedly held responsible for the decline of rational, read scientific, thought in Islamic civilization in these later centuries.<sup>75</sup>

It is assumed that because Ghazali revived Islamic religious sciences he must have been opposed to reason and philosophy. Saliba goes on to state:

The fatal blow that was single-handedly delivered by Ghazali against the philosophers, has become so widespread that those approaches continue to have their deleterious effects on the very reading of the scientific texts that were written both before and after the Ghazali period.<sup>76</sup>

E. C. Sachau, an often-quoted orientalist scholar to whom Saliba attributes much of this attitude, writes:

The fourth [tenth] century is the turning point in the history of the spirit of Islam... But for Al-Ashari and Al-Ghazali the Arabs might have been a nation of Galileos, Keplers, and Newtons.<sup>77</sup>

Henry Corbin, author of the *History of Islamic Philosophy*, writes:

Arabic philosophy began with al-Kindi, reached its height with al-Farabi and Avicenna, suffered the disastrous shock of criticism of al-Ghazali and made a heroic effort to rise again with Averroes.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Saliba, *Islamic Science*, 234.

<sup>76</sup> Saliba, *Islamic Science*, 234.

<sup>77</sup> In Muzaffar Iqbal, *The Making of Islamic Science* (Petaling Jaya, Malaysia: Islamic Book Trust, 2009), 142.

<sup>78</sup> Parvis Morewedge, introduction to *Islamic Philosophical Theology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1979), 9.

Muzaffar Iqbal, a scholar of Islamic philosophy of science, reiterates this commonly held narrative by mentioning that “the generally held view in the West . . . considers Islamic philosophy to have died by the blow served by al-Ghazali’s *Tabafut al-falasifah* (*The Incoherence of the Philosophers*).”<sup>79</sup> George Sarton, the noted historian of science, sets the century of Ghazali, the fourth/eleventh century, as the end of the vigor of the Islamic scientific tradition.<sup>80</sup>

For a student entering the field of Islamic intellectual history, he or she is immediately presented with this strong narrative, which states that Ghazali’s attack against the philosophers was a turning point in Islamic philosophy and the beginning of its end. Ghazali’s relationship to Islamic philosophy, however, is more complex.

Ghazali’s relationship to the Aristotelian philosophy is complicated by several factors. The first is that it is unclear if the representatives of the Aristotelian tradition chosen by Ghazali (namely Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina) truly reflect that tradition. Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina certainly are in the Aristotelian tradition; however, they differ from Aristotle on several major points including cosmology, as will be discussed in detail in dedicated chapter.

Ghazali himself appears to be aware of this, and accuses the philosophers of attempting to “cover up” the Greek philosopher’s doctrines by placing them in Muslim garb. Ghazali’s real target thus is likely the Greek philosophers themselves. As Oliver Leaman writes:

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<sup>79</sup> Iqbal, *Islamic Science*, 116.

<sup>80</sup> George Sarton, *An Introduction to the History of Science 1931-48* (Florida: Krieger Publishing, 1975), 2:1-2, quoted in Muzaffar, *Islamic Science*, 121-122.

Al-Ghazali is hinting that the *falasifa* use these religious verses as a sort of camouflage for their real views, pretending that their doctrines are quite in accordance with religion when they know that they are quite otherwise.<sup>81</sup>

If the views of Gutas, Morewedge, and Davidson are taken seriously as discussed above, then Ghazali might be giving the philosophers too much credit. Instead of a cover-up, it might have been the case that the philosophers were genuinely interested in reconciling Islamic theology with Greek philosophy. With regards to Ghazali's cosmology, Professor al-Akiti writes:

Ibn Sina faced the problem of reconciling the Muslim Godhead—an omniscient being—with the Unmoved Mover of Aristotle—an isolated entity who knows only Himself.<sup>82</sup>

Ghazali, however, goes on to accuse Ibn Sina of coming up with a “half-baked” (to use al-Akiti's word) solution and failing to properly follow Aristotle. He accuses the philosophers of propounding double truth (*talbis*).<sup>83</sup> The question of whether Ghazali's accusation against the philosophers is a fair one has been raised in this paper. The chapter of Aristotle, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina will examine the complex relationship between the three, and attempt to demonstrate the Muslim philosophers struggle with Aristotelian philosophy in attempting to make room for Islamic theology. If this is a genuine struggle, they may have been ultimately unsuccessful, but Ghazali's accusation against them for being disingenuous may or may not be true.

Any attempt to historize Ghazali must also attempt to unravel the thinkers preceding him whom Ghazali engages with. This will allow the answering of questions such as: Were

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<sup>81</sup> Oliver, Leaman. “Islamic Philosophy,” in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. E. Craig (London: Routledge, 1998), accessed December 12, 2005, <http://www.rep.routledge.com/article/H057>.

<sup>82</sup> Al-Akiti in *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2009), 66.

<sup>83</sup> Al-Akiti in *Avicenna and His Legacy*, 66.

the Muslim philosophers “blind followers” of Aristotle? Was Ghazali’s thought really that different from Ibn Sina? Is Ghazali really opposed to philosophy? What was the nature of Ghazali’s objection to Ibn Sina’s world view? Therefore, I have dedicated a chapter of this thesis to the three principle philosophers: Aristotle, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina.

### Denying Causation Undermines Science

In the realm of intellectual thought one of the most important concepts held responsible for the decline of science in Islam is the concept of causation, and Ghazali’s critique of it. The quest for determining causes of natural phenomena is central to science. It is on this basis that future events can be predicted and theories can be formed. Denying causation would then undermine a basic premise of natural science.

This leads historians, such as Tamim Ansary, author of *Destiny Disrupted*, to write: Take it however you will, the argument against causality undermines the whole scientific enterprise. If nothing actually causes anything else, why bother to observe the natural world in search of meaningful patterns? If God is the only cause, the only way to make sense of the world is to know God’s will, which means that the only thing worth studying is the revelation, which means that the only people worth listening to are the ulama.<sup>84</sup>

Ahmad Dallal, author of *Islam, Science and the Challenge of History*, writes:

Numerous historians have focused on Al-Ghazali’s denial of causality and argued that by repudiating a cornerstone of natural science, Al-Ghazali undermined the very possibility of scientific knowledge.<sup>85</sup>

Farida Chafri explains that denying causation amounts to the refusal to admit that man has “formulated a representation of the universe based in the discovery of fundamental

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<sup>84</sup> Tamim Ansary, *Destiny Disrupted* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 112.

<sup>85</sup> Ahmad Dallal, *Islam, Science, and the Challenge of History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 139.



physical laws.” She argues that “to partially accept fundamental laws of physics is to render the whole theory incoherent.”<sup>86</sup>

The preceding set of opinions is often derived from Ghazali’s 17<sup>th</sup> Discussion in the *Tahafut* where he states, “the connection between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what I habitually believed to an effect is not necessary....”<sup>87</sup> Even scholars such as Solomon Monk takes this to mean that “the philosophers’ theory of causality is false, and that they are not right when they deny that things can happen contrary to what they call the law of nature and contrary to what happens habitually.”<sup>88</sup>

To interpret Ghazali in a manner in which he is held to reject causation completely is a much too simplistic way of understanding Ghazali. The reality of Ghazali’s view is much more complex and nuanced. Therefore, a significant section of this thesis will be devoted to attempting to understand Ghazali’s motivation and his notion of causation. This chapter is based primarily on Ghazali’s 17<sup>th</sup> discussion of the *Tahafut* in which he discusses causation. It also considers some of the challenges in contextualizing and interpreting Ghazali’s ideas and motives.

### Denying Causation Supports Ash’arite Theology

Ghazali’s critique of causation is often seen to support Ash’arite theology. Consequently, Ghazali is often seen as subscribing to Ash’arite theology. This is controversial on several counts: 1) there is a debate in the scholarly literature as to whether Ghazali did in fact subscribe whole heartedly to Ash’arite theology, 2) the notion that the

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<sup>86</sup> Farida Faouzia Chafri, “When Galileo Meets Allah,” *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Winter 2002, [http://www.digitalnpq.org/archive/2002\\_winter/charfi.html/](http://www.digitalnpq.org/archive/2002_winter/charfi.html/).

<sup>87</sup> Michael Marmura, *Al-Ghazali The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1997),a 170.

<sup>88</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 147.

Ash'arite worldview automatically undermines science has also been questioned, and 3) whether Ash'arite theology does indeed become the dominate theology of Islam has been questioned by George Makdisi, as has already been discussed.

In simplified terms Asharite theology (particularly its causal theory) can be contrasted with Aristotelian causal theory. In the Aristotelian view, things cause other things. Fire burns cotton. In the Ash'arite view, only God causes things to happen. God, of His own free will, causes the cotton to burn when it is in close proximity to fire. In the Ash'arite view (also known as occasionalism) all actions are caused only, and directly, by God. Osman Bakar briefly explains the perspective:

In order to safeguard or glorify divine omnipotence, it denies the objective reality of causal powers in creatures, given to them by God as part of their respective natures. Apart from the phrase "God has power over all things", which one finds repeated in almost every page of the Quran, there are numerous verses which provide a clear scriptural basis for the Islamicity of the theological [Ash'arite] perspective. We produce here a few examples: "It is God Who causeth the seed-grain and the date-stone to split and sprout" (6:95).<sup>89</sup>

In some of the popular and historical literature this perspective is viewed as tantamount to fatalism. That, all power belongs to God, man is powerless, and thus cannot affect his own future. Ghazali is assumed to be a chief proponent of this world view. Some scholars, who view Ash'arism as having become the orthodox form of Islam, and subsequently undermining philosophy and science by its insistence on occasionalism, often accuse Ghazali of supporting and causing the dominance of Ash'arism.

C. S. Marshall writes: "In the very moment of its triumph, in the act of perfecting its own tradition, Ashari Kalam was near losing sight of its very purpose: the rational defense of non-rationalistic kerygmatic position."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Osman Bakar, *Atomistic conception of nature in Ash'arite theology*.  
<http://www.allamaiqbal.com/publications/journals/review/oct91/2.htm>.

<sup>90</sup> C. S. Marshall, *The Venture of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 2: 178.

The explanation for the decline of Islamic science linked to denial of causation and Ash'arism's rise has become influential by its repetition in the popular literature by non-specialists in the field. Glen Segell summarizes a similar explanation for the decline:

Islam saw events or actions, fatalistically, as the will of Allah. Islamic civilization reached great heights, but turns to orthodoxy and stability would eventually lead to its demise.<sup>91</sup>

The famous physicist Pervez Hoodbhoy author of *Islam and Science* subscribes to a similar point of view. He describes the Ash'arites as believing that “even a speeding arrow might not reach its destination.” Professor Hoodbhoy explains the effect of orthodoxy striking back against the rationalists. Quoting Nietzsche he states, “rationality is a matrix of connections between cause to affect” which leads to the “will to power.” Hoodbhoy argues that the denial of rationality, which he identifies with causation, led to a fatalist view of life.<sup>92</sup> For Hoodbhoy Ghazali's denial of causation means nothing can be predicted in the world. Therefore, humans do not have much incentive to better their lives since they do not feel in control of their future.

M. T. Ansari writes: “Ghazali's view lead to an absurd world, and to save it requires God and Miracles.... A civilization which accepts Al-Ghazali will patiently wait for miracles to happen [to] leave everything to Allah.”<sup>93</sup> Ansari also makes statements such as

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<sup>91</sup> Glen M. Segell “9/11: Wahabism/Hegemony and Agenic Man/Heroic Masculinity,” *Strategic Insights*, no. 3 (March 2005): 4.

<sup>92</sup> Pervez Hoodbhoy, *Islam and Science: Religious Orthodoxy and the Battle for Rationality* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1991).

<sup>93</sup> M.T. Ansari, *Secularism, Islam and Modernity: Selected essays of Alam Khundmiri* (London: Sage, 2001), 125.

“Ghazali... repudiates causality to establish the occasionalistic doctrine”<sup>94</sup> and “Al-Ghazali challenged the rational trends in his days and re-established an Islamic orthodoxy.”<sup>95</sup>

### But Was Ghazali an Ash’arite?

In the scholarly literature there is debate regarding Ghazali’s relationship with Asharism. Griffel summarizes this discussion when he writes:

Initially, al-Ghazali was regarded as a faithful Asharite theologian who followed the Asharite model of an occasionalist universe in which God is the only direct and indirect cause of events. However, an ever-growing appreciation of al-Ghazali’s complex relationship with Aristotelian philosophy, particularly the philosophy of Ibn Sina, has led to the realization that this is not the whole truth.<sup>96</sup>

Kojiro Nakamura who has analyzed many of Ghazali’s own writings and comes to the conclusion that Ghazali’s views in many respects are

very much different from, even contradictory in some points to, traditional Ash’arite theology. Certainly Ghazali himself never denies being an Ash’arite, but he is not satisfied with *traditional* Ash’arism and even becomes critical of it once in a while as an independent thinker. This makes his theological standpoint subtle and complex, and even difficult to pinpoint.<sup>97</sup>

Ghazali often talks about Asha’rites in the third person seemingly detached from them, and sometimes even disagrees with established Ashari theologians.<sup>98</sup> George Makdisi argues in his “The Non-Ash’arite Shafi’ism of Ghazzaliyy” that Ghazali never claims to be an Ash’arite, and belonged to a school of law founded by Imam Shafi’i. According to

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<sup>94</sup> Ansari, *Secularism, Islam and Modernity*, 34.

<sup>95</sup> Ansari, *Secularism, Islam and Modernity*, 33.

<sup>96</sup> Yitzhak Tzvi Langermann, “Al-Ghazali’s Cosmology in the Veil Section of his *Mishkat Al-Anwar*,” in *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2009), 27.

<sup>97</sup> Nakamura, “Was Ghazali an Ash’arite?” 20.

<sup>98</sup> Nakamura, “Was Ghazali an Ash’arite?” 5.

Makdisi, Imam Shaffii founded his method against the Kalam tradition in which Ash'arism falls.<sup>99</sup> Richard Frank is also of the opinion that Ghazali was not an Ash'arite and in fact argues that he subscribed to the Aristotelian causal theory.

Others such as Marmura, clearly place Ghazali in the Ashari tradition. This view is also supported by several medieval Muslim scholars such as Al-Subkiyy, Al-Zubaydiyy, and Sulayman Dunya.<sup>100</sup> The contemporary thinker Ahmad Dallal has argued against the view of Richard Frank stating:

The fundamental tension in the abstract thought of al-Ghazali derives from the very fact that he tries to use logical reasoning to demonstrate the limited authority of reason. Arguably, this is one of the central objectives of the Ash'arites. In fact, when read in the context of his general ideology, al-Ghazali exhibits remarkable consistency in his unwavering commitment to traditional Ash'arism.<sup>101</sup>

Ghazali's relationship with Ash'arism and Aristotelianism will be discussed in detail in the section on causation. It will be argued that attempting to place him in one tradition or the other missed the point regarding Ghazali's primary motivation. Ghazali may accept both theories as long as a certain worldview and principles are maintained.

The further question of whether Ash'arite theology can be held responsible for a decline in Islamic science is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the works of George Saliba are evidence of the fact that even this assertion is not true. That, science continued to flourish after the rise of Ash'arism. This will be discussed towards the end of this thesis.

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<sup>99</sup> Abu-Sway, *Al-Ghazaliyy*, 34.

<sup>100</sup> Abu-Sway, *Al-Ghazaliyy*, 33.

<sup>101</sup> Dallal, *Ghazali and the Perils of Interpretation*. <http://www.ghazali.org/articles/ad-gz-rmf-rv.pdf>.

## Chapter VIII

### Aristotle, Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina

Any attempt to historicize the influence of Ghazali must consider the intellectual environment in which he lived and the critical ideas he was principally engaging with. As has been discussed, it is often suggested that Ghazali aimed his attack on philosophy and philosophers. The question then arises, what exactly about philosophy was Ghazali attacking? Why was he attacking it? And who within the philosophical tradition was his main target? Although, as quoted below, Ghazali appears to target Al-Farabi and particularly Ibn Sina, the reality is much more complex. He appears to be attacking them because of their blind acceptance of the Aristotelian worldview which, according to Ghazali, is not demonstrably provable and in some cases contradicts the Islamic worldview. So, what was Aristotle's view of causation? Did Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina "transmit" that view without being conscious of the Islamic viewpoint or without critical analysis?

#### The Philosophers' Understanding of Causation

The two primary thinkers Ghazali chooses to criticize in the *Tabafut* are Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. He considers them representatives of the Islamic philosophy scholars and transmitters of Aristotelian logic and philosophy. In his *Incoherence*, Ghazali writes:

Moreover, the words of the translators of the words of Aristotle are not free from corruption and change, requiring exegesis and interpretation, so that this also has aroused conflict among them. The most reliable transmitters and verifiers among the philosophers in Islam are al-Farabi Abu Nasr and Ibn Sina. Let us then confine ourselves to refuting what these two have selected and deemed true of the doctrines of their leaders in error. For what they have abandoned and scorned to pursue no one contests is error and needs no lengthy examination to refute. Let it then be known that we are confining ourselves to the [philosophers'] doctrines according to

the transmission of these two men so that the discussion would not spread [far and wide] with the spread of doctrines.<sup>102</sup>

In order to understand the material Ghazali is attacking it is important to examine the views of these thinkers, namely Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina. Along with their relationship to Aristotelian philosophy and Islamic theology it is also important to understand their motives and the context in which they were operating. A brief overview of important principles of Aristotle's thought may provide a good starting point for this discussion since Ghazali aims much of his criticism towards philosophers who are followers of Aristotle. Ghazali writes:

We must therefore reckon as unbelievers both these philosophers themselves and their followers among the Islamic philosophers, such as Ibn Sina, al-Farabi, and others in transmitting the philosophy of Aristotle.<sup>103</sup>

One of the questions that I will address is, to what degree is this characterization of Ibn Sina, for example, accurate? Was he simply a follower of Aristotle? I will examine the views of Aristotle, Al-Farabi and Ibn Sina.

## Aristotle

There are two concepts from Aristotle's thought that play a key role in Islamic philosophy and specifically in the evolution of causal theory in Islam: the efficient cause and the unmoved mover. Although Aristotle's influence is far more widespread than these two ideas, they are the most relevant to this thesis and therefore deserve a brief review.

The efficient cause according to Aristotle is one of four causes he describes. The efficient cause is the primary source of the change. For example, in the creation of a statue the efficient cause is the artisan's art of bronze-casting, which created it. The other causes

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<sup>102</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 4-5.

<sup>103</sup> W. Montgomery Watt, *The Faith and Practice of al-Ghazali* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1953), 32-33.

are the material cause (the matter out of which something is formed), the formal cause (the form the effect takes), and the final cause (the reason for which a thing is done).<sup>104</sup>

Causality plays a major role in Aristotle's epistemology. According to Aristotle, to have knowledge of something implies knowing its cause. Implicit in this theory is the idea that everything must have a cause. The efficient cause is the principal or primary cause that produces an effect. Although there is some controversy over whether Aristotle preferred the final cause over the efficient cause as the explanation of natural phenomena, that discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>105</sup>

Aristotle also promulgated the theory of a Prime mover or an unmoved mover. It is the first cause of motion from which everything else followed. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle describes this Prime mover as "something which moves [other things] without [itself] being moved [by anything]."<sup>106</sup>

Aristotle uses the idea of motion to build his metaphysics. Istvan Bodnar describes Aristotles view that "the universe depends on an eternal motion (or on several eternal motions), the eternal revolution of the heavenly spheres, which in turn is dependent on one or several unmoved movers."<sup>107</sup> The moving cause is the origin of the causal chain which results in motion. Bodnar writes: "Aristotle claims that in a chain of efficient causes, where

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<sup>104</sup> Andrea Falcon, "Aristotle on Causality," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2011 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, last modified September 2, 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-causality/>.

<sup>105</sup> Falcon, "Aristotle on Causality."

<sup>106</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 12.1072a, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/>.

<sup>107</sup> Istvan Bodnar, "Aristotle's Natural Philosophy," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2012, ed. Edward N. Zalta, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/aristotle-natphil/>.



the first element of the series acts through the intermediary of the other items, it is the first member in the causal chain, rather than the intermediaries, which is the moving cause.”<sup>108</sup>

Aristotle’s argument for motion can be summarized as follows:

1. Everything is moved by something.
2. There cannot be an infinite regress of movers.
3. There must be an unmoved mover.

Since, according to Aristotle, motion is both eternal and necessary, the unmoved mover must also be eternal and necessary. It is the primary cause of motion in the Universe.<sup>109</sup> Griffel summarizes the Aristotelians, “every effect is necessary in relation to its efficient cause. Existence is viewed as downwards progressing, a higher efficient cause passes it to a lesser one.”<sup>110</sup> The consequences of accepting such a causal theory will play an important role in Ghazali’s *Incoherence of the Philosophers*.

#### Al-Farabi

Al-Farabi is often called the “second master” [after Aristotle]. He was the self-proclaimed heir of the Aristotelian tradition.<sup>111</sup> The principle of causation is central to both philosophers theories. Al-Farabi’s cosmology is slightly different from that of Aristotle. In addition to motion, Al-Farabi adds the idea of being and intellection.

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<sup>108</sup> Bodnar, “Aristotle’s Natural Philosophy.”

Aristotle, *Physics* 8.5, 257a10-12.

<sup>109</sup> Barry Smith, *Aristotle*. Last modified on January 2, 2006.  
<http://www.abu.nb.ca/courses/grphil/philrel/aristotle.htm>

<sup>110</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 135.

<sup>111</sup> Jon McGinnis and David C. Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources*, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2007), 55.

In his presentation each stage in the causal process imparts reality to the next in a descending series of intellections until the Universe as we know it is made to exist. For Al-Farabi the First Mover is God. Riesman describes his argument as follows:

The First Cause is the incorporeal First Mover, in that the celestial spheres move out of desire for it. This First cause in thinking itself, emanates the incorporeal being of the first intellect. In turn this first intellect thinks of the First Cause and of itself; this “multiplicity” of thought process, in the first intellection the second intellect.<sup>112</sup>

God, in thinking Itself, emanates a single being, the intellect. God directly acts upon only one being—the first intellect. Since God is One in all respects, He cannot act upon anything else. Griffel writes: “What is truly single in all its aspects is unchanging and can only have one effect, the highest created being.”<sup>113</sup>

Deborah Black describes the relationship between Aristotle’s view and that of Al-Farabi. She writes:

In its basic premise it represents a radical departure from Aristotle, for whom God was not an efficient cause of the very existence of all other beings, but only the first cause of motion in the universe. Many of the properties of al-Farabi’s emanational God are Aristotelian, however: God is one, immaterial, eternal and acts of necessity. Most importantly, however, God is characterized by al-Farabi as an intellect whose principal activity is self-understanding, echoing Aristotle’s conception of God’s activity as “thinking of thinking.”<sup>114</sup>

Explaining, or proving, God in this way limits the attributes of God to being primarily a first cause. Al-Farabi writes: “The First cannot be divided in speech into the things which would constitute its substance.” God cannot directly be known by the human

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<sup>112</sup> McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 57.

<sup>113</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 137.

<sup>114</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Philosophy* (Lahore: Suhail Academy, 2002), 189.

intellect according to this view.<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, according to Al-Farabi, God has no goal, pursuit, desire, or intention.<sup>116</sup> The universe is a necessary consequence of God's existence.

Ibrahim Makdour describes Al-Farabi's view: "He holds that from the Necessary One flows or emanates only one other by virtue of Its self-knowledge and goodness. Thus, knowledge equals creation, for it is enough for a thing to be conceived in order to exist."<sup>117</sup> Majid Fakhry emphasizes the consequences such a theory has for Divine attributes. He writes: "The crux of the argument... is that the First—owing to the superabundance of his being and perfection— generates the whole order of being in the universe by way "necessity of nature" which is entirely independent of his choice or desire."<sup>118</sup>

Although Al-Farabi does not deny causation,<sup>119</sup> he does add another layer of nuance to the process. The fact that Al-Farabi moves slightly away from a strictly Aristotelian approach, with the addition of intellection, indicates his consciousness of Islamic theology and his attempt to accommodate it. Adding intellection to the strict causal chain does leave open the possibility that humans could know God.<sup>120</sup> It allows him to expand Divine attributes beyond being the cause of the (Aristotelian) first motion. Makdour writes that "Al-Farabi expounds philosophy in a religious way and philosophizes religion, thus pushing them in two converging directions so that they may come to an understanding and co-exist."<sup>121</sup> Al-Farabi also admits to the validity of miracles since they are the means of proving

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<sup>115</sup> McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 58.

<sup>116</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 142.

<sup>117</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 458.

<sup>118</sup> Majid Fakhry, *History of Islamic Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 122.

<sup>119</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 459.

<sup>120</sup> McGinnis and Reisman, *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, 58.

<sup>121</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 457.

prophecy. He holds that miracles although supernatural do not contradict natural laws.<sup>122</sup> Farabi tries “to reduce to causality matters beyond the habitual course of nature and even contradictory to it.”

The desire to reconcile philosophy with theology is present in Al-Farabi’s work. Teresa Druant argues that Al-Farabi adopted the Neoplatonic theory of emanation, knowing it is not Aristotelian, in order to “complete his account of the part of metaphysics that comprises theology or divine science, in which the causal relations between divine and natural beings is set forth.”<sup>123</sup> In attempting to solve the problem of free will in Islam, Al-Farabi makes an important contribution that will later be taken up by Ibn Sina for an entirely different purpose.

Al-Farabi gives an example of a person, Zayd, and attempts to reconcile Zayd’s freedom to choose whether he will travel with God’s foreknowledge that Zayd will travel, drawing a distinction between two types of events:

1. Possible by virtue of themselves (*mumkin bi-nafsibi*) – e.g., Zayd’s decision to go or not.
2. Possible by virtue of something else (*wajid bi-ghayrihi*) – e.g., God’s foreknowledge that Zayd will go.

Zayd may decide to stay or go. The possibility of his staying home remains. However, this possibility will not be realized since God has foreknowledge that Zayd will travel. God’s knowledge does not remove the human experience of free will.<sup>124</sup> This distinction, however, will play a major role in Ibn Sina’s metaphysics. Here we see Al-Farabi using philosophy in the service of a theological problem.

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<sup>122</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 466.

<sup>123</sup> Nasr, *Encyclopaedia of Islamic Philosophy*, 188.

<sup>124</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 137.

Ibn Sina

Ibn Sina's proof for the existence of God utilizes yet another variation of Aristotle's theory. His proof is based upon drawing a distinction between what is necessarily existent by reason of itself and what is existent by reason of something else. Davidson writes:

His [Ibn Sina's] proof for the existence of God consists in analyzing the concept of the *necessarily existent by reason of itself* and establishing its attributes; then analyzing the concept of the *possibly existent* and showing that if anything actually exists, something necessarily existent by reason of itself must also exist.<sup>125</sup>

For Ibn Sina, God is a necessarily existent being and all of the rest of creation is merely possibly existent. The possibly existent does not come into existence unless caused by the necessarily existent. Davidson explains:

To put this in another way, the possibly existent does not actually exist unless rendered necessary by something else; and conversely everything actually existing, including whatever occurs in the physical world, such as combustion, necessary in one sense or the other.<sup>126</sup>

Ibn Sina himself explains his proof for God's existence in *Avicenna al-Risalat al'Arshiya* (Avicenna on Theology). Following in the Aristotelian tradition he writes: "Whatever has being must either have a reason for its being, or have no reason for it... Such a being is either contingent or necessary... Contingent beings end in a Necessary Being."<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Herbert Davidson, "Avicenna's Proof of the Existence of God as a Necessarily Existent Being," in *Proofs for the Eternity, Creation and the Existence of God in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 175.

<sup>126</sup> Davidson, "Avicenna's Proof," 174.

<sup>127</sup> Ibn Sina, *Avicenna on Theology*, trans. Arthur J. Arberry (London: Hyperion Press, 1992), 25.

For Ibn Sina, the Necessary Being must be God. Since it is God who necessarily exists by reason of itself and not by any other reason. God is one and has no cause. For Ibn Sina, this implies everything directly and sequentially emanates from God. He writes:

Since you now know that He is a Necessary Being, that He is One, and that He has no Attribute which augments His Essence; this being so it followed that His First Act is one. For if there had emanated from Him two acts, the emanation would have been in two different manners, for duality in this act implies duality in the agent. He who acts by virtue of his own essence, if his essence is one only one act emanates from it.<sup>128</sup>

### Attributes

Ibn Sina then describes the attributes of his God. This is important because of Ghazali's later concern for Divine attributes. Ibn Sina describes:

Since it is established that God is a Necessary Being, that He is One in every respect, that He is exalted above all causes, and that He has no reason of any kind for His Being; since it is further established that His Attributes do not augment His Essence, and that He is qualified by the Attributes of Praise and Perfection; it follows necessarily that we must state that He is Knowing, Living, Willing, Omnipotent, Speaking, Seeing, Hearing and Possessed of all the other Loveliest Attributes.<sup>129</sup>

In Ibn Sina's cosmology, similar to Al-Farabi, God is the final cause without any further complexity, no internal causes. Davidson explains Ibn Sina's view:

The denial of internal causes means that the necessarily existent by reason of itself can have no "principles which combine together and in which the necessarily existent consists." The implications for the thesis are far reaching. For if the necessarily existent by reason of itself can contain no parts whatsoever, it is simple in every conceivable way.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibn Sina, *Avicenna on Theology*, 35-36.

<sup>129</sup> Ibn Sina, *Avicenna on Theology*, 32.

<sup>130</sup> Davidson, "Avicenna's Proof," 175.

Ibn Sina is, however, able to with reason establish certain characteristics of God. Namely, these are that God is “uncaused, simple incorporeal, one, pure intellect, true, good, beautiful, an object of desire, possessed of the greatest pleasure.”<sup>131</sup>

In his *Danish Nama*, Ibn Sina writes about God: “All things are known to It, then, due to Its own essence. It does not become a knower of things because It is caused by them, but on the contrary, Its knowledge is the cause for the existence of all things.”<sup>132</sup> He compares God’s knowledge to that of a builder who has knowledge of the house he conceived.

According to Ibn Sina God’s knowledge is an aspect of divine essence and as such it does not change. God’s essence is total unity and is totally unified in its nature. God cannot choose between the creation of blue or yellow heaven. Blue heaven is necessary since it is what was already a part of God’s knowledge. It is unchangeable but is also perfect. Griffel describes their view as, “God has no goal (*qasd*), pursuit (*talab*), desire (*arzu*) or intention (*gharad*) present when He creates.” The Will of God is defined as merely His knowledge of His action, even if there is not “willful choosing” between options involved.<sup>133</sup> This definition of God is implied in a universe with a strict and absolute causal chain, which must therefore extend also to God. Even God is therefore apparently denied motives or true free will.

It is here that Ibn Sina appears to depart from the orthodox Islamic view. In Ibn Sina’s cosmology the world must exist and a consequence of God’s existence, since it necessarily emanates from the Divine. In the orthodox view, the world is created and

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<sup>131</sup> Davidson, “Avicenna’s Proof,” 176.

<sup>132</sup> Parviz Morewedge, *The Metaphysics of Avicenna* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 61.

<sup>133</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 141-142.

therefore is a result of God's choice. It is here that Ibn Sina fails to make the Aristotelian theory fully comply with Islamic cosmology.<sup>134</sup>

### Historical Context

Davidson remarks that the concept of *Necessity*, which Ibn Sina introduces to the Aristotelian, adds nothing to his proof for God.<sup>135</sup> According to Robert Wisnovsky, however, Ibn Sina's motive for his theory has to do with the theological debates that were occurring at the time.

There was a heated debate in Islamic theology regarding whether something other than God could have the divine attribute of eternity. The Mu'tazilites had argued that the Quran could not be eternal, since only God is eternal, and giving the Quran such a status would conflict with Divine Oneness. The Ash'arites on the other hand defended the idea that the Quran was uncreated and eternal, since it is the word of God and thus a divine attribute that is eternal with God. Wisnovsky writes: "the Sunnis had insisted on the reality, eternity, and distinctiveness of the divine attributes."<sup>136</sup> However, "by the Mutazlites reckoning, a cluster of eternal, real and distinct attributes violated Islam's cardinal tenet of God's oneness (*tawhid*)."<sup>137</sup> For the Mu'tazlites being eternal was a unique characteristic of God alone and could not be applied to anything else, including the Quran.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Morewedge, *Metaphysics of Avicenna*, 272-273.

<sup>135</sup> Davidson, "Avicenna's Proof," 175.

<sup>136</sup> Robert Wisnovsky, "Avicenna and the Avicennian Tradition," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 121.

<sup>137</sup> Wisnovsky, "Avicenna," 121.

<sup>138</sup> Wisnovsky, "Avicenna," 121.



Ibn Sina solves this problem by replacing the concept of eternity with necessity. Being eternal is no longer a distinctive characteristic of God. Instead, being necessary of existence by reason itself becomes God's distinctive characteristic. According to Wisnovsky, distinguishing between God and other eternal things was one of Ibn Sina's main purposes in creating his theory.

It was influential. The post-Ibn Sina Sunni Mutakallimun replaced eternity with necessity. Instead of eternity they began to use necessity of existence as meta-attribute of God as it was less problematic.<sup>139</sup> Wisnowksy writes:

God's self is necessary of existence, as are God's attributes, yet the attributes are not necessary of existence in themselves, since they are merely attributes and thus, strictly speaking, not "selves" but only predicated of selves.<sup>140</sup>

Ibn Sina solved one problem in Islamic theology, but another persisted. Ibn Sina appears committed to Aristotle's theory of causation, which would imply that not only God, but also subsequent creation exist out of necessity. One consequence of Ibn Sina's theory is that in moving away from eternity (*qadim*) toward necessity he leaves out the doctrine of God's creation of the Universe at some point in *time* in the past.

The Mutakallimun were satisfied using Ibn Sina's theory to prove God and separate him from creation. But not to explain how God created or interacts with the world. Because "it could be taken to imply that God's causation of the world was no more than an involuntary act of necessitation, rather than a voluntary act of agency."<sup>141</sup> This view denies God an important attribute, that of omnipotence. That He has power over all things and can act as He pleases at any time. Wisnovsky writes,

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<sup>139</sup> Wisnovsky, "Avicenna," 130.

<sup>140</sup> Wisnovsky, "Avicenna," 130.

<sup>141</sup> Wisnovsky, "Avicenna," 131-132.

One theme that runs through much of the first part of Ghazal's *Incoherence of the Philosophers* is that Avicenna's conception of the relationship between God and the world—a relationship between a being which is necessary of existence in itself, and all other beings, which are necessary of existence through another—robbed God of any true agency. It is not enough, according to al-Ghazali, to conceive of God merely as a cause; we must also conceive of God as an agent and there make some room for God's will.<sup>142</sup>

This will be discussed in more detail in the section below on Ghazali's refutation of causation.

### Ibn Sina and Aristotle

There are two philosophical principles which underlie Ibn Sina and Aristotle's proof: (a) the principle of causality and (b) the impossibility of an infinite regress of causes.<sup>143</sup>

Ibn Sina's view of causation differs from Aristotle when it comes to the First Mover. He reaffirms also that the first cause is the sum total of perfection, and that every entity loves this Absolute Good and aspires to such perfection. A contingent existent is viewed not only with respect to its proximate cause, or its remote, efficient cause, but also with respect to what Ibn Sina calls, "the cause of perfection." This is a concept not found in Aristotle. Morewedge writes that "a similar emphasis on 'the role of the first mover with respect to the world' is not to be found in the works of Aristotle."<sup>144</sup>

Ibn Sina distinguishes between cause of "generation" (*buduth*) of an object and the cause of its "maintenance" (*thabat*). *Possibly existent* must at all times depend on a cause distinct from itself to maintain it in existence.

Avicenna's proof goes beyond Aristotle's, however, in establishing a first cause of the very existence of the universe rather than just a first cause of motion. His proof,

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<sup>142</sup> Wisnovsky, "Avicenna," 130-131.

<sup>143</sup> Davidson, "Avicenna's Proof," 177.

<sup>144</sup> Parvis, Morewedge. *The Metaphysics of Avicenna* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), 209-210.

further, is original in basing even the philosophical principles needed for the argument exclusively upon an analysis of concepts.<sup>145</sup>

Ibn Sina rejects the notion that the knowledge of God can be arrived by solely by philosophical arguments of the First Mover.<sup>146</sup> According to Davidson: “Its existence, Ibn Sina writes, is surely not self-evident. Nor can its existence be established through a syllogistic ‘demonstration’ (*burhan*).”<sup>147</sup>

Ibn Sina rejected the Aristotelian argument that the first cause can be arrived at by the argument from motion. Gutas quotes a passage from Ibn Sina in which Ibn Sina attempts to refute Aristotle. Gutas writes:

It is nonsensical to arrive at the First Truth by way of motion and by way of the fact that it is a principle of motion, and [then] to undertake from *this* [position] to make it into a principle for the essences, because these people offered nothing more than establishing it as a mover, not that it is a principle for what exists. How utterly incompetent that motion should be the means of establishing the One, the Truth, which itself is the principle of every being.<sup>148</sup>

Ibn Sina is arguing that to prove God by using the argument of the first mover, only establishes a single characteristic of God, namely that of a mover. Whereas, as Ibn Sina implies, motion itself is a creation of God who has many other attributes. In this line of argument one finds an echo of Ghazali. As will be discussed later, Ghazali criticizes arguments for the existence of God by the “philosophers” precisely for this reason.

Ibn Sina appears clearly aware of the problems posed by Aristotelian philosophy to Islamic theology. Gutas also quotes a disciple of Ibn Sina, who would have heard Ibn Sina state:

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<sup>145</sup> Davidson, “Avicenna’s Proof,” 180.

<sup>146</sup> Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1988), 264.

<sup>147</sup> Davidson, “Avicenna’s Proof,” 176.

<sup>148</sup> Ibn Sina, *Fair Judgment*, quoted in Gutas, *Aristotelian Tradition*, page number. Gutas was also commenting on Lamda, in Badawi *Aristu* 12.21-24.1.

It distresses me that the belief in the permanence of the first principle and in the permanence of its unity should be arrived at by means of motion and the ones of the moved world, as if the Metaphysics could yield its riches concerning God Almighty only in this way!<sup>149</sup>

Gutas emphasizes Ibn Sina's departure from Aristotelian philosophy. According to Gutas, Ibn Sina "increasingly stopped seeing himself in the traditional mold of a philosopher ... he started coming into his own and speaking in his own voice as a philosopher— another Aristotle, as we saw in the implications of his source of the Autobiography."<sup>150</sup> Ibn Sina felt less and less committed to the Aristotelian tradition. He saw himself as a communicator of knowledge, not a mere commentator on Aristotle. In fact, over time Ibn Sina become more critical of the Aristotelian tradition and "less willing to spend time repeating their theories which he considered erroneous and refuting them."<sup>151</sup>

Ibn Sina presented works as his "own synthesis of what was best in the tradition with his own thoughts, and without reference to the authority of the tradition." Ibn Sina attempted to set up his own philosophical school and to "delineate its identity sharply by explicitly contrasting it with the Aristotelian tradition."<sup>152</sup> The evidence of Ibn Sina's break from the Aristotelian tradition is evidenced by the severe criticism he received from other scholars and even his own students for abandoning the Aristotelian tradition.<sup>153</sup>

Ibn Sina's desire to dissociate from the Greek tradition is also seen with regards to his logic. Gutas writes that Ibn Sina avoids the use of the term *mantiq*, which was commonly used to refer to Greek logic, and instead uses a variety of other terms such as *tarzu*, *mizan*,

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<sup>149</sup> Gutas, *Aristotelian Tradition*, 264.

<sup>150</sup> Gutas, *Aristotelian Tradition*, 297.

<sup>151</sup> Gutas, *Aristotelian Tradition*, 297.

<sup>152</sup> Gutas, *Aristotelian Tradition*, 297.

<sup>153</sup> Gutas, *Aristotelian Tradition*, 298.

*mikyal*, etc., finally settling on *ala* to stand for logic.<sup>154</sup> According to Gutas, Ibn Sina did this “because he wanted to sever the identification in peoples’ minds between logic and Greek logic and thereby win acceptance for his own logic that he believed to be a revision of Greek logic, i.e., that of the school Aristotelian tradition.”<sup>155</sup>

Ghazali spends a significant amount of effort criticizing Ibn Sina. However, Gutas makes the remarkable claim that Ghazali’s logic was essentially identical to that of Ibn Sina and that Ghazali’s primary purpose was to apply this logic to Islamic theology. Gutas writes:

Ghazali wanted to sever the same identification but for the different purpose of winning formal acceptance for logic as an instrument in theological studies. And if it is considered that Ghazali’s logic was, in all its essentials, that of Avicenna, then we could perhaps state with relative certainty that Ghazali was in this respect Avicenna’s collaborator and mouthpiece, through whom Avicenna’s logic was advertised and ensconced in Islamic culture’.<sup>156</sup>

#### Ibn Sina and Causation

The idea that Ibn Sina committed to a strict causal chain is questioned by Goodman. Ibn Sina, “the ascription of all effects to a single cause can in no way obviate the ascription of each to its particular, proximate cause.”<sup>157</sup>

Ibn Sina also struggles with the concept of causation. He tries to avoid reducing the universe to simply causes and effects and devoid of any other meaning. As Goodman writes:

In Ibn Sina’s treatment there is room for causality, but its operation is not simply imposed upon the structure of logic. As he puts it, “the consequent is not a definition of the antecedent.” Avicenna’s ability to escape the logicism that would

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<sup>154</sup> Gutas, *Aristotelian Tradition*, 282.

<sup>155</sup> Gutas, *Aristotelian Tradition*, 284.

<sup>156</sup> Gutas, *Aristotelian Tradition*, 284.

<sup>157</sup> Lenn Goodman, *Avicenna* (London: Routledge, 1992), 207.

later trap Ibn Rushd, while still avoiding the accidentalism of the kalam is of course, an expression of his conception of the relative contingency of all events in nature, dependent on their cause, but capable of treatment in abstraction from the supposition of those causes.<sup>158</sup>

In doing so Ibn Sina is again moving away from the Aristotelian tradition of reducing all knowledge to knowing its cause. Goodman writes: “He found it necessary to break away from the confining boundaries of the approach traditional among his predecessors, no longer simply following the contours of the Aristotelian texts.”<sup>159</sup>

Ibn Sina differed from Aristotle in the way he understood causal theory as it relates to the first mover (or in Ibn Sina’s terminology the *Necessary Existent*). Ibn Sina’s draws a distinction between the “producer” and “sustainer” of an event. The immediate prior series of events may cause a subsequent event, however, it is sustained by the Necessary Existent. The Necessary Existent is the “the principle of sufficient reason” and the “the cause of perfection” of each event in the world. Therefore, Morewedge points out that “Ibn Sina departs from Aristotle in relating the cause of every existent to the Necessary Existent, the ultimate necessary origin of every existent.”<sup>160</sup> In this formulation, Ibn Sina’s consciousness of the Islamic concept of God can be sensed as he attempts to relate every event directly to God while still trying to preserve the laws of causation.

#### Ibn Sina and Ghazali

The notion that Ibn Sina was the (or at least one of the) targets of Ghazali’s criticism of philosophy has been questioned by Jules Janssens.<sup>161</sup> According to Janssen, Ghazali’s real

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<sup>158</sup> Goodman, *Avicenna*, 208.

<sup>159</sup> Goodman, *Avicenna*, 209.

<sup>160</sup> Morewedge, *Metaphysics of Avicenna*, 208-209.

<sup>161</sup> Jules Janssens, “Al-Ghazali’s Tahafut: Is It Really a Rejection of Ibn Sina’s Philosophy?” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12, no. 1 (2001) 1-17.

targets were the ancient philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Ghazali warned against blindly following them without verification (*tabqiq*) and ignoring reliable reports (*kbabar*). Such following led some to reject Islamic duties (*ibadat*). Ghazali's intentions are illustrated by the terminology he uses for criticism that relate directly to the ancients.

Janssens writes:

But if he [Ibn Sina] was the major target of the *Tabafut* as most scholars to date appear to have thought, why does al-Ghazzali use a quite different terminology, on that probably characterizes an earlier philosophical period –*dhaka* undoubtedly going back to Aristotle himself.<sup>162</sup>

Furthermore, Ghazali himself singles out the ancients as his target when he states his purpose for writing the *Tabafut* as “in refutation of the ancient philosophers” (*raddan ‘ala l-falasifa al-quduama*).<sup>163</sup>

If this were the case, however, how does one explain the lack of direct citation of Aristotle himself in the *Tabafut*? Janssens thinks that Ghazali uses Ibn Sina's most Aristotelian works for this purpose in order to refute Aristotle as he was perceived in the Arabic world. Ghazali was, however, well aware that Ibn Sina disagreed with Aristotle on several issues (including God's knowledge) and certainly did not consider himself to be a “blind follower” (*taqlid*) of Aristotle. The only way in which Ibn Sina may have been guilty of *taqlid* is in accepting the premise that reason alone can explain the universe, even though Ibn Sina disagreed with Aristotle's conclusions. Janssens writes:

Ibn Sina still continued to try to explain God's knowledge in a purely demonstrative way, which allowed him to qualify it as “universal.” In that respect, Ibn Sina remains somehow guilty of *taqlid*, albeit in a weaker form. Ibn Sina's philosophy moved in the right direction, but it failed to realize the final step.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Janssens, *Al-Ghazali's Tabafut*, 2.

<sup>163</sup> Janssens, *Al-Ghazali's Tahafut*, 3.

<sup>164</sup> Janssens, *Al-Ghazali's Tahafut*, 14.

Despite this, Ghazali is fascinated with Ibn Sina and uses his terminology in his own many works. Janssens wonders: “Indeed one sometimes gets the impression that al-Ghazzali is convinced that Ibn Sina’s philosophy, including its metaphysics, when ‘adapted’ into the right ‘framework’, is acceptable.”<sup>165</sup>

Janssen points out that one of Ghazali’s earliest texts the *Maqasid* (which lays out the doctrines of the philosophers) is essentially a “paraphrastic translation” of Ibn Sina’s book the *Danesh Namah*. Furthermore, contrary to popular opinion Janssen argues that the *Maqasid* largely reflects Ghazali’s own genuine commentary on Ibn Sina and was not written with the purpose of being later refuted by his *Tahafut*. Janssens writes: “I believe that I can now affirm without any reserve that the *Maqasid* was not written as a preparatory work to the *Tahafut*.”<sup>166</sup>

Professor Al-Akiti has translated an entire corpus of previously unpublished early philosophical manuscripts written by Ghazali. Among these works is a work he calls the *Major Madnun*, which was written after the *Maqasid*. According to Al-Akiti, this book, although similar in style to the *Maqasid*, more accurately reflects the actual views of Ghazali as it relates to philosophy. Al-Akiti points out subtle changes in terminology between the two texts which point to Ghazali adopting and refining Ibn Sina’s philosophy into his own theological curriculum.<sup>167</sup>

It seems, therefore, that there is more in common between Ghazali and Ibn Sina than one would be otherwise led to believe by simply reading Ghazali without referencing

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<sup>165</sup> Janssens, *Al-Ghazali’s Tahafut*, 15.

<sup>166</sup> Janssens, “Al-Ghazali’s Tahafut,” 13.

<sup>167</sup> Al-Akiti, “The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Falsafa: Al-Ghazali’s Madnun, Tahafut, and Maqasid, with Particular Attention to Their Falsafi Treatments of God’s Knowledge of Temporal Events” in Langerman, *Avicenna*, 55.



Ibn Sina. Richard Frank summarizes Ghazali's relationship with Ibn Sina fairly well, he writes:

Clearly he comes to use and to incorporate into his own thought certain elements, language, concepts, constructs, as well as principles and presuppositions, from Avicenna's philosophy, but explicitly rejects others that are fundamental to the whole which he received. On the other hand, when one reads al-Ghazali's theological works carefully, it becomes apparent that he may well have done more than simply to borrow elements of Avicenna's philosophy, adapting them to his own use, for he seems to have appropriated, even if not fully and integrally always, a number of things in such a way as to have a significant effect on his understanding of traditionally held dogmas.<sup>168</sup>

Thus, based upon this historical research, Ghazali's thought owes a major debt to Ibn Sina, and represents an evolution within Islamic thought rather than a blanket rejection of Ibn Sina's philosophy.

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<sup>168</sup> Frank, "Al-Ghazali's Use," 272.

## Chapter IX

### Ghazali's "Refutation" of Causation

Ghazali's direct attack on the Aristotelian and Avicennian theory of causation comes in the seventeenth discussion of his famous *Incoherence of the Philosophers*. In this chapter he makes his case against necessary causation and then offers responses to possible objections to his theory. This chapter begins with the famous statement:

The connection between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what is habitually believed to be an effect is not necessary, according to us.<sup>169</sup>

This statement has been interpreted in many different ways by subsequent and even modern-day scholars of Islam, as will be discussed in this paper. To understand the differences in its interpretation it would be useful to quickly review the rest of Ghazali's seventeenth discussion on causation.

Ghazali goes on to state:

Their connection is due to the prior decree of God, who creates them side by side, not to its being necessary in itself, incapable of separation. On the contrary, it is within [divine] power to create satiety without eating, to create death without decapitation, to continue life after decapitation, and so on to all connected things. The philosophers denied the possibility of [this] and claimed it to be impossible.<sup>170</sup>

He then uses the common example of the fire burning cotton and states, "we allow as possible the occurrence of the cotton's transformation into burnt ashes without contact with the fire."<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 170.

<sup>170</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 170.

<sup>171</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 171.

Up to this point Ghazali sounds very much in line with the Asha'rite theologians. He is emphasizing the divine power in every action and apparently down playing the role of causation. The nature of his attack can also be considered consistent with the Hanbalite theologians who were extremely critical of philosophy as a whole.

This perspective is adopted by Solomon Monk and Michael Marmura. Monk interprets this as meaning that “the philosophers’ theory of causality is false, and that they are not right when they deny that things can happen contrary to what they call the law of nature and contrary to what happens habitually.”<sup>172</sup> Marmura interprets it to mean that “the Aristotelian theory of natural efficient causation is false.”<sup>173</sup>

Then Ghazali considers possible objections to his view. The first, the philosophers would argue that fire burns cotton because it is the nature of fire to always do so. Fire cannot not burn cotton. Ghazali describes this as fire being “incapable of refraining from” burning.<sup>174</sup> It is a characteristic of the fire that it burns cotton.

Ghazali’s response is to question how we know that it is in fact fire that burns the cotton. He argues that all that can be observed is a sequence of events. One observes the cotton brought close to the fire and then the cotton turns black. The temporal sequence of events, the fact that they occur in close proximity to each other, should not be mistaken for causation. Even if this connection between fire and the cotton and burning is observed every time, there is no proof that the fire caused the burning of the cotton. Ghazali writes:

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<sup>172</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 147.

<sup>173</sup> Michael E. Marmura, “Ghazali’s Attitude to the Secular Sciences and Logic,” in *Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).

<sup>174</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 173.

They have no proof other than observing the occurrence of the burning at the [juncture of] contact with the fire. Observation, however, [only] shows the occurrence [of burning] at [the time of the contact with the fire], but does not show the occurrence [of burning] by [the fire] and that there is no other cause for it.<sup>175</sup>

M. M. Sharif summarizes Ghazali's view of causation in this section as follows:

We observe that objects succeed on another or that similar objects are constantly conjoined. Now, this proves succession, not causation, or conjunction, nor connection.<sup>176</sup>

He further offers two examples to prove his point. The first, Ghazali says the Islamic philosophers would agree with. He states that when the sperm comes in contact with the womb to produce offspring people understand that it is not merely the sperm that gives rise to the offspring rather it is God who does so via intermediaries such as angels. Ghazali writes: "It has thus become clear that existence 'with' a thing does not prove that it exists 'by' it."<sup>177</sup> The second example he gives is that of a blind man who is cured and opens his eyelids to see the world. Ghazali writes that it would be inappropriate to think that the temporal sequence of events, namely the opening of the eyelids, resulted in his seeing. Rather, the process, in reality, is more complex.<sup>178</sup>

Thus far, Ghazali appears to be defending the Ash'arite position of Occasionalism. His view appears similar to that of the Ash'arite theologian Al-Baqillani who writes:

Observation (mushahada) points towards a concomitant concurrence (al-husul-indahu) but not a combined occurrence (al-husul bihi) and that there is no other cause (illa) for it.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 171.

<sup>176</sup> Sharif, *Muslim Philosophy*, 615.

<sup>177</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 171.

<sup>178</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 171-172.

<sup>179</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 152-153.

Ghazali now considers an objection to his argument, which is the basis for much of the criticism Ghazali has received in the popular history of science as discussed earlier. The objection is that a world in which there is no causal connection could lead to an unpredictable universe with an absurd array of possibilities. For example, Ghazali states a person who leaves a book at home would allow it to be possible that the book might turn into a horse when he returns.<sup>180</sup>

Ghazali's reply here is critical to understanding his view of causation. Even if causation is understood the way Ghazali has explained it, one can still be confident about predicting outcomes. He writes:

We are not, however, rendered skeptical by the illustration you have given because God created for us the knowledge that He did not enact these possibilities.... The continuous habit of their occurrence repeatedly, one time after another, fixes unshakably in our minds the belief in their occurrence according to past habit.<sup>181</sup>

According to Ghazali, God ensures the uniformity of natural phenomena that we experience. Thus, we can confidently predict future events based upon prior experience. Our strong conviction that God does not change the natural course of things gives us confidence that the book will remain a book and other things will transpire as they always have and as we expect them to. In his *Balanced Book on What-to-Believe*, Ghazali distinguishes between what is possible and what can actually exist in reality. Although it is possible for a book to turn into a horse, it does not happen in reality because that is not God's habit.<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 174.

<sup>181</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 174.

<sup>182</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 154.

Ghazali concedes that there is an apparent correlation between cause and effect, and it is something that we can rely upon. As Griffel writes: “Ghazali does not deny the existence of a connection between cause and its effect; rather he denies the necessary character of this connection.”<sup>183</sup> Marmura summarizes Ghazali’s position here as:

Ghazali, in effect, has offered a theological justification of the principle of nature’s uniformity. This uniformity is not necessary in itself, but is created by God who is powerful and good, who creates in us the assurance that, with the rare exception of miraculous happenings, this uniformity will go on uninterrupted.<sup>184</sup>

If Ghazali is to admit that effects do follow from causes in a predictable way, then he has to deal with the problem of miracles: One of the reasons the Ash’arites had rejected a reliance on a cosmology based upon causation was because it appeared to exclude the possibility of miracles. The classic example used has been that of Abraham being thrown in the fire but not being burnt. Here Ghazali has two answers.

The first is to offer the view that in the rare instances of Miracles, “God disrupts the habitual [course of nature] by making [the miracle] occur at the time in which disruption of the habitual [events] take place.”<sup>185</sup> God certainly has the power to do so, argues Ghazali.

Ghazali refers to the argument that the Ghazalian worldview would result in an unpredictable universe as “sheer vilification.”<sup>186</sup> Implying that his worldview does not result in unpredictability, and he appears bothered by this accusation. He then offers another perspective on understanding his view of causation and the problem of miracles.

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<sup>183</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 149.

<sup>184</sup> Marmura, “Ghazali’s Attitude,” 109.

<sup>185</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 175.

<sup>186</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 175.

Ghazali's motives with this perspective have been interpreted in different ways by several authors including Marmura, Frank, and Griffel.

Ghazali then goes on to offer an account of natural and apparently supernatural phenomena that is very similar to that of the Muslim philosophers. He writes:

The second approach, with which there is deliverance from these vilifications, is for us to admit that fire is created in such a way that if two similar pieces of cotton come into contact with it, it would burn both, making no distinction between them if they are similar in all respects. With all this, however, we allow as possible that a prophet may be cast in the fire without being burned, either by changing the quality of the fire or by changing the quality of the prophet.<sup>187</sup>

In the first sentence Ghazali concedes the existence of causation. In the second Ghazali concedes that things do have natures, and it is based upon these natures that they act. However, Ghazali is now saying that these natures can be changed.

Furthermore, Ghazali goes on to redefine what he means by miracles. Instead of defining them as a disruption of the habitual course of nature, he changes the words he uses for miracles. He now describes them as, "strange and wondrous things."<sup>188</sup>

No longer is he saying that "natural laws" need to be broken for "strange and wondrous" things to occur. Instead Ghazali now tries to explain apparent miracles as marvels that have a causal explanation, but have not yet been discovered or may not be possible to discover.

Marmura calls this the "modified Aristotelian theory."<sup>189</sup> According to Marmura, "this is a theory in which created things have causal efficacy, provided one maintains that the divine act remains voluntary, not necessitated by the divine essence.

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<sup>187</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 175.

<sup>188</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 176.

<sup>189</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, xxiv.

Divine power is such that it can intervene in the natural order, creating new causal conditions that produce the miracle.”<sup>190</sup>

He compares these wondrous events to some astonishing natural phenomena. He gives the example of certain animals that according to the science of his time, were considered spontaneously created from the earth including worms and rats. He writes: “Their disposition to receive forms differ due to things unknown to us, it being beyond human power to know them.”<sup>191</sup> How these animals are created was unknown at Ghazali’s time, but Ghazali implies that this is only because their explanation is not known, not that one does not exist. He writes that “among the objects lying within God’s power there are strange and wondrous things, not all of which we have seen.”<sup>192</sup>

Strange and wondrous events which have been related to the Prophets are similar. The causal chain does not need to be broken, but there may be additional causes of which we are unaware. They are natural phenomena, the cause of which we do not fully comprehend. He writes:

The denial of this is only due to our lack of capacity to understand, [our lack of] familiarity with exalted beings, and our unawareness of the secrets [of] God, praised be He, in creation and nature. Whoever studies inductively the wonders of the sciences will not deem remote from the power of God, in any manner whatsoever, what has been related of the miracles of the prophets.<sup>193</sup>

So now, towards the end of his discussion on causation, Ghazali’s view seems much closer to the Philosophers than the Ash’arite theologians. Ghazali is reaffirming

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<sup>190</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, xxiv.

<sup>191</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 177.

<sup>192</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 176.

<sup>193</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 178.



the laws of nature, that causation exists and is ensured by God. Even apparent miracles are only “strange and wondrous events” that can be explained by science, the only caveat being that the explanation is not known to us.

### Interpreting Ghazali

There is disagreement amongst scholars about Ghazali’s own position on causation. If Ghazali rejects causation, this will give credence to the argument that Ghazali undermined the study of science. Whereas, if Ghazali accepts causation then there can be no claim that he undermines science. As Marmura explains:

If the epistemological claims of natural science are true and if the Aristotelian causal theory justifying these claims are false, then natural science cannot be committed to this theory.<sup>194</sup>

So what then is Ghazali’s true position on the issue of causation?

### Frank

Taking a lead from Ghazali’s discussion on causation, Richard Frank concludes that Ghazali is essentially agreeing with and accepting the Aristotelian causal theory and cosmology. Frank analyzing almost the entire Ghazali corpus asserts that Ghazali’s cosmology is almost identical to Ibn Sina’s for practical purposes.<sup>195</sup> Frank writes,

from a theological standpoint, most of the [falsafah] theses which [Ghazali] rejected are relatively tame and inconsequential compared to some of those in which he follows the philosophers.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Marmura, “Ghazali’s Attitude,” 109.

<sup>195</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 180.

<sup>196</sup> Richard Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1992), 28-29.

He summarizes Ghazali's similarities with Ibn Sina as follows:

1. The universe is a closed deterministic system of secondary causes whose operation is governed by the first created being (Angel or intellect in the outmost sphere).
2. God cannot intervene in the operation of secondary causes, celestial or sublunary.
3. It is impossible for God to have willed to create a universe in any respect different from this one.

For Frank, Ghazali uses both causalist and occasionalist language; however, this contradiction is only on the language level and not substantive in thought. Sometimes Ghazali is seen as using language distancing himself from the Ash'arite school.<sup>197</sup> Frank concludes that Ghazali's "basic theological system is fundamentally incompatible with the traditional teachings of the Asharite school."<sup>198</sup> Frank writes that Ghazali wrote his book, *Faysal al-Tafriqa*, as a response to Ash'arites who were accusing him of deviating from Ash'arism.<sup>199</sup>

S. van den Bergh, an early translator of the *Tabafut al-Falasifa* essentially agrees with Frank and writes: "Ghazali abandons the Ash'arite theory of the denial of causation, and reverts to the rationalistic supernaturalism of the Muslim philosophers."<sup>200</sup>

Frank, however, must explain why Ghazali sounds very much like an Ash'arite in certain later books such as the *Iqtisad*, which according to Marmura is a clearly Asharite

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<sup>197</sup> Frank, *Creation*, 181.

<sup>198</sup> Richard Frank, *Al-Ghazali and the Asharite School*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 87, 101.

<sup>199</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 105.

<sup>200</sup> Binyamin Abramov, "Al-Ghazali's Theory of Causality," *Studia Islamica* 67(1988):75-98.

text. Frank argues that the *Iqtisad* is designed for simple-minded and average scholars and is not a comprehensive work of theology. It therefore does not lay out his complete worldview, and is designed primarily to show his outward conformity with Ash'arism, whereas it does not fully represent his own view.<sup>201</sup> However, Ahmad Dallal has pointed out that Frank's interpretation of Ghazali is often problematic and inconclusive. He writes:

His [Frank's] interpretations of various texts by al-Ghazali are not conclusive. In fact, when read in their immediate textual context, most of Frank's interpretations seem improbable.<sup>202</sup>

#### Muslim Thinkers

Within some quarters of the Islamic tradition, Ghazali was understood as giving in to the philosophers as well. Although Ghazali sets out to refute the philosophers, according to this view, he ends up conceding to them. Ibn Rushd (Averroes) understood Ghazali in essentially the same way. He too claims that Ghazali accepted the philosophers' teachings in metaphysics.<sup>203</sup> He accuses him of switching positions and writes:

He is an Asharite with the Asharites, a Sufi with the Sufis, and a philosopher with the philosophers.<sup>204</sup>

Ibn Sab'in, a Sufi from Andalusia, is similarly critical of Ghazali. He writes:

Al-Ghazali is a language without clarity, a voice without words, a madness that combines contradictions and a confusion that splits the inner parts. One time he

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<sup>201</sup> Dallal, "Perils of Interpretation," 2-4

<sup>202</sup> Dallal, *The Perils of Interpretation*, 6.

<sup>203</sup> Dallal, *The Perils of Interpretation*, 284.

<sup>204</sup> Anna Akasoy in Yitzhak Tzvi Langerman, *Avicenna and His Legacy: A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2009), 129.

is a Sufi, another time a philosopher, and a third time an Asharite, a fourth time jurist, and a fifth time a perplexed man. His achievements in the sciences of the ancients are thinner than a spiders' web, and likewise in Sufism.<sup>205</sup>

Others such as Ibn Taymiyya harshly rebuke Ghazali for accepting Ibn Sina's universe.<sup>206</sup> Ibn Taymiyya writes: "Stranger than this, [Ghazali] wrote a book he called *al-Qistas al-Mustaqim*, attributing [logic] to the teachings of the prophets. He only learned it from Avicenna who learned it from the books of Aristotle."<sup>207</sup> Ibn Taymiyya, unlike Frank, does not systematically illustrate his assertion and simply makes general remarks.<sup>208</sup> Even some of his contemporaries such as Abu Bakr ibn al-Arabi were distressed by Ghazali's engrossment with philosophy.<sup>209</sup>

#### Marmura

On the other end of the spectrum is the view, chiefly professed by Michael Marmura, that Ghazali rejects Aristotelian causation and is a strict Ash'arite. Marmura claims that Ghazali held the view "that the Aristotelian theory of natural efficient causation is false."<sup>210</sup> Marmura is of the view that Ghazali is fully an Ash'arite. He writes: "Ghazali's attitude toward science and logic can only be understood against the background of the occasionalism and atomism this school endorsed and refined. The Ash'arites are noted for their denial of the concept of natural causation."<sup>211</sup> Marmura writes:

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<sup>205</sup> Langerman, *Avicenna and His Legacy*, 129.

<sup>206</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 200.

<sup>207</sup> Marmura, "Ghazali's Attitude," 103.

<sup>208</sup> Dallal, "Perils of Interpretation," 3.

<sup>209</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 66.

<sup>210</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 66.

<sup>211</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 100.

Yet in all major points of Muslim theology, al-Ghazali held positions that closely followed ones developed earlier by Ash'arite scholars, such as the possibility of miracles, the creation of human acts, and God's freedom in all matters concerning the creation of the universe.<sup>212</sup>

For Marmura, Ghazali's refutation of causation undermines his argument in support of Iba Sinan logic. Marmura writes that Ghazali wanted "to induce the theologians to accept Avicennian logic."<sup>213</sup> Marmura writes that "Ghazali endorsed Avicenna's logic and wrote these treatises urging his fellow theologians to accept it."<sup>214</sup> However, according to Marmura, Ghazali "destroys" his own efforts by refuting causation.<sup>215</sup>

Marmura also must deal with Ghazali's own text in which he seems to be essentially defending the philosophers view of causation with the caveat that it is ensured by God. Marmura himself summarizes what he calls Ghazali's "modified Aristotelian theory" as a theory:

In which created things have causal efficacy, provided one maintains that the Divine act remains voluntary, not necessitated by the Divine essence. Divine power is such that it can intervene in the natural order, creating new causal conditions that produce the miracle.<sup>216</sup>

In this theory causality itself is preserved, albeit it is aided by Divine will and power. If this is Ghazali's view then, according to Marmura, it cannot be categorically

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<sup>212</sup> Michael Marmura, "Ghazalian Causes and Intermediaries," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 115, no. 1(1995) 92-93.

<sup>213</sup> Marmura, "Ghazali's Attitude," 109.

<sup>214</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 102.

<sup>215</sup> Marmura, "Ghazali's Attitude," 109.

<sup>216</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, xxiv.

stated that he held the view “that the Aristotelian theory of natural efficient causation is false.”<sup>217</sup>

Marmura argues that in fact this “modified Aristotelian theory” does not reflect Ghazali’s true opinion. For Marmura this new theory is incompatible with Ghazali’s original position in which things only have associations and everything is directly caused by God. According to Marmura Ghazali does not believe that these two theories are mutually exclusive, and therefore cannot co-exist.<sup>218</sup>

Marmura bases his conclusion, partially, on another one of Ghazali’s texts entitled the *Iqtisad*. Marmura writes that in that text “al-Ghazali affirms without any equivocation the Ash’arite causal theory.”<sup>219</sup> Ghazali writes in this text that “Power belongs only to the animate. But this is a power which God ‘creates’ in humanity. It is a created power. Created power, however, has no causal efficacy.”<sup>220</sup> This, according to Marmura, is a direct contradiction to Ghazali’s modified Aristotelian theory and Ghazali must have presented the modified theory only for the sake of argument. Marmura states:

It [Ghazali’s modified Aristotelian theory] is clearly introduced there for the sake of argument, to demonstrate that even if one allows a measure of causal efficacy in things, one can still allow the possibility (denied by the philosophers) of certain kinds of miracles.<sup>221</sup>

Therefore, for Marmura, Ghazali is an occasionalist and is only using Aristotelian or Ibn Sinaian language for purposes of argumentation without actually believing it.

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<sup>217</sup> Marmura, “Ghazali’s Attitude,” 109.

<sup>218</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, xxv.

<sup>219</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, xxv.

<sup>220</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, xxv.

<sup>221</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, xxv.

Dennis Morgan Davis Jr. in his introduction to the translation of the *Iqtisad* refers to this method as *reduction ad absurdum*—that Ghazali is only seeming to adopt his opponents premises for the sake of argument.<sup>222</sup>

Marmura is essentially taking a polar opposite position to Frank by stating that Ghazali’s Aristotelian statements do not reflect his own opinion, whereas Frank thinks that when Ghazali makes Ash’arite statements those do not reflect his true and complete opinion.

#### Which Account Is True?

Both Marmura and Frank assume that Ghazali belonged to one camp or the other. Either he was an Occasionalist or an Aristotelian. Griffel writes: “both Frank and Marmura deny the possibility that al-Ghazali showed any uncertainty or may have been in anyway agnostic about which of the two competing cosmological theories is true.”<sup>223</sup> For Marmura Ghazali’s use of causalist language in the *Incoherence*, the *Revival* and in the *Standard of Knowledge* should be understood metaphorically.<sup>224</sup> For Frank, Ghazali’s true opinion is based upon causation and deterministic, and his use of occasionalist language is only to appease the masses (or average scholars).

Frank’s view is primarily based upon his analysis of Ghazali’s *Mi’yar* where on a discussion on causation Ghazali states, “to doubt the death of a decapitated person is mere delusion.” Frank argues that this is contrary to the Ash’arite view that decapitation

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<sup>222</sup> Dennis Morgan Davis Jr. “Al-Ghazali on Divine Essence: A Translation from *The Iqtisad Fi Al-Itiqad* with Notes and Commentary,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Utah, 2005), 37.

<sup>223</sup> Langermann, *Avicenna and His Legacy*, 183.

<sup>224</sup> Langermann, *Avicenna and His Legacy*, 181.

is not the cause of death rather God is. Dallal has, however, pointed out that in almost all of Ghazali's books he refers the reader back to the *Tabafut* for a full discussion on causation. Therefore, it would be a mistake to extrapolate theories from scattered remarks in his other texts. Dallal goes on to state that in the *Tabafut*, "in conformity with Ash'arite occasionalism, he [Ghazali] clearly states that the relationship is one of habitual concomitance in accord with God's custom."<sup>225</sup>

McGinnis has recently argued for an intermediate position to resolve the dispute. According to McGinnis, in Ghazali's view causal processes exist but are immediately dependent upon a divine act. God must actualize the passive powers of things (which can be considered their natures) in order for the effect to take place at any given moment in time.<sup>226</sup> Griffel also argues for a somewhat intermediate position. In his view Ghazali essentially offers a modified occasionalist account which is compatible with causation. He attempts to clarify that Ghazali argued against *necessary causation* not causation itself. So in Ghazali's view causal connections exist but these are not necessary. In other words it is possible for them not to exist. This is demonstrated by Ghazali early in the seventeenth discussion where he argues that we only observe association not causation. What Ghazali is stating is that "the connection *could* be different, even if it never will be different from what it is today."<sup>227</sup> Griffel writes:

In its practical implications and particularly regarding the pursuit of the natural sciences, the occasionalist universe of al-Ghazali is indistinguishable from the universe of the *falasifa*.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Dallal, "Perils of Interpretation," 15.

<sup>226</sup> Dallal, "Perils of Interpretation," 15.

<sup>227</sup> Dallal, "Perils of Interpretation," 172.

<sup>228</sup> Dallal, "Perils of Interpretation," 201.



Things have causal efficacy, this efficacy can be suspended by God, but never will. This is confirmed in the later section of the *Incoherence* in which Ghazali offers a theory of natural phenomena that is based upon causation. Griffel writes: “Al-Ghazali argues against an understanding of occasionalism that assumes God will break His habit. That, he implies, will not happen.”<sup>229</sup> Ghazali even places miracles within the realm of causation. Massimo Campanini writes:

God is able to overturn the rules of natural eventualities and submit the functions of nature to completely new laws. But this does not mean that God really behaves in such a manner or that He does not give the fire or the water the natural properties to burn and to extinguish.<sup>230</sup>

What Ghazali is doing, however, is accusing the philosophers of excluding God from the equation. Griffel writes:

Al-Ghazali accuses the *falasifa* of obfuscation and of using language that aims to create the impression (*talbis*) that their God is a true agent. Yet they implicitly reject this position because they deny His will and free choice.<sup>231</sup>

Causation cannot be necessary because “divine will on God’s part excludes His acting out of necessity.”<sup>232</sup> However, causal connections will always be present. The difference is only on the conceptual level. Griffel writes:

Ghazali aims to point out that the connection could be different, even if it never will be different from what it is today. For Avicenna the fact that it was never different and never will be different implies the connection is necessary....Ghazali however rejects the idea of necessity in Avicenna’s cosmology. For al-Ghazali the connection between the cause and its effect is contingent even if God never changes His habits. An actual break in God’s habit is not required for the connection to be contingent.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Dallal, “Perils of Interpretation,” 172

<sup>230</sup> Campanini, “Al-Ghazali.”

<sup>231</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 185.

<sup>232</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 185.

<sup>233</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 172-173.

So for Griffel, Ghazali's cosmology is practically identical to Ibn Sina's. The only difference is the way causation is understood.

L.E. Goodman also makes the case that Ghazali is not opposed to causation. Rather, similar to the views of Janssen he thinks, Ghazali's main criticism is Muslims who copy Greek philosophers without any critical analysis. Goodman writes:

The thesis Ghazali sets out to refute in his celebrated discussion of causality in the *Tahafut al-Falasifa* is not the doctrine that there exists some connection between cause and effect but the specific doctrine of the neo-Platonic Aristotelians who he calls by the title they have arrogated to themselves, the Philosophers.<sup>234</sup>

Goodman continues:

Thus Ghazali's discussion refers not to the question of whether the notion of causality is applicable in general but specifically to the question as to whether the Philosophers are correct in locating causal necessity within the phenomenal or empirical world.<sup>235</sup>

Abrahamov analyzes the non-philosophical works of Ghazali and also comes to the conclusion that Ghazali in fact reaffirms causation in a way that combines both the "Philosophers" and the "Asharites" position. He writes:

Al-Ghazali puts forth here a theory of dual causality, divine as well as natural, co-operating in the generation of the same effect. God is the First Cause of everything, that happens in the world. He created a chain of cause and effect and He keeps it in continuous operation.<sup>236</sup>

#### The Author's View of Ghazali's Critique of Causation

In the final analysis, it seems Ghazali's primary motivational factor in the *Tahafut* is preserving the divine attributes of free will and power. The *Tahafut* is key to interpreting

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<sup>234</sup> L. E. Goodman, "Did Al-Ghazali Deny Causality?" *Al-Ghazali Online Project*, last modified January 2, 2012. <http://www.ghazali.org/articles/ad-gz-rmf-rv.pdf>.

<sup>235</sup> Goodman, "Did Al-Ghazali Deny Causality?" 84.

<sup>236</sup> Abrahamov, *Al-Ghazali's Theory*, 83.

Ghazali, particularly in relation to causation, since in every subsequent text Ghazali refers the reader back to the *Tabafut* for a complete discussion of the topic.<sup>237</sup> Therefore, it is reasonable to draw conclusions relating to Ghazali's own beliefs based upon the text of the *Tabafut*. In the *Tabafut*, Ghazali is concerned that Ibn Sina's model of causality denies God certain attributes, primarily that of free agency. Griffel writes: "For al-Ghazali, god is not the cause of the world but its creator. God is a personal agent who freely chooses and who precedes His creation."<sup>238</sup>

Being loyal to a particular school whether Ash'arism or Aristotelian is not Ghazali's principal motive. He is primarily attempting to make space for God, as understood in the Islamic tradition, within any theory of nature. He seems to have no interest in denying the apparent uniformity of nature, and appears upset at the suggestion that he thinks otherwise.

Ghazali's key point is to ensure that what Aristotle, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina described as causation does not exclude the possibility of divine will being part of that causal connection. Ghazali appears concerned that Ibn Sina's theory of emanation proving the necessary existent God and the creation of the Universe leaves out God's free agency in deciding if and when to create the Universe. Ascribing to God the ability to do as He wills at any moment in time is a theme that runs through the seventeenth discussion. Ghazali's explanation for natural phenomena appears to change, but his insistence on assuring a place for divine will remains in place.

It seems that the method of justifying the conclusion, whether by philosophy, or revelation, is not Ghazali's concern. Rather, his concern is making sure that God's

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<sup>237</sup> Dallal, "Perils of Interpretation," 4.

<sup>238</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 280.

attributes, primarily those related to his will and freedom, are not trampled upon in the process. This is consistent with Ghazali's own statements in the introduction of the *Tabafut* that he does not intend to prove any specific doctrine but rather to "render murky" the assertions of the philosophers in so far as they contradict Islamic doctrine.<sup>239</sup>

Seyyed Hossien Nasr describing the reason Ibn Sina came under criticism by Islamic authorities (such as Ghazali) writes:

It is neither in his unified vision of the cosmos nor in the doctrine of Divine intellection that Ibn Sina differs from the Islamic perspective. It is more in limiting the power of God to a predetermined logical structure and in diminishing the sense of awe of the finite before the Infinite that he came to be criticized by certain authorities of the Islamic Tradition.<sup>240</sup>

He continues:

In the Muslim perspective, God, as the source of all qualities, must not only be absolute determination and necessity but also absolute freedom. His Will must transcend all systems which try to limit it to the domain of finiteness.<sup>241</sup>

The title of Ghazali's book *Incoherence of the Philosophers* is misleading. It may sound to the casual reader as a critique of philosophy itself. Rather it is a philosophical critique of the philosopher's arguments. The primary motive for the critique is to preserve the divine attributes. The critique is based upon reason, not dogma. Ghazali is certainly not arguing against philosophy. In fact, he attempts to bridge the gap between philosophy and theology. Furthermore, it is likely as Jannsen argues that Ibn Sina is not the primary target of the *Incoherence* at all. Rather it is the flaws and assumptions of ancient and

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<sup>239</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 7-8.

<sup>240</sup> Sayyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 214.

<sup>241</sup> Nasr, *An Introduction* 214.

Aristotelian philosophy, which undermine Islamic doctrine that appear to be Ghazali's primary concern.

## Chapter X

### Tying up Loose Ends: Ghazali's Legacy on Philosophy, Science, Heresy and Law

As we have seen Ghazali was not only unopposed to philosophy, but he attempted to introduce philosophical principles into theological discussions. Instead of rejecting philosophy, however, Ghazali is bringing philosophy into the Islamic sciences. Watt writes: “what al-Ghazali had done was to effect a complete fusion of the Greek and Islamic intellectual traditions.”<sup>242</sup> In doing so Ghazali in fact introduced philosophy as a tool to be used by Islamic theologians. Watt continues:

The achievement of al-Ghazali in his encounter with philosophy has left a mark on the whole subsequent course of Islamic thought. He gave theology a philosophical foundation, and also made possible an undue intellectualization of it.<sup>243</sup>

His purpose in doing so was to defend the Islamic principles, primarily those related to the attributes of God. Griffel states: “Ghazali aims to make room for the epistemological claims of revelation.” *The Incoherence* can be seen in a larger context in which Ghazali aims to set forth a comprehensive understanding of religion. Watt writes: “The negative aim of *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* was a necessary preparation for the erection of a building—a clearing of the site—but the ultimate building was not yet planned in detail.”<sup>244</sup> This would eventually be done, arguably, in his magnum opus, the *Revival of the Religious Sciences* to be penned later in life. This view has been challenged by professor M. Afifi al-Akiti.

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<sup>242</sup> Montgomery Watt, *Muslim Intellectual: A Study of Al-Ghazali* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963), 123.

<sup>243</sup> Watt, *Muslim Intellectual*, 71.

<sup>244</sup> Watt, *Muslim Intellectual*, 59.

In a recently published work, al-Akiti makes a powerful argument regarding the central role philosophy plays in Ghazali's theological system. Professor al-Akiti examines many of Ghazali's philosophical writings to determine his relationship with philosophy. In fact, Al-Akiti concludes that philosophy is, according to Ghazali the highest level of knowledge meant for the brightest scholars of religion. Ghazali then essentially "dumbs down" theology and cosmology for public consumption in his subsequent works, such as his magnum opus the *Ihya-Uloom-ad-Deen* (The Revival of the Religious Sciences). Al-Akiti writes:

In sum, the *Madnun* corpus [Ghazali's early works related to philosophy] sits at the top of al-Ghazali's theological curriculum and represents the most sophisticated expression of his theological project. It is in this corpus that al-Ghazali reveals the extent to which his theologizing has developed: by relying on the scientific and philosophical community, he has constructed a unified theological system giving a reasoned explanation of the world, but expressing his ideas in traditional terms.<sup>245</sup>

Here Al-Akiti echoes Janssen's sentiments that Ghazali's engagement with philosophy was sincere, and not merely for purposes of refutation. The discovery of the *Major Madnun* by Al-Akiti gives further credence to this view.<sup>246</sup> Conversely Dallal points out that "al-Ghazali criticizes and differs from traditional *kalam*, and that he does not think it represents the highest form of knowing."<sup>247</sup>

Ghazali, far from shunning philosophy, is encouraging theologians to study it. Al-Akiti writes that "having opened that door, Ghazali must now control the access to it."<sup>248</sup> He goes on to say, "Al-Ghazali reiterates to the best scholars of his community—

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<sup>245</sup> Al-Akiti, "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Falsafa: Al-Ghazali's *Madnun*, *Tahafut*, and *Maqasid*, with Particular Attention to Their Falsafi Treatments of God's Knowledge of Temporal Events" in Langerman, *Avicenna*, 55.

<sup>246</sup> Abu-Sway, *Al-Ghazali*, 80.

<sup>247</sup> Dallal, *Perils of Interpretation*, 19.

<sup>248</sup> Al-Akiti, "The Good, the Bad," 86.

the expert theologian—the message that they must not shy away from the truth, no matter what its sources: even heterodox authors like Ibn Sina, or gentile aliens like Aristotle.”<sup>249</sup> Al-Akiti continues, “for al-Ghazali, *burhan*—but not *kalam*— is what he considered to be scientific knowledge, the ‘gold-standard’ in the art of reasoning—a judgment expounded in his *Mi’yar al-’ilm* [Standard of Knowledge].”<sup>250</sup> Professor Marmura summarizes Ghazali’s attitude towards *definitive logical proof* as

[a] science whose conclusions are not demonstrably true and which are in conflict with the literal assertions of scripture must be rejected. On the other hand, if what is demonstrably true contradicts the literal sense of scriptural language, then the latter must be interpreted metaphorically.<sup>251</sup>

This position of Ghazali’s is also emphasized in his *Faysal-Tafriqa*.<sup>252</sup>

Professor Al-Akiti writes, “Al-Ghazali made the art of *burhan* acceptable in the *Weltanschauung* [worldview] of Islam’s religious scholars.”<sup>253</sup>

Ghazali’s opinion on philosophy as essentially the “gold-standard” of knowledge contradicts the popular view that he “destroyed” philosophy. Professor Al-Akiti continues:

This may sound surprising to those familiar with the view that al-Ghazali was an out-and-out opponent of *falsafa*. In fact, having ‘disassembled’ *falsafa*—as the *Tabafut* indicates— he ‘reassembled’ the fragments into another version of it.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Al-Akiti, “The Good, the Bad,” 60.

<sup>250</sup> Al-Akiti, “The Good, the Bad,” 91.

<sup>251</sup> Marmura, “Ghazali’s Attitude,” 101.

<sup>252</sup> Sherman Jackson, *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 112-115.

<sup>253</sup> Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 91.

<sup>254</sup> Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 92.



In fact, this conclusion is the same as that arrived at by his critics in the Islamic tradition, such as Ibn Rushd and Ibn Taymiyya. Even other philosophers, such as Ibn Tufayl, reached the same conclusion regarding Ghazali's attitude towards philosophy.

Accepting philosophy does not mean accepting philosophers. Often times Ghazali is quoting large passages from Ibn Sina and borrowing terminology. Al-Akiti shows that the differences between Ibn Sina and Ghazali are sometimes subtle. However, this does not mean that they are insignificant. As Ghazali himself states that "the right and wrong positions in theology actually can be that close to each other, as close as the counterfeit money is to the genuine, or the venom is to its antidote from the same receptacle of the snake."<sup>255</sup> For example, as Dallal points out, "despite his [Ghazali's] use of Avicennan idiom, al-Ghazali is still trying to prove the contingency of the world, contrary to one of the most basic doctrines of the philosophers."<sup>256</sup>

Nevertheless, Al-Akiti compares numerous passages of Ibn Sina and Ghazali in many cases the "fundamental doctrinal content remained the same"<sup>257</sup> Al-Akiti writes:

Effectively, what al-Ghazali is saying in the *Munqidh* is that knowledge taken from the *falsafa* tradition should not be judged bad simply because of its negative reputation and notorious errors. This parallels exactly his sentiments in the *Ihya* when he warns his students not hastily to judge a science as bad, but to evaluate it first on its own merits.<sup>258</sup>

Ghazali, therefore, has a nuanced view on philosophy. He introduces the study of philosophy and logic into the Islamic educational curriculum. He thinks, however, that the public at large need not engage with it because of the risk of being led astray.

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<sup>255</sup> Jackson, *On the Boundaries*, 59.

<sup>256</sup> Dallal, *Perils of Interpretation*, 20

<sup>257</sup> Dallal, *Perils of Interpretation*, 63.

<sup>258</sup> Dallal, *Perils of Interpretation*, 86.

On the other hand, for the expert theologian, he expects high standards in their engagement with philosophy.

### Ghazali and Science

Given that Ghazali's theory of causation is practically no different from causation as understood by the philosophers and scientists of his time, the argument that his view undermines the foundations of science loses strength. The only difference is the theoretical addition of God as a divine free agent who can, in theory, interfere with the workings of the universe, but never will and never does. As Griffel points out:

Trust in God (*tawakkul*) is a major condition for investigating the natural sciences. Such trust requires the certainty to know that God will not change books into horses or disconnect our knowledge from reality. Given that God habitually creates our knowledge to accord with reality, we can rely on our sense and our judgment and confidently pursue the natural sciences.<sup>259</sup>

Ahmad Dallal has an interesting interpretation on the consequences of Ghazali's view on science. Dallal takes the perspective that Ghazali essentially separates, or disengages, the study of science from that of religion. Ghazali's concern when it comes to science only relates to its apparent conclusions that contradict religion. In these cases Ghazali points out that the supposed logical arguments are flawed.<sup>260</sup>

Ghazali's critique of causation, Dallal argues, had the effect of separating metaphysics from natural science. He writes:

After Al-Ghazali, the need to invoke religion to vindicate science considerably decreased, not because science was not accepted but because it did not need vindication. Excluding final-cause explorations from science did not

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<sup>259</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 162.

<sup>260</sup> Dallal, *Islam, Science*, 140-141.

compromise the providence of God, which was simply assumed without questioning (*bila kayf*).<sup>261</sup>

Ghazali's view actually contributed to a rise in science in the Muslim world. Dallal writes:

Al-Ghazali's views on the various sciences were quite influential, and in some cases, there is evidence of the direct effects of these views on the development of some scientific disciplines. His discourse apparently helped naturalize logic.<sup>262</sup>

He points out that, according to ibn Khaldun, after Ghazali all religious scholars studied logic. It seems Dallal interprets Ghazali's ambivalent attitude towards causal explanations in the seventeenth discussion to mean that he does not really care—as long as the explanation does not conflict with the Divine attributes.<sup>263</sup> Furthermore, he argues that the critique of causation actually created an environment that fostered natural science exploration. He writes:

The aspect that had the most influence on the development of science was the concept of multiple possibilities (*tajwiz*), the notion that specific natural philosophical explanations (or planetary models) are possible but not certain, and that there may exist alternative explanations for the natural phenomena... This idea was grounded in an epistemological criticism of Aristotelian metaphysics.<sup>264</sup>

This is consistent with the previous discussion regarding miracles. In the seventeenth discussion, Ghazali had argued that wonders of nature (otherwise known as miracles) may have multiple causal chains, some of which are unknown to us and as yet undiscovered. This possibility of the unknown is perhaps what Dallal is referring to as an impetus for science in Ghazali's discussion on causation.

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<sup>261</sup> Dallal, *Islam, Science*, 146-147.

<sup>262</sup> Dallal, *Islam, Science*, 146-147.

<sup>263</sup> Dallal, *Islam, Science*, 141.

<sup>264</sup> Dallal, *Islam, Science*, 144.

It has also been argued that Ghazali had a significant influence upon the rise of Western science, including in the development of the theories of Newton and Hume. However, an examination of this connection is beyond the scope of this thesis.<sup>265</sup>

### Science in the Incoherence

In his section on the physical sciences, which serves as the introduction to the seventeenth discussion, Ghazali clearly states that he has no objection against the study of the natural sciences, other than in a few select cases. He writes:

Regarding what are called “the natural sciences,” these consist of many sciences, whose divisions we will now mention so that it would be known that the religious law does not require disputing them nor denying them, except in places we will mention.<sup>266</sup>

Saliba argues that the idea of an Islamic decline after Ghazali is due to a misreading of history and the texts. He states that orientalist scholars could not see the originality in the post-Ghazali books, even though they read them carefully, simply because they were not looking for any such originality. The phenomenon is best seen in the context of the commentary literature, which is often construed as redundant learning, lacking in originality.<sup>267</sup> However, the role of commentaries in the Islamic tradition has not been fully developed. They were, Saliba argues, a much better way of learning than even modern-day periodicals, since they required synthesis of all previous knowledge into one text followed by the authors own input and thoughts, which resulted in advancement of the science.<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Arun Bala, “Did Medieval Islamic Theology Subvert Science?” *Knowledge and Cultures: Crossing Boundaries in History* (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2009).

<sup>266</sup> Marmura, *Incoherence*, 164.

<sup>267</sup> Saliba, *Islamic Science*, 237.

<sup>268</sup> Saliba, *Islamic Science*, 240.

Saliba asks if Ghazali is responsible for the decline of science, then how does one explain the

production of tens of scientists in every discipline, who continued to produce scientific texts that were in many ways superior to the texts that were before the time of Ghazali. In the case of astronomy, one cannot even compare the sophistication of the post-Ghazali texts with the pre-Ghazali ones, for the former were in fact far superior both in theoretical mathematical sophistication, as well as in blending observational astronomy with theoretical astronomy.<sup>269</sup>

In fact, most of the authors of these scientific works were men of religion.<sup>270</sup>

According to Saliba, neither Ghazali's religious thought, nor the destruction of Baghdad by the Mongols, can explain the brilliant scientific production in the post-Ghazali period. The post Ghazali period witnessed a renaissance in comparison to the pre-Ghazali period.<sup>271</sup> Saliba states that the field of astronomical instruments also witnesses a "golden age" in the post-Ghazali period, "in complete synchrony with the field of planetary theories."<sup>272</sup>

### Ghazali and Theological Tolerance in Islam

The primary relevant text in this regard is the *Faysal Tafriqa* (The definitive criteria for distinguishing truth from masked falsehood). Despite its title, it is a work of spreading inclusivity and not of intolerance.

The purpose, as Ghazali describes in his introduction, is to advise his friends and students on how to deal with criticism related presumably to the works of Ghazali, which appear to stray from the views of the speculative theologians of the Ash'arite

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<sup>269</sup> Saliba, *Islamic Science*, 241.

<sup>270</sup> Saliba, *Islamic Science*, 243.

<sup>271</sup> Saliba, *Islamic Science*, 246.

<sup>272</sup> Saliba, *Islamic Science*, 246.

school. He is responding to their claim that “digressing from the Ash’arite school of theology, even so much as a hand’s length, is an act of Unbelief (*kufr*).” He continues, “Why should one of these parties enjoy a monopoly over the truth to the exclusion of the other?” Frank writes that Ghazali wrote the *Faysal* because he himself was accused of unbelief for deviating from the Ash’arite teachings in his *Ihyal*.<sup>273</sup>

### Clandestine Apostasy

There are three particular conclusions, or teachings of the philosophers, that are particularly disturbing to Ghazali, and that he claims in his brief *fatwa*, fall outside the realm of accepted Islamic beliefs.<sup>274</sup> These are:

1. The world has no beginning in the past and is not created in time.
2. God’s knowledge includes only universals (classes of beings) and not particulars (individual beings and their circumstances).
3. Rewards and punishments in the next life are only spiritual in character and not also bodily.

In his *Scandals of the Esoterics*, Ghazali identifies two more heretical views:

1. Blatant violation of monotheism in Islam.
2. Teachings of the Prophets are not true, although they provide some benefit (*maslaha*) to both the individual and society.<sup>275</sup>

Other than these teachings, Ghazali is careful to emphasize that both the philosophers and the Mu’tazilites (who had similar beliefs regarding God’s unity and

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<sup>273</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 105.

<sup>274</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 101.

<sup>275</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 102.

attributes) should be considered within the bounds of Islam and therefore tolerated. He accuses them of innovation (*bid'a*) but writes:

As far as we are concerned, we do not prefer to plunge into the [question] of pronouncing those who uphold innovations (*bid'a*) as unbelievers and what is or is not adequate for them lest the discourse could stray from the objective of this book.<sup>276</sup>

The accusation of innovation (*tabdi*), error (*takhti'a*), deviation (*tadlii*), or unorthodox teachings cannot lead to any legal sanctions or punishments imposed by the judicial and political authorities. State authorities should use coercion to prevent the teaching of unbelief (*kufr*). They should not interfere in the teaching of innovation, error, or deviation.

Even though Ghazali defined apostasy, his definition is very lenient. In defining apostasy Ghazali attempted to create a widely inclusive definition of Islam. He “firmly establishes the legal status of tolerated heterodoxy, a category containing Mu'tazilites and most Shiites”<sup>277</sup> By avoiding the three teachings mentioned above most Neoplatonic philosophers would also fall in this category.

Tolerated heterodoxy had no legal implications and in fact amounted to a declaration of tolerance in Islam. Since it defined these individuals as falling within Islam, and thus provided them legal protections. This is as opposed to the accusation of apostasy, which may have resulted in a trial.<sup>278</sup>

Just as with the *Tabafut's* 17<sup>th</sup> Discussion where Ghazali lays out acceptable ways of interpreting causation, in the *Faysal* Ghazali lays out acceptable forms of

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<sup>276</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology* 103.

<sup>277</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 105.

<sup>278</sup> Jackson, *Boundaries*, 115.

interpretation of scripture. Dallal writes: “his ‘real’ purpose is ... to foster more tolerance amongst Muslims for the interpretive exercise.”<sup>279</sup>

Ghazali presents his theory of language signification as a way of listing possible ways in which the religious texts can be interpreted. These include: real, sensible, imaginative, conceptual, and similar. He states that a Muslim must believe that a reference in the revelation Quran or Hadith does refer to *something*. As long as this condition is fulfilled they all still fall within Islam, and cannot be considered unbelievers: “You should know that everybody who reduces a statement of the lawgiver to one of these degrees is one of those who believe.”<sup>280</sup>

#### Ghazali and the Islamic Legal Sciences

There is debate amongst intellectuals regarding the development of legal stagnation in Islam around the time of Ghazali and the role it plays in the perceived decline of Islamic civilization. This phenomenon is often referred to as the “closure of the gates of *ijtihad* [original legal thinking]”. Ghazali, however, can hardly be held responsible for this. Ghazali does suggest *taqlid* [blind following of legal schools] to the common public. This is, however, only meant for the lay public with no interest in the Islamic sciences. For the scholars he has different standards.

Ghazali was very critical of existing institutions. He claimed that he had reached the level of a *mujtahid* and had abandoned the practice of blind following (*taqlid*).<sup>281</sup> Ghazali holds philosophers and scholars to a higher epistemological standard than the

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<sup>279</sup> Dallal, “Perils of Interpretation,” 11.

<sup>280</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 108.

<sup>281</sup> Wael Hallaq, “Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 16, no. 1 (March 1984): 16-18.



general population and that the lay person may be justified in following the position of a scholar without much investigation. However, he argues that if a person takes on the role of a scholar or philosopher, then they are obligated to independently investigate the sources and the logic of the arguments they are aligning themselves with before propagating them. In his *Mizān* he writes:

Therefore, stop relying on the schools, and seek the truth by way of demonstration (*nazar*) so as to be a master of a school (*sahib madbhab*). Do not follow a guide like a blind man.<sup>282</sup>

He rebukes the philosophers, as we have seen, for blindly following (*taqlid*) Aristotle, Plato, and the subsequent chain of philosophers without investigating the premises and arguments that they presented. Ghazali argues that the conclusions drawn by them do not meet their own requirements of demonstrative proof (*burhan*).<sup>283</sup>

He states, “Truth is never known by means of an authority; rather, authorities are known by the fact that they speak truth.”<sup>284</sup> For Ghazali, this type of *taqlid* by the scholars is the root of all falsehood, and the enemy of the inborn faculty of seeking and accepting demonstrative arguments.

In Ghazali’s writings such as in the *Ihya* and *Munqidh*, Ghazali’s main criticism relates to “theopolitical conflicts and ... religious malpractices” not the legal system. Hallaq writes that “in Ghazali’s doctrine jurists are instrumental in any attempt at religious revival.”<sup>285</sup> In fact Ghazali himself is an example of robust and innovative legal thought in Islam. Hallaq writes:

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<sup>282</sup> Nakamura, *Was Ghazali an Ash’arite?* 3.

<sup>283</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 100.

<sup>284</sup> Griffel, *Philosophical Theology*, 121.

<sup>285</sup> Hallaq, “Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?” 3.

It is our common, but rather inaccurate, belief that during the first three centuries of Islam, the highest and final stage of legal thought had been reached. It may be astonishing, therefore, to realize that the sophistication of technical legal thought was in fact achieved after these centuries, particularly during the fifth/eleventh and sixth/twelfth centuries.<sup>286</sup>

According to Hallaq, the disappearance of legal scholarship in Islam comes through the dying out of scholars, not from its intrinsic demise.<sup>287</sup> Although Ghazali suggests *taqlid* for the unlearned layperson, he is a strong advocate for independent thinking for the scholar and theologian.

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<sup>286</sup> Hallaq, "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?" 19.

<sup>287</sup> Hallaq, "Was the Gate of Ijtihad Closed?" 35.

## Chapter XI

### Conclusion

Historicizing Ghazali is a challenge. It is difficult because of the limited historical information available surrounding his life and works. It is also difficult because of the existence of a significant amount of secondary literature that may be biased or based upon incomplete information, which sets up a picture of Ghazali that may be inaccurate.

In the first section of this thesis Ghazali's education and development are explored. The role of the Nizamiyya madrasa system on Ghazali's thought is examined and a hypothesis is presented that argues that the nature of the educational system itself may be partly to blame for Ghazali's spiritual and physical crisis later in life.

In the second section of this thesis, Ghazali's critical ideas are examined in the context of Islamic philosophy and science. It is argued that almost all of the criticism Ghazali has received for contributing to the decline of Islamic civilization (including science, philosophy, law, etc.) is misplaced.

Ghazali is not intrinsically opposed to any of the sciences. He critiques claims of some thinkers who argue that their conclusions are based upon definitive logical proof, which Ghazali denies. His primary concern is preserving Divine attributes: primarily omnipotence and free will.

Ghazali's relationship with the philosophers is much more complex and intertwined than one may otherwise think given the title of the *Incoherence* and some of the secondary literature. Perhaps, Ghazali is best seen as a member of the Islamic

tradition of engaging with and challenging Greek thought that began with the philosophers and continued with the scholastic theologians.

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