

Monism and Monotheism in al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-anwār*

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It is appropriate to begin a study on the problem of Monism versus Monotheism in Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī's (d. 505/1111) thought by juxtaposing two passages from his famous treatise *Mishkāt al-anwār* ('The Niche of Lights') which is devoted to an interpretation of the Light Verse (Q. 24:35) and of the Veils Ḥadīth (to be discussed below).¹ As I will try to show, the two passages represent monistic and monotheistic perspectives respectively.

For the purposes of the present study, the term 'monism' refers to the theory, put forward by al-Ghazālī in a number of contexts, that God is the *only* existent in existence and the world, considered in itself, is 'sheer non-existence' (*ʿadam maḥḍ*); while 'monotheism' refers to the view that God is the *one* of the totality of existents which is the source of existence for the rest of existents. The fundamental difference between the two views lies in their respective assessments of God's granting existence to what is other than He: the monistic paradigm views the granting of existence as essentially *virtual* so that in the last analysis God alone exists, whereas the monotheistic paradigm sees the granting of existence as *real*.²

Let us now turn to the passages in question.

Passage A: *Mishkāt*, Part 1, §§52–4³

[§52] The entire world is permeated by external visual and internal intellectual lights ... Lower [lights] emanate from one another the way light emanates from a lamp [*sirāj*, cf. Q. 24:35] ... [Similarly,] higher [lights] are kindled from one another and arranged in a hierarchy of stages (*tartīb maqāmāt*). The entire [hierarchy] ascends to the 'Light of lights' – the [other lights'] first source and origin. This [origin] is God the Exalted, alone, without a partner. Other lights, by contrast, are borrowed (*mustaʿāra*), the only *real* light being His light. [Indeed,] everything is His light. Moreover, He is everything. Moreover, nothing save He has a 'he-ness', except metaphorically (*lā huwiyya li-ghayrihi illā bi'l-majāz*).

[§53] Therefore, there is no light but His light, whereas other lights are lights not in themselves but only with respect to {the face}⁴

adjacent to Him. Indeed, the face of everything that has a face is {directed}⁵ at Him and turns in His direction: *Wherever you turn, there is the Face of God (fa-aynamā tuwallū fa-thamma wajhu'llāh)* [Q. 2:115]. Hence, there is no god but He, for the term 'god' denotes that toward which face{s} turn with worship and godliness (*ta'alluh*) ... Moreover, just as there is no god but He, there is no he but He (*lā huwa illā huwa*), for the term 'he' denotes that to which any kind of a reference is made, and there can be no reference but to Him (*lā ishāra illā ilayhi*) ...

[§54] There can be no reference to the light of the sun but only to the sun. Now, everything in existence relates to [God] as light relates to the sun, in the plain terms of this image (*fī zāhir al-mithāl*). This is why 'There is no god but God' is the *tawhīd* of the commoners, whereas 'There is no god but He' is the *tawhīd* of the elect, since this is more perfect, special, comprehensive, correct and precise. It is more conducive to the holder [of this doctrine] entering into pure singularity and sheer unity.

Passage B: *Mishkāt*, Part 2, §§11–15⁶

[§11] Since the world of [divine] kingdom (*‘ālam al-malakūt*) contains lofty, noble, luminous substances, called angels, from which lights emanate upon human spirits – which is why they are [also] called lords, God being the Lord of lords – and since [these substances] have diverse degrees (*marātib*) in luminosity, it is appropriate that their image[s] (*mithāluhā*) in the world of manifestation (*‘ālam al-shahāda*) be the sun, the moon and the stars.

[§12] The traveller (*sālik*) on the path first encounters the [angel] whose rank is the rank of the stars (*mā darajatuhu darajat al-kawākib*). He perceives the effluence of [this angel's] light and realises that the entire lower world is under its control and the effluence of its light ... Hence he says, '*This is my Lord*' [Q. 6:76].

[§13] Then when he clearly perceives what is above it, i.e. the [angel] whose rank is the rank of the moon, he realises that the first [angel], in comparison to what is above it, enters the setting place of disappearance [lit. 'falling', *huwīy*]. Hence he says, '*I do not like those that set (al-āfilīn)*' [Q. 6:76].

[§14] He ascends in the same manner till he reaches the [angel] whose image (*mithāl*) is the sun. He sees that it is greater and higher [than the previous angel], yet he sees that it [too] admits of having an image through possessing a kind of analogous correspondence with it (*qābil li'l-mithāl bi-naw^c munāsaba lahu ma^cahu*). However,

analogous correspondence with something imperfect is also an imperfection and a 'setting' [*ufūl*, cf. Q. 6:76]. This is why he says: *I turn⁷ my face as a true believer⁸ to Him who created the heavens and the earth (innī wajjahtu wajhiya li'lladhī faṭara'l-samāwāti wa'l-arḍa ḥanīfan)* [Q. 6:79].

Now, the meaning of 'He who' (*alladhī*) is an unspecific reference (*ishāra mubhama*) [whose referent] has no analogous correspondence (*lā munāsaba lahā*). Indeed, if someone were to ask, 'what is the image (*mithāl*) of the referent (*mafhūm*) of 'He who'', this question would have no conceivable answer. This is why that which transcends any analogous correspondence is the First, the Real (*fa'l-mutanazzih 'an kull munāsaba huwa al-awwal al-ḥaqq*) ...

[§15] This is why when Pharaoh asked Moses, 'What is the Lord of the worlds?' (*mā rabbu'l-‘ālamīn*) [Q. 26:23] like someone who asks about His whatness [or 'quiddity', *māhiyya*], [Moses] responded to him only through a reference to [God's] acts, for acts were more manifest to the questioner. Thus [Moses] said [in response], 'Lord of the heavens and the earth' [Q. 26:24]. Pharaoh said to those around him, 'Do you not hear [this]?' [Q. 26:25] like someone who is accusing [Moses] of having begged the question about whatness. [Finally, when] Moses said, 'Your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers' [Q. 26:26], Pharaoh called him insane (*nasabahu ilā'l-junūn*), for he was asking about image and whatness (*al-mithāl wa'l-māhiyya*) while [Moses] was responding about acts. Thus [Pharaoh] said, 'Indeed your messenger, who has been sent to you, is insane' [Q. 26:27].

I am not aware of any study that puts these passages together. Yet they are so closely related that they cannot be read in isolation from one another:

1. Both passages present a hierarchy of spiritual lights ascending to the First Source – God – called in the first passage 'the Light of lights' (*nūr al-anwār*) and in the second, 'the Lord of lords' (*rabb al-‘arbāb*) (note the similar structure of both expressions). This terminology reflects the respective Qur'anic substrata of these passages: the Light Verse in the first case, and a number of ayas from *Sūrat al-An‘ām* (Q. 6:76–9), describing Abraham's ascent to belief in God through a sequence of intermediary 'lords', in the second.
2. In both cases a Qur'anic aya about 'turning' or 'turning the face' is quoted. In the first passage, this is Q. 2:115, *Wherever you turn, there is the Face of God (fa-aynamā tuwallū fa-thamma wajhu'llāh)*; in the second passage this is Abraham's final confession, Q. 6:79, *I turn my face as a true believer to Him who created the heavens and the earth (innī wajjahtu wajhiya li'lladhī faṭara'l-samāwāti wa'l-arḍa ḥanīfan)*.

3. Furthermore – and this is especially striking – in both passages God is designated by a pronoun: the masculine singular *personal* pronoun *huwa* in the first passage and the masculine singular *demonstrative* pronoun *alladhī* in the second.
4. In both cases, important conclusions are drawn from this designation, both using the term ‘reference’ (*ishāra*). In the first case, God is said to be the only ‘he’ in existence, i.e. the only real existent, with the implication that there can be no reference *save to Him* (*lā ishāra illā ilayhi*). In the second case, God is said to be the ‘He who’ (*alladhī*), an unspecific reference (*ishāra mubhama*), with the implication that God *can have no analogous correspondence* (*munāsaba*).⁹
5. Finally and most significantly, there are important philosophical terms ‘hidden’ in each of the passages. In Passage A, this is the term *huwiyya*, translated above as ‘he-ness’ but also meaning ‘existence’.¹⁰ In Passage B, this is the term *māhiyya*, ‘whatness’ or quiddity, around which al-Ghazālī’s interpretation of the Qur’anic dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh revolves (Q. 26:23–7).¹¹

What I wish to suggest at this point is that the two passages reflect two distinct themes or perspectives present in the *Mishkāṭ* and in al-Ghazālī’s theology in general. The first perspective can be described as monistic; the second, as monotheistic. Indeed, according to the first passage, God is the only true existent, the other existents possessing only borrowed and metaphorical existence – hence monism. According to the second passage, by contrast, God is the Lord and Creator (*I turn my face as a true believer to Him who **created** the heavens and the earth*) and while the *divinity* of the intermediary ‘lords’ is rejected their *existence* is never denied – hence monotheism.

What I propose to do in the following discussion is to consider the two perspectives separately, using especially the *Mishkāṭ* but also other works of al-Ghazālī, in Arabic and Persian, and to examine how these perspectives unfold and interrelate.

Monotheism: Commentary on Passage A

Let us start with Passage A and with the monistic perspective. As stated above, the term monism refers to the view – put forward by al-Ghazālī in a number of contexts in several works – that ‘There is nothing in existence save God’ (*laysa fī’l-wujūd illā’llāh*)¹² and that the world is ‘sheer non-existence’ (*‘adam maḥḍ*).¹³

The theme of God as the only true existent is central to al-Ghazālī’s metaphysics. It occurs, most famously, as the highest stage of professing God’s oneness, *tawḥīd*.¹⁴ In the *Mishkāṭ* itself, as we have seen toward the end of Passage A, al-Ghazālī draws a distinction between two types of *tawḥīd*, characteristic of the commoners and the

elect respectively. The commoners believe in the plain meaning of the *shahāda*, 'There is no god but God'. The elect, by contrast, have a more esoteric version, which reads: 'There is no god but He'. An even more esoteric version, 'There is no he but He' (*lā huwa illā huwa*) is mentioned earlier in the same passage without attribution. The implication is that this is the *tawḥīd* of the elect among the elect, *khawāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*, a group mentioned elsewhere in the *Mishkāt*.¹⁵

In several of his works al-Ghazālī discusses *tawḥīd* and divides it into a number of levels or stages (*marātib*). The best known – fourfold – classification is found in Book 35 of the *Iḥyā'* (*Kitāb al-Tawḥīd wa'l-tawakkul*), in the corresponding sections of *Kitāb al-Arbaʿīn* and the Persian *Kīmīyā-ye saʿādat*, and in *Kitāb al-Imlā' fī ishkālāt al-Iḥyā'* – a work supplementary to the *Iḥyā'* and written to rebut criticisms directed at the latter.¹⁶ A slightly different classification is presented in one of al-Ghazālī's Persian letters.¹⁷ There, *tawḥīd* is divided into six levels. In the following discussion I shall take the fourfold classification of the *Iḥyā'* as a basis, providing references to other classifications in endnotes where appropriate.

In Book 35 of the *Iḥyā'* al-Ghazālī divides *tawḥīd* into four levels and compares them, respectively, to a nut's husk of the husk, husk, kernel and kernel of the kernel, progressing from the most outward dimension to the innermost.

1. The first level is purely superficial. By it al-Ghazālī means enunciating the *shahāda* not by the heart but by the tongue alone; this is the *tawḥīd* of the hypocrites (*tawḥīd al-munāfiqīn*).¹⁸
2. The second level affirms the meaning of the *shahāda* (*maʿnā al-laḥz*)¹⁹ by the heart as recognised by the commonality of Muslims. This is the view of the commoners (*iʿtiqād al-ʿawāmm*). It is compared to a knot (*ʿuqda*) upon a person's heart;²⁰ religious innovation (*bidʿa*) strives to loosen and untie this knot, whereas *kalām* protects it (al-Ghazālī refers in this context to his *kalām* treatise *al-Iqtisād fī'l-iʿtiqād*).²¹
3. The third level implies envisioning the *shahāda* by way of disclosure (*bi-ṭarīq al-kashf*) by means of 'expansion of the chest' (*inshirāḥ al-ṣadr*)²² and illumination by the light of truth (or God: *nūr al-ḥaqq*).²³ This is the station of those 'drawn near [to God]' (*maqām al-muqarrabīn*). They see all things, despite their plurality, as originating from a single source, God. In this stage of *tawḥīd* God is *the only agent* (*ḥāʾil*), to which all other existents are subjugated (*musakhkharūn*);²⁴ this is why it is called *tawḥīd al-fiʿl* or *tawḥīd fiʿl-fiʿl*;²⁵ it is this stage of *tawḥīd* that is the foundation of *tawakkul*.²⁶
4. Finally, the fourth level implies envisioning God as *the only existent*. This is the highest purpose of *tawḥīd*, called 'the contemplation of the righteous' (*mushāhadat al-ṣiddīqīn*) or, in Ṣūfī parlance, 'obliteration in *tawḥīd*' (*al-fanā' fiʿl-tawḥīd*), inasmuch as one who sees in existence nothing but God ceases to

see himself.²⁷ In this stage one sees the universe (*al-kull*) not insofar as it is many but insofar as it is one (*min ḥaythu innahu wāḥid*).²⁸ This contemplation is sometimes lasting but more often comes as a flash of lightning.²⁹

It is important to note that in referring to the fourth level of *tawḥīd* al-Ghazālī is not speaking of a purely *subjective* state of the mystic, who, being totally devoted to and focused on God, sees nothing else – not even himself – in existence; whose vision, however, does not correspond to the actual state of affairs, where both God and creation exist. Such purely subjectivistic interpretation ignores the fact that the fourth level of *tawḥīd* has, for al-Ghazālī, an important cognitive content, which he seeks to analyse and explain in rational terms or through images, as we shall see below.³⁰ It is with this cognitive content and the *ontology* revealed therein, not merely with the psychological state that leads to its realisation, that he is primarily concerned. This is why he is not content with the Ṣūfī designation of this state as ‘obliteration’ (*fanāʾ*),³¹ which overemphasises the subjective and experiential side, and insists on calling it *tawḥīd*, emphasising its ontological aspect.

It is for this reason, too, that al-Ghazālī is careful to reject alternative ontological interpretations of this state: he wants to ensure that the ontology it reveals is adequately interpreted and understood. This is the purpose of the following comment, made by al-Ghazālī in the Persian letter mentioned above, in which he criticises the ‘ecstatic’ Ṣūfīs al-Ḥallāj (d. 309/922) and Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 261/874 or 264/877–8) who, in his view, failed adequately to interpret their experience:³²

Those who have reached this stage are overcome in it by a state similar to intoxication (*sokrī*) and in this intoxication are prone to err in two ways. First, they may think that there has occurred a conjunction (*etteṣālī*) [with God] and express it in terms of [God’s] indwelling (*ḥolūl*) [within them]. Second, they may think that there has occurred a union (*etteḥādī*) [with God]: they have become [God] Himself³³ and the two have become one ... [like those who say] ‘I am the Real [i.e. God]’ and ‘Glory be to Me’ [i.e. al-Ḥallāj and al-Bisṭāmī respectively]. When this intoxication gives way to sobriety they understand that they have been in error. [Al-Ghazālī then goes on to refute these interpretations on philosophical grounds.]

The notion that it is not only in a mystic’s subjective experience but also in actuality that (in the last analysis) there is nothing in existence save God is a striking one, and al-Ghazālī is very much aware that it will raise some eyebrows. He therefore attempts to forestall criticism by offering a variety of partial but complementary explanations.³⁴ The most revealing of these is to be found in the first part of the *Mishkāṭ* and in the Persian letter mentioned above. These texts are cited below side by side: the former in paraphrase, the latter in translation.

Mishkāṭ, Part 1, §§37–43

[§37] Al-Ghazālī describes a hierarchy (*tartīb*) of lights. This hierarchy is not infinite but ascends to a First Source (*manbaʿ awwal*) – the Light in and of itself (*al-nūr li-dhātihi wa-bi-dhātihi*), above which there are no lights and from which the entire hierarchy shines forth. This Light deserves the name of light more than secondary lights.

[§38] Moreover, the name 'light' as applied to other lights is a pure metaphor (*majāz mahḍ*), since their luminosity is borrowed (*mustaʿāra*) (for if considered in their essence (*dhāt*) they have no light whatsoever) and the relation of the thing borrowed to the borrower is a pure metaphor (*nisbat al-mustaʿār ilā'l-mustaʿir majāz mahḍ*).

[§40] Non-existence is utmost darkness; existence is utmost light.

[§41] Existence is divided into two kinds: existence proper to a thing and existence borrowed from elsewhere (*mā li'l-shayʿ min dhātihi wa- ... mā lahu min ghayrihi*). That which exists by virtue of borrowed existence is pure non-existence (*ʿadam mahḍ*) if considered in its essence. God alone is the Real Existent (*al-mawjūd al-ḥaqq*) and the Real Light.

[§42] There is nothing in existence save God. *Everything is perishing save His Face* [Q. 28:88]: not perishing at a certain moment [in the future] but from eternity to eternity (*azalan wa-abadan*).

[§43] Each thing has two faces: one toward itself, another toward its Lord. With regard to the former, it is non-existence; with regard to the Face of God it exists. Therefore, there is no existent save God and His Face. Therefore, *everything is perishing save His Face* [Q. 28:88] from eternity to eternity.

Persian Letter³⁵

[Question:] Sky, earth, angels, stars, demons all exist. So what is the meaning of [the statement] that there is no other existent save God?

[Answer:] If a king, on the day of a festival were to go with his servants to the desert and give each of them a horse and an outfit similar to his own and if someone were to see all this and say 'Oh, all of them are equally wealthy' or 'all of them are rich', this statement would be and appear correct [but only] with regard to someone who does not know what is behind the matter. [However] someone who knows what is behind the matter – [namely] that this possession and this favor have been granted to [the servants] as a loan (*ʿariyya*) and that [the king] having performed the holiday prayer will take them away again – *he* would say 'None is rich save the king' and his statement would be correct in the real sense. This is because the relation of the loan to the borrower is metaphorical (*majāzī*), so in reality he remains as poor as he had been [before the loan] while the lender remains in control of his wealth despite the money lent out.³⁶

Know that the existence of all things is a loan (*ʿariyya*) and comes not from the essence of [these] things (*az dhāt-e chīzhā*) but from God, while the existence of God is essential (*dhātī*) and does not originate from anything else. Rather He is the Real Being (*hast-e be-ḥaqīqat*), while all other things are [only] seeming beings (*hast-e nomāy*) with regard to someone who does not know that [their existence] is a loan. However, he who has understood the real nature of things sees with his own eyes that *Everything is perishing save His Face* [Q. 28:88], [perishing] from eternity to eternity (*azalan va-abadan*), not [merely] at some particular time [in the future]. Indeed, all things at all times are non-existent (*maʿdūm*) as far as their essence is concerned (*az ānjā ke dhāt-e vey ast*), since non-existence and existence come to them not from their essence but from the essence of God. Therefore, this existence is metaphorical (*majāzī*), not real (*ḥaqīqī*). Hence, the statement that there is no other existent save [God] is correct.

Here, in the *Mishkāt* and the Persian letter, al-Ghazālī provides theoretical justification for his radical claim that ‘There is nothing in existence save God’: the ‘borrowed’ and hence ‘metaphorical’ nature of the existence of created things.³⁷

What is the origin of this idea? In order to answer this question let us notice that while consonant with important developments within the Šūfī tradition³⁸ al-Ghazālī’s monistic ontology is critical of some aspects of that tradition (the ecstatic pronouncements of al-Ḥallāj and al-Bisṭāmī as well as Šūfī terminology) and on the other hand can be shown to stand on a firm philosophical foundation. Specifically, it bears a striking structural resemblance to, and integrates important elements of, Avicenna’s metaphysics, especially Avicenna’s quiddity/existence distinction and the proof for the existence of God.³⁹

According to Avicenna, it is not to their quiddities (‘whatnesses’, *māhiyyāt*) that most existents owe their existence, for if they did, they would exist necessarily in virtue of what they are and could not not-exist. Since, however, this is patently not the case, their existence must be due to an external efficient cause: it is ‘borrowed’, in al-Ghazālī’s terminology. As Avicenna demonstrates, the chain of efficient causes cannot be infinite and must have a beginning – the first efficient cause, i.e. God, who alone is ‘necessary of existence’ (*wājib al-wujūd*), that is, necessarily existent in virtue of what He is (*li-dhātihī*), and not merely ‘possible of existence’ (*mumkin al-wujūd*), that is, capable of both existence and non-existence as the rest of existents.

It can be seen that in the passages cited above al-Ghazālī’s discussion follows the structure and conceptual framework of Avicenna’s argument quite closely, with only occasional modifications and ‘re-naming’ of some of the concepts:

1. Al-Ghazālī’s ‘light’ (in the *Mishkāt* passage) is another term for existence, as al-Ghazālī himself makes clear in *Mishkāt*, Part 1, §40.⁴⁰
2. The hierarchy of lights, emanating light upon one another, corresponds to Avicenna’s chain of efficient causes, bestowing existence upon one another. The First Source of these lights corresponds to Avicenna’s first efficient cause.
3. The ‘borrowed’ nature of existence corresponds to the fact that in Avicenna’s system existence is bestowed upon a quiddity by an external efficient cause (and ultimately by the First Cause).
4. The perpetual ‘perishing’ of all existents corresponds to their ‘possible’ nature (*imkān*) in Avicenna’s system. This explains why, according to al-Ghazālī, their perishing is ‘from eternity to eternity’ (*azalan wa-abadan*): although, in contradistinction to Avicenna, al-Ghazālī sees the world as created in time, the world’s possible nature, that is, its being capable of existence or non-existence, is nevertheless eternal.⁴¹

5. Finally, the two 'faces' of existents – directed at themselves and at God – correspond to their quiddity and existence respectively. The 'Face of God' is the flow of existence in created things.⁴²

Furthermore, on several occasions, Avicenna claims that contingent existents, taken in themselves, are 'void' (*bāṭila*) and 'deserve non-existence' (*tastaḥiqqu'l-ʿadam*). In the following remarkable passage from *Ilāhiyyāt*, Book 8, Chapter 6, he even uses the concept of 'face' and quotes the same Qur'anic aya – Q. 28:88 – to substantiate this claim:⁴³

[The Necessary of Existence] is sometimes also called Real (*ḥaqq*), since the belief in Its existence is real. Moreover, there is nothing more deserving this reality (*aḥaqq bi-hādhihi'l-ḥaqqīqa*)⁴⁴ than That the belief in whose existence is real, and not only real but eternal, and not only eternal but is also due to Itself, not to another. The quiddities of other things, however, do not ... deserve existence (*lā tastaḥiqqu'l-wujūd*); rather, taken in themselves, when their relation to the Necessary of Existence is severed, they deserve non-existence (*tastaḥiqqu'l-ʿadam*). This is why they are all void (*bāṭila*) in themselves and real (*ḥaqq*) by It, becoming actualised with respect to the face that is adjacent to It (*wa-bi'l-qiyās ilā'l-wajh alladhī yalihi ḥāšila*). This is why *everything is perishing save His Face* [Q. 28:88], and thus He is more deserving [than anything else] to be [the] Real (*aḥaqq bi-an yakūna ḥaqqan*).

Al-Ghazālī's use of the concept of 'face' in the *Mishkāt* and of the Qur'anic phrase *everything is perishing save His Face* undoubtedly goes back to this and similar Avicennian passages. It is also worth noting that when al-Ghazālī speaks of the fourth degree of *tawḥīd* he usually calls God 'the One, the Real' (*al-wāḥid al-ḥaqq*),⁴⁵ providing a direct link to this passage by Avicenna, in which God's name 'the Real' is analysed. Moreover, in his commentary on the Divine Names, *al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ maʿānī asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā* – a work written after the *Iḥyāʾ*⁴⁶ but prior to the *Mishkāt*⁴⁶ – al-Ghazālī explains that the name *al-ḥaqq* refers to the essence (*dhāt*) of God insofar as it is necessary of existence (*wājibat al-wujūd*), again alluding to Avicenna.⁴⁷ All this leaves al-Ghazālī's debt to Avicenna beyond reasonable doubt.

The fourth degree of *tawḥīd* represents, therefore, an interpretation – a radical interpretation, one may add – of Avicenna's metaphysics. This interpretation is a monistic one: 'There is nothing in existence save God'. Even though this interpretation does not do justice to Avicenna's system as a whole,⁴⁸ we do find in Avicenna passages – such as the one just quoted – that can be taken to support this

view. It is primarily on such passages that al-Ghazālī's monistic interpretation of *tawhīd* is based.

Monotheism: Commentary on Passage B

Let us now turn to Passage B and the monotheistic perspective. Hermann Landolt in his important study on the *Mishkāt*, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', published in 1991, pointed out that this passage is closely related to the third part – the so-called 'Veil Section' – of the *Mishkāt*.⁴⁹ This section is devoted to an interpretation of the Veils Ḥadīth: 'God has 70 [in some versions: 70,000] veils of light and darkness; were He to lift them, the glories of His Face would burn up everyone whose sight perceived Him'. Following this ḥadīth, al-Ghazālī presents a classification of human beings into four categories: (1) those veiled from God by pure darkness, (2) those veiled by darkness mixed with light, (3) those veiled by pure light, and finally (4) the attainers (*al-wāṣilūn*). It is essential for our purposes to deal with the last two categories in detail.

The third category is divided into three groups: first, those (group 3.1) who know the true meaning of the divine attributes (such as speech, will, power and knowledge) and realise that there is no connection between the application of these terms to God and to other existents, including humans. Hence they avoid naming God by these attributes and refer to Him merely through the *relation* (*iḍāfa*) He has to created beings, as did Moses in his response to Pharaoh's question 'What is the Lord of the worlds?' (Q. 26:23).⁵⁰ This group believes that the Lord transcends the meanings of the attributes and is the mover and caretaker of the heavens (*muḥarrrik al-samāwāt wa-mudabbiruhā*).⁵¹

The second group (3.2) realises that there is plurality in the heavens and that each sphere is moved by a separate angel, the angels being multiple and analogous to stars (*nisbatuhum ilā* [read *fī?*] *al-anwār al-ilāhiyya nisbat al-kawākib*).⁵² Hence they conclude that the Lord is the mover of the outermost celestial body encompassing all the spheres (*al-jirm al-aqṣā al-munṭawī 'alā'l-aflāk kullihā*), who is untouched by plurality.

The third group (3.3) realises that the mover of the outermost celestial body causes the motion of the heavens directly (*bi-ṭarīq al-mubāshara*). Since it is not fitting for the Lord to be the *direct* cause of motion, the mover of the outermost celestial body cannot be the Lord but an angel, standing at the Lord's service and analogous to the moon (*nisbatuhu ilā* [read *fī?*] *al-anwār al-ilāhiyya al-maḥḍa nisbat al-qamar*).⁵² They believe that the Lord is the Being that is obeyed by this mover (*al-muṭā' min jihat hādihā'l-muḥarrrik*)⁵³ and moves the universe not directly but by way of command (*bi-ṭarīq al-amr*).⁵⁴

So far the threefold division of the third category. Finally, the fourth category (group 4), the attainers, are those who realise that even this obeyed one (*al-muṭāʿ*) has a quality that is at odds with pure singularity, 'on account of a secret that cannot be disclosed in this book',⁵⁵ and that the obeyed one is analogous to the sun among [sensible] lights (*nisbat hādhā'l-muṭāʿ nisbat al-shams fī'l-anwār*).⁵⁶ This is why they turn their faces away from the movers of the heavens, the mover of the outermost celestial body, and the obeyed one, by whose command it is moved, toward Him who created (*faṭara*) them all.

As noted by Landolt, both Passage B and the Veil Section are parallel to, and based on, Abraham's gradual ascent to belief in God in Q. 6:76–9. According to the Qur'anic passage, Abraham saw a star and declared, '*This is my Lord (hādhā rabbī)*' (Q. 6:76), yet when the star disappeared beneath the horizon, Abraham said, '*I do not like those that set (al-āfilīn)*' (Q. 6:76). Then the moon rose and Abraham declared again, '*This is my Lord*' (Q. 6:77); but the moon set, too. Next, the sun appeared and Abraham exclaimed, '*This is my Lord, [for] this is greater*' (Q. 6:78). Finally, after the sun disappeared as well, Abraham renounced all forms of idolatry and proclaimed, '*I turn my face as a true believer to Him who created the heavens and the earth*' (Q. 6:79).

In the case of Passage B the Qur'anic substratum is evident, since this passage alludes to Abraham's ascent to belief in God by quoting the relevant *ayas*. In the case of the Veil Section, too, the threefold division of those veiled by pure light is based on the Qur'anic account of Abraham's ascent. The three groups 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 are differentiated according to *which* among the Lord's angels they mistakenly believe to be the Lord: whether the movers of the heavens, analogous to the stars (group 3.1), or the mover of the outermost celestial body, analogous to the moon (group 3.2), or the obeyed one, analogous to the sun (group 3.3). Finally, the fourth category, the attainers, go beyond all these and turn their faces toward Him who created them all, as Abraham did.

What makes the connection between Passage B and the Veil Section even closer is that in Passage B al-Ghazālī is not speaking of *physical* lights (the stars, the moon and the sun), but of a *spiritual* and *angelic* hierarchy that runs parallel to the physical one. The 'star', the 'moon' and the 'sun' that the 'traveller' encounters on his way are *not* the physical star, moon and sun but the spiritual substances (angels) *corresponding* to these.⁵⁷ The 'traveller', in fact, encounters in succession the very same three angels that the three groups 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 mistakenly view as the Lord.

Why does the traveller turn away from the 'sun' – i.e. from the 'sun-angel' (=the obeyed one of the third part of the *Mishkāt*)? According to Landolt, he does so because the 'sun[-angel]' is 'greater and higher than the moon[-angel]' and, being 'related to something less perfect' than itself, is itself imperfect.⁵⁸ This however is

not precisely what al-Ghazālī says. Al-Ghazālī's text reads (to quote Passage B again):⁵⁹

He ascends in the same manner till he reaches the [angel] whose image (*mithāl*) is the sun. He sees that it is greater and higher [than the previous angel], yet he sees that it [too] admits of having an image through possessing a kind of analogous correspondence (*munāsaba*) with it. But analogous correspondence with something imperfect is also an imperfection and a 'setting' [*ufūl*, cf. Q. 6:76]. This is why he says, 'I turn my face as a true believer to Him who created the heavens and the earth' [Q. 6:79].

It is clear that the imperfection of the sun-angel derives not from the fact that it is greater and higher than the moon-angel, as Landolt interprets it, but from the fact that this angel has a physical image (*mithāl*) – the sun – with which it has analogous correspondence (*munāsaba*). This, in my view, helps solve one of the puzzles of the Veil Section, namely why al-Ghazālī refrains from identifying the obeyed one with the Lord: the obeyed one falls short of the ultimate perfection precisely because it still has an image in the sensible world – the sun. This may be the meaning of al-Ghazālī's statement quoted earlier that 'the obeyed one has a quality that is at odds with pure singularity and utmost perfection, on account of a secret that cannot be disclosed in this book'.⁶⁰

According to Passage B, only God Himself transcends any analogous correspondence.⁶¹ God is the 'He who' (*alladhī*) of the Qur'anic aya that describes the last stage of Abraham's ascent: 'I have turned my face as a true believer to **Him who** (*li'lladhī*) created the heavens and the earth' (Q. 6:79), and 'He who' is an unspecific reference (*ishāra mubhama*) whose referent can have no analogous correspondence. Indeed, al-Ghazālī explains, if someone were to ask, 'what is the image (*mithāl*) of the referent (*mafhūm*) of "He who"?', this question would have no conceivable answer.⁶²

As al-Ghazālī further explains, the terms 'heavens' and 'earth' stand for the two worlds, the spiritual/intelligible 'world of concealment and the [divine] kingdom' (*ʿālam al-ghayb wa'l-malakūt*) and the bodily/sensible 'world of possession and manifestation' (*ʿālam al-mulk wa'l-shahāda*).⁶³ Thus, al-Ghazālī's exegesis of Q. 6:79 implies that although there is analogous correspondence (*munāsaba*) between the worlds – the sensible world consisting of images (*amthila*) of the intelligible one – He who created these worlds (*alladhī faṭara'l-samāwāti wa'l-arḍ*) has no image and transcends (*mutanazzih*) any analogous correspondence.

It might be useful, at this point, to make an excursus on al-Ghazālī's theory of analogous correspondence (*munāsaba*), or parallelism (*muwāzana*), between the two

worlds, to which he resorts in this passage.⁶⁴ In the second part of the *Mishkāt* the following explanation is provided:⁶⁵

Divine mercy (*al-raḥma al-ilāhiyya*) made the world of manifestation parallel to (*°alā muwāzana*) the world of [divine] kingdom, so that there is nothing in this world that is not an image (*mithāl*) of something in the world of kingdom. Sometimes one and the same thing [in the world of manifestation] is an image of several things in the world of [divine] kingdom; and sometimes one and the same thing in the world of [divine] kingdom has many images in the world of manifestation. In order to be an image a thing has to bear some kind of likeness to (*mumāthala*) and match (*muṭābaqa*) [that whose image it is].

On the epistemological level, the analogous correspondence between the two worlds is highly significant, for if it did not exist one would be unable to ascend to the world of [divine] kingdom at all.⁶⁶ This is why al-Ghazālī regards this analogous correspondence as a sign of divine mercy. On the ontological level, the analogous correspondence between the two worlds results from the fact that the world of manifestation is *caused* by the world of kingdom and, as al-Ghazālī says, ‘the caused is always parallel to (*muwāzāt*) the cause and imitates (*muḥākāt*) it in some way, be it proximate or remote’.⁶⁷ In other words, the image corresponds to that whose image it is precisely because it is caused by it and hence receives its imprint.

At this point, we need to ask ourselves *how*, in al-Ghazālī's view, an image corresponds to that whose image it is? What kind of analogous correspondence does the obeyed one, for instance, have to the physical sun? The answer to this question can be found in al-Ghazālī's discussion of the use of images in a different yet related field, that of dreams and dream interpretation. Significantly, this discussion, too, occurs in the second part of the *Mishkāt*, immediately after the discussion of the traveller's encounter with the three angels:⁶⁸

The science of dream interpretation (*°ilm al-ta°bīr*) will teach you how images are coined (*minhāj darb al-mithāl*), for dream (*ru°yā*) is a part of prophecy.⁶⁹ Do you not see that in a dream the sun is to be interpreted as a sultan, because they share, and are similar in (*al-mushāraka wa°l-mumāthala*), a spiritual meaning (*ma°nā rūḥānī*), namely being above all (*al-isti°lā° °alā°l-kāffa*) and having their effects emanating on all [the rest]. [Similarly] the moon is to be interpreted as a minister, for while the sun is absent it emanates its light upon the world through the mediation of the moon, just as the sultan emanates his lights upon those who are absent from his presence through the mediation of the minister.

From this passage we learn that al-Ghazālī's 'image' (*mithāl*) does not resemble that whose image it is in any *direct* sense but through sharing the same 'spiritual meaning' or, in modern terms, an abstract quality.⁷⁰ Furthermore, and this is important, this quality is *relational* and refers to the *role* the two analogues play in their respective systems. The only sense in which the sultan, for instance, is similar to the sun is that they share an abstract quality, 'being above all', and perform the same function in, and relate in the same way to other members of, their respective systems: the sultan to the minister and the subjects and the sun to the moon and the sublunar world. Al-Ghazālī's analogous correspondence (*munāsaba*) is therefore *systemic*: the two systems – in this case, the system of a country's administration and the system of celestial luminaries – correspond to each other as a whole.

This holds true also for cosmological symbolism: the similarity of the obeyed one to the sun is not direct. Rather, they share the same abstract quality, 'being above all' again, and the same function, emanating lights upon the angel or the luminary immediately beneath them. Here too the analogous correspondence is systemic: the two systems – that of spiritual lights and that of celestial luminaries – correspond to each other as a whole.

It is in this sense that God is said to have no image and transcend any analogous correspondence: no abstract quality pertaining to created beings – not even the obeyed one's quality of 'being above all' – can be legitimately predicated of God, whose function in the universe, as its Creator, has no counterpart within the created universe itself.

Monism and Monotheism: The Relationship Between the Two Perspectives

I hope to have shown that both the monistic and the monotheistic perspective are present in al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-anwār*. It might be useful at this point to discuss how the two are related. I therefore suggest looking at the two passages analysed in the course of this study from the point of view of Avicenna's quiddity/existence distinction, already invoked in the first section of this study. The terms *huwiyya* and *māhiyya*, 'encoded', as we have noticed above, in Passages A and B respectively, provide a formal justification for this approach.

Once we do so, it becomes clear that Passage A, which I have called monistic, analyses the relation between God and the world from the perspective of *existence*. From this perspective, contingent quiddities, considered in themselves, are sheer non-existence (*‘adam maḥḍ*). They *borrow* existence from God. God, by contrast, is pure existence, which lends itself out to non-existent quiddities to render them 'quasi-existent'. In the last analysis, however, only God exists in the real sense, only He has a 'he-ness' (or 'existence', *huwiyya*) and only He can be referred to (*lā ishāra illā ilayhi*). The *tawḥīd* of the elect among the elect, 'There is no he but He'

(*lā huwa illā huwa*), means simply that, there being nothing but God, any reference is a reference to Him.⁷¹

Passage B, by contrast, focuses on *quiddities*. From this perspective, God is not similar to any other being, either because God has no quiddity at all other than His existence (as Avicenna taught) or because His quiddity is in some other way totally unlike those of other existents.⁷² On the level of quiddity, of 'what they are', God and creatures are incomparable. It is for this reason that Passage B – and the Veil Section related to it – stress that God has no image (*mithāl*) and transcends any analogous correspondence (*munāsaba*) to created beings.

It is also possible to look at the two passages from the point of view of the standard opposition between, and complementarity of, *tashbīh* and *tanzīh*, or God's immanence and transcendence. Seen from this perspective, Passage A represents *tashbīh* carried to its logical conclusion: to the degree that a contingent existent exists it is identical with God (or God's Face) and, conversely, to the degree that it is not identical with God it does not exist (is 'sheer non-existence'). Passage B, by contrast, represents the *tanzīh* perspective, highlighting the absolute incomparability between God and creatures.

Passages A and B can also be regarded as representing two different ways to reach the stage of facing God. The first way is *conceptual*; it consists in rejecting the very concept of contingent quiddity as being ultimately unreal and non-existent. This leaves one immediately facing God alone as the only real existent. The second way is *experiential*; it leads to the same conclusion through the (often gradual) leaving behind of all the contingent existents as being not-God and hence as ultimately irrelevant.⁷³ One faces God only at the very end of this process, after all the veils have been removed and all contingent existents, in the world of manifestation and the world of [divine] kingdom alike, have been rejected.

The following passage at the very end of the Veil Section describes the attainment of this stage by followers of the second way:⁷⁴

[The attainers] arrive at an Existent who transcends (*munazzah*) everything that [one's] sight has perceived before them. The glories of His Face, the First, the Supreme, have burnt up everything that the observers' sight and insight (*baṣar al-nāzīrīn wa-baṣīratuhum*) have apprehended. They find Him transcending and incompatible with (*muqaddasan munazzahan*) everything that we described previously. Next, they are divided [into two groups]:

With regard to some [4.1], everything that their sight has perceived is burnt up, effaced and annihilated, yet *they* remain contemplating the [divine] beauty (*jamāl*) and holiness as well as contemplating themselves invested with beauty through the arrival at the divine

presence (*al-ḥaḍra al-ilāhiyya*). Thus, with regard to them, only the objects of sight (*al-mubṣarāt*) have been effaced, but not the seer (*al-mubṣir*).

Another group [4.2] goes beyond these. They are the elect among the elect (*khawāṣṣ al-khawāṣṣ*). The glories of His Face have burnt them up and the power of the [divine] sublimity (*jalāl*) overwhelmed them.⁷⁵ They are effaced and annihilated in themselves (*fi dhātihim*), no longer observing themselves for they are obliterated from themselves (*li-fanā'ihim* *ʿan anfusihim*). Only the One, the Real remains. The meaning of His *aya everything is perishing save His Face* becomes their experience and state (*dhawqan wa-ḥālan*). We have referred to this in the first part [of the *Mishkāt*], mentioning how they use and construe the term 'union' (*ittiḥād*). This is the utmost limit of the attainers (*nihāyat al-wāṣilīn*).

It is clear that the experiential way, as practiced by the Ṣūfīs, often lacks the conceptual clarity required to *explain* what it is that one has experienced. Al-Ghazālī reminds us of this by referring back to the first part of the *Mishkāt*, where he criticised the ecstatic utterances of al-Ḥallāj and al-Biṣṭāmī, which in his view reflect erroneous interpretations of this experience as 'union' and 'indwelling' (see above). This is why al-Ghazālī's advice to those who have attained this experience – but are not qualified to interpret it – is to refrain from mentioning more than the poet's line:⁷⁶

There was what there was, which I do not recall // so think [of me]
well and do not ask for a [detailed] account (*khabar*).

On the other hand, neither is the conceptual way, the way of theoretical knowledge alone, sufficient in itself, for knowledge (*ʿilm*) is inferior to experiential realisation, or 'tasting' (*dhawq*).⁷⁷ It is only through a thorough philosophical training *and* experience (in this order) that one can hope to face God as al-Ḥallāj and al-Biṣṭāmī did, at the same time avoiding their errors in interpreting this experience.

Al-Ghazālī Between Philosophy and Ṣūfism

It is this *union* between conceptual rigor and an experiential path, and more broadly between philosophy and Ṣūfism (in this order) that constituted al-Ghazālī's theological agenda. He did *not*, as is often believed, renounce philosophy to adopt a kind of un- or even anti-philosophical mystical worldview. To the contrary, he criticised precisely those tenets of Ṣūfism (the ecstatic pronouncements of al-Ḥallāj and al-Biṣṭāmī) that he considered philosophically untenable, while *his* Ṣūfism remained philosophical through and through.⁷⁸ His use of Avicenna's ideas, as we have seen especially in the first part of this study, represents an important milestone

in the history of the progressive integration of philosophical concepts, terminology and even methods – both Aristotelian (and subsequently Avicennian) and Neoplatonic – by the Ṣūfī tradition.⁷⁹

Lest the idea of a ‘philosophical Ṣūfism’ sound like an oxymoron, let us take a brief look at a passage from Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī's (d. after 442/1050) famous book on India. Al-Bīrūnī – more than half a century before al-Ghazālī's time – regards the Ṣūfī tradition as having close affinity with philosophy, so much so that he derives the term ‘Ṣūfī’ from the Greek *sophia*, ‘wisdom’.⁸⁰ Even more significantly, the passage in which this etymology occurs deals with monistic doctrines of the Ancient Greeks, in comparison to those of the Indians and the Ṣūfis. It deserves to be quoted in full:⁸¹

Before the emergence of wisdom [i.e. ‘philosophy’, *ḥikma*] through the Seven [Sages] called the Pillars of Wisdom (*asāṭīn al-ḥikma*) ... and the [further] refinement of philosophy (*falsafa*) at the hands of their followers, Ancient Greeks (*qudamāʾ al-yūnāniyyīn*) followed a doctrine similar to that of the Indians (*maqālat al-Hind*). Some of them maintained that all things are one ... others ascribed real existence to the First Cause alone (*kāna yarā al-wujūd al-ḥaqīqī li'l-‘illa al-ūlā faqat*), for [the First Cause] is self-sufficient in [existence] (*li-istighnāʾihā bi-dhātihā fihī*), whereas other [existents] are in need of It [in order to exist], and the existence of that which is in need of another in order to exist is like imagination and is not real (*ka'l-khayāl, ghayr ḥaqq*), so the only real [existence] is the One, the First. This is the opinion of the *sophoi* [*al-Sūfiyya*, with a *sīn!*], i.e. wise men (*ḥukamāʾ*), for in Greek *soph[ia]* means wisdom and the philosopher is called *pīlāsūpā*,⁸² i.e. lover of wisdom (*muḥibb al-ḥikma*). When some people among the Muslims (*fi'l-Islām qawm*) began following a doctrine similar to theirs they were called by the same name, but since this term was not widely understood it was reinterpreted, on account of [their] reliance [on God] (*li'l-tawakkul*), to refer to the ‘porch’ (*al-ṣuffa*) and they [were considered] to be the ‘people of the porch’ at the time of the Prophet.⁸³ Afterwards, the term was corrupted [further] and came to be derived from [the word for] goat wool (*ṣūf al-tuyūs*).⁸⁴

Whether or not there is a grain of truth in al-Bīrūnī's etymology and his account of the history of Ṣūfism, it is evident that the Ṣūfism he had in mind was of a philosophical bent, with a pronounced monistic tendency. It is this trend of Ṣūfism that al-Ghazālī followed, reinforcing it further by integrating in his monistic ontology important elements of Avicenna's metaphysics.

NOTES

1 An earlier version of this paper was presented at the conference 'The Qur'an: Text, Interpretation and Translation', School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 10–12 November 2005. I wish to thank the organisers of the conference for inviting me to SOAS and the participants for important feedback. An earlier version of the first part of this paper was also presented at the annual meeting of the American Oriental Society in Seattle, 17–20 March 2006. I owe a similar debt of gratitude to the organisers and participants of the AOS meeting. Finally, my thanks go to the two reviewers at the *JQS* for their helpful suggestions and encouragement.

References to the *Mishkāt*, including paragraph numbers, follow the Arabic text printed in al-Ghazālī, *The Niche of Lights*, tr. D. Buchman (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1998). Other editions of the *Mishkāt* were consulted as well: (1) ed. Aḥmad ʿIzzat and Faraj Allāh Zakī al-Kurdī (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al-Ṣidq, 1322/1904–5); (2) ed. Abū'l-ʿAlāʾ ʿAfifī (Cairo: al-Dār al-Qawmiyya li'l-Ṭibāʿa wa'l-Nashr, 1964); (3) ed. al-Sayrawān (Beirut: ʿĀlam al-Kutub, 1407/1986). Al-Sayrawān's edition is based on one of the earliest known manuscripts of the *Mishkāt*, Beirut MS AUB 325, copied in 541/1147. Other works by al-Ghazālī are abbreviated as follows: *Arbaʿīn* = *Kitāb al-arbaʿīn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. ʿA.ʿA. ʿUrwānī and M.B. al-Shaqafa (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1424/2003); *Faḍāʾih* = *Faḍāʾih al-bāṭiniyya*, ed. ʿA. Badawī (Cairo: al-Dār al-Qawmiyya li'l-Ṭibāʿa wa'l-Nashr, 1383/1964); *Fayṣal* = *Fayṣal al-tafriqa bayn al-Islām wa'l-zandaqa*, ed. M. Bījū (Damascus: n.p., 1993/1413); *Ihyāʾ* = *Ihyāʾ ʿulūm al-dīn* (5 vols, Cairo: al-Maktaba al-Tawfiqiyya, n.d.); *Imlāʾ* = *al-Imlāʾ fī ishkalāt al-Ihyāʾ*, appended to the edition of the *Ihyāʾ*, vol. 5, pp. 282–326; *Iqtisād* = *al-Iqtisād fī'l-iʿtiqād*, ed. I.A. Çubukçu and H. Atay (Ankara: Nur Matbaası, 1962); *Jawāhir* = *Jawāhir al-Qurʾān* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfaq al-Jadida, 1397/1977); *Kīmiyā* = *Kīmiyā-ye saʿādāt*, ed. Ḥoseyn Khadīv Jam (2 vols, Tehran: Sherkat-e Enteshārāt-e ʿElmī va Farhangī, 1383Sh/2004); *Makātib* = *Makātib-e fārsī-ye Ghazzālī be-nām-e Faḍāʾil al-anām min rasāʾil ḥujjat al-Islām*, ed. ʿAbbās Eqbāl (Tehran: Ketābforūshī-ye Ebn-e Sīnā, 1333Sh/1954); *Maqāsid* = *Maqāsid al-falāsifa*, ed. M.Ş. al-Kurdī (Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Mahmūdiyya al-Tijāriyya bi'l-Azhar, 1355/1936); *Maqṣad* = *al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī sharḥ maʿānī asmāʾ Allāh al-ḥusnā*, ed. F.A. Shehadi (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1971); *Munqidh* = *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl*, ed. J. Ṣalībā and K. ʿAyyād (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1387/1967) (the paragraph numbers follow R.J. McCarthy's translation of the text in his *Freedom and Fulfillment: An Annotated Translation of al-Ghazālī's al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl and Other Relevant Works of al-Ghazālī* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980)); *Tahāfut* = *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut: Imprimerie catholique, 1927). References to chapters and subdivisions of each work are given where possible. All translations in this study are my own.

2 The questions of creation in time versus perpetual creation and creation *ex nihilo* versus creation from preexistent matter need not concern us here. What is important for our purposes is that the monotheistic paradigm acknowledges creation (in any sense of the term) as a real and fundamental fact.

3 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 1, §§52–4, p. 20, lines 3–20.

4 The textual corrections are based on another edition of the *Mishkāt*, ed. al-Sayrawān, p. 144; cf. H. Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*: Some Notes on the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*', *Études Asiatiques* 45:1 (1991), pp. 19–72, at p. 61.

5 Adding *muwajjih* as suggested by Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 61, n. 166 (where *muwajjihūn* is almost certainly a mistake, and should probably read *muwajjihun*).

6 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 2, §§11–15, p. 27, line 15 to p. 28, line 19.

7 The perfect often has the performative meaning of '[a]n act which is just completed at the moment, and by the very act, of speaking' – W. Wright, *A Grammar of the Arabic Language* (2 vols, Cambridge: University Press, 1896–8 and reprints), vol. 2, p. 1B, §1d.

8 This is a provisional translation of the complex term *ḥanīf*, on which see most recently F. de Blois, 'Naṣrānī (Nazoraios) and ḥanīf (ethnikos): Studies on the Religious Vocabulary of Christianity and of Islam', *Bulletin of the Society of Oriental and African Studies* 65:1 (2002), pp. 1–30, at pp. 16ff., with relevant bibliography.

9 This term will be clarified in what follows.

10 On this term, see most recently P. Adamson, 'Before Essence and Existence: al-Kindī's Conception of Being', *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 40 (2002), pp. 297–312, passim, esp. pp. 299–300 for references to earlier literature.

11 For a comparable treatment of the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh see the passage from the *Epistles of the Brethren of Purity*, Epistle no. 4.1 [42], referred to by Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 29.

12 This formula occurs in al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, bk 36, *bayān* 8, vol. 4, p. 444, line 28; *Maqṣad*, p. 59, line 1; *Mishkāt*, part 1, §42, p. 16 (as noted by Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 60, this is the only section in the entire work entitled *ḥaqīqat al-ḥaqā'iq*), and in one of al-Ghazālī's Persian letters, *Makātib*, p. 19, line 8; cf. German tr. in D. Krawulsky, *Briefe und Reden des Abū Ḥamid Muḥammad al-Ġazzālī* (Freiburg im Breisgau: K. Schwarz, 1971), p. 91. In *Mishkāt*, part 1, §43, p. 17, line 3, '... and His Face' is added (see paraphrase below). See also al-Ghazālī, *Kūmiyā*, 'onvān 2, faṣl 8, vol. 1, p. 62; and the important passage in al-Ghazālī, *Maqṣad*, p. 58, lines 7ff. (quoted in B. Abrahamov, 'al-Ghazālī's Supreme Way to Know God', *Studia Islamica* 77 (1993), pp. 141–68, at pp. 159f.).

According to Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 60, n. 161, the phrase 'there is nothing in existence save God' is a 'famous dictum summarising ontological *tawḥīd*, attributed by °Ayn al-Quḍāt to Ma°rūf al-Karkhī (*Tamhūdāt* [ed. °Oseyrān, *Moṣannaḥāt-e °Eynolqodāt-e Hamadānī* (Tehran: Dāneshgāh-e Tehrān, 1962), p.] 256)'. He goes on to say that others, like Najm-e Rāzī and Semnānī, attribute it to Junayd (citing *Der Islam* 50 (1973), p. 56). See also W.C. Chittick, 'Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*' in A. Banani et al. (eds), *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rūmī* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 70–111, at p. 71; p. 105, n. 4 with further references; I am indebted to Kazuyo Murata for bringing Prof. Chittick's article to my attention. The historicity of the attribution of this phrase to such early authorities as Ma°rūf al-Karkhī or Junayd is however somewhat suspect. Junayd's discussion of *tawḥīd* (A.H. Abdel-Kader, *The Life, Personality and Writings of al-Junayd* (London: Luzac, 1976), pp. 68–75 and Arabic part, pp. 51–7) although fascinating in its own right, makes no reference to this phrase or idea. I am grateful to Prof. Gerhard Böwering for discussing this point with me and providing important references on the history of this idea in the Ṣūfī tradition.

It should also be mentioned that in less esoteric contexts al-Ghazālī uses the fuller formula 'There is nothing in existence save God and His acts' (*laysa fi'l-wujūd illā 'llāh wa-af°āluhu*), speaking, as it were, from the point of view of the third degree of *tawḥīd* (e.g. al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir*, part 1, ch. 3, p. 11, lines 1–2; *Maqṣad*, p. 58, lines 9–10; *Mustasfā*, *muqaddima*, *da°āma* 1, *fann* 2, *imtiḥān* 2, vol. 1, p. 69, lines 11–12; cf. *Iḥyā'*, bk 31, vol. 4, p. 38, lines 5–6 ('There is none in existence save God, his attributes and his acts'); *Iḥyā'*, bk 36, vol. 4, p. 452, penultimate line (God's essence and acts are the only existents)). Yet, the problem of how the shorter formula, expressing the fourth degree of *tawḥīd*, is to be interpreted still remains. (On the four degrees of *tawḥīd* see below.)

13 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 1, §41, p. 16, line 8. The entire passage is given in a paraphrase below.

14 On al-Ghazālī's view of *tawḥīd* see also: M.M. al-Miṣbāḥī, 'al-Ghazālī bayna waḥdat al-tawḥīd wa-waḥdat al-aḥadiyya' in M.M. al-Miṣbāḥī, *Dalālāt wa-ishkālāt: dirāsāt fi'l-falsafa al-°Arabiyya al-Islāmiyya* (Casablanca: Manshūrāt °Ukāz, 1988), pp. 85–112, esp. pp. 104ff.; M. Noor Nabi, *al-Ghazālī's Conception of tawḥīd: An Analytical Approach* (Aligarh: n.p.,

1977). The latter reference is supplied by H. Daiber, *Bibliography of Islamic Philosophy* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), vol. 1, p. 706, no. 6871; I have not seen this work.

15 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 3, §33 (quoted in the Section 'Monism and Monotheism: The Relationship Between the Two Perspectives' below), where Q. 28:88 is mentioned as their 'experience and state' (*dhawqan wa-hālan*).

16 Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, bk 35, *bayān* 2, vol. 4, p. 342; *Kīmīyā*, bk 38, ch. 2 (*Haqīqat-e towḥīd ke benā-ye tavakkol bar vey ast*), vol. 2, pp. 529ff.; *Arba'īn*, bk 4, ch. 7, pp. 236f.; *Imlā'*, pp. 292ff. (cf. also *Ihyā'*, bk 1, ch. 3, *bayān* 2, vol. 1, pp. 56f. where al-Ghazālī deals with the meanings of the term *tawḥīd*, presenting a threefold division). On the historical context and agenda of the *Imlā'*, see now K. Garden, *al-Ghazālī's Contested Revival: 'Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn' and its Critics in Khorasan and the Maghrib*, PhD Dissertation (University of Chicago, 2005), esp. pp. 121ff.

17 Al-Ghazālī, *Makātīb*, pp. 15ff.; Krawulsky (tr.), *Briefe und Reden*, pp. 79ff. In this letter al-Ghazālī responds to several queries pertaining to topics raised in his *Mishkāt al-anwār* and *Kīmīyā-ye sa'ādat*, including the classification of *tawḥīd* in the *Mishkāt*. See Garden, *al-Ghazālī's Contested Revival*, pp. 104ff. for a discussion of this letter and its historical context.

18 Cf. al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 3, §12: 'jamā'ca yaqūlūna bi-lisānihim "lā ilāh illā 'llāh". This correspondence is noted by Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 32, p. 63.

19 *Al-Lafẓ* here refers to *lafẓ al-tawḥīd*, i.e. the *shahāda*; cf. al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, bk 35, *bayān* 2, vol. 4, p. 342, line 14, line 19. The expression *ma'nā al-lafẓ* is not to be understood in the sense of 'literal meaning'.

20 This pun makes creative use of the fact that the Arabic word for knot (*'uqda*) comes from the same root as the word for view or opinion (*i'tiqād*).

21 Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, bk 35, *bayān* 2, vol. 4, p. 344, line 12. This is not the place to discuss al-Ghazālī's attitude to *kalām*. See the nuanced and detailed discussions in *Ihyā'*, bk 1, *bāb* 2, *bayān* 2, vol. 1, p. 40, lines 11ff.; *Ihyā'*, bk 2, ch. 2, vol. 1, pp. 146–52 (on the legal status of *kalām*). Cf. al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, §§21ff., pp. 66ff., esp. §21, p. 66.

22 Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, bk 35, *bayān* 2, vol. 4, p. 343, lines 7–10. Expansion of the chest was impossible in the second stage of *tawḥīd* due to the knot on the heart that prevented it from expanding.

23 Note that the third level of *tawḥīd* is connected to 'knowledge' (*'ilm*) in the triad *īmān* (or *i'tiqād*)–*'ilm*–*dhawq*; cf. al-Ghazālī, *Mustasfā*, *muqaddima*, *da'āma* 1, *fann* 2, *imtiḥān* 2, vol. 1, p. 68, lines 7–8, where *'ilm* is connected to *kashf wa-inshirāh*: '*wa-ammā al-'ilm ... fa-innahu kashf wa-inshirāh, wa'l-i'tiqād 'uqda 'alā'l-qalb, wa'l-'ilm 'ibāra 'an inḥilāl al-'uqad.*' On the light cast by God into al-Ghazālī's chest and the subsequent *sharḥ al-sadr* see *Munqidh*, §§15f., pp. 62f., where this light is described as 'the key to most knowledge'. See discussion of this motive in H. Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies in al-Ghazzali* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), pp. 284–90.

24 Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, bk 35, *bayān* 2, vol. 4, p. 344, lines 18–19: '*fa-innahu al-fā'il 'alā'l-infirād dūna ghayrihi, wa-mā siwāhu musakhkharūna lā istiqlāl lahum bi-tahrīk dharra min malakūt al-samāwāt wa'l-ard.*' See also al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, §45, pp. 77f. where God's being the only true agent, the rest of the universe being subjugated (*musakhkhara*) to Him, is the only correction offered by al-Ghazālī to the philosophers' teachings in the domain of physics.

25 Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, bk 35, *bayān* 2, vol. 4, p. 343, line 11; p. 351, line 14; p. 356, line 10.

26 Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, bk 35, *bayān* 2, vol. 4, p. 344, lines 9–10.

27 '*Wa-tusammihī'l-Ṣūfiyya al-fanā' fī'l-tawḥīd li-annahū min ḥaythu lā yarā illā wāḥidan fa-lā yarā nafsahu ayḍan wa-idhā lam yara nafsahu li-kawnihī mustaghriqan bi'l-tawḥīd kāna fāniyan 'an nafsihī fī tawḥīdihī bi-ma'nā annahu fāniya 'an ru'yat nafsihī wa'l-khalq.*' Note

that Ṣūfī terminology is introduced with some reservation and explained in terms of al-Ghazālī's own theory. Moreover, the ending 'obliteration in *tawḥīd*' was probably added by al-Ghazālī himself to make the Ṣūfī term closer to his own. Cf. al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 1, §48, p. 18 (paraphrased in note 32 below); *Makātīb*, p. 18, lines 21–2; Krawulsky (tr.), *Briefe und Reden*, p. 90 (the Ṣūfīs are called *ahl-e baṣīrat*).

28 In the *Mishkāt*, al-Ghazālī calls this 'pure singularity' (*al-fardāniyya al-mahḍa*) ('*istaghraqū bi'l-fardāniyya al-mahḍa*' (part 1, §45, p. 17, lines 16–17); '*al-mustaghriq bi'l-fardāniyya*' (part 1, §57, p. 21, line 12); cf. part 1, §54, p. 20, line 20). He clarifies that the realm of singularity (*mamlakat al-fardāniyya*) is the end of the creatures' ascent (*muntahā mi'raj al-khalā'iq*) (*Mishkāt*, part 1, §55, p. 21, line 1; §57, p. 21, line 18), since any ascent presupposes plurality, and in the realm of singularity all plurality is abolished (*Mishkāt*, part 1, §55).

29 Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, bk 35, vol. 4, p. 344, lines 2–3. On the use of the image of a 'flash of lightning' in this context cf. references given in B. Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of al-Ghazali and al-Dabbagh* (London and New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), p. 65; p. 68; p. 160, n. 90; p. 160, n. 102; al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, bk 21, *bayān* 8, vol. 3, p. 26, lines 23–4; vol. 3, p. 27, lines 26–8.

30 The subjectivistic interpretation is favored by W.M. Watt, 'A Forgery in al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt*?', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1949), pp. 5–22, at p. 16, and Abū'l-°Alā° Afīf in the introduction to his edition of the *Mishkāt*, pp. 15–16, among others (°Afīf claims that this is only how mystics *see* things, it is *waḥdat al-shuhūd*, not *waḥdat al-wujūd*). For the objectivist interpretation proposed here see, e.g., F. Shehadi, *Ghazali's Unique Unknowable God: A Philosophical Critical Analysis of Some of the Problems Raised by Ghazali's View of God as Utterly Unique and Unknowable* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964), p. 32, n. 4.

31 See note 27 above.

32 Al-Ghazālī, *Makātīb*, p. 19, lines 15–20; Krawulsky (tr.), *Briefe und Reden*, pp. 91–2. In the first part of the *Mishkāt* al-Ghazālī argues along similar lines: 'The ecstatic pronouncements of al-Ḥallāj, al-Biṣṭāmī and their likes are due to intoxication (*sukr*) and passionate love (°*ishq*); these people do not reach real union (*ḥaqīqat al-itihād*), which is impossible, but what *resembles* union (*shibh al-itihād*)' (*Mishkāt*, part 1, §46). The correct term to describe this state is, in relation to the person who attains it, 'obliteration' (*fanā'*) or rather 'obliteration of obliteration' (*fanā' al-fanā'*); and in relation to That in which he is immersed (*al-mustaghraq bihi*), *tawḥīd* (*Mishkāt*, part 1, §48; Buchman mistranslates 'in relation to the one immersed in it', taking *bihi* to refer to the state (*ḥāla*), which is impossible grammatically as well as from the point of view of the content, since al-Ghazālī is distinguishing here between *ṣāhib al-ḥāla* and *al-mustaghraq bihi*, and they cannot both refer to the person who attains the state). For a similar interpretation of al-Ḥallāj and al-Biṣṭāmī see also al-Ghazālī, *Maqṣad*, p. 139; and cf. al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'ih*, p. 109 where several groups who believed in *ḥulūl*, including the ecstatic Ṣūfīs, are discussed. Cf. al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, §96, p. 102 for implicit criticism of ecstatic Ṣūfīs; *Mizān*, ch. 4, p. 207, lines 7–14 (taken out in the corresponding discussion in *Iḥyā'*, bk 21, *bayān* 4); *Iḥyā'*, bk 30, *bayān* 2, vol. 3, p. 556, lines 6ff.

33 The text is not clear: '°*ū khūd gashṭ*' (Krawulsky translates: 'dass sie selbst vergingen'). I suggest amending it to '°*ū khodā gashṭ*', 'he became God'.

34 See, e.g., al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā'*, bk 35, *bayān* 2, vol. 4, p. 343, lines 14ff. (cf. *Kūmiyā*, bk 38, ch. 2, vol. 2, pp. 532f.); bk 36, *bayān* 8, vol. 4, p. 444, line 28 to p. 445, line 5 (and cf. *Iqtisād*, Introduction, p. 4, lines 1ff.); *Imlā'*, p. 309, lines 26–9; *Maqṣad*, p. 58, line 9 to p. 59, line 2 (quoted in Abrahamov, 'Supreme Way', pp. 159f., esp. p. 160, n. 87). In the *Maqṣad* al-Ghazālī argues that everything is God's acts, but insofar as they are *God's* acts, produced by the divine power, they are inseparable from God, just as the light of the sun is inseparable from the sun. (On the image of the sun and its rays see note 71 below.)

35 Al-Ghazālī, *Makātib*, p. 20, lines 3–19; Krawulsky (tr.), *Briefe und Reden*, pp. 92–3.

36 Cf. al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 1, §§38–9 for a shortened version of this parable (omitted in the paraphrase cited here).

37 Note the rhetorical background of the terms *musta'ār* and *majāzī*, both meaning 'metaphorical'. I am grateful to one of the reviewers for pointing this out in his or her comments.

38 See, e.g., R. Gramlich, 'Mystical Dimensions of Islamic Monotheism' in A. Schimmel and A. Falatūri (eds), *We Believe in One God: The Experience of God in Christianity and Islam* (London: Burns and Oates, 1979), pp. 136–48 and Chittick, 'Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*', pp. 70–1.

39 For the following discussion of Avicenna's quiddity/existence distinction and the proof for the existence of God see, e.g., H.A. Davidson, 'Avicenna's Proof of the Existence of God as a Necessarily Existent Being' in P. Morewedge (ed.), *Islamic Philosophical Theology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1979), pp. 165–87; M.E. Marmura, 'Avicenna's Proof from Contingency in the *Metaphysics* of His *al-Shifā'*', *Mediaeval Studies* 42 (1980), pp. 34–56.

40 Cf. al-Ghazālī, *Maqṣad*, section on the name *al-nūr*, p. 157, line 15 to p. 158, line 4; H.A. Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect: Their Cosmologies, Theories of the Active Intellect, and Theories of Human Intellect* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 132f., p. 142.

41 Notice how the question of creation becomes irrelevant in the monistic paradigm. What matters is that created existents are perpetually perishing (both 'before' – if this is a meaningful expression – and after creation); it is their eternal 'possible' nature that comes to the fore.

I disagree with Davidson's interpretation (*Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, p. 133), according to which this passage implies preeternity of the world. In my view, the passage takes no stance on the question of preeternity; rather it presents it as irrelevant. Significantly, in the *Maqāṣid*, *Metaphysics*, p. 68, al-Ghazālī reinterprets the term *muḥdath* ('originated') as *mumkin al-wujūd*, following Avicenna: '*wa-qad dhakarnā anna'l-mumkin lā yakūnu mawjūdān bi-nafsihi bal bi-ghayrihi wa-hādihā ma'nā kawnihi muḥdathan, fa'l-ālam idhan mumkin al-wujūd fa-huwa idhan muḥdath, wa-ma'nā kawnihi muḥdathan anna wujūdahu min ghayrihi wa-laysa lahu min dhātihi wujūd, fa-huwa bi-i'tibār dhātihi lā wujūd lahu wa-bi-i'tibār ghayrihi lahu wujūd, wa-mā li'l-shay' bi-dhātihi qabla mā lahu bi-ghayrihi qabliyyatan bi'l-dhāt, wa'l-ādam lahu bi'l-dhāt, wa'l-wujūd bi'l-ghayr, fa-ādamuhu qabla wujūdihi, fa-huwa muḥdath azalan wa-abadan li-annahū mawjūd min ghayrihi azalan wa-abadan*'. Cf. Avicenna, *Dāneshnāme-ye 'alā'i: elāhiyyāt*, ed. M. Mo'īn (Tehran: Anjoman-e Āthār-e Millī, 1952), §28, p. 83, lines 4–5: '*momken ol-vojūd rā vojūd be-ellat bovad va be-khūd ū rā hastī nabovad va be-chīzī dīgar-ash hastī bovad, va moḥdathī īn bovad*'.

42 This has already been noticed by Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 61.

43 Avicenna, *al-Shifā'*: *al-ilāhiyyāt*, ed. G.C. Anawati et al. (Cairo: Wizārat al-Ma'ārif, 1380/1960), bk 8, ch. 6, pp. 356, lines 10–15. The importance of this passage for al-Ghazālī was already noticed by R.M. Frank, *Creation and the Cosmic System: al-Ghazālī & Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1992), p. 16; p. 62, n. 118. Other relevant passages in Avicenna include: *Ilāhiyyāt*, bk 1, ch. 8, p. 48, lines 5–13; bk 8, ch. 3, p. 342, lines 6–14; *Commentary on Metaph. Lambda*, ad 1072b3 in °A. Badawī (ed.), *Aristū 'inda'l-°Arab* (Kuwait: Wakālat al-Maṭbū'āt, 1978), pp. 22–33, here p. 25, line 23 to p. 26, line 2 (alluding to Q. 28:88; at p. 26, line 2 read '*wa-{kāsī} al-ashyā' al-ukhrā ḥaqīqat wujūdihā*', following Cairo, *Dār al-Kutub*, MS Ḥikma 6M, fol. 139v.; I am grateful to Prof. Dimitri Gutas for kindly providing me with a copy of the manuscript and to Prof. Jules Janssens for confirming the reading); *Commentary on the Theology of Aristotle* in Badawī, *Aristū 'ind al-°Arab*,

pp. 35–74, at p. 46, lines 5–9. On the First Cause as pure self-subsisting light see also Avicenna, *Commentary on the Theology of Aristotle*, pp. 56–7 (already discussed by Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, pp. 132f.).

44 Here and below notice Avicenna's puns on the root *ḥ-q-q*.

45 Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, bk 35, *bayān* 2, vol. 4, p. 343, line 13 and elsewhere, e.g. bk 36, *bayān* 8, vol. 4, p. 444, line 29; vol. 4, p. 445, line 2; *Mishkāt*, part 1, §45, p. 17, line 15; part 2, §26, p. 30, line 15; part 3, §33, p. 52, line 6 (cf. part 1, §42, p. 16, line 16 and part 2, §14, p. 28, line 10: '*al-awwal al-ḥaqq*'). In the context of the *third* degree of *tawḥīd* God is usually called *al-wāḥid al-qahhār* (the expression occurs e.g. in Q. 40:16, quoted in *Mishkāt*, part 1, §44, p. 17; *Maqṣad*, p. 160). See *Ihyā'*, bk 35, *bayān* 2, vol. 4, p. 342, line 9; p. 351, line 5; cf. *qāḥir* in *Ihyā'*, vol. 4, p. 345, line 22.

46 G.F. Hourani, 'A Revised Chronology of Ghazālī's Writings', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 104 (1984), pp. 289–302, at p. 298a.

47 Al-Ghazālī, *Maqṣad*, p. 172, lines 13–14; cf. the section on *al-ḥaqq* in *Maqṣad*, pp. 137ff., which is clearly modelled on the passage from Avicenna's *Ilāhiyyāt*, bk 8, ch. 6, quoted above.

48 For Avicenna, both the Necessary of Existence and the contingent beings can be said to exist in the proper sense (the existence of the contingent beings is *not* metaphorical), yet the degree to which they 'deserve' existence differs, and hence the term existence is predicated of them 'by gradation' (*bi'l-tashkīk*). See the discussion of 'graded terms' (*asmā' mushakkika*) in Avicenna's *Maqūlāt* of the *Shifā'*, ed. G. Anawati et al. (Cairo: Wizārat al-Ma'ārif, 1378/1959), bk 1, ch. 2, p. 10, line 8 to p. 11, line 4, where 'existence' is used as an example. I intend to deal with the question of the 'gradation of existence' (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) in Avicenna in a forthcoming study.

49 Watt's view that the third part is not authentic (Watt, 'A Forgery in al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt*?) is to be rejected, among other reasons because there are (partial) parallels to this section in other works of al-Ghazālī; see Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 27, n. 34 for references, to which one can add al-Ghazālī, *Kīmiyā*, '*onvān* 2, *faṣl* 5, vol. 1, p. 57ff. However, as Landolt notices (p. 72), 'only a careful examination of the *whole* manuscript tradition, plus external evidence' will be able to settle the question completely.

50 Moses' response is '*Lord of the heavens and the earth*' (*rabbu'l-samāwāti wa'l-arḍ*) (Q. 26:24, also a grammatical *iḍāfa* in Arabic). Both Pharaoh's question and Moses' response are quoted and discussed in al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 2, §15 (Passage B above).

51 It goes beyond the scope of this article to provide identifications of these groups. This subject is in need of further study. For tentative identifications based on earlier scholarship (Gairdner and Landolt) see Buchman's notes to his translation of the *Mishkāt*, p. 67, n. 14, nn. 16–18.

52 The construction *nisbatu X nisbatu Y* ('X is analogous to Y') is related to the more common construction *mathalu X mathalu Y* ('X is similar to Y'). The reading *fi* instead of *ilā* is, as far as I know, not attested in the manuscripts of the *Mishkāt*; however, it seems superior, for al-Ghazālī is speaking about the rank of the angels *among* the intelligible lights (analogous to the rank of the stars, the moon and the sun *among* the sensible lights (*fi'l-anwār al-maḥsūsa*)), not about their relation *to* the intelligible lights, of which they, after all, form a part.

53 *Min jiha* serves simply to indicate the agent of the passive participle (cf. *min qibal* in Modern Standard Arabic). Both Buchman (*Mishkāt*, p. 51) and Landolt ('Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 41) seem to mistranslate the sentence. *Min jiha* in this function occurs in *Munqidh*, §45, p. 78, line 7 ('*bal hiya musta'mala min jihat fātirihā*') as well as in, e.g., Ps.-Ammonius, see Ulrich Rudolph, *Die Doxographie des Pseudo-Ammonios: Ein*

Beitrag zur neuplatonischen Überlieferung im Islam (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1989), §XX.1–3, p. 67 ('nūr 'aqlī lā yudraku min jihat 'uqūlinā'; cf. tr. p. 103).

54 Davidson, *Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on Intellect*, pp. 134f., p. 142 argues that the angels that move their celestial spheres *directly* and *by way of command* are, respectively, the souls of the spheres and the incorporeal intelligences. If this is correct, the moon-angel and the sun-angel (=the obeyed one) are, respectively, the soul and the intellect of the outermost celestial body. Notice that in *Maqāsid*, *Metaphysics*, p. 128, lines 3–4, al-Ghazālī draws a distinction between the souls of the spheres, who set the spheres in motion 'bi-tariq al-mubāshara wa'l-fi'l', and the separate intelligences, who do that indirectly, 'bi-tariq al-'ishq' (that is, through the spheres' love to them). This reference, not supplied by Davidson, supports his position.

55 'Tajallā lahum aydan anna hādihā'l-muṭā' mawṣūf bi-ṣifa tunāfi'l-wahdāniyya al-mahḍa wa'l-kamāl al-bāligh li-sirr lā yahtamilu hādihā'l-kitāb kashfahu' (al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 3, §31, p. 51).

56 As Frank Griffel kindly informed me, the idiosyncratic reading of the old Cairo edition (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Ṣidq, 1322/1904–5, p. 55, lines 1–12), 'nisbat hādihā'l-muṭā' ilā'l-wujūd al-ḥaqq nisbat al-shams ilā'l-nūr al-mahḍ aw nisbat al-jamr ilā jawhar al-nār al-ṣirf' (underlying Gairdner's translation of the passage), is not attested in the manuscripts that he consulted. My gratitude goes to him for generously sharing with me a draft of his critical edition of the passage.

57 Al-Ghazālī is very clear on this point: *Mishkāt*, vol. 2, §12 ('yantahī ilā mā darajatuhu darajat al-kawākib'); §13 ('mā fawqahu mim mā rutbatuhu rubat al-qamar'); §14 ('yantahī ilā mā mithāluhu'l-shams'). In the *Ihyā'* (bk 30, *bayān* 2, vol. 3, p. 555, line 13ff.) al-Ghazālī makes it clear that neither was Abraham misled by the *physical* stars, moon and sun, but by the spiritual lights analogous to these.

58 Landolt, 'Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', pp. 51–2: '[At the highest stage of his ascent] Abraham ... points to "He who" (*alladhī*). That means, Ghazālī explains, that the mystic (*sālik*) at the final stage of his "ascent" reaches a point where he "turns his face" from the "sun", because the sun, being "greater" and "higher" (than the moon), is *eo ipso* "related" to something "less perfect" – whereas the act of "turning his face to He [*sic!*] who originally created" is by itself "undetermined" (*ishāra mubhama*), given that "the concept of He who" (*majhūm alladhī*) is, as such, beyond any conceivable referent; and "what is beyond any relation is the True First (*al-awwal al-ḥaqq*)."

59 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 2, §14, p. 28, lines 6–8.

60 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 3, §31, p. 51. Landolt, again, assumes that the imperfection derives from the fact that the obeyed one has a relation to the moon-angel insofar as it is obeyed by it ('Ghazālī and *Religionswissenschaft*', p. 50). This is different from my suggestion put forward here that the imperfection has its origin in the obeyed one having a sensible image, i.e. the sun.

One of the reviewers of this article has pointed out to me that my 'interpretation that the Obeyed One falls short of perfection because susceptible of symbolisation, oddly does not explain why Ghazālī says the secret of this falls outside the remit of the book'. This is certainly true, and possibly al-Ghazālī's statement that this secret cannot be disclosed in this book should not be taken on its face value. Perhaps it alludes, somewhat more generally, to al-Ghazālī's esoteric writing technique, employed most prominently in the *Mishkāt*, a technique that requires that a work be 'decoded' through constant reflection on and juxtaposition and careful analysis of certain passages. (This technique is employed by other authors as well, notably by Maimonides in the *Guide of the Perplexed*.)

61 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 2, §14, p. 28, line 10: 'fa'l-mutanazzih 'an kull munāsaba huwa'l-awwal al-ḥaqq'.

62 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 2, §14, p. 28. My paraphrase here clears some inaccuracies of Landolt's paraphrase quoted in note 58 above. First, al-Ghazālī, strictly speaking, is not saying that the act of turning the face is 'undetermined' but rather that 'He who' is an unspecific reference. Second, he is not saying that 'the concept of He who (*mafhūm alladhī*) is, as such, beyond any conceivable referent' but that the referent of this concept has no image (*mithāl*) and does not have analogous correspondence (*munāsaba*) with anything else.

63 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 1, §29, p. 11.

64 On this subject see also the excellent studies by Lazarus-Yafeh, *Studies*, Appendix C: 'Some Notes on Al-Ghazālī's Cosmology', pp. 503–22; K. Nakamura, 'Imām Ghazālī's Cosmology Reconsidered with Special Reference to the Concept of *jabarūt*', *Studia Islamica* 80 (1994), pp. 29–46.

65 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 2, §§9–10, p. 27.

66 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 2, §9, p. 27.

67 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 1, §31, p. 12.

68 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 2, §17, p. 29. Admittedly, the term *munāsaba* is not used in this passage, but the context, explaining how images are coined, suggests that this discussion applies to cosmological images as well. The term *munāsaba* does occur in a parallel, but more extended, discussion of dream interpretation in al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā'*, bk 40, ch. 8, vol. 5, p. 204, line 5.

69 This is an allusion to the ḥadīth 'the veridical dream is one forty-sixth part of prophecy'.

70 On the correspondence in *ma'nā rūḥānī* see al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal*, ch. 4, in the discussion of the five levels of existence, on the intellectual existence of the 'Hand' of God: '*wa-man qāma 'indahu al-burhān 'alā istiḥālat yad li'llāh ta'ālā hiya jāriḥa maḥsūsa aw mutakhayyala fa-innahu yuthbitu li'llāh subḥānahu yadan rūḥāniyya 'aqliyya, a'nī annahu yuthbitu ma'nā al-yad wa-ḥaqīqatahā wa-rūḥahā, dūna šuratihā, inna rūḥ al-yad wa-ma'nāhā mā bihi yabḥīshu wa-yaf'alu wa-yu'fī wa-yamna'u, wa'llāh ta'ālā yu'fī wa-yamna'u bi-wāsiḥat malā'ikatihī*' (p. 36).

71 Notice also the striking phrase 'There can be no reference to the light of the sun but only to the sun. Now, everything in existence relates to [God] as light relates to the sun' (al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 1, §54, p. 20, lines 17–18, at the end of Passage A). The image of the sun and its rays is used by al-Ghazālī in several works (see, e.g., the reference to the *Maqṣad* in note 34 above), usually in implicit parallel to God and His Face: just as the sun cannot be said to be greater than its light so also God cannot be said to be greater than His Face. Compare e.g. the following passages on the meaning of 'God is greater' (*Allāhu akbar*): (1) 'The meaning of *Allāhu akbar* is not that He is greater than other things, since there is nothing else beside Him (*bā vey*) for Him to be greater than it, for all existents come from the light of His existence [just as] the light of the sun is nothing but the sun and it is impossible to say that the sun is greater than its light. Rather the meaning of *Allāhu akbar* is that He is too great to be known by humans through rational inference (*qeyās-e 'aql*)' (*Kimiyā*, 'onvān 2, faṣl 8, vol. 1, p. 62, lines 17–22); (2) '[The knowers] do not understand the meaning of *Allāhu akbar* as implying that He is greater than something else, God forbid, since there is nothing else beside Him (*ma'ahū*) for Him to be greater than it. Anything other than He does not have the rank of witness (*ma'iyya*) but the rank of following (*taba'iyya*). Moreover, anything other than He exists only with respect to the Face adjacent to Him. Therefore only His Face exists. It is impossible to say that He is greater than His Face. Rather the meaning of [*Allāhu akbar*] is that He is too great to be called "greater" in the sense of relation or correspondence (*bi-ma'nā'l-iḍāfa wa'l-muqāyasa*) and too great for another to grasp the utmost limit of His magnificence, even be he a prophet or an angel' (*Mishkāt*, part 1, §44, p. 17, lines 5–11; cf. also *Arba'in*, bk 2, ch. 6, pp. 73–4).

72 The possibility that al-Ghazālī followed Avicenna in believing that God has no quiddity other than existence has to be taken seriously. In the *Maqāṣid*, for instance, al-Ghazālī says that it is because God has no *māhiyya* that He cannot be known through rational inference (*qiyās*) (*Maqāṣid*, p. 97, line 2ff.). Admittedly, *Maqāṣid* is an Avicennian work, largely based on Avicenna's *Dāneshnāme* (see J. Janssens, 'Le *Dānesh-Nāme* d'Ibn Sīnā: Un texte à revoir?', *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale* 28 (1986), pp. 163–77); however, this passage does not seem to have a correspondence in the *Dāneshnāme* and is, in all likelihood, al-Ghazālī's own addition. This subject requires further study.

73 Al-Ghazālī himself draws a distinction between these two ways. In the first part of the *Mishkāt* (part 1, §45), al-Ghazālī states that there are two ways toward the realisation that 'There is nothing in existence save God'. Some of those who see only God in existence arrived at this realisation through a scientific cognition (*'irfānan 'ilmiyyan*), others – through an experiential state (lit. 'state of tasting', *ḥālan dhawqīyyan*, cf. *Mishkāt*, part 3, §33 quoted below). I prefer not to translate *'irfān* as 'gnosis', since this may be misleading. For this term see *Mishkāt*, part 1, §66, p. 24, line 10, where it obviously means 'cognition' and has no mystical connotations.

74 Al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt*, part 3, §§31–3, p. 51, line 17 to p. 52, line 8. Some of the elect among the elect (4.2), al-Ghazālī continues, reach this realisation gradually like Abraham, others instantaneously (*duf'atan*) like Muḥammad.

75 Notice the contrast between the experience of *jalāl* here and the experience of *jamāl* by the previous group (4.1).

76 Al-Ghazālī, *Munqidh*, §96, p. 103, line 1, '*wa-kāna mā kāna mim mā lastu adhkuruhu / fa-ḥanna khayran wa-lā tas'al 'ani'l-khabari*'. The verse is by Ibn Mu'tazz (metre: *al-basīf*).

77 On *'ilm* and *dhawq* see, e.g., Abrahamov, 'Supreme Way', pp. 165f.; M.E. Marmura, 'Ghazālī and Ash'arism Revisited', *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 12 (2002), pp. 91–110, at pp. 97ff.; R.M. Frank, 'Al-Ghazālī on *Taqīd*: Scholars, Theologians, and Philosophers', *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften* 7 (1991–2), pp. 207–52, at pp. 216ff.

78 This subject will be treated in greater detail in my forthcoming PhD dissertation on al-Ghazālī's metaphysics, directed by Prof. Dimitri Gutas.

79 To the best of my knowledge, this process has not been sufficiently documented and analysed. A careful study of it would be an important contribution to the history of Ṣūfism and Islamic thought as a whole.

80 Al-Bīrūnī's *India* was completed in 421/1030, shortly after the death of his patron Maḥmūd of Ghazna. See C. Edmund Bosworth et al., art. 'Bīrūnī' in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 4, pp. 274–87, at p. 275b.

81 Al-Bīrūnī, *Alberuni's India: An Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India about A.D. 1030*, ed. Edward Sachau (London: Trübner, 1887), ch. 3, p. 16. I owe this reference to William Chittick's article, 'Rūmī and *waḥdat al-wujūd*', pp. 104f., n. 3, where this passage is partially translated and briefly discussed. On comparable doctrines on the Indian side see al-Bīrūnī's discussion in his *India*, ch. 2. One thinks especially of the Advaita Vedānta (not, however, mentioned by al-Bīrūnī). A very brief and insufficient analysis of al-Bīrūnī's presentation of Indian monism, in comparison to Advaita Vedānta is offered by H. Heras, 'The Advaita Doctrine in Alberuni' in *Al-Bīrūnī Commemoration Volume, A.H. 362–A.H. 1362* (Calcutta: Iran Society, 1951), pp. 119–23.

82 The form of this term as given by al-Bīrūnī is in fact Syriac, not Greek.

83 The 'porch' was part of the mosque in Medina, where the pious 'people of the porch' reportedly lived at the time of the prophet. For the translation 'porch' (as opposed to the more common but incorrect 'bench') see Lane's entry in his *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Beirut:

Librairie du Liban, 1997), bk 1, pp. 1693–4: ‘An appertenance of a house ... or of a building, like a wide *bahw* [... a kind of vestibule, or portico, for shade and shelter, open in front] with a long roof or ceiling’; the *ṣuffa* of the mosque of the Prophet was ‘a covered place, an appertenance of the mosque, ... roofed over with palm-sticks’. See also W.M. Watt, art. ‘Ahl al-ṣuffa’ in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd edn.

84 On this trend in early Ṣufism, see the references cited in note 38 above.