Ghazālī and the Perils of Interpretation[*]

By

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Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) is one of the most celebrated thinkers of Arabo-Islamic culture. The scope and high quality of al-Ghazālī's prolific intellectual career reflect not just his genius and ambition, but, in many ways, mark the culmination of one cultural epoch and the beginning of another. The continuing interest in and discussion of al-Ghazālī, which began in his life time, assured him a central position in Islamic culture as one of its constitutive elements and authoritative voices. Reflecting a highly developed stage in medieval Islamic thought, his works abound in confrontations between the manifold epistemologies and systems of thought that were adopted and employed by the various political, sectarian, and ideological groups populating the Islamic cultural landscape. Richard Frank's *Al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School* provides perhaps the most authoritative study to date of the place of Ghazālī's thought in Islamic theology, and thus merits a full examination on account of the centrality of the study and its subject matter.

Given the range of his ideas, al-Ghazālī has both inspired and puzzled many of his readers, past and present: some have seen him as a champion of Islam, while others have vilified him as its enemy. Others still, like Muḥammad ibn al-Murtaḍā (d. 1680) in his famous *al-Maḥajja al-Bayḍā'*,[1] chose to mute their partial criticisms of al-Ghazālī, and to appropriate him by arguing that, at some point toward the end of his life, he repudiated the objectionable aspects of his thought. Muslim philosophers are equally represented among al-Ghazālī's numerous critics; they grudgingly attempted (and perhaps eventually failed) to contain the damage caused by his attacks, not just from without but also from within their system of thought. On a more traditional level, some argued that, despite his critique of philosophy, al-Ghazālī was never able to rid himself of residues of this same philosophy which were ingrained in his thought.[2] In fact, the ambiguity in al-Ghazālī's position towards philosophy is itself a symptom of the difficult relationship between the so called 'Islamic' and 'foreign' sciences in medieval Islamic cultures, one marked at once by ideological rejection as well as epistemological attraction.

Modern scholars have also tried to explain the apparent inconsistencies in the thought of al-Ghazālī, often by positing a chronology behind his psychological and intellectual profile. According to this approach, al-Ghazālī underwent an existential crisis that led to a transformation in his views. While before this crisis al-Ghazālī was greatly influenced by philosophy, following it he fell under the spell of gnostic anti-philosophical thought. Perhaps the main limitation in this view is that philosophical influences can still be traced in the gnostic and post-crisis works of al-Ghazālī. Yet another standard method

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[*] This is a review article of R. M. Frank, *Al-Ghazālī and the Ashʿarite School*. Duke Monographs in Medieval and Renaissance Studies 15. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994. 101.

[1] Muḥammad al-Mawlā Muḥsin al-Kāshānī Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *al-Maḥajja al-Bayḍā' fī Tahdhīb Kitāb al-Iḥyā'* (Tehran, 1960).

[2] See, for example, Miguel Asin Palacios, *Algazel: dogmatic, moral, ascetica (*Zaragoza, 1901).

for resolving inconsistencies in al-Ghazālī's thought has been to question the attribution of some of the problematic works to him.[3]

Understandably, therefore, the various readings of the thought of al-Ghazālī, whether direct and expository or interpretative and reconstructive, have been able to cite evidence in their support. Reading al-Ghazālī is further complicated because it involves dealing with a whole cultural legacy with its numerous trends and schools. In a famous reference reflecting past and present difficulties in assessing the works of al-Ghazālī, Ibn Taymiyya says:[4]

> ... due to his intelligence and sincere quest, he [al-Ghazālī] became aware of the confusion in the method of the theologians and philosophers. God granted him comprehensive belief--as he says about himself--and he then hoped to explicate the totality [of his belief]. He found the views of the masters and the Sufis closer to the truth, and more worthy of confirmation than the views of the philosophers and the theologians.... Thus he believed that the explication of the totality [of belief] can be attained solely through this method [of the Sufis]. He had no other method available to him: the special, exalted prophetic path was blocked before him due to the little knowledge he had of it, and due to the obscurities he inherited from the philosophers and the theologians.... Because of this, he was often critical of these obstacles and the [related] method of knowledge. This, however, was only due to the [particular kind of] knowledge he adopted, which shielded him from the truth of the pursuit of the [prophetic] message. For this, in fact, is not knowledge; it is only philosophical and theological dogma....
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> A group of people that recognized [al-Ghazālī's] virtues and religiosity denied the attribution of these books [ex. Bidāyat al-Hidāya and Al-Maḍnūn bihi 'alā Ghayri Ahlihi] to him.... Those, however, who are familiar with him and his circumstances know that these are all his own words because they are aware of the similarities between the various elements of his discourse. Moreover, he and people like him, as I said earlier, are restless and they do not adhere to one firm view, because they have such intelligence and craving [for knowledge] that they hope to discover the method of the elect....
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> He was inclined to philosophy, but he presented it in the guise of Sufism and Islamic terminology. Because of this, Muslim scholars have responded to him, including the closest of his companions, Abū Bakr ibn al-'Arabī, who said: "our master Abū Ḥamid entered the stomach of the philosophers, then when he wanted to come out he could not do so."

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[3] M. Watt, for example, argues that since the contradiction between the third section of *Mishkāt al-Anwār* and the rest of the book, as well as al-Ghazālī's other books, amounts to real incompatibility, therefore, this section could not have been written by al-Ghazālī. See M. Watt, "A Forgery in al-Ghazālī's Mishkāt?" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1949): 5-22. Also see Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, ed. A. 'Afīfī (Cairo, 1964).

[4] Aḥmad Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmū' Fatāwā Shaykh al-Islām Aḥmad ibn Taymiyya*, ed. Muḥammad ibn Qāsim al-'§ṣimī al-Najdī al-Ḥanbalī, 37 vols. (Saudi Arabia, 1977), 4: 63-6.

Despite differences in style and judgment, the main points of the argument above bear a striking resemblance to the central thesis of Richard Frank's *Al-Ghazālī and the Ash'arite School*. Both agree that 1) despite his attacks on philosophers, al-Ghazālī was greatly influenced by philosophy; 2) that he was critical of traditional methods of acquiring knowledge, including those of the various religious sciences and theological schools; 3) that students of al-Ghazālī's works are often confused, and either deny the attribution of certain works to him, or else argue that there are inconsistencies in his writings; 4) that despite these ostensible inconsistencies, and although al-Ghazālī did not write a single coherent exposition of his own theological views, elements of his theology can be traced in his various works; and 5) that al-Ghazālī chose to conceal his real theological views by manipulating language, and by deliberately using traditional religious idiom to introduce his own unconventional ideas.

To be sure, there are also differences between Ibn Taymiyya's assertions and Frank's analysis of the works of al-Ghazālī. Ibn Taymiyya, does not illustrate any of his allegations, and simply refers his reader to several books and authors who have written responses to al-Ghazālī. In contrast, Frank provides a readable, thorough, and systematic interpretation of al-Ghazālī's thought. The main difficulty in Frank's close readings is that his representations of al-Ghazālī's thought are often open to alternative interpretations. I will devote the remainder of this review to demonstrate this point, but before I continue it would be useful to outline Frank's methodology.

Frank plows through the Ghazālian corpus, explores its various layers, and tries to establish the nature of the relationship between these layers. The result provides a detailed analysis of the thought of al-Ghazālī and its relation to the traditional teachings of the Ash'arite school. Although many of Frank's final conclusions are not new, what makes this book unique is the way in which he painstakingly reconstructed the thought of al-Ghazālī.

Owing to the abstract nature of the subject, studies of theological and philosophical topics tend to be dry and difficult to follow. Yet in this book, Frank presents the material in a lucid and systematic manner, while managing to convey the complexity of the original debates and systems of thought, all fully informed by his intimate knowledge of the Islamic theological tradition in general and the Ash'arite tradition in particular.

By working back and forth through them, rather than taking a strictly chronological approach in his analysis, Frank tries to discern a consistent system of thought underlying al-Ghazālī's texts. Grounding his interpretations in close textual readings, he examines and reinterprets many texts by al-Ghazālī. He then uses his renditions of these texts to reconstruct al-Ghazālī's whole system of thought. His focus, therefore, is on al-Ghazālī's intentions as revealed in reconstituted texts, and not on any preconceived notions of what these intentions may be. Moreover, Frank (87) argues that "...one should not try to separate his [al-Ghazālī's] work (or parts of his works) into esoteric and exoteric, as if some were addressed to the religious scholars at large and others, containing his "real position" to some elite fraternity. His works are, rather, to be viewed together as the essentially consistent, albeit rhetorically modulated, address to his fellow Shāfi'is and to the 'ulama at large."[5] In only one instance, Frank (91) maintains

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[5] In the above mentioned article, Watt similarly dismisses the notion that contradictions between various parts of al-Ghazālī's works can be explained by dividing them into esoteric and exoteric, or by arguing that certain esoteric writings are exclusively addressed to the intellectual elite. Unlike Watt, however, Frank does not consider the possibility that certain works are falsely attributed to al-Ghazālī, and argues instead

that "al-Ghazālī seems manifestly to deny what he in fact believes." He adds, however, that this is an exception, the rule being that al-Ghazālī generally tends not to say things he does not believe in. According to Frank, therefore, al-Ghazālī's texts may not be interpreted under the assumption that they mean the opposite of what they say. However, al-Ghazālī's work may be "rhetorically modulated," and the meanings Frank assigns to the texts, or what he considers to be intentional ambivalence on the part of al-Ghazālī, are often based on his estimation of the intended audience of the particular work under examination.

Al-Ghazālī's "higher theology" vs. traditional Ash'arite theology:

Frank (100-101) attributes the impression that some have of "gross inconsistency" in al-Ghazālī's works to the interplay of several factors including: 1) the fact that "al-Ghazālī never composed a complete systematic summary of his theology in formally conceptual terms"; 2) that his theology is "rather superficial; the general structure is there, but in a number of places seems incomplete"; and 3) that al-Ghazālī associated himself with the Ash'arite school "with regards to teaching and instruction of religious doctrine on a general or elementary level." Elsewhere (99) Frank attributes this association to al-Ghazālī's professional interests and "training under Juwaynī and... his position in the Niẓāmiyya...." 4) Finally, according to Frank, the impression of inconsistency is due to the fact that, despite his formal association with the Ash'arite school, al-Ghazālī did not hold the "traditional doctrine of the school as his own, personal *madhhab*...."

According to Frank, al-Ghazālī was consistent in his reserved attitude towards, and eventually outright alienation from the Ash'arite school, and in "deplor[ing] the theoretical worthlessness of ordinary *kalām*" (98). Al-Ghazālī's alienation, according to Frank, finds its clearest expression in his later works, such as the *Fayṣal*[6] and the *Iljām*.[7] Frank also argues (87) that "Where he [al-Ghazālī] presents his thought in unambiguous conceptual terms, the basic character and structure of the system is clear to see...," although (Frank, 92) al-Ghazālī's language "lacks precision," and after piecing together different elements from his various texts "the view often remains only that of the general sense of what he thinks, while important aspects of the matter remain unexplained."

In fact, al-Ghazālī proves to be consistent in a number of ways which are, perhaps, more significant than those emphasized by Frank. Before taking up the issue of al-Ghazālī's attitude towards traditional Ash'arism, however, it may be useful to mention one particular instance of such consistency: al-Ghazālī's charge that the philosophers are guilty of unbelief on account of their doctrine of the eternity of the world, their denial of bodily resurrection, and their assertion that God's knowledge does not encompass particulars. In most of his works, including those which, according to Frank, mark al-Ghazālī's alienation from traditional Ash'arism, as well as a high level of borrowing from philosophical doctrine, al-Ghazālī either reiterates his main criticisms of philosophy listed above (*Fayṣal*, 191-2), or explicitly refers his reader to his standard attack on philosophy in the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*[8] (for example *Mi'yār*,[9] 191; *Miḥakk*,[10] 61; *Mustaṣfā*,[11] 45-6).

that, in general, the noted contradictions in the works of al-Ghazālī are apparent (at the level of language) and are not real.

[6] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-Tafriqa bayn al-Islām wal-Zandaqa*, ed. S. Dunyā (Cairo, 1961).

[7] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iljām al-'Awām 'an 'Ilm al-kalām*, ed. M. Baghdādī (Beirut, 1985).

[8] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, ed. M. Bouyges (Beirut, 1982).

Frank argues that the traditional Ashʻarite view of *kalām* is that it is a "rational metaphysics" (5), "the universal religious science" (9) that "proves the basic articles of Muslim religious belief without formal appeal to... religious belief as such" (5). Al-Ghazālī's view of *kalām*, on the other hand, is ambivalent; not only do the school theologians focus almost exclusively on disputation, but also the reasoning of *kalām* itself is "merely dialectical" (Frank, 16), and it "cannot yield true intellectual insight or knowledge of the essential natures of things as they really are in themselves" (Frank, 17). Later, Frank's initial references to ambivalence become more conclusive, as he asserts that "al-Ghazālī's basic theological system is fundamentally incompatible with the traditional teaching of the Ashʻarite school" (87), and that al-Ghazālī "deplores the theoretical worthlessness of ordinary *kalām*--its inherent failure to grasp the 'true natures of things'" (98). This is not to say that al-Ghazālī, according to Frank, did not associate with traditional Ashʻarism, but his association was purely formal. Al-Ghazālī thus "needed to demonstrate his formal bond to the Ashʻarite school in terms that would not conflict with his private or interior *madhhab*" (99). To do this, Frank argues, al-Ghazālī resorted to "rhetorical maneuvers" (18) and linguistic acrobatics as he sought to "mute, reconcile, rationalize, or override" his conflict with fellow Ashʻarites (xi). He tried to "bring his own metaphysics... into some kind of positive relationship with the traditional teaching of the Ashʻarite school. Since the two are fundamentally incompatible, one of the things he did was to attempt a kind of harmonization at the level of language" (88). In other words, according to Frank, al-Ghazālī used traditional Ashʻarite language to express ideas that are incompatible with traditional Ashʻarite doctrine.

Frank maintains that the level of ambivalence in the works of al-Ghazālī differs according to the purpose of the book and the specific context of its writing. As a general rule, al-Ghazālī tends to be more explicit in expressing his own metaphysical views, and in using a language that does not conform with the traditional Ashʻarite idiom, in works written towards the end of his career. The *Miʻyār, Miḥakk, Maqṣad*,[12] *Iḥyaʼ*,[13] *Jawāhir*,[14] *Mishkāt, Arbaʻīn*,[15] *Qisṭās*,[16] *Mustaṣfā*, and *Iljām* are all works that are not "consistent with traditional Ashʻarite *kalām* either in language and conception or in theoretical assumptions and constructs...." (29, also 100).

The *Iqtiṣād*[17] (and, to a lesser extent the *Qudsiyya*,[18] Frank, chapter 3) is 'formally' an Ashʻarite work where, according to Frank, al-Ghazālī's ambivalence is illustrated. This book is meant to be a traditional summary manual and, because of that, it uses traditional Ashʻarite language. It is directed to the simple minds of "average

[9] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Miʻyār al-ʻIlm*, ed. S. Dunyā (Cairo: 1961).

[10] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Miḥakk al-Naẓar*, ed. M. B. al-Naʻsānī (Beirut, 1966).

[11] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Mustaṣfā min ʻIlm al-Uṣūl*, 2 vols. (Būlāq, 1322 A.H).

[12] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fī Sharḥ Maʻānī Asmāʼ Allāh al-Ḥusnā,* ed. Fadlou A. Shehadi (Beirut, 1986).

[13] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyāʼ ʻUlūm al-Dīn*, 4 vols. (Beirut, 1982).

[14] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qurʼān* (Beirut, 1977).

[15] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Arbaʻīn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, (Cairo, 1925).

[16] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm*, ed. Victor Shalḥat (Beirut, 1983).

[17] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Iqtiṣād fī al-Iʻtiqād*, ed. I. A. Cubukcu and H Atay (Ankara, 1962).

[18] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Risāla al-Qudsiyya*, ed. A. L. Tibawi, *in The Islamic Quarterly* 9.3-4 (1965): 79-94.

religious scholars," and is not a work of "higher speculative theology" (30-31). The book does not consider the world as a system, but "only as it is God's making" (36). For this reason, al-Ghazālī does not elaborate his cosmology or his full theological doctrine in the *Iqtiṣād*, although he makes subtle references to both. Frank adds, however, that in this book al-Ghazālī intentionally avoids saying anything that would contradict his "higher theology" (which is never stated but only hinted at by al-Ghazālī and reconstructed by Frank). Moreover, Frank maintains (29-30), the arguments and explanations of the *Iqtiṣād* are significantly different from those of traditional Ash'arism; in a few cases al-Ghazālī explicitly rejects Ash'arite doctrine, while in other cases he deliberately uses vague language in order to give the impression that he is in conformity with the Ash'arites (18). In contrast to this attitude toward traditional Ash'arism, Frank adds, al-Ghazālī makes "frequent, though irregular, use of Avicenna's vocabulary." Frank thus concludes that the *Iqtiṣād* can be properly understood only in light of other clearer works by al-Ghazālī.

Frank typically engages in intricate analysis of words and sentences to demonstrate al-Ghazālī's ambivalence and close affinity to the Mu'tazila on a number of theological points. For example, Frank maintains (36) that al-Ghazālī ends up being "much closer" to the Mu'tazila than the Ash'arites when he holds that (a) "ethical imperatives can be fully rationalized, and (b) ethical necessity... is a kind of natural necessity, being founded on the obligation to avoid harm to one's self." To illustrate this point of "natural necessity," Frank goes on to say that al-Ghazālī "in fact holds that God necessarily creates what he creates and can have created no other universe. This is indicated in the statement (*Iqtiṣād*, 43,3), "'*al-qadīm*' [the eternal, a description unique to God] is an expression for that which exists necessarily in all its aspects" (*mā huwa wājibu l-wujūdi fī jamī'i jihātihī*)."

The above quote from al-Ghazālī is a stark example of the central problematic in Frank's book. His interpretations of various texts by al-Ghazālī are not conclusive. In fact, when read in their immediate textual context, most of Frank's interpretations seem improbable. For example, the last quote is taken from a section in the *Iqtiṣād* in which al-Ghazālī denies that God is "spatially located," and asserts that "God is not in any one of the six directions," (39). So al-Ghazālī in the above quotation discusses "directions" and "spatial locations" not "aspects." In fact, the Arabic translated by Frank is slightly misquoted, for the original reads "that which exists necessarily in all directions" (*mā huwa wājibu l-wujūdi min* [not *fī*] *jamī'i al-jihāt* [not *jihātihī*]) (*Iqtiṣād*, 43,3). If there is any doubt as to what al-Ghazālī means by *jihāt*, it is immediately clarified as he moves on to say (*Iqtiṣād*, 43,4): "If someone says that only God is characterized by the direction of above, we say...."

The above problem of interpretation is recurrent throughout Frank's analysis not just of the *Iqtiṣād*, but other works by al-Ghazālī as well. Other examples dealing with al-Ghazālī's discussion of causality in the *Iqtiṣād* are quoted by Frank, and these and others will be discussed in the following sections. In concluding this section, however, two points need to be made: First, that although al-Ghazālī shapes the arguments in his various books with particular audiences in mind, this does not necessarily mean that he devises deliberate stratagems to elude traditional theologians or to cover up his "real" philosophical inclinations. Second, the priorities of the Ash'arite ideological program had undergone significant changes between the time of the founder of the school and al-Ghazālī's time. It is quite possible that al-Ghazālī adhered faithfully to the general outlines of this program, namely to provide theoretical ammunition for battling the Ismā'īli Bāṭiniyya and, to a lesser extent, the philosophers, even if he uses some of the tools of the philosophers, or even, as some would argue, the Ismā'īlis. At any rate, there

may still be great value in the now old and frequently made argument that al-Ghazālī agreed with the conclusions of the theologians but did not approve of their methods, and opposed the conclusions of the philosophers while subscribing to their methods of demonstration.

Frank argues that al-Ghazālī has his own notion of *kalām* as "extended metaphysics" that is quite different from traditional Ash'arite *kalām*. Like the earlier *kalām* of the Mu'tazila, al-Ghazālī's metaphysics constitutes a universal, higher religious science that is the basis of all other particular sciences. This science is the "measure of the truth of any and all theological propositions" (11). Furthermore, al-Ghazālī maintains that "knowledge of the essential natures of things as they really are in themselves" is achievable through demonstrative proof (*burhān*), "carried out on premises which are founded in one of five sources," all of which are taken from Ibn Sīnā (Frank, 17). Thus while al-Ghazālī opposes the conceptual and analytical tradition of *kalām*, he is in favor of a metaphysics based on philosophy.

As he does throughout this book, Frank goes through a meticulous analysis of various quotes in order to reconstruct al-Ghazālī's higher theology and his real views on philosophy. Here too, however, Frank's interpretations are problematic and inconclusive. For example, on the notion that al-Ghazālī believes in a higher theology, Frank maintains (8) that "al-Ghazālī speaks of having insight into the truth 'by means of speculative reasoning, rational inquiry and the correct elaboration of logical demonstration'" (*kashfu dhālika... bi l-naẓari wa l-baḥthi wa-taḥrīri l-'adillah*) (*Iḥyā'*, I, 15, 12f.). Now, although al-Ghazālī speaks elsewhere of speculative reasoning and demonstration as the highest form of several ways of achieving certain knowledge (for example, *Iljām*, 111-2), the immediate textual context of the above *Iḥyā'* statement by al-Ghazālī precludes Frank's interpretation. The full quotation of al-Ghazālī reads: "the first thing that is obligatory on a legal major (*bāligh*) is to learn the two professions of faith and to understand their meaning... and it is not obligatory on him to achieve the exposition of this [knowledge] to himself by means of speculative reasoning, investigation, or the exact formulation of demonstrative proofs." (*wa laysa yajibu 'alayhi an yuḥaṣṣila kashfa dhālika li nafsihi bil-naẓari wal-baḥthi wa taḥrīri l-adilla*)."

In a more pertinent example used to illustrate al-Ghazālī's belief in the ultimate authority of his kind of *kalām*, Frank (8) says: "Classifying religious sciences in *Mustaṣfā*, al-Ghazālī says that *kalām* is the one that is universal (*al-'ilmu l-kulliyyu mina l-'ulūmi l-dīniyyah*) (5, 9)... and [it] ultimately demonstrates the basic truths of the revelation and establishes the principles of the other religious sciences." If, however, we continue to read al-Ghazālī we end up with a different interpretation than the one provided by Frank. Immediately at the point where Frank stops quoting, al-Ghazālī goes on to say that *kalām*

> [D]istinguishes between the possible, the necessary and the impossible in regard to Him [God]; it then illustrates that the principle of action (*aṣl al-fi'l*) is possible to Him; that the making of the world is possible; that since it [the world] is possible then it needs a maker (*muḥdith*); that the sending of prophets is among His possible actions and that He is capable of it and of illustrating their truth through miracles; that this possible [act] is in fact an actual reality. At this point the speculation of the theologian terminates, and the disposition of the intellect ends (*'inda hādha yanqaṭi'u kalāmu l-mutakallimi wa yantahi taṣarrufu l-'aql*). Indeed, the intellect only

demonstrates the veracity of the prophet. It then absolves itself and it concedes that it accepts what it receives from the prophet regarding God and the hereafter. These are things that the intellect neither perceives independently, nor does it deem them logically impossible; for it is possible that the law (*sharʿ*) informs of things that the intellect is incapable of perceiving independently (when left to its own means).

Frank's interpretation of the above quotation fails to note that when al-Ghazālī refers to *kalām* as *al-ʿilm kullī* he does not mean that it is the highest form of knowledge, but simply that it is the starting point of all sciences, a stratum which all the sciences share; not a theology but a simple tool. More importantly, rather than ascribing the highest of authorities to his own brand of *kalām*, al-Ghazālī uses a rational argument to assert the limited authority of reason in religious matters.

Proceeding to delineate the distinction that al-Ghazālī makes between his higher theology and traditional *kalām*, Frank (21-2) maintains that "[t]hough his language may vary according to context, al-Ghazālī's intention remains constant." School *kalām* is for "simple people, while the 'balance' of truly demonstrative reasoning, which gives 'genuine insight into the true realities of things,' is for the intellectual elite (*Qisṭās*, 79f.) who are capable of a higher theology which he refers to consistently as '*ʿilm al-mukāshafah*'." Here too, Frank's interpretation does not conform with the general context of the *Qisṭās*. In defining what he means by the word "balance," al-Ghazālī says (*Qisṭās*, 50-1): "One who weighs gold with a balance can weigh with it silver and other precious stones, because the balance identifies its quantity not in so much that it is gold, but because it is a quantity." Thus, in contrast with Frank's interpretation, al-Ghazālī's "balance" is a neutral tool, an instrument, which provides information about quantities not essences, and which is needed for all sciences (religious or secular) (*Qisṭās*, 82, also *Mustasfā*, 10). Needless to say, an instrument of knowledge does not in itself constitute a theology or a cosmology.

The contention that al-Ghazālī adopts a cosmology, which is derived from the cosmological systems of the philosophers, is central to Frank's argument. He argues (22-23) that in the *Iḥyāʾ* (20f.) al-Ghazālī considers as part of the religious sciences "the science of the states of the soul and its moral characteristics, good and bad." Under these religious sciences al-Ghazālī includes *ʿilm al-muʿāmala* and *ʿilm al-mukāshafa*, the former being the "higher ethical science," while the later is "a higher theology that embraces the knowledge of the celestial realm, its governance of the material, sublunary world and its role in accomplishing the perfection of the human soul; he [al-Ghazālī] says that it is "the science of what is hidden and this is the ultimate of the sciences." Frank then quotes a long paragraph from the *Iḥyāʾ* in which al-Ghazālī defines what he means by *ʿilm al-mukāshafa*. This quote from al-Ghazālī again illustrates the problematic and inconclusive nature of Frank's interpretations. I will thus reproduce Frank's translation; in places where the difference significantly affects the general sense of the quoted paragraph, I will provide in square brackets my own translations, as well as translations of omitted sections. Al-Ghazālī says (*Iḥyāʾ*, 20f.) that *ʿilm al-mukāshafa* is

an expression that refers to a light that appears in the soul when it is cleansed and purified of its bad characteristics (*ṣifātuhā l-madhmūmah*) and from this light many things are revealed (*yankashif*)... to the point that one achieves the true knowledge (*maʿrifah*) of God's being and of His enduring and perfect

> attributes and His judgment in creating this world and the next world and the way that He ordered the next world to this world [and the knowledge of the meaning of prophethood and prophet, and the meaning of revelation, and the meaning of Satan] and the knowledge (*ma'rifah*) [sic. *ma'nā*, i.e. meaning] of the word 'angels'...[and devils, and the manner in which the devils confront man] and how the angel becomes manifest to prophets and how revelation reaches them and the knowledge (*ma'rifah*) of the kingdom of the heavens and the earth [and knowledge of the heart] and how the hosts of angels and devils meet there in conflict... and what it means to encounter God (the mighty, the Glorious) and to look at His gracious face and what it means to be near Him and to stop in his [sic. His] proximity and what it means to attain blessedness (*ḥuṣūlu* [sic. *ḥuṣulī*]*l-sa'ādah*) through the companionship of the High Council and the company of the angels and the prophets....

While it is safe to assume that in the above quote al-Ghazālī considers *'ilm al-mukāshafa* to be the ultimate science, it is questionable whether he is referring to a "higher theology" as opposed to simple mysticism or Sufism. Removing references to Satan, and the clashes of the "soldiers of angels and devils" in the heart would reorient the argument of al-Ghazālī and give the impression that he is referring to the hierarchical order of being. However, it would indeed be hard to read a cosmology into the above passage when it is read in its totality. In fact, further clarification of the meaning of *'ilm al-mukāshafa* is provided in the same passage as al-Ghazālī continues:

> ... and other things the explication of which takes too long, for after believing in the truth of these matters people have various positions regarding their meanings.... Thus we mean by *'ilm al-mukāshafa* the lifting of the veil such that the plain truth in these matters becomes clear in such a way that it will be analogous to eye witnessing which is never in doubt. This is possible in the essence of man were it not for the accumulation of rust and maliciousness on the mirror of the heart due to the filth of the (earthly) world. We only mean by the science of the way of the hereafter the knowledge of the manner of cleansing this mirror from the filth that [puts a] veil between it and God, may He be exalted and glorified, and [between it and] His attributes and actions. Refining and purifying it (the mirror) comes only through the avoidance of lusts and by following the example of the prophets, may God's prayers be upon them.... There is no way to it except through exercise (*riyāḍa*) the details of which will follow in the relevant section, and through knowledge and learning. These are the sciences which are not written in books; a person whom God has blessed with some of it (i.e. this science) does not talk about it except with people worthy of it, and these are the ones who participate in it by way of supplication (*mushārik fīhi 'alā sabīl al-mudhākara*), and through the methods of secrets (*bi ṭarīq al-asrār*), and this is the hidden science...."

It is thus clear that according to al-Ghazālī *'ilm al-mukāshafa* has to do with purifying the heart by following the example of prophets. It should be added that prophets, even according to most earnest advocates of philosophy, do not arrive at certain knowledge through the systematic application of the rules of logic, but through intuitive knowledge and with the aid of revelation. Unlike Aristotelian demonstrative proof (*'ilm al-burhān*), the rules of the science of *mukāshafa* are not written in books because it is a practical

science not a theoretical one, and because it depends on worship, self discipline and supplication. There is abundant evidence throughout the writings of al-Ghazālī that illustrate the distinction he makes between knowledge acquired through demonstrative proof (*burhān*) and other kinds of certain knowledge (*yaqīniyyāt*). It would suffice here to mention one additional example from the *Miʿyār* (192), a book which, according to Frank (29), is in plain "Aristotelian cast." Al-Ghazālī says that "some kinds of certain conviction (*al-iʿtiqādāt al-yaqīniyya*) cannot be made known to another [person] through demonstrative proof (*bi-tarīq al-burhān*), unless [such a person] participates with us in its practice, so that he can share with us in the knowledge extracted from it (*illā idhā shārakanā fī mumārasatihi li-yushārikanā fī al-ʿulūm al-mustafāda minhu*)." Therefore, Frank's interpretation of *mukāshafa* as a higher theology grounded in Aristotelian logic and Avicennan epistemology seems to be unwarranted. A more likely meaning, which, incidentally conforms to the conventional use of the term in Arabic, is the spiritual, mystical knowledge of the Sufis.

In yet another example, Frank (24-6) argues that, according to one classification (*Iḥyā'* 3, 15ff.), al-Ghazālī classifies the sciences into rational and religious; the former including the sciences concerned with the next world (*ʿilmun 'ukhrawī*) "clearly to be identified with higher metaphysics (*'ilm al-mukāshafa*)" (Frank, 24). In this classification, however, al-Ghazālī divides the sciences whose locus is the heart into rational and religious sciences; the former is then further divided into necessary sciences which we possess but whose source we cannot identify (*lā nadrī min ayna ḥaṣalat*), and acquired sciences, including worldly sciences as well as sciences concerned with the next world. It thus follows that there is, according to al-Ghazālī, necessary knowledge that is not acquired but created. Frank does not mention this kind of knowledge and goes on to quote a long passage in which al-Ghazālī pleads "for the essential role of formal logic." Frank translation of this passage starts with the following sentence (25): "The things one seeks to know are not given innately (*fiṭriyyah*) and cannot be caught save in the net of truths that are already achieved (*al-ʿulūmu l-ḥāṣilah*)...." In the Arabic original, however, the word (*allatī*), which is dropped by Frank, precedes (*fiṭriyyah*). The exact translation should thus read: "The things one seeks to know <u>which are not</u> given innately cannot be caught save in the net of sciences already achieved...." The difference between these two readings is not trivial. According to al-Ghazālī, there are intellectual sciences that are innately given and necessary, and *burhān* is neither useful nor essential to the acquisition of these sciences. Given this reading of the above quotes by al-Ghazālī, Frank's assertion that *mukāshafa* is identical with rational higher metaphysics cannot be sustained.

In chapter four, Frank discusses what he considers to be the anti-Ashʿarite texts of Ghazālī, mainly the *Fayṣal* and the *Munqidh*,[19] but also the *Iljām*, *Maqṣad*, *Mishkāh*, and parts of the *Iḥyā'*. According to Frank (77-8) the *Fayṣal* is formally about the criteria for determining whether an individual is a believer or an unbeliever when exercising "non-literal interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of descriptions of God" in scriptures. However, Frank adds, the *ta'wīl* al-Ghazālī is really concerned with in this book is "that involving his conception of the operation of the cosmic system in the deterministic causation of events...." As proof of this point, Frank says, "This would seem to be... confirmed where in the discussion (37ff.) of interpretation and exegesis on the basis of the five modes or levels of the presence of existence (*darjāt al-wujūd*), he cites as examples of the "intellectual level" (*al-wujūd al-ʿaqlī*) the interpretation of... God's "hand" as referring to

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[19] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, ed. J. Saliba and K. ʿAyyād (Beirut, 1983).

"a spiritual and intellectual hand," which is to say, to the intermediate agency of angels (40, 10ff.), just as the Tradition according to which "the first thing God created was the intellect...."

In other words, Frank argues that this particular interpretation of "God's hand" illustrates al-Ghazālī's real interest, namely to provide a *ta'wīl* based on his own cosmology. In this section of the *Fayṣal* (182-3), however, al-Ghazālī provides several acceptable interpretations of God's "hand." These include, for example, the possibility that the word "hand" refers to either the metaphorical meaning of the "hand," i.e. "that with which God strikes and acts, gives and deprives"; or to the pen "with which true knowledge is inscribed on the tablets of the hearts of prophets and saints"; or to one of the attributes of God such as His power or something else. Al-Ghazālī adds (*Fayṣal*, 186): "The purpose [of listing these possibilities] is not to validate any of the interpretations, but to know that each group, irrespective of the extent to which it adheres to the literal meaning of the text, must still resort to interpretation." Al-Ghazālī then states the general rule for validating any particular *ta'wīl*, namely that it should be demonstrated that the literal interpretation of the text is impossible (*qīyām al-burhān 'alā istiḥālat al-ẓāhir*) (*Fayṣal*, 187). It seems abundantly clear, therefore, that al-Ghazālī's real interest in this book is not to promote any particular kind of *ta'wīl* based on his own cosmological system. Rather, his "real" purpose is to establish the criteria for distinguishing between belief and unbelief, and, ultimately, to foster more tolerance amongst Muslims for the interpretive exercises.

Another example used by Frank to argue the point of *ta'wīl* based on cosmology is al-Ghazālī's discussion in *Iljām* of the meaning of the Qur'ānic reference to God's "ascending the throne" (*al-istiwā' 'alā al-'arsh*).[20] Frank (84) maintains that despite al-Ghazālī's reference to Sufis in *Iljām*, "his *ta'wīl* of "ascends the throne" (68f.) and his explanation of the degrees of being (107ff.) make it clear that it is not the claims of mystical experience that are in question, but rather his own theoretical cosmology and ontology."

Here too, the immediate textual context of al-Ghazālī's discussion seems to contradict Frank's reading. In the first section (*Iljām*, 68f.) al-Ghazālī considers several interpretations of the expression "ascending the throne." While Frank considers only one of these interpretations, and asserts that it reflects al-Ghazālī's own position, al-Ghazālī argues that all of these interpretations are acceptable. Moreover, even in the one interpretation considered by Frank, al-Ghazālī makes it quite clear that the knower (*'ārif*) cannot assert the veracity of his own interpretation to the exclusion of other ones, and he can only confirm its possibility (*tajwīz*). As for the "degrees of being" (*marātib al-wujūd*), Frank's reference (*Iljām*, 107ff.) is to a section that deals with the question of the eternity of the Qur'ān. In this section al-Ghazālī argues that there are several ways of referring to the Qur'ān: one can refer to the Qur'ān in itself, in which case it is eternal; eternity here, according to al-Ghazālī, is an attribute of the essence of the Qur'ān, not to our knowledge of it, nor to what is uttered on our tongues or written on blank paper. According to al-Ghazālī, knowledge, utterance, and writing of the Qur'ān are all created; thus, it is possible to say that the Qur'ān is created if what we are referring to is our knowledge, the utterance, or the writing of the Qur'ān. It is clear, therefore, that al-Ghazālī's expression "degrees of being" refers to the various ways of thinking about the

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[20] for further discussion see the section below on causation.

Qur'ān, according to which we may say that it is either created or not created. There is obviously no reference here to any cosmological hierarchy as Frank argues.

Frank (93-4) even questions al-Ghazālī's intentions in the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, the one book by al-Ghazālī that is devoted completely to a critique of the doctrines of the Muslim philosophers. Frank maintains that in the beginning of the *Mi'yār* al-Ghazālī states that the "primary purpose" of the book is to "aid the reader's understanding of *Tahāfut* by introducing him formally to the logic and the technical lexicon of the falāsifa." However, according to Frank, al-Ghazālī concludes the book by stating a different purpose for it, namely that it was written "in order to show 'the way to come to the knowledge of the essential natures of things and to explain the rules of systematic reasoning.'" Frank adds: "What, thus, at the outset was stated to be the primary purpose of the book is ignored, as he seems to imply that most of what he has presented he agrees with." Supposedly, then, in the beginning the *Mi'yār* al-Ghazālī portrays the book as a neutral exposition of the epistemological system underlying the *Tahāfut*; in the conclusion of the book, however, it becomes clear that he in fact espouses this epistemology. Ostensibly, this example demonstrates beyond doubt one of Frank's main arguments: that, despite his nominal disclaimers, al-Ghazālī's is really influenced by philosophy. Moreover, this example seems to provide a stark illustration of what Frank calls the "rhetorical maneuvers" of al-Ghazālī.

On closer examination, however, none of these conclusions can be sustained. Indeed, at the outset of the *Mi'yār*, al-Ghazālī does state in no ambivalent terms the purposes for writing the book. He says (*Mi'yār*, 59): "The motive for composing this book entitled *Mi'yār al-'Ilm* is two fold: first, to explain the methods of systematic thinking and reasoning (*tafhīm ṭuruq al-fikr wal-naẓar*), and to elucidate the ways of analogies and reflection; for since the theoretical sciences are not innately and instinctually available and given, they are no doubt acquired and sought...." Ghazālī adds that he "organized this book as a scale for speculation and reflection, and a balance for research and contemplation, and for sharpening the mind... so that it becomes in relation to the evidence of the mind like metrics for poetry. (*rattabnā hādhā al-kitāb mi'yāran lil-naẓar wal-i'tibār, wa mīzānan lil-baḥth wal-iftikār, wa ṣaqīlan lil-dhihn... fa yakūn bil-nisba li-adillat al-'uqūl kal-'arūḍ lil-shi'r*)". Ghazālī continues (60):

> The second motivation [for composing the book] is to explain what was included in the book *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, for we debated them using their language and addressed them on the basis of their terminology which they agreed on in logic. In this book the meanings of these technical words will become clear. This is the more specific (*akhaṣṣ*) of the two motives, while the first is more general and more important.... As for the reasons why it is more important, surely there is no need to point this out to you. As for the reason of it being more general, it is because its benefit encompasses all the theoretical sciences, intellectual and legal (*al-'aqliyya minhā wal-fiqhiyya*), for we will show you that systematic reasoning in the legal sciences is not different from that in the intellectual sciences in its organization and conditions and measures; rather, (they differ) only in the source of their premises (*ma'ākhidh al-muqaddimāt*).

So, contrary to Frank's assertions, al-Ghazālī does not hide his true intentions in the beginning of the *Mi'yār*, only to disclose them at the end. Rather, al-Ghazālī is not just

consistent, but he is forthright in expressing his views and intentions right from the outset. Moreover, in the *Mi'yār* al-Ghazālī does not "formally present the definitions of the falāsifa" (Frank, 93), but simply the neutral tool of logic which, according to al-Ghazālī, is as useful for *fiqh* as it is for any other rational science.

Al-Ghazālī's most tangible and most unequivocal condemnation of philosophical doctrine is related to the question of resurrection. According to Frank (91), "the only instance... al-Ghazālī seems manifestly to deny what he in fact believes occurs in the discussion of resurrection in *Iqtiṣād*." Frank adds (95-6), however, that al-Ghazālī expresses his "obvious commitment to the psychology and metaphysics of the falāsifa," in his discussion in the *Mīzān*[21] of the status of the soul after death, and that "al-Ghazālī appears to agree with the thesis, here attributed to 'the Sufis and the metaphysicians amongst the falāsifa,' that at death the soul becomes permanently separated from the body: the pleasures and pains of the next life are purely intellectual, those depicted in the revelation being only images for what cannot be imagined (5f.)." Now since this is perhaps Frank's most radical reinterpretation of al-Ghazālī, I will quote the full reference from the *Mīzān* (5-6) before addressing Frank's argument:

> Regarding the afterlife people are divided into four groups: One group believes in (the day of) congregation and resurrection of the dead, and in paradise and hell just as the scriptures have spelled it out, and as the Qur'ān has clearly described it (*kamā naṭaqat bihi al-sharā'i' wa afṣaḥa 'an waṣfihi al-Qur'ān*). They confirm the bodily pleasures relating to intercourse, food, smells, touch, dress, and views. They also acknowledge that in addition to these there are kinds of happiness and varieties of pleasures which the description of the describers cannot encompass, for they are things that no eye has seen and no ear has heard of and never even occurred to the heart of a human. [They also believe] that all of this goes on without interruption, and that it can only be attained through knowledge and actions. These are the totality of the Muslims (*wa hā'ulā' hum al-Muslimūn kāffa*), and indeed most of the followers of prophets among Jews and Christians.
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> The second group, are some of the Muslim metaphysicians among the philosophers who acknowledge a kind of pleasure the manner of which does not occur to the heart of human, and they call it intellectual pleasure. As for the sensible (pleasures), they deny their external existence but confirm them through imagination as in the state of sleep... except that sleep is unsettled by waking up while (pleasure) is everlasting and is never unsettled. They claim (*za'amū*) that this sort of thing is confirmed for those who are fond of sensible pleasures and the attention of whose souls is fixated on them, and who do not rise to intellectual pleasures. This (opinion) too, does not lead to a state which entails slackness in the quest (*wa hādhā lā yufḍī ilā amr yūjib futūran fil-ṭalab*)....
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> A third group went as far as denying sense pleasures altogether, by way of reality or by way of imagination. They claim that imagination does not occur except through bodily instruments, while death severs the connection between the soul and the body which is its instrument for imagination and for the rest of the senses, and it never returns to govern the body once it discards it. Thus nothing remains for it (the soul) except pains and pleasures that are

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[21] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Mīzān al-'Amal* (Cairo, 1963).

not sensibles.... They also claim that the senses in regard to the pleasures which exist in the abode of the afterlife are extremely inadequate.... They also claim that since this (intellectual pleasure) is far from the understanding of the masses, they (i.e. the pleasures of the afterlife) are compared for them with what they are familiar with of the sensibles.... This (opinion) too, had it been correct, does not entail slackness in the quest.... This is the opinion of the Sufis and the metaphysicians among the philosophers... in fact the highest echelons of the Sufis openly profess (this view) and say that whoever worships God to seek paradise or to avoid hell is mean. Rather, the aim of the travelers to God is nobler than this....

(12) ...And the Sufis and the philosophers who believe in God and the hereafter in general, even if they disagree on the manner, all agree that happiness is in knowledge and deeds (al-'ilm wal-'amal). They only speculate over the specifics of knowledge and deeds. So to hold back despite this agreement is foolishness....

(13) ...Suffice it for you to embark on [the acquisition of] knowledge and [the performance of good] deeds on which all three [groups] agree, since your purpose in asking is not disputation, but your purpose is to seek success, just like a patient who seeks a cure without disputation, for his goal is the agreement of various physicians on it.

If language and choice of words is any indication, as Frank argues throughout his book, then certainly al-Ghazālī is not in favor of the position that Frank attributes to him. Al-Ghazālī refers to those who believe in bodily resurrection as the "totality of the Muslims," and as those whose belief is "just as the scriptures have spelled it out, and as the Qur'ān has clearly described it." As for the two other groups, al-Ghazālī uses the term "they claim" several times to refer to their doctrines; he also uses the phrase "had it been true" to refer to the doctrine of the third group. Rather than implying an open endorsement, as Frank maintains, al-Ghazālī seems to express hesitation even as he reports the views of these groups. Frank also suggests that al-Ghazālī's use of the adjective Islamic in reference to the "metaphysicians amongst the falāsifa" means that he advocates their view. There are, however, two groups of such metaphysicians whom al-Ghazālī describes as Islamic; since the positions of these two groups are significantly different, al-Ghazālī could not have agreed with both and, therefore, no deeper meaning can be read into his use of the adjective "Islamic." Rather than dismissing al-Ghazālī's clear position on resurrection as stated not only in the *Iqtiṣād*, but also in the *Fayṣal*, *Tahāfut*, and elsewhere, the one obvious interpretation of the above quotation from the *Mīzān* seems to reaffirm this position. Al-Ghazālī's purpose is not to discuss which of the different positions on life after death is correct, but simply to point out the consensus among all schools, even those with whom he disagrees, that there is life after death, and that it is necessary to do good deeds and to acquire knowledge in preparation for this afterlife.

Al-Ghazālī on Causation

The cosmology of al-Ghazālī, according to Frank, parallels that of Ibn Sīnā in its conception of a definite cosmic hierarchy with a system of deterministic, invariable

secondary causes.[22] In this system God governs the universe through intermediaries (angel, intellect, or outermost sphere), and He cannot disrupt the operation of secondary causes. Since this argument is not prevalent in scholarship on al-Ghazālī, Frank devotes large sections of this book to demonstrate that there is in fact an invariant, sequential relationship between cause and effect in the writings of al-Ghazālī. He also tries to prove that al-Ghazālī's use of traditional Ash'arite language is simply to appease his Ash'arite readers and to conceal his true sympathy with philosophical determinism. Thus, according to Frank, al-Ghazālī's use of such standard Ash'arite expressions as God's custom is purely rhetorical, while in reality he believes in the invariability of the relationship between cause and effect.

A central example which Frank uses to demonstrate the above argument is al-Ghazālī's discussion of causation in the *Mi'yār* (109, 21ff.). In his treatment of the nature of the relationship between decapitation and death al-Ghazālī presents two alternative explanations without indicating his preference: either the "connection between the two events is something necessary and whose alteration, therefore, is impossible absolutely," or that "the connection between the two is simply "the normal course of God's custom (*jarayānu sunnati llāh*) through the efficacy of His eternal will, which is not subject to substitution and alterations" (Frank, 18). In either case, what matters, according to Frank, is that "the invariance of the connection between decapitation and death is inevitable" (19).

Al-Ghazālī gives the example above in the course of responding to one who questions the certainty of the belief in an invariant relationship between decapitation and death. A questioner repeats the traditional Ash'arite argument that decapitation is not the cause of death, eating not the cause of satiation, and fire not the cause of burning; rather, God habitually creates burning, death, and satiation together with these things but not because of them. The full response by al-Ghazālī reads:

> We have pointed out the profundity and the true meaning of this subject in the book *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (*qad nabbahnā 'alā ghawr hādhā al-faṣl wa ḥaqīqatihi fī kitāb Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*). The extent that is needed now is that, if a speaker is told that his son has been decapitated, he would not doubt his death, and there is no rational person who would doubt it; he would admit the occurrence of death and look into the mode of connection. As for the speculation over whether it [i.e. the connection between the two events] is a necessary concomitance, which is impossible to change, or whether it is by virtue of the normal course of God's custom through the efficacy of His eternal will, which is not subject to substitution or alteration, this is a speculation over the mode of concomitance, not the [fact of] concomitance itself. So understand this, and let it be known that to doubt the death of a decapitated person is mere delusion, and that the believe in his death is a certainty regarding which one entertains no doubts."

The first important point is that, on the nature of the connection between cause and effect, al-Ghazālī refers his reader to the *Tahāfut*, where, in conformity with Ash'arite occasionalism, he clearly states that the relationship is one of habitual concomitance in

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[22] This argument is fully articulated in Frank's earlier work *Creation and the Cosmic System: al-Ghazālī and Avicenna* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitatsverlag, 1992). For a review of this work see Michael E. Marmura, "Ghazālian Causes and Intermediaries," *JAOS* 115.1 (1995): 89-100.

accord with God's custom. Al-Ghazālī consistently refers to the *Tahāfut* every time the question of the relationship between causes and effects comes up. For example, as in the case with the above example from the *Mi'yār*, almost identical references are made in the *Miḥakk* (61), and the *Mustaṣfā* (45-6). It is also significant that in these three examples, the discussion occurs when al-Ghazālī lists the various methods of attaining certain knowledge (*madārik al-yaqīn*), and, in particular, when he discusses what he alternatively calls '*tajrībiyyāt*' (experience) or '*mujrayāt*' (God's regular custom). Therefore, in the example quoted by Frank, al-Ghazālī does not address the mode of the connection between cause and effect; on this question he is abundantly clear, and he consistently refers his readers to the *Tahāfut* on this issue. Surely one cannot expect al-Ghazālī, or anyone else, to make all of his arguments in every single book he writes, and unambivalent reference should suffice to indicate his position on this matter. The subject of the above quote from al-Ghazālī is the methods of attaining certain knowledge; such knowledge, according to al-Ghazālī, is not contingent on a particular mode of connection between cause and effect. Rather, it suffices that there are habitual regularities in the relationships between events, a condition which is easily satisfied under the traditional Ash'arite notion of God's custom.

Building on his analysis of the example of decapitation in the *Mi'yār*, Frank moves on to argue that the ambiguity in this discussion can be resolved if interpreted in light of al-Ghazālī's cosmology. Frank (19-20, also 84) quotes a section from the *Iljām*, which he considers to be an "exposition of the deterministic governance of the world through the angel of the outermost sphere." Frank argues that "in *Iljām* (68f.) he [al-Ghazālī] offers the relationship between the brain and the rest of the body as an analogue to the relation of the outermost sphere to the rest of the created universe, and there states his position clearly and unambiguously: the soul governs the body through the brain and although it is possible absolutely that man have been created such that it governs the body in some other way, what God wills he wills eternally and necessarily. It is de facto impossible that God have willed that the soul be related to the body in any other way, wherefore man is, in effect, so constituted that it is impossible that the soul govern the body other than through the instrumentality of the brain. Here (*Iljām*, 69, 6) al-Ghazālī cites *Faṭir* (v. 43) verbatim in confirmation of his thesis: 'you shall never find any substitution in the custom of God.'"

Again, for a proper interpretation of the quote above, we will need to examine its immediate textual context. In the previous section of the *Iljām*, al-Ghazālī discusses various ways of interpreting scriptures; after going over several kinds of forbidden interpretations, he considers the interpretation which is done by a knowledgeable person (*'ārif*) for himself. Here al-Ghazālī lists three kinds: the first is definite or certain; the second is uncertain; and the third is one of which the interpreter is almost certain but not completely so (*maẓnūnan ẓannan ghāliban*); this means that he knows for sure that the interpretation is logically possible, but he is not sure whether this particular interpretation is the one intended by God. This last kind is involved when interpreting the expression "ascending the throne" (*al-istiwā' 'alā al-'arsh*) to mean the special attribution (*al-nisba al-khāṣṣa*) of the throne; namely "that God administers the whole universe and governs matters from the heavens to the earth through the throne; for He does not create in the world a form unless He creates it in the throne, in the same way a sculpturer or a scribe does not create a form or a word on a white (paper) unless he creates it in the brain.... Thus, the heart governs the matters of its world, which is its body, through the brain" (*Iljām*, 69). Al-Ghazālī goes on to say:

> Perhaps we hesitate over whether positing this relation (*nisba*) of the throne to God, may He be exalted, is possible, either because it is necessary in itself, or because He made it the normal course of His custom and habit, even though its opposite is not impossible, in the same way He made the normal course of His custom with regard to the heart of man that he [i.e. man] cannot govern except through the brain, even though it is logically possible with regard to God that He could have enabled him [i.e., man to govern the body] without the brain, had His eternal will ordained it, and had the eternal word which is His knowledge truly determined it. Thus, its opposite becomes impossible not on account of any deficiency in the essence of power (*dhāt al-qudra*), but because of the impossibility of anything that contradicts the eternal will and the pre-existent eternal knowledge, and this is why He said: "you shall never find any change in the custom of God"; it does not change because it is necessary, and its necessity is because it issues from a necessary eternal will, and the consequence of the necessary is itself necessary; furthermore, its opposite is impossible, even though it is not impossible in itself, but on account of something else, namely that it would lead to replacing eternal knowledge with ignorance, and it would declare impossible the execution of Divine will.

Al-Ghazālī then repeats his warning that, although this kind of interpretation of the meaning of the throne and its relation to God is logically possible, upon reflection one continues to wonder whether this relation does in fact exist in reality. Al-Ghazālī adds that in all events, the speculator (*nāẓir*) should not rest assured that his interpretation is final and certain, and that he should only make definitive statements regarding his own preferences and choices, and not the true meaning of the text which he can never know for certain.

Now, Frank rightly maintains that, according to al-Ghazālī, "it is not possible that God have willed that this [i.e., decapitation resulting in death] not be the case"; Frank's other conclusions, however, do not necessarily follow. According to al-Ghazālī, it is impossible that something happens when God wills otherwise. God does not will one thing and then act in a way that is different from what He willed. This, however, does not mean that God is not capable of willing a natural pattern with habitual relationships between concomitant events, and with occasional interruptions of this pattern. Put differently, God, in His eternal will, may ordain one custom, which entails both a customary, recurrent pattern of relationships between certain events, and a certain number of interruptions of this pattern. The only thing here that is impossible is that God's will be opposed, and thus the natural order of things can be interrupted if God has so willed. It is significant that al-Ghazālī repeatedly states that the invariance in the connection between events is not inherent in things on account of their natures, and that only God's will is invariant. This reading seems to be confirmed by al-Ghazālī's emphatic assertion of the uncertain nature of the interpretation that God governs the universe through the throne. While Frank considers this to be al-Ghazālī's own position, al-Ghazālī is keen on indicating that such an interpretation is permissible (*jā'iz*) but not certain (*qaṭ'ī*). Moreover, al-Ghazālī argues that while the governance of the head over the body is known, there is no certain parallel in the case of the universe; therefore, it is not as clear as Frank argues that there is a cosmology in the thought of al-Ghazālī that neatly ties the "outermost sphere" and the sublunary world.

In his chapter on the *Iqtiṣād*, Frank (38-9) argues that al-Ghazālī's use of "God's custom" is incompatible with the traditional Ash'arite use. According to the Ash'arites, God's custom means the "normal and sometimes invariant sequence of events in an occasionalistic universe," whereas it "is employed by Ghazālī to describe the lawful operation of secondary causes in a deterministic universe willed and created by God." Frank (44-46) goes on to argue that in the *Iqtiṣād*, al-Ghazālī does not commit himself to traditional Ash'arite occasionalism and that, in fact, even in this book, one can read a Ghazālian cosmology according to which "God creates through a series of secondary causes...." Neither does al-Ghazālī, according to Frank, commit himself to the traditional Ash'arite position on the relationship (or lack thereof) between action and the created power of voluntary action. Frank says (44, quoting *Iqtiṣād*, 92): "All of this [discussion of human voluntary act as performance (*kasb*)] sounds very much like traditional Ash'arite teaching. Had he said '*lam yaqi*'' [sic. *yaqa*'] or '*lam yaḥṣul bi-qudrati l-'abd*', it might be difficult to understand him to intend anything else, but, as it is, his intention is not fully and explicitly stated." Al-Ghazālī, adds Frank (46), "nowhere unambiguously commits himself to the thesis of al-Juwaynī that the action "does not take place through the created power of voluntary action." Elsewhere, Frank (90) restates his thesis and adds that when the question of "the nature and efficacy of the created power of voluntary action" is raised "al-Ghazālī tends to weasel," and "When he is formally obliged to deal with the question in *Iqtiṣād*, he buries the real issue under a cloud of dialectical obfuscation."

The evidence from the *Iqtiṣād*, however, does not accord with these conclusions. To start with, in taking up the example of decapitation in which, according to Frank, causal determinism and cosmology are inevitable, al-Ghazālī (*Iqtiṣād*, 224) maintains that ultimately the solution of this problem is to be sought in the "general rule regarding the pervasiveness of [God's] power and the denial of generation (*al-qānūn al-ladhī dhakarnāhu fī 'umūm al-qudra wa ibṭāl al-tawallud*). Based on this, one should say regarding a person who has been killed that he died by his *ajal* (*māta bi ajalihi*), *ajal* being the time on which God has created his death, whether or not this (occurs) with decapitation, lunar eclipse, or the falling of rain; this is because, to us, all of these are concomitants and not generated acts, but the concomitance of some of them is repeated by custom and some are not repeated (*li'anna kulla hādhihi 'indanā muqtarināt wa laysat mutawallidāt, wa lākin iqtirān ba'ḍihā yatakarraru bi al-'āda, wa ba'ḍihā lā yatakarraru*)." Frank dismisses this clear rejection by al-Ghazālī of *tawallud*, and his obvious endorsement of occasionalism.

Frank also contends that al-Ghazālī's "intention is not fully and clearly stated" when he talks about human voluntary act as performance. Al-Ghazālī, according to Frank, uses ambivalent language, but does not commit himself to the traditional Ash'arite position on this issue; had he used the unambiguous expressions (*lam yaqa*') and (*lam yaḥṣul*), it "might be difficult to understand him to intend anything else." Now, it so happens, that al-Ghazālī uses exactly these two expressions just a few paragraphs after the section quoted by Frank. Thus in the *Iqtiṣād* (94-5), in response to one who maintains that "a created power through which an action does not take place (*qudra lā yaqa' bihā maqdūr*) is equivalent to impotence," al-Ghazālī says: "if you mean that it [qudra] is equivalent to impotence in that the action did not happen by it (*fī anna al-maqdūr lam yaqa' bihā*), then your assertion is correct...." Ghazālī later says (98) "Therefore, according to us it is impossible to say that an action took place through a created power 'of voluntary action' (*fa innā idhan aḥalnā an naqūl ḥaṣala maqdūr bi qudra ḥāditha*)." Here too, both in substance and in language, al-Ghazālī conforms to traditional

Ash'arism, and the contentions that he "tends to weasel" and "buries the real issue under a cloud of dialectical obfuscation," are, to say the least, unfounded.

In yet another example, Frank argues (94) that the *Miḥakk* marks "an important moment in al-Ghazālī's career," in which he presents "his own theology in his own terms." This is so because al-Ghazālī, according to Frank (94), speaks of "God's governance of the universe through the agency of a "single celestial cause" by means of a complex sequence of intermediary causes" (*Miḥakk*, 82).

Now, this quotation is from a section where al-Ghazālī discusses physiognomy (*firāsa*); he says:

> All indicants (*adilla*) in physiognomy are such that one draws conclusions regarding the character on the basis of appearance and mood, not because one is the cause of the other; rather, both, according to the normal course of custom (*bi-ḥukm jarayān al-'āda*) are the results of one cause.... Thus it becomes known that one implies the other upon (fulfilling) other conditions which are added to it.... It is also known for a certainty that the redness on the shoulders of sheep is not the cause of the fighting of sultans.... Rather, it is not unlikely that, as part of the wonders of the creations of God, may He be exalted, there exists among the heavenly causes a single cause that happens to occur in that particular year (*yattafiq fī tilka al-sana*) which would be at once the cause, according to the normal course of custom, for a certain life in the members of animals and their formations, and in the causes of abundance of clouds, and in the ferocity of hearts, which are the causes of fighting.... These sciences (physiognomy) are only denied by ignorant people who have no knowledge of the wonders of God's creations, may He be exalted, and the expanse of His power.

Once again, Frank's interpretation of the quote above seems improbable when considered in the context of the whole passage where it occurs. First, it is significant that the subject that al-Ghazālī treats in the above passage is physiognomy, which may be derivative, but hardly representative of a cosmology influenced by philosophy. Second, al-Ghazālī's emphatic reference to the traditional Ash'arite notion of custom (*jaryān al-'āda*) clearly attributes effective causation to God. Finally, when al-Ghazālī speaks of "a single heavenly (or celestial) cause" he obviously does not mean a fixed celestial cause (such as an angel, or intellect) in a permanent system of cosmological hierarchies; for, not only does al-Ghazālī say that this "celestial cause" is an accidental event that happens to be connected at one particular moment (*yattafiq fī tilka al-sana*) to a number of other events, but he also says that it functions as a cause by virtue of custom (*bi-ḥukm ijrā' al-'āda*). So, rather than providing evidence for al-Ghazālī's belief in the deterministic operation of intermediary secondary causes, the above reference from the *Miḥakk* seems to illustrate his adherence to traditional Ash'arite occasionalism.

Conclusions

Frank is justified in arguing that al-Ghazālī criticizes and differs from traditional *kalām*, and that he does not think it represents the highest form of knowing. Frank also rightly argues that al-Ghazālī's standard *kalām* works do not include a full exposition of

his views on all subject matters. It does not follow, however, that these works do not reflect al-Ghazālī's "fuller understanding" of the subjects he does address in these books. In other words, al-Ghazālī may not say everything he knows in each and every book he writes, but what he says he means. Perhaps, it would be useful to use as a principle for interpreting al-Ghazālī, a rule which he himself repeats in various places in his work, namely, that unless one can demonstrate that a statement taken literally is impossible, one has to accept it as it is. While Frank's analysis of the technical terminology employed by al-Ghazālī provides some useful insights into his thought, it often proves to be precarious. For example, Frank (72) points out that, in his proof of the contingency of the world and the existence of God in the *Iqtiṣād*, al-Ghazālī "expressly points the reader toward the Avicennan ontology, which he considers the proper conceptual foundation for a truly demonstrative proof...." By "Avicennan ontology" Frank presumably means the reference to various kinds of being (*wujūd*). But, what Frank misses here, however, is that despite his use of Avicennan idiom, al-Ghazālī is still trying to prove the contingency of the world, contrary to one of the most basic doctrines of the philosophers.

The problems that, in our view, Frank could not resolve by analysis of al-Ghazālī's terminology, may be better addressed through examination of his general intellectual program. Rather than assuming a hidden agenda every time we encounter some ambivalence or possible ambiguity in his writings, it may be more profitable to grant that al-Ghazālī is trying to be consistent, but he is dealing with intertwined and at times conflicting epistemologies and systems of knowledge. The idea of gnostic knowledge (*al-maʿārif al-kashfiyya*) is one area where there is possible contradiction in the thought of al-Ghazālī. He tries to prove the validity of this kind of knowledge by using logical arguments, and his language betrays the influence on his thought of the philosophical metaphysics of an assortment of various schools of philosophy. And yet, al-Ghazālī continues to attack philosophy and to repudiate its metaphysics. Therefore, as I argued above, it does not follow that al-Ghazālī means by *'ilm al-mukāshafa* a "higher theology" that is based on Aristotelian demonstrative proof. Rather, the fundamental tension in the abstract thought of al-Ghazālī derives from the very fact that he tries to use logical reasoning to demonstrate the limited authority of reason. Arguably, this is one of the central objectives of the Ashʿarites. In fact, when read in the context of his general ideology, al-Ghazālī exhibits remarkable consistency in his unwavering commitment to traditional Ashʿarism.

Rather than being nominally committed to the Ashʿarite position on account of training, professional interests, old connections, and other factors that have no bearing on his real beliefs, al-Ghazālī's commitment to Ashʿarism is much more serious than Frank concedes. Frank overlooks what is perhaps the most important ideological dimension that guides al-Ghazālī's intellectual career. At the time of al-Ashʿarī (d. 935 AD), the priorities of the school doctrine were to establish the importance of *kalām* against the objections of the Ḥanbalites, and to formulate a unified and acceptable Sunni theology as distinct from that of the Muʿtazilites. This focus starts to shift way before al-Ghazālī's time, certainly by the time of ʿAbd al-Qāhir al-Baghdādī (d. 429 AH/1037 AD). Al-Baghdādī delineates a new set of Ashʿarite priorities in his *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*[23] (282) where he singles out the Ismāʿīli Bāṭiniyya as the greatest enemy of Sunni Islam; he says:

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[23] ʿAbd al-Qāhir ibn fiāhir ibn Muḥammad Al-Baghdādī, *Al-Farq bayn al-Firaq*, ed. M. M. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Cairo, 1964).

> Know, may God please you, that the harm of the Bāṭiniyya to the various groups (*firaq*) of Muslims is greater than the harm of Jews and Christians and *Majūs*; in fact it is greater than the harm of the *Dahriyya* and the rest of the kinds of unbelievers; even greater than the harm of the false Messiah who will appear at the end of time. [This is so] because those who will be led astray by the summons of the Bāṭiniyya, from the time they appeared till our present day, are far more numerous than those who are led astray by the false Messiah at the time of his appearance; for the strife of the false (Messiah) will not last more than forty days, while the slanders of the Bāṭiniyya (*faḍā'iḥ al-Bāṭiniyya*) are more numerous than the sand and rain drops.

Al-Ghazālī clearly commits himself to this Ash'arite program. In fact, with al-Ghazālī the political attack against Bāṭiniyya gains an elaborate theoretical dimension. For him, the struggle against the Bāṭiniyya is not just over political or even theological issues; rather it is a fight over the authority and role of reason. It is significant that al-Ghazālī (*Fayṣal*, 195) says that differences on the principle of the imāmate, its designation and its conditions do not justify the charge of unbelief. Therefore, the Ismā'īlis are not accused of unbelief on account of their doctrine of the imamate; rather, they attribute lying to the prophet, a fact that is itself an outcome of their arbitrary *ta'wīl* of scriptures, and their suspension of the role of reason in distinguishing between right and wrong in matters of religion. In the face of the Ismā'īli belief that the imam has a monopoly over the secret knowledge of the scripture, al-Ghazālī insists on the role of logic as the shared method for acquiring knowledge.

Al-Ghazālī, then, remains committed to the general Ash'arite objective of securing an authoritative role for the rational faculties against the Bāṭiniyya who reject this authority. Al-Ghazālī, however, is keen to distinguish his position from those who go as far as judging or even dismissing the scriptural authority on the basis of human reason. This distinction is repeated over and over again in almost all of the works of al-Ghazālī; for example, in the section quoted above from the *Mustaṣfā* (5-6) al-Ghazālī maintains that, if something cannot be demonstrated through *burhān*, then it does not follow that it is impossible; rather "the intellect only demonstrates the truthfulness of the prophet and then absolves itself (*ya'zilu nafsahu*)," and concedes the higher authority of the scripture.

Consistent with this theoretical attack on the Bāṭiniyya, al-Ghazālī also identifies philosophy as the source for the strong and deadly (as it were) theoretical underpinnings of Ismā'īli ideology. Distorted as the Ismā'īli views of philosophy may have been, al-Ghazālī's censure of the metaphysics of the philosophers is in effect an attack on the Ismā'īli Bāṭiniyya. In *Faḍā'iḥ al-Bāṭiniyya*[24] (46), for example, al-Ghazālī says in reference to the *bāṭini* belief regarding the hereafter (*ma'ād*): "This is their opinion (*madhhab*) regarding the hereafter; it is exactly the opinion of the philosophers. It only became widespread among them (the Bāṭiniyya) when a group of dualists and philosophers dedicated themselves to the support of their *madhhab*.... Thus most of their *madhhab* conformed to the dualists and the philosophers in secret (*bāṭin*) while it conformed with the other Rawāfiḍ and Shī'a in outward appearance (*ẓāhir*)." Al-Ghazālī makes similar remarks when referring to the *bāṭinī* doctrine of prophethood which is "close to the *madhhab* of the philosophers" (40) and is "extracted from the *madhāhib* of the philosophers on prophethood with some distortion and change" (42).

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[24] Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *Faḍā'iḥ al-Bāṭiniyya*, ed. A. Badawi (Cairo, 1964).

There is, then, in the various writings of al-Ghazālī a consistent commitment to traditional Ashʿarism, not just at the level of ideology, but also at the level of the deeper theoretical conceptions and objectives. In the same reference quoted in the beginning of this essay, Ibn Taymiyya attributes discrepancies in the thought of al-Ghazālī to his excessive eagerness to acquire knowledge, and not to the lack of the proper tools to do so. Frank, in another divergence from Ibn Taymiyya, is not as generous in his assessment; after carefully reading al-Ghazālī, Frank (92) concludes that "his formal treatment of a number of topics is remarkably superficial." However, the evidence provided by Frank to substantiate his allegation is not incontrovertible. Although Frank does not claim to have said the last word on the subject, he does aim at providing a "useful basis for further investigation" (101) of al-Ghazālī by establishing the exact nature of his relationship with traditional Ashʿarism. In this book, therefore, Professor Frank simply tries to pin al-Ghazālī down. The great thinker, however, remains at large.