

THE CLIMAX OF A PHILOSOPHICAL CONFLICT IN ISLAM¹

Arabic philosophy has been stigmatized as non-original, non-creative and imitative. It is recognized that the Arabs have at best, played a role in transmitting some Greek philosophical texts to the Western world; and this somewhat lifeless transmission has become a sort of a slogan associated with most evaluations of Arabic thought. It must be remembered, however, that such judgments are still due to a partial and incomplete knowledge of all Arabic philosophical texts. As a result we are now groping in the dark as to the real contribution of the Arabs to pure philosophy. Such a work will have to be awaited; and when done it will itself take its place as a contribution to the general history of philosophy.

On the other hand, there are many recent indications of a new trend. From various and far removed intellectual quarters come similar warnings of the necessity for a fresh approach towards the work of Muslim philosophers. John Wild of Harvard speaks of the stir which the introduction of the Arab philosophical texts of Avicenna and Averroës produced in the Christian culture of the Middle Ages.² Etienne Gilson of the Sorbonne describes Averroës' treatises *Agreement of Philosophy and Religion* as "a landmark in the history of Western civilization."³ He also urges the study of the philosophical Arabic texts as the indispensable condition for every interpretation of the Aristotelian movement of the thirteenth century.⁴ The revival in the Latin world of Thomist philosophy, in its modern garb of Neo-Thom-

ism, is bringing to the fore the realization that there is a missing link in the general history of philosophy which should be discovered. Might not this missing link be Arabic philosophy?

The *Tahafot*. Our immediate and direct concern turns towards two classical texts in Arabic: *Tahafot al-Falasifat*⁵ of al-Ghazālī (1095) and *Tahafot al-Tahafot* of Averroës (1180), both known to Latin Christendom as *Destructio Philosophorum* and *Destructio Destructionis*.⁶ Very inadequate study has hitherto been made of them in English. Yet very few Arabic books display as much unity of purpose and composition and embrace in a unified whole the wide range of philosophical and theological problems which upset the heart and mind of Islam.

Background. The first contact of Islam with Greek philosophy and Christian and Jewish theology produced the rational school of the Mu'tazilah as well as the anti-rational school of al-Ash'ari. From the time of al-Ash'ari (888-951) to that of al-Ghazālī (1050-1111), the Arabs assimilated the essentials of Hellenism, and Arab culture produced a vigorous philosophical renaissance chiefly represented by al-Fārābī (d. 950) and Avicenna (980-1037). Under the impact of their great philosophical systems, theology felt itself shaken once more as it did when it confronted the daring thought of the Mu'tazilah, and perhaps even more strongly than before. Men thoroughly acquainted with the refinements of philosophical speculation and the intricacies of metaphysical abstractions were needed in order to support the dogmas of

¹ This article is based on a section from the doctoral thesis of the writer entitled: "Reason and Revelation in Islam with Particular Reference to Ghazālī and Averroës," June, 1951.

² John Wild, *Introduction to Realistic Philosophy*, New York, 1948, p. 24.

³ Etienne Gilson, *Reason and Revelation in the Middle Ages*, New York, 1938, p. 40.

⁴ E. Gilson, *Etudes de philosophie médiévale*, Strassbourg, 1921, p. 51. In this connection, two recent books ought to be mentioned: G. Quadri, *La philosophie arabe dans l'Europe médiévale*, French trans. by Roland Huret, Paris, 1947, and Léon Gauthier: *Ibn Rochd*, Paris, 1948.

⁵ The Arabic word "Tahafot" (*tahāfut*) has been the subject of controversy among scholars. On the views regarding its translation into European languages see Miguel Asín y Palacios: "Sens du mot Tahafot dans les oeuvres d'al-Ghazālī et d'Averroës," *Revue Africaine*, Nos. 261 and 262; Alger, 1906. For a compilation of the various translations of this Arabic word, see the introduction of Father M. Bouyges, S. J., to his edition of "Tahāfut al-Falāsifat" Beirut, 1927, which has been used throughout this study. Father Bouyges favors the French word "Incoherence" but contends that it does not reproduce exactly the meaning of *tahāfut* which is used by al-Ghazālī sometimes with reference to philosophers and sometimes to their doctrines. He therefore suggests the adoption of the Arabic word "Tahafot" since it does not offer any difficulty to Europeans.

⁶ Mentioned by Raymond Martin (1230-1284), by Raymond Lull (1235-1315) and later by Cajetan (1468-1534).

Islam⁷ and discredit the conclusions of philosophy inconsistent with it. Islam found its man in al-Ghazālī who was able to withstand Hellenism and attack its great ancient masters and the then modern Muslim representatives.

The *Tahafot* represents the culmination of the philosophical task of al-Ghazālī and belongs to the period of maturity in his life. To us today the *Tahafot*, besides its philosophical value, has a double interest: First, in a world torn by ideologies, such as we are now witnessing in the conflict between East and West, the two *Tahafots* of al-Ghazālī and Averroës constitute a microcosm of a similar past conflict which upset the world of Islam. In a way it was a conflict between East and West: the East as represented by the religious mystical trend culminating in al-Ghazālī, and the West as represented by the philosophical rational trend culminating in Averroës. The stage of the conflict was, however, narrower since it was then confined to the Mediterranean world.⁸

Secondly, the two trends are still at work in present day Islam. For that reason, in any new approach to the understanding of its modernist and progressive schools, we are bound to study them in the light of those great Muslim predecessors, who in their way were the modernists of their own times: The Falāsifa, the Peripatetics, the Platonists and Neo-Platonists, al-Fārābī, Avicenna and Averroës.⁹

But above all, the *Tahafot*, as well as all Muslim philosophy, ought to be viewed from within. For at the basis of Muslim philosophy there was a *real* problem, real in the sense which Existentialism today attaches to the meaning of reality. That problem was the conflict between faith and reason, or Islam versus Hellenism.¹⁰ The Arabs did not only

"think" that problem, they also "lived in" it fully and deeply. It divided Muslim society, aroused caliphs and masses, and inflamed men with love and hatred. And while beset by that problem the Muslim soul raised fearlessly the eternal ultimate questions of God, man, freedom, and immortality. As Father Bouyges said in his introduction: "The *Tahafot* will remain, as I hope, a useful instrument in the study of the most passionate of philosophical speculations—those which endeavour to know God."¹¹

Al-Ghazālī's Objectives. Al-Ghazālī's main philosophic objective was to prove the insufficiency of reason as a guide to the truth.¹² This he endeavours to achieve by invalidating the conclusions of reason in the field of philosophy.¹³ Many critics have remarked that al-Ghazālī's *Tahafot* dealt a deathblow to philosophy in the world of Islam. This view can hardly be appreciated before al-Ghazālī's criticism is fully grasped.

The *Tahafot* contains an introduction and twenty "questions" or "disputations."

In the introduction al-Ghazālī remarks that there are some thinkers who, in their pride, have rejected religious authority merely on the basis of the authority of certain grandiose names such as Socrates, Hippocrates, Plato, Aristotle and others. Bewildered by the vast knowledge attributed to those geniuses, they only desire to elevate themselves above the mass of the people by disdaining religious admonitions.

Ignaz Goldziher: "Stellung der alten islamischen Orthodox zu den antiken Wissenschaften," *Abhandlungen der Königl. Preuss. Academie der Wissenschaften*, 1915.

⁷ *Tahafot*, op. cit., p. viii.

⁸ G. Quadri: op. cit., p. 123.

⁹ Prior to al-Tahafot, al-Ghazālī wrote *Maqāsid al-Falāsifa*, "The Aims of Philosophers," in which he reproduces objectively Aristotelianism in order to prepare for the attack which was to appear later in the *Tahafot*. This, as he explains in the preface, he conceives as a pre-requisite for refutation. The book, translated into Latin towards the end of the 12th century, was mistakenly considered as a statement of al-Ghazālī's philosophy because the preface was omitted from the Latin translation. Thus St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*, q. 45, Art. 5 (note 6) refers to al-Ghazālī's Metaphysics. See S. Munk: *Mélanges de philosophie juive et arabe*, Paris, 1927, p. 370. The Latin text of al-Ghazālī's book was edited in 1933 by the Rev. A. T. Muckle under the title, *Algazel Metaphysics—A Medieval Translation*, Toronto, 1933.

¹⁰ G. Quadri, op. cit., p. 122.

¹¹ See George Sarton, "Unity and Diversity of Mediterranean Culture," *Osiris*, Bruges, 1936, Vol. II, pp. 407-408. Also M. Meyerhof, "Von Alexandrien nach Bagdad," *Sitzungsberichte d. preuss. Akad. Wissensch. Phil. Hist. Klasse*, 1930, XXXIII.

¹² Louis Gardet, "Raison et Foi en Islam," *Revue Thomiste*, November-December, 1937, p. 442.

¹³ On the attitude taken by conservatives and masses against philosophers, see:

It is to eradicate this evil by its roots that al-Ghazālī wants to demolish the entire philosophical systems. He goes on to explain in detail four basic principles upon which his criticism is based and which may be briefly summarized as follows:

1. Since it is not in his power to discuss the doctrines of all ancient philosophers—for each of them contradicted his predecessors, including Aristotle, who criticized his teacher Plato most bitterly—al-Ghazālī concentrates on Aristotle.

Aristotle is regarded as the greatest philosopher who refuted a number of their doctrines and established the best. This proves that metaphysics, far from being founded on certain and irrefutable axioms, such as mathematics and logic, is built on guesses and unproved hypotheses. Later on the interpreters and commentators of Aristotle differed among themselves; al-Ghazālī confines himself to the two best Muslim representatives: al-Fārābī and Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā).

2. Philosophers and sects differ. First, on the use of certain terms, such as "substance," which lead to controversies which are not deemed the subject of his inquiry. For this belongs rather to philosophy and casuistry than to his field of inquiry. Secondly, they differ on the mathematics, astronomical and geometrical sciences, which are wrongly rejected by some thinkers on religious grounds, but which do not really contradict the fundamentals of religion. He who imagines that it is a religious duty to refute such sciences as mathematics will in fact injure religion. Thirdly, they differ on metaphysical doctrines, such as creation *ex nihilo*, the attributes of God, the resurrection of bodies, in all of which the philosophers negate the fundamentals of religion. His struggle will consist in refuting them.

3. He would turn against the philosophers who grant them confidence and think that they are immune from contradictions, by indicating their incoherences and inconsistencies (*tahāfut*). It is for the express purpose of "destruction" that al-Ghazālī delves in the works of philosophers. For this purpose, he would welcome the aid of the various sects (Mu'tazilah, Karramites and others) though he disagrees

with them on certain details, since they do not deny the basic religious principles.

4. The philosophers in order to confuse people claim that metaphysics is a difficult and complicated science whose understanding requires a good knowledge of mathematics and logic. But, says al-Ghazālī, mathematics is necessary to metaphysics no less than to medicine or grammar. Logic, on the other hand, is undoubtedly needed; but it is by no means confined to the philosophers. The theologians consider it to be a basic element in their preparation. The philosophers, however, give it a different name and use other terminology. In order to destroy their false presumption, al-Ghazālī meets the philosophers on their own ground by using their own terminology.¹⁴

Having thus laid the foundation, al-Ghazālī continues his work. He does not state a given doctrine in its entirety, but he takes specific points, one by one, and then attacks and refutes each in a vigorous manner. This method which gives the *Tahafot* a scholastic form was the same which St. Thomas used in the West later.¹⁵ It is our purpose to present the argument of al-Ghazālī as much in its entirety as possible.

The Eternity of the World. It forms the subject matter of the first disputation of the *Tahafot*. It is a question which had a long history in Greek and Christian thought before al-Ghazālī.¹⁶ The forces of the Church, both Eastern and Western, had already met the Hellenists on this same issue; and Proclus in particular presented a synthesis of the rational arguments to prove the eternity of the world. In Islam Mutakallimun and Falāsifa have equally been preoccupied with it.¹⁷ Al-Ghazālī says that in proving the eternity of the world the philosophers offer their strongest arguments and

¹⁴ *Tahafot*, pp. 3-17.

¹⁵ Carra de Vaux: *Ghazzali*. Paris, 1902, p. 61. Carra de Vaux concludes, "Le *Tahafot* marque le summum de l'art de la dispute scholastique; il en est le premier chef d'oeuvre."

¹⁶ See I. F. Burns: "Cosmology and Cosmogony." *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. IV, pp. 141-151.

¹⁷ M. Worms: *Die Lehre von der Anfangslosigkeit der Welt bei den mittelalterlichen Philosophen des Orients und ihre Bekämpfung durch die Arabischen Theologen (Mutakallimun)*. Münster, 1900.

display a considerable amount of subtlety. The majority of ancient and modern philosophers, agree that the world is eternal, continuously co-existing with God, but never coming later than He in time, in exactly the same way as the effect co-exists with the cause, or the light with the sun.¹⁸

The first argument of the philosophers may be summarized by this question: Why is it that the world was not created before the time in which it was? Was God at that time incapable of creating it, or was creation then impossible? To answer these questions in the affirmative would amount to ascertaining that the Eternal passed from having no power at all at one time, to having power at another, and the existence of the world became possible after having been impossible. Obviously these are absurd inferences. The nearest hypothesis is therefore to say that creation had been willed by God. Thus, the will has been introduced. But the introduction of will in the essence of the Eternal is impossible because the Eternal cannot be the place of things created, and this creation outside His essence would deprive Him of a free will. Let us, however, put aside the place of creation and concentrate on its principle which raises all the difficulties. Where was that Will produced? How did it come into existence? And what is it that was lacking in it? Was it an instrument, a power to create, or an end? Was it primary matter or was it a first Will? These questions cannot go on *ad infinitum*. Therefore since it is impossible, nay absurd, for a created world to be produced by an Eternal Agent, without any change in Him, and since the world exists, it is impossible that it had been created and it cannot be anything else but eternal.¹⁹

Al-Ghazālī in his turn asks the philosophers, Why should they deny that the world has been created by an eternal will which decreed its existence at the time it existed? And on what grounds should they reject that at the time the world was created it was willed by that eternal will, and because of this it came into existence?

¹⁸ *Tahafot*, op. cit., p. 21.

¹⁹ *ibid.*, p. 23-25. On the other hand, Averroës questions al-Ghazālī's honesty in presenting the philosophers' doctrines, *Tahafot*, pp. 146 and 366.

It is to be noted that the dialectics of this argument evolves around three terms: God, the universe and man. One should not expect that the opponents remain on solid grounds; the dialectics goes downwards to man, upwards to God and sometimes to the universe which becomes a sort of a middle term.

The philosophers reply that it is absurd to suppose an eternal creator in whom all conditions for creation are fulfilled, and yet creation lags behind during a time which may stretch over a thousand years, after which God suddenly creates. This impossibility, i.e., of the cause lagging behind the effect, is not confined only to the Divine Will but applies to the human will as well. If, for instance, a man pronounces his wife to be divorced, and if the separation between the man and his wife does not take place immediately, one cannot imagine that it will take place later. For if this man made his pronouncement a complete and immediate cause,²⁰ it is hard to conceive that the consequence should be delayed, unless it has been made conditional upon the coming of the next day, or the return of his wife to the house, which is impossible. It would seem in this case that personal human desire is incapable of delaying the effect. If we cannot understand the possibility of delay in this instance, how can we conceive of it in the case of essential, rational and necessary conditions?²¹

Here the dialectic reaches a middle term between God and man, namely, the universe. The doctrine of the Eternity of the World is absurd, says al-Ghazālī, because it leads to the affirmation of the view that the celestial spheres have an indefinite number of rotations whose units are impossible to count, although they have among them definite proportions and a well-calculated number.²² "This number must be

²⁰ In Muslim law the separation becomes effective upon the pronouncement of the man that his wife is divorced.

²¹ *ibid.*, pp. 26-29.

²² al-Ghazālī goes on to describe in detail those proportions. "Indeed," he says, "the sphere of the sun makes a circle in one year; and the sphere of Saturn in thirty years. . . ." See Algazel: *Tahafot*, pp. 31-32. The development of this argument has an interest only in so far as it shows the astronomical and mathematical knowledge at the time of al-Ghazālī and the way in which the infinite was conceived.

either odd or even, or both, or neither the one nor the other. If you say that it is odd and even at the same time, or that it is neither the one nor the other, the error of such a claim is quite evident. If you say it is even, the even becomes odd by adding one unit to it. But how is it possible to add one unit to that which is indefinite? If you say it is odd—the odd becomes even also by adding one unit. But how could this indefinite number lack one unit which would make it odd? Thus you are obliged to conclude that it is neither odd nor even.”²³

The philosophers object that odd and even cannot describe adequately the infinite since such an explanation would necessarily imply that it is composed of present existing units. Al-Ghazālī replies that, in the case of the universe, we are actually facing a “whole” made out of component units which constitute the rotations of the celestial spheres. Their number must necessarily be either odd or even. He summarizes the argument: “Our aim is to prove that the philosophers cannot refute their opponents on the relationship between an eternal will and creation except by resorting to rational evidence; at the same time they cannot prevent that this same evidence may be invoked against them.”²⁴

Choice between Similar and Pure Will. The philosophers now take a new approach: Moments of time are all similar and stand equally in relation to the Eternal Will. What is it therefore that distinguishes a specific moment from that which is precedent or antecedent to it since either could have been willed? Similarly, the place which is capable of receiving white is also capable of receiving black. What are the reasons that made eternal will prefer white to black? If there has been no specific reason for creation, the world which had the possibility to exist as well as not to exist, would have been chosen arbitrarily since existence and non-existence are equally possible. Thus the question arises: How can the will *choose* between two possibles absolutely similar. The philosophers deny that such a choice is possible.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 33.

The world, says al-Ghazālī, did not exist, when it existed in the way and the place where it did, except by an eternal will. The will is a faculty whose essence is to distinguish one thing from another similar to it. To ask why the will can distinguish one thing from another similar to it is equivalent to asking why science comprehends its known object as that object is. Such is the essence of science. In the same way the will is a faculty whose essence is to distinguish one thing from another similar to it.

It might be objected that such a faculty is unintelligible and contradictory. For to say that a thing is similar to another means that one cannot distinguish between them. To affirm that they can be distinguished is to say that they are not absolutely similar. Furthermore, this will in the last analysis is similar to the will in man which always presupposes a choice; if a thirsty man finds himself near two glasses of water, similar from every point of view in their relation to his desire, it is not possible for him just to take either one of the two. He cannot take except that which seems to him more beautiful, lighter, or nearer to his right hand if he is accustomed to use his right hand. Outside this, it is impossible to conceive a distinction between one thing from another similar to it when all conditions are equivalent.²⁵

Al-Ghazālī argues that it is wrong to compare the Divine Will with human will in the same way as it is wrong to compare human knowledge with God's knowledge. “If the term ‘will’ is not fit for the Divine, let us call it another name, for words have no importance. And if I use it, it is only because the Divine law has permitted its use. Otherwise the will indicates in language merely a desire. *But the Divine Will is above and beyond any desire.* We stick to the sense and not to the word.”²⁶

Even if we were to take the inner sense, the meaning re-

²⁵ The argument on the freedom of indifference occurs first in Aristotle when he says that according to Anaximander the earth keeps its place because of its indifference. See Aristotle: *On the Heavens*, 295b 10-35. Trans. by J. L. Stoeck. *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, New York, 1941. See also L. Gauthier, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-224.

²⁶ *Tahafot*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

mains correct; and it can easily be proved that although there might exist a choice between two unequal things, yet nothing prevents the existence of a choice between two absolutely similar and equal things in relation to desire. Suppose, for instance, that there are two similar dates placed equally near the hand of a man who desires them both, but who cannot obtain them. This man would evidently take one of them in virtue of a faculty whose essence is to differentiate one thing from another similar to it. All attributes such as beauty, proximity and facility to take disappear and the possibility to choose remains. You have therefore the choice between two propositions; either you would say that it is not possible to imagine the equality of both dates in relation to the desire of man, which is absurd, for such a possibility exists; or to say that, in admitting the absolute equality of both, man remains in a continuous state of hesitation, looking at the two dates and not taking any in virtue of his *pure will* and *free choice* both detached from desire. Such a supposition is also absurd and its absurdity is proved by facts and evidence.

It is thus inevitable for every thinking man, present or absent, who exercises a free act in virtue of pure will, not to accept the faculty whose essence is to distinguish between a thing and its similar or equal. It is precisely when the will acts without motive that its pure nature is discovered. Such is God's will. God does not create or will under any determination. And since everything exists because willed by Him, it follows that everything is possible, nothing is necessary. The act of God is that which is possible in an absolute sense, in virtue of pure will.²⁷

It is to be noted that religious thought, on the whole, has emphasized Divine Will in an absolute sense. St. Thomas Aquinas held a similar theory on God's Will. According to him nothing except God can be eternal and His Will is the only cause of things. Therefore things are necessary insofar as it is necessary for God to will them. Supposing an eternal

²⁷ *Tahafot*, pp. 41-46.

world exists, it does so only to the extent that God wills, since the being of the world depends on the will of God as its cause.²⁸

Second Argument of the Philosophers: Time and Space. This argument stems from the idea of time and space consecutively. The philosophers ask: "Has God been unable to create the world one or two years earlier than He did?"²⁹ They maintain that God precedes the world, *per se*, not in time, in the same way as 1 precedes 2; it is a precedence which flows from the nature of things since both may exist simultaneously in time. The same can be said of cause and effect, such as the movement of a person in relation to the movement of his shadow, or the movement of water in relation to the hand that moves it. If, on the contrary, God precedes the world and time, not *per se* but in time, then there existed a time, in which the world did not exist. Before time there thus was an indefinite time, which is contradictory. That is why it cannot be said that time was created but is eternal.

To this al-Ghazālī replies that time was created with the world. And when it is stated that God is prior to the world and to time it means that: (1) God existed while the world did not exist, and (2) that afterwards He existed and the world existed with Him. The first premise posits the existence of the essence of God, and the non-existence of the essence of the world. The second premise posits the existence of the two essences only. By precedence it is meant that God alone did possess existence. "Afterwards" does not imply a chronological order. If nevertheless we infer from it a sequence and thus introduce a *third element*, which is time, it is our imagination which does so and not reason.³⁰

The Hellenists reply, Suppose the world will disappear and God alone exists, it would be incorrect then to say, God *existed*; but rather God *shall* exist. There is then a basic dis-

²⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. Q. 46. Art. 1. "On the Beginning of the Duration of Creatures."

²⁹ *Tahafot*, p. 35.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 51-52.

inction between the two forms, since one cannot take the place of the other. This distinction does not consist in the existence of an essence and the non-existence of another, but in the existence of a third meaning, i.e., the element *past*. The *past* is *time*. The *past* is a movement which passes and thus *time* passes away. There ought, therefore, to have existed a "Time" before the world itself came into existence.

The fundamental meaning of the two premises, 1 and 2, insists al-Ghazālī, is the existence of an essence and the non-existence of the other. The introduction of the element of time is a subjective addition which has a relative, not an absolute value. In fact, if we suppose the world never to exist in future, and then we suppose it to exist afterwards, it would still be correct to say: God existed and not the world, and that would apply to the non-existence of the world in the two cases: before the world comes into existence and after it goes out of existence. The future itself may become a past, and would be referred to in the past form. All this is due to the utter inability of our imagination to comprehend a starting point without something prior to it. This "something prior to it" which our imagination pictures as real and existing is "Time,"³¹ which in fact does not exist.

Here again al-Ghazālī's doctrine of time is a reminder of another Christian philosopher, St. Augustine, who denied time and made it a subjective principle while discussing the question of creation. Neither past nor future have a real existence, according to him, but only the present is. "Who shall lay hold upon the mind of man, that it may stand and see that time with its past and future must be determined by eternity which stands and does not pass, which in itself, has no past or future."³²

This resemblance is not a mere coincidence but springs from a deeper cause. A mark of almost all mystical metaphysics is the denial of the reality of time. This in turn is an outcome of the denial of division; if all is one, the distinction

of past and future must be illusory; and this certainty is born in the moment of mystic insight which comprehends reality as an undivided whole.³³ A Persian Šūfī poet says:

Past and future are what veil God from our sight
Burn up both of them with fire! How long
Wilt thou be partitioned by these segments as a reed.³⁴

Space. As in the case of time, imagination cannot but suppose that beyond the world there is an indefinite space which is either full or vacuum. The error of imagination in this instance is proved by the fact that vacuum as such is incomprehensible: for distance is inherent to the body which has dimensions and extension; and since the body is finite, distance is also finite. It is therefore certain that beyond the world there is neither a vacuum nor a full space. Furthermore, as the "spatial distance" is inherent to the body, the "time-length" is inherent to movement. But as it has just been established that the body is finite in space, so movement is finite at the two ends of the world and consequently time, too. There is no difference between the "time length" which is relatively described by "before" and "after," and the "spatial-distance" which is relatively described by "above" and "below." And since it is established that there is an "above" beyond which there is nothing, it necessarily follows that there was a first movement before which no time existed.³⁵

The philosophers object to the comparison between time and space. The world, they say, being spherical, has neither an "above" nor a "below." These are subjective terms which can be changed in relation to man. Those parts of the sky which you suppose to be above during daytime, themselves take a position below at night. On the contrary, it is not possible to suppose that that which is first in the existence of the world becomes last and vice versa. The future non-existence of the world and its first moment of existence are essential,

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 54-55.

³² St. Augustine, *Confessions*. Bk XI. 11. See also, John F. Callahan: *Four Views of Time in Ancient Philosophy*, Cambridge, 1948.

³³ B. Russell, *Mysticism and Logic*, London, 1918, p. 10. Also pp. 21-26.

³⁴ *Masnawi*, Whinfield's translation, Trübner, 1887, p. 34. Quoted by B. Russell; *ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁵ *Tahāfot*, p. 56.

and it is impossible to suppose that this first moment changes and becomes last. Time consists in that which we understand by "before" and "after."³⁶

To this al-Ghazālī emphatically objects that when we say, "God exists and not the world," we mean just this and nothing else. Imagination by its own nature cannot but comprehend everything in time and space, whereas reason, which takes little notice of the workings of imagination, does not reject either the existence of a limited body, nor the coming into being of a world preceded by nothing.³⁷

The controversy is by no means ended. The philosophers claim that there are many *possible worlds* which God was capable of creating at various intervals of time. There was therefore before the first moment to mark the beginning of the world, possible intervals of time which vary from each other as, for instance, the figures 1, 100, 1000 vary. The possible duration, which serves as a necessary basis to measure these various intervals, is nothing else but time eternal. It could not be *non-being*, because non-being cannot be the measure of being.

Al-Ghazālī refutes this argument by resorting again to the comparison between time and space: God was capable of creating the world greater or smaller from what it is now by an arm-length or two or three. There must therefore exist, beyond the world an indefinite space to serve as the basis for measure since two arm-lengths do not have the same measures as three or four; and this indefinite space must be either full or vacuum. But the vacuum cannot be measured; and the philosophers themselves reject the existence of an indefinite space.

Third and Fourth Arguments. The *possible*, the *impossible* and the *necessary*. The philosophers maintain that the world existed as a possibility long before it actually came into existence. This possibility has no beginning, is continuous, and does not cease at any time. If then the existence of the world is always possible, it would be absurd to maintain the

³⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 64-66.

³⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

contrary, namely, that existence is impossible at any time, or that it had a beginning. To this al-Ghazālī opposes the view that creation of the world is always possible and that there is no time in which the world could not have been created. Its creation has been decreed from all eternity but achieved in time. Thus, creation is not concomitant with possibility as such. The possibility for creation and the principles of existence cannot be determined by "sooner or later." That which can be ascertained is the principle that the world was created. This is the only real possibility.

But is it not evident, replies al-Ghazālī's opponent, that every created being is preceded by its constituent matter? For such a being cannot exist without matter. Matter then is not created. Forms, accidents and modes are the only things created. The existence of every created being is, before its creation, *possible*, *impossible* or *necessary*. It cannot be *impossible*, for the *impossible* in essence does not exist. It cannot be *necessary* either, for the *necessary* never vanishes away. This leaves us with the *possible*. The *possible*, however, does not exist separately or in the mind of man. It needs matter in which to inhere. The black and the white are not possible by themselves. They are impossible without a body. The change of color is only possible in a body. *Possibility* must therefore be added to matter.³⁸

This possibility, answers al-Ghazālī, is in the last analysis a rational judgment. "Everything which reason supposes to exist—without anything preventing such a supposition—we call it possible. If anything prevents this supposition, we call it impossible. And if reason is incapable of supposing it not to exist, we call it necessary. These are rational judgments which do not need any real being to be predicated of."³⁹ Thus, reason supposes black and white as possible by themselves and existing outside of a body. But when they are referred to, as possible in a body which they describe, the possibility in this case is no more theirs, but that of the body. It is true that science and knowledge require a thing to be

³⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 66-69.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p. 70. Quoted by Carra de Vaux, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

known. But science deals with universals and the philosophers themselves recognize that universals are in reason, not in things. Color as such is a general idea which transcends white or black and which exists in reason without any specifications. Minds might altogether disappear, but not the possible as such, which remains in the mind of God.⁴⁰

This is only a gist of an argument which both al-Ghazālī and his opponents discuss from various angles.⁴¹ In fact, the problem at issue, in the opposition of nominalism and realism, or al-Ghazālī versus the philosophers, was that of the objective significance of universals which occupies a cardinal place in Muslim and Christian scholasticism. The problem arose when an unanswered question about the ultimate nature of universal concepts was found in Porphyry's *Isagoge*, "Are universals themselves realities existing in things, or apart from them, or are they merely mental products?" The medievals found it impossible to discuss this problem except within a total and comprehensive metaphysics.⁴²

In what remains we can only give a simple enumeration of the other nineteen disputations:

Disputation II: "On the perpetuity of the world."

- " III: "On the artificiality of the philosophers' claim that God is the Creator of the world."
- " IV: "On their inability to prove the existence of God."
- " V: "On their inability to prove the unity of God."
- " VI: "On their denial of the Divine attributes."
- " VII: "On their inability to prove that God is above definition."
- " VIII: "On their doctrine that God is a simple being without essence."
- " IX: "On their inability to prove that God is bodiless."
- " X: "On their identification of God and the world."
- " XI: "On their inability to prove that God knows beings outside of Him."

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 71-77.

⁴¹ In the *Tahafot* itself this problem is taken up by al-Ghazālī in Question XVIII. See in particular *Tahafot*, pp. 328-332.

⁴² D. J. B. Hawkins, *A Sketch of Medieval Philosophy*, New York, 1949, p. 12.

Disputation XII: "On their inability to prove that God knows himself."

- " XIII: "Refutation of their doctrine that God does not know particulars."
- " XIV: "On their doctrine that heaven is an animal moved by will."
- " XV: "Refutation of what they described as the purpose that moves heaven."
- " XVI: "Refutation of their doctrine that the souls of heavens know particulars."
- " XVII: "Refutation of their denial of miracles."⁴³
- " XVIII: "On their doctrine that the human soul is a separate substance, neither a body nor an accident."
- " XIX: "On their denial of the immortality of the soul."
- " XX: "On their denial of bodily resurrection."

This is undoubtedly an imposing bill of complaints against philosophy. One remark, however, seems to be necessary. After refuting every philosophical doctrine known to the world of Islam and after proving the utter powerlessness of reason to reach the truth by itself, al-Ghazālī has this to say: "Reason may affirm the existence of a being, who has nothing similar to him nor position limiting him, such as the existence of the Creator of the universe."⁴⁴ He has thus implicitly assigned to pure reason, a power which he denied to it at the beginning. This is unlike Kant, who left not to pure reason but to practical reason the competence to affirm the existence of God through the inner moral law of man. After all, it was by the help of reason itself, that al-Ghazālī was able to dethrone it from where the philosophers have placed it. But we should go no further. This was to be the task of Averroës in his *Tahafot al-Tahafot*.

GEORGE J. TOMEH

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⁴³ It is in this disputation that al-Ghazālī gives a full statement of his denial of causality. Al-Ghazālī in his introduction (see above, p. 7) does not mention this problem among the basic ones. Causality, the attributes of God, the soul, universals and particulars, and resurrection, have been discussed at length in the writer's thesis.

⁴⁴ *Tahafot*, p. 332.