

## CURRENTS AND COUNTERCURRENTS

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Philosophical and theological traditions, systems and subsystems, are generated within particular cultural and social milieux and their histories are necessarily bound to the histories of these broader contexts. Certain fundamental givens of the historically common world are inevitably taken for granted and incorporated at some level. In some cases this takes place on the explicit basis of tradition or of religious belief while in others it occurs simply because of the way the world presents itself “naturally” and so manifestly is. “Language is Being’s house and in its dwelling man resides.”

For the ancient Greeks, the Gods (θεοί, δαίμονες) had always been features or elements of the world, beings whose activity lies just below the manifest surface of things, of natural events and some human actions, and are the source of our amazement and fascination with the natural world. The philosophers, rejecting the testimony of traditional report (μῦθος) for that of rational discourse (λόγος), found “god” (or the gods), s.c., the divine (τὸ θεῖον) in the most proper sense, to be ungenerated and eternal, that which is “first and most dominant”<sup>1</sup> in ordering the universe and on which therefore in some sense “the heavens and nature depend”.<sup>2</sup> The stable and well ordered universe (κόσμος) is simply there—taken for granted as being eternal and the divine, whether conceived as a nature or principle (φύσις or ἀρχή) that is “separate and immovable” (χωριστή καὶ ἀκίνητος) as with Aristotle or as permeating all things as with the Stoa, is seen as an impersonal element or an aspect of the Whole which may be discovered through speculative reasoning. There may be a kind of “providence” (πρόνοια), but it is altogether impersonal. It is a principle of philosophy that one must follow the path of critical reasoning wherever it leads—ταύτη ἰτέον ὡς τὰ ἴχνη τῶν λόγων φέρει—but however firm one’s resolve to submit all judgements and beliefs to critical and rigorously logical scrutiny, there is and can be

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<sup>1</sup> Aristotle *Metaphysics*: 1064a.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 1072b.

no absolute intellectual space wholly uncontroled by the historically present matter of his world into which he can withdraw in order to take the measure of things exactly as they are without bias or preconception. The determinant criteria of plausibility and of "elegance" are not freely chosen. The Gods of Greek religion were elements or aspects of the natural order of the world and this understanding of the divine was carried over into Greek philosophy. For this reason the assimilation of Greek philosophical thought posed a serious problem for early Christian thinkers.<sup>3</sup>

Islam was founded in a prophetic message and its sense of the world developed and was articulated largely along with and in terms of readings and interpretations of that message. The theologians of the predominant sunnī schools found the world to be radically contingent: from not-being (*adam*) it came into being (*wujūd*) at a time finitely removed from the present through an act of the creator. The creator exists altogether apart from and independently of the world. God acts freely by choosing; he makes himself known through particular individuals to particular peoples at particular times as he chooses.

Greek philosophy, the Neo-Platonized Aristotelianism of late antiquity, was partially remoulded in the contexts of its transmission to Muslim thinkers and modified again in the milieux which took it up. It was embraced, however, as received tradition. Over a millennium had elapsed since Plato and Aristotle had founded the tradition and the Muslims who found the tradition appealing were not historically prepared to make a radically new beginning. According to al-Fārābī, philosophy had attained a level of perfection in the time of Aristotle such that, as there remained no subject for further investigation, it could be transmitted and taught as "demonstrative science."<sup>4</sup> In its own peculiar way, thus, philosophy had become a kind of *μῦθος* in those intellectual circles for whom it furnished an authoritative paradigm by which to interpret present reality, the natural world and the human world and the divine. The transmitted tradition, by virtue of its comprehensiveness and its claim to be independent of, and therefore superior to, particular historical cultures and religious traditions, gave its adherents a sense of high intellectual power and control. Their boundless confidence in the certitude available through the

<sup>3</sup> See Pannenberg 1967:296-346.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Fārābī *Kitāb al-Hurūf*: 151f.

Aristotelian logic is reminiscent of Xenophon's naïve enthusiasm for the dialectic of Socrates; inherited premises and the world they presupposed were not called seriously into question. Avicenna alone explicitly criticised the orthodox tradition of the "peripatetics" and claimed personally to have improved upon it.<sup>5</sup> Most seem to have assumed—and some assert—each that his own peculiar views are nothing less than the consistent elaboration of the true sense and intention of the original tradition.

In appropriating Greek philosophy to their own use the *falāsifa* introduced a number of significant and interesting modifications into the basic tradition they had received, some specifically as adjustments to the Islamic religious milieu. The most important of these, at least for the context of our present considerations, is that the divine was no longer seen simply as responsible for the consistently ordered progression of phenomena, but rather the "First Cause" was conceived as the transcendent cause of the very existence of the world.<sup>6</sup> Thus, whereas according to the emanationism of Plotinus the One underlies (grounds) the presence of form and intelligibility and thereby too the principle of ordered movement and activity, and so ultimately the coming to be and the passing away of things, in the emanationism of al-Fārābī and Avicenna "the First cause" is the originating, efficient cause of the existence of the universe, of the form of what has form and of the matter of what has matter, wherefore the existence of the whole, of the world as such and in its entirety, is wholly contingent with respect to the one being whose existence is necessary in itself. The world is not itself the Whole (*τὸ πᾶν*) of what is and simply there as it was for the Greeks; it has to be explained, to have a cause beyond itself.<sup>7</sup> The First Cause, however, produces the world necessarily, "by its essence" (*bi-dhātihī*), and therefore eternally; the perfection of God's being entails the emanation of the world. God thus needs the world insofar as his being would not be complete did it not exist. Carrying through the theory of the determinant necessity of the sequential emanation of the hierarchy of celestial beings

<sup>5</sup> See generally Gutas 1988.

<sup>6</sup> E.g. al-Kindī *Rasā'il*: 62 and 182f.

<sup>7</sup> Cf., e.g., al-Fārābī *al-Siyāsa al-madaniyya*: 31f., *Mabādī*: 88f., and Avicenna *al-Ilāhiyyāt*: 402ff. One inside the closed system of the universe can truly know the nature of a cause which exists outside the system and is unconditioned by anything within the system because such knowledge is given through the action of one of the necessarily emanated intelligences (*al-'aql al-fa'āl*) which has a mediated intuition of the first emanated being and through it a knowledge of its cause.

one from another together with their essential natures and order, Avicenna teaches a radical determinism which embraces every event in the sublunary world, human voluntary actions included. So too, the consistently held doctrine of a separated "active intellect" furnished not only an explanation for prophetic dreams and visions—things the "fact" of which was universally taken for granted—but also for the origin of religious prophecy. Significantly, however, as al-Fārābī and Avicenna take the agent intellect to be a celestial being, the mind is not conceived as the autonomous agent of its own intuitions. Avicenna's concentrated focus on necessary and contingent being and on essences as possibles whose instantiations are necessary *ab alio* stands in conspicuous contrast with the traditional Aristotelian focus on the substantial being of entities.<sup>8</sup>

What I wish to do, then, is to call attention to the fundamental differences that underlie several views that were widely held in sunnī Islam concerning the relation of God to the world and to man, viz., those originally Muslim systems of the Basrian Mu'tazila and of the Ash'arites on the one side, and on the other that of al-Ghazālī, who was heavily influenced by the philosophy of Avicenna. Though very broad in that a number of diverse elements have necessarily to be taken into account for each system considered, our present remarks are nonetheless quite narrowly focused on the most basic theological differences that characterise and distinguish the three schools of thought. Textual citations have been restricted to a few basic texts and there to but one or two passages as seemed appropriate for illustration.<sup>9</sup>

### 1. *The Mu'tazila*

God's existence is necessary in itself;<sup>10</sup> eternally he knows everything, what shall come to exist and what shall not come to exist and has the infinite power to create any thing whose existence is not impossible.<sup>11</sup> The power to act is the power to act or not to act freely and

<sup>8</sup> Compared to οὐσία in the philosophy of Aristotle, *jawhar* stands as a relatively secondary concept in Avicenna's. The sublunary world with its "substances" is merely contingent, having of and in itself no being (Avicenna *al-Ilāhiyyāt*: 356).

<sup>9</sup> Additional references regarding several of the Ash'arite theses here discussed may be sought in Gimaret 1990.

<sup>10</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār *al-Mughnī*: 11, 432f.

<sup>11</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār *Uṣūl*: 80 and *al-Mughnī*: 8, 68, and 11, 94.

autonomously and, since God's being is such that it is impossible that its perfection be increased by the existence of any contingent entity or diminished by its non-existence, it is possible both abstractly and concretely that he have created nothing at all.<sup>12</sup> The real possibility of the existence of any contingent entity is grounded in the power of the agent that can cause it to come to be and God's power is unlimited, embracing an infinity of classes of beings<sup>13</sup> and an infinite number of individuals in each class.<sup>14</sup> The primary classes of created entities, real and possible, are two: (1) the spatially extended atoms, which are essentially identical one to another and are independent entities in that each "subsists in itself" (*qā'imun bi-nafsihī*) and not in another, and (2) the various classes, subclasses, and varieties of entitative "accidents," instances of which exist in individual atoms. Corporeal beings are basically composites of atoms and accidents. Living beings have a proper ontological unity as such since their characteristic states and activities require the structured, organic composite,<sup>15</sup> and accordingly, predicates that are particular to living bodies—of men and of animals—are properly said of the structured, organic whole.<sup>16</sup> Even under the restriction of the limited number of kinds of essential entities (*dhawāt*), sc., atoms and accidents, that make up the present world God could have created a world radically different from that which presently exists; he could, for example, have created other kinds of living creatures and need not have created any or all of the kinds he did create;<sup>17</sup> the forms and constitutions of corporeal beings, living and inanimate, that actually exist were chosen freely by God. There are, however, absolute ethical principles of what is good and bad to which all knowing agents are subject.<sup>18</sup> Because God's being transcends benefit and harm it is concretely impossible that he be moved to do wrong or injustice and for this reason there are certain factual limitations on what God can create:<sup>19</sup> he could not create a universe in which there were no living beings, for this would be a pointless act and to do what is pointless (*al-'abath*) is wrong; similarly it is factually impossible that he have

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. 11, 98f. and 14, 205f.

<sup>13</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār *Mutashābih al-Qur'ān*: 1, 50 and *al-Mughnī*: 6/1, 162.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. 6/1, 63.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 7, 33f.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 6/2, 22f. and 11, 352ff.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 11, 154.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. generally Hourani 1971 and 1960, and Frank 1983.

<sup>19</sup> See Frank 1985a.

created living beings without creating also the things they need for their sustenance.<sup>20</sup> It is, however, ethically legitimate that God do or not do whatever he does gratuitously<sup>21</sup> and consequently the fact that he does not create all the good that lies within his power to create does not entail his being miserly, for miserliness (*al-bukhl*) is to withhold what is obligated.<sup>22</sup>

In the school of Abū Hāshim, man is conceived essentially as a living being that has the power of voluntary action (*hayyun qādīr*),<sup>23</sup> though more completely, "the being that is alive and has the power of voluntary action is this individual body (*shakhs*) that has a particular structure (*binya*) by which it is distinguished from all other animals and to which are directed command and prohibition, blame and praise".<sup>24</sup> God could have chosen to create man immediately in the state of paradise<sup>25</sup> or to have created him with intelligence but without the power of autonomous choice,<sup>26</sup> but chose instead to create him "having autonomous power of action, cognition, perception, life and volition" and so *mukallaf*, i.e., a free and autonomous subject that as such merits reward and punishment for his actions.<sup>27</sup> Having

<sup>20</sup> 'Abd al-Jabbār *al-Mughnī*: 11, 154.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 127. According to al-Nazzām and some masters of the Mu'tazilite school of Baghdad, God has to do what is best (*al-aṣlah*) for his creatures. This thesis is not, however, intended to assert (and was not understood by its opponents as implying) that there is a unique best possible universe or order of the universe that God must create, if he chooses to create man; it says, rather, that knowing what choices each free human agent will make under what circumstances, God is ethically obligated to make the world and the human condition to be such that a maximum number of individuals freely act so as to achieve each his ultimate well being (*al-ṣalāh*); cf., e.g., al-Ash'arī *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn*: 576 and 'Abd al-Jabbār *al-Mughnī*: 14, 140ff. Note that the Mu'tazila and the Ash'arites alike tend to avoid saying that God acts or creates "for a reason" (*li-'illa*) because the expression is ambivalent and may be taken to imply the necessity of creation, even though there is in God's wisdom that which makes creation (and the creation of man) good (*hasan*); cf., e.g., *ibid.* 11, 92f. (where note that the first line on p. 93 belongs at the bottom of the page).

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 11, 311f. and 345.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 11 and 311.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 11, 71f. and 14, 137f.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 11, 137.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* 11 and 309. God's imposition of moral obligation (*al-taklīf*) consists, most strictly speaking, in his "either making known directly through intuition or by presenting adequate evidence for inferring that those acts that are obligatory are in fact obligatory" (*ibid.* 11 and 150). That the freedom to act is necessarily the freedom to do wrong as well as right (to obey God and to disobey), cf., e.g. *ibid.* 128 and 168. That the voluntary acts of men are truly free, see generally Frank 1982. Knowledge of the basic rules of good and bad in action are given by God in immediate

freely chosen to create man so, God is not altogether free with respect to his living creatures, but bound by the rule of justice and right action. Because human life inevitably involves some degree of hardship and pain and to live according to the fundamental principles of right action is often difficult, God owes his servants some proportionate compensation for the difficulties and pains they endure and has, moreover, willed to grant a reward that greatly exceeds any thing that could strictly speaking be merited.

Because man's acts are not causally determined by antecedent states and events, but are performed freely for some intended good, the being of the individual, as he consciously anticipates his own future as or through action to be done, transcends the immediate state of the atoms and accidents that constitute the individual whole or body that is he. Beings that lack the power of autonomous action have no intrinsic activity of their own. There is no "nature" (φύσις) in the classical sense; most "natural events"—all events that do not take place directly or indirectly as actions of living creatures—are directly or indirectly created by God.

There was no intrinsic need or necessity for God that he create man *mukallaf*.<sup>28</sup> He did so gratuitously<sup>29</sup> simply for the ultimate benefit and good of his creature.<sup>30</sup> Having created man thus as an autonomous agent responsible for his own actions, however, God is obligated to give him some basic kind of assistance (*lutf*) towards the fulfillment of his duties,<sup>31</sup> i.e., that he furnish some incentives or motivations (*dā'iya*) given which the individual will or is more likely to choose to do what is good and to avoid what is bad.<sup>32</sup> Prophetic

intuition; cf. Hourani, *op. cit.* Note that volition, according to the Basrian school is itself an act. The formulations of the proposition that what is an object of human agents' power of voluntary action cannot be an object of God's power may sometimes give the impression that what is meant is that there are possibles with respect to the power of human action that are excluded from God's power, but what is intended is that no act of a human agent can occur through God's power. Those who hold that God must do "what is best" assert that the *taklīf* is ethically necessary; cf. 'Abd al-Jabbār *al-Mughnī*: 14, 100f. and 140ff. and also 13, 7.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 11, 71f. and 15, 115ff.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 11, 134f. and 154.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 11, 238.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 11, 222 and 224f.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 11, 258 and 13, 39, and 'Abd al-Jabbār *Mutashābih al-Qur'an*: 1, 24f. It is a central teaching of the Mu'tazila that God cannot be the cause (agent) of man's actions, that no action can occur through the power of two agents. Because of the disputes with the Ash'arites, discussions of this are frequent and lengthy, involving much tedious detail; similarly with the thesis that God cannot constrain (*alja'a, id'tarra*)

revelation is a special form of this obligatory assistance.<sup>33</sup> Whereas, however, the primary rules of ethics are rationally given and as such (as *al-taklīf al-‘aqlī*) are incumbent on all men of sound mind, those peculiar to the prophetic laws (*al-taklīf al-shar‘ī*) are not,<sup>34</sup> but are rather particular enactments whose aim is to foster adherence to the universal principles of moral action.<sup>35</sup> The action of God with respect to man is essentially personal; whether in creating intuitive cognitions directly or in causing spontaneous thoughts and motivations (*khawāṭir*) that are conducive to right action.<sup>36</sup> God acts individually towards particular individuals whose natures he has determined in creating them and in prophetic revelation he makes knowledge of himself and his will for men expressly available to selected communities through chosen individuals. The human agent interacts with God as he responds to or rejects the revelation or any of the other kinds of assistance (*al-īāf*) that God offers him. The basic recognition that there is a creator, since it is achieved through logical inference, is the result of a voluntary action. God’s action in creation, both in the basic ordering of the world<sup>37</sup> and in his various levels of gracious assistance, calls for a response on man’s part—for obedience to the moral law, for recognition of God’s goodness and for gratitude. The human intellect is ordered to action, the doing of what is obligatory and right, and thereby is oriented towards God, the ultimate judge and giver of reward and punishment. Accordingly, the world has consistency and meaning as the manifestation of God’s power, will, and

the individual to act, since this would vitiate the agent’s freedom and render the resultant act valueless. That to know God is a universal obligation, cf., e.g. *al-Mughnī* 12, 352ff. and that it must be achieved as voluntary act through rational reflection (ibid. 11, 150 and 15, 59).

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. 15, 9ff. and 23ff.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. 13 and 187.

<sup>35</sup> On this see Gimaret 1974:16ff., Hourani 1971:126ff. and 132ff., and Frank 1978a:124ff.

<sup>36</sup> ‘Abd al-Jabbār *al-Mughnī*: 15, 509.

<sup>37</sup> The question of the order of the world as conceived by the Mu‘tazila has received no systematic study. The Basrians, generally speaking, hold that sequences of events which, under known conditions, occur invariantly are due to the lawful operation of secondary causes (*asbāb*) related to the essential characteristics of particular accidents or structured composites (e.g. ‘Abd al-Jabbār *al-Mughnī*: 4, 42 and 124; 8, 186; 9, 53, 96, and 109; 11 and 79; and Abū Rashīd *al-Masā’il*: 56 and 122f.), while those that vary consistently within a given range but for which the exact causes or conditions are not known are created directly by God according to his consistent custom or habit (*‘āda*) (e.g. ‘Abd al-Jabbār *al-Mughnī*: 11, 79 and 115; 12, 52 and 86; 16, 307, 310, and 311 and Abū Rashīd *al-Masā’il*: 37f.).

justice and the structured locus and context of man’s interaction with his fellows and with his creator under a single set of moral rules to which all are obligated.

The theology of the Mu‘tazila was fundamentally at variance with the basic religious sense of more conservative religious scholars and it was the teaching of that of the Ash‘arites that came to form the school theology for the Shāfi‘ites and the Mālikites.

## 2. The Ash‘arites

God with his essential attributes exists eternally and necessarily.<sup>38</sup> To be God (*al-ilāhiyya*) is to possess unique and all-encompassing knowledge, power, and will,<sup>39</sup> what he wills comes to be, what he does not does not.<sup>40</sup> Where for the Mu‘tazilites the non-existent possible is in some sense a being as a known or posited instance of a given class,<sup>41</sup> for the Ash‘arites, the possible as such is pure non-existence, a mere nothing (*‘adam maḥd*); it has being only as God creates it<sup>42</sup> and creating it makes it to be what it is.<sup>43</sup> The primary classes of created entities are atoms, and accidents.<sup>44</sup> The Ash‘arite view differs significantly, however, from that of the Mu‘tazila. Life and the phenomena associated with it do not require any specially structured substrate,<sup>45</sup> wherefore no primary predicates are properly said of any composite as such, whether animate or inanimate, but only of the individual atoms as they are qualified each as a separate locus of

<sup>38</sup> Al-Bāqillānī *al-Tamhīd*: §53, al-Juwaynī *al-Irshād*: 84, and al-Anṣārī *al-Ghunya*: fol. 25r.

<sup>39</sup> Al-Anṣārī *al-Ghunya*: fol. 33r, al-Isfarā’inī *al-‘Aqida*: §II, 10 [= 134], and al-Qushayrī *Luma’*: 59.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Juwaynī *al-Shāmīl* [1969]:271.

<sup>41</sup> See Frank 1979:54f. and 65f.

<sup>42</sup> Al-Juwaynī *al-Shāmīl* [1981]:22.

<sup>43</sup> Ibn Fūrak *Mujarrad*: 253f. and al-Juwaynī *al-Shāmīl* [1981]:22. God makes the different kinds of things to be different (see the references in Frank 1992:52, nn. 95–97). There are possible kinds of contingent beings of which God has not created actual instances (Ibn Fūrak *Mujarrad*: 246); whether, however, the subclasses of certain classes are limited or not, was debated; v. Frank 1992: *loc. cit.*

<sup>44</sup> Al-Bāqillānī *al-Tamhīd*: §37 and al-Juwaynī *al-Irshād*: 17. Note that even though they do not occupy space and so are not “independent beings” (*qā’imun bi’l-nafs*), accidents, for the Ash‘arites, as also for the Mu‘tazila of the same period, are nonetheless conceived as being entities in the full and proper sense.

<sup>45</sup> Al-Juwaynī *al-Shāmīl* [1969]:410 and 415ff.

particular instances of one or more accidents;<sup>46</sup> “knows” is properly said and is true only of particles (*ajzāʿ*) in which resides the accident, cognition, and “acts” only of the particle in which the event occurs. While atoms, once created, may continue to exist,<sup>47</sup> no accident endures beyond the instant (*waqt*) of its creation.<sup>48</sup> Bodies are conglomerates of two or more atoms, whose conjunction, each with its neighbour, is an accident. No created entity or event can be the cause of any other; whatever is or occurs God creates immediately, either according to the known and generally foreseeable pattern of his consistent “custom” and “habit”<sup>49</sup> or in unusual events as wonders on behalf of saints and magic for sinners,<sup>50</sup> or in uniquely peculiar events as miracles for prophets.<sup>51</sup> Since God is conceived as altogether transcendent and altogether separate in the necessity of his eternal being from all contingent beings, it would seem that the world as created and distinct ought to have some proper ontological density that belongs to it as such. Plainly, however, this is not the case, for it has no intrinsic or natural order, no substantiality, form, content or act of its own, but consists simply of the featureless atoms that are the passive recipients of God’s ongoing activity as they receive the transient accidents that qualify their actuality from moment to moment, “signs” that are the manifestations—the correlates and referents—of his “action attributes” (*sifātu afʿālihi*). The existence of any created entity in being what it is God’s act of creating it.<sup>52</sup> The texts evidence some interest in the regular and sometimes-invariant association between certain kinds of phenomena as antecedents and consequents, but the discussion is most often focused, directly or indirectly, on the determination of the criteria by which genuine miracles

<sup>46</sup> Ibn Fūrak *Mujarrad*: 146, al-Juwaynī *al-Shāmil* [1969]:665ff., and al-Anṣārī *al-Ghunya*: foll. 155r ff.

<sup>47</sup> Opinions as to how this is so differ; some early authorities (e.g. al-Ashʿarī and al-Isfārāʾīnī) hold that since “continues exist” is not equivalent to “exists” or “is an atom”, there must exist an accident, “perdurance” (*al-baqāʿ*), which God creates in each atom in each successive instant; most later authorities deny such an accident and hold that perdurance is simply that the atom go on existing. The details of this we need not go into here. Only intrinsic or essential property of the atom is that it occupies a minimal volume of space. Atoms, therefore, cannot exist without one or more of the set of accidents that determine and define location and position.

<sup>48</sup> Ibn Fūrak *Mujarrad*: 13 and al-Anṣārī *al-Ghunya*: fol. 92r.

<sup>49</sup> Ibn Fūrak *Mujarrad*: 131 and 283.

<sup>50</sup> Al-Mutawallī *al-Mughnī*: 52 and al-Anṣārī *al-Ghunya*: foll. 183v ff.

<sup>51</sup> Ibn Fūrak *Mujarrad*: 134, al-Bāqillānī *al-Tamhīd*: §§12 and 639 and al-Juwaynī *al-Shāmil* [1969]:284, 501, 529, and 590.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Bāqillānī *al-Tamhīd*: §556 and al-Juwaynī *al-Shāmil* [1981]:47f.

may be distinguished from other unusual events within the overall framework of an occasionalistic universe. God’s action, moreover, is bound by no principle or rule of right or of justice; his power and authority are absolute and any action of his is good as such. Whatever he might do and whatever its relation to or effect on any creature is good (*hasan*) and is just (*ʿadl*), simply and exclusively by virtue of its being his act.<sup>53</sup>

Man has no essential nature as such, but is simply a conglomerate body having a particular configuration.<sup>54</sup> The individual is an accidental whole that is one and centred only in the accidental continuity of the sense or impression of unity and wholeness that God creates in a part of it from one instant to the next. Volitions are accidents that God creates in particular parts of the whole which at the moment are said to will and similarly the power of voluntary action (*al-qudrah*) is an accident created simultaneously with the event which is its correlate or object (*mutaʿalliquhā*) in the particular substrates in which the event takes place and by virtue of which the event is described as the individual’s “performance” (*kashb, iktisāb*) rather than as something he merely undergoes. Whatever may follow a basic or primary act as an apparent consequent is a distinct and separate act of God’s—a whole set of acts, in fact, simultaneous and sequential. The consequent may be related juridically to the primary act or performance (e.g. drinking to inebriation), but they are not causally related. Nothing can be willed but what God wills. Within the context of Ashʿarite theocentrism it is unthinkable that God not be the efficient agent of every event that takes place in the created universe and so therefore that he have created man as an autonomous agent of his own voluntary acts, for the occurrence within God’s realm of anything that he does not will and do would indicate that his knowledge and power were not absolute.<sup>55</sup> There can be but one autonomous cause of any existence or occurrence.

For the human agent, good is what God commands and bad is what he forbids; there is no moral obligation (*taklīf*)—no ethical right

<sup>53</sup> See generally Frank 1983:207ff. “Good” is predicated of God’s acts and of human acts that conform to God’s commands and prohibitions. That “good” is not predicated of God is highly significant for the conceptual development of both the Ashʿarite and the Muʿtazilite theologies. In origin this has to do with the semantics of Arabic “*hasan*”, which originally is employed of the aesthetically beautiful and from this of the ethically good.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Bāqillānī *al-Tamhīd*: 194, 2f.

<sup>55</sup> Al-Ashʿarī *al-Lumaʿ*: §§51ff. and Ibn Fūrak *Mujarrad*: 69f. and 72f.

or wrong—prior to or apart from the promulgation of the revealed law.<sup>56</sup> God commands belief and creates belief in some individuals, in others unbelief; his doing the former is termed “gracious assistance” (*lutf*) and his doing the latter “abandonment” (*khidhlān*).<sup>57</sup> The human individual is nothing more than the passive locus of some of God’s acts, as he may choose to create or not to create knowledge of himself and belief in some of the body’s elemental particles and obedience or disobedience in others. Beatitude and damnation are meted out in accord with belief and unbelief, obedience and disobedience, but not because of them,<sup>58</sup> for God can owe nothing to a creature.<sup>59</sup> God speaks to men through his emissaries, the prophets, calling them to acknowledge his being and to obey his commands; some respond, some do not, as God chooses and does. In those who cannot recognise the truth of the revelation, their rejection (*kufū*), is an event willed and created by God and is, accordingly, the manifestation of his concealing himself from them. Similarly, the knowledge of God’s being on the part of those who recognise the truth of the revelation is also willed and created by him so that, in effect, their recognition of God’s signs (*āyāt*) as such—the verses of the revealed text as his self-revelation—is itself one of his signs. Here God discloses himself, as it were, on two levels. The believer’s basic knowledge of God and his attributes normally follows reflection on evidence presented in the world and argued as such in the text of revelation; God’s eternal being remains remote. What the believer hears and understands through the articulated words (*al-‘ibārāt*) of the revealed text, on the other hand, is God’s own, eternal speaking (*kalāmuhu l-qadīm*),<sup>60</sup> one of his essential attributes. In creating this understanding of the prophetic text, therefore, God communicates something of his eternal being. The sacred text, thus, does not merely impart information about God and his commands, but presents *kalām al-ḥaqq*: the true, eternal speaking of God himself. The believer, however, remains always the passive recipient of God’s action; there is, strictly speaking—and can be—no interaction between them.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>56</sup> See Frank 1983:210ff. and 1985b:42ff.

<sup>57</sup> Al-Mutawallī *al-Mughnī*: 43 and al-Anṣārī *al-Ghunya*: fol. 161v.

<sup>58</sup> Al-Mutawallī *al-Mughnī*: 38 and al-Anṣārī *al-Ghunya*: fol. 155r.

<sup>59</sup> Ibn Fūrak *Mujarrad*: 163 and al-Anṣārī *al-Ghunya*: fol. 173r.

<sup>60</sup> Ibn Fūrak *Mujarrad*: 59ff. and al-Qushayrī *al-Fuṣūl*: §§35ff., pp. 63f.

<sup>61</sup> The Ash‘arite masters draw very precise logical distinctions regarding how an event can be ascribed to God under one description and to the human agent or

Whatever one may think of it, the Ash‘arite account of the world and human existence does preserve the appearances. Often, in the discourse of the jurists (*al-fuqahā*) and in that of the orthodox sufis especially, one talks in terms of reasons or causes and, in the analysis of human acts, speaks with considerable insight of motivation, purpose and intention, of actions as produced or occasioned by prior events and present circumstances, and of the formation of character and habit, but the final ontological analysis here finds only God’s action. Thus al-Kiyā’ al-Harāsī,<sup>62</sup> a student of al-Juwaynī, says that people commonly talk of “reasons” or “causes”—for example, that eating is the cause of satiety—and that such popular usage is acceptable enough in legal reasoning, though in fact “there is no cause (*‘illa*) in the strict and formal sense”, but only the occasionalistic occurrences of God’s customary action. Whatever consistency the world has and whatever meaning that is not illusory, is that it is the material manifestation or expression—the *Äußerung*—of God’s power and will. What belongs to man as strictly his own is (whether he understand it so or not) his experience of God’s immediate and personal action. All experience is the experience of God’s activity and consciousness itself, together with its contents, is God’s act.

The teaching of the Ash‘arite school is the formal articulation of a common sunnī sense of the being of God, man and the world and as such presents one aspect and level of the religious vision of a particular segment or region of Muslim society at a given historical period. It is, however, a narrowly focused vision, one in which the world is almost excluded from view save as a kind of background or stage for the believer’s contemplation of God’s all-powerful presence. Though it is akin to and was long associated with the theology of some of the orthodox sufis, it was not conceived and elaborated on the foundation of that more intimate level and modality of religious experience, but on the basis of a religious sense that was widely shared amongst religious scholars.

subject under another (see Frank 1983:212), but it remains that any state of being or event (in their terminology, any accident or performance) that qualifies the human subject is, in its existence and in its being essentially what it is, the act of God’s creating it, even though it may be predicated of the subject and not of God under one or another description (e.g. “movement” or “performance” [*iktisāb*] or “obedience”).

<sup>62</sup> *Uṣūl*: fol. 201r.

3. *Al-Ghazālī*

As the transmitted heritage of Hellenistic science and philosophy came to be more widely known and cultivated in Muslim intellectual circles, a number of religious scholars came to have an increasing sense that traditional *kalām* was fundamentally incapable of serving as the foundation for an adequate and sufficiently comprehensive account of the basic truths of religion. It is within this context that al-Ghazālī undertook the construction of a new synthesis of Muslim theology and the acclaim with which his *Ihyā' ulūm al-dīn* was received is witness to the extent of the dissatisfaction with traditional *kalām*, at least in some circles.

As with the Ash'arites, and the Mu'tazila too, al-Ghazālī holds that God is the one being whose non-existence is impossible and whose knowledge and power are infinite and that the existence of the world is contingent on his will, whose act is neither entailed by his essence nor moved by any need or expectation of return. In its general conception as also in its detail, however, the theology of al-Ghazālī departs significantly from the common Ash'arite doctrine of the Shāfi'ite colleges in which he was trained and in which subsequently he taught, in his adopting and adapting basic elements of the teaching of the *falāsifa* and, with regard to the principal matters of our present considerations, of Avicenna in particular, which he amalgamated with elements of various sufi currents.<sup>63</sup> The actual beings that make up the universe are conceived as instantiating essences or essential natures (*ḥaqā'iq*). They are divided into a number of basic

<sup>63</sup> There are significant elements of his thought which closely resemble and may likely be derived from matters derived from the school of al-Kindī; this, however, has yet to be studied. Some of the material al-Ghazālī took from sufi sources, moreover, may prove to be closely related to elements of the ethical teaching of al-Kindī. Other elements may derive from Ismā'īlī sources (cf. Leibholt 1991). It should be noted that while al-Ghazālī in a number of places expresses himself plainly in quite formal terms, especially in *al-Maḥṣad al-asnā* and *Mishkāṭ al-anwār*, major elements of his theology often remain unstated or are implied only obliquely in other works and are largely obscured, e.g., in *al-Iqtiṣād*. Though he insists on the value and importance of logic and talks earnestly about rational proof and justification, he seldom offers seriously elaborated arguments for his own most important theological positions and his presentations of logic are, for all his earnestness, conspicuously superficial. There is, in fact, some reason to suspect that he never really thought through the detail and the implications of a goodly number of the theses and propositions that he states or that seem to be implied by theses he does clearly assert. Concerning the questions discussed here see generally Frank 1992; and concerning al-Ghazālī's relation to the Ash'arite school, see Frank 1994.

classes, the material and the immaterial on the one hand and on the other into those, celestial and sublunary, which make up the "universal, fundamental, permanent, and stable causes",<sup>64</sup> and those sublunary beings, which come to be and pass away.<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, al-Ghazālī enthusiastically discards the propositional analytic of the Ash'arites in favour of the Aristotelian logic.<sup>66</sup>

The essences of contingent beings are unoriginated and are finite in number, already there as possible instances of which God has the power to create.<sup>67</sup> God's being, moreover, is "necessary in its every aspect"<sup>68</sup> whence, albeit the world has existed for only a finite period of time, from eternity he wills necessarily what he wills.<sup>69</sup> Al-Ghazālī rejects the emanationism of al-Fārābī and Avicenna;<sup>70</sup> God creates, rather, the universal, permanent components of the universe, according to his wisdom, justice, and liberality, ordering them in precisely that order which is necessary and right (*al-tartīb al-wājib al-ḥaqq*) in order that everything in the world should be "as it ought to be"<sup>71</sup> so as to produce the one best possible universe.<sup>72</sup> What is good, right, and best here is not determined arbitrarily and gratuitously merely by being what God wills as in traditional Ash'arite teaching, for his choice, according to al-Ghazālī, is effectively limited and determined by what is good and best in terms of the essential natures of the finite set of contingent possibles.<sup>73</sup> God's action is purely voluntary (*ikhtiyār mahd*), but it is not totally free, since he could not have chosen otherwise.

<sup>64</sup> Al-Ghazālī *al-Maḥṣad*: 100.

<sup>65</sup> Though his general conception of material being is "Aristotelian" (essential forms are transmitted from a celestial agent; some accidents are "concomitant" and endure so long as the subject they qualify continues to exist, while others are transitory, of shorter or longer duration), he seems nonetheless to have held an atomistic conception of bodies as such; cf. Frank 1994:48ff.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. al-Ghazālī *Mihakk* generally and also *Mustasfā*: 1, 11ff. and *al-Maḥṣad*: 17ff.

<sup>67</sup> Though, curiously enough, al-Ghazālī does not discuss the origin of the possibles and whether their classes or "forms" are infinite in number, that they are finite and in number and unoriginated is the only view that is consistent with what he does say; cf. Frank 1992:52–63. It seems likely that he may have failed to see the theological importance of the question.

<sup>68</sup> *Mi'yār*: 195 and *al-Maḥṣad*: 43.

<sup>69</sup> *Ijām*: 68f.

<sup>70</sup> *Tahāfut*: 110ff.

<sup>71</sup> *Ihyā'*: 4, 252 and *al-Maḥṣad*: 109.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* 68 and 81.

<sup>73</sup> On this see Frank 1992:63ff. Al-Ghazālī's conception of God's will would appear to have been worked out chiefly against Avicenna's thesis that creation emanates from God because of his very nature (*bi-dhātihī*) and therefore must exist coeternally with God; v. *ibid.* 77f.



The universe functions as a complexly integrated machine in which every event is determined by the nature of its major operating components given the way in which they are ordered to one another<sup>74</sup> under the governance of the outermost sphere (God's "Throne") which, with its attendant "angel" (a "separated intelligence" in the lexicon of the *falāsifa*, to which al-Ghazālī occasionally refers as "the Well guarded Tablet"), contains, as it were, the program for the entire history of the world.<sup>75</sup> Albeit with the passage of time an increasing, though ultimately finite, number of immortal souls are produced, it remains that one can—at least from one perspective—hardly speak of history in the proper sense, for if one could know, as God does, the precise state of the entire system in all its detail at any given moment he could foresee every detail of all future states in succession and, even though the operation of the machine may not be reversible (the water cannot, consistently with al-Ghazālī's image of the water-clock,<sup>76</sup> run back up into the aperture from which it escaped), one could in principle calculate from the present all past states as well. In any case, it is God who is ultimately, through his creation of the system, "the one who makes the causes to function as causes"<sup>77</sup> so as to bring to existence everything whose being is in fact possible. He "is the existent whose existence is necessary in itself and from which exists everything whose existence is in possibility."<sup>78</sup> God's power is, in effect, limited to what must be, given the natures of the contingent possibles and the constraining necessity that there be the best possible world. Accordingly, "everything which lies in God's power is willed"<sup>79</sup> and "what lies in God's power [eventually] comes to be."<sup>80</sup> God, moreover, cannot intervene in the operation of the system.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>74</sup> *Al-Maḥṣad*: 99f.

<sup>75</sup> E.g. *Ihyā'*: 3, 18. Cf. Frank 1992:42ff. and refs.

<sup>76</sup> Al-Ghazālī *al-Maḥṣad*: 99. It might be well to note that, howbeit al-Ghazālī conceives the universe as a kind of automaton, what is required in order to know all future states and events within it is not simply the knowledge of an initial state and of a limited set of universal laws, but rather the knowledge of an initial state together with an exhaustive knowledge of all the properties of each of the entire panoply of essential natures, material and immaterial whose instances make up the universe.

<sup>77</sup> E.g. *Ihyā'*: 1, 74 and *al-Maḥṣad*: 116.

<sup>78</sup> *Al-Maḥṣad*: 47.

<sup>79</sup> *Al-Iqtisād*: 107.

<sup>80</sup> *Al-Maḥṣad*: 103.

<sup>81</sup> Al-Ghazālī occasionally speaks of the secondary causes as the "conditions" of the existence of their effects (see Frank 1992:25ff.) and insists that within the universe God can create only those things the "conditions" of whose coming to be are

There can, thus, be two accounts of the occurrence of any event in the universe; the one as it is "created," i.e., as out of the mere possibility of its coming to be, its existence is ultimately determined and caused by God's original "determination" and subsequent creation and ordering of the universe and the other as it is the necessary result of more proximate secondary causes.

The being of the human individual—his essential reality—is, most properly understood, the soul (most often referred to by "spirit" or "heart"), an immaterial entity which, though not strictly speaking "located in" the body, governs it through the mediation of the brain.<sup>82</sup> The individual is not created directly by God, but rather through the intermediate agency of "angels", as a product of the operation of the universal system. Though similar in their elemental human constitution (*al-fiṭra*), individuals differ in accord with the differences of the particular mixture (*al-mazāj*) of the humours and elemental properties that make up their bodies and as they are endowed with greater or lesser intellectual potential; whatever his native endowments, however, each one through the course of his life develops his state of being with its peculiar level of perfection or imperfection as is determined by various events, physical, sensory, or intellectual, that occur in the successive stages of his ongoing interaction with the material world, with others, and, directly and indirectly, with causal agencies of the celestial world.

Every human action occurs as the inevitable product of the physical and psychological state of the individual and the immediately effective occurrence of particular, antecedent sensations and impressions or cognitions which determine motivation and thereby volition and action or forbearance. Man, in short, is endowed as such with the faculties of cognition, deliberation, and will and with the power to act, but the act of the will and the consequent action or forbearance are caused deterministically (*jabran, idtirāran*) by antecedent states and events which are not chosen and whose existence derives ultimately from the operation of external causes, sublunary and celestial.<sup>83</sup> In

fulfilled (e.g. *Ihyā'*: 4, 249f. and *al-Maḥṣad*: 125). The structure and operation of the universe and all its parts is necessary (*Ijām*: 68f.); if God were to alter the universe in any way in order that some particular evil be avoided, the result would be that even more evil occur (al-Ghazālī *al-Maḥṣad*: 68).

<sup>82</sup> That al-Ghazālī holds the rational soul to be immaterial and immortal has been disputed, but a more thorough examination of the texts shows clearly that he did; cf. Frank 1994:55ff.

<sup>83</sup> E.g. *Ihyā'*: 4, 248ff.

effect, thus, the human individual is in no way autonomous or free. Volitions are simply moments in causally determined sequences of events and the power of voluntary action is therefore not the originating efficient cause of his acts. The being of the living individual, in short, is never anything more than the essentially passive subject of the complex of forces and stimuli, physical and psychological, which converge upon him through the operation of cosmic forces ordained and created by God. However much al-Ghazālī's teaching may differ from that of his Ash'arite predecessors with regard to how God acts in creation, it remains that he can, no more than they, entertain the thought that God does not ultimately will everything that is willed and do everything that is done; no more than they can he imagine the possibility that human volitions and actions are free.

Prophetic revelations are given through the agency of the celestial intelligences and operate as a stimulus and guide for souls to seek and attain their proper perfection. Against the Mu'tazila al-Ghazālī insists<sup>84</sup> that it was not necessary for God either that he create man or that, having created them, he send prophets; but "necessary" is used here as an ethical term describing what an agent must do for his own interest and advantage, wherefore the thesis in no way conflicts with al-Ghazālī's assertion that from eternity God necessarily wills to create this uniquely best universe.<sup>85</sup> The occurrence of prophetic revelation through particular individuals at particular times and to particular social groups has thus also to be one of the phenomena that are determined by the requirements of the universal system, an infrequent, but nonetheless "programmed" moment or output of the operation of the system. The "prophetic light" is automatically transmitted by the angelic agent to a given individual when the conditions of its reception are fulfilled and its specific content, as it becomes (again according to a predetermined necessity) a functioning element within the cultural tradition (as an operative factor in the interaction of various individuals and groups within the society), has diverse, though in each case, inevitable, causal effects on the lives of various individuals.<sup>86</sup>

The soul is brought to one or another degree of imperfection or perfection according to the amount of true "light" which, originating

<sup>84</sup> *Al-Iqtisād*: 174.

<sup>85</sup> See Frank 1992:66ff.

<sup>86</sup> E.g. al-Ghazālī *Ihyā'*: 4, 86f.

in God, is received by its various faculties, sensory, imaginative, intellectual, or prophetic<sup>87</sup> from the highest angelic "light"<sup>88</sup> through the intermediate activity of various angelic agencies<sup>89</sup> according to the particular conditions that obtain in each individual case. Attaining its true perfection, the intellectual faculty sees the true natures of things and their causes and so achieves the vision of God's wisdom in creation<sup>90</sup> and at the highest level perceives only unity in God.<sup>91</sup> "they see in existence only the True One".<sup>92</sup> The "light" of created intellects is, like their existence, given ultimately from God; it is "borrowed" from God who "is light in and of himself"<sup>93</sup> and "apart from whom there is no light".<sup>94</sup> In a sense, then, the fully enlightened soul may be taken to participate in the divine light, but the creature remains fully distinct from the creator. Moreover, this light is not, as in traditional Ash'arite teaching, held to be given directly and, as it were, personally by God, for it is given by the highest "angel" as a function of its general governance of the universe. Only a few are destined to attain the highest levels of enlightenment.

Between al-Ghazālī's conception of the universe and man and of God's relation to them and that of traditional Ash'arite doctrine the contrast is thus considerable. Although he insists (following Avicenna) that for all created beings existence is an accident<sup>95</sup> so that they are, in and of themselves, nullities or non-beings,<sup>96</sup> al-Ghazālī's universe has nonetheless a proper ontological substantiality of its own. Essential natures (*al-ḥaqā'iq*), howbeit their particular instantiations may be purely contingent, are unoriginated and as such are given—in themselves already there—for God's creating the only universe he can create. The universe, moreover, is conceived as a sort of machine that once built and set in motion runs itself as inevitably it must (the image is twice set forth quite explicitly). One does not contemplate the beauty of nature as that of an organism suffused by the One as in the doctrine of Plotinus, but rather the wisdom and liberality of

<sup>87</sup> Al-Ghazālī *Mishkāt*: 76ff.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. 52f.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. 60.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid. 45.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 63ff.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 57.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 54.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid. 59f.

<sup>95</sup> *Mīyār*: 57.

<sup>96</sup> *Al-Maqsad*: 137 and *Mishkāt*: 55f.

the creator in his ordering and construction of the whole. Like the Ash'arites, al-Ghazālī says that "there are in existence only God and his actions",<sup>97</sup> but what he means and asserts is altogether different. For al-Ghazālī the being of every contingent entity and its being essentially what it is is not God's immediate act of creating it. Nor does one contemplate single entities and events of the sublunary world as things—as signs—each of which is willed individually and created by God immediately. On the contrary, God's relation to the world and men is essentially impersonal. He willed necessarily to create the best possible universe—knew and therefore chose amongst possibles the one that "ought to be". By implication, thus, he created man, not particularly and as such, but because the human is one of the given essential natures each of which must be instantiated in the best possible world.<sup>98</sup> Though God knows particulars and therefore each individual as such and the details of his life as a given focal point of numerous determinate series of causes in the operation of the universal system, he does not, strictly speaking, choose the destiny of each individually and for himself; rather, each one comes to be and prospers or suffers and is brought to a predetermined level of perfection or imperfection (and ultimately, since the soul is immortal, to eternal bliss or perdition) as is demanded by the good of the whole and of the species as one of its constituents.

It is within this overall framework—this conception of God, the universe, and the rational soul—that the significance and nature of al-Ghazālī's sufism is to be understood, for this is the context in which he explains it. That he appeals to the witness of non-rational states of mind for the ultimate confirmation of his theories does not diminish the rational assumptions and the structure that govern the conception and elaboration of the whole.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

Summarising the salient characteristics of the three systems, then, we see that for the MU'TAZILA God exists necessarily and is altogether self-sufficient; he need not have created anything at all and creating could have created an altogether different universe. The universal

<sup>97</sup> E.g. *al-Maṣṣad*: 57.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Frank 1992:63f.

principles of right and wrong action, however, impose certain limitations on the kinds of universe that he might have chosen to create.

God, a free moral agent, chose freely and gratuitously to create man an autonomous moral agent and so with the opportunity of gaining a reward for doing good and avoiding evil that is great beyond any possible merit. The revelation was given as an aid and incentive to this end. Nature is not simply given nor is the universal moral code merely conventional.

Sentient creatures have a claim of justice and right on each other and on God. The basic principles of good and bad in action are absolute for all intelligent agents. God knows them and imparts them to human intuition as a part of the *taklīf*. God's action in relation to man and the world is essentially personal. In being naturally oriented to his own highest good, man is oriented towards God as creator, benefactor and judge. God's being and actions, the world and the revelation are rationally intelligible to human reason.

With the ASH'ARITES, God is totally self-sufficient and totally free; he might have created any kind of universe or nothing at all. Even with creation, however, the primary sense of "being" (*maṣṣūd*)—all that can properly be said to be—is God, his attributes, and his actions (*Allāh wa-ṣifātuhū wa-af'āluhū*). Human beings, whatever they are or do or undergo, whether in this life or in the next, are most strictly speaking God's acts, immediate and direct. His being and his acts are essentially personal.

God commands his creatures but is not himself subject to any rule; his acts, like his commands and prohibitions, are altogether autocratic and arbitrary. They can be described both as such (in themselves and as God's) and, occurring as human performances, juridically, but can be rationalised under neither description; their occurrence is occasionalistic and their juridical classification in the case of human performances is arbitrary. The fate of individuals in the next life is not intrinsically related to the juridical status of their actions in this life. No contingent being or event can be rationally accounted for.

AL-GHAZĀLĪ is bound to a neo-Platonic paradigm. God is not totally free; creating, he must create the uniquely best possible universe. Moreover, if the assertions that God being is necessary in its every aspect and that his will is both eternal and necessary (*azalīyatun wājiba*) mean what apparently they must mean, then God, as conceived by al-Ghazālī, is not absolutely self-sufficient either, since it is

impossible that he not have willed to create the world. The world, then, will be a kind of complement to God's being—not in so radical a way as it is in the philosophy of Avicenna, perhaps, but a complement nevertheless—something without which his being would be in some way incomplete.

God creates all sublunary events, human choices and actions included, through the determinate operation of unalterable sequences of secondary causes according to a program eternally determined (*muqaddar*) in his knowledge and wisdom and fixed in the outermost sphere at the first moment of creation. The revelation itself is a necessary output of the system. God's relationship to the world and to his creatures is fundamentally impersonal.

The good of man is determined by the nature of the rational soul and the good of action accordingly is subordinate and ordered to that of the intellect. God is just and generous, but nothing he does is, strictly speaking, gratuitous; nothing is arbitrary. Every contingent being and event, including the nature and order of the universe, the principles of ethics, the entire content of the revelation, and the ultimate status of each individual in the next life, is as it must be in the best possible universe and can therefore in principle be rationally explained.