

The influence of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina on Descartes^{*}

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In this article the author maintains that it is necessary to engage in a renewal of thought outside the European/Western tradition and to reappraise the contribution of Islamic legal thought to European legal philosophy. After brief bibliographical surveys of Al-Ghazali (1058–1111), Ibn Sina (980–1037) and Descartes (1596–1650) and an outline of Descartes' theory of knowledge, the author poses the question: To what extent was Descartes' famous proposition 'I think, therefore I am' influenced by Al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina? He questions the originality of Cartesian thought and proceeds to demonstrate that the primary ideas in Descartes' theory of knowledge, namely (1) the method of doubt and scepticism, (2) dualism and (3) the existence of God were directly influenced by the two Islamic scholars who preceded him by some 500 years, namely Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali.

Ithonya lika-Al-Ghazali no-Ibn Sina kuDescartes

Kulo mbhalo umbhali ubeka ukuthi kuyadingeka ukuthi kuke kubhekwe imicabango emisha engaphandle kosiko lwaseYurophu/



lwaseNtshonalanga, futhi kubuye kuhloliswe umnikelo owenziwa yimicabango yezomthetho yamaSulumani kuleyo ndlela abaseYurophu ababona ngayo ezomthetho. Ngemuva kophenyo olufushane lwemibhalo ka-Al-Ghazali (1058–1111), eka-Ibn Sina (980–1037) nokohlaka lwethiyori yohwazi kaDescartes, umbhali ubeka lo mbuzo: Ngabe isiphakamiso esidumile sikaDescartes esithi I think, therefore I am, sithonyeke kangakanani yimisebenzi ka-Al-Ghazali no-Ibn Sina? Ubuzisisa ngomsuka wendlela yokubuka izinto, olandela imibono kaDescartes, abeseqhubeka ekhombisa ukuthi imi-

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bonongqangi kule thiyori yolwazi kaDescartes, okuyile, (1) indlela elandelwayo mayelana nokungabaza nokungakholwa kahle ngokuthile, (2) ukuba nezinhlangothi ezimbili kokuthile, kanye (3) nokuba khona kukaNkulunkulu, yathelwa ngqo yilezi zazi ezimbili zamaSulumani ezeza ngaphambi kwakwe ngeminyaka engama-500, okungu-Ibn Sina no-Al Ghazali.

1 Introduction

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, it is necessary to engage in a renewal of thought outside the European/Western tradition and to reappraise the contribution of Islamic legal thought to European legal philosophy and law. In an article published a few years ago and entitled 'Islamic influences on European legal philosophy and law' the influence of the great intellectual activity of Islamic Spain in the eleventh and twelfth centuries on medieval Western Europe, focusing particularly on the impact of Ibn Rushd's (1126–1198) Aristotelian commentaries on the thinking of St Thomas of Aquinas¹ was discussed. In that article, briefly over-viewing the history and development of Islamic thought, it was stated that

[t]he Persian Abu Ibn Sina (980–1037), known as Avicenna in the West, is [regarded as] the most notable Islamic philosopher of the Middle Ages. Although some of his works are in Persian, he wrote mainly in Arabic. His greatest philosophical work, the *Kitab al-Shifa* (Book of Healing), translated into Latin as *Liber Sufficientiae*, exercised an important influence through independent circulation of its sections

on, *inter alia*, metaphysics and further had a powerful effect on Christian philosophy in the 13th century.²

On the transmission of knowledge from the Islamic world to Europe, Weeramantry was quoted as follows:

Some great translators, such as the Italian Gerard of Cremona who lived in Toledo, translated as many as 71 scientific treatises from Arabic into Latin. Indeed, the entire Aristotelian *corpus* was translated from Arabic into Latin as were also the works of great Islamic philosophers such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, [Ibn Sina] and Al-Ghazali.³

It should be borne in mind that Saint Thomas of Aquinas was influenced not only by Ibn Rushd but by Ibn Sina as well. In his work *De ente et essentia*, in which St Thomas formulates the distinction between essence and existence, he relies heavily on Ibn Sina to support his thesis. In fact, one author regards St Thomas's thought in this respect as entirely Avicennan.⁴

This article focuses on the impact of Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Al-Ghazali on European legal thinking. More particularly, it focuses on their influence on the thinking of René Descartes, the great French philosopher. To what extent was Descartes' famous proposition 'I think, therefore I am' influenced by Ghazalian and Avicennan thought? Since Descartes was a devout Catholic and both Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali were Muslim, the focus now, in continuing the dis-

1 *Fundamina* (1999) Vol 5 44–67.

2 *Ibid* 48; see also Haren *Medieval thought* (1985) 122 and Jordan *Western philosophy from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (1987) 343.

3 *Ibid* 50; Weeramantry *Islamic jurisprudence: An international perspective* (1988) 21.

4 Khan MS *The philosophy of Avicenna and its influence on Medieval Europe* (1969) 95. This is a translation of AM Goichon's *La philosophie d'Avicenna et son influence en Europe Medievale*.

cussion, is on Islamic and Christian metaphysical speculation. Who was Ibn Sina, who was Al-Ghazali and who was Descartes?

2 A brief bibliographical survey

2.1 Abu Ibn Sina (980–1037)

Abu Ali Al-Husayn Ibn Abdallah Ibn Sina was born in 980 of Persian parents in the village of Afshana, near Bukhara, in Iran. After a basic education in Islamic teaching, he studied arithmetic and later philosophy. He began practising medicine at the age of 16. Together with his tutor he read the Arabic translation of the *Isagoge* of Porphyry, being an introduction to Aristotle's *Organon* and to the study of philosophy itself. What troubled Ibn Sina most was the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. More specifically Aristotle's First Philosophy, and the question of what the science of being *qua* being has to do with Divine Science, with a science of first principles, and with metaphysics. He found the discipline of metaphysics unintelligible until he read Al-Farabi's short work *On the Object of metaphysics*.⁵ He was then 18 years old. This was the start of his career as a philosopher. Roger Bacon would later refer to him as the '*dux et princeps philosophiae*' and the chief commentator and exponent of Aristotle.⁶ Furthermore, in the brief history of philosophy which Bacon included in his *Opus maius* in 1266 to 1267 he neatly identifies the place of Ibn Sina in the Western scientific and philosophical tradition. He makes the point that the major part of Aristotle's works received little attention until after the time of the Prophet Muhammad (on whom be peace), when

Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and others 'recalled it to the light of full exposition'.⁷

Ibn Sina wrote more than a hundred treatises in Persian and Arabic on, *inter alia*, logic, mathematics, physics, medicine and metaphysics. A Latin translation of his chief medical treatise, *The canon of medicine* or *Qanun* was the standard reference in Europe in this field of study until the seventeenth century. As stated earlier,⁸ his greatest philosophical work, the *Kitab Al-Shifa* ('Book of Healing') – healing for the soul – was translated into Latin as *Liber sufficientiae* and exercised an important influence in respect of metaphysics on later Christian and Western thinking. Descartes' reliance – although never acknowledged by him – on Ibn Sina is clear and represents but one enquiry in this vast field.

2.2 Al-Ghazali (1058–1111)

Abu Hamid ibn Muhammad Al-Ghazali was born in Tus in 450. Besides early training in theology and canon law, his later education included science, dialectics, philosophy, logic and Sufi practice and doctrine. After initial success as a teacher and consulting lawyer, he was struck down by a mysterious disease, his speech became impaired and he suffered from loss of appetite. As the strain increased, he touched the depths of absolute scepticism; he doubted the evidence of the senses since they often deceived him.

At the age of 36 Al-Ghazali turned to meditation and Sufism. His greatest theological work, *Ihya Ulum-ud-Din* ('Revival of the religious sciences'), is regarded, after the *Qur'an* and the

5 The Arabic version consisted of a mere eight pages, while the French version was no more than four pages long. See further Goodman LE *Avicenna* (1992) 15.

6 Wickens GM *Avicenna: Scientist and philosopher* (1974) 109.

7 *Ibid* 84.

8 See n 2 *supra*.

Sunnah (recorded sayings, traditions and practices of the Prophet Muhammad), as the most authoritative reference in Islam. In the field of legal philosophy, his more important works include *The tendencies of the philosophers*, *The incoherence of the philosophers* and *The deliverance from error*. In the last-mentioned work, Al-Ghazali states that irreligious ideas are not peculiar to all areas of philosophy, only to metaphysics. He argued that logic and logical conditions of proof cannot be satisfied in metaphysics and, further, that on the ultimate issues of truth and reality, nothing more than speculation can be expected of the human intellect.⁹

Ultimately, for Al-Ghazali, Sufism held out the promise of further progress, beyond reason and intellect. In his own words:

There were revealed to me things innumerable and unfathomable. This much I shall say about that in order that others may be helped: I learnt with certainty that it is above all the mystics who walk on the road of God; their life is the best life, their method the soundest method, their character the purest character; indeed, were the intellect of the intellectuals and the learning of the scholars, who are versed in the profundities of revealed truth, brought together to improve the life and character of the mystics, they would find no way of doing so; for to the mystics all movement and all rest, whether external or internal, brings illumination from the light of the lamp of prophetic revelation; and behind the light of prophetic revela-

tion there is no other light on the face of the earth from which illumination may be received.¹⁰

According to Islamic tradition, every century will see a great reviver of the religion of Islam. Al-Ghazali is regarded as the reviver of the twelfth century or the sixth century of the Islamic era.

2.3 Descartes (1596–1650)

René Descartes is regarded as the father of modern Western philosophy. He was born at La Haye (today La Haye Descartes), near Tours, in France in 1596. From his eleventh to nineteenth years he studied classics and philosophy at the Jesuit college of La Fleche in Anjou and took a doctorate in law at the University of Poitiers in 1616. In 1618 he embarked on a military career and travelled to Holland to join the army of Prince Maurice of Nassau. Making no mark as a soldier, he discovered his vocation as a thinker in Bavaria in the winter of 1619. Descartes describes this



⁹ Jordan n 2 *supra* 349.

¹⁰ *Ibid* 350.

experience in his *Discours de la methode*, ('Discourse on the method'). In the words of Bertrand Russell: 'The weather being cold, he got into a stove in the morning, and stayed there all day meditating; by his own account, his philosophy was half finished when he came out, but this need not be accepted too literally. Socrates used to meditate all day in the snow, but Descartes' mind only worked when he was warm'.¹¹

Descartes lived in Holland for 21 years, composing works on cosmology, mathematics, physics, optics, meteorology and philosophy. When he initially left for Holland he took only a few books with him, among them the Bible and the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas (since it has been shown that St Thomas was influenced by Ibn Rushd and Ibn Sina, their indirect influence on Descartes cannot be doubted¹²). Bertrand Russell writes that Descartes was not industrious, worked short hours and read little, and that his work seems to have been done with great concentration during short periods. Descartes wrote in French and Latin. His most important works on philosophy are *The discourse on the method*, published in French in 1637, the *Meditations on first philosophy*, published in Latin in 1642 and the *Principles of philosophy*, published in Latin in 1644. Although the *Principles* contains the most comprehensive statement of Descartes' position, the *Meditations* 'is the key text, not only because of its relentless and concentrated argument, but also because it represents Descartes' attempt to show the originality and importance of his philosophical method'.¹³

What then was Descartes' theory of knowledge?

3 Descartes' theory of knowledge

3.1 Cartesian doubt

The heart of Descartes' philosophy was that 'the greatest care must be taken not to admit anything as true which we cannot prove to be true'.¹⁴ Thus, in order to have a firm foundation for his philosophy, he resolved to make himself doubt everything that he could manage to doubt. The scope of Cartesian doubt was fairly wide-ranging and begins with scepticism in respect of the senses. He held that the entire field of human sense perception could be doubted – since it might well be that what is presented to humans by their senses is as insubstantial as dreams, illusions and hallucinations. The cause of these insubstantial presentations may well be an evil demon and not a good God, he thought. So, belief in God could now be doubted. However, once doubt reached this stage, Descartes feared, it would be impossible for humans to maintain even the validity of mathematical truths. For this reason he writes in the *Meditations* that there are beliefs that his dreaming argument cannot withstand and that these beliefs concern what is most general, such as those encountered in mathematics: 'whether I am awake or asleep, two and three added together are five, and a square has no more than four sides'.¹⁵ It seemed impossible, he thought, that such transparent truths could incur any suspicion of being false.

How, then, does Descartes overcome doubt?

3.2 The *Cogito*

The one thing he could not doubt was

11 Russell B *History of Western philosophy* (1948) 581.

12 See Introduction and n 1 *supra*.

13 Grayling AC *Philosophy I: A guide through the subject* (2000) 443.

14 See n 11 *supra*.

15 Meditation 1, 20; see also Grayling n 13 *supra* 444.

that 'I doubt'. But to doubt is to think. Thus 'I think' is an indubitable fact. However, I cannot think if I do not exist. Thus he explains in his *Discourse on the method*: 'I saw ... that from the mere fact that I thought of doubting the truth of other things, it followed quite evidently and certainly that I existed'.¹⁶

He further explains, in Part Four of the *Discourse*:

But immediately upon this I observed that, whilst I wished to think that all was false, it was absolutely that I, who thus thought, should be somewhat and as I observed that this truth, *I think hence I am*, was so certain and of such evidence, that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the sceptics capable of shaking it, I concluded that I might, without scruple, accept it as the first principle of the philosophy of which I was in search.¹⁷

Descartes' conclusion is thus contained in the famous Latin phrase '*Cogito, ergo sum*', 'I think, therefore I am'. 'I think, therefore I am' makes mind more certain than matter. Having thus established his own existence, Descartes goes on to examine his nature and goes on to reflect upon the nature of physical things (bodies). This would consequently lead to his theory of dualism – the dualism of the soul and the body.

3.3 Cartesian dualism

Bertrand Russell adequately explains the idea of Cartesian dualism in the following précis:

The I that has been proved to exist has been inferred from the fact that I think, therefore I exist while I think, and only then. If I ceased to think, there would be no evidence of my existence. I am a thing that thinks, a substance of which the whole nature or essence consists in thinking, and which needs no place or material thing for its existence. The soul, therefore, is wholly distinct from the body and easier to know than the body; it would be what it is even if there were no body.¹⁸

In his *Meditations* Descartes makes the following observation:

I know that everything which I clearly and distinctly understand is capable of being created by God so as to correspond exactly with my understanding of it. Hence the fact that I can clearly and distinctly understand one thing apart from another is enough to make me certain that the two things are distinct, since they are capable of being separated, at least by God.¹⁹

Because Descartes clearly and distinctly perceived that thought is the essence of mind, and extension the essence of body, and nothing else the essence of either, he clearly and distinctly perceived that the mind is essentially distinct from the body and therefore in principle separable from it. There is, thus, a real distinction between mind and body. For him, the *mind* is a thinking substance, in the sense common to the rationalist philosophers; it is a bearer of properties, which depends

¹⁶ *Discourse on the method* 32.

¹⁷ See *René Descartes A discourse on method Meditations (on the first philosophy) and Principles (of philosophy)* trans by J Veitch 1999 24–25.

¹⁸ Russell n 11 *supra* 587.

¹⁹ Meditation 6; see also Grayling n 13 *supra* 447–48.

for its existence on no other thing besides God. Yet the *body* is not a substance in this sense, since it depends for its existence on things other than God.

It is to Descartes' demonstrations of the existence of God that I now turn.

3.4 Descartes on the existence of God

'Cogito ergo sum, ergo Deus est'

In his fifth Meditation Descartes presents the ontological argument, maintaining that existence necessarily belongs to God's essence, that God is unique, that it is necessary that He has existed from eternity and will abide for eternity and that He has many other attributes.

Earlier, in the third Meditation, Descartes had already explained that by 'God' he understood a substance that is infinite, eternal, immutable, independent, supremely intelligent and powerful, and which created everything that exists. At the beginning of the fourth Meditation he adds that God's perfection entails His complete lack of malice and of trickery or deception.²⁰

Descartes was a pious Christian. But this is not solely why he set out to prove the existence of God. He argued that, without such proof, there would be no way of refuting his scepticism. Essentially he proved the existence of God through his ontological argument and his idea of the necessary being. However, Bertrand Russell argues that 'Descartes' proofs of the existence of God are not very original'.²¹

On the whole, how original is Cartesian thinking?

3.5 The originality of Cartesian thinking

The primary ideas in Descartes' theory of knowledge and the central themes in his *Meditations* centre around the essence and existence of matter, of the self and of God. Within this framework of ideas the following are issues of fundamental concern:

- (1) the method of doubt and scepticism
- (2) dualism
- (3) the existence of God

How original are these ideas? In this regard two enquiries must be pursued.

The first enquiry: Are *all* the ideas original? If the first enquiry is answered in the affirmative, there is no need to pursue the second enquiry. If, however, it is answered in the negative, the second enquiry follows.

The second enquiry: this would entail two related questions,

- (i) Are *some* of them original?
- (ii) Are *none* of them original?

To what extent was Descartes influenced by Ghazalian and Avicennan thinking? To what extent was Cartesian doubt, to what extent was Cartesian dualism and to what extent were his views on God's existence influenced by Al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina?

4 The influence of Al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina on Descartes

4.1 Cartesian doubt and scepticism

Al-Ghazali reached the depths of absolute scepticism and doubted the evidence of the senses since they often deceived. Long before Descartes' attempts Al-Ghazali, in his *Deliverance from error*, had attempted to discover absolute truth. He began this process by

²⁰ Grayling n 13 *supra* 149–150.

²¹ Russell n 11 *supra* 589.

temporarily suspending authority in matters of faith. If authority could not be trusted, was it then possible to believe in sense perception and necessary truths that seem to be self-evident? A despairing Ghazali scrutinised all his cognitions and found himself devoid of any knowledge, except in the case of sense-data and self-evident truths. During his period of personal scepticism, in order to distinguish absolute truth from falsity, he doubted the reliability of sense-data and self-evident truths. He also compared the conscious state of wakefulness with the state of dreaming. In an attempt to show that sense-data or the things we clearly perceive, such as our state of being awake, may be deceptive he offered the example of dreams. Ghazali states: 'Don't you see that when you are asleep you believe certain things and imagine certain circumstances and believe they are fixed and lasting and entertain no doubts about that being their status? Then you wake up and know that all your imaginings and beliefs were groundless and insubstantial.'²²

Indeed, the deceiving nature of sense-data is further explained by Al-Ghazali with reference to the viewing of a star. When we look at a star we see it no bigger than a coin. In actual fact, it is bigger than the entire earth itself. How do we know this? Ghazali's answer was that we know this through our intellect (the reason judge), through geometric calculations. However, Ghazali went on to doubt even mathematical and logical truths, since even they were deceiving.

Cartesian doubt follows closely the methodology of Al-Ghazali. Like Ghazali, Descartes rejected authority or custom and relied solely on his own reasoning. After establishing his self-responsibility in finding the absolute truth, Descartes also doubted the rela-

bility of the senses due to their ability to deceive. Descartes then asked: What about things that we clearly perceive, such as our state of wakefulness (the same illustration had been used by Al-Ghazali five hundred years earlier) or the fire in front of which we are sitting? Arguing that they, too, could be deceiving, he proves his point using the example of a dream (just as Al-Ghazali had done). Finally Descartes, like Ghazali, too doubted necessary and mathematical truths by raising the following question: 'Since I judge that others sometimes make mistakes in matters that they believe they know most perfectly may I not, in like fashion, be deceived every time I add two and three or count the sides of a square, or perform an even simpler operation, if that can be imagined.'²³

It is on these foundations that René Descartes went on to demonstrate the existence of his mind or consciousness. Since he could doubt everything except the fact that he was doubting or thinking, he arrived at his famous proposition '*Cogito, ergo sum*' or 'I think, therefore I am'.

4.2 Cartesian dualism

The essence of Cartesian dualism is, first, that the soul is wholly distinct from the body and, second, that upon death the soul does not perish with the body. Of course, the issues of the immortality of the soul and the idea of God had first been analysed in Greek philosophy. In the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, Plato argued that the soul is to be conceived as remaining unchanged in its essential nature through all the processes of birth and death, as being born many times into the sensible world and departing from it again, but always maintaining the continuity of its life and

²² *Ibid.*

²³ René Descartes *Discourse on method and Meditations on first Philosophy* trans by D A Cress (1998) 47.

carrying with it, in a more or less explicit form, all the knowledge it ever possessed.

Ghazali distinguished between body and soul. According to him, the soul of the human being originates directly from God and that is why it is immaterial, immortal and more unique than the body or the rest of natural creation itself. The soul thus occupies a pivotal role in Ghazalian metaphysics. Without the soul the body is not complete and cannot function. Ghazali states: 'The body is subject to dissolution as it was subject to being compounded of matter and form, which is set forth in the books. And from ... verses and traditions and intellectual proofs we have come to know that the spirit [the soul] is a simple substance, perfect, having life in itself, and from it is derived what makes the body sound or what corrupts it.'²⁴

For Ghazali, the human being is both soul and body, he/she is at once both physical being and spirit, and the soul governs the body. However, this dual nature of the human being does not necessarily imply a dualism since the soul and the body are two aspects of one and the same entity. For him, the soul and the body are interdependent.

Some six centuries before Descartes, Ibn Sina had already proven the essence of Cartesian dualism, namely that the human soul is wholly distinct from the body and that the soul does not perish with the body. In fact, in one of his works he begins the section entitled 'The human soul' as follows: 'The human soul, as distinguished from the animal and vegetable souls, is an im-

material substance, independent of the body.'²⁵

Chapter XIII²⁶ of *Avicenna's psychology* is headed 'The soul does not die with the death of the body; it is incorruptible' and begins thus:

We say that the soul does not die with the death of the body and is absolutely incorruptible. As for the former proposition, this is because everything which is corrupted with the corruption of something else is in some way attached to it.

And anything which in some way is attached to something else is either coexistent with it or posterior to it in existence or prior to it, this priority being essential and not temporal.²⁷

4.3 Descartes on God's existence

How original is Descartes' ontological argument that existence necessarily belongs to God's essence? How original is his argument that God is a Necessary Being? It will be remembered that Bertrand Russell had stated that 'Descartes proofs of the existence of God are not very original' and that in the main they emanate from scholastic philosophy.²⁸

In Ibn Sina's discussion of the nature of God, the first subheading is 'That there is a necessary being'. He argues that whatever has being must either have a reason for its being or have no reason for it. If it has a reason, it is contingent. If, however, it has no reason for its being, then it is necessary in its being. Having confirmed this rule, he

24 See 'The Ghazalian origins of modern philosophy', paper presented by Prof Cemil Akdogan of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation, Malaysia, at the International Conference on Al-Ghazali's Legacy: Its Contemporary Relevance, 24–27 October 2001. See also Al-Ghazali *AH Al-Risalat Al-Laduniyya* Part II, translated by M Smith in *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 1938 193.

25 Rahman F *Avicenna's psychology* (1952) 3.

26 *Ibid* 58.

27 *Ibid*.

28 See n 25 *supra* and the section 3(4) of this article, headed *Descartes on the existence of God*.

proceeds to prove that there is in being a being which has no reason for its being. Arberry explains:

Such a being is either contingent or necessary. If it is necessary, then the point we sought to prove is established. If, on the other hand, it is contingent, that which is contingent cannot enter upon being except for some reason which sways the scales in favour of its being and against its non-being. If the reason is also contingent, there is then a chain of contingents linked one to the other, and there is no being at all; for this being which is the subject of our hypothesis cannot enter into being so long as it is not preceded by an infinite succession of beings, which is absurd. Therefore contingent beings end in a Necessary Being.²⁹

Having proven that God (Arabic, Allah) is a Necessary Being, Ibn Sina proceeds to show that God is Without Cause. Listing four types of causes, namely an active cause, a final or complete cause, a material cause and a formal cause, he demonstrates that God cannot be the result of any of these causes, that God is exalted above any of these causes and that there is no cause to Allah's Attributes.³⁰ Finally, Ibn Sina also demonstrates that God's Essence (Quiddity) is not other than His Identity, is not other than His Being.

5 Concluding comments

MM Sharif has cogently, coherently, adequately and effectively summarised the influence of Al-Ghazali on Descartes in the following words:

The influence that al-Ghazali had on modern European thought has not so far been fully appreciated. There is no acknowledgment by Descartes of his indebtedness (direct or indirect) to any Muslim thinker, and yet it is difficult to believe that he did not know al-Ghazali's general position and was not influenced by it through the Latin scholastics, whom beyond question he must have read ...

We notice that, exactly like al-Ghazali, Descartes came to his conclusions by a study of his own self, al-Ghazali's starting formula being 'I will, therefore I am' and Descartes' being 'I think, therefore I am'. He followed al-Ghazali's derivation of the negative and positive attributes of God from the concept of necessary existence ... Exactly like al-Ghazali he begins with describing how in vain he interrogated in his mind every school and every creed for an answer to the problems that disturbed him and finally resolved to discard all authority.³¹

Both Al-Ghazali's *Munqidh min al-Dalal* (The deliverance from error) and Descartes' *Discours de la Methode* are autobiographical works and they contain a number of significant similarities, including:

- (1) both decided that they would not believe anything that was based on tradition, custom or example
- (2) both held, for exactly the same reasons, that the senses cannot yield certain knowledge
- (3) the language and the example of the defects of sense-experience given by

29 Arberry AJ *Avicenna on Theology* (1951) 25.

30 *Ibid* 2631.

31 Sharif (ed) *A history of Muslim philosophy (Vol II)* 1966 1382.

both of them were almost identical.³²

Thus, as far as the originality of Cartesian thinking is concerned,³³ the answer to the first enquiry, namely whether *all* his ideas are original, has clearly been proven to be in the negative. As to the second enquiry, namely whether *some* or *none* of his ideas are original, it cannot be said that he contributed nothing of his own. In the light of this article, it would be apt to conclude that originality in the thinking of Descartes was minimal.

6 Ibn Sina's Poem of the Soul

Out of her lofty home she hath come
down
Upon thee, this white dove in all the
pride
Of her reluctant beauty; veiled is she
From every eye eager to know her,
though
In loveliness unshrouded radiant.
Unwillingly she came, and yet perchance
Still more unwillingly to be gone
from thee;
So she is torn by griefs. First she
refrained,
Being all unaccustomed; but at last,
When she was firmly knit, she loved
the use
Of being neighbour to this arid waste.
And now methinks she hath forgotten quite
The tents where once she dwelt, the
far abodes
She was so little satisfied to leave.
So, being now united with these
depths
And parted from her sandy hills of
yore,

Her wings are heavy upon her, and
she rests
Dejected mid these waymarks and
mean mounds
Weeping (yet she remembereth not
her home
Of yore), until her tears abundant
flow,
And she not yet set forth. But when
the time
Is nigh for her departing to that place
And near the hour to be upon her
way
Unto the broader plain, then perching
high
Upon the topmost steep, she carolleth
For knowledge doth uplift the low-
liest heart
With ken of every hidden mystery
In all the world returning, still
unstopped
The orifice of heeding; and it proves
Her coming down was necessary woe
That she might list to truth else all
unheard.
Why then was she cast down from
her high peak
To this degrading depth? God
brought her low,
But for a purpose wise, that is
concealed
E'en from the keenest mind and
liveliest wit.
And if the tangled mesh impeded
her,
The narrow cage denied her wings to
soar
Freely in heaven's high ranges, after
all
She was a lightning-flash that
brightly glowed
Momently o'er the tents, and then
was hid
As though its gleam was never
glimpsed below.³⁴

32 *Ibid* 1383.

33 See 3.5 of this article.

34 Gohlman's translation; see Gohlman *The life of Ibn Sina* (1974) 7778.