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GHAZĀLĪ ON THE ETHICS OF ACTION

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Leaving aside Ghazālī's ethics of character, the article examines his treatment of the ethics of action in *Iqtīṣād*, *Iḥyā'* and *Mustaṣfā* and finds a consistent theory.

The ethical meaning of *wājib* is defined as "necessary for an agent's interest." The main interest for man is personal salvation. Thus the concept of "obligation" as essentially connected with social justice is absent from Ghazālī's ethics. Similarly *ḥasan* is understood as "what serves an end" and *qabīḥ* as "what hinders attainment of an end." The Mu'tazilite doctrine that some acts are good or evil in themselves without regard to the agent's ends is rejected.

God has no interests or needs and is under no necessity; thus none of the above concepts apply to him in their ordinary sense. But He creates good for man out of His grace.

The rules of conduct necessary or serviceable for man's salvation cannot be known by independent reason, as the Mu'tazila thought, following imperfect inductions and emotional biases. These rules are derived from revelation, supplemented by dependent reasoning such as *qiyās*. *Istiṣlāḥ* is acceptable within certain limits.

1. WITH ALL THE BREADTH OF HIS INTERESTS as a theologian, jurist, logician, educator, Sūfī, critic of philosophy and foe of Isma'ilism, Ghazālī's central concern throughout his life (A.D. 1058-1111) may fairly be described as an ethical one: right conduct and the purification of the soul by the individual, as means to a harmonious relation with God and the attainment of everlasting joy. This is of course a religious view of ethics, and one believed to have been learned from God through prophetic revelation and associated divine sources accepted in classical Islam.

The present study will not attempt to treat the entire system of his ethics in its prolific details. We shall be concerned with some of its general aspects. We shall also limit the study to the sphere of conduct, and not deal with the sphere of character and improvement of the soul, important as that subject is in Ghazālī's total ethics.¹

In order to explain more precisely the object of study and its place in the system as a whole, it will be useful to begin with a summary account of three relevant religious sciences as Ghazālī conceived them: theology (*'ilm al-kalām*), "law" (*'ilm al-fiqh*) and ethics of character (*'ilm al-akhlāq*).

Kalām is defined by Ghazālī simply as the study of God, and it has four principal topics: the existence and fundamental nature of God, His attributes, His actions, and His prophets and revelation.² Our concern will be mainly with the third of these topics, God's actions. We shall deal with *kalām* first because it is the most general and architectonic religious science, which determines the sphere of each of the more specialized religious sciences.³ It sets up their cosmological framework, the definitions of their value terms such as *wājib*, *ḥasan* and *qabīḥ*, and the authority of their revealed sources through its proofs of God and the authenticity of the Prophet's mission.

Fiqh is concerned with human conduct. It is "the science of scriptural rules established for the acts of people under obligation (*al-mukallaḥīn*)."⁴ Rules (*ḥukm*, plural *aḥkām*) are stated or implied in the scriptural sources for every class of act, determining whether the act is commanded, recommended, permitted, disapproved or forbidden by God. Thus *fiqh* in its details (*furū'*) is the normative religious science, theoretically able to discover the divine judgement on every class of

¹ See M. A. Sherif, *Ghazālī's theory of virtue* (Albany, 1974).

² *al-Iqtīṣād fī al-i'tiqād*, ed. I. A. Çubukçu and H. Atay (Ankara, 1962), p. 4 = Spanish tr. M. Asín Palacios, *El justo medio en la creencia* (Madrid, 1929), p. 28.

³ *al-Mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-uṣūl* (Cairo, 1937), I, 4-5.

⁴ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 3.

human act. But *fiqh* has also a more fundamental part, the science of legal principles (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) or jurisprudence, which investigates in a general way the proofs of the rules of *fiqh*: the conditions of validity of the sources, Qurʾān and others (and here it overlaps with *kalām*), and of the methods of interpreting and extending the sources. We shall deal with this part of *fiqh*, since it is an inquiry into the principles of normative ethical judgements on external human acts.

The other science of human ethics is that which Muslim philosophers named "the science of character" (*ʿilm al-akhlāq*). Ghazālī accepts this science on his own terms; in fact he regards it as more important than *fiqh*, corresponding to the superiority of character to action. But he prefers other names for it, more in line with Islamic and especially Sūfī terminology: "the science of states of the heart" (*ʿilm aḥwāl al-qalb*) or "the science of conduct" (*ʿilm al-muʿāmalā*) understood as a study of the right dispositions (virtues) that underlie the acts prescribed by the Law.⁵ In other words it is a study of the inward side of ethics, the cultivation of the personal soul.

Thus the scope of this article may be described as a review of the more philosophical aspects of Ghazālī's ethics of action—"philosophical" being used here in a broad modern sense of "concerned with fundamental questions," not necessarily connected with the Greek philosophical tradition which Ghazālī repudiated as a whole.⁶ The first two of the three sciences just described will be dealt with in turn, within the limits mentioned.

But before we proceed to the content of Ghazālī's thought it will be advisable to settle a question of method. Already in the twelfth century Andalusian philosophers observed a chameleon-like quality in Ghazālī's thought; Ibn Rushd accused him of being "an Ashʿarite with the Ashʿarites, a Sūfī with the Sūfīs and a philosopher with the philosophers," the last of which is patently unfair about a man who openly attacked the philosophers.⁷ Modern scholars such as W. M. Watt

have drawn attention to the problem of consistency posed by the variety in Ghazālī's viewpoints and opinions and have suggested more sympathetic solutions, relying on the evolution of his thought, described by himself in *al-Munqidh min aḍ-ḍalāl*,⁸ as well as on his consciousness of the need for different approaches to different audiences.

Now it may turn out that in the end certain apparent inconsistencies can only be explained in one of these ways. But such explanations will have to be well supported by evidence or strong implications; otherwise they are liable to be lazy man's solutions, resorted to because one has not sought hard enough for a real consistency behind the appearances. At any rate, we are likely to penetrate further by starting from a methodological assumption of basic unity in a thinker's views, allowing for the continuous development that is normal in anyone's thought.

It may be doubted that Ghazālī's development was normal, since it was broken by two sharp crises. But if we look at these crises closely we can see no reason why they should have resulted in sharp changes in his beliefs. The first was a sceptical crisis of youth, overcome probably before he had written any surviving books.⁹ The second, culminating in 1095 at the age of thirty-seven, resulted in a change of religious orientation and values but not necessarily any intellectual change in beliefs.¹⁰ These remained much the same, but there are new interests and a more earnest religious outlook. So let us attempt a unified account of his ethical system and see how far we can go before we meet with insoluble inconsistencies. At the end we shall be better able to estimate their extent.

Averroes on the harmony of religion and philosophy (London, 1961), p. 61; see note 145 in the latter for further references and comments. Other Andalusian critics: Ibn Ṭufayl and Ibn Sabʿīn. See also Sherif, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-22; and H. Lazarus-Yafeh, "Philosophical terms as a criterion of authenticity in the writings of al-Ghazzālī", *Studia Islamica*, 25 (1966), pp. 111-21, suggesting a method of rejecting spurious works that eliminates many of the supposed inconsistencies.

⁸ Ed. J. Saliba and K. Ayyad, 3rd printing (Damascus, 1939); Eng. tr. W. M. Watt, *The faith and practice of al-Ghazālī* (London, 1953), with margin numbers referring to pages of Saliba and Ayyad.

⁹ *Munqidh*, pp. 67-77.

¹⁰ *Munqidh*, pp. 122-29.

⁵ *Iḥyāʾ ʿulūm ad-dīn*, ʿIrāqī edition (Cairo, Istiḳāma Press, no date), I, 20-21.

⁶ It is tempting to substitute "theological" for "philosophical" here, since Ghazālī's ethics is so emphatically based on revealed sources. But "theology" is too closely associated with *kalām*, whereas Ghazālī's treatment of ethics goes well beyond the sphere of *kalām*.

⁷ *Faṣl al-maqāl*, ed. G. F. Hourani (Leiden, 1959), margin page 18 (Müller edition) = Eng. tr. G. F. Hourani,

2. In his main treatise on *kalām*, *al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād*, Ghazālī devotes the third part to God's action towards the world. He opens this part with a short statement of the dogmas of Islam on God's unbounded freedom in relation to the world and man. But before these dogmas can be demonstrated, he says, we must understand the correct definitions of the terms of value that are applied to action and character:

"All these assertions are based on investigation of the meaning of 'necessary' (*wājib*), 'good' (*ḥasan*) and 'evil' (*qabīḥ*). People have delved into the subject and engaged in protracted discussions on whether intellect can make things good, evil or necessary, but confusion has only increased because they have not grasped the meaning of these expressions and the differences in their technical senses."¹¹

He then proceeds to give his own definitions of these terms, and subsequently to elaborate the dogmas in a way that depends on these definitions.

Wājib is said to have two generic meanings, one of which is subdivided into two species.

(1) "Logically necessary", predicable of anything whose non-existence leads to an impossibility. In this sense we describe as *wājib* the pre-eternal Being, or the existence of an object of knowledge where there is knowledge. This meaning does not concern ethics.¹²

(2) "Prudentially necessary." *Wājib* in this sense is predicable of an act, when from the standpoint of self-interest its performance is preferable to its omission in a decisive way, i.e., when severe and certain harm to the agent is to be expected from omission of the act. Thus an act is *wājib* when it is necessary for the agent to do it if he is to avoid such harm.¹³ The translation given here, "prudentially necessary," does not correspond to any two words of Ghazālī, but it is used because it is the best expression to bring out the main features of

what Ghazālī means by his definition, as understood from his explanations. "Necessary" links *wājib* in this sense to the first sense; it is a hypothetical necessity, just as in "If there is knowledge there must be an object of knowledge." "Prudential" (used in its technical philosophical sense) brings out the essential condition attributed to practical necessity: the service of the act to the interest of the agent. More will be said of this feature shortly. Because of its unusual character it will be advisable not to translate Ghazālī's *wājib* (2) as "obligatory," which has other connotations.

This second meaning of *wājib* is subdivided according to the location in which harm is to be expected, in this life or the next. (a) Expected harm in this life may be recognized by intellect. Thus a non-believer may call it "necessary" for a person dying of hunger to eat; "and we mean by 'the necessity of eating' the preferability of action to omission on account of the harm connected with omission." (The use of such a technical meaning (*istilāḥ*) is not precluded by the Law; "the only prohibition comes from language, when such a meaning is not in accord with the acknowledged convention.")¹⁴ (b) Expected harm in the next life is known by revelation,¹⁵ "as when it is said, 'it is necessary for the servant to obey God so that He will not punish him with fire in the next life'."¹⁶ This is the more important subdivision of *wājib* (2), the sense in which it is used in religious contexts. We should examine the ethical character of this concept in Ghazālī's theory.

Two features of it call for attention. One is its place in the range of objective-subjective concepts, explained as follows. An objective concept is one whose true predication is determined by facts of the world other than the opinion of some judge or observer about it. The Mu'tazilite definition of *wājib* applied to an act is "that, for whose omission the agent deserves blame."¹⁷ This is objective: "deserves" introduces a fact which is truly or falsely predicated regardless of anyone's opinion.¹⁸ A subjective concept is one whose true

¹¹ *Iqtisād*, p. 160 = Asín, pp. 245-46. "make things good, evil or necessary" gives Ghazālī's interpretation of *yuhassin*, *yugabbih* and *yūjib*, whereas the Mu'tazila understood these words as "find things good," etc.

¹² *Iqtisād*, pp. 161-62 = Asín, pp. 246, 248. *Iḥyā'*, I, 111; also in separate ed. as *ar-Risāla al-Qudsiyya* (= *Iḥyā'*, Book ii, ch. 3), ed. and Eng. tr. A. L. Tibawi, *al-Ghazālī's tract on dogmatic theology* (London, 1965), pp. 25 and 48.

¹³ *Iqtisād*, pp. 161-62 = Asín, p. 248. *Iqtisād*, p. 195 = Asín, p. 192. *Iḥyāt*, I, 111 = Tibawi, pp. 25 and 48. *Iḥyāt*, I, 113 = Tibawi, pp. 27 and 53. *Mustaṣfā*, I, 40.

¹⁴ *Iqtisād*, p. 162 = Asín, pp. 247-48. Cf. *Iḥyā'*, I, 111 = Tibawi, pp. 25 and 48.

¹⁵ *Iqtisād*, p. 162 = Asín, p. 247.

¹⁶ *Iḥyā'*, I, 111 = Tibawi, pp. 25 and 48.

¹⁷ See G. F. Hourani, *Islamic rationalism: the ethics of 'Abd al-Jabbār* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 39, 116.

¹⁸ This is so, irrespective of any particular set of criteria for desert. The concept causes difficulties for the Mu'ta-

predication is determined by the opinion of some judge or observer. Such is the case of justice according to the theory of some ancient Greek sophists, that the just is determined by the laws of each state: not merely known through the laws, but determined solely by them, meaning nothing else but "whatever the laws ordain." There are similar modern theories which make custom or current "values" (i.e., prevalent valuations) the determinants of what is right in any society. These theories may be described as social subjectivism. In classical Islam ethical subjectivism took a theistic form, by which *wājib* as applicable to human acts was defined as simply whatever is commanded by God, with the backing of divine sanctions by Rewards and Punishments. This was the doctrine most firmly held by the Sunnite law schools of Shāfi'ī and Ibn Ḥanbal and the theological school of Ash'arī, as well as Ibn Ḥazm in his thoroughgoing application of Zahirite fundamentalism to theology. Its proponents explicitly denied the Mu'tazilite doctrine that *wājib* was an attribute of certain types of act in themselves, which were then commanded by God for man to perform; on the contrary, no such attribute could be discerned, and God's commanding certain types of act was itself the essential characteristic that made them *wājib*.

Now Ghazālī's position would be expected to conform to that of his Shafi'ite and Ash'arite masters, and while it does so in a general way it introduces an element of objectivity which gives his definition a tinge of originality. This is because the hypothetical imperative by which *wājib* is interpreted, "If you want x, it is necessary to do y," expresses a causal relation which, in the world as it is constituted, is a true fact independent of any opinion. This is at any rate a formal characteristic of Ghazālī's definition. But if we go deeper and look at the conditions controlling what is *wājib* in the actual world, we learn that this world is constituted entirely by the will of God, that He creates the nature of man and his natural ends, that He decides and commands what acts it is necessary for man to do to achieve these ends, and finally that He imposes the sanctions which make such acts necessary for man. Thus Ghazālī's position is ultimately subjectivist in the sense defined, only a little less so than that of

his predecessors.¹⁹ He agrees with them that there is no attribute that makes acts necessary for man to do in his own interest, other than that they are commanded by God. The difference between his predecessors and him is a subtle one: for them, *wājib* means commanded by God, for him it means necessary because commanded by God.²⁰

The second noteworthy feature of Ghazālī's concept of *wājib* is that it is related in an essential way to the interest of the agent himself. Obedience to God's commands is *wājib* in that it is necessary for serving one's own long-term interest. This doctrine is made explicit in the course of a rebuttal of a Mu'tazilite assertion that certain acts of God are *wājib* for Him because of the benefit they confer on His creatures. Ghazālī retorts: "—but that which contains benefit to others is not necessary for Him, since there is no benefit to Him in benefitting others."²¹ A parallel view is that of David Hume, who wrote in *An Enquiry concerning the principles of morals*:

"having explained the moral approbation attending merit or virtue, there remains nothing but briefly to consider our interested obligation to it, and to inquire whether every man, who has any regard to his own happiness and welfare, will not best find his account in the practice of every moral duty."²²

¹⁹ In one place, *Mustasfā*, I, 39, Ghazālī states as his own the Ash'arite definition: "... *wājib* has no meaning (*ma'nā*) but what God the Exalted has made necessary (*awjaba*) and commanded, with threat of punishment for omission; so if there is no revelation what is the meaning of *wājib*?" This statement cannot be explained as a later development of his thought, since he reverts to his usual definition on p. 40 where he says that *wājib* only means the preferability of action over omission. Perhaps p. 39 should be understood as a loose expression, in which *ma'nā* is used not for the formal essence but for the content in extension of *wājib*, so that Ghazālī is saying merely that there is nothing necessary (*wājib*) in fact but what God has made so by his command and threat.

²⁰ While I am unable to trace Ghazālī's position to a previous source, a suggestion towards it can be found in a passage of Juwaynī's *Irshād*, ed. M. Yūsuf Mūsā and A. A. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo, 1950), pp. 271-72. Juwaynī discusses what could be meant by *wujūb* in speaking of God, and considers as one alternative God's expectation of harm from omitting an act; this is then ruled out, it is impossible for God to be benefitted or harmed.

²¹ *Iqtisād*, pp. 175-76 = Asín, pp. 265-66.

²² *Hume's Enquiries*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1936), p. 278.

zilité and some other theories of ethics. See Hourani, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-47.

Ghazālī's definition of practical *wājib*, like Hume's of "interested obligation," is in sharp contrast with obligation as understood by most modern philosophers who, while disagreeing widely in other respects, commonly connect obligation essentially with the interests of others, in relations of justice such as gratitude, repayment of debt, fulfilment of contract and so forth. Such a view is now so prevalent that it has become a question whether one can ever have an obligation to oneself. And any theory in which obligation is related entirely to the interest of the agent is regarded as analysing obligation in a prudential sense which is not ethical; or, to put it more bluntly, as not analysing obligation at all but substituting another concept for it.

3. For the definition of *ḥasan* there are two accounts, in *Iqtīṣād* and *al-Mustaṣfā min 'ilm al-uṣūl*, with slight inconsistencies between them and even within each one.²³ The complications raised by attempting to explain the variations in accurate detail would not be worth the effort to the writer and readers, and a unified account of Ghazālī's position, which is clear in general, will suffice. He gives two general meanings, and the first has three technical subdivisions.

(1) *Ḥasan* in general usually means agreeable or fitting to an end; it may be translated as "good," which corresponds to this main meaning and all the others to be mentioned. The end may be that of the agent, as in the commonest usage, or that of other persons, or of the agent in one respect or one time but not others. Thus *ḥusan* is relative (*iḍāfi*) to the end specified, and what is good for Zayd may not be so for 'Amr, or even for one of them in different respects or times. Ghazālī does not distinguish between relations to ends actually sought and relations to opinions, and he gives some examples of the latter, e.g., an irreligious person may call adultery "good" because he approves of it.²⁴ Also under the heading of "good" he gives examples of aesthetic preferences—for colors, complexions, voices—which vary with the tastes and feelings of different people.²⁵

²³ *Iqtīṣād*, pp. 163-74 = Asín, pp. 248-52. *Mustaṣfā*, I, 36. The account in *Iqtīṣād* is more elaborate and will be drawn on to a greater extent.

²⁴ *Iqtīṣād*, p. 164 = Asín, p. 250.

²⁵ *Ibid.* *Mustaṣfā*, I, 36.

(a) The first technical meaning of *ḥasan* is whatever is fitting for any end in this life.²⁶

(b) More important is what is fitting only for the ends of the next life. This is the meaning adopted by *ahl as-sunna*, the orthodox Muslims. It is what scripture urges us to seek. Ghazālī does not emphasize relativity here, presumably because the ends and the means are assigned to everyone by scripture, not by individually chosen ends. And here he seems to be referring primarily to the ends of the agent, for this is what concerns most people in regard to the future life; (an exception might be made for preachers and teachers, but Ghazālī does not go into this question).²⁷

(c) *Ḥasan* can be extended to cover anything that agents are permitted to do.²⁸

(2) In a different usage, all God's acts are called *ḥasan*, although they have no personal end. *Ḥasan* is applied to His acts in the sense that they have no effect on Him and that they are not subject to blame, and that He is the unique Agent in His kingdom.²⁹

Qabīḥ (evil) does not receive separate analysis, but in the course of the account of good it is described as the opposite of good in its various meanings. Thus, for (1) general, evil is whatever is repugnant or inappropriate to an end, and so on, with mentions of its relative character. (Presumably there is no meaning (2) applicable to God).

These definitions of good and evil resemble that of *wājib*, at a less stringent level. Instead of referring to what is indispensable for life or salvation, like *wājib*, *ḥasan* refers simply to what is serviceable to an end, *qabīḥ* to what hinders attainment of an end.

The Mu'tazila had already objected that the meaning of good in common usage is not restricted to what promotes an end, nor the meaning of evil to what hinders attainment of an end. For people perform some acts as good on their intrinsic merits, when they cannot possibly foresee any advantage

²⁶ *Iqtīṣād*, p. 165 = Asín, p. 251. *Mustaṣfā*, I, 36. In both passages this meaning is submerged in the general meaning (1), but it needs to be made distinct for the sake of completeness. The distinction corresponds to *wājib* (2) (a) above and conforms with Ghazālī's regular scheme of classification.

²⁷ *Iqtīṣād*, p. 165 = Asín, p. 231. *Mustaṣfā*, I, 36.

²⁸ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 36. Cf. the Mu'tazilite definition of *ḥasan*, in Hourani, *Islamic rationalism*, pp. 39, 103.

²⁹ *Iqtīṣād*, p. 165 = Asín, pp. 251-52.

to themselves, and likewise they avoid other acts as evil even when they can see no disadvantage to themselves. As an instance of intrinsic good sought, someone gives help and comfort to a dying person with no expectation of reward; he does it simply because it is good in itself to help others in distress. As an instance of intrinsic evil avoided, a man without belief in religion, and thus in no fear of afterworld punishment, refuses to break a contract, even under threat of execution for his refusal; such a man regards breaking a contract as evil not merely in relation to ends, and avoids it as evil in itself.

Ghazālī seeks to rebut these instances by finding other explanations for them than a rational desire for good and a rational avoidance of evil. He explains the first instance by instinctive sympathy between human beings, or by love of praise, or by association of ideas which leads one to do in an abnormal situation what would serve an end in a normal one—in this case, where the patient would be expected to live and show gratitude. He explains the second instance by the agent's love of praise for honesty, or by association of ideas—breaking a contract is normally followed by harmful consequences. What Ghazālī is looking for in these explanations is self-interested or emotional causes for the acts mentioned, in order to avoid admitting attributes of good and evil intrinsic to the acts themselves and acceptable or rejectable to the rational mind regardless of personal ends.³⁰

It is strange to see the protagonist of religion strenuously denying intrinsic goodness to acts. But it is not accidental: his whole view of ethics is based on extrinsic relations of acts to good and evil. That is to say, an act is good when it promotes our ends; moreover, it does so not by direct instrumental causation but because God has decided upon rewards for certain acts and punishment for others. Such a view is coherent with the occasionalist theory of God's relation to the world, an Ash'arite doctrine which Ghazālī had learned from the books of Bāqillānī, Juwaynī and Ash'arī himself.

After the explanation of these concepts we shall be better able to follow Ghazālī's doctrines on the roles of God and man in turn in the ethical scheme of the world.

³⁰ *Iqtīṣād*, pp. 170-74 = Asín, pp. 257-63. Cf. *Mustaṣfā*, I, 37.

4. According to Ghazālī God has no ends,³¹ He is too Exalted and Holy for that.³² Or rather, more accurately, He has no needs, but He did create the world for the ends of revealing His power and realizing His will.³³ But these ends are not "interests" or "benefits" for Him. Consequently "good" cannot be applied to any of His acts in the usual sense, as explained above.

"Evil" is entirely relative to (interested) ends and cannot be applied to God's acts in any sense, even though He is the creator of things that are evil in relation to human ends.³⁴ Equally, He cannot do wrong; for wrongdoing (*ẓulm*) consists in dealing unjustly with the property of others, but He is the Lord and master who owns everything, no one else has any property for Him to deal unjustly with.³⁵

God is not under any prudential necessity (*wu-jūb*). This follows from the fact that He has no needs. It is illustrated by Ghazālī in several directions, as the opening passage of *Iqtīṣād*, Part 3, shows:

"The totality of acts of the Exalted is admissible (*jā'iza*) and none of them is describable as 'necessary'. We assert seven things in this part.

We assert [1] that it is admissible for God the Exalted not to impose obligations (*yukallifu*) on His servants, as well as [2] to impose on them unachievable obligations, [3] to cause pain to His servants without compensation and without [preceding] offence [by them]; [4] that it is not necessary for Him to heed what is most advantageous for them, or [5] to reward obedience or punish disobedience . . . and [7] that it is not necessary for God the Exalted to send prophets, and if He does send them it is not evil or absurd, but He is able to show their truthfulness by a miracle. All these assertions are based on investigation of the meaning of *wājib*, *ḥasan* and *qabīḥ*."³⁶

After the investigation of these concepts (as explained above, §§2-3) Ghazālī proceeds to justify

³¹ *Iqtīṣād*, p. 179 = Asín, p. 271.

³² *Mustaṣfā*, I, 39.

³³ *Iḥyā'*, I, 91.

³⁴ *Iḥyā'*, I, 112 = Tibawi, pp. 26 and 51.

³⁵ *Iqtīṣād*, p. 184 = Asín, pp. 276-77. *Iḥyā'*, I, 91 and 112 = Tibawi, pp. 25-26 and 49-50.

³⁶ *Iqtīṣād*, p. 160 = Asín, p. 245. The sixth proposition concerns man's knowledge of God and how it becomes *wājib* on man. Therefore it will be more appropriately discussed in a later section.

each of the seven propositions in order, with dialectic against Mu'tazilite objections.

(1) Ghazālī: God has no necessity to create creatures or, if He has done so, to impose obligations on them. The truth of this assertion follows from the definitions of *wājib* as that whose omission brings harm to the agent, or that whose contradictory is impossible. God does not expect harm from not creating; and there is no impossibility in His not creating, so long as we do not make the (needless) assumption that God has eternal knowledge and an eternal will for creation, in which case of course He cannot not create.³⁷

Mu'tazilite objection: these acts of God are obligatory on Him because they bring benefit to the creatures.

Ghazālī: Benefits to others do not imply necessity in any of the senses given.

(Here I have translated *wajaba* and its forms with two words, "obligatory" and "necessity," to bring out the disconnection between the arguments of the Mu'tazila and Ghazālī, based on different definitions).³⁸

Ghazālī goes on: In any case it is not obvious that creatures are benefitted by the present creation, still less by the burden of their obligations (*taklif*).

The Mu'tazila: Our obligations benefit us by making our Reward deserved and so more agreeable.

Ghazālī: Gratuitous aid from God, without previous burdens, would have been still more agreeable. In any case, any deserts that we have are entirely due to the gift of God.³⁹

(2) God is able to impose obligations beyond the capacity of His servants to fulfil. This is so because the essence of *taklif* is speech of a commander to an intelligent obligatee (*mukallaḥ*). There is no contradiction between this act and commanding the impossible. Nor is there any moral repugnance (*istiḡbāḥ*) to accepting the possibility that God would do that, because *qabīḥ* only applies to acts with personal ends and God is free of these.⁴⁰ Finally, there are recorded

cases of impossible obligations, such as the obligation to become a believer, when God knew that the person would not and could not become one.⁴¹

(3) God can make harmless animals, children and insane persons suffer and not compensate them. He certainly can do so, because he does it all the time. And He is under no necessity not to, because necessity as defined does not apply to Him. Nor is such action opposed to His wisdom, understood as His knowledge of the harmony of the world. Nor is He a wrongdoer in doing it, because wrongdoing is wholly inapplicable to Him, as He is not dealing with another's property and not under any Law or command.⁴²

(4) God does not have to do what is most advantageous (*al-aṣlah*) for His servants. This is demonstrated by repeating a well-known dialogue between Ash'arī and the Mu'tazilite Jubbā'i, concerning three children in the next world who discuss their fates with God; Ash'arī proved that it was impossible that all three of them could have received the most advantageous treatment.⁴³

(5) God is not under necessity to reward the obedient or punish sinners—except when He has promised to do so, for God cannot lie.⁴⁴

(7) Sending prophets to the human race is possible for God; it is neither impossible nor necessary. The Mu'tazilite claim that it is necessary has been disproved already (under (1) and (4)), derived from the definition of prudential *wājib* and its inapplicability to God's acts.⁴⁵ Its possibility for God is proved by analysis of the constituent acts. A "Brahmin" argument that it is impossible is refuted, then the rest of the section is taken up by apologetic arguments for the authenticity of the Prophet, against various rationalist objections.

From this account of *Iqtīṣād* the negative aspect of God's ethical relation to the world stands out: He is under no necessity to create His servants or to do any good to or for them (in the sense of *ḥasan* (1), serving their ends). In *Iḥyā'* we see

al-istiḡbāḥ is used before and afterwards in the same context.

⁴¹ *Iqtīṣād*, p. 181 = Asín, p. 273.

⁴² *Iqtīṣād*, pp. 182-84 = Asín, pp. 275-77.

⁴³ *Iqtīṣād*, pp. 182-84 = Asín, pp. 278-79. Also in *Iḥyā'*, I, 112 = Tibawī, pp. 26 and 50. For the dialogue see M. Fakhry, *A history of Islamic philosophy* (New York, 1970), pp. 229-30, with reference to Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-a'yān* (Cairo, 1949), III, 398.

⁴⁴ *Iqtīṣād*, pp. 185-89 = Asín, pp. 280-84.

⁴⁵ *Iqtīṣād*, p. 195 = Asín, p. 293.

³⁷ *Iqtīṣād*, pp. 174-75 = Asín, pp. 264-65. Cf. *Iḥyā'*, I, 112.

³⁸ *Iqtīṣād*, pp. 175-76 = Asín, p. 265. Cf. *Iḥyā'*, I, 111 = Tibawī, pp. 25 and 48.

³⁹ *Iqtīṣād*, pp. 176-77 = Asín, pp. 266-67.

⁴⁰ *Iqtīṣād*, pp. 178-79 = Asín, pp. 270-71. At p. 179, line 8, I read *al-istiḡbāḥ*, following Asín, instead of *al-istilāḥāt* or *al-istiḥsān* as in the mss. and Çubukçu edition.

a more positive view. God does good without necessity, and rewards believers for obedience by generosity, not by their deserts or any necessity.⁴⁶ He has created man and imposed obligations (*taklīf*) on him by His favor (*mutafaḍḍil*),⁴⁷ and He has poured out the bounties of nature for man's benefit, as the Qur'ān often reminds us. Still more has He favored His community the followers of truth with the guidance of prophecy.⁴⁸

How God causes good for men is described in a passage of *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, in the seventeenth discussion, "On natural causes". Here Ghazālī wants to show that even on a theory of natural causation such as that of the philosophers a primary cause will be needed, which is God. He argues: Let us concede to the philosophers that things have natures, so that when, for example, two similar pieces of cotton come into contact with fire both alike must burn. Still, these natures may change, and God can invest a piece of matter with different properties, so that it will behave in the way we call a prophetic miracle, such as recalling a dead man to life or changing a rod into a snake.

"If it is said [by the philosopher]: 'Does this event proceed from the soul of the prophet or [rather] from another principle at the suggestion of the prophet?' we answer: Likewise, do those events which *you* admit may happen by the force of the prophet's soul, such as a downpour of rain or a thunderbolt or an earthquake, arise from the prophet or [rather] from another principle?

"So what we say about this case is the same as what you say about the other case, and it is more fitting for both us and you to relate the event to God, either without a medium or by mediation of the angels. But the due time for its occurrence is when the prophet turns his attention to it and when the order of the good (*niẓām al-khayr*) is determined (*ta'ayyun*) in the event's appearance, to the end that the order of the divine Law may endure; all this gives a preponderance in favor of [its] existence. The thing in itself is possible, the Principle of it is bountiful and generous, but it issues from Him only when the need for its existence preponderates and the good becomes determined (*muta'ayyin*) in it; and the good becomes determined in

it only when the prophet needs it for confirmation of his prophecy in order to disseminate the good."⁴⁹

In this imaginary dialogue, even while moving over towards the philosophers' theory of natural causation for the sake of an *ad hominem* argument, Ghazālī states the causation of good in a way that accommodates the Muslim theologians' view of God, with a subtle difference from that of the philosophers. For the latter, following the Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition, the good *determines* the acts of God, who finally (if not implicitly already in Plato) becomes a part of the determined order of the universe. For Ghazālī God remains a person, the only completely free one, and He is the decider of every event. If He decides to do good for man, the good "is determined," "particularized," "instantiated" in the world on those occasions when it is most useful, but always by His gracious will.

The problem of predestination is suggested here but it will not be pursued. It is sufficient to note that, while Ghazālī supports predestination like any other Ash'arite theologian, he does not see it as incompatible with human choice and "ac-

⁴⁹ *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut, 1927), p. 289 = Eng. tr. S. A. Kamali (Lahore, 1963), pp. 191-92. Quoted by Ibn Rushd, *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut, 1930), p. 534 = Eng. tr. S. Van den Bergh (London, 1954), I, 327. "Good" here is *khayr*, not *ḥasan*. *khayr* is more metaphysical and more appropriate to the good of the universe; it is the word used by the philosophers, see *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, p. 159 = *Tahāfut al-tahāfut*, p. 308.

Van den Bergh understood *ta'ayyana* and *muta'ayyan* as active, and so translates, "the order of the good determines its appearance" and "the good only determines it." But *ta'ayyana* cannot be active in this sense, being a reflexive fifth form, and *tu'ayyinu* (second form, imperfect active, 3rd person fem.) will not work because *niẓām* is masculine. Moreover, Van den Bergh thus transformed Ghazālī into a Neoplatonist philosopher for whom the good determines what occurs in the world. But for Ghazālī God always remains the sole determiner, and this is allowed in my translation of this passage. (Kamali's translation here is more like a paraphrase and also makes the determinant other than God). *ta'ayyana* here means that the abstract *khayr* is particularized in a temporal occurrence.

I am indebted to Michael E. Marmura for valuable suggestions on the interpretation of this passage, as well as for other comments on the present article.

⁴⁶ *Iḥyā'*, I, 91.

⁴⁷ *Iḥyā'*, I, 110 = Tibawi, pp. 25 and 48.

⁴⁸ *Iḥyā'*, I, 105 = Tibawi, pp. 16 and 32-33, with quotations from Qur'ān, lxxviii, 6-16; ii, 164; lxxi, 15-18; lvi, 58-73.

quisition" of acts in a certain sense. With this attitude he feels able to assume the freedom and responsibility of man in all contexts that concern human decisions.⁵⁰

5. Within a study of this scope it is impossible to present Ghazālī's thought on the ends of man and the means to their attainment in all its richness and breadth.⁵¹ We shall content ourselves with a short general account of some formal elements that give structure to this thought.

The end of man as an individual is the attainment of happiness, and happiness is to be found overwhelmingly in the next life. This is known from the Qur'ān, which also gives descriptions of this happiness; but the descriptions are to be understood variously according to each person's capacity for understanding, ranging from literal to mystical.

The primary means to the end are of two kinds: external acts of obedience to the rules of conduct, revealed in scripture (with certain permitted extensions), and internal cultivation of the virtues of the soul. External acts are helpful both because obedience is rewarded directly for its own sake and because these acts contribute towards the acquisition of virtues. But the inner state of the heart is more important than any external acts in the eyes of God and more conducive to Reward. The virtues form a scale with levels, and at the highest point of the mystical virtues a few people can enjoy in this life a foretaste of the happiness of the hereafter.⁵²

None of the relations just described is causal. Acts do not cause virtues, as they do in Aristotle's doctrine of habituation. Acts do not cause rewards in the next life. And even virtues do not cause rewards, as they do in Hindu *karma* or Ibn Sīnā's eschatology. In all cases the rewards or the moral progress are bestowed by God through His grace. Here once again, God is the only cause and He is under no necessity. Religious enlightenment consists largely in understanding these truths.

⁵⁰ See L. Gardet, *Dieu et la destinée de l'homme* (Paris, 1967), pp. 74-77, for a discriminating analysis of Ghazālī's position on this problem.

⁵¹ A brave attempt at this vast undertaking has been made by A. I. Othman, *The concept of man in Islam in the writings of al-Ghazālī* (Cairo, 1960). Much ground is also covered in a systematic way by Sherif, *op. cit.* The *Iḥyā'* is an almost inexhaustible mine for research on the content of Ghazālī's ethical thought.

⁵² See Sherif, *op. cit.*, chs. 2-4.

The secondary means are those which are necessary for the effectiveness of the primary means to happiness. These are principally knowledge and motivation. The mission of the prophets is designed to provide these aids, for scripture gives both guidance and inspiration, both to acts of obedience and to the virtues. Finally, the Muslim community when it is working properly sustains the individual in various ways through its organization and leaders.^{52a}

Corresponding to the two human means to happiness are two practical sciences mentioned previously: *fiqh*, the ethics of action, and *akhlāq*, the ethics of character. Because of their fruits they are the most important kinds of knowledge for men below mystical knowledge, and it is necessary for everyone to study them. Their more advanced portions, however, the study of their principles, is not for everyone but for scholars in religion. The following sections give an account of the principles of the ethics of action, with special attention to their sources of knowledge.

6. Ghazālī's theory of ethics of action is a modified form of the theory of ethical voluntarism (or theistic subjectivism) which had already had a long history of powerful support in earlier Islam. The core of that theory was, on the negative side, that the value terms applied to action, such as *wājib*, *ḥasan* and *qabīḥ* have no meanings in themselves, hence their application to action cannot be known by natural human intellect. The positive side was that these terms have meanings related to the commands and prohibitions of the divine Law (*shar'*), so that their application can be learned exclusively by studying that Law. The opponents whose position is denied were, of course, the Mu'tazila with their ethical objectivism and rationalism; voluntarism had been developed in reaction against them by all the more conservative spokesmen of Islam, who referred to themselves as "the people of tradition and the Community" (*ahl as-sunna wa l-jamā'a*).

From an early time Muslims who understood the overwhelming power of God as the chief message of the Qur'ān could not admit that man could ever work out by his own intellect, without aid from scripture, what was right and what was wrong in the world, still less what was obligatory for God to do or not to do with His creation. The

^{52a} A full account of Ghazālī's political theory is given by H. Laoust, *La politique de Ghazālī* (Paris, 1970).

Traditionists naturally felt this way since the Mu'tazilite claim undermined the utility of their collections. More weightily, the schools of law inclined in this direction increasingly, until voluntarism as a theory of jurisprudence was worked out with the most thoroughgoing logic by Shāfi'ī (d. 820). Ghazālī's Shafī'ism is apparent in many details of his ethics of action. On the side of theology, voluntarism found a champion in Ash'arī (873-935) and his successors, but we do not find extensive argument in the surviving works of the school before Juwaynī (1028-85), who disputes the Mu'tazilite theory at some length.⁵³ Ghazālī develops the position of his master Juwaynī on this question, enriching it with his broader viewpoint on Islam and his more lively style of exposition.

Ghazālī in this sphere of ethics is still reacting chiefly against Mu'tazilite rationalism. This is surprising since the Mu'tazila were no longer a living, fighting school in his lifetime in Baghdad or the cities of Iran and Syria where he studied and wrote.⁵⁴ The main reason is probably that the Mu'tazilite theory was the only articulate theory that could be set in contrast to the prevailing trend of Islamic thought on ethics in theological and juristic circles. It raised primary issues, which could not have been addressed through less fundamental discussions with the other schools of law or theology. As for the philosophers, whose position was rationalistic and objectivistic from a somewhat different viewpoint from that of the Mu'tazila, Ghazālī ignores them, choosing to concentrate on their metaphysics in *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*. It is possible that he did not find in the writings of Fārābī or Ibn Sīnā any considerable passages on the points at issue in ethical philosophy, on which he could focus an attack. Moreover, in his principal writings on the ethics of action he was addressing a milieu of theologians and lawyers who were little interested in philosophy.

Ghazālī's longest discussions of the subject occur in three books which constitute his major contributions to the three sciences mentioned previously: *Iqtisād* on *kalām*, *Mustasfā* on the princi-

ples of *fiqh* and *Ihyā'* on *akhlāq*. These books were written over a period of fourteen eventful years in the author's life. *Iqtisād* was written in 1095, probably in the first half of the year, before Ghazālī entered the acute stage of his personal crisis which led to his conversion to Sufism and departure from Baghdad.⁵⁵ The second book of *Ihyā'*, on the articles of religion, where he discusses this side of ethics, dates from his residences in Jerusalem and Damascus, between the beginning of 1096 and some time in 1099.⁵⁶ The *Mustasfā* can be dated exactly: it was completed on August 5, 1109.⁵⁷ In spite of the intervals of years between these books, no differences in their views on the ethics of action are noticeable, and differences in presentation and range of topics can easily be explained by the varying purposes of the books. Several of the arguments are found in two or all three of them, in more or less similar forms. It will therefore be permissible and instructive to conflate the materials from the three accounts into a single systematic account. A few points can be added from *Mi'yār al-ilm* and *Munqidh*.

7. It is time now to turn our attention to Ghazālī's theory of ethical knowledge, which shall be our central subject. How should the individual acquire knowledge of the *wājib* for him, of his good and his evil? Bearing in mind the definitions of these terms and the ends and means of man as explained, we can see that these are questions about a man's knowledge of his true interests, i.e., of what he should do and become to attain happiness in the life of the next world. Such questions can be posed either with regard to a particular choice, how to act in the situation that confronts one immediately, or with regard to a long-range policy for life.

The form of ethical question that Ghazālī seems to consider in this context may be presented as follows. We want to bring each act and attitude under a general rule (*ḥukm*), a judgement of

⁵³ *Irshād*, pp. 257-301. See G. F. Hourani, "Juwaynī's criticisms of Mu'tazilite ethics," *The Muslim World*, 65 (1975), pp. 161-73.

⁵⁴ See G. Makdisi, *Ibn 'Aqīl et la résurgence de l'Islam traditionaliste au XI^e siècle* (Damascus, 1963) on the decline of the Mu'tazila in Baghdad under Hanbalite and caliphal pressure.

⁵⁵ M. Bouyges and M. Allard, *Essai de chronologie des œuvres de al-Ghazali (Algazel)* (Beirut, 1959), pp. 33-34. G. F. Hourani, "The chronology of Ghazālī's writings," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 79 (1959), p. 228. A. Badawī, *Mu'allafāt al-Ghazālī* (Cairo, 1961), pp. 87-88.

⁵⁶ Bouyges and Allard, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-43. Hourani, *op. cit.*, pp. 229-30.

⁵⁷ Bouyges and Allard, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-75. Hourani, *op. cit.*, p. 232. Badawī, *op. cit.*, pp. 216-18.

normal value for a type of act or attitude, so that we may have for our guidance a steady system of such rules to cover all occasions. The main question for an ethical theory of knowledge is, therefore, What are the sources of knowledge of rules?

He discusses this question in terms of a choice between two large sources, which between them cover all alternatives: independent reason and revelation. By "independent" reason we mean precisely any reasoning that proceeds without any help from revelation. This is what is often called simply *ʿaql*, "reason," in the well understood convention of the Islamic sciences. It is contrasted with *naql*, "tradition," which covers revelation in its direct and derivative forms, also with *sharʿ*, scriptural texts and traditions viewed as sources for *aḥkāṁ*. But reason also has dependent uses, when it serves to draw out implications from *sharʿ* in certain ways to be specified below.

Now the main drive of Ghazālī's ethical theory of knowledge can be stated in two short sentences: Ethical knowledge is not derivable from independent reason; it is derivable entirely from revelation. The negative side will be elaborated in §§8-11, the affirmative in §12.

8. The denial that ethical rules can be known by independent reason is made repeatedly by Ghazālī. Although his entire contemporary milieu of Sunnite intellectual society agreed with him on this point, he insists on it against the arguments of past Muʿtazilite scholars. Evidently his strong feelings on this question arose from the threat of rationalism to the position of the Qurʾān and Traditions as the unique and indispensable sources of all ethical knowledge. Ghazālī's entire loyalty was to these sources and their supreme Source. Even if there were almost no living Muʿtazila within the central lands of Islam, their books survived and expressed the principal direct opposing view to what had now become orthodoxy on this question. But before we come to a discussion of his arguments against them it will be well to dispose of another opposing view, that of the philosophers.

Objectivist theories of ethics are nowadays commonly divided into teleological and deontological, and the theories of the Islamic philosophers and the Muʿtazila fall respectively into these two divisions. In a teleological theory the value of acts is considered to be determined by their efficacy in promoting ends. Ancient Greek philo-

sophers from Socrates onwards took as their starting point the ends of the individual and concentrated on his good, with little attention to obligation. They assumed that there is a natural comprehensive end for everyone, which is happiness, and attempted to show how all less comprehensive ends were either constituents of happiness or means to it. The main thrust of their arguments was that virtuous living is the key to happiness: but not because of any direct external rewards it gives—experience shows the contrary—but because constant activity of this sort purifies the soul and makes it delight in such activity more and more. So much is common to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. But Plato went further, and in the more speculative form of his "myths" suggested that purity of soul is carried over to a future immortal life where it brings to its owner everlasting bliss. Through the combined influences of Plato, Neoplatonism and Islam this last doctrine was inevitably taken up by Islamic philosophers. Ibn Sīnā, for instance, worked out in clinical fashion just how purity of soul would cause happiness and impurity misery in the future life.⁵⁸

Now Ghazālī does not refute this theory, so far as I know. He is silent about it, perhaps because in his one book against the philosophers, *Tahāfut al-jalāsifa*, he concentrates on their metaphysics and physical philosophy, attacking twenty of their doctrines in these spheres. He is not entirely averse to ethical philosophy, which he considers to have been taken from the Šūfīs, some of whom must have existed in every age;⁵⁹ but the philosophers have muddled their pure sources and their ethics presents dangers to indiscriminating readers.⁶⁰ He himself makes use of Platonic and Aristotelian schemes of the virtues, with Islamic adaptations of his own.⁶¹ He, too, shares with the philosophers a common point of some generality, in holding a teleological theory of ethics. We have seen how his theory is based on his definitions of *wājib*, *ḥasan* and *qabīḥ* as related to ends, principally the ends of the agent.

⁵⁸ *Najāṭ*, ed. M. S. Kurdī (Cairo, 1938), pp. 291-98 = Eng. tr. A. J. Arberry, *Avicenna on theology* (London, 1951), pp. 64-76.

⁵⁹ *Munqidh*, p. 100.

⁶⁰ *Munqidh*. pp. 100-07.

⁶¹ See Sherif, *op. cit.*, ch. 2, and Ghazālī's *Mizān al-ʿamal*.

Yet, in spite of all these points, it is certain that he was opposed to their teleological ethics. And, in spite of his silence in answering them, it will be instructive to see why he must have opposed them. The opposition turns around two points, their different metaphysics of causality and the prominence of the after-life in Islamic theology.

The core of Greek ethics is an attempt to demonstrate causal relations, showing how certain ways of life directly cause certain changes in the subject (as well as in other people through education or corruption); and such explanations are extended, with some hesitation, to the states of souls in the next life. The entire construction is based on the assumption of natural causality which was shared by all the Greek and Muslim philosophers. But Ghazālī rejects natural causality and, as stated above (§5), he applies this rejection to every stage in the chain of "means"⁶² and ends. Let us make these assertions specific in connection with ethical knowledge. Firstly, we do not know how acts operate on the character of the subject; this is a mystery, and *ʿilm al-akhlāq* had better be expounded in terms of divine assistance. Secondly, we have no clue to how virtuous acts lead to rewards in the next life; we only know through revelation that they do so in fact, owing to divine mercy, and it is presumptuous to think like Ibn Sīnā that they must do so as an effect of the merits of human acts. And thirdly, we likewise do not understand how virtuous character leads to rewards, for similar reasons.

Further, because causal connections are absent or hidden, we do not even know by any process of independent teleological reasoning *which* acts improve character, *which* acts bring rewards and *which* dispositions of character bring rewards. All we know about these facts is known from scripture.

9. A teleological ethics different from that of the philosophers would have been possible for the Muʿtazila along the following lines. The end of man is happiness, and this results from the rewards of God at the Judgement. Since justice is an attribute of God, His rewards follow His known character; and, although it is theoretic-

cally within His power to reward evildoers, it is inconceivable that He would do so. Thus, since man also knows rationally which acts are good and which evil, he can attain practical certainty about the means to his end. Here is the closest thing to causality, although it is not natural but mediated through God's will which is known from revelation.

However, the Muʿtazila chose to define the main terms of ethics in ways which avoid teleology. Muʿtazilite ethics is deontological, because it explains *wājib*, *ḥasan* and *qabīḥ* not entirely by relations to ends, but sometimes at least as characters of acts themselves. *Wājib* as an attribute of acts is defined as "that for the omission of which the agent deserves blame," *qabīḥ* as "that for doing which the agent deserves blame," and so on. The blame can be known by the intelligence of any rational person, often—as in the cases of lying and injustice—without reference to consequences.

Thus the Muʿtazila developed an ethical theory that was original in relation to that of Greek philosophy. In the paucity of knowledge about the beginnings of Muʿtazilite theology we may speculate why their ethics took this sharp turn from teleology to deontology. Probably the deepest reason lies in the new prominence of obligation in Islamic ethical thinking, as compared with Greek. This prominence is due to the relations of God and man as the Qurʾān establishes them: relations of contract, in which God imposes burdens and promises rewards, relations of law in which God legislates and man obeys, relations of justice in which every man is to receive what he deserves. In such relations obligation in the proper sense occupies a central role. The Muʿtazila took it seriously. This is not the place to estimate their success in analysing it, but we may say this much in their favor: that at least they did not try to dissolve it by explaining *wājib* in terms of the interest of the subject. In discussing *wājib* they were discussing "obligatory," and continued to do so until their school faded away.

Their central position on ethics is that man can know some of his obligations, his good and evil too, by the independent use of his reason, before and without the aid of scripture. The basic ontological assertion that makes these value attributes accessible to human reason is their objectivity: they are real attributes belonging to individual acts and classes of acts. In the developed Muʿtazilite ethics as found in ʿAbd al-Jabbār (c. 935-

⁶² It may be questioned whether we should speak of "means" at all in discussing an occasionalist theory. But I shall continue to do so for convenience, with the understanding that these "means" are not strictly causes but only occasions for God's favor or disfavor.

1025), objectivity is worked into a complex and flexible theory. *Prima facie* values of different aspects of an act should first be judged separately, then these aspects should be weighed against each other to produce an overall judgement. This process will lead to varying conclusions in varying situations. But the process is not possible in all cases, for there are certain classes of act which have invariable value characters, regardless of other aspects. For example, all acts of *ẓulm* (wrongdoing, injustice, oppression), useless acts, ungrateful acts and (probably) all lies are evil, and are known to be such by all rational persons. These are universal rules, and they give an absolutist dimension to a part of the objective facts of ethical value.⁶³

Now Ghazālī does not argue directly with the feature of objectivity as such in the Muʿtazilite ethical concepts, apart from occasional sweeping denials that these concepts have any objective meanings. His attack is concentrated against the partial and inessential feature of absoluteness in some of the rules, and the main thrust of his attack is that there are no universal ethical rules (*aḥkām*) knowable by independent reason. Thus he makes the issue one of relativism versus absolutism, rather than (as it should have been) of subjectivism versus objectivism. This formulation becomes clearest in a passage of *Mustasfā*. After he has given his own relativistic definitions of *ḥasan*, he states the Muʿtazilite objection: We do not deny these meanings, but there are also some acts good or evil by essence, agreed on by all intelligent people without regard to relative conditions, e.g., wrongdoing, lying, unbelief and ignorance.⁶⁴

Ghazālī's refutations of rational universal rules occur in various places in his works and take different forms, with some overlap of arguments between different works. In the following account I shall attempt a systematic exposition of his arguments according to their forms, bringing together under each one what he says in different places.

According to Ghazālī, the claim of rational universal rules fails several tests that it should meet if it is to be accepted.

(1) All proposed rational rules fail in universality. "Killing is evil" is not universal, for the Muʿta-

zila themselves immediately qualify the judgement with exceptions: killing is not evil when it is punishment for crime, or when the victim is to be compensated in the next life.⁶⁵ (This is an unfair argument because the Muʿtazila did not claim that killing is universally evil. All Ghazālī can show is that their rule about it is complicated). "Lying is evil" is not universal, because it is permitted and even required to lie to save a prophet's life.⁶⁶ "Spreading peace is good" is not universal; it is untrue in circumstances of dire necessity.⁶⁷ These and similar propositions are only generally true: they are thus not fit to be major premises in demonstrative practical syllogisms, but are only suitable for conjectural use in legal arguments.⁶⁸

(2) The supposed universal ethical truths fail to pass the subjective test of indubitable certainty which is required for all intuited first principles of the intellect. Here Ghazālī draws upon a typical Avicennan argument: If you were to come into existence fully rational but without experience of society or instruction, having only sense experience and images, you would be able to doubt such premises as "Killing a man is evil," or at least to hesitate about them, but you could not doubt "Negation and affirmation cannot be true of the same state of a thing" or "2 is greater than 1."⁶⁹

"These judgements are such, that if one were to confine himself to his pure reason, his faculties of estimation and sense, the mind (with the aid of reason and sense alone) would never arrive at any of them. Rather, the mind makes these judgements only as the result of accidental causes that confirm and fix them in the soul."⁷⁰

What these accidental causes are, in Ghazālī's opinion, will be described in the next section.

(3) Any proposition that is intuited immediately or necessarily (*bi ḍ-ḍarūra*) must command un-

⁶⁵ *Mustasfā*, I, 36-37.

⁶⁶ *Mustasfā*, I, 37. Cf. *Mi'yār al-ʿilm* (Cairo: Kurdistan Press, 1329 h.), p. 113.

⁶⁷ *Mi'yār*, p. 113.

⁶⁸ *Mi'yār*, pp. 112, 114. See M. E. Marmura. "Ghazālī on ethical premises," *The Philosophical Forum* (New Series), 1 (1969), pp. 393-403, a translation and analysis of the relevant passage of *Mi'yār*.

⁶⁹ *Mi'yār*, p. 114; taken from Ibn Sīnā, *al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbihāt*, ed. S. Dunyā (Cairo, 1953), I, 400-01.

⁷⁰ *Mi'yār*, p. 112. Quotations from *Mi'yār* are as translated by Marmura.

⁶³ For details see Hourani, *Islamic rationalism*, especially pp. 29-33, 62-81.

⁶⁴ *Mustasfā*, I, 36.

animous agreement. But the suggested rational truths of ethics fail to do so, for important Islamic schools disagree with them. The Mu'tazila retort that the disagreement is on the theory of ethical knowledge (such as the question here at issue), but not on first order normative propositions, which are what they consider rational. But this is untrue, says Ghazālī, there are also disagreements in normative knowledge, for example on the wrongness of causing pain to animals: this is claimed by the Mu'tazila as known by reason, but God in scripture has revealed approval for it, in animal sacrifices.⁷¹

(4) But even unanimity is only a necessary not a sufficient condition for proof of immediate knowledge. For instance, belief in the existence of God is almost universal, but even if it were completely so it would still not be immediate.⁷² The reason (not mentioned here) is that it needs to be demonstrated, it is "acquired" (*muktasab*) not "immediate" (*ḍarūrī*).

(5) If *wājib* is understood in the "correct" Ghazalian sense of "necessary to produce benefits," it is impossible for reason to demonstrate this kind of *wujūb* for any of the Mu'tazilite rules. Ghazālī expounds his refutation lucidly in *Mustaṣfā*, proceeding by a definition and a series of dilemmas.

"Gratitude to a benefactor is not necessary by reason, contrary to the Mu'tazila. The proof of this is that 'necessary' (*al-wājib*) has no meaning but what God the Exalted has made necessary (*awjabahu*) and commanded with threat of punishment for omission; so if there is no revelation what is the meaning of 'necessity'? This argument is confirmed as follows:

"Reason should make gratitude necessary either for some benefit or for none. It is impossible that reason necessitates it for no benefit, for that would be useless and foolish. If it is for a benefit, it must either be for the One served, but that is impossible since He is too Exalted and Holy to have ends, or for the servant. The servant's benefit must either be in this world or in the next. But there is no benefit to him in this world, rather he is [only] wearied by study and thought, knowledge and gratitude, and deprived by them of

desires and pleasures. And there is no benefit [known by reason] in the next world, for Reward is bestowed as a favor from God, and is known by His promise and His announcement; and if He did not announce it how would it be known that there is to be Reward?"⁷³

Ghazālī's refutation is unconvincing to a detached observer, for it assumes his own definition of *wājib*, as stated, and his own theodicy in which Reward for human desert cannot be inferred from the divine nature. But on their own definition of *wājib* in the sense of "obligatory" the Mu'tazila would not have to prove that reason sees the *benefit* of acts to agents, but only their *obligatoriness*, a concept that Ghazālī does not seem to grasp at any stage (and we must admit after the struggles of modern ethical philosophy that it is a puzzling concept). But even if the Mu'tazila were required to prove a rational knowledge of the otherworldly *benefits* of fulfilling obligations, they could do so on their own theodicy by inferring Rewards for human desert from the justice of God in His acts, a justice that sprang from His nature and was to be understood in the same sense as human justice.

What all this shows is that Ghazālī should have gone deeper into a discussion of the divergent assumptions of the Mu'tazila and himself. Perhaps he did so elsewhere in his extensive writings, but he did not bring any such discussions to bear on this particular argument. The absence of living challengers was taking its toll on the level of argument of Sunnite theologians, as it had done already on that of Ghazālī's predecessor Juwaynī. We are far from the laborious and seemingly interminable dialectic of 'Abd al-Jabbār a century earlier, with its painstaking efforts to answer every criticism spoken, written or imaginable.

10. Ghazālī is not content to combat intellectually the error of ethical absolutism. He also shows a great interest in explaining its causes,⁷⁴ intel-

⁷³ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 39. Cf. *Iḥyā'*, I, 113 = Tibawi, pp. 26-27 and 51-52; *Iqtiṣād*, pp. 189-91 = Asín, pp. 285-88.

⁷⁴ It may be wondered how Ghazālī as an occasionalist can speak of "causes" other than God, as he does here and frequently elsewhere in his writings. Presumably if challenged he would have said that he was using the conventional language, and that the true relation between two events that we call "cause" and "effect" is always a constant conjunction caused by God, according to the doctrine of 'āda (God's "habit").

⁷¹ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 37, Cf. Juwaynī, *Irshād*, p. 261. In answering the same objection Juwaynī denies the distinction between two levels of knowledge, but falls into fallacies in his answer. Ghazālī composes a more direct reply by pointing to normative disagreements.

⁷² *Mustaṣfā*, I, 37.

lectual and emotional, and suggests a number of them. He addresses himself to this question in three passages in *Mi'yār*, *Iqtisād* and *Mustaşfā*. There is naturally some overlap between these passages. I shall take *Mi'yār* as the primary account, since it is the earliest and the most elaborate, but some important points from the other two texts will be added.

In *Mi'yār* Ghazālī gives a long list of examples of ethical rules "commonly believed" (*mash-hūrāt*) to be universal:

"These are exemplified by our judging it good to spread peace, feed others, bestow largess on kinsfolk, adhere to truthfulness in speech, observe justice in legal suits and judgements; and by our judging it bad that one should harm humans, kill animals, disseminate slander—that husbands should acquiesce in the licentiousness of their wives, that benevolence should be repaid with ingratitude and oppression."⁷⁵

After denying that these are rational judgements he claims that they are due to "accidental causes" and lists five.

(1) Tenderness of heart, a quality of innate disposition. This explains the belief that slaughtering animals is evil according to reason. Only scripture has turned most people away from this belief by recommending animal sacrifice.⁷⁶

(2) Pride, another inborn quality of temperament. This explains most husbands' jealousy of their wives' intimacy with other men, although the husbands believe their disapproval is an immediate rational judgement. But husbands in some societies, and adulterers everywhere, regard such conduct as good. So neither of these contradictory judgements can be a rational intuition, since they fail the test of unanimity.⁷⁷

(3) Love of conciliation and co-operation. This explains belief in the absolute goodness of spreading peace and the absolute badness of ingratitude. But others incline towards conflict and regard it as better than peace. Without any feelings one way or the other, "their minds in their natural

state (*fiṭra*) would make no judgements about these things in terms of goodness and badness."⁷⁸

(4) Religious instruction, from childhood on. Beliefs gained from repeated instruction become so ingrained that they come to appear rational, e.g., the beliefs that kneeling and prostration in prayer, animal sacrifice, are good. Intellect alone would make no judgement.⁷⁹

By his choice of examples here Ghazālī shows that he is quite indifferent to any need for rational justification of such beliefs; he is confident in the sufficiency of their scriptural justification.

(5) "The induction (*istiqrā'*) of numerous particulars; for, when a thing is found in many of its circumstances conjoined with another thing, it is thought that it is conjoined with it absolutely." For example, spreading peace is good in most situations, so that one forgets that it is bad in cases of dire necessity. Likewise truthfulness is nearly always good, so one forgets that it is evil to disclose truthfully the location of a prophet hiding from enemies seeking to slay him. There are conditions for the goodness of truthfulness; the error of absolutism arises from ignoring them.⁸⁰

Two further causes of error are mentioned in other books.

(6) Inability to accept the interests of others as valid grounds for relative goodness. This leads us to describe as absolutely evil what may be good for the ends of another.⁸¹ This is the typical fault of egoists: they call evil absolutely and essentially whatever does not suit their own purposes.⁸²

(7) Imaginative associations of ideas, leading us to react in uniform ways to what is associated with something regarded as usually good or evil—as when a person with a horror of snakes shrinks

⁷⁵ *Mi'yār*, p. 113.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Cf. *Iqtisād*, p. 167 = Asín, pp. 253-54, on the effects of education and repetition in this context.

⁸⁰ *Mi'yār*, pp. 113-14. Cf. *Iqtisād*, p. 167 = Asín, pp. 253-54; *Mustaşfā*, I, 37. When Muḥammad and Abū Bakr were hiding in a cave in the course of their emigration from Mecca to Madīna, Abu Bakr's daughter Asma denied knowledge of their whereabouts to Abū Jahl and other men of Quraysh who were searching for them: Ibn Ishāq, *Sira*, ed. F. Wüstenfeld, *Das Leben Muhammed's* (Göttingen, 1858-60), I, 329-31 = Eng. tr. A. Guillaume, *The life of Muḥammad* (London, 1955), pp. 224-25.

⁸¹ *Mustaşfā*, I, 37.

⁸² *Iqtisād*, p. 166 = Asín, p. 253.

⁷⁵ *Mi'yār*, p. 118.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* Ghazālī digresses here to a discussion of how the Mu'tazila try to justify the scriptural ruling rationally and how their attempts fail. There is no need to present this discussion here. Cf. *Iqtisād*, pp. 182-84 - Asín, pp. 275-77, and *Iḥyā'*, I, 112 for other discussions of harm to animals.

⁷⁷ *Mi'yār*, p. 113. Cf. *Iqtisād*, p. 164 = Asín, p. 250.

from a twisting rope of mottled color.⁸³ Such associations explain the prejudices of Mu'tazilite and Ash'arite theologians, their repulsion against theories which they recognize as coming from the other camp.⁸⁴

All these causes of error may be resumed under two heads. One is incomplete induction, leading us to universalize what is only generally the case. The other is emotion, distorting our rational judgments. These two are not exclusive of each other but interact. There is much of interest in Ghazālī's remarks on this subject. But attempts to psycho-analyse one's opponents are laden with dangers of misunderstanding except in the hands of an unusually sympathetic critic, which Ghazālī was not in regard to the Mu'tazila.

11. There remains for consideration one argument for rational obligation which the Mu'tazila considered a trump card, and which Ghazālī is at pains to refute. This is the argument that there must be at least one obligation known by reason prior to revelation: the obligation to inquire into (*an-naẓar fī*) the authenticity of the prophet as shown by the evidence of his miracles. This obligation is the starting point for accepting scripture as authentic, and therefore for accepting all obligations derived from scripture. But the obligation to accept scripture and its obligations obviously cannot be derived from scripture prior to its acceptance as scripture.

Ghazālī's answer to this challenge⁸⁵ starts from his own definition of *wujūb* as strong preferability; the *wājib* is anything the neglect of which is seriously harmful to one's real interest. Now since God has set the conditions for salvation and made them known through scripture, it is objectively to everyone's interest to inquire into scripture, and therefore to take the first step by inquiring whether the prophet's miracles are a proof of his mission being authentic and his message of divine origin. Somewhat in the spirit of Pascal's wager, Ghazālī says it only needs ordinary prudence for anyone to take this step. It is as stupid to omit it by asking to be convinced of a "necessity" in advance of inquiry, as for a man, warned of a

lion at his back, to answer "I shall not look behind unless I am first convinced of your truthfulness in warning me,"⁸⁶ or for an invalid offered medicine to tell the doctor "I shall not take it unless I know whether it is necessary by reason or by your word."⁸⁷ In fact God has provided all we need to lead us to an intelligent decision: a prophet to warn us, miracles to back his authority, our intellect to understand the warnings and grasp the significance of the miracle, and our natural inclination to motivate us to avoid harm and seek reward.

"The true formulation is to say that necessity (*al-wujūb*) is preferability (*ar-rajjāh*), the necessitator (*al-mūjib*) is God the Exalted, the informer is the Messenger, while that which instructs us on what is prohibited and the truthfulness of the Messenger is reason. What urges us to follow the way of salvation is nature."⁸⁸

Ghazālī adds that if the Mu'tazilite circular argument were valid it would apply equally if intellect were the necessitating force: "If one does not inquire he does not know the rational necessity to inquire, and if he does not know the necessity to inquire he does not inquire."⁸⁹

It may be objected that Ghazālī has based his reply to the Mu'tazila on his own definition of *wājib*, which is not theirs and is false anyway. However, his reply points to a valid reply even if *wājib* is understood as "obligatory": that there is no need for anyone to prove that inquiry into miracles and scripture is obligatory before embarking on such an inquiry. All one needs is a natural concern for our own interest. Thus the circle of "an obligation to learn about obligation" is broken by denying the Mu'tazilite assumption of an initial obligation.

12. The affirmative side of Ghazālī's theory of knowledge of the rules of action will now be considered.

⁸⁶ *Iḥyā'*, I, 113 = Tibawi, pp. 27 and 52. *Mustaṣfā*, I, 40.

⁸⁷ *Iqtīṣād*, p. 193 = Asín, p. 290.

⁸⁸ *Iqtīṣād*, p. 195 = Asín, p. 292. *Mustaṣfā*, I, 40. Further points in Ghazālī's exposition: (1) God gives man the possibility of knowledge; He does not need to give actual knowledge (*Mustaṣfā*, I, 40). (2) Reason by itself does not motivate, inclinations are necessary for this (*Iqtīṣād*, p. 194 = Asín, p. 291. *Mustaṣfā*, I, 40). 'Abd al-Jabbār defined motives entirely as intellectual states (Hourani, *Islamic rationalism*, pp. 82-84).

⁸⁹ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 40.

⁸³ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 38.

⁸⁴ *Iqtīṣād*, pp. 167-69 = Asín, pp. 254-57. Cf. pp. 171-72 = Asín, pp. 258-62.

⁸⁵ *Iqtīṣād*, pp. 191-95 = Asín, pp. 288-92. *Mustaṣfā*, I, 40. Less fully in *Iḥyā'*, I, 113 = Tibawi, pp. 27 and 52-53.

The bare fact that the rules for action are all derived from revelation or authorized extensions of it is one of Ghazālī's most basic principles, and is stated by him in many places.⁹⁰ But the theory of the sources and methods of knowledge of rules is the subject of the science of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, consequently the details are dealt with principally in *Mustaṣfā*. The theory follows the classical lines of the Shafi'ite school, and the book is less notable for originality than for lucid and attractive exposition, a quality that has kept it in the curriculum of Islamic law studies to the present time. There will be no need to enter into much detail, but only to note a few salient features.

The rules of action are produced in the first place by three kinds of "proofs" (sing. *dalil*, pl. *adilla*): those found in the Qur'ān, the *sunna* and consensus.⁹¹ Concerning the authority of the Qur'ān no question ever arose.⁹² Previous scriptures are disallowed as sources of proofs.⁹³ The *sunna* is limited to the acts, words and silences of the Prophet Muḥammad.⁹⁴ Following the Shafi'ite tradition, the *sunna* of the Companions is not accepted, for they disagreed and were not infallible.⁹⁵ Consensus (*ijmā'*), while not being a textual source like the first two, is accepted as a source of proof on the authority of the Qur'ān and *sunna*, especially of the *sunna*, which is clearer on this matter.⁹⁶ Consensus is to be defined as that of competent scholars, not of the public at large.⁹⁷

The fourth "root" (*aṣl*) of the Law is analogy (*qiyās*), but this is not a "proof" or "source" (*madrak*) in the sense in which the first three are: it is rather a method of drawing out the meaning to be understood (*al-ma'qūl*) in the sacred texts or the statement of consensus.⁹⁸ So here Ghazālī

is moving into the sphere of reason. As expected in the Shafi'ite tradition, the use of reason in law is carefully restricted with a view to making it entirely derivative or dependent on the revealed sources, never independent by having its own sources in natural experience and intuition. Compared with the *muqallid* who merely follows authorities, the *mujtahid* is the scholar who is competent to exercise his own judgement. But he has no choice in deciding the rules of action, they are all given in revelation; his function is merely to infer them where they are not obvious.⁹⁹

The method most proper to *ijtihād* is analogy based on revelation (*qiyās shar'ī*). The starting point must be a rule (*ḥukm*) known exclusively from scripture, and this must not be distorted by enunciation of a divine reason (*'illa shar'iyya*) at this stage. The *'illa* is to be inferred from the original rule, through understanding this rule in its context; then the final operation of *qiyās* consists in applying the *'illa* to give a rule for cases analogous to the original case in respects relevant to action. An *'illa* is not indispensable for every rule, since God can issue rules without reasons; but when it is present the human race is allowed to discover it and use it to extend its knowledge of the divine rules.¹⁰⁰

There is, however, another method of reasoning which falls partly outside analogy: consideration of social interests (*istiṣlāḥ*). Because it is on the frontiers of the permissible use of reason, it will be illuminating to examine how Ghazālī deals with it and to see how far, or how little, he is willing to stretch those frontiers.

Ghazālī begins his examination of *istiṣlāḥ* in *Mustaṣfā* by distinguishing three possible relations of human interest (*maṣlaḥa*) to the Law, with a view to isolating where the real problem lies:

(a) Where the Law provides evidence for a *maṣlaḥa* being used in revelation as an *'illa*, it is legitimate to draw analogies from it. Ghazālī gives a familiar example. The prohibition of wine leads by analogy to the prohibition of all other intoxicating drinks,

pp. 57-88. This valuable article uses other juristic works of Ghazālī besides *Mustaṣfā*:

al-Mankhūl fī uṣūl al-fiqh (Damascus, 1970), *Shifā' al-ghalīl fī bayān masālik al-ta'līl* (Baghdād, 1971), "Asās al-qiyās," MS. Beṣir Ağa (Süleimaniye) 650, fols. 178-201.

⁹⁹ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 144-45.

¹⁰⁰ See Brunschvig, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76, 83-84.

⁹⁰ E.g., *Iqtiṣād*, p. 160 = Asín, p. 245; p. 192 = p. 289. *Iḥyā'*, I, 91; 113 = Tibawi, pp. 26-27 and 51-53. *Mustaṣfā*, I, 35-36.

⁹¹ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 5 and 64-127.

⁹² *Mustaṣfā*, I, 64-83.

⁹³ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 132-35.

⁹⁴ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 83-110.

⁹⁵ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 135-37.

⁹⁶ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 110-27. See G. F. Hourani, "The basis of authority of consensus in Sunnite Islam," *Studia Islamica*, 21 (1964), pp. 25 ff.

⁹⁷ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 115.

⁹⁸ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 144-45 and II, 54-101. See R. Brunschvig, "Valeur et fondement du raisonnement juridique par analogie d'après al-Gazālī," *Studia Islamica*, 34 (1971),

"because they are forbidden in order to preserve the intellect which is the pivot of imposed obligation (*taklif*), and the Law's prohibition of wine is the proof for observing this interest."¹⁰¹

Here the preservation of uninterrupted mental sanity in man, so that he may always understand his obligations, is the *'illa* or divine reason for the prohibition of wine, as is made clear in the text of scripture; so it may be used as a basis for analogy to apply the prohibition to drinks which similarly impair sanity. And the *'illa* is a purpose of God to safeguard a *maṣlaḥa* of man. In such cases, then, *istiṣlāḥ* is absorbed into the method of normal *qiyās*, and no special problem arises about it.

(b) Where the Law provides evidence for rejection of a *maṣlaḥa*, it must be rejected. Here too no problem arises.¹⁰²

(c) Where the Law provides no evidence for or against a *maṣlaḥa*, there is a problem whether this *maṣlaḥa* should be a consideration in determining the rule, and if so by what authority it is a valid consideration in Islamic law. This had become the classic problem of *istiṣlāḥ* by Ghazālī's time, and he devotes attention to a solution. It was a problem because lawyers had in earlier times based decisions rather freely on judgements of social interest based on their own sense of equity and the public good, and while these decisions may have been practically and ethically sound they could in no way be justified as Islamic in the strict sense required by jurisprudence; the interests in question therefore came to be known as *maṣāliḥ mursala*, "interests cut loose" from any link with *sharʿ*. The theoretically easy way to deal with them was to reject them entirely. But while this might be done lightly by academic jurists like Ibn Ḥazm, practising lawyers could not brush aside the public interest. There is no need here to recount the ways in which *istiṣlāḥ* was dealt with in classical Islam, but only to attend to Ghazālī's treatment.

He approaches the problem in typical fashion by offering a definition of *maṣlaḥa*. The original meaning of the word is "deriving benefit or repelling harm," but this is not what is meant by it in law because "benefits" and "harm" are normally understood as human interests and the ends of human purposes.

"We mean by *maṣlaḥa* preserving the purpose of the Law, and the purpose of the Law for man is fivefold: the preservation for them of their religion, soul, intellect, offspring and property. Whatever includes the preservation of these five elements is a *maṣlaḥa*, and whatever dispels these elements is a cause of damage (*mafsada*) whose repulsion is a *maṣlaḥa*."¹⁰³

Such a sweeping generalization about the purposes of God is a bold move by Ghazālī, running contrary to the predominant aversion of Sunnite jurists to any ethical statements going beyond the piecemeal evidence of the *sharʿ*. The five purposes look like rational deductions from God's justice and providence, such as the Muʿtazila might have made, but of course they are nothing of the sort. They are known by induction, "through numerous proofs that cannot be limited, from the Book and the *sunna* and their contexts."¹⁰⁴ There is no question of any objective good or evil in the rationalist sense that Ghazālī rejected; all that is stated is the purposes that God has willed for the human race, as known from scripture.

Can the five purposes of the Law be used as *'ilal*, divine reasons from which specific commands and prohibitions can be inferred? This is a delicate question because these purposes are not stated in a particular text (*naṣṣ muʿayyan*) in scripture, so it would seem repugnant to the very "positive" spirit of Islamic law to use them as bases for judging rules. But Ghazālī does accept them, under strict limits. The rule deduced must be for something necessary (*darūrī*) for preserving one of the five vital interests, something of universal concern (*kullī*), and something beyond doubt (*qaṭʿī*). The classic example, given by Ghazālī among others, is the rule permitting a Muslim army to shoot at Muslim prisoners being used as a screen by an attacking infidel army, when the entire Muslim people is being imperilled by such an attack. He thinks the intention of the Law is certain in such cases and a few others, even without a particular text.

The method of decision here is essentially the same as in analogy, but he prefers to call it *maṣlaḥa mursala*, not *qiyās*, because of the difference in the kind of *'illa*—understood from scripture in general not from a particular text. And, although he is willing to call this method *istiṣlāḥ*, he rejects *istiṣlāḥ* in weaker cases where the pur-

¹⁰¹ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 139.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 140.

¹⁰⁴ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 144.

pose is need (*hāja*) at the ordinary level or mere improvement and doing good (*taḥsin*). In such cases the use of *maṣlaḥa* as a basis for decision is a usurpation of the function of the Legislator, on the same forbidden level as using personal judgement on what is best (*istiḥsān*).¹⁰⁵

We may conclude this account of Ghazālī's theory of ethical knowledge, applied to action, by contrasting it with Aristotle's theory of deliberation as expounded in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to Aristotle, the raw material for ethical knowledge is the diverse experience of the individual or what he learns from the community or the wise; and we begin from intuitions of good and evil in particular ends and means. Reflective people proceed from there, by induction from masses of experience, to more general value statements about ends and means. At the highest level the philosopher seeks to organize the entire range of such conclusions in a unified system, involving a supreme end, "happiness" (*eudaimonia*), and a hierarchy of subordinate ends and means. Now the man of practical wisdom in his most enlightened form can deliberate on action by working downwards from the most general ends, deducing what practical rules and acts will best satisfy these ends in a given society or a particular situation. This is a brief account which leaves out the abundant details and illustrations provided by Aristotle, as well as any discussion of ambiguities in his theory. The only point to be made here is that Aristotle is confident that man has the capacity to arrive at true conclusions at every step by his natural understanding—not every man, but the wiser, and not with scientific certainty but sufficiently for practical purposes.

Ghazālī, on the other hand, does not think that natural understanding is useful for most of the steps required; on the contrary, it is more likely to lead us astray because it is itself liable to be led astray by desires. At the initial stage it can only inform us of short-term good and evil, whatever is fitting or repugnant to our personal ends as we see them. To know our ultimate ends and the effective means to them we depend completely on the guidance of God, provided in scripture. The rules for action are given piecemeal, on the whole, and must be followed as they come; and we must be cautious in generalizing

them, although we have seen Ghazālī doing so at one point with his five purposes of the Law. Deliberation, whether to arrive at rules of action or individual decisions, then proceeds from quite different premises from Aristotle's: not from constructions of human wisdom or philosophy but from the revealed Law. After this point, however, Ghazālī allows the use of human reasoning to draw further conclusions from the scriptural premises, by the methods of analogy and a narrowly restricted *istiṣlāḥ*.

13. Ghazālī's thought on the sphere of ethics surveyed here has shown itself internally consistent. The leading themes of his theology are the omnipotence of God and the complete dependence of man; the corresponding themes in *fiqh* are the dominant role of revelation and the subordinate role of natural reason in giving guidance for external action.

But this part of ethics is only "the beginning of guidance,"¹⁰⁶ which leads on to "the science of states of the heart," dealing with the cultivation of the virtues and inward purification, the chief means to man's salvation. In this sphere, many questions about the method of knowledge of virtue can be asked. How do we know the necessity of acquiring virtue? How do we know its essence and kinds, it causes, the methods of attaining it? Some of the answers are given or suggested in Sherif's book. He shows the relation of Ghazālī's thought to philosophy, and to the culminating science and practice of Sufism. But we shall not pursue these questions here. They have been mentioned only to give perspective to the part of Ghazālī's ethics that has been described.

His general attitude to the functions of revelation and reason in ethics can best be summarized in his own words in *Munqidh*:

"In sum, prophets are the doctors of heart ailments. The only beneficial function of intellect is to teach us that fact, bearing witness to the veracity of prophecy and its own incompetence to grasp what can be grasped by the eye of prophecy; it takes us by the hand and delivers us to prophecy as the blind are delivered to guides and confused patients to compassionate doctors. Thus far is the progress and advance of intellect; beyond that it is dismissed, except for understanding what the doctor imparts to it."¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ *Mustaṣfā*, I, 140-44. See R. Paret, "Istiḥsān and istiṣlāḥ," *New Encyclopaedia of Islam* (Leiden, 1960-), IV, especially, p. 257. and Laoust, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-71.

¹⁰⁶ *Bidāyat al-hidāya*, the title of a short book of Ghazālī serving as an introduction to *Iḥyā*.

¹⁰⁷ *Munqidh*, p. 146.

Thus, independent reason is indispensable for the first steps in apologetics, since revelation cannot authorize its own authority, as the Mu'tazila had never tired of pointing out. Revelation then takes over the bulk of the task of ethical guidance, being supplemented by reason only in its dependent functions of interpretation and drawing out implications.

Ghazālī would no doubt have liked us to conclude with another quotation which comes to mind, the last of the beautiful "light verses" of the twenty-fourth *sūra* of the Qur'ān:

"And to whomsoever God assigns no light, no light has he."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Qur'ān, xx v, 40: *wa man lam yaj'ali llāhu nūran*

In his view the light of ethics comes only from revelation, except for that mystical light which comes directly to a few by inspiration. But this interpretation begs the question: May not intellect be a part of the divine light, as it has been considered by so many Muslim, Christian and Jewish thinkers in the Neoplatonic tradition? Such a question is too large to enter into here. But I think it permissible to end on this personal note of scepticism about Ghazālī's exclusion of independent human reason from the operations of ethical judgement.

fa-mā lahu min nūrin. Eng. tr. A. J. Arberry, *The Koran interpreted*, 2 vols. (London, 1955).