

## AL-GHAZZĀLĪ'S *TAHĀFUT*: IS IT REALLY A REJECTION OF IBN SĪNĀ'S PHILOSOPHY?\*

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Al-Ghazzālī used many Avicennian texts in those of his works that are of a predominantly philosophical nature, namely *Maqāṣid*, *Mi'yār*, *Mizān* and *Tahāfut*. The first of these four, the *Maqāṣid*, since it is largely based on the *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ*, must be considered the most overtly Avicennian in character. It should most probably be classed among works of the genre of 'ta'liqa', i.e., an advanced student's work which presents a straightforward commentary (including in this case a paraphrastic translation) of a writing of the master in terms close to the latter's usual manner of reasoning. No great novelty was involved in such a work. Detailed analysis of the doctrine of the inner senses in the *Maqāṣid* shows that al-Ghazzālī modified Ibn Sīnā's wording of the *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ* only slightly. Moreover, almost all the modifications and/or additions have their source in other Avicennian writings, such as, for example, the *De Anima* of the *Shifā'*, *Najāt* (*Aḥwāl al-naḥs*), *Ishārāt*, or even 'Uyūn. For al-Ghazzālī's exposition on the inner senses in the *Tahāfut*, there does exist a clear Avicennian basis. However, notwithstanding Ibn Sīnā's affirmation there that the philosophical doctrine of the soul is not open to any serious religious objection, since it is based on facts one may observe, al-Ghazzālī does not in the *Tahāfut* simply repeat the wording of the *Maqāṣid*. In fact, the latter work has only slightly influenced the formulation of some minor details. The basis of the main part of the formulation of the argument in the *Tahāfut* is another Avicennian work, namely the *De Anima* of the *Shifā'* (together with a few additions derived from *Najāt* (*Aḥwāl al-naḥs*)). But, in contrast to what was the case in the *Maqāṣid*, al-Ghazzālī now takes greater liberties in the use of his source(s). In all this, might one see a strong indication that the *Maqāṣid* was not written with the *Tahāfut* in mind, and surely not by way of a direct

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‘introduction’?<sup>1</sup> Or is this an over-hasty conclusion? Does analysis of one element in it suffice to determine the nature of a whole work? Before dealing with this particular point, let us examine what al-Ghazzālī himself has to say in the Preface and the Introduction(s) of the *Tahāfut* about its aims, nature and method.

In what M. Marmura, in his critical translation,<sup>2</sup> has presented as the ‘religious preface’, al-Ghazzālī mentions two major failings of an unspecified(!) group of people. First, their believing themselves possessed of *fiṭna* and *dhakā*<sup>3</sup> (M. ‘superior quick wit’ and ‘intelligence’) so that they do not hesitate to reject even the Islamic duties (*‘ibādāt*) and to place themselves above the masses and the commonality. Second, their attitude of *taqlīd*<sup>4</sup> to the ancient philosophers such as Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato and Aristotle, so that they paid no attention whatever to the presence of any reliable report (*khābar*) or verification (*taḥqīq*). But who were these men? Looking at the first characteristic, Ibn Sīnā’s distinction between *ḥads* (‘intuition’) and *fikra*,<sup>5</sup> ‘thorough investigation’, comes immediately to mind. So he could belong to that ‘group’. But if he was the major target of the *Tahāfut* as most scholars to date appear to have thought, why does al-Ghazzālī use a quite different terminology, one that probably characterizes an earlier philosophical period—*dhakā*’ undoubtedly going back to Aristotle himself (*An. Post.*, 89b 10)? This difference in terminology will be even more striking if the *Ma‘ārij* is confirmed as an authentic Ghazzalian work,<sup>6</sup> since it contains almost verbatim

<sup>1</sup> For details see J. Janssens ‘al-Ghazzālī and his Use of Avicennian Texts’ in *Problems in Arabic Philosophy* (in the press). This paper was presented at an international colloquium held at the P. Pázmány-University (Piliscsaba, Hungary) in 1996. I thank M. Maroth for inviting me to participate.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Ghazzālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. A parallel English–Arabic text translation, introduction and notes by M.E. Marmura, (Provo, Utah, 1997). (Hereafter, a number in parentheses refers to the pagination of Marmura’s edition and translation.)

<sup>3</sup> D. Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (I.P.T.S., IV: Leiden, 1988), 166–7, shows how *dhakā*’ is the precise equivalent of the Aristotelian notion of *anchinoia*, and suggests ‘acumen’ as the English equivalent. As for *fiṭna*: it is present in a fragment of al-Nūshajānī, a companion of al-Sijistānī (cited in al-Tawḥīdī, *Muqābasāt*, §106), see J. L. Kraemer, *Philosophy in the Renaissance of Islam* (Leiden, 1986), 162. From that fragment, it is clear that *fiṭna* designates intelligence linked with thorough investigation.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Rushd also accuses his Arabic predecessors in philosophy of *taqlīd*, but in contrast to al-Ghazzālī, he is referring to the fact that they followed the ‘Commentators’ instead of Aristotle himself.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Ishārāt*, ed. J. Forget (Leiden, 1892), 127.

<sup>6</sup> See J. Janssens ‘Le *Ma‘ārij al-quds fī madārij ma‘rifat al-nafs*: un élément-clé pour le dossier Ghazzālī–Ibn Sīnā?’ in *Archives doctrinales et littéraires du moyen âge*, 60 (93), where I develop some arguments in favour of attributing the work to al-Ghazzālī,

what Ibn Sīnā said about the two terms in the *Ishārāt*. Of course, Ibn Sīnā may still be among the ‘group’ al-Ghazzālī is criticizing, but it does not follow that the critique is primarily directed against him or his philosophical system. While I do not yet claim that this *cannot* be the case, I would stress that it certainly is not self-evident, and should therefore be studied with great caution, the more so as the second accusation, of *taqlīd*, looks rather problematic in the case of Ibn Sīnā. In the context of this paper, it may suffice to refer to the fundamental study of D. Gutas,<sup>7</sup> who has convincingly shown that Ibn Sīnā considered himself to be a ‘new Aristotle’, and most certainly was not a slavish follower of the ‘old Aristotle’. It is impossible that al-Ghazzālī simply did not know this, for (as will be indicated later) he was well aware of the fact that regarding God’s knowledge, Ibn Sīnā had developed a theory quite distinct from that of all his philosophical predecessors and contemporaries. However, insofar as Ibn Sīnā obviously held Aristotle in high esteem, he is not automatically cleared of the accusation of *taqlīd*. But again, this is far from being self-evident. On the contrary, it even becomes doubtful, when al-Ghazzālī explicitly states a little later (3) that he has written his book ‘in refutation of the ancient philosophers (*raddan ‘alā l-falāsifa al-qudamā*)’ to show the incoherence of their belief (*‘aqīda*) and the contradictions of their words in matters relating to metaphysics (*ilāhiyyāt*). This affirmation is surprising in several respects. (1) It specifies the nature of the present work as a *radd*, a ‘refutation’, not of all philosophers, but of the ‘ancients’ only. (2) It alludes to these philosophers in terms of a group having a particular ‘credo’ (*‘aqīda*). And (3) it associates the notion of *tahāfut*, incoherence, with this particular credo, and hence with the philosophers’ general system, while the accusation of contradiction remains limited to matters ‘related to metaphysics’. On the first point: as al-Ghazzālī has already objected to an attitude of *taqlīd* towards the ‘ancients’, it follows that, in refuting them, he also refutes whoever ‘imitates’ them. The second point shows that for al-Ghazzālī philosophy was a school, based upon a fundamental conviction to which its members subscribed. The third shows that, in al-Ghazzālī’s view, there exists a problem of (logical) coherence at the very basis of the philosophical project of the ‘ancients’, and moreover that, at least in one domain—specified not just as metaphysics, but as metaphysics *and* matters related to metaphysics—one encounters ‘contradictions’, which clearly constitute an extreme case of incoherence. Whatever the meaning of

but there remain some (minor) doubts which I am still unable to resolve. One can read the passage on *ḥads* and *fikra* on p. 142 of the Beirut, 1981 edition.

<sup>7</sup> See his *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (n. 3 above), *passim*.

all this may be, one thing is certain from the above statement: it is impossible to declare Ibn Sīnā's philosophy the primary target of al-Ghazzālī's *Tahāfut*, unless one reduces the statement to mere rhetoric. But is there any reason to do so? At first sight, no. One may even wonder whether al-Ghazzālī really intends to refute 'philosophy' as such, since a few lines later he declares: '... all significant thinkers, past and present, agree in believing in God and the last day', completed somewhat later by: 'that those prominent and leading philosophers ... are innocent of the imputation that they deny the religious Laws (*sharā'i*); that (on the contrary) they believe in God and His Messengers, but that they have fallen into confusion in certain details beyond these principles, erring in this, straying from the correct path, and leading others astray' (3).<sup>8</sup> Al-Ghazzālī stresses that the 'real' philosophers never called into question the fundamentals of religious belief, i.e., the belief in God, the Prophets and the last day. However, they were wrong regarding secondary matters ('details'), albeit obviously not in a deliberate way ('confused'). Nevertheless, they clearly did err, and thereby induced people into error. In this sense, a reserved attitude towards philosophy seems to be required. But the overall tone of the passage does not give the impression that philosophy has to be radically rejected.

Therefore, one cannot but be surprised when al-Ghazzālī, in the final conclusion of the work, unambiguously condemns the philosophers for *kufr* (unbelief), at least regarding the three well-known issues of the pre-eternity of the world, God's knowledge of the temporal particulars and the resurrection of the body. Moreover, the actual wording of these three items as given by al-Ghazzālī in that final conclusion indicates a definite Avicennian inspiration. Had the formulation been in more Aristotelian terms, one would have expected instead a condemnation in terms of the eternity (and not just the pre-eternity) of the world, of the limitation of God's knowledge to self-knowledge, and (possibly) of the denial of resurrection as such.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the very fact that, on the issue of pre-eternity, al-Ghazzālī not only mentions the world, but also 'all the substances' (*al-jawābir kulluhā*), hardly appears reducible to an Avicennian source, and, indeed, poses problems as to its exact

<sup>8</sup> From the two statements together, it follows that for al-Ghazzālī, according to what he affirms in his *Fayṣal* (ed. Beirut, 1986, 4: 134; trans. R.J. McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Boston, 1980), 162), these philosophers accept the basic roots of authentic belief.

<sup>9</sup> Aristotle's position on this issue is not entirely clear, but according to one of the basic axioms of Aristotelian philosophy, given that the human soul is originated, it must therefore also perish.

meaning as well as possible source. In my opinion, al-Ghazzālī is most probably referring to Abū Bakr al-Rāzī's 'five eternal principles',<sup>10</sup> but I do not have any conclusive proof for this claim. However it may be, the 'final conclusion' of the *Tahāfut* surely does not allow one to state with certainty that Ibn Sīnā's philosophy forms the explicit, or even principal, object of al-Ghazzālī's criticism. It does clearly offer a stronger condemnation of philosophy than the one expressed in the Preface. So, one may ask: are there elements elsewhere in the *Tahāfut* which can explain this apparent contradiction?

Let us first examine what al-Ghazzālī affirms in his Introduction(s).<sup>11</sup> In the first, al-Ghazzālī insists that Aristotle's thought, notwithstanding its being a purified synthesis of all the philosophical currents of thought before it, is not free from inner contradiction. He moreover contends that, in matters of metaphysics, one looks in vain for really demonstrative proofs, as evidently offered in logic and mathematics. Finally, he stresses that serious mistakes occurred in the translation of the Aristotelian corpus into Arabic, although al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, the most excellent of the Islamic philosophers, rejected many of those mistakes. It looks as if al-Ghazzālī in this first Introduction wants above all to warn against *taqlīd* of the ancient philosophers, in view of the inner tensions which are found in the doctrine(s) of their major representative(s), on the one hand, and the absence of reliable translations of his (their) works on the other. In the second Introduction, al-Ghazzālī states that neither strictly verbal matters nor doctrines which do not clash with any religious principle will be disputed. To illustrate the former case, he points to the philosophers calling God a substance ('substance' not having there the meaning of 'occupying space', *mutahayyiz* in the terminology of *kalām*). This example may somewhat surprise readers familiar with Ibn Sīnā's thought. If he, in his *K. al-ḥudūd*,<sup>12</sup> in fact accepted such a denomination without further qualification, he modified his view in the *Shifā'* by insisting that it must be understood in a completely negative way, and in the *Ishārāt* and the *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ*, he even declared that the very notion of substance must be denied of God.<sup>13</sup> There is little, indeed no, doubt that al-Ghazzālī knew all

<sup>10</sup> See P. Kraus (ed.), *Abū Bakr Al-Rāzī: Opera Philosophica* (repr. Beirut, 1982), 191 *seq.*

<sup>11</sup> Although al-Ghazzālī seems to distinguish between four introductions, it is obvious that they are most complementary, and must be taken together to form a single whole. However, for the sake of convenience I will discuss them separately here.

<sup>12</sup> This is clearly a work in which Ibn Sīnā is still working along overtly Aristotelian lines, and therefore probably one of his earlier ones.

<sup>13</sup>A brief, but very valuable, survey of all this is given by D. De Smet, *La quiétude de l'intellect* (Louvain, 1995) 45–6.

this.<sup>14</sup> So, one gets the impression that he consciously disregards this later evolution in Ibn Sīnā's thought. Bearing in mind also the first Introduction, the use of this precise example can only be explained as a confirmation that the basic goal of the *Tahāfut* consists in the rejection of philosophers who blindly imitate Aristotle and the ancient philosophers. While it is not certain that Ibn Sīnā figures among them, al-Ghazzālī does not give any indication that this is not the case. At this point in the work, it simply remains an open question. As to matters which may be qualified as 'religiously neutral' (the second case mentioned above), al-Ghazzālī points to natural phenomena, part of what we nowadays call 'physics'. Let us simply note that he strongly defends the philosophers' way of dealing with such phenomena, and vehemently condemns any religious obscurantism. Having specified what the work is not about, al-Ghazzālī proceeds to a more positive outline of its proper objective. Here, he for the first time alludes to the 'three most objectionable doctrines' by stating that the philosophers have rejected the ideas of novelty (M.: 'origination') of the world (*ḥadath al-ʿālam*), the attributes of the Maker (M.: 'Creator') (*ṣifāt al-ṣāniʿ*) and the Congregation (M.: 'resurrection') of the (sensible) bodies (*ḥashr al-ajsād wa l-abdān*). We must note that the present wording is *kalāmī* in inspiration, and that it is not exactly the same as that of the 'final conclusion' already mentioned. In the third Introduction, al-Ghazzālī stresses that he will limit himself in the present work to proceeding by way of interrogation and negation, and that he will not develop any positive doctrine.<sup>15</sup> In the fourth Introduction, he more explicitly specifies his method as that of the 'logicians', insisting that he will express himself in no other idiom than theirs. But he also stresses that the knowledge of mathematics is in no way needed in order to understand metaphysics. Also in this case, one may wonder whether Ibn Sīnā does not rather fall beyond the scope of the book? In his *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ*, he did not hesitate to place metaphysics immediately after logic, without any mention of mathematics.<sup>16</sup> One wonders whether he omitted

<sup>14</sup> See J. Janssens, '... His Use of Avicennian Texts' (n. 1 above).

<sup>15</sup> Marmura, *Introduction*, xxiii–xxvi, argues convincingly that the *Iqtisād* must be considered as *the* supplementary work to the *Tahāfut*, in which al-Ghazzālī develops his own theory positively and in full accordance with the principles of the Ashʿarī school of *kalām*. However, a definite judgement about al-Ghazzālī's real convictions seems impossible without a structural analysis of the precise way in which al-Ghazzālī is using (and/or combining) his source-texts in his different works. I have not yet dealt in any systemic way with his *Iqtisād*, but I would be really surprised if a systematic use of the writing(s) of (a) predecessor(s) could not be found in that work.

<sup>16</sup> As with the *Najāt*, Juzjānī's explanation of its omission (this time due to a so-called loss) seems to be apologetic. See Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian*

the latter because he simply did not want to repeat what he had already said elsewhere in an (in his eyes) indisputable way, or because he no longer agreed with the (Platonic–)Aristotelian curriculum? Unfortunately, no definite answer to this question can be given at present.

The Introduction(s) reinforce(s) the impression that Ibn Sīnā's philosophy as such does not constitute the primary target of the *Tahāfut*. The target appears to have been ancient philosophy, especially its metaphysics, and the uncritical acceptance thereof. In full accordance with what was said in the Preface, philosophy is not rejected in its totality. Is it then possible that some philosophers are, in al-Ghazzālī's own opinion, innocent of any of the charges developed subsequently in the main body of the work? Already at the outset of the first question, it is evident that al-Ghazzālī does not claim that all philosophers without exception adhere to the doctrine of the pre-eternity of the world. In fact, he mentions that Plato, according to a certain report, has said that 'the world is generated and originated'<sup>17</sup> (12). But al-Ghazzālī hastens to add that one (*man*—M. 'some') of the philosophers has (have) subsequently interpreted his statement (*awwala kalāmahu*, M. 'interpreted his language as metaphor'), so as to be able to deny that Plato had ever believed in the (temporal) origination of the world. By not specifying which author(s) has (have) proposed this interpretation, al-Ghazzālī gives the impression that in the main tradition of philosophy it was not considered to be an 'interpretation', but the only possible correct reading of Plato. In other words, if—but this being far from certain—Plato really did make that

*Tradition*, 113. Gutas is surely right when he says that Ibn Sīnā did not find it necessary to repeat his views, since there was no disagreement among philosophers on these matters (as al-Ghazzālī also explicitly accepts). But the displacement of the metaphysical part in the *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ* is probably not just a rupture with the usual practice but indicative of a significant doctrinal change in the proper evaluation of the aim and place of metaphysics itself.

<sup>17</sup> I have looked in vain for this affirmation. That the world is generated (*mukawwan*) is a doctrine which Aetius Arabus (ed. H. Daiber, Wiesbaden, 1980), 140–41) confirms as existing in ancient philosophy, but ascribes to Pythagoras and the Stoics. However, al-Ghazzālī's affirmation may have its ultimate source in Aristotle, *Physics*, VIII, 1, 251b 17–19. (Note that the Arabic translation seems to have affirmed that for Plato time (*zamān*), and not heaven (*ouranos*)—as the Greek original seems to have affirmed—is generated.) As for the qualification of the world as having been originated (*muhḍath*), it is linked with the name of Plato in the (ps.?)-Fārābī, *K. al-jam' bayna ra'yay al-ḥakimayn*, ed. A. Nader (Beirut, 1968), 100. As for the possible non-Farabian origin of this work, see J. Lameer, *Al-Fārābī and Aristotelian Syllogistics* (Leiden, 1994), 30–9. But I doubt al-Ghazzālī took it from there, since what follows in the *jam'* is an interpretation of Aristotle's affirmation(s) on this matter, and not at all of the (alleged) Platonic saying itself.

statement, he clearly held an atypical position among the philosophers. But al-Ghazzālī mentions still another case, namely Galen, who in his *Peri tōn eautō dokountōn*<sup>18</sup> expressed a non-committal position on the question of the pre-eternity of the origination of the world on the grounds that (limited) human reason cannot resolve in a satisfactory manner the difficulties inherent to that question. But al-Ghazzālī observes that such a position is very unusual in philosophical circles, and that the overwhelming majority unambiguously declare the world to be pre-eternal. In brief: neither of the two doctrines mentioned seem to have received any serious attention from those who claim adherence to the philosophical ‘credo’. However, is al-Ghazzālī not somehow simplifying things here, by omitting any reference to such eminent philosophers as J. Philoponus and al-Kindī? Was he really ignorant of their works, or did he perhaps have no direct access to them? Or did he omit any reference to them because he considered them to be practitioners of *kalām* rather than of *falsafa*? Or was this omission due to a deliberate polemical tactic whereby the non-mention of a clearly different position greatly facilitates the rejection of what then looks like a unified theory? Although I am aware of the importance of this question, I cannot unfortunately go into it in great detail here. Given its very complex nature, I dare not even attempt the beginning of an answer. In the context of the argument here, it suffices to note that al-Ghazzālī has in mind a large group of philosophers for whom the pre-eternity of the world can in no way be called into question.

Another illustration of al-Ghazzālī’s being aware of different positions among the philosophers can be found in q. 4, more specifically when he presents at least two different views on the survival of human souls (83–4). The first affirms the existence of one pre-eternal soul, which after having been diversified and having joined the human bodies in this life, finally reunites once again into one single soul (Plato). The second states that the existence of the soul is dependent upon that of the body, and that the death of the latter implies the annihilation of the former (al-Fārābī, in his lost commentary on the Nichomachean Ethics?).<sup>19</sup> Al-Ghazzālī adds that in both cases it is impossible to decide whether the number of souls

<sup>18</sup> This text has been translated into Arabic and into Latin. Unfortunately, I had no direct access to either, or to the Greek original.

<sup>19</sup> According to Ibn Bājjā, al-Fārābī, in that commentary, denied life after death. For further references, see M. Galston, ‘The Theoretical and Practical Dimensions of Happiness as Portrayed in the Political Treatises of al-Fārābī’ in: Ch. Butterworth (ed.), *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992), 95–151, esp. 100 and 121.



is finite or infinite (in the former, because of there being no number; in the latter, because the living beings which exist are finite, but those which do not exist cannot be expressed in terms of finitude/infinitude, unless one supposes them 'existent'!). In all this one may see an indirect reference to Ibn Sīnā who, according to al-Ghazzālī<sup>20</sup> (see q. 1, p. 19), accepted the existence of an infinite number of souls in the hereafter. This also helps explain why in his 'answer' al-Ghazzālī refers to Ibn Sīnā explicitly. Let us observe that he mentions him together with al-Fārābī and the exacting among the philosophers, clarifying further on that their position is that of Aristotle and the 'Commentators'. He clearly distinguishes them from those 'who have swerved away from this course' (*man 'adala 'an hādhā l-maslak*). The course referred to is the doctrine of the soul as a self-subsistent substance. Whereas the holders of this latter idea are not able to specify the number of souls (after death) as either finite or infinite, except by guesswork (*fī l-wahm*),<sup>21</sup> al-Ghazzālī tries to show that the other philosophers have still more problems, insofar as they must either admit a pure impossibility, or accept the existence of an actual infinity of souls, although, not being self-subsistent substances, they are not pure spiritual beings. Although I present this overall interpretation of this final part of q. 4 with due care, and allowing that I might be mistaken in some of its details, it suffices for the purposes of the argument here to show that al-Ghazzālī clearly distinguishes several philosophical currents, and that obviously none of them enables a coherent and satisfactory answer to the problem of the number of souls after death.

Al-Ghazzālī's awareness of great differences within the movement of *falsafa* again comes to the fore in q. 11, where he insists that Ibn Sīnā is the only philosopher who accepts the knowledge by God of things outside of His essence. He even insists that on this topic Ibn Sīnā is in complete disagreement with his 'philosophical Brethren' (131).

So, already within the circle of the philosophers, one sometimes discovers (more or less) important variations in doctrine, and this is perhaps some part of the 'incoherence' to which the title of al-Ghazzālī's work refers. As for Ibn Sīnā, his name is once cited together with what appears to be the 'major trend in philosophy', but

<sup>20</sup> Al-Ghazzālī was not mistaken in his claim, see M. Marmura, 'Avicenna and the Problem of the Infinite Number of Souls', in: *Med. Stud.*, 22 (60), 232–9.

<sup>21</sup> Is al-Ghazzālī here indirectly referring to Ibn Sīnā's idea of 'imaginal resurrection'? This is not certain, but cannot be excluded *a priori*. More research is needed in order to settle this question, but it is one beyond the scope of the present paper. On the notion of 'imaginal resurrection', see J. Michot, *La destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne* (Louvain, 1986), *passim*.

on another occasion in strong opposition to it. So, the question now arises: to what degree is al-Ghazzālī's criticism directed against Avicennian philosophy in particular?

This question is far from secondary, when the very wording of al-Ghazzālī's questions seems, at least on initial reading, to be highly Avicennian in inspiration. A closer analysis shows that al-Ghazzālī, especially in his formulation of the philosophers' point(s) of view, has indeed made quite systematic use of Ibn Sīnā's *Shifā'* (both in its metaphysical and psychological parts), supplemented by additions taken from *Najāt* (or a text similar to the *Najāt*)<sup>22</sup> and *Ishārāt*. I also found a few small derivations from two Farabian texts, *al-Madīna al-fāḍila* and *K. al-siyāsa*. These are quite limited in scope as well as number, but I have yet to complete a thorough search of the whole book. However, I seriously doubt that such a search would bring to light systematic use of a Farabian source such as one finds in the *Mi'yār al-'ilm*.<sup>23</sup> A rudimentary summary leads to the following picture:

- q. 1–2:     *Shifā'*, *Met.*, 9: 1;
- q. 3:        9: 4;
- q. 4:        8: 1 and 3;
- q. 5–6:     8: 7;
- q. 7:        9: 1;
- q. 8:        8: 4;
- q. 9:        *Ishārāt* (ed. Forget), 144
- q. 10:       based on preceding questions
- q. 11:       *Ishārāt*, 168
- q. 12:       no precise reference
- q. 13:       *Shifā'*, *Met.*, 8: 6;
- q. 14:       no precise references, but the title may be inspired by  
*Shifā'*, *Met.*, 381, l. 11;
- q. 15–16:   9: 2;
- q. 16:       end *Aqsām*<sup>24</sup>
- q. 17:       *Shifā'*, *De An.*, 4: 4, and *Ishārāt*, 219
- q. 18:       4: 1 and 5: 2, and *Najāt*, *De An.*, c. 11–13

<sup>22</sup> For more detail, see Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 112–14, but let me remark that whereas Gutas believes that *Aḥwāl al-naḥs* is earlier than the *Najāt*, Michot, *Destinée*, 6, has offered strong evidence for its being later.

<sup>23</sup> See Janssens '... His Use of Avicennian Texts' (n. 1, above).

<sup>24</sup> See J. Michot, 'Les sciences physiques et métaphysiques selon la *R. fī aqsām al-'ulūm* d'Avicenne', *Bull. philos. méd.*, 22 (80), 62–73, App.

- q. 19: 5: 4, and *Najāt*, c. 13  
 q. 20: *Shifā'*, *Met.* 9: 7, and *Aḥawīyya*, c. 3.<sup>25</sup>

I can now set out a number of observations:

1. Ibn Sīnā's *Shifā'* (above all *Ilāhiyyāt*, but for questions regarding the soul also *K. al-nafs*) undoubtedly merits the qualification of basic source of the *Tahāfut*. However, if one looks for literal, or near-literal, citations, then most of the time one comes across isolated sentences, and longer passages rather seldom. In this respect, the use of the *Shifā'* in the *Tahāfut* is not only extremely different from that of the *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ* in the *Maqāsid*, but also perceptibly different from that of Avicennian works in other writings of al-Ghazzālī, as e.g., *Mīzān*, *Mi'yār*, or, possibly, *Ma'ārij*. In all these cases, the text(s) which function(s) as a source can easily be recognized, notwithstanding the clear interventions that articulate al-Ghazzālī's own thinking. Moreover, the source text(s) can also be traced in the structure of the exposition and, often, even in the precise wording. The *Tahāfut*, for the most part, reformulates elements, based more or less on the *Shifā'*, in a much freer way, to the point indeed that one wonders if al-Ghazzālī is still reproducing Ibn Sīnā's thought correctly. For example in q. 5 (89) he affirms, without adding any further qualification, that for Ibn Sīnā the quiddity is prior to existence; and in q. 17 (172) he states that particular events are caused by the 'Dator formarum'. Marmura<sup>26</sup> rightly insists that in the former case the interpretation given is debatable, even doubtful, and that the latter affirmation does not correctly reflect Ibn Sīnā's causal theory, since Ibn Sīnā surely does not say that all particular events are caused by the active intellect. But even discounting these rather problematic interpretations, one has the impression that al-Ghazzālī is presenting a kind of personal synthesis, the core of which consists in a few literal, or near-literal, citations.

2. Two major passages from two minor works, *Aqsām* and *Aḥawīyya*, function as an important source in q. 16<sup>27</sup> and q. 20

<sup>25</sup> S. Dunya, in his edition (Cairo, 1949) of Ibn Sīnā's *R. aḥawīyya*, has already pointed to this derivation, see G.C. Anawati, 'Un cas typique de l'ésotérisme avicennien', *La revue du Caire*, June 1951, 91, n. 1. (Repr. in *Études de philosophie musulmane*, Paris, 1974, 286, n. 1.) (Unfortunately, I have not myself seen S. Dunya's edition.)

<sup>26</sup> M. Marmura, *The Incoherence*, 237, nn. 6–7, and 242, n. 8, respectively.

<sup>27</sup> M. Marmura, *ibid.* 164–9, indicates the use of the *Aqsām* not in q. 16, but in what he describes as the 'Introduction' to the second part of the *Tahāfut*, i.e., the part concerning the 'natural sciences'. However, al-Ghazzālī discusses the topic of the rational soul at some length in q. 16 and makes some reference to the doctrine of the soul in even earlier questions. Further, in q. 20, he places the issue of the *ma'ād* in a

respectively. In these cases, al-Ghazzālī is using his sources in his more usual way. But their presence surprises in that both texts present views different from those held by Ibn Sīnā in the *Shifā'* (as well as in the *Najāt* and the *Ishārāt*). The division of the natural sciences in the *Aqsām* is not in accordance with the actual division of the *Shifā'*. For example, parts of the *Meteorology* of the *Shifā'* are now incorporated into the (untitled) fourth book of the natural sciences, more especially, the *De Anima* is no longer presented as the sixth, but as the eighth book. The division as given by the *Aqsām* is undoubtedly more genuinely Aristotelian<sup>28</sup> than that of the *Shifā'*, and has much in common with the order given by Ibn Sīnā's famous Arabic predecessors, al-Kindī<sup>29</sup> and al-Fārābī.<sup>30</sup> In other words, it seems to reflect the point of view of the Arabic Aristotelian tradition. It is probably for that reason that al-Ghazzālī quotes it. But why does he remain silent about Ibn Sīnā's revision(s)?<sup>31</sup> Is it for the sake of easiness, or is he deliberately seeking to present Ibn Sīnā as an authentic follower of the Stagirite? For the moment, I prefer to leave this question open. The *Adḥawiyya*, in a way similar to the *Aqsām*, entails a radical departure from the *Shifā'*, insofar as it denies the reality of bodily resurrection without any qualification. As for the *Shifā'*, Ibn Sīnā explicitly states that the truth of bodily resurrection cannot be established within the domain of syllogistics or rational demonstrative proof, but must be accepted on the basis of prophecy. Of course, one may wonder whether this latter affirmation is not merely a rhetorical device, and whether the truth is not in what is

clearly metaphysical perspective, linking it directly with the problem of the eternity of the world. Finally, as we noted above (p. 3) he explicitly states that his criticism in the *Tabāfut* is directed only against metaphysical doctrines, or matters related to metaphysics. His discussions on the soul do therefore need to be placed in the perspective of a metaphysics of the rational soul (which is indeed an Avicennian perspective).

<sup>28</sup> See M. Mahdi, 'Avicenna. The Division of the Rational Sciences' in R. Lerner and M. Mahdi (eds), *Medieval Political Philosophy* (Glencoe, 1963), 95–7.

<sup>29</sup> Al-Kindī, *Kammīyya kutūb Aristū* in Abū Rīda, *Rasā'il al-Kindī* (Cairo, 1950), 1: 368, 382–3.

<sup>30</sup> Al-Fārābī, *Iḥṣā' al-'ulūm* (ed. A. Gonzalez Palencia, Madrid, 1932), 49–50 (Arabic).

<sup>31</sup> One may use the plural since Ibn Sīnā, in his *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ*, seems to introduce an even more radical change, as already stated. It may be noted that the *Aqsām* appears at first sight to be a work by the young Ibn Sīnā, not least in view of its high Aristotelian contents. But in matters of chronology extreme care is needed, and a later dating cannot at present be excluded. However, even if the later date turns out to be the correct one, the division of the sciences as given would still remain atypical for Ibn Sīnā. This might be the reason why he states at the beginning of the treatise that he will not go beyond what his interlocutor has asked him.

presented in the minor 'esoteric' writing? Let me observe that things are never as simple as they appear to be at first sight. In fact, Michot<sup>32</sup> has offered strong evidence for a rather early date, i.e., Rayy 1014–15, for the *Adḥawiyya* treatise. It may then be that Ibn Sīnā changed his mind, and in a later development of his thought formulated a position that fits better with the requirements of Islamic belief. On the other hand, irrespective of any chronological consideration, a reconciliation of the formulation in the two works is possible on the basis that Ibn Sīnā, in the *Adḥawiyya*, limits himself to articulating those matters, and only those, that are susceptible to apodeictic demonstration. Once more, al-Ghazzālī remains silent about all this. And the question again arises whether he here wants to discredit Ibn Sīnā, or whether he just considers this position to be more typical of the general Arabic Aristotelian tradition?

3. One is struck by the (almost) complete absence of references to the *Maqāṣid*.<sup>33</sup> Hence, bearing in mind what I have already argued in earlier papers,<sup>34</sup> I believe that I can now affirm without any reserve that the *Maqāṣid* was not written as a preparatory work to the *Tahāfut*, and that therefore there is no direct link between the two works. But what then of the similarity in title of the two works? The fact that the *Maqāṣid* contains no other sources than Avicennian ones, on the one hand, and the fact that the Latin medieval translation is entitled '*Summa theoricæ philosophiæ*'<sup>35</sup> (this title being moreover rather close to the Persian '*Dānesh-Nāmeḥ*'!), on the other hand, would seem to indicate that the present title was not the original one.<sup>36</sup>

So far, a few formal considerations regarding al-Ghazzālī's use of Avicennian texts in the *Tahāfut*. It is worthwhile keeping in mind that those texts do not constitute al-Ghazzālī's only sources. We have already mentioned al-Fārābī and Galen. We may add the *Liber de Causis*, which seems to have functioned as the source for al-Ghazzālī's allusion to a mediative eternal circular movement that in one

<sup>32</sup> J. Michot, *Destinée*, 2, n. 10, 6 and 23–4.

<sup>33</sup> It remains possible that a yet more thorough investigation may turn up some derived elements, but it is already clear that there is absolutely no evidence of any systematic use.

<sup>34</sup> See J. Janssens 'Le *Dānesh-Nāmeḥ* d'Ibn Sīnā: un texte à revoir?', *Bull. philos. méd.*, 28–86, 163–77, esp. 167–75, and '... His Use of Avicennian Texts' (n. 1, above).

<sup>35</sup> see Ch. Lohr, *Einleitung* to: Ghazzālī, *Logica et philosophia*. (Venice, 1506; repr. Frankfurt, Minerva, 1969.)

<sup>36</sup> The title was not very clear in the Arabic tradition. See M. Bouyges, *Essai de chronologie des oeuvres de al-Ghazali*, revised edn by M. Allard (Beirut, 1959), 23, n. 5.

respect resembles the Eternal, and in another the temporal,<sup>37</sup> as well as Proclus' *De Aeternitate mundi* (probably mediated through Philoponus' refutation), which appears to have constituted the basis of a proof meant to demonstrate the impossibility of the annihilation of the world.<sup>38</sup> However, both the extent and the impact of these non-Avicennian sources is extremely limited compared to the Avicenna-inspired materials. What is particularly surprising is that there does not appear to be even one direct citation of Aristotle, even though, in the first Introduction, al-Ghazzālī presents the latter as the most important of the ancient philosophers. Did he simply forget that basic statement when elaborating his work? I do not think so. It rather looks as if al-Ghazzālī considered certain works of Ibn Sīnā to express in the best possible way the Stagirite's thoughts. If this was indeed his attitude, then he surely did not consciously intend to disguise Ibn Sīnā's own philosophical ideas, but rather to offer as perfect as possible a formulation of Aristotle's views (as perceived in the Arabic world).<sup>39</sup> In light of this, it is easy to understand why he makes use of Ibn Sīnā's most 'Aristotelian' texts. For al-Ghazzālī certainly did not consider Ibn Sīnā a slavish follower of the Stagirite in every respect. As I already mentioned, al-Ghazzālī insists in q. 11 that Ibn Sīnā's philosophical Brethren disagreed with him on the issue of God's knowledge of the whole. On that issue Ibn Sīnā clearly took a position that more closely conforms with the data of the Qur'ānic revelation. But, at the same time, it is certain that, in al-Ghazzālī's eyes, Ibn Sīnā's *démarche* was in the end far too timid. In conformity with the essentials of the Aristotelian project, Ibn Sīnā 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 Sīnā remains somehow guilty of *taqlīd*, albeit in a weaker form. Ibn Sīnā's philosophy moved in the right direction, but it failed to realize the final step. This seems to have been a cause of a great disappointment to al-Ghazzālī. But where there was disappointment, there was at the same time a great fascination. The presence of so very many Avicennian fragments, from a wide range of works, in a great variety

<sup>37</sup> See q. 1, p. 29 §74. A similar idea is expressed in the *Liber de Causis*, §30–31.

<sup>38</sup> See q. 2, p. 49, §13 *seq.* The relevant proof is proof 5 in the Greek edition of Rabe, and proof 6 in the edition of the Arabic translation by A. Badawi, *Al-Aflāṭūniyya al-muḥdatha 'inda l-'Arab* (Cairo, 1955).

<sup>39</sup> It may be noted that al-Shahrastānī in his *Milal* also presents Aristotle in 'Avicennicized' terms, his exposition of Aristotle being largely based on extracts from Ibn Sīnā's *Commentary on Book Lambda of the Metaphysics*. See the French translation by J. Jolivet in Shahrastānī, *Livre des religions et des sectes* (Paris, 1993), 2:281 *seq.*, where all the relevant references can be found.

of al-Ghazzālī's writings, including *Iḥyā'* and *Maqāṣid*,<sup>40</sup> illustrates that fascination most instructively. Indeed one sometimes gets the impression that al-Ghazzālī is convinced that Ibn Sīnā's philosophy, including its metaphysics, when 'adapted' into the right 'framework', is acceptable.<sup>41</sup> A good example is offered in *al-Mustaḥbirī*<sup>42</sup> (§166–69), where al-Ghazzālī illustrates 'necessary knowledge' in the domain of metaphysics (following on from an example in the domain of mathematics) by a (on first view, slightly) reworked version of Ibn Sīnā's proof of contingency, based on the distinction between necessary and possible. My impression, from a preliminary analysis of the text, is that al-Ghazzālī puts a somewhat stronger emphasis<sup>43</sup> than Ibn Sīnā had done in his original proof on the real contingent character of the 'possible', and this might express a shift towards the more classical *kalāmī* proof for God '*ex creaturis*'. However we interpret it, it is clear from this passage that al-Ghazzālī does not claim that metaphysics as such must be rejected, and that he judges some of Ibn Sīnā's formulations in this domain to be worthy of acceptance, albeit somewhat modified. Furthermore, when it is affirmed (as it must be) that this proof for God's existence is original with Ibn Sīnā, it straightaway becomes probable that Ibn Sīnā is not the philosopher al-Ghazzālī has particularly in mind when he accuses the philosophers of *taqlīd*.

A few lines earlier, I said that al-Ghazzālī does not reject metaphysics in its totality. But is metaphysics not presented in the *Tahāfut* as the 'bad guy'? How these two apparently contradictory postures can be reconciled is indicated in the *Munqidh*<sup>44</sup> where the wording is: 'in it one finds most of their [the philosophers'] mistakes', and not: 'it is totally mistaken'. Note moreover that the principal accusation is now no longer expressed in terms of *taqlīd*, but in terms of an over-confidence in one's capacity to offer apodeictic proofs in metaphysical matters. We have already come across this accusation in the Preface of the *Tahāfut*, in connection with the notions of superior quick wit and intelligence (above, p. 2). It is worthwhile noting that in

<sup>40</sup> For further references see J. Janssens, '... his Use of Avicennian Texts' (n. 1, above).

<sup>41</sup> Al-Ghazzālī probably gave some thought to a synthesis between Avicennism and Ash'arism. See T. Mayer, review of R. Frank, *al-Ghazzālī and the Ash'arite school* (Durham and London, 1994), in *J. of Qur'ānic Stud.*, 1(1) (1999), 170–82, esp. 177.

<sup>42</sup> Having no direct access to Badawī's Arabic edition, I referred to the English translation by R. McCarthy, *Freedom and Fulfillment* (Boston, 1980), App. 2, 175–286.

<sup>43</sup> Of course the idea of contingency is certainly not absent in Ibn Sīnā!

<sup>44</sup> See the edition and French translation by F. Jabre (Beirut, 1969), 23 (Arabic), 78 (French).

q. 14, which turns around the affirmation that ‘heaven is an animal obeying God’, the accusation of *bid‘a* (innovation) does not concern the affirmation itself, but exclusively the philosophers’ pretension to have established its truth by demonstrative proof. Ibn Sīnā’s theory of *ḥads* makes him a strong candidate for being an object, if not the object, of this particular criticism by al-Ghazzālī. However, in the *Shifā’* and in the *Aqsām*, Ibn Sīnā explicitly states that for such a specific religious matter as bodily resurrection no demonstrative proof can be given, and that it must then be accepted solely on the testimony of the prophet. If that is indeed his final position, it is one quite similar to al-Ghazzālī’s. But as soon as one looks more closely at how Ibn Sīnā really dealt with these matters, it becomes obvious that he took a rather different stance. In fact, Ibn Sīnā tried to do justice ‘philosophically’ to these religious articles of faith, which would seem to be in flagrant contradiction to the very fundamentals of the philosophical project. Hence, in the final analysis, he simply continued to subjugate Revelation to reason. In that sense, his philosophy undoubtedly remained unsatisfactory for al-Ghazzālī.<sup>45</sup> But, at the same time it is certain that for al-Ghazzālī this same philosophy already contained within it the germs of the right solution—the elaboration of a real Islamic philosophy instead of a philosophy of Islam. As already mentioned, Ibn Sīnā was aware that no apodeictic proof can be given for all the fundamentals of the religious Revelation. He therefore agreed to renounce a few generally accepted doctrines in the *falsafa*-movement, but did not go so far as to abandon any of the major fundamentals of its project, above all its acceptance of a causal determinism. To that extent, al-Ghazzālī’s attack is *also* directed against him. But may one add ‘primarily’? I seriously doubt it. Is it not significant that al-Ghazzālī, in the *Munqidh*,<sup>46</sup> when alluding to the danger of philosophy, names not Ibn Sīnā, but the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’? It is they who, in citing the prophets, and by using mystical terminology, really create ‘confusion’, especially among the masses.<sup>47</sup> This is evidently not the case in Ibn Sīnā. Of course, one could object that in q. 11 (131, §18), al-Ghazzālī seems to be addressing Ibn Sīnā directly, when he states: ‘as long as you agree with them in denying (God’s) will ...’. As Ibn Sīnā was no longer living, one may read this direct address as a rhetorical device, accompanied by what could be considered a cynical undertone. If this interpretation is correct, then the description of the *Tahāfut* as an

<sup>45</sup> See J. Michot, *Destinée*, 217–18.

<sup>46</sup> See the edition of F. Jabre, 27 (Arabic), 84 (French).

<sup>47</sup> Surprisingly enough, al-Ghazzālī here adopts the philosophers’ distinction between the masses and the elite, which he criticizes in the Preface of the *Tahāfut*.



‘ad hominem’ argument against Ibn Sīnā can hardly be rejected. However, could it not be that al-Ghazzālī is not addressing Ibn Sīnā himself so much as he is addressing the latter’s disciples? Could it not be that he has them in mind when ‘speaking to’ the master himself—which of course is a rhetorical device? I think that it is at least possible to understand the fragment concerned in this way—the disciples are more likely than the master to be guilty of *taqlīd*. In light of the evidence I have given above and elsewhere, it seems that the *Tahāfut* is not necessarily an (explicit) anti-Avicennian work. I am aware that I have not offered conclusive proof against such a description of it, but I believe that I have put forward several arguments that encourage one to doubt it. I am therefore convinced that no clear-cut answer to whether the *Tahāfut* is an anti-Avicennian work is possible at present. By making the question into a genuinely open one, I hope to have stimulated new research on the nature of the *Tahāfut* and its place in al-Ghazzālī’s ‘oeuvre’, and to have demonstrated that some of the established ideas about it are far from being obvious.