THE MUSLIM WORLD

A JOURNAL DEVOTED TO THE STUDY OF ISLAM AND CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONSHIP IN PAST AND PRESENT

IBN RUSHD VERSUS AL-GHAZĀLĪ:
RECONSIDERATION OF A POLEMIC

The history of philosophy is, to a large extent, a history of polemics. We need only remember Aristotle and his criticism of Plato: criticism in this case was used as a constructive force in the creation of new thinking. Neither did Aristotelianism stand apart from the polemical process. When Aristotle's works were "discovered" in the first century of the common era, they immediately became the focus of much philosophical discussion. Galen of Pergamon (129-199 A.D.), better known as a physician, moved away from the usual path of interpretation and "corrected" Aristotelian theories. Such an attitude provoked the reaction of a contemporary scholar and fellow of the same school, Alexander of Aphrodisia (160-230 A.D.), who tried to give "Aristotelian" answers to the problems raised by Galen.[1]

This process reveals a "three-phase" structure which has often been present in the history of philosophical polemics. It can be summarized as follows. One authority establishes a thesis; another thinker makes objections or even refutes the original proposition; in a third moment, someone claiming to be the true follower of the first authority goes on to destroy the opinions of the second and seeks to demonstrate the validity of the first thesis. The result is not merely a return to the point of departure. Through the polemical process, a particular question comes to be considered under new aspects, and the sum of knowledge is increased. New explanations may mean a closer approach to reality.

Other paths of philosophical discourse should not, of course, be overlooked. In contrast to the polemical process stands that of synthesis, which sometimes leads to syncretism. We may remember, for example, how Plotinus (205-270 A.D.) or Porphyry (234-301 A.D.), his main disciple, "Platonized" Aristotle with such success that philosophy in the later Roman Empire became generally Neo-Platonic. Al-Farabi in his turn sought to harmonize Plato and Aristotle, in

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[1] Galen's critical remarks on Aristotle are found throughout his works. Cf. Claudii Galeni *Opera Omnia,* ed. C. G. Kühn. Leipzig, 1821-1833, 20 vols. In vol. XIX, pp. 39-48, he gives a list of his own works, but none is directed expressly against Aristotle.

Alexander of Aphrodisia answered him in different ways. There are, for instance, the *Physikai scholikai aporiai kai lyseis,* edited by I. Bruns in *Alexandri Scripta Minora Reliqua* II, 2. (Berlin, 1892). P. Moraux refers accurately to their content in his book *Alexandre d'Aphrodise, exégète de la noétique d'Aristote* (Paris: Liège, 1942), pp. 19-24.

Other works are extant only in Arabic, as we know from N. Rescher & M. Marmura, the editors and translators of *The Refutation by Alexandre of Aphrodisia of Galen's "Treatise on the Theory of Notion."* (Islamabad, 1965).

which endeavor he was facilitated by the fact that his understanding of Aristotle was already Platonic.

The present discussion, however, examines the polemical method. A second example confirms its three-phase structure. Belief in the world's eternity was commonly accepted in antiquity, and proofs sustaining it did not need to be particularly stringent. As Zoroastrianism, Judaism, and Christianity brought into special relevance the doctrine of a personal God as Creator of the world and therefore of its temporal origin, the discussion became sharper. A renewed defense of eternity was produced by the Neo-Platonic philosopher Proclos (412-485), Būruqlūs for the Arabs, who wrote eighteen theses in support of the philosophical view.[2]

The second phase is represented by John the Grammarian (ca. 490-580), known both as Philoponus and, among Arabs, as Yahyā al-Nahwī. This Christian thinker was the author not only of a book *Contra Aristotelem* but also of a *De æternitate mundi contra Proclum*.[3] John was an Aristotelian in disagreement with Neo-platonic emanationism, and was perfectly ready to criticize Aristotle when the latter's opinions came in collision with his own beliefs. Thus, while remaining one of the most important of Aristotle's commentators, he is exemplary of the polemic process we are considering as an advocate of temporal creation.

For the third phase of this process, we look at Simplicius, who moved to Ctesiphon in 529 after the closure of the Athenian school of philosophy and on to Rome in 533. Simplicius was a still more detailed commentator of Aristotle and the last great Neo-Platonist. He refuted Philoponus, or John the Grammarian, and returned to Aristotle following the arguments of Proclus.[4] With him, the polemical process reached its end in the Hellenistic world.

The polemical process was inherited and continued by the Arabs. Respecting the above example, they adopted both positions. Al-Kindī (+ 866) and Abū Zakarīyā al-Razī (+ 925) among the philosophers, and the whole *Kalām* tradition, supported John Philoponus. On the other hand, al-Fārābī (870-950) and Ibn Sīnā (987-1037) repeated the efforts of Simplicius and Proclus to save Aristotle's opinions on the eternity of the world.

The three-phase development of the polemic is also evident in the Arab tradition. The first stage is represented systematically by Ibn Sīnā. Through his work, Islamic philosophy matured in systematic form. Thus, when al-Ghazāli wanted to expose and critique the whole system of Islamic philosophy in his *Maqāsid al-falāsifa*, he did nothing other than explain Ibn Sīnā's thought.

Al-Ghazāli's attempt to refute Ibn Sīnā marks the second step of the polemic we are considering, as evidenced in his works *Tahāfut al-falāsifa* and *Al-iqtisād fi l-i'tiqad*[5] The *Iqtisād*, which M. Asin Palacios translated into Spanish under the expressive title *El justo medio en la creencia*, extends beyond mere refutation. It expounds the main theses of Ash'arite doctrine in which al-Ghazāli had been schooled by his teacher al-Juwaini, the Imām al-Haramain (1028-1085), whose *Kitāb al-Irshād*[6] is a leading example of Ash'arite *Kalām*.

This raises an interesting, yet difficult question. Was it al-Ghazāli's role in the polemic to defend the *Kalām* tradition, and specifically Ash'arism? The answer is not easy. Al-Ghazāli did not see in *Kalām* an ultimately valid response to Ibn Sīnā's philosophy. In a well-known metaphor he compared true science with pilgrims on their way to Mecca who are compelled by the dangers on the road to take a bedouin escort. The escort represents *Kalām* (*Ihyā*, I. 1. 2, p. 22), an enterprise neither useful nor harmful, neither lawful nor unlawful in itself. It may be rendered useful and lawful when employed for a right purpose:

> Theology (*Kalam*) is designed solely to safeguard the articles of faith which the followers of the Prophet's tradition (*Sunna*) transmitted down to us from the righteous Fathers, nothing else (*Ihyā*; I. 1.3, p. 40).

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[2]   *Epicheirēmata peri aidiotētos tou kosmou.* The theses are preserved not in an independent book, but in that of Philoponos' *De æternitate mundi contra Proclum*, ed. H. Raabe (Leipzig, 1899). T. Taylor selected the theses using Philoponus' Renaissance edition (Venice, 1535) and translated them into English: *The Fragments that Remain of the Lost Writings of Proclus* (London, 1825), pp. 35-92.

[3]   Only some fragments of the *Contra Aristotelem* are preserved. The *De æternitate mundi contra Proclum* is mentioned in note 2, above. John also wrote a non-polemical work on the subject: *De opificio mundi Libri VII*. Ed. W. Reichard (Leipzig, 1897).

A brief, but excellent, exposition of the polemic is presented by S. Pines in the article " A lost work of John Philoponus," *Israel Oriental Studies*, 2 (1972), pp. 337-346. See also M. Mahdi's "Alfarabi against Philoponus," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 26 (1967), pp. 233-260.

[4]   His arguments against Philoponus on the present subject are mainly produced in his commentaries on the *Physics* and on *On the Heavens: In Aristotelis Physicorum IV libros priores commentaria* (C.A.G. IX), idem, *IV libros posteriores*, Ed. H. Diels, (Berlin, 1882-1895). *In Aristotelis De coelo commentaria* (C.A.G. X). Ed. J.L. Heiberg (Berlin, 1894).

[5]   See abbreviated bibliography under *Tahafut* and *Iqtisād*. The second has been also edited by I.A. Cubcu and H. Atay (Ankara, 1962). According to M. Bouyges, *Essai de chronologie des oeuvres d'Algazel* (Beirut, 1959), these works were written in the following order: *Maqāsid* : 487/1094 (Bouyges, *ibid*, # 17, pp. 23-24). *Tahāfut*: 488 H, *Muharram* 11th/ 1095 (*ibid*, # 16, p. 23). *Iqtisād*: 488/1095 (*ibid*, # 24, pp. 33-34). Bouyges' results coincide basically with those reached independently by G. F. Hourani: "Chronology of Ghazāli's Writings," *J.A.O.S*, 79 (1959) pp. 225-233.

[6]   *El Irchad*, par Imām el Haramein. Ed. & French tr. J.D. Luciani (Paris, 1938).

Al-Ghazali's use of *Kalām* in the *Iqtisād* contains neither logical demonstrations nor dialectical arguments which are the main features of intellectual debate. A chapter of the first book of the *Revival of the Religious Sciences,* devoted to *Kalām* as a debating technique, carries the significant title: "On the Evils of Debate *(jadal)* and on the Resulting Influences that destroy the Character" *(Ihyā;* I. 1. 4, pp. 45-48). As the book unfolds we become more aware of al-Ghazali's reluctance to embrace *Kalām.* What was partially accepted at the beginning comes to be viewed as having dangerous consequences and is eventually rejected for the following reasons:

1) Debate, which appears as the main method of *Kalām,* is a cause of moral destruction. Al-Ghazali refers to ten major evils caused by debate: envy, pride or haughtiness, rancor, back biting, self-justification, spying into the private affairs of men and rejoicing at the injury of others, deceiving, detesting the truth, and hypocrisy:

> Hypocrisy is that virulent disease which, as will be discussed in the *Kitāb al-riyā;* leads to the gravest of major sins *(Ihyā;* I. 1. 4, p. 47).

Some pages later, in the section entitled "The Book of Faith," we find similar judgments: the harm of *Kalām* lies in raising doubts about the faith and, specifically, in the fanaticism kindled by disputation which prevents people from knowing the truth (see *Ihyā;* I. 2, P. 96).

2) The destruction of morality is linked to the destruction of faith. Although everyone has access to faith, the way and the degree to which one has it vary. In this respect al-Ghazali was particularly sensitive to the role of education. Common people run a higher risk of losing their faith than the learned, especially if it comes to them in an inappropriate form such as *Kalām.* This division between the learned and the unlearned seems to be traditional in Islam, and al-Ghazali applies it to the study of *Kalām.* Towards the very end of his life (505/1111), he wrote a book about the hazards of this kind of theology: the *Kitāb Iljām al-'awāmm 'an 'ilm al-Kalām,*[7] in which he insisted:

> Proofs [concerning God's existence and nature] are of two kinds: those requiring such great keenness and reflection that the common people cannot reach them, and those self-evident, clear, and known from the first outset. There is no danger at all in the second class; on the contrary, the first requires such efforts of thinking that it is above the capacity of the common people *(Iljām,* p. 20).

We already find the same contention in the *Ihyā,* a book written at least ten years earlier:[8] laymen should be left alone in the safety of their beliefs. To teach them *Kalām* is harmful because it will arouse doubts and weaken their faith (cf. *Ihyā,* I. 2., p. 96). Al-Ghazali nevertheless maintained a partial acceptance of *Kalām.* It could serve as an argumentative defense of the *Sunna,* but he restricted its use to a small number of learned men who must be of both high intelligence and high moral qualities, because the dangers of debate are very grave.

3) The most decisive dimension of al-Ghazali's critique of *Kalām* addresses its internal nature, and raises the issue of epistemology. Al-Ghazali accepts that the use of logic in *Kalām* has produced undeniably good results in the struggle against those who seek unwarranted innovation *(bida').* Yet he is alert to certain inherent problems within *Kalām* itself. The logical way of demonstration starts from necessary premises and proceeds to a generally recognizable truth. He argues that the premises used by *Kalām* are taken from human consensus or from the Qur'ānic tradition, neither of which are logically necessary *(darūriyāt,* cf. *Munqidh,* I p. 16).

To state the same point in a different manner, in the *Ihyā,* *Kitāb 'ajā'ib al-qalb,*[9] al Ghazali establishes firmly that knowledge of God's revelation *(tajallin)* takes place on three different levels: on that of the common people by means of faith by authority; on that of the learned men *(mutakallimūn)* by means of knowing through "indication" *(istidlāl);* and on the superior level, that of the gnostics *(al-'ārifūn),* though direct illumination *(Ihyā,* III. I, pp. 115 -119). Regarding the knowledge of the *mutakallimūn,* he draws the following analogy. Someone hears Zayd's footsteps inside his home, but does not see him because there is a wall between them; he infers only that Zayd is in his house; similarly, the *mutakallimun* infer God's existence. The import of

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7   "Book on restraining the common people from the science of Kalām." See M. Bouyges, *Essai de Chronologie,* # 63, pp. 80-82; the book was finished in the month of *Jumada' II* 505/Dec. 1111, "quelques jours avant la mort d'Algazel."

8   Bouyges, *Essai de chronologie,* # 28, pp. 41-44, places its composition between the years 489/1096 and 495/1101-2. There is an English translation of the whole Ihya' by Fazal-ul Karim, (Lahore, 1983), 4 v. in 2. From among the partial translations are the following: *Islamische Ethik:* Vol. I: *Über Intention, reine Absicht und Wahrhaftigkeit* (Book 37). Tr. H. Bauer (Halle, 1916). Vol. II: *Von der Ehe* (Book 12). Tr. H. Bauer. Halle, 1917. Vol. III: *Erlaubtes und verbotenes Gut* (Book 14). Tr. H. Bauer (Halle 1922). Vol. IV: *Vom Gottvertrauen* (Book 35). Tr. H. Wehr (Halle, 1940). Repr. in 1979, (Hildesheim: G. Olms) in 1 vol. *Die Wunder des Herzens.* K. H. Eckman (Mainz, 1960) (Ph.D. Diss.). *L'obligation d'ordonner le bien et d'interdire le mal.* L. Bercher (Tunis, 1961). Book of Fear and Hope. W. McKane (Leiden: Brill, 1962). *The Book of Knowledge.* N. A. (Paris: Lahore, 1962). *Über die guten Sitten beim Essen und Trinken.* H. Kindermann, (Leiden: Brill, 1964). *Le livre du licite et de l'illicite.* R. Morelon, (Paris: Vrin, 1981). *Die Lehre von den Stufen zur Gottesliebe* (Bucher 31-36). R. Gramlich, (Wiesbaden, 1984). *Livre de l'amour.* M. L. Siauve (Paris: Vrin, 1986) (*Ét. musulm.* XXIX). *The Book of Invocations and Supplications.* K. Nakamura, (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Soc., 1988).

9   "Book of the Mysteries of the Heart." *Ihyā,* (Book) III. (Ch.) 1, pp. 2-47.

this analogy lies in its implied criticism of the internal weakness of the *Kalām* system of knowledge. Al-Ghazāli is equally concerned with its subjective consequences. The *mutakallimūn* are in great danger of losing themselves and their faith in dry debates and logical constructions. The believers have to know God, His attributes and works, and these truths do not result from *Kalām.* "in fact, theology is almost a veil and a barrier against it" (*Ihyā'* I. 1. 2, p. 22).

This criticism of *Kalām* occurs throughout al-Ghazāli's writing, and is central to his thought. After his analysis of *Kalām* in the *Kitāb qawā'id al-'aqā'id* [10], he concludes:

> Listen to one who has familiarized himself with the *Kalām* and after a careful study and thorough investigation... has come to dislike it and has ascertained that the road to what knowledge really is, is closed from this direction (*Ihyā'* I. 2, p. 97).

It is on grounds of its inability to provide a true knowledge of God that al-Ghazāli passes an ultimately negative judgment upon *Kalām,* even while according it a qualified usefulness, in the hands of suitably learned scholars, in defending the verities of revelation. The same criticism applies—even more so in al-Ghazāli's reckoning—to philosophy. Fearing that the defense of revelation from the assault of philosophy was insecure in the hands of *Kalām,* he preferred to entrust faith to religious authority and gnostic experience.

Basic faith, he argued, is surely open to everybody, but it does not seem to result in great knowledge. Religious observance, while compulsory for all, needs to be complemented for those who seek greater understanding of the meaning of Qur'ānic tenets. For this, al-Ghazāli turned to Sufism or gnostic knowledge.

Gnostic science is what al-Ghazāli referred to as the "Mysteries of the Heart," to which he devoted an entire book in the *Ihyā'* (see note 9). In this he argues that everything which God has created or will create is contained in the "well preserved table," doubtless a derivation of the "Table" keeping the original Qur'ān.[11] Here are inscribed all eternal ideas, of which the bodies of the sensitive world are merely copies.

The heart, in al-Ghazāli's analysis, can know these ideas or true essences in two forms: through the senses, i.e., through their copies, or directly. Direct knowledge may be gained through the heart which acts like a mirror, reflecting not only sensitive images but also ideas existing in the "well preserved table." Such knowledge he also compares to pure water springing direct from the earth:

[10] "Book on the foundations of the beliefs," *Ihyā'* I. 2, pp. 89-125.
[11] *Sura* 85:22.

We say: we may imagine that the heart reaches the reality of the world and its form sometimes through the senses and sometimes from the "preserved table" as we may imagine that the eye gains the form of the sun sometimes by looking at it and sometimes by looking at the water which reflects the sun and repeats its form. Whenever the veils between the heart and the preserved table are raised, the heart sees the realities and science flows into it, and it does not need to acquire the science through the senses: it is like an outlet of water from the depth of the earth (*Ihyā'* III. 1. 10, p. 21).

Al-Ghazāli's own words suffice to introduce a way of knowing which is different from both *Kalām* and *Falsafa,* one in which the "well preserved table" and the heart, considered as a "spiritual and divine fine-substance" (*Ihyā'* I. 1. 2, p. 3) are the central pillars. Man's heart is actually his true essence *(haqīqa)* and can hardly be distinguished from his spirit or his soul.

Although al-Ghazāli's theory of the "preserved table" differs in important respects from Sufi understandings of this Qur'ānic symbol, just as his system of thought is not that of Sufism, it is clear that both share a common attitude. We agree with Duncan Black Macdonald[12] that al-Ghazāli helped Sufism attain a recognized position in Islam. This convergence is clearest, with respect to the concerns of this paper, in the way knowledge is obtained:

> not by study, but rather by fruitional experience and the state of ecstasy and "the exchange of qualities"[13]

However, we must not overlook the originality of al-Ghazāli's system which J. Obermann[14] characterized as 'Subjectivism'—whatever other scholars may argue about external influences upon him.[15] As far as knowledge is concerned, he argued that it does not have to be rational:

[12] *Development of Muslim Theology, Jurisprudence and Constitutional Theory* (New York, 1903), p. 239.
[13] *Al-munqidh min al-dalāl,* p. 123; the quotation is taken from McCarthy's English translation: p. 90. 'Fruitional experience' is the term he uses to translate *dhawq,* literally 'taste'. Cf. F. Jabre, *Essai sur le lexique de Ghazāli* (Beirut, 1985, 2. ed.); *dhawq,* pp. 100-102; *hāl,* pp. 79-80 & *fana',* p. 226.
[14] *Der philosophische und religiöse Subjektivismus Ghazālis* (Vienna, 1921).
[15] Asin Palacios' insistence on finding a Christian origin for al-Ghazāli's beliefs is widely known: see *La espiritualidad de Algazel y su sentido cristiano,* 4 v. (Madrid, 1934-41), *passim.* Wensinck (*La pensée de Ghazāli,* p. 199) adds Platonism to the Christian influence. Neo-Platonic philosophy is an important source according to H. Lazarus-Yafeh (*Studies in al-Ghazzāli,* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), pp. 277-324). On the contrary, M.-L. Siauve restricts its role (*L'amour de Dieu chez Gazālis,* (Paris: Vrin, 1986), pp. 119-123).

For the mystics *(arbāb al-qulūb)*, God causes every atom in the heavens
and on the earth... to speak a language without letters and without sounds
(Ihyā', IV. 5. 1, p. 248).

To understand this language, man has to acquire a hearing organ, other
than the physiological one, one that "perceives a speech without letters and
sounds, neither Arabic nor foreign" *(ibid)*. This is the knowledge of the heart
which leads to a supra-rational deepening of understanding within the obliga-
tions of religious observance which mark the sentinel authorities of faith.
Differentiating himself at this point from both the advocates of *Kalām* and
Falsafa, al-Ghazāli was equally critical of many Sufis who, in his judgment,
failed to live up to the standards of the "masters of the hearts". Only the very
truest believers are the *'ārifūn* or *ahl al-ma'rifa*, whom we may call gnostics.[16]

It is at this point that al-Ghazāli's polemic against the philosophers and
mutakallimūn is sharpened to a practical issue. In his "Book of the Mysteries
of the Heart" he criticizes the opinions of people " who speculate and reflect"[17]
concerning Sufism. Asin Palacios reads this as a reference to the philosophers,
and translates accordingly, though my own judgment is to interpret the refer-
ence more broadly to include Muslim theologians in general representing the
traditions of *Kalām* as well as *Falsafa*.[18] While these each followed systems of
thought which were very different from Sufism, they did not deny its legitimacy
either as an ascetic discipline of purification, or as a means of knowledge
(ma'rifa). They saw it, however, as the way of a very few, and even those who
traversed the path of spiritual purification had no assurance of being able to
retain the gift of *ma'rifa* for a sustained period. It was scarcely an effective
way of knowledge for the majority of believers. Against this view al-Ghazāli
maintained the inherent quality of *ma'rifa* as the superior way of knowledge
of God, and persisted in calling everyone to undertake the spiritual path without
which it was inaccessible.

In this light it becomes clear how al-Ghazāli represents the second-stage
position in the three-phase polemical process which developed in the Islamic
tradition. In the struggle against *Falsafa* he made a qualified use of *Kalām*
while being alert to its epistemological and moral shortcomings. But he relied
ultimately upon the experiential knowledge of the heart which, as a mirror,
reflects the eternal truths of God's revelation. Thus, if al-Ghazāli made limited
use of certain forms of *Kalām* in his polemic against philosophy, it was with
the effect of infusing these with the epistemological richness of what he learned
from the Sufi tradition as he adapted it in his distinctive system of thought.

Turning now to the third stage in the philosophical polemic which devel-
oped in the Islamic tradition we call to evidence the work of the great Islamic
philosopher, Ibn Rushd, who took up the argument against al-Ghazāli in defense
of the principles of *Falsafa* which he—al-Ghazāli—had attempted to refute.
Before addressing this polemic, however, it is important to acknowledge areas
of agreement between Ibn Rushd and al-Ghazāli. For example, in chapter three
of the *Fasl al-maqāl*, which is clearly a conciliatory work, Ibn Rushd pays
tribute to al-Ghazāli for his contribution to the development of the "sciences of
asceticism and of the future life" *(Fasl*, p. 19; tr. p. 63)*. Moreover, we find Ibn
Rushd in agreement with al-Ghazāli on the need to avoid *Kalām*. If Ibn Rushd's
criticism lacks the moral condemnation which is characteristic of al-Ghazāli's
position, Ibn Rushd's polemic disqualifies *Kalām* on methodological grounds.
In the *Fasl al-maqāl*, his discussion of *ta'wil* [19] considers three kinds of inter-
pretative method regarding theological issues: "rhetorical, dialectical and de-
monstrative" *(Fasl*, p. 14; tr. p. 58)*. The *mutakallimūn* employ dialectical proofs
which Ibn Rushd rejects as illegitimate, even though he was prepared, like
al-Ghazāli, to extend a qualified tolerance to other aspects of *Kalām*. *Ta'wil*, he
argues, can only be undertaken legitimately by philosophers on the basis of
natural understanding or demonstrative proofs:

> The dialectical way in the discussion is forbidden when talking about
> how the Creator knows Himself and the other beings, let alone putting it
> down in a book *(Tahāfut*. p. 356; cf. tr. p. 215)*.

The only way to discuss these questions is by way of strictly philosophi-
cal reasoning, the *tariq al-burhān (ibid.,* p. 357)*. Few people are capable of

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16 For a wider analysis, see A.J. Wensinck: *La pensée de Ghazzali*, (Paris, 1940), pp. 153-168.

17 *An-nuzzār wa-dhū al-i'tibar, Ihyā', III,1.9, p. 20.

18 *La espiritualidad de Algazel y su sentido cristiano*, vol. III, p. 226. I base my interpretation on
the definition of the *mutakallimūn* Ghazāli gives in *Al-munqidh*, p. 76.

19 Certainly, there is disagreement between al-Ghazāli and Ibn Rushd upon the nature of *ta'wil*
which consisted originally in interpreting some passages of the Qur'ān in an allegorical way.

Al-Ghazāli builds many of his doctrines upon the double meaning of terms (exoteric/esoteric)
and does not link it with dialectic. After having examined different kinds of interpretation in the
Book of Faith, he states: "a group went to the middle point and they opened the door of the
allegorical interpretation for what is related to God's attributes and excluded it from what is related
to the future life... they are the Ash'arites" *(Ihyā', I. 2. 2., p. 103)*. He could accept the *Kalām* and its
restricted application of *ta'wil* in this case and could employ it also in others, but probably not to the
extent that F. Jabre ascribes to him: "Le *ta'wil* de Ghazali prend ainsi des proportions cosmiques"
(La notion de certitude selon Ghazāli, Paris, 1958, p. 179)*.

Ibn Rushd was not prone to making wide use of *ta'wil* it becomes necessary only if the revealed
text contradicts the results of demonstration. In such a case, he looked for the metaphorical
meaning of the words following the rules of the Arabic language.

Al-Ghazāli had frequent recourse to *ta'wil*, but never accepted, as did Ibn Rushd, that it can
be used in order to cause reason to prevail over revealed texts whenever both are in apparent
contradiction *(Fasl*, pp. 14-15)*.

pursuing this path, for few possess the requisite moral and intellectual quali-
ties. Where these are lacking Ibn Rushd warns against any form of knowl-
edge other than common-sense understanding:

> It is appropriate for you to keep yourself to the apparent meaning *(zāhir)*
> of the Divine Law *(sharʿ)* and not to look for these new dogmas [e.g.,
> Ashʿarism] in Islam; for if you adhere to them, you will be neither a man
> of certainty [philosopher] nor a man of Divine Law (*Tahāfut.*, p. 361-362;
> cf. tr. p. 218).

On such grounds Ibn Rushd excludes *Kalām* from treating basic theo-
logical questions. His criticism is based not only on its negative results, but
on the wrongfulness of its arguments. In the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* he often
complains that the *mutakallimūn* employ false premises in their arguments;
on other occasions, he accuses them of falling back on acts of sophistry like
the use of "transference."[20]

Thus far we can find no reasons for a polemic between Ibn Rushd and
al-Ghazāli. Both agree that *Kalām* is not the way to truth. Though they do not
agree upon where the way to is to be found, Ibn Rushd does not reject the
intuitive knowledge of the Sufi *dhawq* (See p. 15) nor al-Ghazāli the rational
knowledge of the philosophers. Yet the polemic does take place because both
are moving on a rational level and because al-Ghazāli, in spite of his critique,
makes use of *Kalām*. This brings us to their difference regarding philosophy.

Two well-known writings bear special witness to their philosophical po-
lemic: al-Ghazāli's *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* and Ibn Rushd's *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut.*
Al-Ghazāli's book was written in 488/1095 according to Bouyges.[21] This makes
it earlier than the aforementioned *Iqtisād* and *Ihyāʾ*, and it is important to notice
that the texts I have produced so far to express his opinions against *Kalām* are
dated later. Ibn Rushd wrote his *Tahāfut* in 1180, and there is no reason to
believe or suspect that the relevant thoughts contained in the work were su-
perseded by later evolution.

Ibn Rushd's criticism of the twenty objections which al-Ghazāli raised
against the philosophers follows the same non-systematic order as al-Ghazāli
had elaborated. The issues that can be qualified as "substantive" mainly concern

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[21] See Note 5. For Ibn Rushd's *Tahāfut at-Tahāfut*, see M. Alonso, *Teologia de Averröes.*
(Madrid-Granada, 1947), p. 92.

the nature of God and the world, but it is my intention to consider only the
concepts underlying them. Causality[22] is such a concept, and a basic one, which
appears already in the "first discussion," and it will now draw our attention.

All of Greek and Roman philosophy, with the possible exception of the
Epicurean school, avowed both the existence of causes and an order among
them. Causes, it was argued, are linked to one another, and all eventually go
back to a First Principle identified with God, who acts not directly, but through
the chain of causes. The theory of knowledge in harmony with this view links
the chain of reasoning to the chain of causes and is a doctrine which the Muslim
philosophers in their turn would inherit.

Kalām theologians, however, tried a different rational explanation, with
the primary intention of enhancing the omnipotence of a personal God. If we
follow Wolfson's analysis,[23] we find as many as eight ways of explaining the
phenomenal world without admitting any principle of causation in the philo-
sophical sense. The common denominator among these *Kalām* theories is the
principle that God acts directly, not indirectly through a chain of causes and
effects as the Græco-Roman philosophers believed. According to *Kalām*, as God
created the world from nothingness by an act of divine will, so God creates
directly every single action which occurs in time and space. Al-Ghazāli sets
forth the classical Ashʿarite position in the following passage:

> Accidents are destroyed by themselves and their endurance is not con-
> ceivable. For if their endurance were conceivable, their annihilation
> *(fanāʾ)* would not be conceivable because of this intention *(maʿnā)*. Al-
> though substances do not endure by themselves, they do so because of
> an endurance added to their existence. If God does not create the endur-
> ance, they become non-existent.[24]

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[22] The importance of this subject has been acknowledged for many years and S. van den Bergh
already devoted a number of notes on causality in his translation of the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* to causality.
J. Obermann was the first to approach the question with "Das Problem der Kausalität bei den
Arabern," *Wiener Zeitschr. f. d. Kunde d. Morgenlandes,* 29 (1916) pp. 323-350. See also among
recent studies: M. Marmura, "Ghazāli and Demonstrative Science," *Journal of History of Philosophy,*
3 (1965) pp. 183-204; A. L. Ivry, "Ibn Rushd on Causation," in S. Stein & R. Loewe, eds.,
Studies...presented to Alexander Altmann (London: Alabama U.P., 1979), pp. 143-156; I. Alon,
"Al-Ghazāli on Causality," *J.A.O.S.* 100 (1980) 397-405; A. Hyman, "Aristotle, Algazali and Avicenna
on Necessity, Potentiality and Possibility" in Florilegium Columbianum: *Essays in Honor of P.O.
Kristeller* (New York: Italica Press, 1983), pp. 73-88; B.S. Kogan, *Ibn Rushd and the Metaphysics of
Causation* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985).
[23] *The Philosophy of Kalām* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1976) pp. 522-544; Wolfson uses
al-Ghazāli's *Tahāfut* as a primary source.
[24] *Tahāfut,* II. p. 88; cf. Wolfson, *Kalām,* p. 526.

Ash'arite *Kalām* thus posits a continuous activity of the Divine, who creates not only all beings but also their changes and actions (*kasb*, literally "acquisition"). Substances can endure only if a *ma'na* [25] is added to them for this purpose—something not given to accidents.[26] Although differences within *Kalām* concerning this subject should not be overlooked, there is, as al-Ghazāli affirmed, a prevailing common ground. This denies causality between created beings, and argues as follows:

> The link between what we believe is a cause by custom and what we
> believe is an effect is not necessary in our opinion... From the necessity
> of the existence of the one, the existence of the other does not follow;
> and from the necessity of the non-existence of the one, the
> non-existence of the other does not follow, as between quenching
> thirst and drinking, becoming sated and eating, burning and touching
> fire ... (*Tahāfut*, XVII. 1, p. 277).

Such a theory not only contradicts our daily experience at first sight, but implies very serious consequences. If we cannot know causes, we cannot know the special functions of each thing, and we cannot act either, because we cannot foresee the results of our action. Yet, in fact, we do all these things. We are thus confronted with a contradictory situation: if there are no causes, we act as though there were, and it works.

Kalām's answer to this problem rests on the principle of habit or custom (*'āda*), the origins of which can be traced to al-Ash'ari.[27] The starting point is the very concept of "habitual." Habit is what happens "often" but without necessity, i.e., it need not always happen; sometimes it does not and sometimes it does—but in the opposite direction. It is evident, however, that regularity applies and that exceptions are few. In this manner the Ash'arite theologians even sought to explain miracles.[28]

This answer was not fully satisfactory for all *mutakallimūn*, however, because they were loath to allow "custom" to re-enter the realm of objectivity. In their internal polemic, al-Ghazāli stood behind the Ash'arite school and strove to complete their doctrine of "habit":

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[25] The concept has its roots in the Stoic *sēmainomenon*, but Mu'ammar in the IX century A.D. developed the *Kalām* doctrine in this direction.

[26] V. 'Abd al-Qāhir Ibn Tāhir al-Bagdādā, *Kitāb usūl ad-dīn*, (Istanbul, 1928), p. 230; Abu l-Hasan al-Ash'ari, *Kitāb al-luma'.* Ed & tr. R. J. McCarthy, (Beirut, 1952), pp. 77-78.

[27] According to Ibn Hazm, *Kitāb al-Fisal* (Cairo, 1317/1899), Part V, *Al-kalām fi l-tabā'i'*, pp. 14-16; cf. Wolfson, *Kalām*, p. 546.

[28] For Ibn Rushd treatment of the problem, see M. Fakhry, *Islamic Occasionalism and its Critique by Ibn Rushd and Aquinas* (London, 1958), pp. 103-110.

God has created in us knowledge that He will not do these possible [but absurd] things and that He will not let these things become necessary, but that they are possible: they may occur and not occur. The repetition of the "habit" in them over and over again impresses upon us that their course is in accordance with past custom and that these will not cease to occur (*Tahāfut*, XVII, p. 285).

Al-Ghazāli's prevailing intention is clear: to place God above any limitation, as in his opinion a chain of causes in nature or even regularity would imply. The theory of knowledge he follows requires not only that science or general knowledge are apriori, but even particular knowledge. The issue of the polemic between Ibn Rushd and al-Ghazāli is now plain. Al-Ghazāli's position is directly opposed to classical philosophy. For Aristotle, science is knowledge of causes: "We know something whenever we know its causes and first principles insofar as we have reached its elements" (*Physics*, I. 1, 184 a 12). The same position is faithfully maintained by Ibn Rushd:

> Intelligence is nothing but the perception of things with their causes ...
> and he who denies causes must deny intelligence. Logic implies the
> existence of causes and effects, and knowledge of these effects can only
> be rendered perfect through knowledge of their causes. Denial of causes
> implies the denial of knowledge.[29]

For Ibn Rushd, there is no dichotomy between knowledge and reality, and therefore no necessity for divine intervention. We know something whenever we know its essence, and the essence is determined by causes and determines the effects caused by the being whose essence it.

But while Aristotle did not have to fight against a philosophical school of the Ash'arite kind and did not need to develop an "offensive" line of argument, Ibn Rushd was constrained to do so by adding a refutation of the doctrines of his adversaries. So, for example, the following argument: if we deny the necessity inherent to any kind of knowledge, as *Kalām* does, we must admit that even this affirmation is not necessary knowledge (see note 27, *ibid*). The path taken here by Ibn Rushd consists of unveiling the contradictions into which he saw his adversaries fall.

Ibn Rushd also argues that even though the *Kalām* theologians used different terms than the philosophers, they meant nearly the same thing.[30] The philosophers talk about "matter," the *mutakallimūn* about "condition" and "substratum" (*mahall*); the first, about "form," the second, about

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[29] *Tahāfut at-Tahāfut*, p. 522; English tr., p. 319. Wolfson, *op. cit.*, p. 553.

[30] *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, pp. 521-522; English tr., p. 319.

"quality in the mind"; philosophers accept causality and therefore the existence of effects: the theologians speak of signs[31] even though this also implies a kind of causality.

The main thrust of Ibn Rushd's argument comprises his criticism particularly of the theory of "habit," which—as we have just seen—was affirmed by al-Ghazāli. Ibn Rushd points to what he sees to be its inherent ambiguity:

> I do not know what they [the Ash'arites] understand by the term "habit," whether they mean that it is the habit of the agent, the habit of the existing things, or our habit to form a judgment about such things? (*Tahāfut,* p. 523; tr. p. 320).

He then argues that God cannot acquire a "habit" that would constrain Him. Un-souled beings cannot acquire "habit" either, because this would mean that it belongs to their nature. Of course, the human intellect is familiar with custom, but from it only a "hypothetical" knowledge is possible. If all knowledge were hypothetical "everything would be the case only by supposition and there would be no wisdom in the world from which it might be inferred that its Agent was wise" (*Tahāfut,* pp. 523-524; tr. p. 320).

These last words open the way to another dimension: causality appears not only as the foundation of our knowledge but also as the manifestation of God's wisdom to men. The philosophical argument is definitely better built, but also achieves—in its own way—the same aim intended by *Kalām,* i.e., to emphasize God's influence upon the world and its beings. As M. Fakhry[32] has shown, Ibn Rushd and the tradition to which he belongs have rendered a great service to philosophy.

Although causality was a very important component in the polemic, we should not forget other issues of a non-substantive nature. If we consider, for instance, how causality acts, we see that it is by means of the interaction of the four classical causes (matter, form, agent, end). They are, however, not sufficient to explain the very essence of change or the relation between being and non-being, and last principles have to be found. The polemic against al-Ghazāli also involves these questions.

Let us go back again to the first stage of the philosophical polemic as represented by Aristotelian philosophy. In *Metaphysics* (IV. 3, 1005 a 19-8, 1012 b 31), Aristotle formulates the principles of non-contradiction and of the excluded third: 'x' is or is not. But in the same work and especially in the *Physics* (III,1, 200 b 12-201 b 15), he introduces a new predicate: "possible." Although 'x' does not actually exist, it may potentially exist. Aristotle was here in argument against the Megarian school which denied any kind of potential existence, but his answer did not remain unchallenged. Diodoros Cronos, famous for his Master Argument,[33] derived his definition of the possible from that of the Megarians. Hellenistic philosophy, in general, was concerned with the nature of possibility.

The issue, as it appears in Aristotle, can be summarized for our purpose as follows: existence and non-existence are not contradictory, because existence can be either actual or possible, i.e., in potentiality. Thanks to this distinction, Aristotle found a suitable explanation for the changes and for the coming to be in nature, which consist always of an "actualization" of an existing "potentiality."

A consequence of this theory is that there is no absolute non-existence; thus Greek thought is alien to the idea of nothingness as well as creation from nothingness. The possibility of coming to be enjoys a kind of reality because it also has a *real* foundation. This foundation is associated with the "first matter" as it is the underlying cause of any process of actualization.

Ash'arite *Kalām* did not agree with this conception of possibility, which is linked to causality. It did not admit the universe as an autonomous entity with actual and potential dimensions. Only God can endure, and things are or are not according to God's will; there is no foundation for possible existence. The notion of possibility/potentiality is thus reduced to a logical category: the possible is only what is not contradictory.

Is it, then, possible to admit the reality of "potentiality" in cases where the possible becomes existent in fact? Al-Ghazāli denied this in the following terms:

> By potentiality of existence *(qūwa al-wujūd)* we do not mean anything else than possibility of existence *(imkān al-wujūd),* and that leads to the coincidence in the same thing of the possibility/potentiality of its exist-

[31] *Dalīl,* corresponding to the Greek *sēmeion.* This is defined by Aristotle as a "demonstrative sentence" in *Analytica Priora* II. 27, 70 a 7-10. It refers to something *(pragma)* which happens before or after what exists or has become. A classical instance is smoke as a sign of fire. Five centuries later, Galen gave another definition: "Dialecticians define *sēmeion* as a hypothetical sentence for a sound mind, where the first period can be grasped from the second" (*Opera omnia,* Note 1, c. XIX, 7, p. 235). This second definition reflects Theophrastus' and the Stoic developments, and it is closer to the one employed by the Kalām. As the concept fulfilled its function in Stoicism in relation to causality, so it does in Kalām.
[32] *Occasionalism,* pp. 208-213.

ence and its attainment of existence in act. Its existence in act is identical with the potentiality of existence (*Tahāfut*, XIX, p. 343).

The distinction between *imkān* and *qūwa* is taken from *Falsafa*, where it proceeded from post-Aristotelian philosophy. For al-Ghazāli the distinction has no importance, because possibility and potentiality are never "real." There is only actual existence and possibility appears together with it, being only an "additional attribute" (*wasf idāfī*).

The polemic over this point was not merely academic: it had direct consequences for understanding the nature of the world—its necessity or eternality—as well as of Divine omnipotence.[34] It is therefore not surprising that many arguments of the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*[35] revolve around these opposite conceptions of the possible. Let us consider, for instance, the so called "fourth proof" of the First Discussion involving the eternity of matter. Ibn Rushd condensed the Aristotelian view into these words: "everything that becomes is possible before it becomes, and that possibility needs something for its subsistence (*yaqūm bihi*) namely the substratum (*mahall*) which receives that which is possible" (*Tahāfut*, p. 100; tr. p. 59). This substratum is obviously first matter.

In the same passage, Ibn Rushd relates al-Ghazāli's reaction:

> The possibility of which they [the philosophers] speak is a judgment of the intellect (*qadā' al-'aql*); and anything whose existence the intellect supposes, provided no obstacle presents itself to the supposition, we call possible.[36]

Al-Ghazāli's point was to argue that possibility belongs only to the realm of human thought and its laws. Against this Ibn Rushd raised severe objections on the basis of his realistic theory of knowledge. As in the case of causality, he launched his attack from the fact of knowledge itself:

> If there were outside the soul nothing possible or impossible, judgment of the mind about this [that things are possible or impossible] would be of as much value as no judgment at all, and there would be no difference between reason and illusion (*Tahāfut*, p. 113; tr., p. 67).

If rational knowledge is knowledge of causes, it is also knowledge of the principles sustaining them. The agent of a change, for instance, is the cause that draws the object of this change from potentiality into actuality; its acceptance is also the acceptance of its metaphysical foundations. Ibn Rushd's answer to al-Ghazāli reinforces the Aristotelian line, though he acknowledged certain difficulties with it.[37] In this as in other respects, Ibn Rushd stands as the representative of the Aristotelian tradition in Islam more evidently than his predecessor, Ibn Sīna. For example, with respect to causal efficacy, B. Kogan[38] has recently outlined Ibn Rushd's contribution, showing how it moves away from Ibn Sīna's model of emanation. For the general doctrine of causes and principles Ibn Rushd returns to Aristotle, albeit in a Neo-platonic way which affirms that the giving of unity to a sensible substance gives it existence.[39]

Ibn Rushd's polemic against al-Ghazāli certainly embraces other subjects than those we have considered, as can be seen in the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* or in the *Kashf 'an Manāhij*. The discussion about causality and possibility, however, takes us to the heart of their disagreement and serves to illustrate the nature of their polemical relationship, notwithstanding the important issues upon which Ibn Rushd agreed with al-Ghazāli. The issue in dispute was not al-Ghazāli's adoption of Sufism but his retention of *Kalām*. In his struggle against *Falsafa*, he subscribed to the Ash'arite *Kalām* because of its rational dimension. This no doubt involved him in a contradictory situation: on the one side he rebuked *Kalām*; on the other, he made use of it. His criticism of *Kalām*— as we noticed—was mainly subjective in nature, although he also pointed to the weakness of its reasoning. However, his criticism resulted not in a turn to philosophy, but to non-rational forms of knowledge and to an emphasis of the subjective world.

If we adhere to the chronology of al-Ghazāli's works, it becomes clear that he did not articulate these contradictory opinions about *Kalām* simultaneously. His *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, in which he defended the Ash'arite *Kalām* without any critique, was written before his spiritual crisis of 488/1095.[40] Later, in the *Ihyā'* (written between 489/1096 and 495/1102) he set important limitations to *Kalām* and even advised its avoidance. Finally, in the *Kitāb al-Iljām* (505/1111) he expressed his complete disapproval of *Kalām* and its proponents.

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[34] See van den Bergh's introduction to his translation of the *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut*, pp. xxi-xxiii.
[35] See e.g. pp. 86-117, tr. pp. 50-69.
[36] *Tahāfut*, p. 102; tr., p. 60. A corollary of this proposition establishes that "there is not in possibility anything whatever more excellent ... than it is" (*Ihyā'*, IV, p. 223), and it has raised a discussion about the perfect rightness of this world. See E .L. Ormsby, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought (The Dispute over al-Ghazāli's "Best of All Possible Worlds")* (Princeton: UP, 1984), esp. pp. 32-91.

[37] *Tahāfut*, p. 68; tr., pp. 68-69.
[38] *Averroes and the Metaphysics of Causation*, pp. 250 ff & 256 ff.
[39] *Tahāfut*, pp. 180-181; tr. p. 108 & p. 231-232; tr. pp. 137-138.
[40] See *Al-munqidh*, pp. 125-128; tr. McCarthy, pp. 91-93.

While this chronology helps to distinguish an evolution in al-Ghazāli's thought, it does not resolve the contradictory nature of his evolution. Scholars take different views of this problem. Asin Palacios,[41] who did not have a chronology of al-Ghazāli's works, argued that he remained an Ash'arite throughout his life. Jabre[42] also sees a continuously positive attitude towards *Kalām,* but with conditions. Lazarus-Yafeh[43] considers that his books dealing with philosophical doctrines are not authentic, because the common medieval philosophical terms appear only in these books, and in none other of his works..

In fact, Ibn Rushd himself was the first to be aware of the problem. In the *Fasl al-maqāl* (p. 18; tr. Hourani, p. 61), he complains that the *ta'wil* of al-Ghazāli used "poetical, rhetorical and dialectical methods" with the praiseworthy purpose of "awakening spirits." This resulted in internal contradictions of methodology and effect, and inn inconsistency which undermined his good intentions. In a famous passage, Ibn Rushd condenses his criticism of al-Ghazāli as follows:

> In his writings he did not adhere to any doctrine, because he was an Ash'arite among the Ash'arites, a Sufi among the Sufis, and a philosopher among the philosophers.

Ibn Rushd's criticism is impressive, but unfair. No doubt al-Ghazāli wished "the best" for his people in terms of strong faith and right moral behavior. Philosophers may affirm that rational knowledge leads to these goals in the best way, but one could object that the essence of the religious phenomenon itself lies beyond philosophy or rational theology. This was clearly al-Ghazāli's conviction and in his search for this essence he moved between *Kalām* and Sufism—reason and heart—until the second became his predominant concern.[44] But the subjective system which he set out in the *Ihyā'* as his most representative work, never completely superseded the rational constructions of his Ash'arite works. He may have renounced *Kalām* in the course of his life, but its philosophical dimensions remain objectively present in his work.

In conclusion, therefore, we may say that philosophy in the Islamic tradition continued to advance through the work of al-Ghazāli and Ibn Rushd in the recognized manner of polemic, even if the former did not seem to be aware that he himself was engaged in philosophy. Al-Ghazāli's ultimate personal concern was always other than *Falsafa, Kalām* or even Sufism—for the true nature of religious knowledge cannot be identified with any one of these disciplines of knowing.

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[41] See Algazel. *Dogmática, moral, ascética* (Zaragoza. 1901) p. 226.

[42] *La notion de certitude,* pp. 118-119.

[43] *Studies in al-Ghazāli,* pp. 249-258. She denies that the *Maqāsid, Tahāfut, Mihaqq al-nazar,* and *Mizān al-'amal,* were written by al-Ghazāli.

[44] Some al-Ghazāli scholars certainly insist on the contradiction being apparent and not real; e.g., F. Jabre in *La notion de certitude,* p. 277.