

A Forgery in al-Ghazālī's *Mishkāt* ?

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THE importance of the *Mishkāt al-Anwār* for a full understanding of the thought of al-Ghazālī was long ago recognized by Goldziher. He impressed this on W. H. T. Gairdner, when, in 1911, he was guiding him into the higher reaches of Islamic studies; and in due course Gairdner produced an article on *Al-Ghazālī's Mishkāt al-Anwār and the Ghazālī-Problem*¹ and a Translation of the opusculum accompanied by a thought-provoking Introduction.² On the whole the problems there raised have not received from subsequent writers the attention which Gairdner's discussion of them merits and their own importance warrants.

Most of the problems formulated by Gairdner are connected with the last section of the *Mishkāt*, the detailed interpretation of the Tradition about the Seventy (or Seventy Thousand) Veils (which for convenience I shall call the "Veils-section"). The heart of the difficulties is in the apparent contradiction between many statements in the Veils-section and al-Ghazālī's general position.

It is the purpose of this article to argue that the contradiction amounts to incompatibility and is not apparent but real, and that therefore the Veils-section is not the work of al-Ghazālī but a forgery either completing a work dealing only with the Light-verse or else substituted for the genuine Ghazalian interpretation of the Veils-tradition.

1. *The non-Ghazalian character of the Veils-section*

The contrast between the Veils-section and al-Ghazālī's thought in general, and even the rest of the *Mishkāt*, is striking, and thrust itself upon Gairdner as he wrestled with the difficulties he had raised. "The doctrine of *mukhālafah*—that the divine essence and characteristics wholly and entirely 'differ from' the human—appears to be asserted, as this treatise's last word, in its most extreme and intransigent form. . . . Nevertheless the *Mishkāt*

¹ *Der Islam*, v (1914), 121-153.

² London, 1924 (Asiatic Society Monographs, XIX). References to the *Mishkāt* are to the Cairo edition of 1322 (whose pages are given in the translation in square brackets), followed by the pages of the translation in round brackets. I have generally used Gairdner's translation without alteration.

itself seems to be one long attempt to modify or even negate this its own bankrupt conclusion."¹ These words suggest a line of approach to the question of the authenticity of the Veils-section. It is not enough to show that it is incompatible with the author's views as expounded in other of his later works, for that would leave open the possibility that his views had undergone a further development in the last few years of his life or that in the *Mishkāt* he had been more ready to communicate his inmost beliefs. If, however, it can be shown conclusively that the Veils-section is incompatible with the rest of the *Mishkāt*, then the argument for its spurious character is a strong one. The following are the salient features of the contrast as I see it.

(a) *The doctrine of the attributes in the Veils-section is opposed to that found elsewhere.*

The first group of those veiled by pure light "have searched out and understood the true meaning of the divine attributes, and have grasped that when the divine attributes are named Speech, Will, Power, Knowledge, and the rest, it is not according to our human mode of nomenclature; and this has led them to avoid denoting Him by these attributes altogether, and to denote Him simply by a reference (*bi 'l-idāfah*) to His creation (*makhluqāt*)".²

At first sight this might seem to refer to those of the orthodox theologians, like some of the Ash'ariyah, who so carefully stated their *via media* between *tashbīh* and *ta'īl* that they avoided all suspicion of *tashbīh* or anthropomorphism. Closer examination, however, makes clear that this cannot be so. Gairdner, who is inclined to place some orthodox theologians here, is nevertheless constrained to admit that the latter half of the above quotation together with the following lines "shows that al-Ghazālī has rather in mind those who have steered as clear as possible from *kalām*-theology in every shape and form, and have contented themselves with asserting the divine creatorhood and providence": "The point could be put even more forcibly. None of the orthodox theologians, including the most subtle exponents of *bi-lā kayf*, could be said to "avoid denoting Him by these attributes altogether", for they all spoke freely of God's speech, will, etc.

¹ Introduction, p. 29. Wensinck is also aware of the contrast between the Veils-section and al-Ghazālī's usual doctrine (*La Pensée de Ghazzālī*, p. 13).

² *Mishkāt*, 54 (95).

³ *Der Islam*, v, 126.

To find people to whom this language applies we must turn to the "theistic philosophers", the school of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. These men acknowledged such attributes as those mentioned. A chapter of Ibn Sīnā's *Najāh* is entitled "Chapter on the affirmation of the unity of the First on the ground that His knowledge does not differ from His power, His will and His life in denotation, but that that is all one and the essence of the One Reality is not divided because of any of these attributes".¹ But this discussion of the attributes was not an integral part of their philosophical system; it was a concession to Muslim orthodoxy, to keep the cleavage from being too obvious. Moreover in their treatment of the question they used the word *idāfah* in much the same way as it is used in the passage quoted above. Al-Ghazālī, in his objective account of the views of these philosophers in *Maqāṣid al-Falāsifah*, says that they admitted an attribute like *jawwād*, generous, since this goes back to the *idāfah* or relation of the essence (*dhāt—sc.* of God) to an act which proceeds from it, for they held that a multiplicity of *idāfāt* of this sort does not involve multiplicity in the essence, since a change of *idāfāt* does not involve change of the essence.²

It follows from what has been said that the orthodox theologians must be found among the previous groups, and especially in the closing sections of "those veiled by mixed light and darkness", of whom it is said that "they fell back on what was essentially (*min hayth al-ma'nā*) anthropomorphism, though they repudiated it formally (*bi 'l-lafz*)".³ This is exactly what we should expect from a writer connected with the school of Ibn Sīnā, for it was the normal thing for various philosophically-minded groups to accuse the Ash'ariyah of falling into *tashbīh*.⁴

Closely connected with the doctrine of the attributes held by the "theistic" or Neoplatonist philosophers is their concern to avoid any assertion of plurality in God. This is prominent in the description of the second class of those veiled by pure light, and is implicit in the description of the third class and in that of "those who attain". To the Neoplatonists the ascription of attributes to God appeared to involve a denial of His unity, whereas orthodox

¹ Ed. Muhyi 'l-Din Ṣabī 'l-Kurdī, Cairo, 1357/1938, p. 249.

² Ed. al-Kurdī, Cairo, n.d., part ii, ch. 3, "On the Attributes of God," fourth type, p. 152. Cf. *Najāh*, p. 251.

³ *Mishkāt*, 53 (94).

⁴ Cf. Strothmann, art. "Tashbīh" in *EI*.

Islam was concerned, not with the internal unity of God, but with the avoidance of ascribing "partners" to Him.

In respect of these points, then, the Veils-section is definitely Neoplatonic in its outlook. The rest of the *Mishkāt*, on the other hand, is, as definitely, not Neoplatonic. There al-Ghazālī makes no attempt to "avoid denoting God by these attributes altogether", for he not merely quotes with approval the Tradition according to which the Prophet said, "I have become His hearing whereby He heareth, His vision whereby He seeth, His tongue wherewith He speaketh," but even makes use of the conceptions of the throne and sedile, on which, according to the Qur'ān, God sits.¹

That these are no mere chance remarks or concessions to ordinary usage (why should one make such concessions in a work for initiates?), but are in consonance with al-Ghazālī's whole trend of thought in the *Mishkāt*, is shown by the discussion of symbolism in Part II, especially pp. 34-8 (75-80). Al-Ghazālī there distinguishes between the external or superficial meaning of words and their internal or symbolic meaning, and insists that it is erroneous to confine oneself either to the symbolic meaning or to the superficial meaning. He ascribes these mistaken views to the Bāṭiniyah and the Ḥashwīyah respectively, and conceives of orthodoxy and truth as the maintenance of a balance between them. Admittedly he is not interested here in the application of this principle to the doctrine of the attributes, although, if not identical with the principle underlying that doctrine, it is at least closely allied to it; but he does in fact mention several of the attributes of God in the course of his explanation of the phrase that Adam was created "in the image of the Merciful".² These include both some of the more philosophical attributes and also some of the more obviously anthropomorphic—both God's mercy, kingship, and lordship, and His handwriting and His hand.

It is, I venture to affirm, inconceivable that any thinker with a grasp of his subject could have designed a book to include both this treatment of the "image of the Merciful" and of symbolism in general and the passages about the attributes in the Veils-section.

(The use of the phrase "the face of God" in the Veils-section³ might appear to weaken the above argument, but does not really do so, since it is merely a quotation from the Tradition which is

being interpreted. The presumed forger who has chosen the interpretation of this Tradition as a means of putting his goods into the hands of the customers he cannot gain by lawful means is bound to mention this phrase from his text when he is trying to explain it.)

(b) *There is no mention of prophethood or the prophetic spirit in the Veils-section, although elsewhere these have a central place in the thought of al-Ghazālī.*

Towards the end of the Veils-section there is a reference to Abraham and Muḥammad, and it is suggested that they are examples of the two different methods by which the mystic goal is reached. There is a passing remark near the beginning of the section that only "the prophetic power" (*qūwah nabawīyah*) can determine the exact number of veils, and two Traditions are quoted which are ascribed to "the Prophet". Apart from this there is no mention in the Veils-section of the prophetic office or faculty, and the conception plays no part whatsoever in the elaborate "philosophy of religion" which constitutes most of the section.

This is in striking contrast to the rest of the *Mishkāt* and indeed to other of al-Ghazālī's later works, such as *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl*, where *nubūwah* (which might almost be translated "revelation") and *al-rūh al-nabawī* have a central place. He maintains that "the greatest of philosophies (*a'zam al-hikmah*) is the word of God in general and the Qur'ān in particular",¹ and gives the Qur'ān a high place in his light-symbolism. The man through whom the revelation comes, however, is not a mere instrument, but has himself reached the highest point of religious development; "the Prophets, when their ascents reached unto the World of the Realm Celestial, attained the uttermost goal, and from thence looked down upon a totality of the World Invisible."² The prophets may therefore be regarded as Lamps which bring illumination to the rest of men.³ Finally, in his account of the five faculties or spirits of man and in his exposition of the Light-verse,⁴ the culmination is the transcendent (*qudsī*) prophetic spirit which is here said to be symbolized by the oil that is "well-nigh luminous though fire touched it not".

Not merely does al-Ghazālī thus give a high place to the prophet

¹ *Mishkāt*, 24 (65); 7 (48).

² *Mishkāt*, 34 (76).

³ *Ibid.*, 56 (97).

¹ *Ibid.*, 12 (52).

² *Ibid.*, 13 (54).

³ *Ibid.*, 14 (55); cf. 22 (63).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 39 (81) ff.; 43 (84) ff.

and to revealed truth, but he is intensely interested in the attitude of men towards revealed truth, and he makes this attitude the basis of a classification of the different types of men. The chief passage will perhaps be clearer if we keep to the Arabic terms: " 'ilm is above *īmān*, and *dhawq* above 'ilm; *dhawq* is *wijdān*, 'ilm is *qiyās*, and *īmān* is the simple acceptance by *taqlīd* and the approval of the men of *wijdān* or the men of 'irfān."¹ That is to say, there are three categories of men in respect of religion. The lowest class, in which the great majority of people are to be found, is distinguished by *īmān*, faith or belief in revealed truth, and this faith consists in accepting such truth on the authority of another person or persons belonging to one or other of the two other groups; this *taqlīd* or following of authority is sometimes naïve and unconscious (as in the case of the child adopting the religious beliefs of his parents and teachers without question), and sometimes deliberate and conscious, in which case there is a definite acknowledgment or approval of the authority of the person followed. The second group is distinguished by 'ilm; that is, they are able to give rational grounds for their acceptance of revealed truth, showing both how certain matters involved in revelation, such as the existence of God, can be demonstrated by reason independently of revelation, and how the *mu'jizāt* or miracles of the prophets afford rational grounds for accepting what is revealed through them as true.

Above these two groups is a third consisting of those who not merely are able to give a rational defence of revealed truth but have "seen" or rather "tasted" these matters for themselves—for the characteristic of this group is *dhawq*, which is literally "taste" though it may be translated "mystic experience", and which involves or is a form of *wijdān* or "feeling".

Now all these groups hold the *same* dogmas; they differ only in what may be called their "attitude" towards them. In the Veils-section, on the other hand, the classification of the different religious groups is based on the fact that they hold *different* dogmas or beliefs and the question of their "attitude", whether it is *īmān*, 'ilm, or *dhawq*, does not enter in. The contrast is considerable.

It is conceivable, of course, that the same man might employ different religious classifications at different times and for different purposes; but that is not credible in this particular case. The

¹ Ibid., 42.

conceptions underlying the classification according to *īmān*, 'ilm, and *dhawq* are central in the thought of al-Ghazālī, as a perusal of *Al-Munqidh min al-Dalāl* will readily show. For such a man to concern himself with the distinctions of the Veils-section would be to descend to a lower plane, for the groups discussed there are apparently at the level of either of *īmān* or 'ilm, although no attempt is made to distinguish them on these lines. Moreover, the two systems of classification ought to intersect at the top, at least, for the group of "those who attain" in the Veils-section are presumably characterized by *dhawq*; yet in the account given of them there is no mention of *dhawq* apart from an incidental remark to the effect that to these adepts the meaning of God's word, "All perisheth save His countenance," becomes a *dhawq*¹; and instead the impression is given that their chief peculiarity is the holding of a subtle metaphysical theory, about the distinction between God and the Obeyed-One (*Muṭā'*).

While it is theoretically possible, then, that one man may employ different systems of classification, yet in this case the contrast between the two systems is of such a kind that it is inconceivable that the mind which produced *Al-Munqidh* and the main part of the *Mishkāt* could subsequently have produced the Veils-section. The subject-matter of the latter demands some reference to the earlier conceptions, at least in order to show how the two systems of classification are related to one another.

(c) *While the rest of the Mishkāt is a closely argued whole, the Veils-section has no preparation made for it in the previous part.*

Apart from the Veils-section the *Mishkāt* shows a closely-knit structure. From the very beginning of the treatise where he considers the properties of physical light he is working up to his climax, the interpretation of the Niche, Lamp, Glass, Tree and Oil; and while one or two passages might be regarded as digressions, yet on the whole it is true that the actual interpretation of the light-verse cannot be properly understood without all the previous discussion. Thus there is careful preparation for the final interpretation.

The Veils-section, on the other hand, is not prepared for at all. It opens abruptly in a manner that raises many questions: "I explain it thus. God is in, by, and for himself glorious. A veil

¹ Ibid., 56 (97).

is necessarily related to those from whom the glorious object is veiled. Now these among men are of three kinds, according as their veils are pure darkness, mixed darkness and light, or pure light."¹ Thus we are plunged right into the middle of an interpretation without any previous explanation of the properties of veils; yet surely there ought to be some explanation of how light can be a veil, even if it is held that veils of darkness require no explanation.

It is true that the veiling of light is occasionally mentioned in the earlier part of the work. Thus al-Ghazālī says that error is unveiled when intelligence is separated from the deceptions of imagination; but this does not contribute anything to the Veils-section since he also says that this separation is only completed after death.² There is also a remark, to which we must later return, to the effect that there is no veil between the intelligence and the realities of things apart from one which it assumes of its own accord, whose relation to the intelligence is analogous to that of the eyelid to the eye.³ That also is no preparation for the Veils-section, and the indication that this is to be more fully explained in the "third chapter of the work" is distinctly mystifying.

What appears to be an explanation of "veils of light" is found in a passage whose closing sentence is: "then glory to Him who hides Himself from His own creation by His utter manifestness, and is veiled from their gaze through the very effulgence of His own light!"⁴ The argument leading up to this is based on the fact that we generally and most readily apprehend things through their contraries, e.g. we are aware of the sun because its light is sometimes veiled; now God's light cannot be veiled by anything similar to the sun's setting, but is present with and in all our apprehensions (just as physical light is present in all our perception of visual objects); and therefore since the divine light is invariable and undifferentiated, it is not to be apprehended through the contrast with its opposite and is consequently overlooked by the heedless "on whose faces is the veil". In this sense the effulgence of the divine light is a veil of light.

This may very well have been al-Ghazālī's explanation of the veils of light, but it does not prepare in the slightest for the explanation of the Veils-Tradition as found in existing texts of the *Mishkāt*. In the account of "those veiled by mixed darkness and light"

there is mention of several divine lights, such as the light of majesty and beauty, the light of dominion and glory; but these lights are said to be combined with the darkness either of the senses or of the imagination or of false syllogisms of the intelligence; this combination of light and darkness is exemplified by the idolater who has some appreciation of the Divine majesty and beauty but regards these as inherent in objects of sense such as precious metals and stones. It is apparently its combination with darkness that causes light to be a veil; how pure light can be a veil is not explained at all.

It is not necessary to discuss whether the earlier theory that the undifferentiated character of the Divine light makes it difficult to see can be consistently held by one who wrote the Veils-section. The point to be noticed at the moment is that the earlier passage is not a preparation for the later one, so that nothing is left in the earlier part of the book which leads up to and prepares for the interpretation of the Veils Tradition. It is also curious, to say the least, that a man who had an explanation of how light could act as a veil should not mention it at all when explaining the phrase "veils of light".¹

In three notable points, then, there is a strong contrast between the Veils-section and the rest of the *Mishkāt*. The contrast is one of both matter and form. Other points could be added, such as the attitude to sense, but they would not be so immediately striking, and those already adduced are sufficient to establish the existence

¹ There is an interesting reference to the Seventy Veils at the end of Part III of the *Ihyā'* (*K. dhamm al-ghurūr*, third *ṣanf*, last *firqah*, ed. Cairo, 1316, p. 330). The point made there is that as each veil is removed before a man he imagines that he has reached the final state, the "presence". The first veil is the *nafs* or *sirr al-qalb*, because in the heart are manifested or revealed *ḥaqīqat al-Ḥaqq kullī-hi* and *ṣūrat al-kullī*; thereupon Divine light shines in it, and the man may be misled into extravagant ideas and even into extravagant words, such as *ʿAwa ʿl-Ḥaqq*. This passage follows a different line of thought from both those just considered, but is not incompatible with either. It is perhaps closest to the treatment found in the Veils-section, but differs from that in that the deception is due to the failure to realize that a brighter light lies beyond, whereas in the Veils-section there is a combining of the light apprehended with the darkness of sense, etc. Perhaps the most significant point about the passage in the *Ihyā'* with regard to the present discussion is that there is no mention of "veils of darkness" but only of "veils of light". I have not come across the "veils of darkness" anywhere in the authentic works of al-Ghazālī, whereas he frequently refers to the "seventy veils of light", cf. *Ihyā'*, i, 87; ii, 220 (ed. 1316); or i, 90; ii, 247 (ed. 1348).

¹ *Ibid.*, 47 (88).

² *Ibid.*, 10 (51).

³ *Ibid.*, 7 (48).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 26 (67 f.).

of a strong contrast. It now remains to consider what deductions may be drawn from this fact.

2. *The Alleged Neoplatonism of al-Ghazālī*

Less than seventy years after the death of al-Ghazālī the Neoplatonic¹ character of the Veils-section was noticed by Ibn Rushd, and in particular the doctrine that the mover of the first heaven is not God but a being emanating from Him. Ibn Rushd, however, as a bitter opponent of al-Ghazālī, drew the unfavourable conclusion that al-Ghazālī was inconsistent, since here he formally professed belief in the theological doctrines of the Neoplatonists, whereas in other places he had criticized them.²

This is a conclusion which the impartial student will not readily accept until he has proved that no other hypothesis has any great degree of probability. The alternative which leaps to mind is that in the course of the years al-Ghazālī's attitude may have changed from hostility towards Neoplatonism to acceptance of it. His great work in criticism of the Neoplatonists, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifah*, was written before the decisive change in his life when he left Baghdād in order to live the life of an ascetic and mystic. His studies in the mystical writers may have made him much more favourable towards the Neoplatonists and he may eventually have adopted some or all of their doctrines.

The precise nature of the point at issue should be carefully noted. It is not a question of whether al-Ghazālī was *influenced* by the Neoplatonists; that there was some influence may be readily granted, although the character and extent of the influence requires to be studied more carefully than has hitherto been done. It is a question of whether, in the words of Ibn Rushd, there was any "formal or explicit profession of belief in the theological doctrines"³ which were regarded as peculiar to the Neoplatonists, for, following that distinguished philosopher, we cannot but regard some of the doctrines of the Veils-section as explicitly Neoplatonic. Can we then find any other explicitly Neoplatonic doctrines elsewhere in the later writings of al-Ghazālī?

¹ I use "Neoplatonic" as a convenient way of referring to the school of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.

² *Al-Kashf 'an Manāhij al-Adillah*, ed. Müller, p. 71, ed. Cairo, p. 59 (I quote from Gairdner's article, p. 133).

³ The Arabic is: *taṣrīh min-hu bi-'tiqād madhāhib al-hukamā' fi 'l-'ulūm al-ilāhiyah* (loc. cit.).

It might seem that the theory of lights propounded in the earlier part of the *Mishkāt* was such a doctrine, especially as al-Ghazālī frequently uses *fāda*, one of the regular words used for "emanate". Gairdner, however, in the article already mentioned, has shown conclusively that, despite his language, al-Ghazālī maintains a doctrine of creation and not of emanation in the technical sense.¹ Thus the theory of lights is not an instance of explicit profession of a Neoplatonic doctrine, even if it shows some Platonic or Neoplatonic influence.

In certain passages of the *Mishkāt* al-Ghazālī shows interest in unity and in the movement from plurality to unity, and this might be regarded as Neoplatonic. Thus he writes:—

"This kingdom of the One-and-Onliness (*fardāniyah*) is the ultimate point of mortals' ascent: there is no ascending stage beyond it; for 'ascending' involves plurality, being a sort of relation involving two terms, that *from* which the ascent is made and that *to* which it is made. But when plurality has been eliminated, Unity is established, relation is effaced, all indication from 'here' to 'there' falls away, and there remains neither height nor depth, nor anyone to fare up or down. The upward Progress, the Ascent of the soul, then becomes impossible, for there is no height beyond the Highest, no plurality alongside of the One, and, now that plurality has terminated, no Ascent for the soul."²

This passage is to be interpreted in accordance with an earlier one in the *Mishkāt*,³ where, describing the highest stage of the Ascent as experienced by some mystics, he says:—

"When this state prevails it is called in relation to him who experiences it, Extinction, nay, Extinction of Extinction, for the soul has become extinct to itself, extinct to its own extinction; for it becomes unconscious of itself and unconscious of its own unconsciousness, since, were it conscious of its own unconsciousness, it would be conscious of itself. In relation to the man immersed in this state, the state is called, in the language of metaphor, 'Identity' (*ittiḥād*); in the language of reality, 'affirmation of unity' (*tawḥīd*)."

All this fits in with al-Ghazālī's account in the *Iḥyā'* of the four stages of *tawḥīd*. The first is that of those who pronounce the formula, "There is no god but God," without believing in it; the

¹ *Der Islam*, v, 137-145.

² *Mishkāt*, 23 (64); I have made some alterations in the translation of the last part of the first sentence.

³ *Ibid.*, 20 (61); I have substituted "affirmation of unity" as a translation of *tawḥīd* for Gairdner's "unification", following Nallino, *Raccolta di Scritti*, ii, 234.

second that of those who believe, whether by *taqlīd* or by *'ilm*; at the third stage the man apprehends by direct mystical experience (*kashf*) the truths apprehended by *taqlīd* or *'ilm* at the second stage, and sees for himself how all things despite their multiplicity proceed from the One; finally there is the stage "which Sufism calls extinction in the *tawhīd*" when a man sees in all existence only one thing.¹

In interpreting these passages it has to be remembered that *tawhīd* does not mean "unity", though we often conveniently translate it so, as, for example, when we render the name of the Mu'tazilah for themselves, *Ahl al-Tawhīd wa 'l-'Adl*, as "the party of unity and justice". The *muwahhid* is the man who "makes God one" or "declares God one" either by repeating the first part of the confession of faith or in some similar sense; and *tawhīd* is thus the declaration or assertion of God's unity (though no English phrase is adequate to all four of the stages enumerated). In the highest of the four stages the mystic makes or declares God one in the sense that he is aware of nothing but God, not even of himself. The word *furdānīyah*, isolation or solitariness, is another description of this experience; as Nallino puts it, it "is a particular form of the mode in which God is conceived by a person in a mystic state, that is, it is an abstract conception of God without any relation to the world, as if that did not exist".²

The unity associated with the conception of *tawhīd* is thus quite different from that with which the Veils-section is concerned. The latter bases its assertions on the principle that, since God is absolutely One, He cannot stand in direct relation to more than one entity. To be directly related to a multiplicity of things would involve some plurality in His nature. On the other hand, this principle is not to be found in the *tawhīd*-passages. The third stage in the *Ihyā'* is to apprehend all things as proceeding from God; and the fourth stage is *not* the realization that all things proceed only *indirectly* from God, but a subjective condition in which the mystic no longer notices either the things or their relation to God; there is no suggestion, however, that what was apprehended at the third stage, namely, that all things proceed from God, has ceased to be true. Thus the unity of the Veils-section implies that there is not a

¹ *Ihyā'*, iv, K. al-Tawhīd . . ., Bayān Haqiqat al-Tawhīd . . . (ed. Cairo, 1316, p. 200).

² *Raccolta*, ii, 233 n.

plurality of relations in God; the unity of the *tawhīd*-passages is quite compatible with, and normally seems to presuppose, a plurality of relations in God.

Thus al-Ghazālī's conception of the *tawhīd* found in the highest type of mystical experience is not merely not explicitly Neoplatonic, but leads to the recognition of a further contrast between the Veils-section and the rest of the *Mishkāt*.

The conceptions of *al-'aql al-awwal* or *al-'aql al-kullī* and of *al-nafs al-kullīyah* which are found in some parts of the works of al-Ghazālī¹ need not long detain us here, however important they may be in a study of the influence of Greek philosophy on al-Ghazālī. The important point to notice is that al-Ghazālī does not criticize these in his *Tahāfut*; therefore, we may conclude, he did not regard them as incompatible with orthodox theology; his acceptance of these conceptions is therefore no indication that he had abandoned orthodox theology for Neoplatonism. I should be inclined to suggest that al-Ghazālī regarded these matters as neutral theologically, so that a good Muslim could quite well accept the views of the Greek philosophers on them,² in much the same way as a theologian to-day might accept Einstein's theory of relativity. Al-Ghazālī would be the more ready to accept the conception of *al-'aql al-awwal* in that he regarded as genuine a Tradition to the effect that "the first thing which God created was *al-'aql*".³ Whatever the source of the conception may have been, the mention of "creating" shows that al-Ghazālī's employment of it was not Neoplatonic.

From this examination of alleged instances of Neoplatonism in al-Ghazālī's later writings I conclude that he did not make any explicit profession of belief in the theological doctrines of the Islamic Neoplatonists. In the Veils-section there is an explicit profession of this sort; and therefore the contrast between it and the rest of the *Mishkāt* remains.

The point is reinforced when it is remembered that in the *Munqidh* al-Ghazālī speaks with approval of his criticisms of the Neoplatonists in the *Tahāfut*. The *Munqidh* cannot be very different in date

¹ *Al-Risālah al-Ladunīyah*, chs. v, vi; cf. Dr. Margaret Smith's Introduction to her Translation, *JRAS.*, 1938, 179 ff.

² Cf. *Munqidh*, discussion of *tabī'iyāt* and *ilāhīyāt* in the section on the philosophical sciences, ed. Damascus, 1939/1358, pp. 95 f.

³ *Mizān al-'Amal*, ed. Cairo, 1342, p. 107.

from the *Mishkāt*, and its views are quite in harmony with those of the latter (apart from the Veils-section), although certain sides of his teaching are more fully developed in the *Mishkāt*. It follows from these facts that al-Ghazālī's conversion and retiral from Baghdād are not synonymous with an acceptance of Neoplatonism. The only hypothesis of this sort which could account for the facts as here stated would be that of a second conversion (from mysticism combined with orthodoxy to Neoplatonism) subsequent to the *Munqidh* and indeed to the main part of the *Mishkāt*! This need not be considered seriously; even if there were good grounds for holding it to have happened, the Veils-section might still be dismissed as irrelevant to a study of al-Ghazālī's thought in that it merely showed the wanderings of a mind approaching dissolution; so great is the contrast between the Veils-section and the rest of al-Ghazālī's later writings, and not least the main part of the *Mishkāt* itself.

3. *Al-Ghazālī's Alleged Esotericism*

For those who want to maintain the authenticity of the Veils-section while admitting something of the contrast between it and other writings of al-Ghazālī, there remains one possible means of escape from the net of argument closing round them. They may put forward the plea that in the Veils-section we have al-Ghazālī's esoteric views, and it is not surprising that there should be some contrast between these and his exoteric views.

As proof that he believed in principle in distinguishing between esoteric and exoteric views a passage from *Mizān al-'Amal* is commonly adduced.¹ It will be convenient to commence our study of this alleged esotericism by looking closely at that passage. He is answering the criticism that part of what he says in the book agrees with the system (*madhhab*) of the Ṣūfīs and part with the system of the Ash'ariyah and others of the dogmatic theologians.

"One group (with whom apparently al-Ghazālī identifies himself) says that 'system' is a word common to three different stages or levels: (a) what a man 'supports' in boasting and in debate; (b) what he says privately when giving guidance or instruction; (c) what in his heart he believes on speculative questions as a result of his personal experience. Every fully developed man (*kāmil*) has three 'systems' in this sense.

"The first 'system' is the way of his parents and grandparents,

¹ *Ibid.*, 162 ff.

the system of his teacher and the system of the people of the place where he grew up. . . .

"The second 'system' is the guidance or instruction adapted to those who come to him for knowledge or guidance. This is not something specific or fixed, but differs according to the inquirer; he discourses to each in a way he is capable of understanding. Suppose a Turkish or Indian pupil happened to come to him, or a country yokel, and he knew that, if he informed him that God's essence is not in a place, is neither within the world nor outside it, is neither in contact with the world nor separated from it, then he will immediately deny the existence of God and disbelieve in Him. In such a case he must maintain before his pupil that God is on the throne, that the worship and service of His creatures pleases and delights Him, so that He repays them and sends them into Paradise as an indemnity and reward. On the other hand, if a man is capable of having the plain truth spoken to him, he shows that to him. Thus the 'system' in this second sense is changing and variable; for each pupil it is according to his capacity to understand it.

"The third 'system' is what the man believes secretly between himself and God. None but God is acquainted with it. He speaks of it only to his fellow (*sharik*) who has had a similar experience, or else to one who has reached a stage from which he can apprehend it and understand it. That will be the case when the inquirer is wise. He must not be one in whom an inherited creed, as an adherent and partisan of which he grew up, has taken firm root, or has, as it were, dyed his heart with a fast colour, so that he is like a piece of paper into which writing has sunk so deeply that it cannot be got rid of except by burning or tearing up the paper. This latter is a man whose temperament is corrupted and of whose salvation there is no hope; if anything contrary to what he has heard is said to him, it does not satisfy him; indeed he is anxious that he should not be satisfied with what is said to him and employs deceit in warding it off. Even if he were to pay the utmost attention and devote all his energies to understanding it, he would come to be in doubt about his understanding of it. How then when his aim is to ward it off, not to understand it? The method of dealing with such a man is to cease conversing with him and to leave him where he is. He is not the first blind man to perish through his own wanderings."

In the interpretation of this passage it is important to notice that the difference between the second "system" or "set of beliefs" and the third cannot be simply one of degree, but must be a difference of kind or quality. Within the second heading fall both the teaching given to the country yokels and that given to those whom we might call honours graduates, and there is a great difference between the two. The teaching which comes under the third head would appear to differ from this in some other way; it is not what is given to some group of people who are above the

honours graduates *in the same way* as the honours graduates are above the country yokels (e.g. university professors).

A careful study of al-Ghazālī's phrases will show that the third *madhhab* is what a man knows as a result of his mystical experience, whereas the second comprises what he knows intellectually. Thus the threefold division of *madhhab* corresponds to the triad of *taqlīd* (or *īmān*), *ilm* and *dhawq* which has already been mentioned. The first "system" (of which the description has been mostly omitted) is clearly connected with *taqlīd*; and that goes to support the interpretation of the second and third.

What al-Ghazālī is here saying is not really anything strange, but can easily be paralleled within our own experience. The Christian theologian of to-day does not give the same teaching to a confirmation class of country children as to an atheistic philosophy don who repents of his atheism and wants to be instructed with a view to baptism. On the other hand, there are possibly some things in his private devotional life—the intercourse of his soul with God—about which he speaks to no one. He may say something in general terms; to special persons who are able to appreciate it he may describe some of his deepest experiences; but he will not speak of the "dark night" and the "ligature" to persons who have no conception of the life of prayer and devotion. Communications of this sort presuppose a preparation on the part of the listener that is practical as distinct from intellectual; in other words he must be to some extent a sharer (*sharīk*) in the interior life.

I see no reason for thinking that al-Ghazālī should be taken as meaning anything more than this, provided the differences between his environment and ours are kept in mind. The Oriental does not generally speak freely about the subjective aspect of religious experiences in the way in which some Westerners do, so that considerably more reticence about the third *madhhab* would naturally be expected. Again, in the Christian West there is no hard and fast line between mystic and non-mystic, for all our religion is shot through with mysticism; whereas in al-Ghazālī's world the mystics were a clearly defined group or groups on whom the main body of the orthodox looked with disfavour in view of the unbalanced statements they often made. Thus the number of people to whom al-Ghazālī could speak freely about matters connected with mysticism was comparatively restricted. Apart from this the passage in *Mizān al-'Amal* might apply to a contemporary bishop.

Even if all I have contended for here is not admitted, yet there is nothing in the passage to suggest that al-Ghazālī held esoteric views which opposed or contradicted the views he publicly expressed. Still less does he mention the hiding of one's true views in order to avoid persecution. The example he gives, which might be regarded as involving opposition—the inapplicability of spatial categories to God as contrasted with His sitting on the throne—falls entirely under the second heading, and cannot prove that there was any opposition between the second and the third *madhhab*. Besides, if we may apply to this what al-Ghazālī says about the reality of the outward symbol in the *Mishkāt*,¹ then we have to say that he would have denied that the two sets of assertions were opposed to one another.

I conclude therefore that there is no good ground for thinking that in principle al-Ghazālī distinguished between esoteric and exoteric teaching in any way that could serve to explain the contrast between the Veils-section and other parts of his later works.

Finally, it should be noticed that, even if al-Ghazālī could be shown to approve of the principle of esotericism, this could not solve the problem as I have stated it. For the contrast that has to be explained is not merely one between the Veils-section and al-Ghazālī's later theology in general, but one between the Veils-section and the rest of the *Mishkāt*; and it does not help very much to hold that the Veils-section is esoteric and the rest of the book exoteric!

4. Conclusion

If the above investigations have not overlooked some crucial point, there is no avoiding the conclusion that the Veils-section of *Mishkāt al-Anwār* is a forgery. It has been argued that the contrast between that section and the rest of the book is glaring. The alleged traces of Neoplatonism in al-Ghazālī's thought avail nothing to soften that contrast appreciably; it remains too great to be explained as a contrast between esoteric and exoteric views in any way in which al-Ghazālī can be supposed to have accepted that distinction. The essence of the matter is that the Veils-section is explicitly "Neoplatonic" (in the special sense in which I have been using that term), and that nowhere else does al-Ghazālī either explicitly or implicitly disavow that criticism of the Neoplatonists

¹ 35-8 (77-80).

which is contained in his *Tahāfut*, even if in many ways he had come closer to them. That al-Ghazālī should have written the Veils-section is repugnant to all we know of the man.

A sentence near the beginning of the work I take to indicate that al-Ghazālī intended to write a third section dealing with the Veils-tradition. Speaking of the intelligence he says, "its only veil is one which it assumes of its own accord and for its own sake . . . but we shall explain this more fully in the third chapter of this work."¹ Apart from this there is nothing which absolutely implies a Veils-section apart from the statement of the Tradition at the beginning of the whole work along with the Throne-verse; and that of course could have been added by the forger. In the Arabic text I have used the "third chapter" as simply the Veils-section, though in Gairdner's translation "Part III" begins four pages earlier; but this does not affect the argument. Needless to say there is nothing to explain the veil assumed by the intelligence for its own sake. Al-Ghazālī had evidently thought much about the question of veils. It may be, however, that death overtook him before he was able to write this section of the book. The Neoplatonist forger, with a book before him asking to be completed, would then make good use of his opportunity.

The Veils-section was presumably either written specially, or else consists of old material specially touched up. There are two references to the previous part of the book: "the senses are darkness in relation to the World Spiritual, as we have already shown"; "to this we have made reference in the first chapter, where we set forth in what sense they named this state 'Identity' . . ." ² These do appear to refer to what has gone before, though they twist it towards Neoplatonism. In general the matter of the Veils-section is dull and second-rate compared with the rest of the book; and the style also is inferior.

The recognition that the Veils-section is spurious—if my arguments are accepted—should embolden scholars to make more use of the rest of the *Mishkāt* in their study of the theology and metaphysics of al-Ghazālī. The work is of the highest importance, but the apparently insoluble problems set by the Veils-section have hitherto, it would seem, scared away students of al-Ghazālī from making full use of it.

¹ 7 (48).

² 51 (92); 56 (97).