AL-ḠAZĀLĪ’S CONCEPT OF PROPHECY: THE INTRODUCTION OF AVICENNAN PSYCHOLOGY INTO AŠ‘ARITE THEOLOGY

FRANK GRIFFEL

The traditional argument of Muslim theologians that aims to verify the claims of a true prophet and distinguish him from an impostor is based on the acceptance of miracles performed in history and testified through an uninterrupted chain of tradition (tawātur). A second argument that equally involves transmission through tawātur is based on the prophet’s virtuous and impeccable character establishing the trustworthiness (ṣidq) of the prophet. These are, for instance, the types of proofs (singl. ḥuğga) mentioned by the Baghdadian Mu’tazilī al-Gāḥīz (d. 255/869) in his monograph Ḫuğāq al-nubuwwa.¹

For theologians of the Aš‘arite school this approach to the verification of prophecy posed a problem. According to classical Aš‘arite theology, good is what God commands and bad is what he forbids.² If God chooses prophets to reveal knowledge about what is right and what is wrong, and thus also reveal knowledge about how to live a virtuous life, how can those whom the prophets call upon know that the prophets have a virtuous character before they even know the criteria for virtue? Early Aš‘arite theologians indeed accepted that all prophets had a most virtuous character. This fact, however,


became apparent only after their message gained acceptance within their community and it cannot be regarded as a viable verification of the claim of a prophet to those he calls upon. Al-Ašʿarī (d. 324/935), for instance, is said to have accepted a number of indications that allow humans to distinguish a prophet from ordinary people. He does not mention the claim based on the impeccable moral conduct of prophets. In fact, he stresses that in order to distinguish a true prophet from other people who are close to God (awliyāʾ), but who have no message to reveal, one should put one’s trust only in the occurrence of true prophetic miracles.

The epistemological principle that underlies the rejection to verify the claims of a prophet through reference to his moral conduct is the fundamental distinction between human and divine knowledge in early Ašʿarite theology. While God has provided humankind with the capacity to gain knowledge of, for instance, the natural world surrounding us, the kind of knowledge provided through prophecy originates from outside this human sphere. Any human attempt to distinguish a prophet from an impostor by judgment of whether his conduct is right or wrong, assumes either a knowledge of what is right or wrong, received prior to the revelation, and must therefore be dismissed as an attempt to judge God’s message by a human standard, or is a circular verification of God’s revelation by itself.

3 Ibn Fūrak (d. 406/1015) reports that al-Ašʿarī accepted four kinds of indications for the truthfulness (ṣidq) of the messenger: “One way is that miracles attest this. Miracles are the things that – when the messenger claims to have the message – come about in violation of the habitual practice that has occurred previously. A second way is the confirmation of the prophet’s veracity (tasdīq) expressed by those people who witnessed the miracles. A third one is that, through the prophet’s veracity (ṣidq) in his message, those to whom the prophet is sent achieve knowledge about the necessity (of his prophecy). And a fourth one is that messengers who were before him have announced him and identified him (by specifying) his characteristics and his personality in his time, his epoch, his name, and his state.” (Ibn Fūrak, Muğarrad maqālāt al-Sayḥ Abī al-Hasan al-Ašʾarī, ed. Daniel Gimaret [Beirut, 1986], p. 176.16–20.) On prophecy and the evidence (iṭbāṭ) for prophecies in Ašʿarite theology cf. Daniel Gimaret, La doctrine d’al-Ashʿarī (Paris, 1990), pp. 453–67, particularly pp. 459f. and Michael E. Marmura, “Avicenna’s theory of prophecy in the light of Ashʿarite theology,” in W.S. McCullough (ed.), The Seed of Wisdom. Essays in Honour of T.J. Meek (Toronto, 1964), pp. 159–78, 161–4.

The systematic character of this rejection is most clearly developed in the writings of the Ašʿarite theologian al-Ğuwaynī (d. 478/1085). He argues that while humans are able to gain theoretical knowledge of what is true and false about, for instance, natural phenomena, and are able to do so independent from revealed knowledge, such a capacity does not exist in the case of normative practical knowledge. Humans are, first of all, incapable of determining what is good and bad in matters of religious obligations. Equally, the moral quality of an action or a person’s character cannot be assessed through rational judgment (‘aql). Human epistemological capacities are too weak and therefore unable to penetrate what it really means for an act to be morally good (ḥasan). What al-Ğuwaynī has in mind here is that human moral judgments are intrinsically affected by their interests and therefore cannot recognize the real moral nature of an act.

As a result, humans are unable to distinguish a true prophet from a false one solely through an assessment of his teachings or his moral character. The genuine prophet endows human-kind with truths that are unattainable through means other than prophecy. Prior to the prophets’ missions, those to whom they are sent have no means to know what will be the knowledge prophets are sent to convey to them. The distinction between a true prophet and an impostor therefore relies solely on prophetic signs (āyāt) which – according to al-Ğuwaynī – can only be miracles (muʿḍizāt). Miracles are extraordinary actions that are beyond the capacity of humans.

---


7 Al-Ğuwaynī, al-Irṣād, p. 304.4f. Nothing in the prophets’ message, however, violates reason. The sending of prophets is an expression of God’s grace that makes even the most intelligent people (al-ʿuqalāʾ) believe in God and continue to follow the judgments of reason (ibid., p. 306. ult.f.)
They are acts of God, performing the function to announce the truthfulness (*ṣidq*) of a prophet.\(^8\)

While this is the view of Aš’arite theologians in the 10th and 11th century, later thinkers of the same tradition express a contrary position. Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), for instance, taught that verifying the claims of a prophet by recourse to miracles that are alleged to him bears so many methodological problems that it is inferior to the method based on a judgment on the message as well as the moral character of the prophet. Being well aware of the problematic character of such a view, al-Rāzī backs it with the statement that earlier scholars including the influential Aš’arite theologian al-Ḡazālī (d. 505/1111) have expressed the same opinion.\(^9\)

In fact, at the beginning of his compendium on the methods of jurisprudence, al-Ḡazālī states that “rationality points towards the fact that the Prophet told the truth.”\(^10\) And in a well-known passage from his autobiography *al-Munṣiqīd min al-ḍalāl*, he argued that certainty about prophecy (*yaqīn bi-al-nubuwwa*) can only be achieved by comparing the message of the prophet with what has already been firmly established in the mind of the believer. Knowledge of prophetic miracles, like the changing of a stick into a serpent, cannot provide such firmness, since miracles may always be interpreted as sorcery (*siḥr*) and deception (*taḥyīl*). While knowledge of miracles may in fact support some kind of belief in prophecy, firm belief that is equal to the power of knowledge (*al-ʾīmān al-qawīy al-ʾilmī*) is achieved only through assent to the prophet’s message created by the immediate notion of truth the believer finds within himself.\(^11\)

---

\(^8\) Al-Ḡuwaynī, *al-Irṣād*, pp. 307f.


This passage has confused many interpreters of al-Ghazālī. The text implies that humans are endowed with certain knowledge that precedes the message of the prophets. If prophecy can be verified by a comparison of the prophets’ message with the immediate notion of truth the believer finds in himself, then this immediate knowledge must be epistemologically independent of the prophets’ message. To deny that miracles are the principal method of verifying prophecy implies that there is a strong independent source of knowledge of what is true, a source that does not come with prophecy.

This article will analyze the development and change in the Aš‘arite views on prophecy that occurred roughly between 1100 and 1200. While al-ğuwaynī’s teachings on prophecy and its verification are deeply rooted in early Aš‘arite epistemology, later Aš‘arites like Fahīr al-Dīn al-Rāzī explain prophecy in terms of Ibn Sīnā’s psychology. This article will first analyze al-Rāzī’s views on prophecy and briefly compare them to Ibn Sīnā (d. 429/1037) in order to make his reliance on Avicennan psychology apparent. In the second part of this article, I will analyze al-Ghazālī’s views on prophecy and determine how he introduced elements of Avicennan psychology into the Aš‘arite theological tradition. This paper will attempt to determine the nature and effect of the earliest influence of Ibn Sīnā’s philosophical interpretation of prophecy on the Aš‘arite theological discourse. Al-Ghazālī’s position towards Ibn Sīnā’s interpretation of prophecy shall first be approached from his comments in al-Ghazālī’s two books of refutation (radd), i.e. the Tahkīq al-falāsifa and the Faḍl al-būṭiniyya. Finally, Ibn Sīnā’s subsequent influence will be analyzed from its Sitz im Leben in al-Ghazālī’s theology, his elaborate theory of interpretation (ta‘wīl) in the first six chapters of his book Faysal al-tafriqa

bayna al-Islām wa-al-zandaqa. I will argue that the Avicennan teachings on the soul and its components which al-Ḡazālī introduces fill a place in Aš'arite theology that has been left blank by the self-imposed epistemological restrictions of this school’s theology. Al-Ḡazālī neglects these restrictions and this filling-of-a-blank-space in Aš'arite theology leads to important changes in the school’s approach to prophecy.

I. FAHR AL-DĪN AL-RĀZĪ’S APPLICATION OF IBN SĪNĀ’S PSYCHOLOGY

In his compendium on theology, the Muḥassal, which was written early in his life, Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī discusses three methods of proofs that aim to verify the claims of a prophet. The first method he calls “evidence through miracle” (zuhūr bi-mu‘gīz), the second “inference from moral conduct” (istidlāl bi-al-ahlāq). The third method is based on the information gathered from previous prophets (aḥbār al-anbiyā’ al-mutaqaddimin). In this work, he points out that information on events in the distant past that has been passed down through generations of scholars through tawātūr is not as reliable as the knowledge of events that one has witnessed oneself. Al-Rāzī discusses other methodological reservations against the proof through miracles and tawātūr. He also dismisses as weak the second method to verify the claim of a prophet through inference from moral conduct. Even if the virtuous character of a person can be established, it would be a sign of distinction but not a sufficient sign for prophecy.

In his later work al-Matālib al-‘āliya al-Rāzī revisits the issue and treats it more systematically. In this work, he expresses a much more rationalist view than in his al-Muḥassal and dismisses all these three kinds of verifications in favor of a fourth criterion, not mentioned in the Muḥassal. In the Matālib al-‘āliya he begins his treatment by saying that arguments that

---


15 Al-Rāzī, Muḥassal, ed. Teheran/Beirut, p. 306. This passage is missing in the Cairo edition.
involve tawātur cannot be regarded as attestations that convey certainty. He presents instead a line of thinking understood as a much more decisive argument first in favor of the necessary existence of prophecy and secondly of the method of verifying the claims of a prophet. The argument begins with the premise that human perfection is knowledge of what is true (ḥaqq) and of what is good (ḥayr). In regard to this perfection, humans fall into three classes: first, those who are completely devoid of such knowledge, these are the ordinary people (‘āmmat al-ḥalq wa-ğumhūrum). Secondly, those who are perfect in their knowledge of the true and the good, but who are unable to make up for the deficiencies of other people. These are the awliyā’. Thirdly, those who are both perfect in their knowledge and who also have the capacity to make up for the deficiencies of others. These are the prophets.

The second major premise of al-Rāzī’s argument for the necessary existence of prophecy argues from the unequal distribution of human perfection. Just as there are many people who have a very limited capacity to know what is true and what is right, there must be at least one individual in every epoch who is endowed with both theoretical and practical perfection. The same kind of argument proves, according to al-Rāzī, the existence of a person in a series of epochs that surpasses these perfect individuals and qualifies as the “sublime messenger” (al-rasūl al-mu‘azzam), the “legislator” (wādī’ al-šarā‘i’) and the “one who guides to the truths”

16 Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya min al-‘ilm al-ilāhī, ed. Muḥammad ‘Abd al-Salām Sāhīn, 3 vols. (Beirut, 1420/1999), part 8 (included in vol. 3), pp. 44–6. The eighth book of the Maṭālib al-‘āliya on prophecy is also edited by Ahmad Ḥiḡāzī al-Saqqā under the title al-Nubuwwa wa-mā yata‘allaqu bihā (Cairo, 1985) where this passage is pp. 133–9. This edition is to be preferred. Ahmad Ḥiḡāzī al-Saqqā later published a full edition of the Maṭālib (Beirut, 1407/1987) which was not available to me. Al-Rāzī dismisses tawātur because the traditions that Jews, Christians and other religious groups transmit prove the possibility of collective error.


Al-Râzî’s argument intends to explain the appearance of a prophet as well as prove the necessary existence of prophecy. Al-Râzî argues that prophecy is possible and, further, that it must exist.22 His proof is as follows: While perfection and imperfection are in themselves possible, both together are viewed as a necessary condition of humankind.23 Perfection is divided into two categories, first, those perfect individuals who cannot make others perfect – the awliyâ’ – and secondly, those who can render others perfect, the prophets. The fact that humankind generally falls into two groups, ordinary people (‘awâmm) and the elect (ḥawâss) regarding theoretical and practical wisdom is therefore proof for the existence of prophecy. Prophets are most perfect humans who combine the wisdom accessible to the ḥawâss with the capacity to convey it to the ‘awâmm.24

This argument implies an important assumption that is hidden in the first premise, namely that humans are capable of reaching theoretical and practical perfection without prophecy. This capacity is, of course, unequally distributed. But al-Râzî assumes that at least some humans are able to distinguish rationally the genuine prophet from the impostor solely through the consideration of his message.25 The second group of people (awliyâ’) would surely be able to judge the prophet’s veracity according to whether he calls to right or to
wrong. This opens the possibility of verifying a prophet’s message and distinguishing the true prophet from the impostor:

We say: First of all we know what is true (ḥaqq) and what is right (ṣidq) regarding the things we are convinced of (al-iṭiqādāt). And regarding the things that we do (al-a‘māl), [we do know] what is right (ṣawāb). If we know this, and we then see a man who calls the people to the true religion, and we see that his message includes a strong incitement for people to change from falsehood to truth, then we know that he is a true prophet and that one has to follow him. And this method [to verify the claims of a prophet] is closer to reason (ʿaql), and there is less uncertainty in it.26

Al-Rāzī claims that this method of verifying the claims of a prophet falls together with the one of inference from moral conduct (istidlāl bi-al-ahlāq) mentioned by some of the theologians of the classical period.27 As mentioned above, this method is methodologically superior to proofs based on the reports of prophetic miracles since it does not involve reliance on other people’s judgments or on tawātūr.28

It can be shown that al-Rāzī’s argument for the necessity of prophecy rests on the writings of Ibn Sīnā or those ascribed to

\[\text{\footnotesize 27 Al-Rāzī singles out al-Gāhīzī, Muḥaṣṣal, ed. Cairo, p. 208.12–14, ed. Teheran/Beirut, 351.15f.}
\[\text{\footnotesize 28 This “second method” (i.e. the one not involving tawātūr) is methodologically similar (yağrā mağrā ... and min bāb ...) to a demonstratio quare sive propter quid (burhān al-lima; al-Rāzī, al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya, ed. Beirut, p. 74, ed. Cairo, p. 184; Ma‘ālim usūl al-dīn, p. 70.7ff.) The traditional way to prove prophecy through miracles is described as methodological similar to a demonstratio quia (burhān al-inna), which is according to al-Rāzī in strength inferior to the burhān al-lima. The two types of demonstration are distinguished by the status of the middle term. Both may have the same structure and may be formally identical, but in the case of a burhān al-lima the middle term is just a concept whose extramental existence is not proven. It therefore does not prove the extramental being of the object, but rather what kind of attributes it has if it exists. To prove, for instance, that a unicorn must be mortal would be a burhān al-lima. The burhān al-inna of al-Rāzī’s terminology would argue for the existence of a thing from empirical evidence like – in this case – eyewitness reports. It is inferior because of the problem of tawātūr. Al-Rāzī’s “second method” is similar to a burhān al-lima since it proves the existence of prophecy through “the why” of prophecy (al-lima) and argues from there for its need and subsequently for its existence. Al-Rāzī concedes that he is unable to prove “the that” (al-inna) of prophecy with something resembling a burhān al-inna. No eyewitness report will give sufficient evidence for such a proof. On the distinction between the two kinds of demonstration cf. still Carl Prantl, Geschichte der Logik im Abendlande, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Graz, 1885; reprint Darmstadt, 1957) vol. 2, pp. 324ff.}
Ibn Sīnā. Al-Rāzī seems to have been impressed by the argument that an attribute must exist in perfection whenever it exists in deprivation. Al-Rāzī’s method to verify the claims of a prophet through comparison with what is already known to be true and to be good is a result of his philosophical treatment of prophecy and is thus equally inspired by philosophical literature.

Ibn Sīnā developed two different arguments aiming to prove the necessity of prophecy. Proofs for the necessity of prophecy aim to demonstrate in an apodictical manner that prophecy must exist and that the world cannot be without it. The first of these two arguments is from the psychological part of al-Šifāʾ. In this work, Ibn Sīnā presents a teleological argument based on God’s attribute to choose the best for his creatures. Prophecy is necessary because humans are by nature beings that can only exist and survive through association with other humans. Their nature determines the formation of partnerships and these partnerships need legislation. The best legislation is ordained through prophecy to elected human beings. Before presenting this argument, Ibn Sīnā had already proven that God must necessarily act for the best of his creation. The equally proven possibility that prophecy exists becomes in light of this latter premise a necessity.

This argument for the necessary existence of prophecy, however, seems to have had no impact on al-Rāzī. The premise that God must act for the best of his creation is, in fact, quite far-reaching and for an Aš’arite difficult to swallow. But al-Rāzī seems to have been impressed by a second Avicennan argument for the necessity of prophecy that appears in a weak version in the psychological part of al-Šifāʾ and in a stronger version in one of the shorter writings of the Avicennan corpus, Fī itbāt al-nubuwwāt. Al-Rāzī’s main argument is that the

29 The two meanings of epistemological and ontological necessity are combined in this statement. Cf. note 22.
31 Herbert A. Davidson, Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect. Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect (New York and Oxford, 1992), p. 87, note 56 disputes Ibn Sīnā’s authorship of this text. Davidson’s doubts are prompted by the text’s references to al-ʿaql al-kullī and al-nafs al-kulliyya which do not tally with Ibn Sīnā’s scheme of emanative things. The issue is, however, unresolved since scribal errors may be responsible for
intellectual weakness of some humans proves the necessary existence of at least one individual who possesses both theoretical and practical wisdom and who is able to convey it to those who lack such perfection. In al-Rāzī’s *Maṭālib* the character of this statement is demonstrative. But it can easily be objected that while such an individual may indeed exist, why does al-Rāzī think that he must exist? In the psychological part of *al-Šifāʾ*, Ibn Sīnā gives an argument in favor of the existence of an outstanding mind that is blessed with a wide-ranging as well as a quick capacity to find theoretical knowledge through intuition (ḥads). This argument is repeated in *al-Naḡāt*. The faculty to come to theoretical knowledge intuitively through syllogisms is unequally distributed among humans. The fact that there are people who are extremely weak in this faculty leads to the conclusion that there is also the potential for an individual who has it in perfection. Michael E. Marmura does not consider this passage to present a demonstrative proof for the existence of prophecy. He believes these inaccuracies. Because al-Ḡazālī and al-Rāzī, for instance, may have accepted this text as a work by Ibn Sīnā, we will include *Fī ḳībāt al-nubuwwāt* and refer to it as an Avicennan text.

32 Cf. supra footnotes 23 and 24.
34 Ibn Sīnā, *De anima*, p. 249.11–18.: “[The capacity to hit the middle term (al-ḥadd al-aواسط) in a syllogism] is one of those things that vary both in terms of quantity and quality. [...] Because these variations are not limited by a (fixed) border, but always subject to increase and decrease, and because these variations end on the decreasing side with somebody who does have no intuition (ḥads) at all, the variations must (yaḡibu an) also end at the increasing side with someone who has intuition in regard to all problems or at least most of them, and with someone whose intuition comes in the shortest time or at least quite a short time.” This passage is also translated into English in Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (Leiden, 1988), p. 162 and into German and discussed in id., “Avicenna: De anima,” in Kurt Flasch (ed.), *Interpretationen: Hauptwerke der Philosophie: Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1998), pp. 90–107, 97f. Much of the understanding of this passage rests on the passage “the variations must end . . .” (fa-yaḡibu an yantahī . . .) in the middle of the sentence. This sentence does not indicate logical necessity, but rather states the fact that the variation of humans being endowed with ḥads necessarily ranges from having no insight at all to having the perfect insight of a prophet. This does not mean that there are necessarily persons who have these kinds of insight. It just means that the possibility for the existence of these people exists in a necessary manner. When al-Ḡazālī paraphrases this passage (cf. infra footnote 45) he rightfully replaces the “yaḡibu an . . .” with “ḡāza an . . .” (“it is possible that . . .”) thus making it clear that Ibn Sīnā here just states that prophecy is possible, not that it is necessary.
that in this passage Ibn Sīnā argues for the possible existence of such a mind and concludes that in the psychological part of al-Šifā’ at least, Ibn Sīnā does not claim to give a proof for the necessary existence of a prophetic mind. Al-Rāzī, however, does claim that the existence of the prophet is necessary and he might have read this somehow ambiguous passage to mean that it proves the necessary existence of a person with perfect ḥads.

Al-Rāzī’s argument may be better explained from one of the shorter Avicennan texts, Fī iṭḥāt al-nubuwwāt. This text openly claims to demonstrate the necessary existence of the “holy intellect” (al-‘aql al-qudsī) or “angelic intellect” (al-‘aql al-malakī), i.e. the prophets’ faculty to receive perfect theoretical knowledge without mediation. Fī iṭḥāt al-nubuwwāt says that the capacity to find theoretical knowledge solely through intuition (ḥads) exists actually or potentially in many humans. If an attribute exists actually or potentially in a being, it must be an accident of this being. In order for an attribute to exist accidentally in one being, it must exist essentially in a different being. This being is the “angelic intellect” of the prophets, whose necessary existence is thus demonstrated. The proof is deeply rooted in Avicennan ontology and in the distinction of beings into necessary and possible. It is, indeed, in its structure similar to Ibn Sīnā’s proof for the existence of a “necessary being by virtue of itself” (wāqib al-wuḡūd) – i.e. God – from the

35 Michael E. Marmura, “Avicenna’s psychological proof of prophecy,” Journal of Near Eastern Studies, 22 (1963): 49–56, p. 49, note 1. In his “Avicenna: De anima”, pp. 94f. and in his Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, p. 162, note 36, Gutas points to the connection of this sentence in the De anima with the proof properly expounded in Fī iṭḥāt al-nubuwwāt (cf. infra, note 37). Marmura says that Ibn Sīnā argued for the fact that the potential for prophecy exists in a necessary manner. This does not imply that prophecy itself exists necessarily. His analysis is supported by Ibn Sīnā’s conclusion of the argument in De anima, p. 249.18f.: “It is thus possible that there is a person amongst humans whose soul has been rendered so powerful through extreme purity and intense contact with intellectual principles that he blazes with ḥads.” (Cf. the translation in Gutas, Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, p. 162.) Cf. also Ibn Sīnā, al-Naḡāt, p. 166.13–21 and Fazlur Rahman, Prophecy in Islam (London, 1958), p. 31.

36 Abrahamov, “Religion versus philosophy,” p. 421, for instance, does not believe that al-Rāzī succeeds in his proof. He is, however, unaware of the Avicennan background.

existence of beings that are by themselves only contingent (mumkin al-wuğūd), i.e. the world that surrounds us.  

Most elements of al-Rāzī’s favored method to verify the claims of a prophet are inspired by those parts of the Ṣifā’ where Ibn Sīnā gives further explanations of the prophets’ office. These parts have no real argumentative role in the Avicennan proof for the existence of prophecy other than to illustrate that prophecy is nothing out of the ordinary and, in fact, quite within the reach of human understanding. Ibn Sīnā teaches that the majority of humankind is incapable of grasping metaphysical truths like the one, for instance, that God is not located in space, or that he is neither inside nor outside of this world. The prophets’ teachings should acknowledge this fact and lead the populace on a direct way to virtuous actions that does not aim at their theoretical perfection. A true prophet can therefore be distinguished from a false one through his combination of the different characteristics of prophecy, mainly the acquisition of wisdom, the teaching of justice, and the union with the active intellect. This includes the implicit assumption that at least some humans already know wisdom and justice before the prophets’ revelations, and this knowledge puts them in a position to distinguish the true prophet from the impostor. For Ibn Sīnā – just like for al-Rāzī – the characteristics of prophecy and its aims were most perfectly accomplished by Muḥammad and by the law that he brought.  

II. AL-ĞAZĀLĪ’S CRITICISM OF THE FALĀSIFA’S DOCTRINE OF PROPHECY  

Nowhere in his extant writings does al-Ğazālī refute Ibn Sīnā’s demonstrative argument for the necessary existence of prophecy. He was aware of Ibn Sīnā’s teleological argument from the

---

39 I.e. meaning that prophecy is possible in logical terms and thus also a possible being.  
42 Ibid., 450.7; Ibn Sīnā (?), Fī ḥāṣīʾ al-nubuwwāt, p. 47.
De anima of the Šifā’, which argues that God must choose the best for his creation. Al-Ḡazālī reproduces a concise version of this argument at the very end of his Maqāṣid al-falāṣīfah. The second argument from Ibn Sīnā’s De anima in favor of the possible existence of the extraordinary theoretical capacities of a prophet also appears in the Maqāṣid. More significantly, in his Tahāfut al-falāsifa al-Ḡazālī reproduces this argument almost verbatim from Ibn Sīnā’s De anima. Al-Ḡazālī does not mention the stronger version of this argument from the Avicennan text Fī itbāṭ al-nubuwwāt, which claims to prove the necessary existence of a human with a perfect theoretical faculty.

The Tahāfut al-falāsifa deals with the philosophers’ views on prophecy in the introduction to the part on the natural sciences (ṭabi’iyyāt) and in the preceding 16th discussion on the celestial souls – the last discussion in the part on metaphysics. In the introductory chapter to the natural sciences, al-Ḡazālī gives an account of Ibn Sīnā’s teachings on prophecy from the De anima of the Šifā’. The passage presents three elements of Ibn Sīnā’s psychological teachings on prophecy. All three concern the distinct ways of how prophets receive their revelation and how they perform miracles. First, al-Ḡazālī reports that it is possible for prophets to receive imaginative revelation. It is maintained here in order to distinguish this way of revelation from “intellectual revelation” mentioned below.

43 Al-Ḡazālī, Maqāṣid al-falāṣīfa, ed. Muḥammad  سبحانه al-Kurdi, 2nd ed. (Cairo, 1355/1936), part 3, p. 76.5–14. Divine providence (‘ināya ilāhiyya) necessitates the sending of prophets who teach humankind the benefits of this world and the next just as it necessitates sending rainfall for this world to prosper.

44 Ibid., part 3, pp. 74.ult.–75.8.

45 Al-Ḡazālī, Tahāfut al-falāsifa (= Algazel, Tahafot al-falasifat, ed. Maurice Bouyges [Beirut, 1927]), p. 273.7–10. Significantly, the “it must be that . . .” (yağibu an . . .) of Ibn Sīnā’s (De anima, p. 249.16) text is here replaced by “it can be that . . .” (gāza an . . .), making it clear that Ibn Sīnā does not argue for the necessary existence of an individual who has extraordinary ḥads, but just for the possible existence of him.


47 “Imaginative revelation” is a term used by Fazlur Rahman in his Prophecy in Islam, pp. 36ff. It is maintained here in order to distinguish this way of revelation from “intellectual revelation” mentioned below.
prophets receive revelations as visions in their imaginative faculty (quwwa mutaḥayyila). Al-Ġazālī explains this in Ibn Sīnā’s terminology. Prophets lack impeding forces that in the case of ordinary people suppress visions while they are awake and receive sense data. Therefore, prophets receive in their waking hours visions that ordinary people receive in their sleep.  

Secondly, al-Ġazālī reports Ibn Sīnā’s teachings on intellectual revelation. He gives an account of the view that prophets receive revelations as theoretical knowledge in the intellectual faculty of the prophets (quwwa ‘aqliyya naẓariyya). Prophets have the power of intuition (quwwat al-ḥads) and have the capacity to immediately find the middle term of a syllogism. This capacity makes the prophets achieve perfect theoretical knowledge without instruction, solely through intuition (ḥads).  

Thirdly and finally, al-Ġazālī in this passage gives an account of Ibn Sīnā’s view on the ability of prophets to perform miracles by virtue of an exceptionally powerful practical faculty of the soul (quwwa nafsiyya ‘amaliyya). Since all souls have the capacity to effect physical changes in our own bodies, the extraordinary powers of the prophets’ souls have the capacity to bring about changes in natural objects outside of their own bodies. Prophets have the capacity to cause storms, let rain fall, cause earthquakes, or cause people sink into the ground, but they are not capable of changing a piece of wood into an animal or of splitting the moon.

The first two elements of Ibn Sīnā’s explanation of prophecy, i.e. imaginative and intellectual revelation, pass through al-Ġazālī’s Tahāfut without further comment or criticism. Only the falāsifa’s explanation of miracles is criticized by al-Ġazālī. First, he stresses that he does not reject their explanation and that he agrees with the falāsifa on the prophets’ capacity to make other bodies do their bidding. But al-Ġazālī objects that

---

49 “Intellectual revelation” is also a term coined by Fazlur Rahman in Prophecy in Islam, pp. 30ff.
52 Al-Ġazālī, Tahāfut, p. 275.12f.
this capacity is limited to a change of some accidents within the bodies. Prophetic miracles, he argues, also include the change of essential qualities like in the transformation of a stick into a serpent. Such miracles are implicitly denied by the falāsifa, and it is this denial which leads directly into the 17th discussion of the Tāḥafut on causality.

The Tāḥafut’s 17th discussion on causality may be initially caused by Ibn Sīnā’s explanation of prophecy, it does, however, not touch on this issue. This is quite different in the case of the 16th discussion of the Tāḥafut. The subject of this discussion is the falāsifa’s teachings on celestial beings, i.e. their position that the spheres are connected to intellects and their denial of the existence of an actual “Preserved Tablet” (al-lawḥ al-mahfūẓ) in the heavens as it is mentioned in Qur’an 85:22. Here, al-Ḡazālī first concedes that the falāsifa’s view on celestial beings having souls is indeed not impossible (laysa muḥālan). Similarly, he implicitly concedes that the view of prophecy as knowledge being received from these celestial souls is possible. His argument against these two views is epistemological; it denies the falāsifa’s claims to have real insight into these matters. He confronts their epistemological incapacity with the religious point of view based on the authority of revelation. While the interpreters of revelation have certain knowledge, the falāsifa only claim to have possible knowledge in these matters:

53 This is the prophetic miracle that Moses performed in front of Pharaoh, cf. Qur’an 7.107, 20.69, 26.45.
54 According to al-Ḡazālī, the falāsifa interpreted the lawḥ mahfūẓ metaphorically and understood it as a reference to past and future events that the prophets see in their visions, “the imaginative faculty (quwwa mutahāyyila) […] sees the Preserved Tablet, the forms of future particular events become imprinted in it” (al-Ḡazālī, Tāḥafut, p. 273.8–10). Al-Ḡazālī’s own understanding of the lawḥ mahfūẓ in his later writings like al-ʿArbaʿīn fi ʿusūl al-dīn is, however, hardly different from the falāsifa’s position (cf. Richard M. Frank, Creation and the Cosmic System [Heidelberg, 1992], p. 45).
55 Al-Ḡazālī, Tāḥafut, p. 255.17.
56 According to Ibn Sīnā, the source of prophetic visions must be one of the celestial souls (nafūs samāwīyya) which are attached to celestial bodies, the spheres of the planets. These souls have knowledge of the unknown (al-gāyib). The source of imaginative visions requires a bodily organ and this excludes the celestial intellects and the necessary existent being (wāqib al-wuğād) itself as the source of the visions. (Ibn Sīnā, al-Ṣifa’, al-Ilāhiyyāt, II, 437f.) In al-Ḡazālī’s report of the falāsifa’s teachings the source of prophetic visions is called “the angel” (al-malak); al-Ḡazālī, Maqāṣid al-falāsifa, part 3, pp. 75f.
There is no need for any of the things you [falāsifa] have mentioned, for there is no proof (dalīl) in this. 57 Nor do you have a proof [for your interpretation] of what the religious law conveys regarding ‘the Tablet’ and ‘the Pen.’ For the people versed in the law (ahl al-šar’) do not understand by ‘the Tablet’ and ‘the Pen’ the meaning [you have given to these terms] at all. Consequently, there is nothing for you to cling to [your interpretation] in the religious law. 58

Al-Ḡazālī clearly understands that Ibn Sīnā in his De anima does not claim to demonstrate that prophets receive revelation on the two ways outlined, i.e. on the way of imaginative and intellectual revelation. These are arguments for the possibility of prophecy and not proofs for its existence. 59 The statements on prophecy in the psychological part of al-Šifā’ were understood as explanations of how prophecy must occur, if it occurs. Al-Ḡazālī points out that even the falāsifa’s teachings that revelation is received as a result of a connection between celestial beings and the prophets’ souls are purely explanatory and not demonstrative. 60

Al-Ḡazālī’s subsequent criticism is based entirely on the falāsifa’s inability to prove that revelation is received from the celestial souls. If not proven, these teachings are rendered false by the text of the Qur’ān. Here, he implicitly applies his “law of interpretation” (qānūn al-ta’wil), as he calls it in his later works. The text of the divine revelation may only be subject to allegorical interpretation (ta’wil) and therefore understood to have an inner meaning (bāṭin), if the validity of its literal meaning (ẓāhir) is contradicted through a demonstrative proof

57 The usage of the word dalīl, “any kind of argument,” instead of the stronger burhān, “demonstrative argument,” a fortiori stresses al-Ḡazālī’s claim that the falāsifa are unable to prove their claims.
60 From what he says in his Metaphysics, Ibn Sīnā leaves no other possibility than that the source of prophetic visions can only be the celestial souls (cf. supra, footnote 56). In his most explicit treatment of prophetic visions in the psychological part of al-Šifā’, Ibn Sīnā leaves open from where the prophets’ faculty of imagination receives the visions that make up prophecy. The visions formed in the prophets’ imaginative faculty are here described as resulting from a connection “between the unknown (gāyب), between the soul, and between the inner faculty of imagination.” (Ibn Sīnā, De anima, p. 178.1f.)
Both revelation and demonstration must lead to the same conclusions. If Muslims like the falāsifa try to alter one source of truth, i.e. revelation, with the support of arguments that are based on some kind of reasoning, but not on demonstrative reason (burhān), their interpretations must be rejected. This applies to the falāsifa’s view that the prophets receive their knowledge from the celestial intellects and not directly from God:

With what [argument] would you deny someone who says that the Prophet knows the hidden through God’s apprising him of it by way of [direct] initiation (ibtidā’)?

It follows that the falāsifa’s teachings on the involvement of celestial souls in the process of revelation are arbitrary in terms of the philosophical discourse (mutaḥakkam). These teachings are false in religious discourse, since they contradict the outward meaning (zāhir) of the revealed text. The Qurʾān teaches direct revelation from God to his prophets.

Al-Ḡazālī’s second book of refutation (radd), the Faḍāʾīḥ al-bāṭiniyya wa-faḍāʾil al-mustazhiriyya contains a much more rigorous condemnation of the falāsifa’s views on prophecy. The Mustazhiri – as this book became known – is a refutation (radd) of the contemporary Ismāʿīlī daʿwa, who here are pejoratively called “Bāṭinītes” (those who arbitrarily follow an assumed inner meaning (bātin) of revelation). The reason why al-Ḡazālī discusses philosophical views on prophecy in this book lies in his assumption that the Ismāʿīlī movement and the philosophical movement agree on certain issues. Early on in the book al-Ḡazālī expresses his understanding that the Ismāʿīlī views on prophecy which were reported to him are “close to the teachings of the falāsifa,” and “with some distortion and change extracted from the teachings of the

63 “wa-al-manqūl ‘anhum qarīb min maḏhab al-falāsifa” (al-Ḡazālī, Faḍāʾīḥ al-bāṭiniyya wa-faḍāʾil al-mustazhiriyya, ed. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī [Cairo, 1383/1964], p. 40.18f.).
falāsifa." The lack of reliable (written) information on the Ismāʿīlī teachings may have led him to discuss the more readily accessible views of the falāsifa instead and assume a certain congruity between the two.

Like in the Tahāfut al-falāsifa, al-Ḡazālī here also distinguishes between several elements of the falāsifa’s views and never explicitly condemns all of them. Here, in the Mustazhirī, al-Ḡazālī is concerned with the socio-political aspects of the falāsifa’s teachings on prophecy. The eighth chapter of this book is devoted to a legal examination of the Ismāʿīlīs’ teachings. The question discussed here is whether the different elements of the Ismāʿīlīs’ daʿwa are from the Muslim jurist’s point of view error (ḥaṭṭāʾ), innovation (bidʿa), or unbelief (kufr). According to al-Ḡazālī’s criteria for tolerated and non-tolerated views, the first two categories of error and innovation present no serious problem. These views are false, but give no reason to act for the authorities. Unbelief, however, is for al-Ḡazālī a serious legal offense that the apparatus of state prosecution has to tackle.

Elements of the falāsifa’s views on prophecy fall under the category of unbelief (kufr). In a lengthy passage in the eighth chapter of the Mustazhirī, al-Ḡazālī provides a report of “the Bāṭinites’” teachings on prophecy. A closer examination of the passage, however, reveals that al-Ḡazālī draws entirely on the teachings of Ibn Sīnā, taken mostly from al-Sīra and from smaller books on the afterlife. Al-Ḡazālī concedes in a first

---

64 “fa-hādīhī al-mdāhīhib aydān mustaṭraqā min mdāhīhib al-falāsifa fī al-nubuwwāt maʿa tāḥīf wa-tāqīfīr” (ibid., p. 42.3).
68 Al-Ḡazālī, Faḍāʾīh al-bāṭiniyya, pp. 151–5. I have dealt with this passage in my Apostasie und Toleranz, pp. 293–303. On the Avicennan writings on the afterlife that al-Ḡazālī draws on cf. Jean R. Michot, La destinée de l’homme selon Avicenne. Le retour à Dieu (maʿād) et l’imagination (Leuven, 1986), pp. 49–54, 190–8. There is a second smaller passage earlier in the Mustazhirī that also criticizes the Ismāʿīlīs’ views on prophecy. It is within the fourth chapter on the exposition
step that these views do not explicitly violate any central element of the Muslim creed. Those who adhere to these views profess God’s unity and deny polytheism, and when it comes to certain details of the religious law they interpret them without explicitly denying them. Their interpretation (ta’wīl) acknowledges the validity of the religious law (ṣar‘) in principle.

A closer look into their teachings, however, reveals that they implicitly deny important elements of the religious law. One doctrine they deny is bodily resurrection in the afterlife.69 Already in the Tahāfut this point led to the condemnation of the falāsifa as unbelievers.70 Here in the Mustazhirī, al-Ḡazālī approaches the falāsifa’s teaching from a broader angle. The group criticized in this passage of the Mustazhirī, hold, al-Ḡazālī reports, that the symbolic character of the revelation is to the benefit (maslaḥa) of the ordinary people (‘awāmm).71 Revelation on the other hand teaches close to nothing to those who achieve knowledge through demonstration (burhān). Since the intellectual capacities of the ordinary people are too weak to understand the hidden things, God – according to this group that we identify with the falāsifa – created prophecy, which teaches these matters in a metaphorical language using rhetorical and poetical means of representation.

After a lengthy discussion in which he indicates his hesitation, al-Ḡazālī finally condemns this approach towards prophecy on the grounds that it includes the implicit assumption that the prophets’ message is beneficial but not the whole truth.72 Since truth is, however, the most important claim of the prophets’ message, these (i.e. the falāsifa’s) views of prophecy include an implicit accusation of lying. The accusation to lie or not to tell the truth (takdīb) is the opposite of belief (taṣdīq), i.e. belief in the prophets veracity and the truth of their mission. The falāsifa’s interpretation of the socio-political

---

69 Al-Ḡazālī, Faḍā‘īh al-bāṭiniyya, p. 152.
role of prophecy in society is tantamount to unbelief (kufr) and apostasy from Islam.\textsuperscript{73}

III. AL-\textsuperscript{\(\text{G}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{Z}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)}}\text{}\textsuperscript{\text{L}}}\text{'S PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO PROPHECY IN HIS \text{}\textsuperscript{\text{FAYSAL AL-TAFRIQA}}}

Al-\textsuperscript{\(\text{G}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{Z}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)}}\text{}\textsuperscript{\text{L}}}\text{ develops his own explanation of prophecy in the context of an elaborate argument on the distinction between interpretations of the Muslim revelation that are allowed and tolerated in Islam and those that are not allowed and considered clandestine apostasy (zandaqa). Al-\textsuperscript{\(\text{G}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{Z}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)}}\text{}\textsuperscript{\text{L}}}\text{ expounds this argument in the first six chapters of the \text{}\textsuperscript{\text{FAYSAL AL-TAFRIQA BAYNA AL-ISLAM WA-AL-ZANDAQA}}. The \text{}\textsuperscript{\text{FAYSAL}} was written late in al-\textsuperscript{\(\text{G}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{Z}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)}}\text{}\textsuperscript{\text{L}}}\text{'s life between 491/1098 and 503/1109.\textsuperscript{74} The work deals with the criteria of membership in the Islamic community and thus serves as the background for understanding al-\textsuperscript{\(\text{G}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{Z}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)}}\text{}\textsuperscript{\text{L}}}\text{'s condemnation of the fala\textsuperscript{s}ifa and the B\textsuperscript{\(\text{A}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{T}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{I}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{N}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{I}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{E}\)}}\text{}\textsuperscript{\text{N}}} earlier in his life.\textsuperscript{75} The book begins, however, with an apology. Al-\textsuperscript{\(\text{G}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{Z}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)}}\text{}\textsuperscript{\text{L}}}\text{ states in an address to an unknown student that he himself has been accused of unbelief because of his teachings. He reminds

\textsuperscript{73} The same condemnation is expressed in al-\textsuperscript{\(\text{G}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{Z}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)}}\text{}\textsuperscript{\text{L}}}\text{'s \text{}\textsuperscript{\text{AL-IQTISAD FT AL-I'TIQAD}}}, ed. Hüseyn Atay and Ibrahim Agâh Çubukçu (Ankara, 1962), p. 249.6–9 and is the small work \text{}\textsuperscript{\text{MI'RAG\ AL-SALIKIN}} (the latter is analyzed in Rahman, Prophecy in Islam, pp. 98f.)

\textsuperscript{74} On the dating of the \text{}\textsuperscript{\text{FAYSAL}} cf. my introduction to the German translation of the \text{}\textsuperscript{\text{FAYSAL}}, \text{}\textsuperscript{\text{ÜBER RECHTGLÄUBIGKEIT UND RELIGIOSE TOLERANZ. EINE ÜBERSETZUNG DER SCHRIFT DAS KRITERIUM IN DER UNTERScheidung ZWISCHEN ISLAM UND GOTTLOSIGKEIT}} (Zürich, 1998), pp. 43–5 and Maurice Bouyges, \text{}\textsuperscript{\text{ESSAI DE CHRONOLOGIE DES ŒUVRES DE AL-GHAZAŁI (ALGAZEL)}}, ed. Michel Allard (Beirut, 1959), pp. 46f. The \text{}\textsuperscript{\text{FAYSAL}} is a genuine work of al-\textsuperscript{\(\text{G}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{Z}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)}}\text{}\textsuperscript{\text{L}}}\text{. It is mentioned by al-\textsuperscript{\(\text{G}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{Z}\)\textsubscript{\(\text{A}\)}}\text{}\textsuperscript{\text{L}}}\text{ in his \text{}\textsuperscript{\text{AL-MUNQID MIN AL-DALĀL}}}, p. 24, and in his \text{}\textsuperscript{\text{AL-MUSTASHF MIN 'ILM AL-USĪL}}, I, 185.

his student that there are few scholars who have a clear understanding of the criteria for unbelief (\textit{kufr}) in Islam. Many accuse their theological opponents of \textit{kufr} even if they disagree only in minor points. In order to understand the nature of unbelief, one should first draw attention to its definition.

Michael E. Marmura pointed out that while the classical Ašʿarites view prophecy from the perspective of God’s attributes, the \textit{falāsīfa} analyze prophecy from the prophet’s perspective or that of those who are addressed.\footnote{Marmura, “Avicenna’s theory of prophecy,” pp. 161, 169, 174.} Such a shift in perspective from an Ašʿarite towards a philosophical attitude occurs in the second chapter of the \textit{Faysal}. Here, al-Ḡazālī defines unbelief as the implicit or explicit accusation against Muhammad not telling the truth.

I say, unbelief is the assumption the messenger – peace and prayer be upon him – utters falsehood in anything that comes with him.\footnote{Al-Ḡazālī, \textit{Faysal al-tafrīqa bayna al-Islām wa-al-zandaqa}, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo, 1381/1961), pp. 134.7f. References to the text of the \textit{Faysal} are according to the most widespread edition by S. Dunyā. The text of this edition is, however, only of poor quality. It has been checked and if necessary amended with Muṣṭafā al-Qabbānī’s edition (Cairo, 1319/1901), with Maḥmūd Bīgū’s (Damascus, 1413/1993), and with the MSS Berlin, We 1806 and Istanbul, Shehit Ali Pasha 1712.}

Belief, al-Ḡazālī continues, is to acknowledge the truth (\textit{taṣdīq}) of everything that comes from Muḥammad.

Al-Ḡazālī’s two definitions of belief and unbelief rely on the opposition between \textit{taṣdīq} and \textit{takdīb}. Both terms cannot be easily translated into English. \textit{Taṣdīq} originally means to assume that a person is \textit{sādiq} or has \textit{ṣidq}. In order to be \textit{sādiq} someone must fulfill two conditions not combined in any English word. A person who is \textit{sādiq} is first of all trustworthy, \textit{i.e.} the person reports information to the best of his or her knowledge and does not lie. Secondly, the information that a person, who is \textit{sādiq}, conveys is true.\footnote{On \textit{ṣidq} cf. al-Ḡazālī, \textit{Ihyāʾ ‘ulūm al-dīn}, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1346 [1927–28]) vol. 4, pp. 331f. (XXXVII, 3, 1). It is possible that a person is sincere and truthful in a report that he or she gives, but nevertheless reports things that are not true. On \textit{taṣdīq} as the definition of faith in Islam cf. Wilfried Cantwell Smith, “Faith as Taṣdīq,” in Parviz Morewedge (ed.), \textit{Islamic Philosophical Theology} (Albany, 1979), pp. 96–119 and van Ess, \textit{Die Erkenntnislehre}, pp. 70f.}

\textit{Taṣdīq} is both the acceptance of the claim for truthfulness of the messenger and the truth of the message. This claim is lost if the person violates only one of these two conditions. \textit{Takdīb}, the assumption that
someone has lost his or her *şidq*, occurs if either the message that the person conveys turns out to be false, or if it turns out that the messenger did not report it to the best of his or her knowledge. The *falāsifa*’s views of prophecy, for instance, include the assumption that the prophetic message is true, but only in a metaphorical sense in order to serve for the benefit (*maşlaḥa*) of society. Despite the *falāsifa*’s acknowledgment that the prophets’ message is true, the *falāsifa*’s assumption raises the question of whether the prophet has conveyed his message to the best of his knowledge. For al-Ḡazālī, such a view translates into *takdīb al-nabīyy*, the accusation that the prophet has not told the truth or was not truthful, and is considered unbelief.

Both *taşdīq* and *takdīb* as definitions for faith/belief (*īmān*) and unbelief (*kufr*) have a long tradition in Islamic theology that cannot be dealt with here. In all these discussions, however, God is the object of the believer’s *taşdīq*. Belief, according to the classical Aš’arite definition is “*taşdīq bi-Allāh*”, i.e. to accept the truthfulness of God and the truth of his message. Unbelief is according to the Aš’arite definition “*takdīb bi-Allāh*”, i.e. to believe that God is either not truthful or that his message is not true. Both these definitions appear in the writings of al-Ḡazālī’s teacher al-Ḡuwaynī and those of al-Ḡazālī’s colleagues as students of the Niẓāmiyya in Nishapur.

The change of perspective in al-Ḡazālī’s approach to prophecy occurs when he defines belief as “*taşdīq al-rasūl*” and unbelief as “*takdīb al-rasūl*”. The discussion of the assumed *şidq* or *kidb* that forms the basis of belief or unbelief shifts from the transcendent sphere of God to the human sphere of the
prophet. Only this transformation allows al-Ġazālī to develop an elaborate system to verify the šidq of the Islamic message and of its messenger. In the following I will try to explain this system. It relies on the congruency between mental representations of a person and his utterances. Divine transcendence forbids the application of such a verification to God. Applying criteria to verify whether a nominal Muslim holds taṣdīq or takdīb in respect to Muḥammad, however, leads to the development of a psychological explanation of prophecy.

Al-Ġazālī’s change of the definition of belief is clearly influenced by peripatetic philosophy. Here, al-Ġazālī is inspired by the peripatetic usage of the word taṣdīq in the distinction of all knowledge into taṣdīq and taṣawwur. Taṣdīq is an equivocal word and in the logical works of the Arabic peripatetic tradition it refers to propositional knowledge as opposed to knowledge that is expressed in only one word. In addition to the usage in this taṣawwur-taṣdīq distinction, which goes back to authors like al-Ǧarābī, Ibn Sīnā also uses taṣdīq to denote the act of assent to a proposition and speaks in at least one passage of different degrees of assent (taṣdīq) that can apply both to concepts and to propositions. It is this last usage of Ibn Sīnā that has influenced al-Ġazālī. In the next step


84 On this second meaning of taṣdīq in Ibn Sīnā’s logical works cf. his Second Analytics ( = al-Šifā’, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān, ed. Ibrāhīm Mādkūr and Abū al-‘Alā Āffī [Cairo, 1375/1956]), pp. 51.8–52.2 which distinguishes the strength of taṣdīq according to the means of persuasion (iqnā’) that support the proposition. The word “taṣdīq” is strictly speaking equivocal in three meanings: (1) belief, (2) propositional knowledge, and (3) the truth judgment that supports the proposition (taṣdīq) itself. In this last meaning the word taṣdīq also applies to taṣawwur (non-propositional knowledge). This is expressed in Ibn Sīnā’s al-Naḡāt, p. 60.13ff., where he says that “it is possible that there is a taṣawwur without taṣdīq like, for instance, in the case that someone imagines (yataṣawwaru) the words of another man who says that an empty room exists and he (scil. the first man) does not consider it true (wa-la yuṣaddiq bihi).” (On this cf. van Ess, Die Erkenntnislehre, p. 100.)

85 Cf. al-Ġazālī’s treatment of the several equivocations of taṣdīq in his al-Iqtisād fī al-i’tiqād, p. 225.11–15 where different degrees of taṣdīq are mentioned. For a more thorough discussion of the different meanings of taṣdīq.
al-Ğazālī limits assent to propositions: In order to be verified, *tasdīq* and *takdīb* must apply to a proposition rather than to a person.86 He means that the proposition must be compared to its own object, *i.e.* the “beings” that correspond to the propositions contained in the revelation.87

In the third chapter of the *Faysal* al-Ğazālī explains the meaning of both *tasdīq* and *takdīb*. In order to verify the faith or belief (*tasdīq*) of a Muslim one cannot simply ask whether he affirms the truth of the whole book of revelation. The faith of a believer can be verified only through an inquiry into whether he affirms (*ṣaddaqa*) the “objects” of the revelation. Al-Ğazālī analyzes what it means to affirm a proposition. All this is stated in a very dense and short passage, and it is striking that al-Ğazālī does not expound his underlying ideas of *tasdīq*, neither does he refer to a book where he has done so. The essence of his teaching is presented in two sentences that immediately follow each other:

\[fa-aqīlū al-tasdīqu innāmā yataṭarraqu ilā al-ḥabar bal ilā al-muḥbar.\]

I say that *tasdīq* has to apply only to the proposition, indeed to the object [of the proposition].

In the next sentence al-Ğazālī gives an explanation of the meaning of *tasdīq*:

---

86 Al-Ğazālī has an interesting technique to nonchalantly weave important premises of his later arguments or assumptions of his views into early passages of his writings. Equally here, where in the first chapter he already defines *tasdīq* and *takdīb* as applying only to propositions. During a passage where he discusses the three books of revelation (Torah, Gospel, and Qurʾān) and their character as propositions (*ḥabar*), he reminds his readers that these books also contain imperatives and prohibitions and says, “These three [books of revelation] are different in their essences (*ḥaqāʾiq*). How could it be otherwise, since the definition of a proposition (*ḥabar*) is: ‘That which is subject to affirmation and negation (*tasdīq* and *takdīb*).’ These two, however, can not be applied to an imperative and not to a prohibition. But how is it possible that one thing is subject to *tasdīq* and *takdīb* and at the same time it is not? And how can the negation and the affirmation to one thing be united?’” (*Faysal*, p. 132.6–9). The fact that the books of revelation contain different imperatives and prohibitions leads to the conclusion that only the propositions they contain can be compared in term of their truth-claims.

87 Cf. Ibn Sinā’s definition of *tasdīq* in his *al-Ṣifā*, *al-Manṭiq, al-Madhāl*, ed. Ibrāhīm Mādkūr et al. (Cairo, 1953), p. 17.16f. “*Tasdīq* is when there comes about in the mind a connection between this picture (or form) and the things themselves in the way that the picture is correlating (*muṭābiq*) to the things.”

88 Al-Ğazālī, *Faysal*, p. 175.15f.
The essential meaning [of taṣdīq] is to accept the being of that thing whose existence the Prophet […] reports of.

This last sentence is confusing due to the double appearance of wuğūd, “being” or “existence.” This word has been used before within Muslim theology and within the Aš’arite school, mostly, however, as the nomen regens in genitive constructions in the sense of “the existence of something or of someone.” This is how al-Ġazālī employs it in the second appearance within this sentence, aḥbara ‘an wuğūdīhi. Here the nomen rectum of the genitive construction is represented by the possessive pronoun –hu which stands in for the earlier appearance of wuğūd within this sentence. In this first appearance, wuğūd refers more abstractly to a given being or an entity. This latter usage of wuğūd, in the following translated as “being”, is known from other of al-Ġazālī’s writings.90 What is reported of, is therefore the wuğūd al-wuğūd, the “existence of the being.”

The sentence starts with the assumption that the Prophet both in the revelation and in the ḥadīt reports of wuğūd of being. Both ḥadīt and Qur‘ān are the kind of proposition (ḥabar) whose object (al-muḥbar in the sense of al-muḥbar ‘anhu)91 is mentioned in the first sentence. Taṣdīq for al-Ġazālī means to acknowledge or to accept that such objects of the Prophet’s propositions exist. An explanation of the next step in al-Ġazālī’s text will give a better understanding of what he means by the “acknowledgment of being” (al-i’tirāf bi-wuğūd).

What now follows is a categorization of all “being” (wuğūd) that the Prophet reports of into five categories. It is clear that these five categories of being are understood to be the objects of propositions. Al-Ġazālī here applies a theory of representation in which a proposition contains elements of language that represent objects of the outside world. On this occasion “outside” means outside of language. Such an object outside of

89 Ibid., p. 175.17.
90 Cf., for instance, al-Ġazālī, Mi’yār al-‘ilm, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā (Cairo, 1961), pp. 76.7f., 330.1ff., 383.1ff.; id., Ilgām al-‘awāmm ‘an ‘ilm al-kalām, ed. Muḥammad M. al-Ǧaḥdādī (Beirut, 1406/1985), pp. 107f. and id., Ǧiyā’ul-ḥām al-dīn, II, 18.11. (XXI, 9,1) or IV, 218.2 (XXXV.2). This usage seems to be inspired by philosophical literature.
the proposition is considered a “muhbar” in the first sentence quoted above and a “wuğūd” in the second. Such a theory of representation applies to all propositions, and therefore also applies to propositions within the Qur’ān and the ḥadīt corpus. Although al-Ḡazālī does not give an example at this stage of his text, an illustration may be taken from Sura 12, the Sura of Yūsuf. When the Qur’ān, for instance, reports the fact that Yūsuf had been thrown into a well from which he is picked up by slavetraders who sell him to Egypt (Qur’ān 12.15–20), all the elements of this report like Yūsuf, the well, the slavetraders, and Egypt are considered “wuğūd”, being. Each of these elements are beings that Muḥammad reports of, i.e. the muhbar of the first above sentence. To believe in this report, and thus to believe in the Qur’ān and in the truthfulness of the messenger, means to acknowledge that Yūsuf, the well, the slavetraders, and Egypt did indeed exist. This is “to accept the being of that thing whose existence the Prophet reports of.” The believer who trusts the veracity of the report affirms these objects and the reported facts, i.e. he affirms the relationship that these objects have to one another just as they are reported. For al-Ḡazālī, faith in the Prophet and his revelation is exactly this acknowledgment.

In his categorization of “being” into five degrees, all the elements mentioned in this passage from Sura 12 belong to one category of being. This is the “real being” (al-wuğūd al-dāṭī) that comprises all objects of the outside world. Outside here, means outside of the human mind. Al-Ḡazālī writes:

The real being is the true and firm being (al-wuğūd al-ḥaqīqī al-tābit) which is outside of sense perception and the intellect. But sense perception and the intellect take an image (or: form, şūra) of it, and this is called perception (ıḏrāk). This is like the being of the heavens or the earth, the animals, plants, and this is evident (or: outwardly, zāhir). And it is known that most people do not know any being that is different.

For al-Ḡazālī there are four other kinds of being, and all these kinds are beings within the mind of a person, or more specifically, beings within the mind of the Prophet. The four oblique degrees of beings are as follows:

– Second degree of being, the sensible being (al-wuğūd al-ḥissī): From the examples that al-Ḡazālī gives in his distinction

of the five degrees of being it becomes clear that not all propositions within the Qurʾān and the ḥadīt can be interpreted in the above manner. Both al-Buhārī and Muslim report in their collections the following prophetic ḥadīt:

The paradise (al-ḡanna) was presented to me on the surface of this wall.93

Al-Ḡazālī uses this example in order to explain that the underlying being of paradise cannot be a “real and firm” one. It is easy to prove that the paradise is much bigger than the surface of whatever wall Muḥammad saw it on. The word ḡanna refers to a being that cannot be a “real” one, but it must be a being that is only perceived through the Prophet’s sense perception. This being is a “sensible being” (al-wuḡūd al-ḥissī).

Third degree of being, the imaginative being (al-wuḡūd al-ḥayālī): In the following ḥadīt, the being has not been presented by the senses:

It was as if I saw Yūnus ibn Mattā in two coats of cotton, how he is ready to receive orders and how the mountain responds to him. And God exalted says to him, ‘at your service, Yūnus (labbayka yā Yūnus)!’94

The sentence begins with “it was as if . . .” which indicates that all this happened nowhere else than in the Prophet’s imagination. The corresponding being of Yūnus is therefore an imaginative being “al-wuḡūd al-ḥayālī” within the Prophet’s faculty of imagination.

The fourth degree of being is the conceptual, or intellectual one (al-wuḡūd al-‘aqlī). The prime example here is God’s hand. According to al-Ḡazālī, it can be demonstrated (ʾan burḥān) that God does not have a hand. The existence of such a hand as a real and firm being, as a perceived being, and as an imagined being must therefore be denied. If the being of such a hand can somehow be acknowledged, this can only be done as a conceptual being: the hand exists in order to represent the concept of giving and taking. Al-Ḡazālī defines “hand” as being “the capacity to give and take.”95 This is the essence (ḥaqīqa) of “hand.” God also has the capacity to give and take and this

93 Ibid., p. 179.20.
95 Ibid., pp. 178.1–7, 180–3.
correspondence within the field of essential attributes leads to the identification of the word “hand,” meaning human hand, with God’s capacity to give and take.

– Finally, the fifth and last degree of being is the so-called “similar being” (al-wuğûd al-šibhî). While in the case of the “conceptual being” a correspondence in the field of essential attributes leads to the fact that one being stands for the other, here, the correspondence is in the field of accidental attributes. An example is anger. God is sometimes referred to as being angry. The description of the essence of anger is “that which brings blood to boil because one seeks satisfaction.” God cannot be associated with these emotions and is high exalted above this. However, God’s anger is similar to human anger in the sense that it aims to punish. The aim to punish is not an essential quality of anger, but only an accidental one, and this is the only level on which the two beings can be connected. The word “God’s anger” in the revelation refers on the level of a “similar being” to God’s will to punish.96

The following chart shall clarify al-Ğazâlî’s distinction of the five degrees of being.

The criteria for the distinction into five degrees of being originate in the philosophical theory of the inner senses – the ḥawâss bâṭînâ. Following in the footsteps of Aristotelian and late antique philosophy, the falâsîfa divided the human apparatus of post-sensationary perception into several psychological faculties.97 The ḥîss (or: ḥîss mušтарâk) is the place that collects the perceptions of the five “outward” senses, the ḥayâl is the place where the multitude of single perceptions would be put together to one object. This would be the faculty of imagination. Conceptual knowledge about the definitions of things and their substance is located in the ‘aql. This three-fold distinction of the inner senses is the most basic in Arabic

96 Ibid., p. 183.5–13.
peripatetic philosophy, and al-Ġazālī applies it in various passages of his Ḩiyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn.\textsuperscript{98}

The division of the Fayṣal al-tafriqa is most close to the Avicennan treatise on the evidence for prophecies Fī itbāt al-nubuwwāt. Here, entities are divided into three kinds of

\textsuperscript{98} Cf., for instance, al-Ġazālī, Ḩiyā’ ‘ulūm al-dīn, IV, 219. 4th line from bottom (XXXV, 2); cf. also III, 18.11. (XXI, 9, 1) where the world and its beings are described in three categories (1.) the “real being” (wuḡūd ḥaqīqī), imaginative (ḥayālī) being, and conceptual/intellectual (‘aqūlī) being. Jules Janssens in a recent article analyzes how al-Ġazālī’s works show different applications of Ibn Sīnā’s different models to explain the inner senses based on different books by Ibn Sīnā, “Al-Ghazzālī and his use of Avicennian texts,” in Miklós Maróth (ed.), Problems in Arabic Philosophy (Budapest, 2003), pp. 37–49.
This division is applied in a key passage of the short treatise that interprets a ḥaddīth, which talks about the ways that lead to human salvation. But al-Ḡazālī’s division of entities in the Faysal may well be inspired by other passages in the Avicennan corpus, most notably chapter 4 in the psychological part of al-Šifā’ or even by Ibn Sīnā’s medical writings. Ibn Sīnā’s concept of mental faculties and their place in the human brain includes a general division into sense perception, image-bearing capacities, and conceptual capacities that is manifest on different levels of human faculties. Al-Ḡazālī reproduces the various Avicennan divisions in the 18th discussion of the Tahāfut al-falāsifa. The existence of inner faculties is not called into question during the course of this discussion. Al-Ḡazālī rather criticizes the falāsifa’s claim to know their doctrine of the soul apodictically and through reason alone.

In one of the smaller works attributed to al-Ḡazālī, the Ma‘ārīḡ al-quds fi madārīḡ ma‘rifat al-nafs, the author develops a division of the soul that follows most closely the divisions of Ibn Sīnā into sense perception (ḥiss), imagination (ḥayāl), and intellect (‘aql). In this book, the notions of both the soul

---

99 Ibn Sīnā (?), Fī ḥiḥāḥ al-nubuwwāt, p. 58.5f.
100 Ibid., p. 55.4f.
103 Ibid., pp. 303.11–304.5.
104 The 18th discussion of al-Ḡazālī’s Tahāfut al-falāsifa has recently been analyzed in Timothy J. Gianotti, Al-Ghazālī’s Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul. Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology and Eschatology of the Iḥyā’ (Leiden, 2001), pp. 95–103. Gianotti adequately summarizes al-Ḡazālī’s criticism saying “his objection is not with the philosophers’ doctrine of the soul per se; rather with their assertion of how their knowledge is won” (ibid., p. 101). An important aspect of al-Ḡazālī’s criticism is, however, overlooked. It is generally true that if the falāsifa present a doctrine that violates the outward meaning (zāhir) of revelation, the falāsifa’s incapacity to prove demonstrably a certain element of their doctrine renders this element false in light of the authority of revelation. Here, however, the case is different since al-Ḡazālī concedes that nothing in the falāsifa’s doctrine of the soul violates šar‘ (Tahāfut, p. 303.11f.) The authority of revelation is, however, still at stake. Al-Ḡazālī wants to force the falāsifa to concede that their doctrine of the soul is not known through reason alone. Such an acknowledgment would destroy their claim that revelation cannot teach anything to those who are familiar with the demonstrative method.
105 Al-Ḡazālī, Ma‘ārīḡ al-quds fi madārīḡ ma‘rifat al-nafs, ed. Maḥmūd Bîgû (Damascus, 1413/1992), pp. 56f. This division includes a fourth category, wahm (estimation), between ḥayāl and ‘aql. I am grateful to Hikmatullah Sahib who made much of his unpublished work on the Ma‘ārīḡ al-quds accessible to me.
and prophecy are explained entirely in terms of Avicennan divisions and terminology. Indeed, the text responds to many of the problems that are created by al-Ġazālī’s treatment of Ibn Śīnā’s psychology in the Tahāfut.\textsuperscript{106} The fact that this text is not only very close to Ibn Śīnā’s doctrine of the soul but also includes large parts of almost verbatim quotations from Ibn Śīnā’s De anima led to doubts concerning al-Ġazālī’s authorship of this book.\textsuperscript{107} Al-Ġazālī, however, has never been shy to borrow from other people’s writings, and the fact that the author of this text copied much of his book from Ibn Śīnā does not at all exclude al-Ġazālī from being this author.\textsuperscript{108}

Al-Ġazālī nevertheless makes changes in Ibn Śīnā’s model of interpretation, since he adds the entities of a “real and firm being” as the very first one. Similarly, the fifth category of wuḡūd šibhī is not mentioned in this context by Ibn Śīnā. But the distinction between wuḡūd ‘aqūi and wuḡūd šibhī is equally inspired by the writings of the šayḥ al-raʾīs. In the third and the seventh book of his Metaphysics, Ibn Śīnā deals with the different categories of union, and here he distinguishes between a union “that is based on substance” and one that is “based on accident.”\textsuperscript{109} In his textbook of the philosophical teachings, the Maqaṣīd al-falāsifa, al-Ġazālī reproduces this distinction and connects it with metaphors (maḡāz). He further divides the union “per accident” and refers to the union that is

\textsuperscript{106} Most of these questions are put together by Timothy J. Gianotti in his Al-Ġhazālī’s Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul, pp. 115f., who is unaware of the existence of the Maʿārīf al-quds.


\textsuperscript{108} Cf. Jules Janssens’ forthcoming article “Al-Ghazzālī and his use of Avicennian texts” where he renounced his earlier view that this book is not written by al-Ġazālī and counts it now amongst the writings of al-Ġazālī. The author was a highly original thinker whose ideas are quite complex, and the words of Georges Vajda, “le Maʿārīj mériterait une étude d’ensemble” are still valid. A comparison between Ibn Šīnā’s psychology and that of al-Ġazālī which includes the Maʿārīj al-quds has been attempted by Gamāl Raḡāb Siḏī, Naẓariyyat al-nafs bayna Ibn Šīnā wa-al-Ġazālī (Cairo, 2000) and Muḥammad Ḥuṣaynī Abū Saʿda, al-Atār al-šīnāwiyya fī maḏhab al-Ġazālī fī al-nafs al-insānīyya (Cairo, 1991).

\textsuperscript{109} Ibn Šīnā, al-Ṣifāʾ, al-Ilāhiyyāt, I, 97.4–152; II, 303.15–304.4; cf. id., Kitāb al-Naḡāt, p. 99.
based on the identical quality (kayfiyya) of two things as a union through mušābaha.\footnote{Al-Ğazālī, Maqāsid al-falāṣīfa, part 2, pp. 37–9. My English translation of “similar being” has been chosen following the Latin translation of Domenicus Gundissalinus (Logica et philosophia Alghazelis philosophia Alghazelis Arabis [Frankfurt, 1969] = reprint of the Venice, 1506 print, fol. 21v) who translates the union through mušābaha as unio per simultudo.}

The most explicit passage in the writings of Ibn Sīnā where the four distinctions that al-Ğazālī uses are all exemplified is probably in Ibn Sīnā’s al-Išārāt wa-al-tanbīḥāt:

Sometimes a thing is perceived (mahsūsan) when it is observed; then it is imagined (mutahayyayalan), when it is absent through the representation of its image (or: form, şūrā) inside; just as Zayd, for example, whom you have seen, but now is absent from you, is imagined by you. And sometimes [the thing] is apprehended intellectually (ma’qūlan) when the concept (ma’nā) “man”, for example, which exists also for other people, is formed out of Zayd. When [the thing] is perceived by the senses, it is found covered by things which are foreign to its essence and which, if they had been removed from it, would not effect its essence (māhiyya).\footnote{Ibn Sīnā, al-Išārāt wa-al-tanbīḥāt, ed. Sulaymān Dunyā, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1960–68), vol. 2, pp. 367ff. The passage is translated and discussed by Dag N. Hasse, “Avicenna on abstraction,” in Wisnovsky (ed.), Aspects of Avicenna, pp. 39–72, at pp. 60f.}

### IV. THE FUNCTION OF AL-ĞAZĀLĪ’S FIVE DEGREES OF BEING

It is clear that all elements of this theory of representation are inspired by the writings of Ibn Sīnā. Significantly, al-Ğazālī follows the šayḫ al-ra’ī’s not only in points of detail, he also applies an Avicennan ontological model of being (wuğūd). Aš’arite kalām before al-Ğazālī did not consider the mental states of humans as “beings.” The classical Aš’arite position is that being (wuğūd) and equally thing (šay’) is every thing that can be affirmed (matbūṭ), and this definition seems to exclude mental states.\footnote{Cf. al-Ğuwaynī’s statement in the Iršād, p. 174.10f that “the ahl al-haqq agree upon the view that all being (kull mawgūd) can be seen.” The matter, however, is not that simple, as al-Ğuwaynī’s student al-Anṣārī points out in his Sarḥ al-Iršād. First Part, MS Princeton University Library, ELS 634, fols. 160bff. Recent studies have confirmed the complexity of this subject. Cf. Richard M. Frank, “The non-existent and the possible in classical Ash’arite teaching,” Mélanges de l’Institut Dominicain d’Études Orientales, 24 (2000): 1–37 and id., “The Aš’arite ontology: I. Primary entities,” Arabic Sciences and Philosophy, 9 (1999): 163–231. The ontological positions of mutakallimūn and falāṣīfa seem to be less distinct from one another than initially thought and may indeed be}
interesting theory of mental states as “interior speech in the self” (al-qawl al-qā’im bi-al-nafs). He developed this category in order to solve ontological problems that arose with the assumption of God’s speech being eternal. It describes speech that exists in the minds of persons and that is not represented by sounds. Al-Ghwaynī never applied his model of mind-speech to the Prophet Muhammad. It seems that al-Ghazālī’s notion of mental “beings” that correspond to the propositions of the revelation is a development of this mind-speech concept. In any case, it would be impossible to develop the concept of being that corresponds to revelation without Ibn Sīnā’s notion of wuğūd as a denotation of all possible human knowledge. The connection between habar and wuğūd is entirely Avicennan.

More important within the scope of this paper is the understanding of prophecy that this theory of five degrees of being develops. In order to proceed to further assessments, the purpose of this model must first be understood. After the build-up of this quite elaborate theory of representation in chapters 2 to 4 of the Faysal, al-Ghazālī presents in chapter 5 the purpose of the five-fold division. The aim of the book is to develop a criterion how to distinguish a tolerated interpretation (ta’wil) of revelation from one that is considered unbelief and apostasy from Islam. Chapter 5 begins with the sentence:

You should know that everybody who reduces a statement of the lawgiver to one of these degrees is amongst those who believe. Takdīb is the case only when all these meanings are denied and when it is said that the statements (of the lawgiver) have no meaning and are only pure falsehood (kidb), that the aim behind (such a false statement) is to


Al-Ghwaynī, al-Iršād, p. 104ff. I am grateful to Paul Walker and David Vishanoff who directed me to this passage. Cf. Nagel, Die Festung des Glaubens, p. 147. The concept of soul speech is discussed in some length in al-Anṣārī’s Šarḥ al-Iršād. First Part, fols. 87bff.

Cf. the Chapter I.5 of Ibn Sīnā’s Metaphysics where “being in the soul” (wuğūd fī al-nafs) is qualified as “that which is reported of” (alladīf mā yuḥbaru ‘anhū). “The act of reporting (iḥbār) is in its essential meaning reporting of the existent thing (al-mawḡūd) in the soul, and only in its accidental meaning reporting of the existent thing outside [of it].” (al-Šifā’, al-Ilaḥīyyāt, I, 34.7–9.) In his Iqtisād fī al-i’tiqaḍ, p. 62.12, al-Ghazālī gives the example of the connection between what is known and what is the object of this knowledge as an example for a necessary connection: “mā ‘ulima wuqū’uhu fa-wuqū’uhu wāgīb.”
present things as they are not (talbîs), or to improve the conditions in the present world (mașlaḥat al-dunyā).\textsuperscript{115}

Unbelief and apostasy is the failure to acknowledge that there are beings that correspond to the reports of revelation. “Corresponds” in this regard means not only a correspondence of words to objects of the outside world, but also to the Prophet’s sensible perceptions, to his imaginations, and to his metaphors either as metaphors based on similarities of essential or of accidental attributes. Unbelief is the case only when all these possibilities are denied and when it is said that some reports of the books of revelation do not correspond to anything. In all other cases, jurists should not concern themselves with the alleged apostasy of people who interpret revelation.\textsuperscript{116}

Al-Ġazâlî should be considered bold for his optimism that his colleagues on the Qâdı’s chairs would really follow him through this quite complicated text and apply this rule in order to identify alleged apostates. We know that al-Ġazâlî did not have a positive opinion on the intellectual capacity of his peers in the Islamic sciences, and this rule is in fact not the last word on this subject. In the eighth chapter of the Faysal, al-Ġazâlî presents both a rule of thumb (waṣiyya) and a more detailed “law” (qânûn) that are much more likely to be applied by jurists. The qânûn is based on a distinction between core elements of the Muslim creed and less important elements and does indeed explain the legal background of al-Ġazâlî own condemnation of the falâsifa and the Bâṭinîtes, something the present rule doesn’t even attempt to do.\textsuperscript{117} In addition to these already confusing ideas about how to determine kufr in Islam, the Faysal also contains a most interesting theory of how the five degrees of being can be used in order to determine a true interpretation (ta’wîl) of revelation from a false one.\textsuperscript{118}

\textsuperscript{115} Al-Ġazâlî, Faysâl, p. 184.1–4.
\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 184.6f.
\textsuperscript{117} On al-Ġazâlî’s criteria of distinguishing unbelief from belief according to the “fundamental elements of the creed” (uşûl al-aqâ’id) and his subsequent “law” (qânûn) cf. Faysâl, pp. 195.6ff. and my Apostasie und Toleranz, pp. 304–19.
\textsuperscript{118} On this “law of interpretation” (qânûn al-ta’wil) which is distinct from the “law” referred to in the previous footnote, cf. Faysâl, pp. 187–9 and my Apostasie und Toleranz, pp. 333–5. The content of the “law of interpretation” is explained earlier in this paper, cf. footnote 61.
The concept of prophecy that al-Gazālī reveals in the course of his explanations in the first six chapters of the *Faysal al-tafriqa* regards the Muslim revelation as a literal representation of objects that are outside of its text. Revelation here is understood as a text that represents "being", which is outside of language. Al-Gazālī does not distinguish between the Qur'ān and the ḥadīt and his examples are taken from both textual sources, although mostly from ḥadīt. Since he aims to clarify problems that arise with people doing *ta'wil*, it is clear that this involves both Qur'ān and the ḥadīt corpus.

The being that is represented in the text of revelation can be of two different kinds. First, the text represents events that have happened at the time of the Prophet or before. In this case the being that the text represents is considered a "real" one (*dātī*), and in all these cases the text must be understood in its literal sense. But there are a number of revelations that cannot be understood this way. In these cases, al-Gazālī assumes that the text represents sensible or mental impressions of the Prophet that appeared either in his sensual faculty (*ḥiss*), in his faculty of imagination (*ḥayāl*), or in his rational faculty (*ʿaql*). Here, the text of revelation represents something that was going on either in the sense perception or in the mind of the Prophet. It is important to note that al-Gazālī does not touch on the subject of the origins of these sensible or mental impressions.

Al-Gazālī’s approach to the subject of prophecy in the first six chapters of the *Faysal* is in its details as well as its overall concept of how prophecy can be understood by humans influenced by Avicennan psychology. The five degrees of being stem from Avicennan writings. Moreover, the perspective to regard the Muslim revelation as a conglomerate of propositions (singl. *ḥabar*) and the approach to verify belief (*taṣdīq*) in the Muslim revelation through reference to the correspondence of the propositions with their objects is clearly philosophical. If we further regard the terminology that al-Gazālī has chosen, most notably the choice of "being" (*wuḡūd*) for the object of a proposition (*al-muhbar ‘anhu*), we have to admit that almost everything in the first six chapters of the *Faysal al-tafriqa* is Avicennan.
There are, however, important elements in Ibn Sīnā’s teachings on prophecy that al-Ğazālī does not adopt. These elements are, in fact, criticized in some of his earlier writings. Most notably, these are two notions: First, the view that the sensible and mental impressions, which are the object of revelation, are caused by emanations from celestial souls or are the emanations themselves. Al-Ğazālī seems to reject anything connected to the emanationism of the falāsifa. Secondly, the view that the metaphors, which are a result of the Prophet’s sensible and mental states, are representing things in a way different from what they are (talbīs) and are struck only for the educational benefit of the ordinary people is rejected. The latter notion is, in fact, vehemently denied in the Faysal, and al-Ğazālī’s elaborate theory of comparing the propositions of revelation with their objects tries to counter attempts to allow talbīs within the text of revelation. Al-Ğazālī maintains that the Muslim revelation presents things exactly as they are or as they were. “As they are or were” means, as they were either

119 Richard M. Frank, “Currents and countercurrents,” in Peter Rifel and Tony Street (eds.), Islam; Essays on Scripture Thought and Society (Leiden, 1997), pp. 111–34, p. 127. Al-Ğazālī seems to replace some references to emanation in the teachings of the falāsifa with references to a process of revelation (wahm) in his own teachings. It needs, of course, to be analyzed what wahm really means for al-Ğazālī.

120 Cf. supra footnote 115.

121 It is also evident that even if al-Ğazālī has been inspired by Ibn Sīnā’s ontology, he doesn’t follow him fully in the relationship between ḥabar and wuğād. According to Ibn Sīnā it is impossible that there is a ḥabar which has no corresponding wuğād (Ibn Sīnā, al-Sīfa’, Ilāhiyyat, 1, 32.12–14.) Ibn Sīnā’s ontology regards something that exists only in the mind of a person (wuğād fi al-dīhn, ens rationis, or Gedankending as Immanuel Kant put it) as a being just like any other thing outside of the mind (ibid., 34.7f.) Predication is always predication of something, and there is no predication of the absolute non-existence (al-ma’dūm al-muṭlaq) without the implication that it does exist (ibid., 32.ult.) The possibility that an object doesn’t exist, however, is implied in al-Ğazālī’s concept of the verification of revelation. The unbelievers deny that there is a being corresponding to the ḥabar of the revelation. They imply that the report of the revelation is made up and that nothing corresponds to it. Al-Ğazālī does indeed not accept Ibn Sīnā’s ontological assumption that everything that is possible by itself (mumkin al-wuğād) is also existing (mauğād or šay‘). He criticizes this notion in the discussion of the fourth argument for the pre-eternity of the world in the Tahāfuṭ al-falāsifa, p. 71.6–13. What is possible is according to al-Ğazālī not already existing. In fact, the change from possibility to actuality is the result of an act of the creator. The predication of possible beings does not already involve a statement on the existence of the objects of predication. This is also the ontology he follows in his Maqsad al-asnā, his Iqtisād, and other of his works, cf. Frank, Creation and the Cosmic System, pp. 53f and 62f.
happening in the past, or happening in the Prophet’s sensual, imaginative, or rational faculty. In the *Faysal*, al-Ġazālī ends his inquiry exactly at this point and does not push his investigation further into the providence of these “beings”. This self-restriction must be understood as a reflection of the classical Aš’arite *bilā kayf*-attitude to questions of prophecy. The reader understands that God created and creates both the events represented in the text of the Muslim revelation as well as the frames of mind of the Prophet that are equally represented in this text. Humans, however, still seem to be unable to understand how these states are created.

VI. CONCLUSION: HOW TO VERIFY THE CLAIMS OF A PROPHET?

In his monograph on *Prophecy in Islam*, Fazlur Rahman wrote that among all the authors covered in that book al-Ġazālī proved to be the most difficult one, “if not an outright impossible one to understand in any coherent manner.”122 Fazlur Rahman based his analysis of al-Ġazālī’s views on prophecy on the *Maʿāriğ al-quds* and was puzzled by the author’s strategy to use philosophic doctrines in order to defend what Rahman calls “orthodox Islam.” This, according to Rahman, is puzzling since in some of his books al-Ġazālī condemned views of the *falahāsifa* on prophecy as unbelief (*kufr*).123 “But then follows the chapter on the ‘characteristics of prophecy’, which is almost word for word borrowed from Avicenna.”124

Since al-Ġazālī’s authorship of the *Maʿāriğ al-quds* is still disputed, this paper aims to analyze one of al-Ġazālī undisputed texts and thus show that al-Ġazālī’s views on prophecy are heavily influenced by Ibn Sīnā both in detail as well as in the overall concept of how prophecy can be understood by humans. Al-Ġazālī accepts a great deal of the Avicennan teachings on prophecy, mostly the model that the prophet receives the revelation in his inner senses and verbally represents these impression in his speech, the revelation. It is noteworthy that while Ibn Sīnā recognizes only two kinds of impressions on the prophets’ inner senses, imagination and conceptual knowledge,

---

123 Rahman quotes al-Ġazālī’s *Miʿrāğ al-sālikān*, which repeats the earlier condemnation of the *Fadāʾiḥ al-bāṭinīyya* analyzed above.
124 Ibid., p. 98.
al-Ğazālī divides these impressions into four. His division does not follow Ibn Sīnā’s two-fold division of imaginative and intellectual revelation in the De anima, but follows the theory of the inner senses in philosophical literature and thus involves more divisions.\textsuperscript{125}

The elements al-Ğazālī adopts from Ibn Sīnā are all of a kind that he did not condemn in his two books of refutation, the Tahāfut al-falāsifa and the Fadā‘iḥ al-bāṭiniyya.\textsuperscript{126} There remain, in fact, a number of elements in Ibn Sīnā’s teachings on prophecy that al-Ğazālī criticizes in these books and that do not appear in al-Ğazālī’s teachings. Al-Ğazālī’s usage of Avicennan psychology must be understood as an attempt to enrich Aš‘arite theology on a subject area where it had not developed any specific views. The epistemological self-restriction that is implied in the bilā kayf of early Aš‘arite theology causes this theological system to become quite receptive to the incorporation of elements from peripatetic philosophy once the restrictions are lifted. Al-Ğazālī thus introduces an Avicennan psychological explanation of prophecy into Aš‘arite kalām. He does so by pushing his inquiry into prophecy further than his predecessors, and he sets new boundaries for the self-imposed restrictions of Aš‘arite epistemology. Al-Ğazālī, however, seems to maintain the bilā kayf when it comes to the source of the divine message and how it was communicated to the human soul of the Prophet. Al-Ğazālī’s contribution lies in the adaptation of Avicennan ideas by transforming them to accord with his theology.

As a result, we can first of all conclude that the many Avicennan elements in the Ma‘ārīḍ al-quds as well as the great number of textual borrowings from Ibn Sīnā’s books within this text are not alien to al-Ğazālī’s view on prophecy. Judged from its content, there is no reason to suggest that the Ma‘ārīḍ al-quds is not authored by al-Ğazālī or, if it is indeed a compilation by some of his students’, not authorized by him as one of his genuine publications.

\textsuperscript{125} This must not be understood as a departure from Ibn Sīnā. His two-fold division of revelation in imaginative and intellectual should also be regarded as a result of the various divisions of the inner senses (ḥawāsš bāṭina), cf. Ėlamrani-Jamal, “De la multiplicité des modes de prophétie chez Ibn Sīnā,” pp. 129–36.

\textsuperscript{126} And books depending on this like, for instance, al-Iqtiṣād fi al-i‘tiqād or Mi‘rāğ al-sālikīn.
With the introduction of Avicennan elements comes an important change in the perspective from which prophecy is approached. Unlike his Aš‘arite predecessors, al-Gazâlî explains all events that happened on the human side of the phenomenon of prophecy. The Prophet Muḥammad received knowledge of past and future events as well as sensible images and concepts that all form the foundation of the text. In his *Faysal*, al-Gazâlî does not touch on the subject of who actually coined the words of the revealed text. But since the goal of the inquiry is to establish a method to verify Muḥammad’s *ṣidq* (his trustworthiness and the truth of his message), it must somehow be assumed that it was the Prophet who formed the words of the revealed text. His capacity to represent correctly his knowledge of past and future events or his mental states is what the unbelievers deny. The believers assume that Muḥammad has expressed the right words that represent the events in past and future or the states of his soul exactly as they were or will be.

This is a novel view of prophecy not only for the Aš‘arite school but for the Muslim theological discourse as a whole. It is caused by the change of perspective in the second chapter of the *Faysal*. Al-Gazâlî approaches prophecy no longer from the perspective of God, but from that of the humans who receive it. It is more appropriate to say that al-Gazâlî approaches prophecy from the side of the revealed text. His change of the definition of “belief” from “taṣḥīq bi-Allâh”, as in the classical Aš‘arite school, to his “taṣḥīq al-rasûl”127 leads to a focus on the text of revelation and his author. And while al-Gazâlî may maintain that God is the ultimate author since he first caused the frames of mind of the Prophet and secondly also the words that the Prophet chose to express these frames of mind, al-Gazâlî treats the text of revelation as if it is authored by a human, *i.e.* by Muḥammad.

This change of perspective has significant repercussions on various elements of al-Gazâlî’s theology and there remains much work to be done in order to analyze its impact on Gazalian thinking. One such repercussion is al-Gazâlî’s comment on the verification of prophecy in his influential autobiography *al-Munqid min al-ḍalâl*. Here, he openly departs from the classical Aš‘arite view that prophecy is verified only through miracles. But like in his introduction of certain

elements of Avicennan thought in the Aš'arite theological edifice, al-Ḡazālī’s rejection of the classical verification of prophecy is not a rejection of the overall Aš’arite model of how to verify prophecy. Al-Ḡazālī does not go as far as al-Rāzī, for instance, who states that humans know what is true in terms of theoretical knowledge and what is right in practical knowledge before revelation. Al-Ḡazālī holds that humans have the capacity to know what is true only in certain fields of theoretical knowledge. This capacity fails in some fields of theoretical knowledge like, for instance, the question of whether the world is pre-eternal or created in time. It also fails in the whole field of normative practical knowledge, where humans have no impaired judgment of what is right or what is wrong independent of revelation.

In his views on the relationship between revelation and the sources of knowledge that are independent from revelation al-Ḡazālī is – unlike al-Rāzī and his statement that humans have certain normative practical knowledge, for instance – still deeply rooted in classical Aš’arite epistemology.

According to the Munqid, knowledge about the fact that Muḥammad reached the highest levels of prophecy is necessary or immediate knowledge (‘ilm ḍāruṟī). The necessity of this knowledge is, according to al-Ḡazālī, not conveyed through prophetic miracles. Necessary knowledge about Muḥammad’s prophecy is rather acquired through the experience (taḡriba) that Muḥammad said the truth (ṣaḍaqa) in all of his reports. Such experience comes through a comparison of a prophet’s deeds and sayings with what is already known to be true. An example is given in the case of medicine and jurisprudence. “If you know medicine and jurisprudence, it enables you to identify jurists as well as physicians from witnessing their actions (ahwāl) and listening to what they say, even if you haven’t witnessed them (in person).” Those who have a thorough insight into the knowledge conveyed in the books of jurisprudence can easily determine that a man like al-Ṣāfīʿī, for instance, was a jurist. Similarly, those who have a thorough insight into the books of medicine can easily say that a man

129 Al-Ḡazālī, al-Munqid min al-ḍalāl, p. 43.18-ult.
130 Ibid., p. 43.12–14.
like Galen was indeed a physician. They compare the deeds and words of this particular physician and this jurist with their own theoretical knowledge of the respective field and judge that they were acting in concordance with this theoretical knowledge. Such a comparison leads to the necessary knowledge that al-Šāfī‘ī was a jurist and Galen a physician.131

The same can be done in the case of the prophet. In a first step, al-Ḡazālī implicitly acknowledges that humans are endowed with certain knowledge about prophecy that is independent from revelation and that precedes the message of the prophets. This assumption, however, does not violate the Ašʿarite principle that there is no normative practical knowledge independent from revelation. The kind of knowledge that al-Ḡazālī has in mind is not practical knowledge about what is right or wrong, but is theoretical knowledge about the effects of a prophet’s work. The experiences that verify prophecy are described as follows:

If you have understood the meaning of prophecy and spend much time reflecting on the Qurʾān and the ʿaḥbār, you will achieve the necessary knowledge that Muhammad is on the highest level of prophecy. This is supported by the personal experience (tağriba) of what he says about the ritual duties and the effects they have on the purification of the souls (lit. hearts, qulūb).132

Trying out the ritual duties of Islam leads to the realization that they purify the soul. If al-Šāfī‘ī is considered a jurist by virtue of his skills to make legal judgments and Galen is considered a physician by virtue of his skills to heal the sick, thenMuḥammad must be considered a prophet by virtue of his skills to purify souls. While al-Šāfī‘ī’s claim is verified through the effectiveness of his work in jurisprudence and Galen’s claim through his effectiveness in medicine, the prophets’ claim

131 Ibid., p. 43.14–16.
132 Ibid., p. 43.17–20. Al-Ḡazālī uses “heart” (qalb) synonymous to what in philosophy is called “soul.” Cf., for instance, the second definition of qalb in Ihyāʿ ʿulūm al-dīn, III, 3 (XXI, 1), or the same definition in Maʿārīj al-quds, p. 21. In his al-Risāla al-Laduniyya (in: al-Quṣūr al-ʿawālī min rasāʾil Imām al-Ḡazālī [Cairo, 1964], pp. 97–122), p. 101.13–15 al-Ḡazālī says that those engaged in Sūfism (al-mutasawwifa) use “qalb” for the substance (gawhar) that the philosophers (al-ḥukamāʾ) call “al-nafs al-nāṭiqa.” MS Berlin, Spr. 1968 (Ahlwardt 3210), fol. 41b probably has the more complete textual version and says that the mutasawwifa call this substance “sometimes the qalb and sometimes the rūḥ.” Three lines later, both texts have: “al-qalb and al-rūḥ are for us (ʿindana) names for al-nafs al-nāṭiqa.” On the usage of qalb in the meaning of “soul” cf. also Gianotti, Al-Ḡazālī’s Unspeakable Doctrine, pp. 13, 178.
to prophecy is verified through the effectiveness of their work on the individual souls of the believers. Thus, the body of theoretical knowledge that verifies the prophet’s claim is knowledge of the soul, i.e. psychology. The prophet’s work, his deeds and words, falls into the field of psychology, and it is the theoretical knowledge in psychology, knowledge about the divisions of the soul, the inner senses (ḥawāss bāṭina), and their faculties, that the actions of a prophet must be compared to. For the ordinary believer this field may be determined by his personal experience on matters of the soul or by the experience of how reflections on the Qur’ān and the Sunna effect his soul. For scientists like al-Ḡazālī, however, this field is defined in terms of Ibn Sīnā’s books on the soul. Such an explanation of prophecy in terms of psychology is part of al-Ḡazālī’s project in the Fayṣal. The yardstick for the verification of a prophet lies, therefore, in the judgment whether his deeds and words fulfill the criteria and have the effects that knowledge about the soul (laid down in psychological literature) ascribes to the actions of a true prophet.¹³³

Thus correcting his predecessors in the Aš’arite school, al-Ḡazālī teaches that within the field of human knowledge where rationality is able to prove its case independent from revelation there lies a yardstick for distinguishing the true prophet from the impostor, a yardstick that they have simply overlooked. If the actions of the prophet fulfill the requirements set out in the books on the soul, then this fulfillment provides the most conclusive argument for the truth of his mission and the truthfulness of his office. Against the falāsifa,

¹³³ This criterion for verifying the claims of a prophet doesn’t seem to be entirely unknown to Aš’arite scholarship. It seems to be close to the third criterion of al-Aš’arī reported by Ibn Fūrak (cf. footnote 3). In al-Ḡazālī it is clearly influenced by both philosophical literature as well as Sūfism. As stated earlier, the statements on prophecy in the psychological part of Ibn Sīnā’s al-Šīfā’ were understood as explanations of how prophecy must occur, if it occurs (p. 117 of this paper). Much of the philosophical body of literature on prophecy should be understood as setting such standards for the acceptance of a true prophet. Philosophical literature often compares the work of the prophet with the work of the physician. Cf., for instance, al-Fārābī, Kitāb Taḥṣīl al-sa’āda (The Attainment of Happiness) (Hayderabad, 1345), pp. 46f., ed. Ga’far Āl Yāsīn, 2nd ed. (Beirut, 1403/1983), p. 97. An illuminating example of the dispute between falāsifa and religious scholars on whether the effect of the prophet’s work can be compared to that of the physician is the discussion between one of the authors of the Rasā‘īl Ḥuwān al-Ṣafā’, Muhḥammad ibn Ma’ṣar al-Bīṣṭī al-Maqdisī, with a young scholar named al-Harīrī reported by al-Tawḥīdī in al-Imtā‘ wa-al-mu‘ānasa, ed. Aḥmad Amīn and Aḥmad Zayn, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1373/1952), vol. 2, pp. 11ff.
however, al-Ghazālī also firmly maintains that despite the fact that prophecy can be explained in the science of the human soul, there is a surplus of knowledge once true revelation has set in. This excess knowledge exists in fields where demonstrative reasoning fails to yield certainty. These fields are, for instance, normative practical knowledge, i.e. judgments about the moral value of an act, and certain questions in the field of theoretical knowledge like, for instance, the afterlife, and knowledge of the beginning of the world. Knowledge of the source of the prophets’ revelations also seems to be a point that al-Ghazālī regards as being not accessible to demonstrative knowledge and thus subject to the information one finds in the literal meaning of the Qur’ānic text. In all his explanations of prophecy al-Ghazālī never explicitly touches upon this topic other than maintaining that the ultimate source of revelation is God.134 While he explains prophecy from the perspective of human psychology, such inquiry always reaches its limits where the human touches the divine.135

134 One of the more explicit passages where al-Ghazālī deals with the source of revelation is in Maʿāriğ al-quds, p. 115.21–22 (translated in Rahman, Prophecy in Islam, p. 97) where the revelation is portrayed as coming from spiritual beings (rūḥāniyyāt), who are determined to preserve the order of the word and who act according to God’s command (amr).

135 I would like to thank Peter Adamson, Richard M. Frank, Tariq Jaffer and two anonymous readers for their invaluable comments on earlier drafts of this article.