

GHAZALI AND ASH'ARISM REVISITED

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I

Much has been written on the relation of Ghazali (al-Ghazālī) to Ash'arism¹ that, among other things, indicate his criticisms of the *kalām*.² Underlying his criticisms is a primary thesis, namely that the main function of *kalām* is the protection of traditional Islamic belief ('*aqīda*), rooted in the Qur'an and guided by the customary practice of the prophet, the *sunna*, against heretical innovations (*al-bida'*).³ *Kalām* is not an end in itself and it is error to think that the mere engagement in it constitutes the experientially religious or that it is always needed for attaining salvation in the hereafter.⁴ Its role is very much akin to that of the armed guards protecting the pilgrims' caravan against bedouin marauders.⁵ It is needed, but only as a means to an end. Again, it is like medicine, which at times is certainly needed. But when not needed, or when needed, but not properly administered, it can be very harmful.⁶ As such the commonality (*al-'amma*) of believers, whose faith consists

¹ For some of the literature on the subject, see the bibliography of my article on Ghazali and theology in the *Encyclopedia Iranica*, ed. Ehsan Yarshater, vol. X, Fac. 4 (New York, 2000), pp. 374-6.

² Ghazali is critical of all schools of *kalām*, in part because of the dissensions they cause. See, for example, *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*, 4 vols. (Cairo, 1377/1957), vol. I, pp. 22-3; this reference will be abbreviated (*Ihyā'*) in the notes; al-Ghazālī, *al-Iqtisād fī al-i'tiqād*, ed. I.S. Cubuckcu and H. Atay (Ankara, 1962), pp. 10-11 (hereafter *Iqtisād*). But disagreements are also present within a particular school. This is reflected in Ghazali's references to Ash'arites in his *Fayṣal al-tafrīqa*. Al-Ghazālī, *Fayṣal al-tafrīqa*, ed. S. Dunya (Cairo, 1961), pp. 13-32. Generally, however, when Ghazali in his criticisms refers to *kalām*, he means Ash'arite *kalām*. Hence whenever *kalām* is mentioned in this article, Ash'arite *kalām* is intended.

³ Al-Ghazālī, *al-Munqidh min al-dalāl*, eds. J. Saliba and K. Ayyad, 7th printing (Beirut, 1967), p. 71 (hereafter, *Munqidh*); *Ihyā'*, I, p. 23.

⁴ *Iqtisād*, p. 9 ff.

⁵ *Ihyā'*, I, p. 23; al-Ghazālī, *Jawāhir al-Qur'ān*, ed. M. R. R. al-Qabbani (Beirut, 1986), pp. 40-1.

⁶ *Iqtisād*, pp. 9, 14, 15.

largely in the literal, uncritical, acceptance of religious teaching⁷ and who are incapable of comprehending *kalām*'s arguments, must not be exposed to them.⁸ It should be administered, in a gentle, kind manner, only to the few: those sincerely troubled by the problematic in religion and who are capable of understanding *kalām*'s arguments – this, to restore to them their faith.⁹

To engage in the discipline of *kalām* is thus not incumbent on all Muslims. It is not a *farḍ 'ayn*. But like the practice of medicine it is incumbent only on some. It is a *farḍ kifāya*.¹⁰ Hence, every region should have a *mutakallim*, a theologian, to defend the *'aqīda*.¹¹ Implicit here is the notion that such a *mutakallim* is not a Mu'tazili or one belonging to what Ghazali regards as a heretical sect. Clearly, the *mutakallim* Ghazali has in mind is an Ash'arī, a point to be taken into account in discussing his relation to Ash'arism. Negative critical comments on the *kalām* do abound in Ghazali's writings. Ironically, some of these occur in his most important *kalām* treatise, the *Iqtiṣād fi al-i'tiqād (Moderation in Belief)*, a work, as we shall indicate, he regarded very highly. At the same time there are Ghazalian statements about *kalām* that are positive and which place it within a wider theological perspective, particularly as this relates to gnosis and eschatology. We thus discern from these statements that although *kalām* can be a detriment to the attainment of gnosis (*ma'rifa*), it can also be a help. Moreover, in discussing the relation of *kalām* to gnosis, Ghazali expresses certain of his views on the levels of reward for believers in the hereafter.

Apart from positive statements about *kalām*, there is also the use of arguments that are essentially Ash'arite to defend and explain doctrines that may be encountered on the journey the gnostic undertakes. Ash'arism permeates Ghazali's major work, the *Ihyā' 'ulūm al-dīn (The Revivification of the Sciences of*

⁷ This is what Ghazali usually means by the commonality (*al-'amma*). In one place, however, he seems to be using the term as the opposite of *al-khawāṣṣ*, those special individuals who have attained gnosis, and thus the *mutakallimūn* are included among the *'amma*. See, *Ijām al-'awamm 'an 'ilm al-kalām*, ed. M. M. al-Baghdadi (Beirut, 1985), p. 67.

⁸ *Iqtiṣād*, p. 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹⁰ *Ihyā'*, I, p. 23; *Iqtiṣād*, p. 13ff.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Religion) quite extensively.¹² Here we are not speaking about one of its books, the Ash'arite *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id* (*The Principles of Beliefs*) – though its inclusion in the *Ihyā'* is certainly most significant – but about other discussions. Nor are we suggesting that in these other discussions Ghazali is reverting into being a *mutakallim*, whose main goal is to expound and advocate Ash'arite doctrine. He has done what is needed and sufficient for such a goal – he has written the *Iqtisād* and the *Qawā'id*. This, however, does not necessarily mean that in the *Ihyā'* he no longer subscribes to the Ash'arite articles of faith (as summed up in the *Qawā'id*) or that he does not utilize Ash'arite arguments in his religious expositions. One also encounters in the *Ihyā'* (as well as other works)¹³ Ghazali's adoption of Avicennan ideas. But as we will indicate, these he reinterprets in Ash'arite terms.¹⁴

In the two sections that follow, we will begin by considering some of his statements on *kalām* that tend to be positive. In these, for the most part, Ghazali resorts to examples rather than arguments to explain what he means. We will then focus on Ghazali's treatment of one doctrine in particular, that of human choice in the *Ihyā'*. It is true, he ultimately maintains that the conflicting theological views on human choice are resolved not through argument but on the higher cognitive vision of the mystic. But the doctrine he defends on a more mundane level is Ash'arite. To be sure, his exposition draws on Avicennan ideas. But as we hope to show, these are reinterpreted in occasionalist terms.

¹² I have indicated some of the Ash'arisms imbedded in the *Ihyā'* in "Ghazālian causes and intermediaries," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 115 (1995): 89-100 (hereafter "Ghazālian causes and intermediaries.")

¹³ See, for example, his discussion of non-demonstrative premisses in *Mi'yār al-'ilm* that draws heavily on Avicenna's *Ishārāt*. This is discussed in my article. "Ghazali on ethical premisses," *The Philosophical Forum* (New Series) I, 3 (Spring, 1969): 309-23.

¹⁴ The one area in the *Ihyā'* where his position is not entirely clear is in his discussions of the human soul where at points he seems to veer away from the Ash'arite doctrine of a material soul. Whether this indicates a move in the direction of an Avicennan concept of an immaterial soul, or some other view, is not clear. Whatever is the case, he seems, at the same time to want to maintain the notion of a soul that occupies "space," so as to explain such views as torment in grave and such a tradition (*ḥadīth*) to the effect that the souls of martyrs are in the "crofts of Green birds."

II

In considering Ghazali's statements about *kalām*, one cannot bypass one of the best known and shortest of such statements. This is the statement in his autobiographical *al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl* (*The Deliverer from Error*).¹⁵ Although highly critical of the *kalām*, it is nonetheless not entirely negative. He tells us that he began his quest after knowledge by the study of *kalām*, for which he contributed written works. As a discipline, *kalām* fulfilled its aim, but did not satisfy what he was striving after, its aim being the preservation and the guardianship of the 'aqīda of the adherers of the *sunna* against the distortions of the heretical innovators. The guardianship of the 'aqīda, however, is not unimportant and certainly necessary. When Satan through the whispering of the innovators brought about distortions to the message of the Prophet, God "raised up a group of theologians (*tā'ifa min al-mutakallimīn*) motivating them to defend the *sunna* by systematic discourse to reveal their distortions." Ghazali here is referring to an early group of theologians, precursors to the science of *kalām* as it later developed. This group did well in defending the faith, Ghazali goes on, but in so doing they depended on premises they received from their opponents, being compelled to accept them "either by [uncritical] imitation (*taqlīd*)¹⁶, the consensus of the community or sheer acceptance from the Qur'ān and traditions." For the most part, this group's arguments consisted in showing the contradictions of their opponents. But this approach for Ghazali is of little use for one who admits only necessary truths. He goes on:

Yes, when the art of *kalām* developed, indulgence in it increased, and the time [in which it was practiced] lengthened, the theologians desired to attempt defending the *sunna* by investigating "the true nature of things" (*ḥaqā'iq al-umūr*). They thus plunged into the investigation of [the nature] of substances, accidents, and their governing rules. But since this was not the intention of their science, their discourse [in this] did not reach its high-

¹⁵ *Munqidh*, pp. 71-3.

¹⁶ This translation is not entirely satisfactory, but adequate for our purposes here. The term is not easy to translate but conveys the idea of accepting the outer manifestations of belief in good faith on sheer authority. This is how Ghazali seems to be using it in the section from the *Iḥyā'* we will be shortly discussing. For a discussion of *taqlīd* in pre-Ghazalian Ash'arism, see R. M. Frank, "Knowledge and *taqlīd*: The foundations of religious belief in classical Ash'arism," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 109, no. 1 (Jan-March, 1989): 37-62.

est goal so that there did not ensue from [their discourse] the erasure in its entirety of the darkneses of perplexity that divided humanity. I do not doubt that [the removal of perplexity] has occurred to others; indeed I do not doubt that this has been realized for a group, but in a manner blemished by [uncritical] imitation (*taqlīd*) in some matters that do not consist of primary truths.¹⁷

One notes in this paragraph that Ghazali uses an expression which he uses frequently elsewhere, namely, *ḥaqā'iq al-umūr*, "the true nature of things." This parallels philosophical usage of the term except that *al-ashyā'* instead of *umūr* is used. We find the expression in Kindi and Avicenna. Kindi defines philosophy as "the knowledge of things in their true nature (*'ilm al-ashyā' bi-ḥaqā'iqihā*)¹⁸ to the extent of man's ability," and Avicenna states that "the purpose in philosophy is to know the true nature of all things (*ḥaqā'iqi al-ashyā'i kullihā*) to the extent that man is capable of knowing."¹⁹ When Ghazali, referring to the theologians, states that "this was not the intention of their science" he is saying in effect that they did not pursue knowledge of the true nature of things for its own sake, but only as a means of defending the *'aqīda*.²⁰ Moreover, the endeavors of a group of theologians were "blemished by [uncritical] imitation in some matters that did not consist of primary truths." In other words, *kalām* did not provide him with the certainty in knowledge he was seeking. For a discussion of the knowledge he is seeking as it explicitly and directly²¹ relates to the *kalām*, we will now turn to a passage in *Kitāb Sharḥ 'ajā'ib al-qalb* (*The Book explaining the Wonders of the Heart*) of the *Iḥyā'*.

The passage forms the concluding part of the chapter on the "likeness of the heart, particularly in relation to cognitions."²²

¹⁷ *Munqidh*, pp. 72-3.

¹⁸ Al-Kindi, *Rasā'il al-Kindi al-falsafīyya*, ed. M. A. Abu Rida, 2 vols. (Cairo, 1950), I, p. 97. For the Alexandrian tradition of Kindi's statement, see R. Rashed and J. Jolivet, *Œuvres philosophiques et scientifiques d'al-Kindi*, vol. II: *Métaphysique et cosmologie* (Leiden, 1998), pp. 8-9, 101.

¹⁹ Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), *al-Shifā' (Healing): al-Mantiq (Logic) I: al-Madkhal* (Isagoge), eds. M. Khudayri, G. Qanawati and A. F. Ahwani, revised and introduced by I. Madkour (Cairo, 1953), Bk. I, Ch. 1, p. 12.

²⁰ Implicit in Ghazali's statement is a criterion for distinguishing *kalām* from philosophy (*falsafa*).

²¹ The *Munqidh* indicates the certainty he is seeking, namely, in direct mystical experience, *dhawq*. This relates to his attitude towards *kalām*, but not directly or explicitly.

²² *Iḥyā'*, III, pp. 12-15.

Before we come to our passage, however, a brief summary of the parts that precede it is needed. In these parts, the cognitions Ghazali is speaking about pertain to the world of the unseen. He likens the heart to a mirror²³ receptive of representations of colored objects. Just as the mirror is prevented from having these representations due to certain causes, the heart is also prevented from getting cognitions of the unseen due to analogous causes.²⁴ These causes are five in number. The first cause consists in the mirror not having as yet been properly forged. The analogy to this is the heart of the youngster that has not as yet fully developed. The second is that the mirror may be prevented from receiving the representation due to its murkiness. The heart also is prevented from its cognitions because it has been tarnished by passions and lusts. The third is that the mirror may not be facing its object (we cannot see our backs by simply looking at the mirror in front of us). The heart in a similar manner may be prevented by being diverted from the true objects of knowledge. The fourth is that the mirror may be veiled from the representation. In a similar way, the heart may be veiled by ingrained beliefs. Finally, there may be ignorance of the direction in which the mirror's object is to be sought. The heart, in a similar fashion, may be ignorant of the methodological approach needed for its quest, namely the use of correct syllogistic reasoning.

It is the fourth cause which concerns us here since it relates directly to both *taqlīd* and *kalām*. For, as Ghazali argues, the one who is obedient, who controls his appetites, directing his thought solely to [attaining] one of the realities (*ḥaqīqa min al-ḥaqā'iq*) may not have this [reality] revealed to him (*qad lā yankashifu lahu dhālika*).²⁵ This is because "of his being veiled from it by a previous belief that has come to him from youth, by way of *taqlīd* and the reception [from others] in good faith (*bi-ḥusn al-ẓann*)." "This also," he goes on, "is a great veil by which the majority of the theologians (*akthar al-mutakallimīn*) and partisans of sectarian doctrines (*al-muta'aṣṣibīn li-al-madhāhib*) are veiled." This is because they are veiled by "imitative beliefs

²³ Avicenna also likens the heart to a mirror. See, for example, Ibn Sinā, *al-Ishārāt wa al-tanbihāt* with the Commentary of Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, ed. S. Dunya, 3 vols. (Cairo, 1958), p. 833.

²⁴ *Ihyā'*, III, pp. 12-13.

²⁵ *Ihyā'*, III, p. 13, line 15.

(*i'tiqādāt taqlīdiyya*) that solidified in their souls, and became fixed in their hearts, becoming a veil between them and the apprehension of realities (*al-ḥaqā'iq*).²⁶

As Ghazali goes on with his discussion, it becomes even more explicit that “the realities,” the objects of knowledge that yield certainty, belong to the world of the unseen, the divine realm (*‘ālam al-malakūt*) as distinct from the domain of the seen (*‘ālam al-mulk*). Ghazali, however, also then speaks of both *‘ālam al-mulk* and *‘ālam al-malakūt*, when taken together.²⁷ This, for Ghazali, constitutes the lordly, [divine], presence (*al-ḥaḍra al-rubūbiyya*) which encompasses all the existents, “since there is nothing in existence except God, exalted be He, and His acts, His kingdom (*mamlakatuhu*) and servants (*‘abīduhu*) being among His acts.”²⁸ For some people, what is revealed of this to the heart (*mā yatajallā min dhālika li-al-qalb*) constitutes paradise itself. For those who follow the truth, however, the revelation (*al-tajallī*) is the cause for deserving paradise in the hereafter. Moreover, the degree to which this *tajallī* is attained in this life determines the measure of reward in the hereafter. This *tajallī* and belief (*īmān*), Ghazali states – and this brings us to the concluding part of the chapter which is our main concern – is of three levels:

The first is the belief of the commonality (*al-‘awāmm*). This is belief [based on] pure *taqlīd*. The second is the belief of the theologians (*īmān al-mutakallimīn*) which is mixed with some kind of inference. Its level is close to the belief of the common people. The third is the belief of the gnostics (*īmān al-‘arifīn*). This consists of seeing with the light of certainty.²⁹

Ghazali illustrates these levels of belief by an example, namely, that “your belief that Zayd is in the house has three levels.” The first is that you are informed by one you have always experienced to be truthful. “Your heart acquiesces to him, and you are assured by the information [he conveys] simply by hearing [it].” This, Ghazali explains, which is belief by sheer *taqlīd*, exemplifies the belief of the common people. “For when they arrived at the age of discernment, they would have heard from their fathers and mothers about the existence of God, exalted be He, [about] His knowledge, will, power and the rest of His attributes,

²⁶ *Ibid.*, lines 19-20.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14, lines 21-22. The term used is *daf‘atan*, more literally, “all at once.”

²⁸ *Ibid.*, line 22.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15, lines 1-4.

[about] the sending forth of [His] messengers, their veracity and what they have conveyed.”³⁰ This becomes a belief firmly established in their hearts and in which they become rest assured. What is contrary to what their mothers, fathers and teachers have taught them never crosses their mind. This belief is the cause of salvation (*al-najā*) in the hereafter. The adherers of this belief are among the first of the ranks of “the people of the right (*aṣḥāb ahl al-yamīn*) but not among those drawn close [to God] (*al-muqarrabīn*), because in this belief “there is no unveiling, insight and the opening of the breast by the light of certainty.”³¹ Moreover, error in it is possible as in the case of individual traditional reports, or with several, in relation to beliefs.

Turning to the second level of belief, Ghazali writes:

The second is for you to hear the speech and voice of Zayd from inside the house, but from behind a wall. You would infer from this that he is in the house. Thus your assent, belief and [level of] certainty that he is in the house would be stronger than your assent due to the sheer hearing [from some that Zayd’s is in the house] For, if you are told that he is in the house and then you hear his voice, you would then become more certain [that he is in the house] because voices indicate the shape and visage for the one who [has heard] the voice at a time when he has seen the visage. His heart then judges that this is the voice of that individual. This is belief mixed with inference. It is possible, however, for error to enter into this. For [one] voice may be similar to another and this can be artificially undertaken by way of imitation.³²

Thus this second level, though more assured than the first, is still not entirely immune to error. This is not the case with the third level:

The third level is for you to enter the house and look [at Zayd] with your eye and see him. This is true knowledge and seeing with certitude. This is similar to the gnosis of those drawn close [to God] and the ardently veracious (*wa hiya tushbih ma’rifat al-muqarrabīn wa al-ṣiddiqīn*). Within their belief is enveloped (*yanṭawī*) the belief of the commonality and the *mutakallims* but is differentiated [from it] by a clear characteristic that renders the possibility of error not possible.³³

Ghazali then explains in effect that the cognitions of the gnostics vary in degrees of intensity and clarity and even in the number

³⁰ *Ibid.*, lines 6-8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, lines 9-10. Ghazali here is giving his interpretation of the terms *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* and *al-muqarrabīn* in Qur’ān, lvi, verses, 11, 27, 38, 88, 90, 91.

³² *Ibid.*, lines 13-19.

³³ *Ibid.*, lines 19-21.

of things apprehended. This knowledge, however, remains certain because it represents what is directly experienced.

But while the belief of *Kalām* is on a lower level than gnosis, it nonetheless can also be conducive to arriving at the stage of mystical knowledge. This is conveyed by the final passage we will consider which also gives expression to Ghazali's estachological views. The discussion occurs in *Kitāb al-Arba'īn fī uṣūl al-dīn* at the conclusion of the treatment of ten principles of the belief, in a chapter devoted to indicating the books to be sought for the truth of the creed.

Know that what we have mentioned is the gist of the teachings of the Qur'ān, I mean the sum of what relates to God and the last day, this being an interpretation of the belief which the heart of every Muslim must enfold in the sense that he must believe it and assent to it in a conclusive manner. Behind this belief are two levels. The first is to know the proofs of this belief without plunging into its secrets; the second is to know its secrets, the essences of their meanings and the true nature of their outward manifestations. Both these levels are not incumbent on the commonality [of believers], I mean that their salvation in the hereafter (*anna najātahum fī al-ākhirah*) is not dependent on both; nor is their winning (*fawzahum*) dependent on both. What is dependent on both is the perfection of bliss (*kamāl al-sa'āda*). I mean by "salvation" delivery from torment, and I mean by "winning" is attaining the foundation of bliss, and by happiness attaining the utmost ends of bliss.³⁴

Ghazali then illustrates what he means by the example of a sultan who forcefully seizes a city. The person he does not kill and torment is "saved," even if the sultan expels him from the city; the person the sultan does not torture but allows to stay in this city with his family and earn his livelihood is a winner in addition to being saved; the one upon whom the sultan bestows gifts and give a share in his kingship, in addition to being saved and a winner, attains happiness. The ascending levels of happiness in the hereafter, Ghazali then adds, are innumerable.

Ghazali's example suggests that he identifies those who are "saved" with the pious commonality, the *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* of the *Iḥyā'* passage discussed earlier, those who are winners with the *mutakallimūn* and those who gain the perfection of bliss with the sufis. But he may not have intended his example to be interpreted in so specific a manner.

³⁴ Al-Ghazālī, *Kitāb al-Arba'īn fī uṣūl al-dīn*, ed. M. M. Abu al-Ala (Cairo, 1964), pp. 21-2 (hereafter, *Arba'īn*).

Referring back to the first levels of belief, namely knowing the proofs of the creed, Ghazali then writes:

The first of the two levels, namely, knowing the proofs of this belief, we have placed in *al-Risāla al-quḍsiyya* (*The Jerusalem Treatise*) in some twenty leafs and it constitutes one of the chapters of *Qawā'id al-'aqā'id* (*The Principles of Beliefs*) of the *Ihyā'*. Its proofs with greater ascertainment and precision in bringing out the questions and problems, we have placed in the book *al-Iqtiṣād fī al-i'tiqād* (*Moderation in Belief*) in some one hundred leafs. It is an independent, self-contained, work that contains the essentials of the science of the *mutakallimīn*.³⁵ But it goes deeper in ascertaining [the truth] and is closer to knocking at the doors of gnosis (*wa aqrab ilā qar' abwāb al-ma'rifa*) than the official discourse (*al-kalām al-rasmiyy*) encountered in the books of the *mutakallimīn*.³⁶

The above statement about the *Iqtiṣād* calls for special comment. Before doing this, however, we must first go on with what immediately follows:

All this reverts to belief, not to gnosis. For the *mutakallim* does not differ from the common person except in being a knower (*bi-kawnihi 'ārifan*)³⁷ and the common person being a believer. Rather, [the *mutakallim*] is also a believer who with his belief knows the proofs of the belief so as to confirm the belief, perpetuate it, and guard it against the distortions of the innovators.

The belief of the creed does not reduce to becoming open to gnosis.³⁸ If you wish to have a whiff of something of the scents of gnosis, you will encounter a little of them affirmed in *Kitāb al-Ṣabr wa al-shukr* (*The Book of Patience and Gratitude*), *Kitāb al-Maḥabba* (*The Book of Love*), the chapter on divine unity (*al-tawḥīd*) at the beginning of *Kitāb al-Tawakkul* (*The Book of Trust*) all of these being [parts] of the *Ihyā'*. You will, moreover, encounter [some of their scents] in a suitable measure that will apprise you of the manner of knocking at the door of gnosis (*qar' bāb al-ma'rifa*) in *Kitāb al-Maqṣad al-asnā fī ma'ānī asmā' Allāh al-ḥusnā* (*The Book of the Highest Intent of [Explaining] the Meanings of God's Beautiful Names*).³⁹

Ghazali then makes his well-known but problematic reference to works of his which he refers to as those withheld from the

³⁵ In the genitive case as in the original Arabic text.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁷ Here, not in the sense of possessing gnosis.

³⁸ This is a tentative translation of, *wa lā tanḥallu 'aqīdatu al-i'tiqād ilā inshirāḥ al-ma'rifa*. If we understand Ghazali aright he is speaking of the 'aqīda in its exoteric, outer meaning. Its inner meaning is revealed only by gnosis, but whatever the components of its outer form, they do not by themselves, in their outer form, yield *ma'rifa*.

³⁹ *Arba'in*, pp. 22-3.

unqualified (*al-maḍnūn bihā 'alā ghayri ahlihā*) which (as he proclaims) give frank expression of the knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of the truths of the *'aqida*.

It is, however, his reference to the *al-Maqṣad al-asnā* that is of particular interest. It is a book, Ghazali tells us, that appries one of the manner of “knocking at the door of gnosis.” This is an expression which is almost identical with the one Ghazali has used in his statement about the *Iqtiṣād* in the passage immediately preceding the above.⁴⁰ This indicates that for Ghazali there is a kinship between the two works. The *Iqtiṣād*, however, is Ghazali's major work on *kalām* and it is to his statement about it (as a work of *kalām*) that we must now turn.

In considering his statement, the first thing to keep in mind is that it occurs in a late work of his. It expresses his view of the *Iqtiṣād* long after he had become a sufi and after his having written such works as the *Iḥyā'* and the *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*. He tells us that the *Iqtiṣād*, an Ash'arite work, contains the essentials of the science of the theologians (*lubāb 'ilm al-mutakallimīn*) – it hence goes without saying that these *Mutakallims* are Ash'arites. He deems it superior to the “official” works of Ash'arite *kalām*, implying that the *Iqtiṣād* does not belong to the genre of “official” works. And he deems it superior to these “official” works in two respects that seem to be related. The first is that it goes deeper in its probing to ascertain what is true. The second is that it is “closer to knocking at the doors of gnosis.” This suggests that for Ghazali, the *Iqtiṣād*, as a work of Ash'arite *kalām* that certainly endeavors to protect the *sunna* against heretical innovations, goes beyond such an endeavor: it also represents a move towards gnosis as it comes “closer” to knocking at its doors.

From the above and from the previous passage from *'Ajā'ib al-qalb* one can conclude that for Ghazali, even though Ash'arite *kalām* can stand as a veil preventive of gnosis, it also can facilitate it. Ghazali's use of Ash'arite arguments in his *Iḥyā'* supports this conclusion.

⁴⁰ The slight difference is that the statement about the *Iqtiṣād* uses the term *abwāb*, “doors,” in the plural, while the one used with reference to the *Maqṣad*, uses the term *bāb*, “door,” in the singular.

III

Ghazali's use of Ash'arite arguments certainly manifests itself in the discussion of human choice, *al-ikhtiyār*, in the *Iḥyā'*, in *Kitāb al-Tawba* (*The Book of Repentance*), complemented by its discussion in *Kitāb al-Tawakkul* (*The Book of Trust*).⁴¹ But before turning to the *Iḥyā'*, some preliminary remarks are in order.

To begin with we must remind ourselves that the *Iḥyā'* is primarily concerned with *al-mu'āmalā*, the practical conduct all Muslims should follow if they are to escape perdition and gain salvation in the hereafter. This conduct involves strict adherence to the teachings of the Qur'ān and traditions and the assiduous performance of such duties as praying, fasting, alms giving and (when possible) the undertaking the pilgrimage.

This adherence, while certainly required of the commonality, *al-āmma*, is also an essential requirement for the sufi wayfarer (*al-sālik*). For it means the devoting of one's attention solely to the one God, thereby preparing the heart for the reception of the light of *ma'rifa*. This adherence involves an ascetic disciplining of the soul which includes the pursuit of a puritanical ethics and the adoption of an hierarchy of ethical values the highest of which is the love of God. When the mystic attains *ma'rifa*, he must never forsake this adherence. He must never slacken in maintaining the ascetic, puritanical, devotional way of life. The *sālik*, however, may encounter theological difficulties, giving rise to questionings and doubts that could impede his way. It is in helping solve, explain or ease these difficulties (not necessarily confined to the *sālik*) that Ghazali in the homilies of his *Iḥyā'* resorts to Ash'arite arguments and explanations.

Another preliminary remark pertains to a statement about human choice in *Kitāb al-Arba'in* that can be easily misunderstood. The statement comes in the chapter on the divine attribute of will where Ghazali discusses the two diametrically

⁴¹ This discussion in essence restates and elaborates many of the things said in *Kitāb al-Tawba*. The Ash'arism of this discussion has been indicated in "Ghazalian causes and intermediaries," (pp. 97-9) wherein is quoted the all important central statement that the servant is an agent only in the sense that he is the locus of divine action and where by contrast the act is related to divine power in terms of causal efficacy, namely, in terms of "the connection of the effect to the cause and the created thing to its creator (*irtibāṭ al-ma'lūl bi-al-'illa wa irtibāṭ al-mukhtara' bi-al-mukhtari'*) (*Iḥyā'*, IV, p. 250, lines 31-32).

opposed theological positions, that of the determinists, *al-jabriyya* and the upholders of free will the *qadariyya*, namely, the Mu'tazila. The first base themselves on God's determination of all events, maintaining that both good and evil come from God. By this, Ghazali explains, they intend to remove impotence (*al-'ajz*) from God. They attributed injustice to God. They would thus disobey God and attribute to God their acts of disobedience, thereby maintaining that in this they are blameless. For this reason, Ghazali states, the one arguing with them should "beat them, scratch their faces, tear their clothes and their turbans, pluck their hairs, their mustaches and beards," excusing himself in the same way these "low people" excuse themselves for the "evil deeds that proceed from them."⁴² "The Mu'tazila," Ghazali goes on, "related evil only to themselves and affirmed for themselves all choice, being wary of relating evil and injustice to God." In this, Ghazali explains, the Mu'tazila, without their realizing it, attribute impotence to God. He then writes:

As for the followers of the *sunna* and community (*al-jamā'a*), they took a middle course between them. They did not remove choice entirely from themselves and did not remove the decree and predestination (*al-qaḍā' wa al-qadar*) entirely from God, but said: "the servants' acts are in one respect from God and in another respect from the servant; and that the servant has a choice in the bringing about of his acts (*wa li-al-'abd ikhtiyārūn fī ijād af'ālihi*)."⁴³

It is the last statement that "the servant has a choice in the bringing about of his acts," more literally, "there belongs choice to the servant in the bringing about of his acts," that can be easily understood as affirming (a) that humans have real choice, that is, choice which they themselves initiate, not a choice which God creates for them, and (b) that the servant brings about his own act, that the act is not created for him by God. But this would be a misunderstanding. The above quotation is

⁴² *Arba'īn*, pp. 9-10. There is a parallel to this style of argument in Avicenna. In *Metaphysics* I, 8 of the *Shifā'*, Avicenna maintains that the obdurate who refuse to accept the laws of non-contradiction and excluded middle, "must be subjected to the conflagration of fire; since fire and not-fire are one; pain must be inflicted on him through beating, since pain and no pain are one; and he must be denied food and drink, since eating and drinking and the abstention from both are one [and the same]" [Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), *al-Shifā'* (*Healing*); *al-Ilāhiyyāt* (*Metaphysics*), eds. G. C. Anawati, S. Dunya and S. Zayd, revised and introduced by I. Madkour (Cairo, 1960), p. 53 (hereafter, *Ilāhiyyāt*)].

⁴³ *Arba'īn*, p. 10.

an expression of the Ash'arite doctrine of *kasb*, acquisition. According to this doctrine all human acts are the creation of divine power. Those acts ordinarily regarded as voluntary differ from the involuntary in that they are created with will and power. The created power in humans, however, has no causal efficacy. What is ordinarily regarded as its effect is in reality created for it by divine power. This doctrine, expounded more fully in the *Iqtisād*⁴⁴ is summed up in the *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id* of the *Ihyā'* where it is stated that "God creates both the [human] power and its object and both [the human] choice and the thing chosen."⁴⁵

That human choice is created for the human by God, is discussed more fully in *Kitāb al-Tawba*. The occasionalism that underlies this discussion is signalled for us at the beginning.

Know that repentance is the expression of a meaning that becomes rightly ordered and cohesive through [conditionally] arranged things: knowledge, state and act. Knowledge is the first, state is the second and act is the third. The first necessitates the second and the second necessitates the third by a necessitation required by the continuous sequences of God's practice in the realms of the seen and the unseen (*ijāban iqtadāhu ittirādu sunnati al-lāhi fī al-mulki wa al-malakūt*).⁴⁶

Before turning to the key expression, "the continuous sequence of God's practice," it is best to first indicate what Ghazali subsequently explains as the meaning of "knowledge (*'ilm*)," "state (*ḥāl*)" and "act (*fi'l*)." "Knowledge" is the knowledge of one's sins that are summed up by Ghazali as being alienation from God. When the religious individual fully and sincerely realizes that these sins form a barrier between him and "the Beloved," (*al-maḥbūb*), the necessary result is pain in the heart. The state that follows this is that of remorse or regret (*al-nadam*). The act is the activity that follows true remorse. It involves the act of immediately renouncing the sin and the decision to continue renouncing to the end of one's life. These three are conditionally arranged. Knowledge is a necessary condition for remorse, and remorse a necessary condition for the act of rectification.

⁴⁴ For a full discussion of this doctrine see the author's "Al-Ghazali's chapter on divine power in the *Iqtisād*," *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 4 (1994): 279-315. The article includes an introduction, a critical analysis, and an annotated translation of this chapter.

⁴⁵ *Ihyā'*, I, p. 110, line 15.

⁴⁶ *Ihyā'*, IV, p. 3, lines 14-16.

(There can be no regret without knowledge and no act of rectification without regret). But if we look carefully of what is said, the necessary conditions themselves, do not necessitate. The necessitation is required or demanded by God's *sunna*. This brings us to the concept that underlies this discussion. This is the concept of *ijrā' al-'āda*, to which we will shortly turn, a concept intimately related to the Ash'arite doctrine of the divine attributes.

These attributes are not identical with the divine essence, but are "additional" to it. Hence whatever the divine will eternally decrees and is brought about by divine power, is not necessitated by the divine essence. To be sure, whatever God wills must come to be. But God could have willed things in a different manner. But "once," so to speak, (Ghazali reminds us that the language here is metaphorical) something is eternally willed it must come to pass. It is "necessitated" in this sense, but not, in the sense that it proceeds as a consequence of the divine essence. This is where Avicenna and Ghazali are poles apart. And this is why Ghazali condemned Avicenna as an infidel because of his doctrine of the world's eternity. For this doctrine is the consequence of the Avicenna's theory that everything proceeds by necessity from the divine essence: since the essence is eternal, its necessary consequence, the world is eternal.

The reference to God's *sunna* carries with it the Ash'arite concept of *ijrā' al-'āda*, God's ordaining things to flow according to a uniform habitual course. This habitual course is not necessary in itself and hence it can be disrupted – as when God creates a miracle – without contradiction.⁴⁷ But this uniformity decreed by the divine eternal will includes events that relate to each other as though they are real causes and real events. In fact their causal pattern parallels that elaborated and discussed by Avicenna. But again, there is the vital difference. The necessitation is caused directly by divine power, even though it seems to us to be through secondary causes that have efficacy.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ When the miracle takes place, God removes from the heart knowledge of the uniformity, creating in its stead knowledge of the miracle. See the author's "Al-Ghazali and demonstrative science," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, III, 2, (1965): 183-204; for a discussion of the concept of *ijrā' al-'āda*, particularly as it occurs in the *Ihyā'*, see "Ghazalian causes and intermediaries," pp. 91-7.

⁴⁸ These are "occasional" causes, or, to be more in tune with Ghazali's language, "habitual causes," that behave as though they are real causes. They follow Avicennan causal patterns. Thus the Ghazalian habitual causes divide into those that are essen-

Ghazali insists that this is the case with all human events, psychological and physical. Thus in his discussion of repentance Ghazali declares that the servant does not create and bring about knowledge in himself, “for this is impossible. Rather, [human] knowledge, remorse, act, will, power and the empowered (*al-qādir*), are all God’s creation (*khalq*) and His act (*fi’l*) (‘God created you and what you do [Qur’ān xxxvii, 96]’).⁴⁹ This is the truth for those who have insight (*dhawī al-baṣā’ir*); all else is error (*ḍalāl*).”⁵⁰ Ghazali writes:

If you say, “Has the servant no choice in acting or refraining [to act],?” We say, “yes.”

This is because this does not contradict our saying that all [things] are the outcome of the creation of God, exalted be He. Rather, choice is also God’s creation and the servant is compelled in the choice he has. For God has created the healthy hand, created the savory food, created the appetite for the food in the stomach; He created in the heart the knowledge that this food will quiet the appetite; He created the conflicting thoughts as to whether or not this food has harm even though it calms the appetite and whether [or not] before partaking it there is an impediment that renders partaking it not feasible, creating thereafter the knowledge that there is no impediment. When all these causes are combined, the will that impels the [partaking of the food] becomes decisive (*tanjazim al-irāda al-bā’itha ‘alā al-tanāwul*).

The decisiveness of the will (*fa-injizām al-irāda*) after the hesitation of the conflicting thoughts, and after the occurrence of the appetite for food is termed, “choice.” It inevitably takes place when its causes are completed.⁵¹

Ghazali then explains that the decisive will, the movement of the hand that stretches towards the food are all God’s creation, not man’s. He explains:

tial where the priority of habitual cause to effect is ontological, not temporal, and into accidental where the priority is temporal. Again, as with Avicenna’s real causes, the habitual causes are related hierarchically leading to “the cause of causes,” God. This is so much the case, that Ghazali quite often simply refers to them as causes. But he also reminds us that these habitual causes have no efficacy. Thus, to take the case of human power and what is normally considered to be its effect, both the power and its effect are created for us directly by God. And as immediately quoted above in relation to repentance, “... [human] knowledge, remorse will, power... are all God’s creation.” (Sometimes by “causes” what seems to be meant are the necessary conditions for God’s creating certain events — the creation of human life as a necessary condition for the creation of knowledge, the creation of knowledge as a necessary condition for the creation will). For Ghazali’s causal language, see “Ghazālian causes and intermediaries,” p. 97 ff. See also “Al-Ghazālī and demonstrative science.”

⁴⁹ Cf. Al-Ash’ārī, *Kitāb al-Luma’*, ed. R. J. McCarthy (Beirut, 1953), p. 37 (Arabic text); p. 53-4 (English translation).

⁵⁰ *Iḥyā’*, IV, p. 5, lines 25-27.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5, line 27 - p. 6, line 5.

When the decisiveness of the will comes about, by God's creating it (*bi-khalqi al-lāhi ta'āla iyyāhā*), the healthy hand moves necessarily in the direction of the food, since with the completion of the will and the power, the occurrence of the act becomes necessary. The motion thus takes place. The motion would then be by God's creation (*bi-khalqi al-lāhi*) after the occurrence of power and the will's becoming decisive, these two also being among God's creation (*wa humā ayḍan bi-khalqi al-lāhi*). And the decisiveness of the will takes place after the truth [that the object of] the appetite is not harmful and the knowledge of the absence of impediments. Both these also are the creation of God exalted be He. But some of these creations are dependently ordered on others in a manner which accords with the flow of the custom of God in His creation.⁵² ("Thou will find no change in the way of God [Qur'an xlviii, 23]").⁵³

After using another example, this time of the act of writing, he writes:

Thus knowledge and natural inclination always makes the decisive will (*al-irāda al-jāzima*) follow; and motion will always have power precede [it]. This [conditional] order exists in every act, all being the invention [*ex nihilo*], (*ikhhtirā'an*) of God, exalted be He, but some of His creation constitute a condition for [His creation] of others, and for this reason some must precede and some succeed others.⁵⁴

The terminology here indicates the Avicennan background to this discussion. In Bk. IV, Ch. 2 of the *Metaphysics* of the *Shifā'* Avicenna differentiates between a human will that inclines (*irāda mumāla*) and a will that is decisive (*irāda jāzima*).⁵⁵ For a human power to become "necessarily the principle of necessitating action," it must be conjoined with the decisive will, not merely a will that inclines. The point here is that for Avicenna the necessitation derives from the causal conditions, psychological and physical, being fulfilled. The cause is the combination of power and the decisive will. The effect – the movement of the

⁵² The pattern of this conditional dependence has its source in the doctrine of the eternal attributes as being additional to the divine essence. Thus the divine attribute of life, is a necessary condition of the divine attribute of knowledge, and knowledge of will. But the divine attribute of life is not the cause of the attribute of knowledge, and the attribute of knowledge is not the cause of the attribute of will. All these are coeternal uncaused attributes. This translates into the divine action in creating human life, will and knowledge, each being respectively the necessary condition of the existence of the other. It would be self-contradictory to create will without creating knowledge and to create knowledge without creating life. And since God cannot enact the self-contradictory, He creates in humans, life, then, will, then knowledge.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 6, lines 6-10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, lines 14-16.

⁵⁵ *Ilāhiyyāt*, p. 174.

hand toward food, for example – follows necessarily from this cause. For Ghazali, the combination of power and the decisive will constitute the habitual cause whose existence is decreed by the divine will. The effect follows necessarily from the decree of the divine will, not from the habitual cause as such – hence Ghazali’s insistence the decisive will (with its accompanying conditions) as well as the effect, the movement of the hand, are by God’s creation (*bi-khalqi al-lāhi*). Ghazali in his discussion adopts Avicennan ideas. But these are reinterpreted and cast in Ash‘arite occasionalist terms.

As indicated earlier, Ghazali’s intention in this and similar discussions is not to defend and advocate Ash‘arite theology as such. His Ash‘arite analyses and interpretations seem to have in part a therapeutic intent, to quell doubts. But, if we read Ghazali aright, they lead to a higher purpose, namely to indicate that much of what puzzles us is due to our thinking in terms of the realm of the mundane (*‘ālam al-mulk*). The resolution of these puzzles is to be sought through *kashf*, the unveiling that brings us in contact with the domain of the unseen (*‘ālam al-malakūt*). After indicating that the motion in the hand of the writer is God’s creation, together with the creation of knowledge and the decisive inclination, Ghazali states that these things appear over the body of the compelled servant (*al-‘abd al-musakhkhar*) from the realm of the divine kingdom (*‘ālam al-malakūt*). But “the people of the realm of the [mundane] kingship (*‘ālam al-mulk*) and [mundane] seeing (*al-shahāda*) who are veiled from the world of the unseen and the [divine] kingdom would say, “man, you [yourself] moved, threw, and wrote.” Ghazali then writes:

But from behind the veil of the unseen and the canopies of the [divine] kingdom came the call: “You have not thrown when you threw, but it is God who threw” “and you did not kill when you killed,” [Qur’ān, xiii, 17], but “Fight them, God will torment them with their hands [Qur’ān, ix, 14].” At this point the minds of those seated in the comfort of [the realm of mundane] seeing are perplexed; thus there would be those who would say that this is pure determinism (*jabr maḥḍ*); those who would say that it is pure invention (*ikhṭirā’ ṣirf*); and those who take a middle position, inclining towards [holding this] to be acquisition (*kasb*).

If the gates of heaven were open to them and they look to the realm of the hidden and [the divine] kingdom, it would become manifest to them that each is correct in one respect, but that falling off the mark comprises all. For none of them would apprehend the depth of this affair and will not know all

its aspects. Its complete knowledge is attained through the shining of the light from a small window that leads to the world of the unseen, and that He, may He be exalted, who knows the unseen and the seen will not make manifest the hidden except to an apostle He favors with His choice. Sometimes one who does not fall within the bound of the favored [with apostolic choice] may come to experience this. Whoever pursues⁵⁶ the chain of causes and effects and knows the manner of their connectedness as chains and the manner of the connection of the apex of their chain with the causes of causes,⁵⁷ will have revealed to him the secret of destiny and will know as a certainty that there is no creator (*khāliq*) except God and no fashioner [of out nothing] (*mubdi'*) other than Him.⁵⁸

To the objection that this position where the determinist, the follower of free will and the believer in acquisition hold doctrines that are true in one respect, yet fall short of the truth is contradictory, Ghazali gives a version of the story of the blind men of Hindustan who sought to know the elephant and could do so only through touch. Each described the elephant in terms of the part he touches. All described what is partially true. Only the seeing can give a more comprehensive account. Similarly the truth of the question of human choice in relation to divine power can only be known fully through gnosis.

The passage, however, raises the question – Is Ghazali, in effect, saying that the determinist, the one who advocates freedom of the will, and the one who upholds the doctrine *kasb* are on a par in that each equally holds part of the truth? Now there is a sense in which Ghazali holds that they are on a par, namely, in that their doctrines are the outcome of thinking on the mundane level: it does not penetrate to the mysteries of the world of the unseen. Answers to the question of human choice on this level of thought may attain some aspect of what is true. This, however, need not mean, that for Ghazali each of the three answers is as good as the other. There is no reason to believe that on this level of thought, Ghazali did not fully subscribe to the Ash'arite doctrine of *kasb*. For he held that it contains whatever truth there is in the doctrines of determinism and of freedom of the will. For Ghazali it holds the middle ground that synthesizes, so to speak, the two extreme positions.

In this connection it should be emphasized that in the *Iḥyā'*

⁵⁶ The term here is *yuharrik*, “moves,” probably in the sense of “moves in his reasoning.” “Pursues,” seems to fit the sense best.

⁵⁷ See above, note 47.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6, line 29 - p. 7, line 4.

Ghazali affirms repeatedly the basic premise that underlies the Ash‘arite doctrine of acquisition, namely, that divine power is the direct creator of each and every human act. This, as Ghazali explicitly states, includes human choice. To argue – as Ghazali does – for the belief that human choice is the direct creation of divine power is one thing. However, to experientially apprehend what this means within the cosmic scheme of things as Ghazali pointedly indicates, is another. As *Kitāb al-Tawakkul* of the *Ihyā’* suggests, the mystery inherent in the Ash‘arite belief that all events are the direct creation of divine power is only understood by those who are well grounded in knowledge (*al-rāsikhūn fī al-‘ilm*),⁵⁹ namely, those who have mystic vision (*mushāhada*). It should perhaps be noted here in passing that in *Kitāb al-Tawakkul*, Ghazali speaks of two levels of this mystic vision, one that experiences how each and every event within the multitude of created beings are the direct creation of divine power and a higher level that experiences all that is in existence as one⁶⁰ – suggesting that ultimately God is the only reality.

Our concern, however, is to show that Ash‘arism forms an integral part of those religious homilies of the *Ihyā’* that wax theological and is not irrelevant to its mysticism. Again, this is not to suggest that in these homilies the Ash‘arite explanations are primarily intended as an end in themselves, nor that involvement with Ash‘arite *kalām* as an end in itself (as Ghazali explicitly tells us) cannot be an obstruction to the sufi path. Rather, these discussions reveal quite plainly that Ash‘arite *kalām* when not sought as an end in itself can also be an aid to the *sālik*, the sufi wayfarer. It can bring the *sālik* closer to “knocking at the doors of gnosis.”

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 249, line 29.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 240.