bi-polar, male and female, nature of God including two complementary types of divine attributes, divine majesty and splendor, representing God's justice and mercy. His discussion on the point resembles that of his contemporary Yahyā al-Suhrawardi (d. 587/1191) on divine power and grace, and revives a train of thought in Sufi Islam that may have its distant roots in Plato (dynamis synkolastikē and chariskē) and Talmudic theology (middath ha-din and middath ha-rachamin)64. Daylamī concludes with an exegetical disquisition on Koran 42:11, “like Him there is no naught” (layya ka-mithkhi shay) and supports his argument on the point with garbled versions of Old Testament quotations in Arabized Hebrew – a pattern he also follows in interpreting Koran 2:30 and 24:35.

After the technical detail on the author and the precursory survey of his work, what may be said in preliminary conclusion? First, the body of Daylamī's writings represents much unpublished and original material. His arguments are deeply rooted in personal experience and Koran interpretation. The mix of Daylamī's mystical vision and Koranic exegesis appears to provide the key to his thought. Daylamī's arguments are frequently directed ad hominem and not free from inconsistencies. Daylamī may not measure up to the philosophical prominence of Yahyā Suhrawardi, but then again he did not share the fate of execution although his thought was as heretical as that of his contemporary. Daylamī bridges the gap in 6th/12th century Sufism between 'Ayn al-Quṭṭāt al-Hamadānī and Najm al-Dīn al-Kurra and fore-shadows ideas that emerge in the Kubrawi school and the Ḥuruflī sect. Second, Daylamī's thought is firmly based on theological reasoning and strongly permeated by visionary elements. In fact, the central purpose of his work may best be understood as providing a framework of thought for mystical vision. Daylamī's writings mark a stage of transition in Sufi thought breaking away from karāmāt and legend and turning to waqī'āt and dreams. The visionary world of the mystic is seen as totally real and fully identical with the spiritual world of the invisible realm. The twinning and correspondence of the inner world of man and the outer world of the Unseen provide the platform for Daylamī's thought on the bipolarity of divine nature, his notions of three-dimensional time and eternal space, and his stress on intuitive knowledge and direct vision of the divine.

It appears that Sulamī's collective Koran commentary may be understood as the foundations for medieval Sufi hermeneutics, while Daylamī's writings may be seen as one of its fascinating structures.

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AL-GHAZĀLĪ'S USE OF AVICENNA'S PHILOSOPHY

BY

Richard FRANK

In their introduction to Muslim Theology, L. Gardet and G. Anawati state that al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) dominates the history of Muslim thought, and even though so categorial an assertion may be subject to qualification, there is no denying that he was the most important sufi theologian at a crucial turning point in the history of orthodox Muslim theology. Of those Muslim thinkers who continued and elaborated that tradition of neo-Platonised Aristotelianism which has been the philosophical koinē of late antiquity, on the other hand, Avicenna (d. 428/1037) had a greater influence on the subsequent development of Muslim thought than any other philosopher. That al-Ghazālī was strongly influenced by the philosophers and especially by Avicenna has long been recognised, albeit the question of the exact extent and effect of this influence has not been adequately studied. What I wish to do here is to look briefly at some aspects of the evidence of al-Ghazālī's use of Avicenna. The focus of the present remarks is quite narrow; we shall consider only a small area of al-Ghazālī's theology, apart from the larger context and from a particular perspective. The view, thus, will be somewhat distorted with respect to the overall scope of al-Ghazālī's thought, but as things appear more clearly when their salient features are viewed against a contrasting background, so the present inquiry may serve to bring certain elements of al-Ghazālī's theology into clearer focus and al-
low us to raise questions that may serve as a basis of subsequent investigation.

We should begin by clarifying the terms of the question, what we shall take as al-Ghazâlî’s “heritage” and what as the alien element and also what we may understand by “borrowing” in this context.

To begin with the last term, can one speak of borrowing here? If so, in what sense? Whatever is borrowed never, in principle, becomes truly one’s own. He is obliged to give it back and makes no more use of it afterwards. This, at any rate, is the proper sense of the word. With the goods of the mind and the spirit, however, in giving and receiving the giver retains what he has given and the receiver has full possession of what he receives, to use permanently as he will or to discard. Yet even in this context, merely to borrow implies that one makes only temporary or incidental use of what he borrows. He makes what use of it he will and subsequently sets it aside. One may speak of borrowing, thus, when what is received is taken apart and the parts used transformed in one way or another by their integration into a context intentionally different from that of the integral whole of which originally they were parts. Borrowing is not appropriating. Appropriating is to make one’s own — to take as one’s own — what is not, or was not originally, properly his own. We should speak of appropriation, thus, when what is taken — whether whole or part — is taken over so as intentionally to retain the significance it had in its original context. Al-Ghazâlî’s account of his study of philosophy, as presented in his autobiography, can be read as talking of a borrowing. Clearly he comes to use and to incorporate into his own thought certain elements, language, concepts, constructs, as well as principles and presuppositions, from Avicenna’s philosophy, but explicitly rejects others that are fundamental to the whole which he received. On the other hand, when one reads al-Ghazâlî’s theological works carefully, it becomes apparent that he may well have done more than simply to borrow elements of Avicenna’s philosophy, adapting them to his own use, for he seems to have appropriated, even if not fully and integrally always, a number of things in such a way as to have a significant effect on his understanding of traditionally held dogmas.

For defining what we should consider al-Ghazâlî’s — something about which he is uncommonly silent — the major elements are clear. That is to say, however he might have been willing to classify himself expressly, he was and ever remained a master of Shâfi’ite law and an Ashâ’ite theolo-

2 Al-Ghazâlî’s relation to the Ashâ’ite school is not without certain ambivalences, but he is nonetheless well within the tradition. This is a problem that requires separate treatment.
side, a number of important traditionists and jurisconsults rejected systematic theology and some sufis were disdainful of it.

The main point, however, is this: the three central areas of Muslim religious and intellectual life, law (and with it, tradition), theology, and orthodox ascetical and contemplative theology were closely associated in some leading circles as specifically in one that lay directly in the background of al-Ghazālī.

We should note that the common assertion that al-Ghazālī legitimated sufism for orthodox Islam has little or no substance. These three elements of al-Ghazālī's "heritage" had not, however, as yet been brought together theoretically and fully integrated in a common theological framework. Al-Ghazālī brought them systematically into a unified theoretical system, following which sufī teaching is taken account of in contexts in which earlier it had been generally neglected.

In this connection we may suggest that any generalised theological synthesis had to take serious account of, if not perhaps to take as its point of departure, the sufī theology. This is not so much on account of the sufī's claim to a higher theological insight or of there mere fact that in some cases they did pursue the formal examination of a number of theological questions beyond the limits usually sought and attained by most dogmatic theologians. It is, rather, that it was in sufī circles primarily that moral theology properly speaking was elaborated and elaborated in a broader theological context, one in which the legists' elaboration of the revealed law and the theologians' speculation concerning basic doctrines were important. A significant number of scholars, moreover, were sufis and consequently were aware of the need to understand their disciplines within a more comprehensive theological context. The movement towards a general integration of theology on a broad scale is clearly seen, e.g., on the work of al-Qushayrī and of al-Kalābīdī (d. 380/990). We have already mentioned al-Isfārā'īnī, who had close contacts with a number of leading sufis. That al-Ghazālī was led - in part, at least - to his discovery of the wider significance of sufí thought by this quest for a cognitive certitude that lay beyond the reach of any "conceivable" doubt is irrelevant to the basic fact that in the doctrine of a number of sufis, particularly those associated with the Ash'arīte school, the ground was already well prepared for a generalised synthesis on the scale undertaken by al-Ghazālī. Concomitant with this, within the larger intellectual ambience, was the need for dogmatic theology to take more explicit account of natural phenomena, i.e., to state and to explain how the basic theological doctrines are coherent with the appearances of both human nature and of the physical world as they were commonly understood. This brings us to our third term.

Whereas jurisprudence, the Ash'arite kalām, and orthodox sufism had grown and taken shape as distinctly Islamic movements, the falsafa, the philosophical tradition, had been introduced and originally developed as the deliberate appropriation of a prior, non-Islamic tradition of thought. Avicenna, to be sure, had gone a long way towards adapting this tradition to the Islamic context, but the system steadfastly retained essential elements from its pagan origin which are basically incompatible with fundamental Muslim religious insight and doctrine. Even so, the Aristotelian construction of the universe and of the nature and order of things had gained wide acceptance in various intellectual circles and Avicenna's particular elaboration of what Prof. Gutas has termed "the metaphysics of the rational soul" offered ready to hand a highly sophisticated scheme whereby to explain the nature and occurrence of religious phenomena, including "mystical" experience as such. It was through an elaborate form of neo-Platonic philosophy that this teaching was propagated in the teaching of the Ismā'īlya, a Shi'i sect against whose rapidly growing influence Sunnī Islam had to defend itself. In short, the historical moment for al-Ghazālī's "borrowing" was at hand.

As was the case with al-Ash'arī before him, al-Ghazālī's theology is made up almost entirely of parts that were already there. It contains little, if anything, that is really new and is uniquely his. The success of his work, its widespread and enduring popularity is due to the apparent cohesiveness and the conviction with which he has put the various elements together and to his ability to ground his teaching in the Koran and the tradition.

One of the most interesting facets of Avicenna's apparent influence on al-Ghazālī, and the least tangible, is to be seen in certain of his basic attitudes. Among these is his overweening confidence in the power of the Aristotelian logic and in the scope of "demonstrative science" that is meant to be accessible to those endowed with superior intellect. Knowledge attained by rational demonstration differs from divinely inspired knowledge only in the mode of its achievement. For al-Ghazālī there is no question concerning any proposition of theology that cannot, in principle, be demonstratively resolved by reason under the guidance of revelation. The need for prophetic guidance, it should be noted, is not due to any intrinsic limitation of the power of the intellect, according to al-Ghazālī, but to men's natural tendency to form unwarranted conclusions by associative reasoning; his opposition to the doctrine of the Ismā'īlya precludes his acceptance of the absolute (or continuing) need for extraordinary revelation. More important for our present considerations, however, is al-Ghazālī's attitude towards the school traditions upon which he depends. Contrary to the usual practice of

\[3\] That is, for intellectual guidance and instruction mediated by prophets or by some divinely inspired imam and that are not naturally accessible through the usual operation of the intellect. Note, however, that following Avicenna, al-Ghazālī tends to blur the distinction between knowledge and insight that are rationally grounded and those that are "revealed".
Muslim scholars, he does not acknowledge his masters and sources, even when he draws on them directly and verbatim. Like Avicenna, he seems at times to set himself not only apart from, but also above his predecessors and speaks as if what he has to present were in some way newly and uniquely his own. The impression that he distances himself from the tradition is partially inflated by his language, as often it does not recall, either to acknowledge or to claim, traditional contexts of the topic discussed. Because of this, one can have the impression that what he says is new and somehow more profound by comparison with the work of prior theologians than in fact it is. That he was convinced of the great superiority of his own intellectual powers is clear in his autobiography, which likely may have been composed in imitation of and, to some extent, as a response to, Avicenna’s autobiography. It is evident too in other works, where one detects a kind of intellectual pretentiousness. This attitude is not unimportant, since it is a factor on what statements he may feel obliged to explain or to justify. On the other hand, there is doubtless, in his failure to claim or to acknowledge his links to the school traditions to which he belongs and his obscurity in his dependence on them by the language he employs, a deliberate effort to gain a wider hearing. He really did wish to reduce divisions and heterodoxy within the Muslim community, as has been pointed out by Prof. Laoust and Prof. Watt. These two facets of his writings need not be wholly separable from one another.

Of what al-Ghazâlî took from the philosophers, the ethical elements and the psychological (i.e., those that belong to the psychology associated with physics in the classical tradition) are probably the least important. By far the most significant of his “borrowings” with regard to their impact on his theology are in the areas of logic and metaphysics, including Avicenna’s “metaphysics of the rational soul”. In Ihyâ’ ‘ulâm al-dîn (1, p. 23) he says that logic and metaphysics are parts of kalâm and, later, in the Mustasfâ (1, pp. 5 ff.) he describes kalâm as metaphysics, a metaphysics governed by logic and in accord with divine revelation.

Considered by itself, the material contribution of the Aristotelian logic to al-Ghazâlî’s theology, and to Muslim theology in general, is in some respects has sometimes been suggested. That is to say, although its introduction had a considerable effect on the language and the form of analysis in certain works and in certain areas of theology, that al-Ghazâlî’s theological reasoning is any more rigorous than that of his predecessors or that his theological insight is any more profound is highly questionable. Al-Ghazâlî’s use of Avicenna’s metaphysics, on the other hand, had a profound effect on his theology as viewed against the background of his tradition. The integration of the new material is by no means homogeneous and complete throughout the corpus of his writing. There are problems with regard to the consistency and problems, too, with regard to the compatibility of some of his assertions with certain basic tenets of the established Ash’arite and sunnî orthodoxy.

In order to illustrate the problem concretely, it is convenient to take as our point of departure al-Ghazâlî’s al-Maqâṣâd al-‘asânâ, a work of moderate length on the exegesis of the divine names and in which his use of earlier writers is relatively easy to discern. One sees on the one hand his dependence on the prior Ash’arite tradition, particularly al-Qushayrî, parts of whose Tahâ’lî he paraphrases or takes over verbatim. On the other hand, his use of Avicenna is equally conspicuous, as we find paraphrases of passages of the Metaphysics of the Shi‘a and of the R. al-‘Arshiyas, as well as the appropriation of larger, more general constructs. What I shall do here is to point out one or two notable examples of al-Ghazâlî’s “borrowing” and to indicate some of the problems they present.

In some cases, his use if Avicenna effects only an alteration of language. This in the section on “The Truth” (pp. 137 ff.) as a divine name, he paraphrases a passage from the Metaphysics of the Shi‘a (p. 356), but the general content conforms entirely with earlier Ash’arite teaching. Where he discusses “The First and The Last” (pp. 146 ff.), however, he introduces the neo-Platonic notion of emanation and return and speaks of God as the source of “the ordered chain of beings” and of the degrees and ranks by which the “owners” (al-‘irfûn) rise back towards Him. Here, though the concept of the creation and return can easily be understood so as to conform with Ash’arite and with orthodox sufî doctrine, by speaking of the “ordered chain of beings” al-Ghazâlî introduces an element which seems totally foreign to the way in which earlier orthodoxy speaks of the universe. Al-Ghazâlî, moreover, lays considerable stress on this concept, both in the Maqâṣâd and in other works.

That there is no true agent other than God is common Ash’arite doctrine; but al-Ghazâlî’s account of how God’s agency is exercised and is manifest in phenomena is not what we normally find with earlier theologians. The universal determinism, to be sure, is in no way mitigated, so that the basic doctrine can to this extent be said to remain constant. The alteration of context and concept, however, are not without serious consequences. Against earlier treatments of events as essentially discrete and disconnected, al-Ghazâlî presents the universe as an integrated system of entities and events bound together by “causes” and “intermediaries” and in which God is “the one who makes the causes to function as causes” (masâ’ibî l-‘asâbîh). Lower, proximate and immediate causes are governed by higher, “universal and enduring causes” (p. 98), of which the first is God’s Throne, etc., the outermost sphere of the heavens. He says that “the universe has the character of a single individual composed of many members” (pp. 81 ans 152) and compares it operation to that of a water-clock, in which the final event is
determined by the structure of the apparatus and is effected by the flow of the water through it (pp. 99 ff.). The whole is constructed by God, and the flowing water somehow corresponds to His activity. We cannot enter here into a discussion of secondary causation in the teaching of al-Ghazâlî, but I would call attention to two points. First, there are elements in al-Ghazâlî's Ash'arite background that contribute significantly to the way he structures this universe. Secondly, the overall conception is clearly neo-Platonic. Against Avicenna and with his Ash'arite tradition, al-Ghazâlî empties the concept of the natures of created things; things in their different kinds are generally depicted as empty receptacles of God's action, determinately limiting conditions of what can be received and so of what God can do. On the other hand, his commitment to the neo-Platonic framework transforms the sense of some earlier doctrines.

Within the basic framework of his theological cosmology, al-Ghazâlî presents God's relation to the world schematically—sometimes explicitly and sometimes by allusion—as a hierarchy of three principal terms, which appear repeatedly and in many contexts, though not invariably. Each is referred to, described or alluded to, by a variety of expressions drawn from the common Muslim vocabulary.

The first of these is God, considered as Cætor (al-Khâliq), and specifically His knowledge as determinant of creation. It is referred to as His "judgment" (hukm) and His "wisdom" (hidmah) and also His "ordinance" (taqdir) and His "ordering" (taddir). It is also referred to as His "command" ('amr) and accordingly also as His eternal "speaking" (kalâm), which al-Ghazâlî takes to be identical with His knowledge (ilm). His failure to mention God's will where he discusses these terms in the Maqasid is conspicuous.

The second term is God's causing the existence of things, specifically the creation of the "causes which are universal and enduring" (p. 100) in accord with His knowledge. This is identified with God's general providence, so that it is an almost unrestricted "generosity" (iđâ) and with His universal "enactment" (al-qadâ'). Accordingly, it is equivalent to God's "mystery" (istâlî), i.e., His governance of the universe through the universal causes, preeminently represented by the Throne. The Throne is conceived analogously to the first, universal intellect of Avicenna's neo-Platonic system, for al-Ghazâlî says that no form comes to be in the world that is not first created in the Throne (Iljâm, p. 20). Lower spheres are moved each by an angelic intelligence and there is also an angel that plays the role of the "agent intellect" in Avicenna's system.

The third term is God's "ordering the forms of created beings according to the most beautiful ordering" (al-însana l-târîb; p. 81 and 109) and

"His forming them according to the most beautiful informing" (al-însana l-târîb; p. 81), i.e., His causing the coming of particular events. This directing of antecedent causes to its ultimate effects is God's qadar and is identified with His "justice" (adl). Particular events are His "signs" (îyâd).

The identification of the references of these expressions is readily made on the basis of the Maqasid and once grasped can be recognized as operative in various places in other works as well, so that what may superficially appear as ordinary use of traditional religious rhetoric is often loaded with meaning that is anything but traditional. What the scheme represents is nothing less than a systematic organization of common Muslim religious and theological terms so as to conform to a neo-Platonic model and one which, as is evident in the texts, derives principally from Avicenna.

One has to be cautious, however, in trying to assess how radical a departure al-Ghazâlî has made from what we have called his heritage. The prior Ash'arite theology was extremely conservative. Their focus was carefully restricted to very specific questions and theses as defined in the tradition and the assertions they were willing to make are narrowly circumscribed. Al-Ghazâlî does not offer a full explanation of how the causation of particular events is effected through the various intermediate agents and causes. In the places where he does explain the role of secondary causes, what he has to say follows established Ash'arite teaching. Furthermore, that angels play a role in bringing about various events is common Muslim doctrine, even if it is seldom mentioned or discussed in the manuals. Abû Tâlib al-Makkî, moreover, one of al-Ghazâlî's sources, commonly speaks of (secondary) "causes" and of angelic "intermediaries" and also of God as "masââblâma l-îsâbâ" (Avicenna too uses the latter expression, probably following a source such as Abû Tâlib or an earlier common source).

Concerning our general problem there are several things that should be mentioned here. Although al-Ghazâlî sometimes explains the relationship of a "cause" to its "act" as unrestricted "generosity" (iđâ) and with His universal "enactment" (al-qadâ'), accordingly, it is equivalent to God's "mystery" (istâlî), i.e., His governance of the universe through the universal causes, preeminently represented by the Throne. The Throne is conceived analogously to the first, universal intellect of Avicenna's neo-Platonic system, for al-Ghazâlî says that no form comes to be in the world that is not first created in the Throne (Iljâm, p. 20). Lower spheres are moved each by an angelic intelligence and there is also an angel that plays the role of the "agent intellect" in Avicenna's system. The second term is also described as God's "power" (qudrâh), i.e., the power through which His creation of particular events in the world is exercised.

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adopted or otherwise built up a consistent and unambivalent, formal lexicon of his own nor, concomitantly, has he managed to establish for himself a clearly consistent theoretical framework in terms of which one may readily discern what precisely he means to assert or to deny in the formulations he employs. His language, in short, evokes in various places — and in one and the same work — various prior contexts and the disparate meanings of others without establishing a unified context of its own as that in which its meaning is achieved and presented. Thus it is that sometimes, even when we are able to determine from other places in his work what most likely he means to assert, serious problems remain unanswered. In others, where the form of expression directly recalls the context and teaching of Avicenna and the philosophers, one may have reason to doubt that al-Ghazālī means to assert what his language seems to state or to imply, but is unable to find any satisfactory basis on which to determine exactly how his words are to be understood if not as saying what they seem manifestly to say. Whatever one would allow for internal consistency and for compatibility with prior sunnī orthodox, problems remain with regard to the integration of al-Ghazālī’s “borrowings” and his “heritage”. The brief indication of several examples will have to suffice here.

Al-Ghazālī identifies God’s speaking (kalāmu-hu) with His knowledge, implicitly in the Maqṣād (e.g., p. 98) and unequivocally in the Ilāhīm (p. 20). The two are closely associated by Abū ʾIṣḥāq al-Šarʿānī, who is followed by al-Ghazālī’s master, al-Juwaynī. Their complete identification, however, is inconsistent with the common teaching of earlier Ashʿarī masters and seems, furthermore, to be at variance with what al-Ghazālī himself has to say in his two doctrinal summaries, al-Iqṭiṣād and R. al-Šaykh, at least when these are read within the context of the Ashʿarite tradition, in which they are ostensibly meant to be read. He goes well beyon ab al-Šarʿānī without explanation of any kind.

Again, he says that God’s “hand” in the Koran (e.g., 38.75) refers to angels (Fayṣal, p. 40). This too is an exegesis which differs from and is incompatible with prior Ashʿarite teaching. If the matter be looked at carefully, the relationships prove to be far more complex than first appears. What I wish to point out here is simply that al-Ghazālī’s exegesis is governed by the neo-Platonic model he adopted. In order to make this adjustment he takes “hand” here as a live metaphor, something that is also against earlier Ashʿarite exegesis.

Following Avicenna and against prior Ashʿarite teaching, al-Ghazālī states repeatedly that this is the best of all possible universe. “God is the existent whose existence is necessary in itself, from which is realised the existence of everything whose existence is in possibility in the best modes of order and perfection” (p. 47), toward “the fulfillment of the utmost good whose existence is possible in accord with what has been decreed by the divine generosity” (p. 152). So also, in a notorious passage, “it is the ordering that is necessary and right according to what has to be and as it has to be and in the measure that has to be; there is not at all in possibility anything better and more complete and more perfect; if there were... [this] would be an act of miserliness that is incompatible with [God’s] generosity and an injustice that is incompatible with a unified context of its own as that in which its meaning is achieved and presented. Thus it is that sometimes, even when we are able to determine from other places in his work what most likely he means to assert, serious problems remain unanswered. In others, where the form of expression directly recalls the context and teaching of Avicenna and the philosophers, one may have reason to doubt that al-Ghazālī means to assert what his language seems to state or to imply, but is unable to find any satisfactory basis on which to determine exactly how his words are to be understood if not as saying what they seem manifestly to say. Whatever one would allow for internal consistency and for compatibility with prior sunnī orthodox, problems remain with regard to the integration of al-Ghazālī’s “borrowings” and his “heritage”. The brief indication of several examples will have to suffice here.

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Again, he says that God’s “hand” in the Koran (e.g., 38.75) refers to angels (Fayṣal, p. 40). This too is an exegesis which differs from and is incompatible with prior Ashʿarite teaching. If the matter be looked at carefully, the relationships prove to be far more complex than first appears. What I wish to point out here is simply that al-Ghazālī’s exegesis is governed by the neo-Platonic model he adopted. In order to make this adjustment he takes “hand” here as a live metaphor, something that is also against earlier Ashʿarite exegesis.

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whose existence is possible in accord with what has been decreed by the divine generosity” (p. 152). So also, in a notorious passage, “it is the ordering that is necessary and right according to what has to be and as it has to be and in the measure that has to be; there is not at all in possibility anything better and more complete and more perfect; if there were... [this] would be an act of miserliness that is incompatible with [God’s] generosity and an injustice that is incompatible with a unified context of its own as that in which its meaning is achieved and presented. Thus it is that sometimes, even when we are able to determine from other places in his work what most likely he means to assert, serious problems remain unanswered. In others, where the form of expression directly recalls the context and teaching of Avicenna and the philosophers, one may have reason to doubt that al-Ghazālī means to assert what his language seems to state or to imply, but is unable to find any satisfactory basis on which to determine exactly how his words are to be understood if not as saying what they seem manifestly to say. Whatever one would allow for internal consistency and for compatibility with prior sunnī orthodox, problems remain with regard to the integration of al-Ghazālī’s “borrowings” and his “heritage”. The brief indication of several examples will have to suffice here.

Here we encounter a number of more serious problems. As it stands in the context, the phrase “everything whose existence is in possibility” is ambivalent, since “possibility” can be taken either as absolute or as limited by the determination of God’s foreknowledge of what He will create. So too, the following “in the best modes of order and perfection” is ambivalent, as it can be read either with “is realised” or with “is in possibility.” In accord with what has been decreed...” in the succeeding citation is similarly ambivalent. What is at stake in these ambivalences is far from trivial and one can only wonder why he has not, here and in other places, chosen to express himself more clearly.

When he speaks of the “best”, the “most perfect”, and the “most beautiful” he not only seems to posit a best and most perfect with regard to what lies absolutely within the power of God, but also to assert that this absolute best is in fact realised in the universe of which we are parts. This is contrary to Ashʿarite teaching and several of al-Ghazālī’s contemporaries make a point of denying it, probably against Avicenna. The language itself, “good”, “perfect”, “beautiful”, “right” fix al-Ghazālī’s context as neo-Platonic. He may — and elsewhere does — make distinctions so as to understand these expressions in a way that can be integrated with the traditional understanding of them, but his use of them in the present passages remains alien to the tradition. The Ashʿaris, that is, will insist that “good”, “perfect”, and “right”, as al-Ghazālī here uses them are meaningful only as the created entities described are viewed exclusively with reference to themselves from within the framework of creation. Absolutely speaking, however, they are meaningful and true only with reference to God’s judgement; but God’s judgement cannot be rationalised from a perspective that originates in a consideration of the nature of His creatures. Al-Ghazālī, in short, says
"good", "beautiful", and "right" on the basis of a secondary measure and according to criteria determined by a frame of reference within which the absolutely "good" and "right" cannot be presented, according to traditional orthodoxy. For al-Ghazâlî, so it would seem, God's justice and the goodness of His acts can be judged by the measure of His creatures. He appears to absolutise this frame of reference, i.e., the created universe.

Furthermore, the thesis would seem necessarily to presuppose—following Avicenna—that the classes of beings that it lies within God's power to create are limited to those which actually exist in the world. Since he says nothing to the contrary, we have no grounds on which to suppose that he thought otherwise. Most Ash'ârites held that the classes of beings that God has the power to create are unlimited in number6; al-Ash'ârî and others state explicitly that it is God who makes the different kinds of things to be different. Al-Ghazâlî, by contrast, appears to absolutise the "essences" of created beings and to do so in a way that, following Avicenna and the philosophers, would seem to undermine the most fundamental notion of creation ex nihilo. For al-Ghazâlî, that is, creation appears to be not ex nihilo but ex possibili. Such is plainly the doctrine of Fakhruddin al-Râzî a century later.

Again, taken by itself, the phrase "the ordering which is necessary and right and as it has to be" presents the same kinds of ambivalence as those we noted earlier. In whatever way we interpret this, however, it ties this necessity and appropriateness to God's generosity and justice in such a way as apparently to imply that it is because of God's nature that creation must be as good and as beautiful and as perfect as possible. This, at any rate, would seem to be the obvious sense of what he says. Once again we find the general scheme of the neo-Platonism of Avicenna.

The Ash'ârites, from the very beginning, were careful to explain God's generosity in such a way as to avoid the implication either that He has necessarily (or is obligated) to act in any particular way either with regard to what He creates or with regard to how His action affects His creatures. In the Maqsad al-Ghazâlî speaks at one point (p. 87) of God's generosity in terms that are found in traditional Ash'ârite writings, but even there the language and conception are conspicuously those of Avicenna. His context and meaning in the passage we are considering, however, are not compatible with common Ash'ârite doctrine if we understand "justice" to be an essential attribute, as it is for almost all the Ash'ârites and as seems indicated in the context, or if we understand "generosity" as an essential attribute, as it is by Avicenna, whose language and doctrine the passage directly recalls. That they are to be taken so would appear evident from other places where the terms are used analogously.

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Taking the passage in its apparent sense we can, in any case, read it to mean that it is not necessary that God create anything at all, but that given the divine nature, creation has necessarily to be exactly as it is: if God wills to create, then He wills not necessarily to create the most beautiful and most perfect universe possible. This is not inconsistent with al-Ghazâlî's vehement opposition to Avicenna's thesis of the eternal necessity of creation, expressed in the Tahâfut and elsewhere.

In his borrowing and adaptation of Avicenna's philosophy, al-Ghazâlî thus makes (or seems to make) a far-reaching compromise with the outlook which the latter carries over and develops from its pagan origins. The world is given as having something of the character of an absolute, in its whole, in its parts, and even in the succession of particular events. Following Avicenna and in accord with the Ash'ârites, chance and free choice are totally eliminated from the world. Against the latter, however, choice is radically restricted for God, because of the constraints imposed by the requirement that the real system of possible kinds be as perfect as possible and that the occurrence of the particular instances of the possible kinds and the realisation of their specific potentialities be as good as possible.

If, however, the world is absolute as given, it is nevertheless not absolute in its givenness. It was possible that God not choose to create the world; it might not have existed at all and existing it will come to an end. Al-Ghazâlî's discussion of God's will in the Maqsad (p. 145) would seem to say quite clearly that God could have chosen not to create anything. The passage, however, is substantially a paraphrase of a passage in Avicenna's R. al-'Arshiyya (p. 11) and by evoking the terms and the context of the latter gives rise to questions. These questions become acute when we read in the Iljâm (pp. 20 ff.) his assertion that things are as necessarily they must be because they "proceed from a pre-eternal and necessary volition and the result of the necessary is necessary and its contradictory is impossible".

Here he seems to say, and to say quite plainly, that the act of God's will in His will to create the world as He created it is necessary: that He would not have willed not to create the world and could not have willed to create it otherwise than He did. Once again, the language directly recalls that of Avicenna. It hardly seems likely that al-Ghazâlî would say this, but then it is awkward to construe the passage in any other way.

I will not attempt to resolve these questions here. However we deal with them, we have to ask how consistent is al-Ghazâlî's theology, e.g., between the completion of the Tahâfut in January 1095, and the Iljâm several days before his death in December 1111. Again, to what extent was his ability to resolve his psychological crisis of 485/1095 tied to his coming to terms with Avicenna's philosophy—his coming to "see" God's activity in phenomena according to this model? His sufism, itself highly rationalised, is influenced

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6 Several Ash'ârites are reported to have said that the classes of possibilities are finite but the exact intention and significance of the reported thesis is unclear in the context.
by Avicenna's metaphysics; how thoroughly? His reflective understanding of his religious experience was guided by this model, with the result that, whatever other role Sufi asceticism may have played in his life, it had the psychological effect of giving him unbounded confidence in the truth of his own theological speculation and in its rational certainty as well. Any model must, as such, exercise a certain degree of control in the understanding of the phenomena to which it is applied. For this reason, a number of departures from classical Ash'arite teaching were inevitable in al-Ghazâlî's theology. Their extent and significance, however, were dependant upon a number of factors, among them his grasp of the basic issues, his commitment to the traditional treatment of them, and also to his ability to think independently of his sources, what he "inherited" and what he "borrowed". To deal with these questions one will have to cut through much of the romantic aura with which al-Ghazâlî has been invested in some studies of his work. Certainly he was no Aquinas.

His theology appears to be comprehensive in its scope. Certainly his rationalisation of Muslim dogma extends beyond anything hazarded by earlier Ash'arites. On the other hand, it appears also to be curiously incomplete. Theses are set forth in formally conceptual terms, sometimes at length, with great assurance and even eloquence, but also superficially and inconclusively, as implications are left unclarified and apparent inconsistencies unresolved. To such a complaint al-Ghazâlî would doubtless have responded — as in effect he does in a number of places — that to treat such questions more fully would be inappropriate in the particular context or, following the claims of some Sufis, that it is not licit to divulge the "secrets of divine science". Such evasions seem somewhat lame, however, in the face of the difficulties. To be sure, the wider implications and the corollaries of many theses and analyses often are not exhaustively pursued in the traditional Ash'arite summaries either, but in contrast to al-Ghazâlî the masters of the classical period are almost never ambivalent in their statement and exposition of the principal dogmas. One can only wonder if, in some cases, al-Ghazâlî was in fact fully aware of the difficulties or if he has thought the problem through. In a number of places — again paralleling Avicenna — he speaks of the scholastic theologians' uncritical acceptance of the teaching of their masters. Because his own theology was novel in the historical context, because he has laid it out for himself and had verified, to his own satisfaction, that it was open to no rational doubt, he was unaware, apparently, of how much of the doctrine of Avicenna and the philosophers he had himself uncritically received and appropriated. He frequently inveighs against the disputations of the scholars. One is tempted to think, however, that if he had

deigned to submit his own theological theses to the crucible of that rather rigorous exercise, he might have been forced to state some of his positions somewhat less ambiguously and to confront directly some issues he manages to dodge.

What al-Ghazâlî sought, in effect, was to reshape Sunni theology, to extend it in scope and in depth, and "to bring it up to date" by employing a neo-Platonic model which he took principally from Avicenna. He was unable to achieve a fully consistent synthesis. His relationships to his sources, his commitments to the tradition on the one side and to Avicenna on the other are not everywhere clear; and on the other hand, he does not succeed in explicitly laying out a new context of his own. The full systematisation of Ash'arite theology along the new lines would be carried out two generations later by Fakhrudîn al-Râzî. With that, what al-Ghazâlî borrowed became part of the theological legacy of orthodox Islam.

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Note: All references where there is no indication to the contrary are to al-Ghazâlî's al-
Maqsad al-asârî.

7 This is to say, the formally speculative character of the discourse in which the difficulties present themselves consists of innovating what seems only appropriate, not to say required, that the discussion be carried through to its completion.