AL-GHAZĀLI’S THEORY OF CAUSALITY

1. The question of causality has been much dealt with in Islamic thought. There are two opposite views, one held by the Mutakallimūn and the other by the philosophers. (1) Most of the Mutakallimūn, both Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites, denied natural efficient causality. (2) Their point of departure was God's omnipotence and unity. If God is omnipotent and one, only He created the universe and only He continues to create whatever happens or comes into being in it. Hence they denied causation by secondary agents, animate as well as inanimate. (3) While the basis of their theory was Kur'ānic, the Mutakallimūn resorted to rational argument to substantiate it. They developed a theory of atomism, according to which the smallest part in the universe is an indivisible particle called an atom (dā'ūrā 'alladhi là yahaddī jazza'ī). Each body is composed of several atoms and of the accidents (a'rād) inhering in them. When its atoms are dissolved, a body is destroyed. God creates and annihilates atoms at His spontaneous will not by necessity. Most of the Mutakallimūn held that an atom and an accident cannot endure for more than one instant of time. Consequently, the existence of bodies in the universe and the existence of the universe itself depend upon God's continuous creation of atoms.

(1) W. J. Courtenay ("The Critique on Natural Causality in the Mutakallimūn and Nominalists", The Harvard Theological Review, 66 (1973), p. 77) presents Isāmak a counter-movement to Arabic philosophy in the subject of causality. This suggestion requires careful examination.
(3) See ibid., pp. 518-519.
and accidents. Bodies generate their effects not through their essential natures but only through God’s creation. The repeated occurrences in the universe are explained by God’s custom (‘ida) of creating things in the same way. But God can certainly do otherwise. To sum up, God acts directly in the universe without any intermediate causes. (4)

On the other hand, the Muslim philosophers, following mostly Aristotle as interpreted by the Neoplatonists, taught that creation derives from God through a series of natural, necessary (4) emanations. God is the First Cause of the universe. Other beings in the universe are related to Him and to each other through a necessary natural causal nexus. (7) The occurrence of an event and the coming into being of an object are elucidated as the result of the natures inhering in things, both in agents and in recipients. (4) This philosophical theory of causality is based on the evidence of sense perception, which shows that things always happen in the same way. Things that happen in the same way happen by necessity. (5)

The two opposing theories, that of the Mutakallimun and that of the philosophers are found, among other places, in tahafuf al-falsafa of al-Ghazali (d. 1111), the great exponent of orthodox Islam, and its refutation entitled tahafuf al-tahafuf (48) written by Ibn Rushd (d. 1198), the last of the great Muslim Aristotelians.


(9) See ibid., pp. 69-70.

(10) See ibid., pp. 549-551.


(14) See ibid., p. 326.

(15) See ibid., p. 326.

(16) See ibid., p. 326.

(17) See ibid., p. 326.

(18) See ibid., p. 326.

(19) See ibid., p. 326.

(20) See ibid., p. 326.

(21) See ibid., p. 326.

(22) See ibid., p. 326.

(23) See ibid., p. 326.

(24) See ibid., p. 326.

(25) See ibid., p. 326.

(26) See ibid., p. 326.

(27) See ibid., p. 326.

(28) See ibid., p. 326.

(29) See ibid., p. 326.

(30) See ibid., p. 326.

(31) See ibid., p. 326.

(32) See ibid., p. 326.

(33) See ibid., p. 326.

(34) See ibid., p. 326.

(35) See ibid., p. 326.

(36) See ibid., p. 326.

(37) See ibid., p. 326.

(38) See ibid., p. 326.

(39) See ibid., p. 326.

(40) See ibid., p. 326.

(41) See ibid., p. 326.

(42) See ibid., p. 326.

(43) See ibid., p. 326.

(44) See ibid., p. 326.

(45) See ibid., p. 326.

(46) See ibid., p. 326.

(47) See ibid., p. 326.

(48) See ibid., p. 326.

(49) See ibid., p. 326.

(50) See ibid., p. 326.

(51) See ibid., p. 326.

(52) See ibid., p. 326.

(53) See ibid., p. 326.

(54) See ibid., p. 326.

(55) See ibid., p. 326.

(56) See ibid., p. 326.
causality but rejects the philosophers' doctrine that causes are necessary. (16)

As far as I know, there is no research on al-Ghazālī's views on causality in his non-philosophical writings. Wolfson refers to ṭaḥāra vol. IV, where al-Ghazālī states that a cause is a condition (see below p. 90) but fails to examine all the sections on causality in this volume or in al-Ghazālī's other works. Similarly, Wensinck (see n. 11 above) briefly treats a very few sections in ṭaḥāra vol. IV, ignoring other of al-Ghazālī's books. Thus we have only a partial picture of al-Ghazālī's views on causality, namely that which is found in his ṭahāfa. What follows is an attempt to examine al-Ghazālī's views on causality in ṭaḥāra, k. al-ʻarbaʿ in and al-maṣṣad al-ʻasrān.

II. The fifth root of k. al-ʻarbaʿ in is ʻašāq al-dīn, (22) dealing with God's will (iṣlaḥa), is relevant to our discussion. It begins with the assertion that God has willed every existing thing and that every thing in the perishable corporeal world (maḥāl) as well as in the everlasting spiritual world (mahākal) (18) happens in accordance with God's decree (ḥaqāʾiq) and by his determination (kudar). (19) This is the Ashʿarites' unanimously accepted view concerning God's will. (20) Then, al-Ghazālī goes on to state that the fact that the issue of kudar is a slippery one has caused many people to make mistakes. In his view, these people adhered to ambiguous verses in the Qurʾān (mā taṣḥabaha minha) (21) for purpose of bringing about dissent and in order to misinterpret them, whereas only God and those firmly rooted in knowledge (al-rāzīkhān fīl išār) (23) know their true meaning. Al-Ghazālī follows this statement with the traditional prohibition against dealing with the issue of kudar, which he addresses to those who study it by means of discussion and contest (bi-l-baḥth wa-l-dījaḍ). (24) Kudar, according to al-Ghazālī, is a secret, and any attempt to understand it is forbidden. Whoever wants to know God's secrets must obey His precepts sincerely and do whatever pleases Him. But if he cannot be satisfied with only devotion, he must believe iṣlaḥa as al-ʻašāqā, which Abū Ḥanīfa and his adherents say about this matter, namely, that it is God's act that creates power in man (kudar al-irāq al-fī al-ʻālah) while man's act consists of using the power that was created (wa-ka ṣalat al-irāq al-mudābiḥ al-fī al-ʻašāqā) really and not just metaphorically using it. (25) These are the two basic components of the doctrine of acquisition (kashf), (26) which is repeated twice more in the book (27) as a middle doctrine held by al-ḥusna wa-l-dījaḍ as the middle doctrine of the Kudarites and of the Djabrites.

Up to here, al-Ghazālī has stated the following points: a. Most people are forbidden to deal with kudar. b. Man can know God's secrets through devotion. c. Whoever wants to hold a doctrine concerning kudar should hold the doctrine of kashf. In view of these points, it is quite perplexing to see al-Ghazālī elaborating, as he does, a detailed discussion of the


(20) See k. al-ʻarbaʿ in, p. 84.


(22) On the term maṣṣāri, and its opposite, maṣṣāri, (self-evident verses), which are both derived from ʻašāq 3, 7, see my *The Tabarrakatās Question*, Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam, n. 7 (forthcoming).


(25) See k. al-ʻarbaʿ in, p. 9.

(26) On the doctrine of kashf, see M. Schwarz, *"Acquisition" (Kashf) in Early Kalam*, in *Islamic Philosophy and the Classical Tradition*, ed. S. M. Stern, A. Hourani, V. Brown, Oxford 1973, pp. 355-387. The kashf doctrine according to Abū Ḥanīfa and his followers is different from the doctrine propounded by al-Djurjani in k. al-ʻašāqā. Whereas the latter granted to human created power no impact on action, the former affirmed such an impact. Al-Ghazālī might have learned the Ḥanafite version of kashf from his teacher al-Djurjani who expounded it in his *ʿašāqā ṣininna* apparently following Ḥanafite-Maḥmūdite thinkers. See Schwarz, ibid., p. 360, p. 387, n. 112. In k. al-ʻašāqā, however, al-Ghazālī follows al-Djurjani's way in ʻašāqā. See ibid., pp. 389-381.

(27) See k. al-ʻarbaʿ in, pp. 9-12.

calls this stage the absolute establishment of the absolute perpetual causes (al-wad' al-kulli li'l-asbāb al-kulliyā al-dā'ima). (28) The third stage, named kadar (determination), involves God’s direction (laužih) of the above-mentioned causes through their proportioned, measured motions (bi-muḫārikhāt al-muṯātārāt bi-l-muḫāḏḏa) to the effects, which are brought into being from these motions moment after moment (al-bāẖiṯa minḥa laḏa bi'da laḏa) according to a known measure (kadar muṭlūm) which neither increase nor decrease. (28) It is worth noting that when al-Ghazālī uses the verb kadhāla (meaning: it was brought into being) he seems to attribute the power of efficient cause to the absolute causes. (28) Finally, al-Ghazālī concludes, all this explains why nothing exists outside God’s decree and determination. (49)

Now al-Ghazālī uses a parable to illustrate the scheme according to which everything happens in the world. The parable is about a water clock by means of which one knows the times of the prayers. (49) This instrument is composed of several parts. There is a cylinder (ṣuwarḍa) filled with a known quantity of water. On the surface of the water there is a hollow vessel. To this vessel is tied the end of a thread, while the other end of it is tied to the lower part of a little basin placed above the hollow vessel. In the little basin is a ball and beneath it a bowl. The bottom of the cylinder is perforated with a hole of a given size. When this is done the water begins to descend, the hollow vessel on the surface of the water descends as well, the thread connecting the hollow vessel with the little basin is pulled and moves the little basin with its ball, until the little basin turns over and the ball rolls into the bowl and rings. The ringing in turn, calls men’s attention to and brings about their prayers and other actions. The frequency of the rings depends on the size of the hole perforated in the bottom of the cylinder. [Al-Ghazālī does not explain how the ball returns to the little basin so that it may again roll down


(30) In affirming God's direct continuous creation of everything in the world, including, naturally, man's actions, the Ashʿarītes deny causality. See above, p. 76.


We shall see later that, according to al-Ghazālī, God has will as well as wisdom; He acts at His will but not capriciously.

(32) See k. al-arba'īn, p. 12, l. 6.

(33) See ibid., p. 11, l. 12.

(34) See ibid., p. 12, l. 14-15.

(35) Cf. R. Taylor’s definition of cause: “A cause has traditionally been thought of as that which produces something and in terms of which Lat which is produced, its effect, can be explained…” The Encylopedia of Philosophy, ed. P. Edwards, New York, London 1967, p. 56.

(36) “Then He decreed them (ṣafūthumm) as seven heavens in two days and inspired into each heaven its order...”
is the effect of different locations of the sun; these cause day and night and the various seasons which in turn bring about different kinds of human activities and behaviour. (47) Everything that happens in the world, be it good or bad, useful or harmful, is according to God's will, just as the clock moves according to the will of its maker. (48)

At this point, we may draw the following conclusions: a. Al-Ghazālī purports here a theory of dual causality, divine as well as natural, co-operating in the generation of the same effect. (49) God is the First Cause of everything that happens in the world. He created a chain of cause and effect and He keeps it in continuous operation. He does not intervene in the world directly. (50) Nothing is said about continuous creation. (51) Al-Ghazālī combines two kinds of causes, which consist of two kinds of actions. God is the First Cause and His actions derive from His spontaneous will. The other causes act through God indirectly as well as through the necessity inhering in their essence, (52) an essence which God created and


(48) See k. al-ʿarba’m, p. 14, 4-22.

(49) This reminds one of St. Thomas Aquinas’ solution of the problem of causality. See Fakhr, op. cit., pp. 149ff.

(50) Some Christian thinkers held that God does not intervene in the world after having created it. See Courtenay, op. cit., p. 93. Al-Ghazālī does not speak here of miracles, i.e., the changing of the normal course of events in the world. The parable, however, may imply that God can intervene in the world by changing the duration of the first action, so that an event may take place in a shorter period than usual, and this may make it a miracle. Cf. Al-Ghazālī, bahā’l, p. 534, tr. S. van den Bergh, vol. I, p. 297.


(52) Contrary to Eckmann who says that the causes were decreed to operate in a fixed way (see Courtenay, op. cit., p. 91), it is obvious from the context (see above
continuously maintains. Thus al-Ghazālī puts forward a theory of theistic determinism which seems to aim at reaching an agreement between faith and philosophy. Using the term ḫaṭṭām, which denotes wisdom (and rule as well, see above, p. 80), on the one hand, and the terms ḥaḍara and Ṽaddar, which connote power, on the other hand, he reconciles the philosophical view that God is wise with the religious view that God is power; b. Al-Ghazālī's statement of the verb ḥadaṭha and Ṽawālḍa in connection with the causes may prove that he attributes the power of efficiency to them; c. as if feeling that he has exceeded the due bounds of orthodoxy, at the end of the passage al-Ghazālī admonishes man to leave the parable and to pay attention only to its purpose, which is to prove that everything happens according to God's will. It is quite likely that al-Ghazālī realized that whoever reads the parable carefully would draw the conclusion we did. Given his acceptance, as at least on the surface, of the orthodox theory of ḫaṭṭām, his prudence can be justified.

III. Al-Ghazālī first describes the plan of the universe and tells the parable of the water clock in al-maḥṣud al-ṣarq asmd al-lahān. In this book, after drawing the parable and its implications, al-Ghazālī further elucidates man's position in this scheme of causality. Man must know that p. 84) and from conclusion b that al-Ghazālī believes tha secondary causes have immanent natures.

(54) Elsewhere (k. al-tahāsi ẓ la-Ṭīfād, Cairo, n.d. p. 4) al-Ghazālī opposes the use of the term "generative" (tawallad) on the grounds of its literal meaning, which is the coming out of something contained from a container, as a child comes out from its mother's womb. Since an accident is not contained in another accident, it cannot be regarded as having been generated by another accident. Al-Ghazālī supports his argument with the fact that kāliyad has two meanings: a. to be born, b. to be generated. See also ibid., vol. IV, p. 9 and below p. 94. (The Mu'tazilites taught that whatever is generated from a man's acts is his action. When a person shoots an arrow, for example, he is responsible for whatever injury someone else may receive, for injury derives from his shooting. See Fakhry, op. cit., p. 44f. Fīnes, Beltrân, pp. 31-32.
(56) On al-Ghazālī's self-contradictions see below, p. 10.

everything exists necessarily by virtue of the irresistible eternal decree (al-ḥaḍara al-ṣarq), and not by virtue of the thing itself (li-ḥāḍarī). Whatever is determined (maḍdār) would be fi nāa' and man's anxiety (ḥamān) about it is extraneous (fi'dā). Then al-Ghazālī raises two questions: a. How can anxiety be extraneous when it is determined? For the anxiety was caused and its cause makes the anxiety inevitable. b. If something is completed (mafrūgh minnu), why should man act (fa-fima al-a'māla) if, if the occurrence of an event is pre-determined by God, why should man strive to perform it, since it would undoubtedly be carried out by God anyway. Al-Ghazālī answers the first question by explaining that fi'dā here means an ineffectual act (kāla'ā) which is of no avail (la fā'idātā fāhi). If a thing was in fact determined, anxiety which is the effect of complete ignorance, would not abolish it, and if on the other hand that thing was not determined, anxiety concerning it would be meaningless. Al-Ghazālī reiterates the idea that the existence of a cause necessitates the existence of its effect.

The answer to the second question has its basis in the well-known tradition: i mālā fi-qul fi-mi misconduct la hu, i.e., act, for every one's path in life is paved in accordance with what he was created for. A person for whom happiness (sa'āda) was determined would be led to it by causes which have the general name of obedience (fī a). A person for whom misery (shakāla) was determined would be led to it by inactivity caused by a motive (kāla'ī) which tells him that if he is destined to be happy, there is no need to act, and if he is destined to be miserable, action is of no avail. To illustrate his answer al-Ghazālī offers the example of a person who wants to be a

(58) I do not know why al-Ghazālī prefers the word maḍdār to maqādār which coincide with ḥāḍarī. But since ḥāḍara (the first stem) also means "he determined", al-Ghazālī's use of maḍdār creates no difficulties. Cf. S. van den Bergh, op. cit. II, p. 38, II, 1-3. In ḥāḍar, vol. IV, p. 318, he employs maḍdār and maqādār interchangeably.
(62) On motives and their role in al-Ghazālī's theory of causality see below p. 88. The exact wording here is: "The cause of his inactivity might be that [a thought] would be established in his mind saying if... (maqādi'ā kūfīna sabāb ḥāḍara fi qalābāa fi khaṭṭāmā...)."
jurisprudent (fakih) and attain the position of imam. (48) That person is told to exert himself to that end and study, but says: “If God decree (kađâ) the imama for me from eternity (fi’l-asal), there is no need to make an effort, and if He decreed ignorance for me, exerting myself in attaining the imama is of no avail.” He is then told: If God made this motive overcome you (sallâla ‘alayka hâdha al-khâjir), this proves that He decreed ignorance for you, for if God decrees a person to be imam from eternity, He does so indirectly by decreeing causes which motivate that person to reject inactivity. Al-Ghazâlî sums up saying that whoever does not make an effort will in no way attain the position of an imam. As for the person who does make an effort and for whom the causes are made, his hope of attaining the imama is real if he keeps on making efforts and lets no obstacle bar his way. (49) Al-Ghazâlî’s example, however, does not answer the question of why man should act if things are predetermined. It rather emphasizes the fact that even man’s thoughts and motives are determined by God. As to the question of how man’s actions are decreed, al-Ghazâlî answers that by implication suggesting that God acts wisely, through a cause-effect chain, and not capriciously, and generates man’s actions according to a fixed system. Another conclusion that may be drawn is that in his view of causality al-Ghazâlî leaves no room for man’s free choice. (50)

IV. The notion that man does not have free choice (îkhliyâr) and the notion of causality are further elaborated in the fourth part of al-Ghazâlî’s ibyâ’ “ulum al-dîn. (49) In k. al-bawakkal, al-Ghazâlî divides man’s actions into three kinds: (51) a. natural action (fi’l jâbi’i) such as when a man stands on water, he breaks through it; b. instinctive action (lit. volitional action: fi’l irâ’di) (52) as when man breathes; c. chosen action (fi’l ikhtiyârî)

(43) See al-nasif, p. 87, l. 11ff.
(44) Cf. ibyâ’, IV, pp. 111-112.
(45) Ibn Rushd holds that man’s actions are determined by external as well as internal causes. See ma’shâ’ûh al-ni’llâh, pp. 227-228. The whole section (called fi’l bâdi’ an-ni’-ka’dar) is in ch. 5 of the ma’shâ’ûh needs to be examined and compared with al-Ghazâlî’s theory of causality.
(46) This fact emphasizes the importance al-Ghazâlî attaches to this problem.
(51) See ibyâ’, vo. IV, p. 315, i. 24p. 316, i. 1.
(52) In the following (see ibid., p. 316, i. 20), al-Ghazâlî considers this action to be spontaneous (‘ubd al-bâbi’ah) and undeliberated.

such as writing. According to al-Ghazâlî, these three types of action are the same in relation to the compulsion (iqâr) and necessarily (idârâr) behind them. The compulsion in natural action is evident, since whenever one stands on water or goes beyond the edge of a roof into the air he understandably breaks through both water and air. This breaking through is a necessary effect of both the standing on water and the going beyond the edge of the roof. In this context, breathing is a natural action, since the motion of the throat relates to man’s instinct to breathe in the same way that breaking through water relates to the weight of his body. Weight necessarily causes breaking through, (59) and one has control over neither weight nor over instinct. It is worth noting that weight, i.e., an inherent nature, serves as the cause and not God’s order or creation. Moreover, al-Ghazâlî uses the word fâb’al, making concession to the philosophers also in the terminological domain. Another example, more instructive, of instinctive action given by al-Ghazâlî is man’s shutting necessarily his eyelids when a needle is directed towards his eyes.

Concerning the third kind of action, al-Ghazâlî says that if man wants to he acts, and if he wants to he does not act (în shâ’â fâ’al wa-in shâ’â a lam mut’al). Hence it may be assumed that one has dominion over his will. But this, al-Ghazâlî says, is ignorance of the meaning of choice (îkhliyârî). In what follows he analyzes the difference between the process leading to fi’l irâ’di and the process leading to fi’l ikhtiyârî. Both actions derive from knowledge which tells man whether or not a particular thing is suitable for him (muwâsâ’). This knowledge is the result of either immediate, unhesitating rational judgement, or rational judgement coming after hesitation. An instance of a decision to act without hesitation is when one is threatened by sword. He knows immediately that pushing aside the sword is good and suitable. (70) The process occurs as follows: Man’s volition (îrâ’di) is caused (lasbâ’ilhu) by his knowledge (’ilm) and his power (ka’dra) by his volition, and
consequently the action takes place. On the other hand, there are things which man does not know immediately whether or not they are suitable for him. In this case, he needs to deliberate and reflect (yaabludju 'llā ranniyya 3aw-fikr) until he knows whether acting or not acting is what is good for him (al-khayr f't-l-f't aw al-tark). (27) When he does attain the knowledge of whether acting or not acting is good for him, that knowledge gives rise to his volition in the same way as f't 'Irādī does, that is by necessity. (28) Al-Ghazālī calls this kind of volition 'Iktihār on account of its being caused by an action which reason deems good (khayr). (29) As an example al-Ghazālī depicts man's deliberation when he is on a roof fleeing from someone who wants to kill him. It is possible that he will throw himself off the roof to escape the sword, even if doing so means death for him. But if he is threatened by an only light blow of the sword, his reason will judge that such a blow is less dangerous than throwing himself off the roof, and he will not throw himself off. That is to say, the motive for doing so will not arise (la tār-i-b'liu lahu dī'iga). (30) That is because motive (equals volition) is subject to the judgment of reason and senses, and power is subject to motive, and motion (barādā) is subject to power. This entire process is determined (malakdar) in man by necessity and without his knowledge (min faqihu lā yadra). (30) and man is a substrate (mahall) acted upon by all these things. Man's being compelled means that all the things that happen

(27) The verb 'Irādā (lit. to omit) was already used by al-Husn al-Basri in the sense of "not to do" or "abstain from doing". See H. Ritter, Studien zür islamischen Freimüden, 1, Husn al-Basri, Der Islam 21 (1955), p. 77, ll. 5-6 ltr. by M. Schwarzw., The letter of al-Husn al-Basri, p. 29, at the bottom. Cf. J. von Es, Anfänge Musulmanischer Theologie, p. 56.

(28) Cf. al-Ghazālī, maqāsid al-falāṣipīs, p. 303, ll. 1-3. Describing the philosophical theory of man's action, al-Ghazālī states that whenever man's volition is complete and unhindered, action takes place because of it by natural necessity, just as the power of fire to burn derives from natural necessity.

(29) See ibid, vol. IV, p. 310, ll. 15-20. On the basis of this derivation, the first kind of volition can also be called 'Iktihār by reason of its also coming from khayr.


(35) I do not know exactly what al-Ghazālī means by "unknowingly". He might mean than man does not know that his reasoning is also compulsory.

inside him come from someone else and not from himself. The meaning of his choice is that he is a substrate for volition, which comes into being (hadali) in him through compulsion (djabran), after reason judges that an action is good and suitable for him. This judgement, too, arises through compulsion. Therefore man is compelled to choose (madjāhār 'llā al-ikhātīgār). (31) Borrowing a Mu'tazilite term, al-Ghazālī says that man's action is in an intermediate position (manzila bagnu al-mansilalayn); (32) that is, the fire's action in burning is pure compulsion, God's action is pure choice and man's action is in an intermediate position, since he is compelled to choose. The people of the truth (ahl al-bakī), al-Ghazālī says, called it kasb. Al-Ghazālī adds that God's choice (ikhātīgār) does not mean volition coming after confusion and hesitation both of which are impossible (mabādū') for God.

Up to now, al-Ghazālī's theory about human action is in keeping with the parable of the water clock and its implications. Man is led to act by a cause-effect chain. Also his action of choice is compulsory, since it derives from necessary external and internal causes. Every sane man, according to al-Ghazālī, would perform the same action under the same circumstances. [In contrast to 'Abd al-Djabbrā, (33) al-Ghazālī does relate motives to power or to action as cause to effect] (34) It is worth noting that here too al-Ghazālī does not mention God's directly bringing man's action into being.

All this might suggest that cause generates its effect without God's power. Al-Ghazālī is aware of the danger: "If you say...that knowledge generates (makkada) volition and volition generates power and power generates motion and that every later thing (kull mula'akhkhur) comes into being (hadalā) from a preceding one (min al-mukaddām), if you say this, you
decide that a thing does not come into being through God’s power. [But] if you deny this (i.e. that a thing does not come into being through God’s power), what is the meaning of the derivation of any of these things from other things (tārālat al-ḥaḍār ‘alā al-ḥaḍār)? (80) Al-Ghazālī answers saying that: “Concerning coming into being (udālah) some of the determined things (ba’d al-muṣūdadrāl) derive from others in the same way as a conditioned thing (mashrah) derives from a condition (shart). Volutio, then, comes out of the eternal power (al-kudr al-‘alāqiyya) only after knowledge (comes out) and life (comes out) only after [the existence of the substrate of life (i.e. the body). Just as it is inadmissible (lā-gadālā) to say that life derives from (faṣḥ al-ma’ān) a body, which is the condition for life, so it is inadmissible to say that about the stages of derivation (daraqiq al-ta’līf).” (81) Everything that happens in the world, Al-Ghazālī asserts, is according to a necessary derivation (tawājud wa’dāj) and obligatory truth (balik ta’zīm). It is impossible (muḥāb) that a conditioned thing should precede a condition. (82)

Al-Ghazālī contradicts himself. Above he says that some determined things derive from others, whereas here he says that all that happens in the world comes about through a necessary derivation. This contradiction may be explained by a passage in k. al-ḥaḍār, in which Al-Ghazālī distinguishes between necessary events (ta’zīmilāt) which occur through a chain of conditions giving rise to conditioned responses (e.g. life-knowledge-volition), and necessary events such as cotton burning when it is near fire, which occur by virtue of the consequivness of custom (bi-bi‘ān jard al-‘adā). Events of the first kind must be connected to each other, and as for those of the second kind one can imagine their being disconnected with the violation of customs (khark al-‘adā). Al-Ghazālī considers the first type of events to be subject to the law of contradiction. (83) We may assume that Al-Ghazālī’s first assertion, that some determined things derive from others, represents his view as expressed in k. al-ḥaḍār, while his second assertion expresses his real view in ibn’s. (84) Probably, al-Ghazālī changed his mind in ibn’s which was written after k. al-ḥaḍār, but preferred to conceal his true opinion by contradicting himself. This system of contradicting oneself to conceal one’s true doctrines was adopted by some thinkers in the Middle Ages. (85) The fact that in ibn’s the action of fire in burning is depicted as pure compulsion, as action which occurs necessarily, without any mention of the consequivness of custom, further proves that Al-Ghazālī adheres to the second assertion, namely that everything that happens in the world happens through a series of necessary derivations on condition-conditioned chain, so this chain becomes imperative not only logically but also ontologically. At this point Al-Ghazālī relates a parable to prove that every-thing that is determined, depends when power exists, on the existence of a condition (lāwāṣhaf al-ma’āṣa ma‘a wadāju al-kudrā ‘alā wadāju al-shart). (86) The impurity of person sunk up to his neck in the water will not be removed from his organs even if the water surrounding him (mulūk lān) removes impurity, until he washes his face. God’s eternal power, Al-Ghazālī explains in the parable, is present (ḥudūl). (87) surrounds the determined things and is attached (mu‘ālālit) to them in the same way that the water surrounds man’s body. But what is determined does not occur through the presence of this power alone, just as impurity is not removed by water until the right condition is fulfilled. Al-Ghazālī emphasizes that the fact that impurity is removed after washing one’s face does not mean that the washing is the cause of its being removed. Similarly motion does not occur directly on account of power. When impurity is removed from a person’s face it is removed

(80) See ibn’s, vol. IV, p. 317, II. 15-17.
(81) See ibid., II. 20-23.
(82) See ibid., p. 317, I. 27-318, l. 2. According to al-Ghazālī (k. al-ḥaḍār, pp. 99-100), conditional correlation is one of three kinds of necessary relationships between two terms or entities. The other two are: a reciprocal relationship, “according to which the negation of the one implies necessarily the negation of the other, e.g. right and left, above and below,” and 2. “the relations of cause and effect, whereby the negation of the cause entails the negation of the effect only when the effect has one cause.” See Fakhry, op. cit., pp. 62-63.
(85) See ibn’s, vol., IV, p. 318, I. 5.
(86) Probably he means “present in the determined things”. The text has la-ḥudār al-kudr al-‘alāqiyya ḥudūn. I could not find any meaning for the word ḥudār here.
from other organs by the water which environs them, and not through washing the face, which was the only condition. Once that condition is fulfilled, or power (the 'illa), becomes effective. 'Illa [87] means here God's eternal power. According to al-Ghazäll, this paragraph shows the derivation of determined things (sudār al-ma‘kaddārat) from the eternal power; the power is eternal (al-ka‘dra hadīma) and the determined things come into being (wa‘d-l-mahdūrāl hadīthā) from it. [88]

To sum up, al-Ghazäll asserts that God's eternal power is always present in things, [89] but is actualized only through conditions. The real cause of the occurrence of events is God's power, which is revealed only in the presence of the right conditions. God has established an unchangeable scheme of derivation [89] according to which each thing is derived from another by God's power. There is no mention in the context of the parable of either the continuous creation of accidents or of the theory of habit ('āda) [89] which are cornerstones of the Ash‘arite theory of the universe.

Al-Ghazäll’s repeated assertion (e.g. ibid, vol. IV, pp. 7-8, p. 318, 1. 27-319, 1. 1), however that: “the meaning of man’s acting is that he is the substrate in which God creates power after He creates it in volition after He creates in it knowledge” coincides with the Ash‘arite theory of God's continuous creation of man's action. In short, al-Ghazäll, contradicts the implications of both the principle of fishing and the parable of the water clock. Yet, al-Ghazäll seems to conceal from the ordinary reader his true opinion, which is found in these two parables by repeating of the Ash‘arite theory. This repetition of the orthodox doctrine and the insertion there of only a very few contradictory statements is reminiscent of Maimonides’ way of writing as elucidated by L. Strauss: “We may therefore establish the rule that of two contradictory statements in the Guide or in any other work of Maimonides that statement which occurs least frequently, or even which occurs only once, was considered by him to be true.” [90] One who reads our text carefully may draw the conclusion that even in his seeming acceptance of the theory of consecutive creation, al-Ghazäll does not diverge from the view he expresses in his two parables. In ibid, vol. IV, p. 120, 1. 1, he says that God has a quality called “power” (ka‘dra) from which creation (al-ka‘dāl wa‘l-likhāt) derives (yasudur). Elsewhere, [91] he explains how creation comes about: “Whenever the condition for a quality (wasf) exists, and the substrate is ready to receive that quality (ist‘ā‘ad al-mahdūr li-babāt al-wasf) following (the fulfillment of) that condition, [92] then, that quality derives from God’s generosity [93] and eternal power (baṣala min al-dā‘d al-ilāhi wa‘l-‘a‘d al-anā‘yga ‘inda baṣūl al-ist‘ā‘d). [93] Thus, according to al-Ghazäll, creation derives from God’s eternal power when circumstances are suitable, i.e., when the necessary conditions are met. He says nothing about God who creates the qualities. On the contrary, al-Ghazäll uses intransitive verbs (yasudur, baṣala min) in order, we suggest, to express the notion that God does not intervene directly in nature but through a cause-effect chain derived from His eternal power.

Al-Ghazäll’s use of the word sunna [94] instead of the commonly employed (‘āda) in this context to denote the notion of derivation (tālīb) [95] is very significant. This word has inter

[88] See ibid, ibid, II. 6-16. One may offer a modern example to illustrate al-Ghazäll’s scheme. A car whose engine works does not move unless one gears it. The cause of the car’s motion is the action of the engine but it will not move without gearing which is the condition for its motion. Gearing alone does not make the car move.
[89] Cf. Ibn Rushd’s quotation of Aristotle in tahfīf al-tarhabf: “Everything that is in this world is only set together through the power which is in it from God; if this power did not exist in the things they could not last the twinkling of an eye.” See S. van den Bergh’s tr. Vol. I, p. 90, vol. II, p. 65 (n. 5 to page 90).
[92] See L. Strauss, op. cit., p. 73. This article is not the place to discuss the question of whether al-Ghazäll holds esoteric doctrines. (Cf. H. Lazarus-Ya‘foh, sp. cit., ch. V: The Esoteric Aspect of al-Ghazäll’s Writings). My intention is only to try to prove that in this issue of causality al-Ghazäll conceals his true opinion. It is worth noting that in tahfīf al-falsafī, too, he diverges only once from the Ash‘arite doctrine.
[94] I.e., life serves as a condition for knowledge.
[95] For God’s generosity as the source of creation see Ibn Rushd, tahfīf al-tarhabf, p. 161, tr. S. van den Bergh, p. 90, Plato, Tim. 29, d, e, Plotinus, Enn. v. 4, 1.
[96] Inti‘ād in a philosophical means the ability of an object to receive only one form and not two contradictory forms. See al-Ghazäll, mantu‘ah, p. 293.
[98] See ibid, vol. III, p. 35, II. 6-7: hāyi‘ah ni‘rāfah min sunnah. Allah ‘a‘īb fi tartīb al-ma‘shubhūt ‘a‘īb al-axbāt. “This is the known law of God, may He be
Al-Ghazālī seems to have chosen it to persuade the ordinary reader that he does not deviate from the meaning of the term (ṣunnah) or from the practice of the Prophet (ṣunnah) in order to manifest His wisdom (ṭabā‘a ilā-ṭabā‘a). Al-Ghazālī argues the remedies of quince and dates as causes subject to God's judgment (rasūlīn bi-‘ayn allah) just like the other causes are. Al-Ghazālī reasserts that the cause-effect chain is a law and that it expresses God's wisdom. This use of the words judgment (ḥukm) and wisdom (ḥikma) which combined in unchangeability indicates his intention which is that sunna is a law and not a custom. In laḥāfīf (p. 512, II. 11-12) Al-Ghazālī himself says that "whoever considers the habitual course of events in the world (ṣafā’ī ‘al-‘adāt) an indispensable necessity (al‘ā al-‘adāt) regards all this (i.e. the miracles) as impossible. He thus opposes the ascription of necessity to habit, because it excludes the possibility of miracles. Thus if we accept Wolfsen's rendering of sunna as "customary procedure," how can we explain Al-Ghazālī's self-contradictory statements, namely the coincidence of custom with necessity in ilyādī on the one hand, and the opposition of such coincidence in laḥāfī in the other hand? We must admit that sunna in ilyādī is not equivalent to ‘āda or modīr ‘al-‘adāl in laḥāfī. Moreover, nowhere in laḥāfī does Al-Ghazālī employs the word nature (tabbā‘a). Ibn Rushd, however, states following Aristotle, that things that take place by nature take place invariably or in most cases. (90)

Another issue on which Al-Ghazālī deviates from the theory dominant in the Kalām is that of impossibility. For the Kalām whatever is imaginable is intellectually possible. (90)

See Lane, op. cit., p. 1438.

(100) S. van den Bergh's translation of modīrī ‘al-‘adāt as "the ordinary course of nature" (vol. II, p. 313, l. 13) does not seem suitable to Al-Ghazālī's theory in laḥāfīf because he uses the word "nature" itself.
It is possible by reason that, for instance, fire may cool and rain may heat,\(^{104}\) and that a stone may stand still in the air.\(^{105}\) This view is explained by al-Iḍājī as follows: "All possibilities (mamkināt) depend on God, Glory be to Him, directly (ibdi'ā'ī), and there is no connection between the [consecutive] things which come into being (la'atīdīth) except by [God's] continuing the custom (füda) of creating some things after others. Thus burning comes after fire touches and quenching of one's thirst follows drinking. But God may bring about touching without burning and burning without touching. The same applies to all other events."\(^{106}\) In ʿibdāʿ al-Ghazzālī holds the opposite view. He explicitly states that it is impossible for a conditioned thing to precede a condition, e.g., volition must come after knowledge. "Possibility (in-hān) means derivation (tarīb), and derivation does not admit change (la yakhḍla al-taḥqīf)."\(^{107}\) Likewise it is impossible that God would cause plants to sprout without man sowing or that a woman should give birth without sexual intercourse. Whoever expects God to perform such actions does not know God's law (sunna).\(^{108}\) These examples and others support our conclusion (p. 9), namely, that the rule of derivation or the condition-conditioned chain is valid in the logical realm as well as in the ontological one. Thus al-Ghazzālī expresses in ʿibdāʿ the same view he expresses in some sections in tahāfat.\(^{109}\)

V. Now we are coming to our final conclusions. In ʿibdāʿ al-Ghazzālī reasserts the three principles illustrated by the parable of the water clock, namely: 1. God's wisdom and design (ḥikma, kadīrī).\(^{118}\) 2. God's decree (kaddār) 3. God's de-

\(^{104}\) See Maimonides, loc. cit.

\(^{105}\) See al-Bighzādī, mī'ī al-dīn, Istanbul 1928, pp. 138-139.


\(^{107}\) See ʿibdāʿ, vol. IV, p. 8, I, 15.

\(^{108}\) See ibid., p. 330.

\(^{109}\) See Alm., op. cit., pp. 404-405.

\(^{110}\) See ʿibdāʿ, vol. IV, p. 218, I, 4, and p. 80 above.

\(^{111}\) See ibid., p. 8, II. 18-20, p. 120 and p. 80 above.
b. God acts through His wisdom and not capriciously. c. Consequently it is possible to acquire knowledge about the world, since every event or thing has a cause, and things happen or change according to a fixed scheme. d. Man is obliged to choose his actions but his choice is really compulsory too. These four points constitute a compromise between orthodox Islam and philosophy. Points a and d represent the religious view, while points b and c represent the philosophical view.

— I wish to thank Prof. S. Pines for his valuable remarks.


Dès le IXe siècle, des Mozarabes d’al-Andalus s’enfuirent vers les terres chrétiennes du Nord : Asturies, Catalogne et Languedoc ; ces mouvements migratoires se poursuivirent par à-coups dans les siècles suivants. Beaucoup de chrétiens furent à plusieurs reprises déportés en terre marocaine : notamment de Malaga en 1106, de la région grenade en 1126, de diverses zones d’al-Andalus en 1138 et vers 1170. Le lien entre ces déportations et les guerres contre les royaumes chrétiens d’Espagne se perçoit clairement, d’autant mieux par les contacts établis vers 1120-1125 entre les Mozarabes grenadins et le roi d’Aragon Alphonse I le Batailleur. Ses appels à la reconquête avaient été le préambule...